



Arbitrary, capricious

The Governor has banked not so much on the count the BJP had, as what it could engineer

In summarily ignoring the claim of H.D. Kumaraswamy, Karnataka Governor Vajubhai Vala abandoned both propriety and common sense, acting in a politically partisan manner unbecoming of his office. Mr. Kumaraswamy was elected leader of the Janata Dal (Secular) Legislature Party and, with the declared support of the Congress, had the backing of a majority in the newly elected Assembly. The leader of the BJP Legislature Party, B.S. Yeddyurappa, offered no demonstrable proof of majority, but was invited to form the government, and given all of 15 days to prove he had the confidence of the House, solely on the basis of being the leader of the single largest party. Far from ushering in a stable government, the Governor unbolted the doors to allow room for the BJP to try to engineer defections. In situations such as these, the Constitution allows an element of discretion to the Governor, but this power was never meant to be used arbitrarily and capriciously. In defence of the Governor's action, BJP leaders have cited the *Bomma* judgment, which ruled on the course open for the Governor in the event of a Chief Minister losing majority in the House, but offered no opinion on a post-poll situation, where it said the Governor had to "invite the leader of the party commanding majority in the House or the single largest party/group to form the government." Nothing in the judgment privileges the single largest party over the largest group when it comes to being given the first shot at forming a government.

The BJP leaders have now staked out positions that are at odds with those they adopted after the Assembly elections in Manipur and Goa, when the single largest party, the Congress, was denied a chance to form the government. Union Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad had a weak defence on this turnaround: the Congress, he claimed, had not staked a claim in those two States. The Congress has taken the fight to the Supreme Court, which has asked the Attorney General to produce the letters written by Mr. Yeddyurappa to the Governor in support of his claim. When the members of the Congress and the JD(S) together constitute a majority in the House, it is unclear what letters Mr. Yeddyurappa could have presented to the Governor. No matter how things turn out from here on, the BJP has emerged as a bad loser. The party played a smart hand in Goa and Manipur to deny the Congress, but is unable to accept defeat in Karnataka when beaten at its own game. Politics is not always about reaching for power; sometimes it is also about learning to sit in the Opposition. After all, power is only one of the means of politics, not one of its ends. The BJP may have bested the Congress in Karnataka, but it may not have paid the price for this victory yet.

Growing cities

A fresh look at urban governance is necessary as migration from rural areas picks up pace

Cities are economically vibrant spaces around the world and draw a large number of rural migrants looking for better prospects. This is a sustained trend, particularly in developing countries now, as production, jobs and markets get concentrated. More evidence of this comes from the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, which has released its 2018 Revision of the World Urbanization Prospects. Forecasting for the year 2050, the UN agency estimates that the percentage of urban residents in India would be 52.8, compared to 34 today, while Delhi would edge past Tokyo as the world's most populous city by 2028. India, China and Nigeria are expected to lead other countries and account for 35% of the projected growth in urban population by mid-century. This forecast frames the challenge before developing countries, India in particular. Urbanisation in the country is a complex process, since it is defined not by a constant migration of rural residents but by the flow of workers, mostly men, and the expansion of big cities through the addition of neighbouring towns. Among governments there is a strong policy emphasis on improving facilities in rural areas, indicating a political preference for reduced migration to urban centres, although there is a natural economic magnetism to cities. The imperative before the Centre and State governments is to come up with policies that provide adequate services in the villages, while investing in cities to ensure that their high levels of productivity and efficiency are not compromised.

Even with only a third of the population living in cities, civic anarchy is rampant in the country. Housing deficits have led to the proliferation of slums, lack of enforcement of building norms has left the metros heavily congested, and poor investment in public transport has fuelled unsustainable levels of private vehicle use. Moreover, as recent data released by the World Health Organisation show, 14 Indian cities are among the top 20 worldwide with the worst air quality profiles for fine particulate matter of 2.5 micrometres. Most cities are also unable to collect and dispose of municipal waste scientifically, and simply dump them in the suburbs. Such a dismal scenario can only get worse with higher population concentrations, unless city governments come into their own. Even two-and-a-half decades after municipal laws were reformed, elected Mayors lack the stature and authority to introduce urgently needed reforms. Now is the time to take a fresh look at urban governance. While the Centre's goal of homes for all by 2022 is laudable, it is unlikely to be realised without a push from the States, and the launch of schemes driven by innovation and low-cost approaches. Augmenting rental housing should be a priority within the plan. Integrating green spaces, open commons and wetlands will make cities cleaner and aesthetically richer.

Architecture of the mandate

The lesson from Karnataka: the parties opposed to the BJP must work together from the word go



GOPALKRISHNA GANDHI

Mathematics is about numbers, and mathematics is an exact science. The addition, subtraction, division and multiplication of numbers in *ganita* is about getting problems right. Just that. Right. And a satisfaction is derived, both mathematical and aesthetic, in getting the exercise right. Precision is its sole dharma. Numbers, after a problem is done, stand still. They do not pull at each other, jumping from a plus to a minus, from the times or multiplication sign into an obelus or division sign. A sum does not try to or want to alter itself. The problem-solver or sum-beholder derives satisfaction from the purity of its precision.

Integrity of the arithmetic

Elections too are about numbers and are an exact exercise. But only until the sum is reached. That is, until the Election Commission finishes its calculations and declares the 'sum'. The Election Commission counts and then announces the counts, and once it has done that, retires. After that has been done, the President in the case of Lok Sabha elections or the Governor in the case of Vidhan Sabha elections takes over. It is in their hands that the result of the counting converts itself into the pattern of seats in the elected House. The President or Governor then becomes the keeper of the sum's in-



tegrity and has to see that the pattern of the sum is honoured by the pattern of the seats. In other words, the architecture of the sum is retained by the architecture of their power. The keeper has to see that the integrity of that architecture is not garbled to create a house different in shape from the blueprint of the sum's design.

What was the blueprint of the design that the people of Karnataka drew? The blueprint came in four folds. All of us know them now only too well.

The first fold for the single largest party was the Bharatiya Janata Party, or BJP's.

The second fold for the second largest party was the Congress's.

The third fold for the third largest party was that of the Janata Dal (Secular), or JD(S).

The fourth fold, which showed the first three in a pie, gave their relative shares: the first was smaller, if only slightly, than the second and third seen together.

We have to switch now from designs, graphs, squares and pies to what the Governor had to make of

this four-fold design. We have to switch from arithmetic and geometry to a kind of algebra, the study of mathematical symbols, the rules for their handling, their groups, rings, fields. In other words, we have to switch now from how to move from the numbers to their mandate and see how a House is to be made from out of its mandate, a House for the mandate of the *gana* to dwell in. In this task, though working on and with numbers, a President or a Governor cannot function like a calculator. His task is mathematics plus ethics.

The Governor's options

The Governor of Karnataka saw and may well have felt somewhat like this: If only Party One had just crossed the halfway mark and got a simple majority, his task would have been simple. He would have called its leader to form the government. But that did not happen. The people of Karnataka voted in greater strength against Party Number One than for it. If only Party Two and Party

Three had entered the election as a joint team, in what is called a pre-poll alliance, his work would again have been simple. He would have had to call that two-coloured rainbow to name its leader and invite him to take the oaths of office. But that too did not happen. The majority of the people of Karnataka voted against the BJP but they did not vote cohesively for the Congress-JD(S) combine.

So, the Governor did not get it all that simple. But was what he did get all that complicated? Not really.

Though not a pre-poll alliance, Parties Two and Three did get together with a verve and vim they did not show before the elections to become one, and not only drew up a joint list of the newly elected MLAs to be but also chose a joint leader, unconditionally. There is nothing in any electoral law or court verdict to say that a post-poll alliance is *ab initio* null, void and to be disregarded. True, a pre-poll alliance is a neater, more up-front arrangement, but a post-poll one is not out of order.

The numbers in Karnataka were clear. They showed the people's integrated will, albeit in two frames hinged together requiring Parties Two and Three to be asked to form the government and seek the approval of the House by its users on its floor. If defeated, then ask Party One to try its luck.

That has not happened.

Had Party Two and Party Three not come together post-poll, Governor Vajubhai Vala could have ignored the fact that the non-BJP MLAs outnumber the BJP MLAs – and left it to the Chief Minister or the putative leader of the House to navigate his majority through the

first confidence vote. But he has decided and that is that.

What now? With the two parties having come together, and outnumbering the BJP MLAs, the real test of their political integrity lies in their staying together and defeating the Yeddyurappa government in the first confidence vote. There is only one way in which they can do that. And that is by staying together, staying determined, and voting on vote day unitedly. Will they let their unity and determination, numerical strength, numerical integrity be diminished?

How may that be done? We know the way that happens.

The principle of it

With millions of other Indians I have a political position that opposes the ideology of the BJP and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). But I also have a sense, again with millions of others, of a political ethics that tells me if the Congress had been in the position of single largest party in Karnataka as the BJP is in, and if the BJP and the JD(S) had got together post-poll as the single largest group, and if Governor Vala, citing the single largest party line, had called the Congress to form the government, I would have said exactly the same thing I have said here – in the reverse.

The lesson of the Karnataka Kanda is this: the parties opposed to the BJP and RSS's ideology must work together from the word go, and not let the imponderables of post-election decision-making imperil the will of the people.

Gopal Krishna Gandhi was Governor of West Bengal

The East Asian reset

After years of mistrust, China reaches out to Japan with high-level visits



PALLAVI AIYAR

It appears to be the season for diplomatic resets in Asia. Would-be hegemon China is at the centre of this regional spring thaw. India is not the only rival with which Beijing has recently been trading pleasantries rather than threats. Usually fraught China-Japan ties are in the midst of an upswing as well.

Peace overture

Last week, Chinese Premier Li Ke-qiang was in Japan on a three-day state visit, his first trip to Tokyo since taking office five years ago. It was also the first top-level bilateral visit after relations between the two countries plummeted in 2012 over a chain of disputed islands claimed by both sides.

The melt in this years-long freeze has been evident for several months. One signal came last September when Prime Minister Shinzo Abe became the first Japanese leader in 15 years to attend the Chinese Embassy's annual National Day celebrations in Tokyo. Since then, Mr. Abe and Mr. Xi have met on the sidelines of an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Vietnam.

But the real "reset" began in

more recent weeks with the resumption of a stalled high-level economic dialogue after an eight-year hiatus, which followed close on the heels of an April visit to Tokyo by China's State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi. In early May, Mr. Abe spoke to Mr. Xi on the phone to discuss the unfolding events on the Korean peninsula, the first phone call ever between the two leaders. Talk of a possible trip to China by Mr. Abe later this year is rife. However, it would be sensible to hold back on the champagne just yet.

Why the tension?

Japan and China have one of the most tense, yet economically intertwined relationships. Beijing believes Japan is yet to properly atone for its brutal invasion of China in the run-up to and during the Second World War. In the post-War alignment Japan has remained firmly tethered to the U.S., often putting it in an adversarial position vis-à-vis China. Perhaps the most challenging point of contention is the territorial dispute over the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands as they are known in China and Japan, respectively, in the East China Sea.

Nonetheless, Japan was an important player in China's economic rise, which saw the country's transformation from an agrarian backwater to a global manufacturing powerhouse. According to the



Japan External Trade Organisation, China-Japan trade stands at about \$350 billion (by comparison, India-China trade is \$84.44 billion).

China has overtaken Japan as the world's second largest economy and has also eclipsed it as a global geopolitical player. And the two countries continue to vie for influence in the region, with Southeast Asia in particular emerging as a theatre for this competition.

What has changed?

So, what explains the ongoing thaw, which has seen Mr. Li chatting with Japanese emperor Akihito and gifting the archipelago a pair of crested ibises? According to Shin Kawashima, a China scholar at the University of Tokyo, there is a triumvirate of motivating factors on the Japanese side: an unpredictable U.S., North Korea and business interests.

U.S. President Donald Trump's America First policy and the tariffs he has slapped on some \$60 billion worth of Chinese products have also impacted Japan, which despite its status as a U.S. ally,

failed to get any exemption from new duties on steel and aluminium. This is only the latest example of the increasingly uncertain U.S. policy towards Japan and the wider region, which Prof. Shin describes as "fragile and vague". The result is that Japan needs to keep ties with China on an even keel, at least until it can be more sure of the U.S.'s intentions.

Mr. Abe is also hoping that China can use its influence with North Korea to highlight Japan's concerns, at a time when Tokyo feels somewhat shut out of the flurry of diplomacy on the Korean peninsula. He is particularly worried that in the heat of rapprochement, allies like the U.S. will forget about the 12 Japanese citizens abducted by North Korea in the 1970s and '80s who still remain unaccounted for.

And finally the many Japanese businesses invested in China, that have on occasion suffered punitive measures from Beijing, always welcome stronger bilateral ties.

Conversely for China, the idea of Japan's leader asking for support on North Korea plays well domestically as an example of Beijing's international clout. Moreover, given the simmering possibility of a trade war with the U.S., better ties with economic heavyweight Japan are also in China's interests. In addition, China is keen on getting Japan to play ball with its signature Belt and Road Initia-

tive (BRI), something that Mr. Li stressed more than once during his visit last week.

His efforts culminated in the establishment of a public-private council in Japan to discuss joint projects with China related to the BRI. Although initially reluctant to participate in the BRI, Tokyo has signalled that it is open to the initiative as long as proposed infrastructure projects meet the criteria of being "open, transparent, fair and economically feasible." In this way Japan can keep on the right side of China without necessarily committing to participation. Similarly, the Japan-backed Asian Development Bank is exploring co-financing projects with the Beijing-led Asian Infrastructure Investment bank, even though Japan has formally steered clear of it.

Yet, any China-Japan alignment is a tactical and provisional affair, rather than long-term and strategic, born out of the current moment in a fluid geopolitical landscape. It is more akin to a pause rather than a resolution of conflict. And as with the India-China reset, although it is temporarily beneficial to both sides, the foundation of the bilateral relationship remains troubled and treacherous.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Vajubhai Vala's decision

The Karnataka Governor's decision to invite the single largest party to form the government is not appropriate ("BJP invited to form govt., Cong. moves SC", May 17). The Governor should use the powers vested in him to find a long-term solution; in this case, there seems to be no such solution in sight with the party short of a majority. The post-poll alliance of the JD(S) and the Congress is opportunistic, but in the prevailing circumstances, their combined strength is well over the halfway mark. This glaring inadequacy on the Governor's part has invited a lot of avoidable criticism.

SURYANARAYANAN S.,
Chennai

How can a party that is eight seats short of the

majority prove its majority without indulging in horse-trading? Why was the BJP given 15 days to prove its majority? If the Congress and the JD(S) keep a tight leash on their MLAs, and the BJP is unable to prove its majority, the government will be in power for only 15 days. However, in politics anything can happen because power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. It will be a shame if MLAs offer themselves for a price.

V.S. JAYARAMAN,
Chennai

Those who criticise the Karnataka Governor for his decision may be correct but the Congress's decision to ally with the JD(S) is also not morally correct as both these parties contested the elections independently

but came together after the results were announced. What the Congress offered was also an inducement of sorts. Inducements cannot be avoided if there's a fractured verdict. Hung Assemblies are not new, but to avoid the role of money power, there should be a law laid down to avoid different interpretations in such circumstances.

KSHIRASAGARA BALAJI RAO,
Hyderabad

Pampering certain castes and communities and pitting one group against another not only violates the idea of secularism but creates divisions in society when aggrieved sections retort by fiercely embracing their caste or religious identities ("How the Congress stumbled", May 17). They reward or punish parties based on whether

they are treated as equals or as second-class citizens. This is what happened in the case of the Lingayats.

V.N. MUKUNDARAJAN,
Thiruvananthapuram

While the writer's sympathies seem to lie with the Congress, it is unbecoming of someone of his stature to liken BJP president Amit Shah to an invader.

R. MURALIDHARAN,
Trichy

In Manipur, even when the Congress emerged as the single largest party, the BJP went on to form the government. Manipur Governor Najma Heptulla said then that it was her responsibility as the Governor to measure stability. How did this change in Karnataka's case when two parties stitched

together a post-poll alliance? Democracy is in great danger as money and muscle power are being used to manipulate the mandate of the people.

TALA B. RAGUNATH,
Thanjavur

People elect politicians hoping that something good will come of it, but in reality everyone is busy trying to grab power, irrespective of whether they won or lost. People then begin to wonder what is the point of voting. Politics has become a business to earn money rather than to serve the people. The situation in Karnataka speaks volumes.

VARUN PADMANABHAN,
Erode

Violence in Gaza
What is happening in Gaza is nothing but state-

sponsored violence which deserves condemnation from the international community ("Death in Gaza", May 17). U.S. President Donald Trump seems to be totally unmindful of the repercussions of his decision on peace and stability in West Asia. The disproportionate use of force by Israel against stone-pelting Palestinian protestors is a cause for serious concern.

It should be noted here that continuous injustice to the Palestinians, who for long have been aspiring for an independent homeland, will lead to a breeding ground for international terror.

M. JEYARAM,
Sholavandan

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