

## The Will to Govern

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When India became independent in 1947 one of the most mischievous acts of the departing British was to cause the Doctrine of Paramountcy to lapse. Lord Dalhousie, as Viceroy and Governor General, had enunciated this doctrine to govern the relationship between the British Crown and the Princely States. It was made very clear to the States that their status was that of a vassal and it is the British Crown which was the Sovereign. When one of the Princely States tried to use a crown as a part of its coat-of-arms, the Resident made it very clear to him that this was a prerogative enjoyed only by the King-Emperor. By lapsing Paramountcy the British hoped to create 562 pockets of not only self-governing but almost sovereign units which would keep India divided and weak. The British, however, did not reckon with Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, who was the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for States and Minister for Home Affairs. He was a man born to govern, with an iron will to govern and he made it very clear to the Princely States that the Stand Still Agreement they had executed at the time of independence would have to be converted into an Instrument of Accession. Except for Travancore, Bhopal, Hyderabad and Jammu & Kashmir every single State signed the Instrument. Travancore and Bhopal fell in line and in the case of Hyderabad police action had to be mounted. Jammu & Kashmir was invaded by elements from Pakistan, its Maharaja acceded to the Indian Union and Indian troops then went into action in defence of the State. Junagadh unfortunately acceded to Pakistan, but a popular movement within the State ultimately forced the Nawab to request the representative of the Indian Union in the Residency at Rajkot to take over the administration of the State. When General Sir Roy Boucher, then Army Chief, advised against police action in Hyderabad because he could not spare troops for the purpose it is Sardar Patel who ordered him to withdraw all army troops from internal security duties and release them for action against the Hyderabad State Forces. It was the will to govern of Sardar Patel which converted the mosaic of the Indian States into a single, integral picture of the Indian Union.

Let us move forward from that glorious age to what is happening today. In four districts of Assam Bodo tribals have turned against the Bengali speaking Muslims who are said to be illegal immigrants, though many of them have been in Assam for two or three generations. Undoubtedly there has been a problem of immigration of people from Bangladesh into Assam, but a weak minded government, though aware of the problem, failed to tackle it. For how long will illegal migrants remain illegal? If more than one generation has they lived in Assam, are these people still illegal migrants or do they have the right to be considered Assamese? These are issues which a government determined to govern would have addressed and solved. Successive governments have done nothing about the problem till the festering sore has become a cancer and now finally erupted into what is happening in four districts which together form the home territory of the Bodo tribals. Law and order can break down on many counts, but once a situation has developed in which there is violence the executive magistracy and the police have only one job and that is to restore order. That is as true of a situation of widespread rioting as occurred in Assam as it is of insurgency hit areas dominated by Naxalites. In both cases government must act swiftly to restore order and to put the fear of the law into those who are indulging in criminal acts. Had that been done the rioting, arson, loot and murder in Assam could have been quickly suppressed and order restored. As usual government did nothing really

effective and the situation worsened. One of the consequences of this has been that some Muslim groups of radicals in both India and Pakistan have tried to spread an environment of fear and mutual distrust throughout India, resulting in thousands of people from the North-East fleeing cities such as Bombay, Bangalore and Madras. People do not run away from their jobs if they have confidence that the government will provide them protection and maintain order. If the State has no will to govern it cannot expect people to trust in its ability to maintain law and order and, therefore, people are bound to run away from a perceived threat. By not maintaining order in Assam government has created a situation of near panic in many States which, in turn, is bound to make new terrorists out of persons who themselves have fled in terror.

What does a strong government do? For one thing it is proactive and leads from the front. India's industrial progress occurred because Jawaharlal Nehru spearheaded a process of industrialisation, modernisation and infrastructure building which would give India a new economic profile and new economic skills. Nehru had the will to govern, which is why India made rapid progress in the development field after independence.

There is a reverse to the coin of governance, which is that if there is a will to govern there has also to be a willingness to give up governing if one is defeated at the polls. The will to govern comes from ideological moorings which, in turn, give a political party its specific programme of governance. If there is a programme of governance there would be policies of government and these would be implemented regardless of whether at any given point of time they enhance the popularity of the party concerned or render it liable to ouster at the polls. A government elected under these circumstances would follow its own policy of government, knowing full well that it may lead to temporary unpopularity and, perhaps, the possibility of defeat at the next election. If a party does not succumb to populism at this stage, then it will have the will to govern. Unfortunately these are the very things which are missing from our polity and, therefore, government does not have the will to govern. Such a government can at best be described as a pair of pyjamas without a drawstring

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