



## The power of two

Will the SP-BSP victories be a catalyst for the formation of new political alliances?

While announcing her support for the Samajwadi Party in the Gorakhpur and Phulpur Lok Sabha constituencies, Bahujan Samaj Party leader Mayawati was conducting a political experiment: to test whether her party could effectively work with the SP, until recently her principal rival. By all accounts, the experiment has been a striking success. Poll arithmetic was an important reason for the reversal of fortunes of the Bharatiya Janata Party in the two constituencies, especially Gorakhpur, which Yogi Adityanath had won five successive times, beginning in 1998. Given this, the loss is an embarrassing political setback for the Chief Minister and is likely to be perceived as the squandering of the goodwill built up by successive heads of the Gorakhnath Math. Phulpur, vacated by Keshav Prasad Maurya when he teamed up with Mr. Adityanath as his deputy CM, is also a stinging defeat. That a Chief Minister and his deputy have lost in their own backyards is, to understate the point, hardly a good advertisement for the BJP's popularity or that of its State government. Arguably, it is the BJP's very success that has brought its rivals together. The BSP, which has been averse to political alliances, had offered support to the SP unconditionally without committing to a formal tie-up. The question now is what this successful experiment will engender. Will it convince Ms. Mayawati to go farther, confident that her support base is not averse to a larger alliance between the two parties? The fate of the 2019 election may well depend on the answer to this. To an extent, the leadership of Akhilesh Yadav helped seal the SP-BSP understanding. Ms. Mayawati found it easier to jettison the baggage of the past now that her bitter rival and SP founder Mulayam Singh has receded to the background. Akhilesh Yadav has been open to alliances, displaying a willingness to rise above the clannishness of the earlier generation. What Gorakhpur and Phulpur demonstrate is that the BJP is not invincible in the face of a new social and political electoral regrouping, something that the SP and the BSP must be fully aware of.

Elsewhere, the byelections in Bihar's Araria Lok Sabha and Jehanabad Assembly constituencies have shown that the Rashtriya Janata Dal of Lalu Prasad will not be wiped out by the return of Nitish Kumar's Janata Dal (United) to the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance. Although the results in Bihar, unlike those in UP, may not lead to a realignment of forces, the RJD and the Congress can hope to gain some political momentum on the back of the BJP's loss. The RJD may not have fully recovered from the collapse of the grand alliance with the desertion of the JD(U), but it knows it is not out of the political equation completely. Together with the Rajasthan by-election results, these losses have created doubts about the strength of the BJP's hold in the Hindi heartland, and given its rivals some reason for cheer and some cause to believe in the arithmetic of alliances.

## Hawking, 1942-2018

This great man took physics to the people, and changed the way we think about disability

Few scientists manage to break down the walls of the so-called ivory tower of academia and touch and inspire people who may not otherwise be interested in science. Stephen Hawking was one of these few. Judging by the odds he faced as a young graduate student of physics at Cambridge University, nothing could have been a more remote possibility. When he was about 20 years old, he got the shattering news that he could not work with the great Fred Hoyle for his PhD, as he had aspired to. Around this time he was diagnosed with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, an incurable motor neurone disease, and given two years to live. Not many would have survived this, let alone excelled in the manner he did. Luckily, the type of ALS he had progressed slowly, and over time he made many discoveries that marked him among the great physicists of his time. His first breakthrough was in the work he did for his PhD thesis. The expanding universe and the unstoppable collapse of a black hole under its own gravity present two extreme spectacles for the physicist to grapple with. Inspired by Roger Penrose's ideas on the latter, Hawking came up with a singularity theorem for the universe. This work and its extensions, known as the Hawking-Penrose singularity theorems, brought him international acclaim. Later, along with others he formulated the laws of black hole mechanics, which resemble the laws of thermodynamics. Thinking along these lines led him to a contradiction – that this theory predicted that black holes would exude radiation, whereas in a purely classical picture nothing could escape the black hole, not even light. He resolved this contradiction by invoking quantum mechanics. The radiation of the black hole was named Hawking radiation.

There is no doubt that with Hawking's death the world has lost an outstanding scientist. But he was not only a pathbreaker in the world of science. He came to be known to millions with the publication of *A Brief History of Time*, his best-selling book describing in non-technical terms the structure, development and fate of the universe. He ranks with Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein as that rare physicist who fired the popular imagination. However, while Newton and Einstein worked on broad canvases, Hawking was focussed on cosmology and gravitation. His was a life that carried to the public not only the secrets of the cosmos but also the promise of hope and human endeavour; he showed that disability need not hold a person back in the pursuit of his dreams. He leaves behind a wealth of knowledge, and also the conviction that the will to survive can overcome all odds.

# The Left doesn't need the Congress

A wiser, though counter-intuitive, strategy would be to present the BJP with two separate fronts



G. SAMPATH

It's hardly a week since the nation was subjected to a flurry of gleeful obituaries by self-proclaimed liberals eager to perform the last rites for the Left in India. What was that metaphor again – about the sunset being red, and the sunrise being saffron?

Well, last weekend, 30,000 farmers in Maharashtra marched from sunrise to sunset for days on end with a singular objective – to brandish their red flags in India's commercial capital and demand their rights from a ruling elite that has shown scant regard for the people who produce the contents of their refrigerators.

So, isn't the Left about to die? Wasn't the defeat of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), or CPI (M), in the recent Tripura polls a body blow to the Left? What if it loses power in Kerala, too, in the next Assembly election? As per the currently popular political wisdom, the Left is on life support and its survival depends on its answer to an old dilemma: Should it ally with the Congress or not?

Of course, the loss of the CPI(M) in Tripura was a major setback. It would be delusional to believe otherwise. But it would be tragic if the loss becomes an excuse for it to ally with the Congress.

Two arguments are advanced in favour of such an alliance: the Left's increasing marginalisation, which has rendered it too weak to mount an effective electoral campaign on its own; and the need for all the secular parties to join hands to prevent socially divisive Hindutva forces from returning to power in 2019.

Both may have merit from a



short-term electoral perspective. Over the long-term, however, allying with the Congress could be a strategic blunder that would not only shrink the already dwindling space for progressive politics but also strengthen the purveyors of ultra-nationalist hate politics.

### Learning from the past

The CPI(M) doesn't need groundbreaking theorisation to see what lies ahead. It only needs to consider the history of its counterparts elsewhere. The largest communist party in post-war Western Europe, the Italian Communist Party (PCI) polled 34.4% of the votes in the national elections of 1976. It then made a 'historic compromise' to ally with the then Italian equivalent of India's Congress party, the centrist Christian Democracy (DC), ostensibly to use its mandate to advance a Left-wing agenda.

But during the alliance, it was the Communists who shifted rightward. The secular, progressive PCI found itself back-peddalling on issues such as divorce and abortion, so as not to upset the DC's Catholic middle class voters. Italy's parliamentary Left never recovered from this alliance.

Second, more than the Left needing the Congress, it is the Congress that needs the Left. The Congress has always accommodated both leftist and right-wing factions. Its political character is a reflection of whichever faction

happens to be dominant at a given point in time.

The most progressive phases of the Congress – especially under Jawaharlal Nehru, and the first eight years of United Progressive Alliance rule, when it passed a slew of pro-people laws – would not have happened without an ideologically committed Left within and outside the Parliament.

Without an influential Left to keep up the pressure, the Congress would simply teeter rightward – not just economically but also socially. It will lose whatever progressive potential it holds at present, and collapse into a pale version of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

That's what had happened to the Congress in Gujarat, until its progressive tendencies came to life last year following an understanding with the likes of Jignesh Mevani, Hardik Patel and Alpesh Thakor.

These men were essentially articulating the interests of the Left's core social base: landless Dalits, jobless working classes, marginalised farmers. The redistributive politics of the movements they led share a natural affinity with the Left. But given the Left's near absence in Gujarat, they went along with the Congress, despite the latter's patchy track record in protecting the interests of these groups.

Such political malleability is a

characteristic not just of the Congress but of liberalism itself, which the Congress claims to uphold.

In democracies the world over, liberal politics could flourish only until the Left was hegemonic in the social sphere, and this was a hegemony constructed on the back of the labour movement's victories over capital in the early 20th century. The generous welfare state that defines the West's advanced capitalist economies is a gift not of liberalism but of the Left. This welfarism began to wither shortly after the Soviet Union collapsed and the Left went into a shell globally, leaving the liberals free to peddle neo-liberal austerity as the panacea for every developmental problem.

### Need for an authentic Left

There is also a direct correlation between the decline of the Left and the rise of right-wing hate politics. From Nazi Europe to contemporary Greece and Germany, history has proven time and again that it is not the liberals who are the staunchest defenders of democratic values, and take on neo-fascist elements on the streets but groups affiliated with the Left. We have seen this in India too, from JNU to Kerala.

The reason is simple: liberalism doesn't have the theoretical firepower to map, let alone articulate, the organic link between big capital and right-wing nationalism (or fascism), and between working class deprivation and the lure of authoritarian populism. On the contrary, liberalism believes that problems such as caste oppression and sectarianism can be resolved through free market therapy and homoeopathic consumerism.

This is why the Hindutva brigade reserves its worst animus for the Left and not the liberals. As for India's Left parties, it's been clear for some time what they need to do: go out on the streets and lend their resources and organisational

skill to the multitude of people's movements that have sprouted across the country: from farmers' mobilisations to teachers agitations, student unrest, Dalit movements, and Adivasi struggles for land rights, among others.

The successful farmer's march organised by the CPI(M)-affiliated All India Kisan Sabha has shown what the Left can achieve if it sets aside its electoral anxieties and gets down to the task of political mobilisation. As the rally entered India's financial capital last Sunday, the non-Left and even 'anti-Left' Opposition parties were jumping into the 'sea of red', with the Congress, the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena, and even the Shiv Sena proclaiming their support.

In the final analysis, rather than the Congress and the Left coming together to form a single electoral block – a choice between two options also makes it easier to polarise the electorate – a more sagacious though counter-intuitive strategy would be to present the BJP with two fronts, the Left and the Centre. It has the added merit of pinning the BJP to its actual locus in the socio-cultural matrix – which is at the extreme Right of the political spectrum.

This also makes it more difficult for a Hindutva party, no matter how electorally dominant, to encroach on the centrist space, from where it could eventually push the Left out altogether. The Uttar Pradesh and Bihar by-election results are a timely reminder that even majoritarian politics is subject to the law of diminishing returns.

As for the Congress, it is a hand that can paint with any colour. But without an independent Left to bring out the red, as the brave farmers did in Mumbai, it's only a matter of time before the whole palette is reduced to shades of saffron.

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## Far short of the potential

The India-Japan economic relationship remains underwhelming in relation to strategic ties



PALLAVI AIYAR

In theory, it's hard to find two nations that make a better economic fit than fast-growing, populous India and rich, demographically challenged Japan. India needs technical expertise and investments to develop its infrastructure, while Japan has capital to spare and know-how to share. They have a common strategic objective in countering Chinese hegemony in Asia, a goal that can be best met in collaboration. And they enjoy a rare historic amity, being geographically and culturally close, but not too close and, therefore, free of contentious issues such as border disputes.

### Boosting ties

Consequently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Japanese counterpart Shinzo Abe have worked hard to upgrade ties. Regular high-profile bilateral visits have brought with them a smorgasbord of memoranda of understanding, some big-ticket projects, notably Japanese investment in India's first bullet train, and political

avowals to grow the economic relationship exponentially.

There are now 1,369 Japanese companies and over 4,800 Japanese corporate offices active in India. Japanese investment in India totalled \$4.7 billion in 2016-17, up from \$2.6 billion the previous year. Japan currently ranks as the third largest investor in India.

And yet, the India-Japan economic relationship remains underwhelming both in relation to its potential, and to the ties that each nation shares with China. According to Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) data, China received about five times more Japanese investment between 1996-2015 (\$116 billion) than India did (\$24 billion). Japan-India two-way trade – \$13.48 billion in 2016-17 – is also a fraction of the \$350 billion China-Japan trade relationship or even India-China trade (\$84.44 billion in 2017). In fact the share of India-Japan trade in Japan's total trade basket is barely 1% and it is a little over 2% of India's trade with the rest of the world.

The gap cannot wholly be explained by the usual suspects that plague foreign investors in India such as inadequate infrastructure, complex tax regulations and land acquisition problems, although these remain substantial challenges.



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Tomofumi Nishizawa, manager of JETRO's Overseas Research Department, spent five years at his organisation's India office, till 2015. According to him it takes Japanese companies in India longer than their Korean or Chinese counterparts to learn how best to localise their products for the Indian market.

He elaborated with the example of air conditioners. The Japanese tend to think that the most important element is the quality of the air conditioner so that it is able to last without the need for repairs. But in India it is cheap to have an air conditioner repaired and technicians are abundant. The consumer is therefore more focussed on cost than durability. Japanese manufacturer Daikin, which recently opened a second manufacturing facility in Rajasthan, is an example of a company that eventually cottoned on to this, switching from importing expensive

parts from Japan to sourcing them locally.

### India's image

But the greatest challenge according to Mr. Nishizawa is cultural: an outdated and negative image of India. He said that employees picked for jobs in India often act as though they have drawn the short straw. The larger corporations may realise India's potential, but small and medium enterprises are the worst culprits of this attitude. "Maybe our attitude can be called racist," he said. "It is very difficult to change it."

The difference in the cultural relationship to punctuality is another stumbling block. In Japan, being on time is akin to religion, whereas in India, time is fungible. Ultimately, Japanese corporations are strongly risk averse which makes it difficult for them to cope in the free-wheeling, jugaad-proud environment of India, where flexibility and impromptu decision making are necessary skills in the business arsenal. Mr. Nishizawa says, "We (Japan) are not the global norm, but we act like we are. Unless we become more flexible and adapt better to other ways, we will not succeed."

### Some optimism

But this pessimism can be overblown. A recent development that

bodes well for the future is the collaboration between Japan's Panasonic and India's Tata Elxsi to develop smart solutions and products for Panasonic customers in India and the neighbouring region. "This is only possible in India because it has the capacity and skills for engineering design that can match Japanese requirements," says Mr. Nishizawa. Roping in more Indian companies to develop and design Japanese products for the South Asian market could be one major way forward in deepening the bilateral engagement.

The other is the use of India as a manufacturing base for markets in Africa, a trend that is interesting to Japan's business strategists. Existing examples include Hitachi Construction Machinery's joint venture with Tata whose Kharagpur plant is a hub for exports to developing countries, as well as auto major Nissan, which exports the India-made Datsun 'GO+' to South Africa.

And yet as Mr. Nishizawa concludes, "The G (government) to G (business) to B." Closing this distance remains a tough ask.

Pallavi Aiyar has reported from China, Europe, Indonesia and Japan. She is a Young Global Leader with the World Economic Forum

## 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.

### Not yet, says court

The Supreme Court's decision to indefinitely extend the deadline for Aadhaar-mobile phone linkage, among other such requirements, comes as a respite for the common man ("Aadhaar link deadline extended indefinitely", March 14). The court must pronounce its verdict soon and end this state of confusion and stalemate once and for all. At the same time, it is disheartening to see a batch of petitioners arguing against mandatory Aadhaar linkages with government and other public/private services.

What is wrong if all countrymen are provided with an individual digital identity that not only would help them in accessing various services and welfare measures in an

efficient and transparent manner but also result in limiting corruption, leakages, faulty practices and bolster criminal investigations during legal processes? Such a digital identity database works very smoothly in the developed world.

NISHANT CHOUDHARY, Ajmer, Rajasthan

Most of us have had enough with piecemeal notifications and legislation by the government. The time has come to enable a sense of certainty that citizens will not be harmed in light of the privacy issue and services will continue to be available to them. The government also needs to examine whether there is such a pressing need to link Aadhaar to many services.

B. VEERAKUMARAN THAMPI, Thiruvananthapuram

People are fed up with the ordeal of linking their Aadhaar number to services that impact every aspect of their lives. The risk of data leaks cannot be wished away. On the issue of biometric changes that happen in the case of senior citizens, frequent updating of information is required. It is still unclear whether the "benefits" of Aadhaar linkage in the long run will outweigh the negatives.

K.S. THAMPI, Chennai

### Stephen Hawking

The passing away of Stephen Hawking, the genius who couldn't move but was still ready to travel to space, is extremely sorrowful. His valuable contributions especially to the fields of physics and cosmology have and will continue to serve as a pathway for further

explorations. His three pieces of advice are absolutely true: remember to look up at the stars and not at your feet; never give up work because work gives meaning and purpose to your life; and if you are lucky enough to find love remember that it is rare and never throw it away.

RAMALA KINNERA, Hyderabad

### For Indian lawyers

It is only fair that foreign law firms and lawyers be denied the right to practise in India because when an Indian lawyer enrolls himself with a State Bar Association, he gets the right to practise anywhere in India and not out of India. Hence, similar rights and restrictions should be imposed on foreign legal players. However the 'fly in and fly out' rule laid down by the Supreme Court makes no

sense as the only catch here is that the visit and practice by a foreign law firm should not be frequent but occasional. What amounts to frequent is not expressly stated, which makes it open to interpretation, speculation and misuse. Foreign law firms should have a right to participate only in

### CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

Western Digital Corp. is using a technology based on shingled magnetic recording for its 14 terabyte drive. The technology is not based on microwave-assisted magnetic recording as given in the Business page report headlined "Western Digital's 14 TB drive to debut in 2018" (March 14, 2018).

A clarification: The reference to the 75 MW solar power plant – inaugurated in Mirzapur district, Uttar Pradesh, ("Modi, Macron go on a boat ride", March 13, 2018) – pertains to its current generation. The inaugural plaque says it is a 100 MW plant.

A front-page story titled "Supreme Court seeks data on child sex abusers" (March 12, 2018) talked about the Prevention of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012. It should have been Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012.

It is the policy of The Hindu to correct significant errors as soon as possible. Please specify the edition (place of publication), date and page. The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300 (11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday); Fax: +91-44-28552963; E-mail: readerseditor@thehindu.co.in; Mail: Readers' Editor, The Hindu, Kasturi Buildings, 859 & 860 Anna Salai, Chennai 600 002, India. All communication must carry the full postal address and telephone number. No personal visits. The Terms of Reference for the Readers' Editor are on www.thehindu.com