



## His new Council

There is a clear realignment of power in the second Modi government

His self-assurance boosted by a massive popular mandate, Prime Minister Narendra Modi constituted a 58-member Council of Ministers, with more than 20 fresh faces, on Thursday. In a group far outshone by its leader, analysing individual talent is not easy, and may be irrelevant too. Mr. Modi, characteristically, sees to it that his imprimatur on all executive decisions is unmistakable. Still, the composition of the council throws light on Mr. Modi's thinking. The induction of his long-time lieutenant and BJP president Amit Shah as Home Minister not only fortifies the Prime Minister's authority, it might be the precursor to further changes in the party organisation and the national security architecture. While Mr. Shah's entry into the Cabinet was expected, the surprise induction of former Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar as the External Affairs Minister is evidently meant to deal with the choppy international waters that rock India's sailing. Mr. Jaishankar has been a close confidant of Mr. Modi. He has his task cut out, as India faces challenges with its most important international partner, the U.S. The spillover effects impact the country's interests in multiple ways, including its objectives of economic and technological advancement. By placing the two confidants in critical Ministries, Mr. Modi appears to loosen the grip of his own office on the government; the effects will be felt by National Security Adviser Ajit Doval if he continues into a second term, as is widely expected. The triumvirate of Mr. Modi, Mr. Shah and Mr. Jaishankar will form the centre of power.

Rajnath Singh as Defence Minister and Nirmala Sitharaman as Finance Minister are next in the pecking order. While the top layer of the Council is infused with fresh talent and is expected to generate new momentum, its representative character is skewed. It has only six women, one less than the previous one; the majority community and the Hindi heartland States have disproportionate representation. While Mr. Modi rewarded the upper caste groups that supported him wholeheartedly, the OBCs and Dalits who shifted to his party significantly in 2019 have had to be content with lower representation, at least for now. There is an argument that it is healthy that Mr. Modi does not bargain with caste, linguistic and region-oriented interests groups. Apna Dal leader Anupriya Patel from Uttar Pradesh was dropped; the Janata Dal (United) from Bihar was offered only one berth, which it refused to accept; and the Shiv Sena wanted at least three but has had to be content with one. As equations change, Mr. Modi might have to rethink these positions and there is scope to expand. A Council more representative in nature, in terms of gender, social and linguistic backgrounds and religion, will better reflect the mosaic that is India.

## A second election

Israel goes back to voters within six months in a changing political landscape

When the results of the April elections in Israel were announced, Benjamin Netanyahu, whose Likud party won 35 seats in the 120-member Parliament, was the winner. He was set to form a government with support from right-wing and religious parties to kick off a record term as Prime Minister. But his plans crumbled as the ultra-orthodox Jewish parties and right-wing nationalist Yisrael Beiteinu failed to come on board. When the deadline to form the government expired on May 29, Mr. Netanyahu had the support of 60 lawmakers, one short of majority. For the first time in Israel's history, a Prime Minister-designate failed to form a government, and the country will go to the polls again in September. The issue at stake is a military service bill. The ultra-orthodox Jews, the Haredim, are exempt from mandatory military service. Yisrael Beiteinu leader Avigdor Lieberman, a former Netanyahu aide, has submitted a bill to the Knesset that would enable the government to draft them. Mr. Lieberman, who has five lawmakers, made it a precondition for his support that the bill be passed. On the other side, the orthodox parties, which have 16 legislators, wanted the bill to be amended. Mr. Netanyahu's right-wing religious coalition collapsed before his eyes.

Mr. Netanyahu is a survivor. He will continue to lead the Likud in the September elections and appears better-placed than his rivals to form a coalition government. However, his challenges are rising. The new election will be held around two weeks before his pre-indictment hearing on corruption charges. The allegations have already dented Mr. Netanyahu's image. For decades, he had presented himself as a stronger, better alternative to Israel's old establishment elite. His war rhetoric, strongman policies and appeasement of orthodox Jews all burnished his appeal at a time when the Israeli electorate was steadily moving to the right. But the April election and the subsequent rift within Mr. Netanyahu's coalition suggest that the political landscape may be changing. The Israeli left is no longer Mr. Netanyahu's main political threat. The Labor party won only 4.43% votes and six seats in the April elections, while the Blue and White, a centrist coalition that is as hawkish on national security as the Likud, won 35 seats. The Blue and White didn't stand a chance to form the government this time because it lacked allies. By refusing to back Mr. Netanyahu over the conscription bill, Mr. Lieberman is further trying to weaken this left-right battle and bring into focus secular-versus-religious issues. Mr. Lieberman says he is fighting to prevent Israel becoming a religious state, and by saying so he is attacking Mr. Netanyahu's ties with religious parties. The challenge before Mr. Netanyahu is to fight growing political and legal odds in an election just months away.

# The idea of Congress-free India

The party has been the biggest hurdle for those devoted to remaking India into a 'Hindu rashtra' or into a socialist utopia



VARGHESE K. GEORGE

A fashionable school of soundbite intellectualism seeks to reduce the outcome of the election to the 17th Lok Sabha into the success of one individual and the failure of another. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's oratory, marketing, cunning, etc. and the massive funds available to him were factors in his success while Congress president Rahul Gandhi's untrained oratory and ineffective command over the limited human and material resources under him were factors in his defeat. But the Modi-Gandhi binary is ahistorical, as 2019 has been in the making for a century – the advance of Hindutva through meticulous organisation building and ideological training, and a corresponding retreat of the Congress on both counts. The contest between the themes, Mr. Gandhi's 'love all' and Mr. Modi's 'I will hit you at home', could not have been timed worse for the former historically, though this slogan was never an irresistible one. That creed cost Mahatma Gandhi his life; 'death to Gandhi' was a slogan of many Hindu fundamentalists before his assassination in 1948, by one of them.

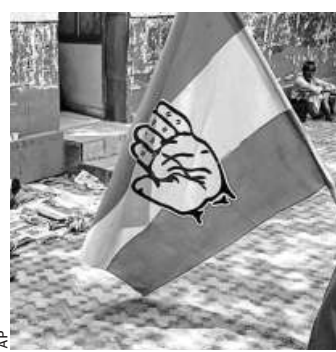
### Not a new leitmotif

'Death to Congress' – or a Congress-free India – is not a new leitmotif in the country's politics, though the idea appears to have acquired a new urgency for some. This call for a Congress-free India comes from diametrically opposite perspectives. For instance, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) president, and now Union Home Minis-

ter, Amit Shah's call for a Congress-free India is for the advancement of Hindutva, while Swaraj India president Yogendra Yadav wants the Congress dead for the exact opposite reason. Mr. Yadav believes the Congress is the only obstruction in the emergence of an alternative to the BJP, presumably his own party which is now TV studio-based.

This certainly sounds ironical, but is neither surprising nor unprecedented. Those who dreamed of reviving India to its pristine Hindu glory and those who vowed to build India into a utopia – of socialist, anarchist or market varieties – all thought the only force that obstructed them in their pursuit was the Congress. They disliked the Congress, variously, for not being Hindu enough, socialist enough or market-friendly enough. They joined hands in waves of anti-Congress mobilisations on different occasions for several decades. While constituents of anti-Congress coalitions had their legitimate grievances about the dominant party, a streak of self-righteous egotism of leaders also contributed to them. Successful waves of anti-Congress mobilisations progressively weakened the party, and opened political avenues for excluded social groups. But they also contributed to an erosion of public trust in parliamentary democracy, party politics, the rule of law and constitutionalism.

The Navnirman Movement in Gujarat in the early 1970s that attacked MLAs to force their resignations, and on its model the Bihar movement led by Jayaprakash Narayan to force legislators to resign, were attempts to overcome the Congress electoral majority in street fights. The latest among these – and India's first mob agitation raised through social media – was the Anna Hazare movement of



2011 that sought sweeping anti-corruption measures and painted politics and politicians as universally corrupt. The widely held claim of populists all around the world today is that they speak for the authentic people without the institutional mediation of popular will in representative democracy has a history in India. We have rarely witnessed a bottom-up mobilisation against communal and caste violence, and this selective nature of 'people's mobilisation' is also revelatory. At each stage of anti-Congress mobilisation, and electoral alliances in 1967, 1977 and 1989, all individual constituents imagined they were using the others, but it was always the Hindutva groups that came on top. The Anna movement was the prefect precursor to the rise of Mr. Modi in 2014.

### A post-2002 binary

So, while it is understandable why Mr. Shah wants a Congress-free India, it is difficult to comprehend why anyone anti-BJP would like the Congress to die. In fact, the 2002 Gujarat riots appeared to bury anti-Congressism among anti-BJP parties forever, as UPA-I took shape on the principle of a valid binary: that the fundamental fault-line of Indian politics is whether India shall remain an inclusive and non-sectarian country or become a Hindu rashtra.

While one call is for the death of

the Congress party; another is for the end of its dynastic leadership, which sounds reasonable and even desirable. Here, the problem is only practical. Some thought JD (U) leader Nitish Kumar could be made Congress president. Apart from the fact that Mr. Kumar landed in the BJP camp soon after the suggestion was made, it is inconceivable that he could have any appeal in, say, Tamil Nadu, where Mr. Gandhi still has a certain influence. The Congress's emotional connect with the Indian public is through the curated memory of the freedom struggle, Nehru, Gandhi, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, etc., while it also developed a network of material patronage. Over the years, the memory and the Nehru-Gandhi family became inseparable as most other icons were ejected from the Congress pantheon – P.V. Narasimha Rao is a relatively recent case in point. If memories are the lifeline of the Congress, the fact that they are all embodied in one family helped the Sangh Parivar politics of dismantling it. Sangh politics seeks to manage the collective memory to its advantage – by manipulation or, in some cases, complete erasure.

The other tool of Congress popularity, patronage, turned from patronage of social groups to patronage of individual vested interests first and crony capitalism post-liberalisation. This strengthened the hands of power brokers, who besieged the family and acted on their behalf with arrogance. They could even deliver electoral victories. Its ideological vacuum has been expanding in the meanwhile, and the Congress's adversarial figure of imperialism became a fading and irrelevant memory for each successive generation in the era of globalisation – while the Sangh Parivar's imagination of an internal adver-

sary gained more traction with the spread of global Islamism. The Sangh Parivar patronage network also grew stronger. Though a dynast himself, and hence part of the problem, Mr. Gandhi has an awareness of the problem. The current crisis in the Congress is a stand-off between Mr. Gandhi and the party old guard. Mr. Gandhi believes that the old guard has failed his reformative agenda; the latter believes that Mr. Gandhi has disrupted the wheels of the party's election winning machine.

Mr. Gandhi has told members of the Congress Working Committee that he would step aside and work as a moral force in politics. He says he does not want to seek positions of power. His desire may be honourable and salutary. But in the current context, that may not be his destiny. Being a political ascetic these days needs film directors, multiple camera angles, attractive and colourful costumes, etc., which is not his forte. Being a dynast may be his biggest burden, but that is also his biggest advantage – the paradox is that only the dynast can rescue the Congress from this abyss, if at all. Nobody else in the party has the moral authority that the rest of the party will defer to.

### An inescapable reality

Calling for a Congress without the dynasty is comparable to calling for a BJP disconnected from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, a Republican Party minus the evangelicals, or a Labour party delinked from trade unions. There may be many things that you disapprove of in these arrangements, but that is an inescapable reality. Calling for a Congress today without a Nehru-Gandhi at its helm is tantamount to calling for a Congress-free India, at least for now.

varghese.g@thehindu.co.in

# Outlining the first 100 days

There must be a revamp of how government services are delivered, and how India does business



SRIVATSA KRISHNA

A full majority government has been re-elected in India after many years. A young, aspirational India has identified itself with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his "idea of India". Here is a non-exhaustive agenda for Mr. Modi's first 100 days. India is on the cusp of overtaking the United States to become the world's second largest economy, with a consumer spending of \$5.7 trillion, 77% of the population under 44 (80% among the middle class), and a billion Internet users, all by 2030, according to the World Economic Forum.

In mission mode, Mr. Modi needs to expand his "home delivery of services" model (cooking gas, health care, multiple citizens' services) to cover major government services. Separating the "point of decision" of a government service from "point of delivery" will be a necessary condition to get red tape out of the way. Technology as the lifeblood has to flow through every major government programme, especially in agriculture and health care, through the ambitious 'Digital India' programme, which cannot remain a stapled-together version of

the schemes of previous years; it needs to become genuinely transformational. An 'AAA' Government or 'Anytime-Anywhere-Anyhow' (or on any device or platform) delivery of services is still far away, which Mr. Modi needs to accelerate in deep collaboration with the private sector.

Loan waivers and input subsidies have not ameliorated rural distress, so the key policy shift is to move away from production to income. Having promised \$85 per small farmer as a direct transfer, he needs to move from an inefficient, ossified cross-sector subsidy regime to an income-support model. This is possible by expanding this to cover all farmers in terms of both value and volume. This unconditional cash transfer should be an electronic transfer (banks, primary agricultural credit societies and post offices, with an area cap) keeping an eye on the fiscal deficit.

### Harnessing data

India is emerging as a major 'data economy' with over 800 million mobile phone users, half of whom own a smartphone. India needs to leverage the enormous data it produces and deepen use of an 'India Stack' everywhere. However, India is way behind the U.S. and China in terms of artificial intelligence, data analytics and blockchain. It needs to pump in millions of dollars to make itself future ready, perhaps by first completing the fibre optic pipe that it begun to lay



R.V. MOORTHY

five years ago. It needs to make it extremely simple for startups to start and die (should they wish to). India received about \$11 billion in venture capital through 748 deals in 2018 (of \$29 billion private equity inflows) but there is much more capital waiting to come if its unicorns and 'soon'icorns (soon to be unicorns) benefit from an easier regulatory framework.

Mr. Modi needs to set up an "India First" Investment Agency directly in his office which should reach out to select 'Fortune 1000' companies to set up shop in India. For example, why shouldn't a Tesla set up its next gigafactory in India if it can be done at half the cost of doing it in Nevada? After a deep dive into their annual reports, he needs to send empowered envoys to attract them for marquee investments (in exchange for assured job creation). Credible incentives must include an exemption from India's notoriously opaque land laws and bureaucratic maze. This should not and must not be outsourced to any Ministry, for only the credibility of the highest office will make investors take such calls

and commitments seriously.

There are 200-odd labour laws that mandate companies with 100 or more workers to get government permission to lay off or even change job descriptions (which never comes). Thus, India does not get the benefits of scale of huge factories with over 75% firms employing less than 50 workers, to escape such regressive laws. There is a golden opportunity to compete with and take business away from Bangladesh (garments), China (toys, electronics and manufacturing) as their wages rise. India can turn attractive by abolishing such restrictive labour laws, which will enhance employment by erasing a key factor that throttles India's global competitiveness.

There are an estimated three million vacancies in government jobs in India and these are often left unfilled to keep the fiscal deficit low. While many of these jobs are redundant for a "New India" in overstuffed sectors such as railways recruitment needs to start now through employment exchanges to buttress the dismal number of doctors, teachers, police officials to keep the ship moving.

### Fast tracking privatisation

There must be a start to the privatisation of Air India and the other top 10 public sector entities without the restrictive covenants that discouraged bidders the last time. It should not be a tinkering on the margins with privatisation as has

been the case so far. The bold reclassification of bad loans (of about \$190 billion) to reveal their true picture needs to be followed by recapitalisation, a merging of banks, narrowing down priority-sector lending, and, finally, at least some privatisation. This will stop bleeding coffers and send out a strong signal to the world that the Modi government means business.

Last but not the least, the focus needs to be on execution and delivery. Mr. Modi should set up a delivery unit inside the Prime Minister's Office using modern technology tools (OmniFocus and Slack), for deep monitoring and follow-up, programme-wise and office-wise. The government's relentless focus should be on results and not only on process and effort. This can be the next avatar of the Pro-Active Governance And Timely Implementation (PRAGATI) system.

A surging 1.3 billion-strong "New India" identifies itself with Mr. Modi. Economic super performance should become a causal effect for election victories and the perpetual intellectual and execution gridlock needs to be broken. Mr. Modi has to deliver India victory in its war against poverty, the bureaucracy and every anti-prosperity force that holds it back. Make no mistake. This mandate is for transformational and not incremental change.

Srivatsa Krishna is an IAS officer. The views expressed are personal

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

### Team Modi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's careful selection of Ministers for the various cabinet portfolios, especially important ones such as Home, Foreign Affairs, Defence and Finance, deserves appreciation. There is no question of favouring the so-called heavyweights in terms of seniority or regional considerations, which were the norms followed earlier. Merit seems to come first in Mr. Modi's scheme of things. I hope that the new Ministers perform well. An interesting portfolio to watch would be Home Affairs and how it aids in federalism, under strain now.

V.S. GANESHAN,  
Bengaluru

Modi 2.0 appears to be quite similar to Modi 1.0. Distilled to its core, the mandate of 2019 was about an element of faith – a faith in Mr. Modi and his ability to defend the interests of the Indian state and advance the goals of growth, development, national security and stability. Now that the new government has taken charge, he cannot keep harping on national security as there are a host of issues that require immediate attention. The expectations are even higher this time as the National Democratic Alliance has had a stable five-year run, unencumbered by the whims of self-seeking allies. A stable and strong government should be synonymous with peaceful co-existence, with absolutely no space for lynch mobs,

self-styled vigilantes and hate-mongers. To deliver on the expectations of the electorate, Mr. Modi would do well to continue with the discipline he instituted in his last term, but make way for autonomy and transparency. PADMINI RAGHAVENDRA,  
Secunderabad

As the Home Minister, Amit Shah should 'do right by all manner of people' without being swayed by any extraneous consideration. He will be watched closely to see how he handles domestic affairs 'without fear or favour and without affection or ill-will'. He must ensure that no one is persecuted in the name of 'internal security'. He has a constitutional and moral obligation to provide protection to India's religious

minorities, which he must fulfil. G. DAVID MILTON,  
Maruthancode, Tamil Nadu

With a strong leader, backed by an overwhelming majority, come decisive and bold decisions. This has been clear in the selection of cabinet picks. The selection of a trained foreign service diplomat, not a party man, shows that business will not be usual in New Delhi. The agenda since the first term of Mr. Modi, to raise the global profile of India as a serious player, will be well served with the selection of a former career officer. There is also a balancing act as far as rewarding supporters, as is evident by the picks from Odisha, Telangana and Rajasthan. Domestic, job-oriented growth that

augments India's aspiration to be a global leader will be the task for the new government. SESHADRI RAMKUMAR,  
Lubbock, Texas, U.S.

### Laying out priorities

The hard work and determined approach of Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy are what have fetched him rewards in terms of his resounding electoral win in the Andhra Pradesh Assembly polls. Besides these it is also the mistakes and blunders of his

### CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

In the front-page story titled "T.N. fails to find a place in Ministry" (May 31, 2019), there was a reference to Atal Bihari Vajpayee becoming Prime Minister for the second time in March 1999. It should have been March 1998.

MORE LETTERS ONLINE:  
www.hindu.com/opinion/letters/