

THE WEDNESDAY INTERVIEW | SHEILA DIKSHIT

‘Congress in U.P. seems to be charged up after Priyanka’s entry’

The former Chief Minister of Delhi on alliance formation and the AAP government in Delhi

AMIT BARUAH & JAIDEEP DEO BHANJ

Sheila Dikshit, three-time Chief Minister of Delhi and a veteran Congress leader, is back in the hurly-burly of Delhi’s politics as the head of the Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee. In this interview, Ms. Dikshit speaks of the Congress’s preparation for the general election, the party’s relationship with the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), and what she thinks will be the best solution for the division of powers between the Centre and the Delhi government. Excerpts:

How do you see the general election unfolding for the Congress?

■ I am very optimistic about our prospects. I feel this because I meet many common people and they speak about their disappointment with the current government [at the Centre] and want a change. Quite obviously, the change, if it has to come about, must come from a party that has a history of governing the country. Whatever is there in the country today it not because of the current government, it’s because of the work the Congress did and what it laid out for the future; everything has been done by the Congress. The Congress stands a very good chance and I get the feeling that people are missing the presence of the Congress.

Would you say that alliances are key to the outcome of the election? And how is the Congress faring nationally when it comes to building alliances?

■ I wouldn’t say that they [alliances] would be key. I wouldn’t use the word key, but yes, wherever they are required, they will be adopted. But I don’t think they will be across the country. It will be State by State. Like we already have an alliance in Tamil Nadu. So, wherever the powers-that-be on both sides think it’s necessary, it will happen.

Many political pundits and

sephologists believe that this election will be won and lost in north India, especially the 80 Lok Sabha seats in Uttar Pradesh. Would you concur with such a view?

■ Yes, because the north has got the largest chunk of seats. There is no denying that. This has always been so. I don’t see any reason why it should not be so now.

The BJP alone won 192 of the 226 seats in the north in 2014.

■ I would say that we will perform well, but I am not able to tell you the numbers because things are beginning to change and the election has not even been announced yet.

But everyone seems to be campaigning already.

■ That is bound to happen since elections are imminent. But the number of seats we get will depend on the candidates who are chosen by the party and by [other parties] as well. Many candidates who are with the BJP now have lost a lot of their colour, their attraction. I will be in a better position to answer your question when we come closer to the elections and the candidates are chosen. For instance, there are rumours in Delhi that they [the BJP] are changing all of them [seven sitting MPs].

In 2017, you were actively



SANDEEP SAXENA

involved with the Uttar Pradesh Assembly election campaign and the Congress had an alliance with the Samajwadi Party (SP). But this time, the Congress and the SP-Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) combine have failed to strike an alliance. Why?

■ One of the reasons is that the Congress has sent Priyanka [Gandhi Vadra] and Jyotiraditya [Scindia] and divided U.P. into two parts – eastern and western – which they have been made in charge of. I think that is a great feeling of comfort for people in U.P. How this evolves eventually, time will tell.

How do you see Priyanka Gandhi Vadra’s entry into politics, and how will it make a difference to the Congress?

■ Well, Congressmen are very happy that she has finally joined, and with her going to U.P., the Congress in U.P. seems to be very charged up and we hope that the results will come. It is too early to pass a judgment on what difference it has made. Let’s

In the case of Delhi, you are working in a situation where whichever is the government at the Centre, you need to work together with them instead of having differences all the time.

wait for a while and see.

If the objective of the Opposition is to defeat the BJP, then the absence of an alliance between the Congress and the SP-BSP will divide the anti-BJP vote in U.P.

■ But it depends on whether the non-BJP vote wants to come together.

What is your sense on an alliance in Delhi? Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has said publicly that it was the Congress which did not want an alliance in Delhi. Have you engaged in any talks with the AAP?

■ No, they have never spoken to me. That’s what sur-

prises me – you are speaking on your own without having spoken to me or my party.

Mr. Kejriwal says that the BJP will win all seven seats in Delhi if there is no alliance between the Congress and the AAP.

■ I won’t be as pessimistic as he is; certainly not.

The AAP came to power in Delhi on an anti-Congress platform. Is that what is holding back a possible alliance?

■ You all see it as an anti-Congress platform. I look at it the other way round. I say we lost [in Delhi] because of the false promises that were made to the people [by AAP]. The people got carried away. Of course, there was a sense of fatigue with the same government coming back three times. But there was also a false sense of ‘you’ll get free water, you’ll get free electricity’. I personally feel that we probably didn’t understand fully this danger, but finally when we got to understand, it was too late.

There is a history of the Congress supporting the AAP after the Assembly elections. Do you see any possibility of such a tie-up?

■ Not now, we will be contesting all seven seats.

We have seen all the battles that the AAP has fought with the Centre and vice versa, and we have seen activist Lieutenant Governors. How was it during your tenure as Chief Minister when you had to deal with an NDA government at the Centre?

■ When you come to govern, you do so in the interest of the city or the State you govern. In the case of Delhi, the Constitution is very different as Delhi is also the capital and you are working in a situation where whichever is the government at the Centre, you need to work together with them instead of having differences all the time. Because, if you were to have differences, eventually it is the Centre that will win, so why do that? You have been selected by the people of Delhi to make Delhi a much better place, and with all humility, I must say that Delhi did become a much better place during the 15 years that the Congress was in power and we were there for 15 years only because of this reason.

What do you think of what Mr. Kejriwal is proposing regarding the full statehood demand for Delhi – that the New Delhi Municipal Council area continues to be under the control of the Centre but the rest of the State gets full statehood?

■ It is for Parliament to decide such constitutional changes. The change has to come from Parliament. Unless that happens, how do you propose to do it? They

ought to know one thing: that you need to learn to work under the circumstances that are there and you can’t be making excuses that this is not right or that is not right. What is the guarantee that if you change it, you are going to be the best government?

Since you have been Chief Minister for 15 years, what according to you should be a practical solution for the division of powers?

■ All parties contest elections to come to power and if you are coming to power, you must accept the constitutional position. How can you suddenly say that the constitutional position is wrong? We also wanted to change the constitutional position and even put it in our manifesto but our own Congress government and the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government did not accept the demand. The ball was in the court of the Central government and we did not get it for the reason that Delhi occupies a special place as the capital city.

During NDA-I, if you wanted something done, how did you go about it? Did you approach the then Prime Minister directly?

■ I was always in touch with Mr. Vajpayee and he was very kind. I was also in touch with Ministers looking after urban affairs and it was never a relationship that did not understand the other’s point of view. They very often did not give in, but they were never impolite or dismissive.

How do you assess the prospects of the Congress in Delhi?

■ I am hoping to get, and I am working to get, all seven seats.

What is the formula you are going to use to select candidates?

■ You will get to know soon.

Do you plan to contest this election yourself?

■ No.

If you are not going to contest, what is your role going to be in Delhi?

■ You don’t have to contest to play a role. I will work for the party with great love and affection.

We see a lot of full-page advertisements by the AAP in the newspapers promoting the work that they have done. What do you think of this advertising blitzkrieg? Does the Congress have any strategy to counter it?

■ The government can spend money on whatever they want. But the question that arises out of this is, why are they spending so much money on this? Are there not better things to spend money on, like development and repairing roads in Delhi which are in a big mess? Are these advertisements really necessary, and how are they helping the growth of Delhi?

There is a sense sometimes that the Congress over-projects its own strength. You need the nuts and bolts to deliver as far as politics is concerned. Do you think the organisational strength is in place for the Congress?

■ Of course it is there and there are Congress workers looking at all aspects. The Congress has always been in tune with the times and has adopted new systems and new ways of doing things. I don’t think we are lagging behind in any way.

SINGLE FILE

Illuminating Asia’s future

Seoul embraces relations with New Delhi solely based on India’s inherent appeal and worth

SOURABH GUPTA



On February 22, a day after South Korean President Moon Jae-in welcomed him as his first state guest of 2019, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was conferred the Seoul Peace Prize in the South Korean capital. Mr. Modi is a conservative, nationalist leader and Mr. Moon is a liberal-minded

leader and a former human rights lawyer. Yet, similar to the *taegeuk* (yin-yang) at the centre of South Korea’s national flag, the two leaders, like their respective nations’ national identities and foreign relations, complement each other.

The striking historical characteristic of Korea is the homogeneity of its people and its continuous history, until recently, as a unified political entity. The same term, *Han min-jok*, is used to denote both the Korean race and the Korean nation. Riven by subnational loyalties, India is anything but homogenous. Yet India too has exuded unity since time immemorial, which is renewed daily in the hearts and minds of its citizens. South Korea’s national identity and nationalism were forged, respectively, by the collapse of Chinese universalism at the turn of the first millennium and, again, in the early 20th century. India was never part of the Chinese world order. Yet both nations were, in the evocative words of Rabindranath Tagore, “lamp bearers” in their modern histories, joined in the struggle against colonialism and determined to re-illuminate the East.

Korea’s foreign relations with China were steadied once its Yalu River frontier was confirmed in the late 14th century. That frontier was as porous as India’s Himalayan frontier is impassable. Yet both frontiers were breached by revolutionary communists in the aftermath of the founding of the People’s Republic, with profound geopolitical consequences that linger to this day.

The long history of Korea’s foreign relations with China also lends an important insight into its modern-day strategic conduct: essential to its preservation as an independent state on imperial China’s periphery was an immutable policy of non-involvement in the power politics or international relations of its continental-sized neighbour.

Seoul today, alone among its Indo-Pacific peers, embraces relations with New Delhi solely based on India’s inherent appeal and worth. India is not a hedge or a foil to be deployed against a rising China. This opens up, rather than limits, the space for bilateral cooperation, including on sensitive defence matters.

India and South Korea view each other today as special strategic partners. As they re-illuminate the eastern sky, they must also help forge a 21st century model of Asian international relations – one that is keyed to regional tradition and historical circumstance, imbued with an ethos of equality and consensus, and which resiles from doctrines that are zero-sum in character.

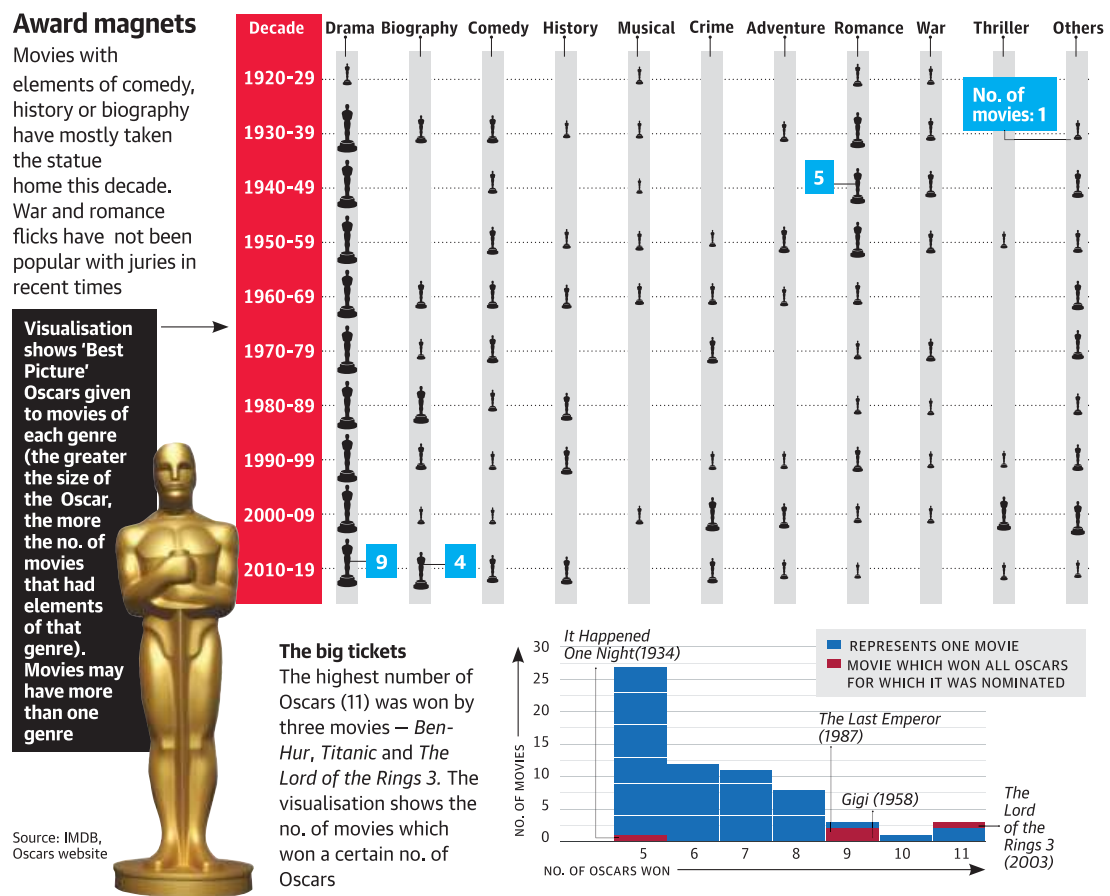
The writer is a Senior Fellow at the Institute for China-America Studies in Washington, D.C.



DATA POINT

Oscar’s favourites

Movies with elements of drama have been evergreen favourites for ‘Best Picture’ among juries of the Academy Awards. Only four movies have won all the awards for which they were nominated. By Varun B. Krishnan



FROM The Hindu. ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 27, 1969

Indian-made rocket launched

The first Indian-made Centaure rocket was successfully launched from the Thumba equatorial rocket station at 3:30 p.m. to-day [February 26] to the great jubilation of a large number of scientists. Dr. Vikram Sarabhai, Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission and Indian National Committee for Space Research, described the flight of the two-stage sounding rocket as “very satisfactory” and as having gone off “completely according to plan.” Hailing it as a “momentous event”, he said: “We are now on the path to long-range development of superior rockets, which will take us to our goal of satellite launching in five years.” He said today’s flight was “steady and powerful”, the separation took place flawlessly and the telemetry signals were “top class”.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 27, 1919

Indians in South Africa.

With reference to a telegram recently received by Mr. M.K. Gandhi and other leaders in India from Mr. Aswat, Chairman of the Transvaal British Indian Association, Johannesburg, in which he complained that laws affecting Indian community were being rigorously enforced with the object of European competitors. Mr. M. K. Gandhi has [as reported from Bombay] addressed the following letter to the press: The cable received by from Mr. Aswat, Chairman, Transvaal British Indian Association, shows that the revival of Satyagraha, with all the attendant suffering, is imminent in South Africa unless the danger that threatens to overwhelm Indians of Transvaal is averted by prompt and effective action by the Government of India and if necessary by the public also. The situation warrants a repetition of Lord Hardinge’s action and immediate despatch to South Africa of a mission consisting of, say a distinguished civilian and an equally distinguished Indian publicist.

CONCEPTUAL Hamilton’s rule

BIOLOGY
This refers to a biological rule that determines when an animal will engage in altruistic behaviour that seemingly does not improve its own well-being. Hamilton’s rule, named after the English evolutionary biologist W.D. Hamilton, states that an animal will engage in altruistic behaviour only when the indirect benefits that it derives from such behaviour are greater than the direct reproductive cost that it incurs. When an animal shares common genes with another animal that is in need of help, for instance, it is likely to exhibit altruism. This has led many biologists to believe that altruism could simply be selfish behaviour at the gene level.

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