

# How BJP is designing its electoral shields and strategies



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When the BJP captured power for the first time in 1996, Prime Minister Vajpayee had to quit within 13 days, unable as he was to prove his party's majority in the floor test. Then he regretted that the BJP had faced a 'political untouchability'. Behind it was there the regional parties' mental distancing from the BJP in the wake of the Rath yatra, Babri Masjid demolition and the subsequent riots. But over the years, the alienation disappeared. Vajpayee again became Prime Minister in 1998 and 1999. Later, the BJP riding on the Modi wave captured power twice.

At a time when the BJP is confronted with challenges, political as well as ethical, several dissident leaders from the opposition parties defect to the saffron party. Ahead of the 2024 parliamentary

elections, the party has been devising various strategies, realizing that in hours of crisis, shields are as important as weapons.

### **Adventure amid rows**

Currently the BJP finds itself in a fix following the Supreme Court's order over the electoral bonds. Meanwhile, Adish C Aggarwala, president of the Supreme Court Bar Association, has written to the President, seeking to stay the enforcement of the court's electoral bonds verdict. But the SC Bar Association has said he has no authority and authorization to write the letter. It is remarkable that Aggarwala, branded by the Congress as a 'Modi devotee', is one of the authors of the book 'Narendra Modi: A Charismatic and Visionary Statesman.'

Meanwhile, a meeting led by Prime Minister Modi was held on March 14, 2024, to decide on the appointments to fill two vacant posts of Election Commissioner. It is to be recalled that Anup Chandra Pandey demitted office as Election Commissioner of India on Feb. 14 and another Election Commissioner Arun Goel has resigned. The above meeting was originally scheduled for March 15, but held one day in advance. The union government recently brought in a legal amendment in order to accommodate a union minister instead of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in the committee for selecting the Election Commissioner. As per the amendment, which was effected in such a way as to water down a Supreme Court order passed in this regard, the committee would consist of Prime Minister Modi, Congress leader in the Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury and a union minister. That is to say, the committee would have two members from the government side. The opposition parties have been criticizing this arrangement.

Meanwhile, the petition against the meeting filed in the Supreme Court is set to come up for hearing on March 15. The BJP's behind-the-scenes role in this affair is alleged. In the past four years, two persons including Arun Goel have resigned from their EC posts. It remains a mystery why Arun Goel, who was set to don the mantle of Chief Election Commissioner in future, has quit three years before his term ends. The air has been rife with speculations that he will be fielded as a BJP candidate in the elections. Thus there are several controversies afloat involving the BJP.

### **Diversion tactic**

While the Supreme Court verdict on the electoral bonds passed on March 11 has sent immense shock waves all through the country, the union government announced in the evening on the day itself that the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) was coming into effect. It was yet another tactical move by the BJP which has mastered the art and craft of deciding which should be the hot topics of discussion in the political arena. Expectedly, the media have started teeming with news and articles about the CAA. It is expected that the BJP would gain a major political mileage from the CAA in Assam and West Bengal – the states that abound in problems pertaining to illegal immigrants. The BJP is hoping that the anti-CAA opinions sweeping the country will turn to its advantage in terms of religion. However, it is quite remarkable that Modi has been stoically silent on this issue.

Yet another BJP-related event has hogged the national attention; that is, the sudden change of guard in the Haryana government. A day after he was praised profusely by Modi himself, Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar resigned amid a split in the ruling BJP and Jannayak Janata Party (JJP) alliance. Of course, Khattar said that he had done as he did only by way of making way for the young in politics. But it is very clear that this development in Haryana was nothing but a reflection of the BJP's customary technique of deflating the anti-incumbency factor in the state. This is corroborated by the appointment of new faces as CMs in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. Moreover, the posting of the new CM for Haryana Nayab Singh Saini belonging to the OBC category is intended to woo the OBCs constituting around 40 per cent of the state's total population. The BJP uses this move as a powerful technique to regain its influence among the Jats whose support for the saffron party has been dwindling on account of the farmers' agitation, female wrestlers' struggle, Agnipath affairs and several issues. As already rattled by the defection of its Jat community leaders Rahul Kaswan in Rajasthan and Brijendra Singh in Haryana to the Congress party, the BJP had to adopt its wonted technique to woo back the Jat community and also to repeat its roaring success in the 2019 parliamentary elections in Haryana where it swept stakes, winning all the 10 constituencies.

### **Back-to-back strategies**

The BJP is contesting only a limited number of constituencies in Andhra Pradesh where it is in an alliance with the Telugu Desam and Jana Sena Party and where both Lok Sabha and Assembly elections are to be held. The reason is that the saffron party, which has lost power in Karnataka, aims to consolidate its position in South India. That is why despite its declaration that it is a party against corruption, it has no qualms about joining hands with Chandrababu Naidu who was arrested on corruption charges and not out on bail. Besides, the BJP is in talks with the Biju Janata Dal for hammering out an alliance. In this context, it is worth noting that the BJD has supported the CAA. If the farmers' agitation comes to an end, the Akali Dal too is expected to join the BJP alliance.

In today's confusing circumstances, the INDIA front's common action plan has not yet been formulated and projected whereas the BJP has a clear vision about its journey and destination.

Meanwhile, the RSS is set to hold a meeting in Nagpur for three days from March 15. The meeting will discuss, among other things, the farmers' agitation, female wrestlers' struggle, Manipur issue, Gyanvapi Mosque case, Mathura Shahi Idgah Mosque issue, Sandeshkhali and Uniform Civil Code. J. P. Nadda, BJP national president, and B. L. Santhosh, BJP national general secretary, are among important dignitaries scheduled to participate in the meeting. Thus the BJP is going full steam, bracing up for the forthcoming parliamentary elections. In fact, it has more shields, strategies and weapons up its sleeve.

Translated by V. Mariappan.