

India after 16th May 2014

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The political scenario unveiling before us for the period 16th May, 2014 onwards for the next five years is still somewhat blurred, but certain alternative structures of government seem to be emerging. The first is an absolute majority which, in the present context, probably centres around BJP. The Congress more or less seems to have come to terms with a situation in which it cannot aspire for a majority. Realistically speaking an absolute majority for any single party does not seem to be on the cards in 2014.

A second alternative would be for the BJP to get somewhere around 220 Lok Sabha seats, in which case it would find no shortage of other political parties wanting to throw in their lot with BJP. What would emerge is a coalition but in which the largest single party has enough representation in Parliament to be able to have a dominant voice. Such a government, whilst being reasonably stable, would also be reasonably firm and resolved in achieving its objective, though not all of them because some compromise would have to be made with the partners. The third alternative would be for the largest single party, most probably the BJP, to get about 180 seats and lead a coalition. However, this would be a coalition of compromise and the government would, therefore, be weak. This would not be a happy situation. The fourth alternative, which is truly horrifying, is that the BJP does not get 150 seats, the Congress reaches a figure of about 120 seats, a melange of parties then forms a government and we witness an era of having the weakest, most corrupt, most indecisive government in our history. Mulayam Singh Yadav and, perhaps, even Sonia Gandhi would be quite happy with this option. This would be very harmful for India, which certainly cannot afford yet another bout of a nonfunctioning government. By the simple logic of *reductio ad absurdum*, love BJP or hate it, one is left hoping for either the first or the second option to come true. One says this without any political bias, but rather because instead of no government this country now needs firm government, which the Congress seems clearly unable to provide.

Are there any indications about the political composition of the new government? In the case of the Congress the party went into the elections in a clearly defeatist mood, with its Prime Minister continuing with his stance of not contesting a Lok Sabha election, its very powerful Finance Minister excusing himself from the election and its Spokesman and Minister for Information and Broadcasting fighting shy of contesting the election. To the general public this meant that powerful ministers themselves lost their faith in themselves and their own party to successfully contest the election. One is surprised that the party did not insist that they would have to contest, regardless of the results. Certainly this has had a very demoralising effect on the party. BJP, on the other hand, came out of its corner at the bell in fighting trim and its entire attitude towards the election has been extremely positive. Its prime ministerial candidate, by the energy shown by him, his body language, his careful choosing of words has shown himself to be clearly the front runner. Narendra Modi has become a very real factor in 2014 election. Perhaps that is the reason why an extremely hostile media has now veered around to showing Modi some respect and in fact conservative, traditionally pro Congress newspapers such as the Times of India, The Economic Times and the Hindustan Times have started commenting editorially on the challenges before a Modi government. This is coupled with the fact that every attempt by the so-called secular parties

to drum up mass opposition to Modi by the minorities has not met with the hoped for success. Some Muslims have voiced reservation about Modi or even outright opposition, but there is no widespread anti Modi hysteria amongst the minorities. This single fact suggests that if Modi does form a government and its performance is positive and addresses minority interests, then minority opposition to BJP may also reduce over time. It would appear that the Muslims may not vote in large numbers for BJP, but it also indicates that there is unlikely to be the level of polarisation of Muslim votes which the Congress hopes for.

Any new government, regardless of which party heads it, will have to squarely face the fact that there is a perception, which started about twenty years ago, that India does not have a worthwhile government and that it is a policy of drift which guides us. Therefore, a major challenge before the new government would be to establish its own credentials as a government which can and will govern, in the public interest, but with great firmness of purpose. Towards this end it will take head on the law and order situation, especially in the Left Wing extremist affected districts of Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Jharkhand and Bihar. The Naxalites will be treated as what they are, that is, the enemies of India and the State will use all its resources to ensure that these lost areas are recovered, the Naxalites eliminated and proper government restored. Of course in doing so great care will be taken to protect the interests of the tribals and to create an environment in which a strong, highly welfare oriented development administration beings to function. In other words, the State will not stint in applying its resources to the development of these districts, but only after the Naxalites are liquidated.

There is a great deal of divisiveness in India in which caste, religion and region all seem to play a part. The new government will have to ensure that people of all religions feel secure, all religions are honoured and any attempt at disturbing communal harmony very strongly dealt with. This means that a person like Praveen Togadia or Azam Khan is made to feel the full weight of the majesty of the law, are successfully prosecuted under section 153 A IPC and made to cool their heels in prison for several years. Anyone promoting communal riots, as happened in Muzaffarnagar, will be dealt with severely and the police will be suitably directed to ensure that riots do not occur and if they do, are immediately put down with a heavy hand. It is not enough for the future Prime Minister to say that he looks upon all Indians as one. By his actions he has to prove that not only are all Indians one but also that the State will ensure that its might will be deployed in ensuring complete protection for every single Indian. The Prime Minister has to make India completely free of communal violence and for this the country must cloak him with plenary powers. It is only then that India can become truly secular. As an extension of this doctrine of harmony and amity the new government also has to find ways to free India from the curse of caste, irrational regionalism and linguistic chauvinism. Shiv Sena and MNS may find this hard to swallow, casteist politicians of U.P. and Bihar may find this a bitter pill, but such medicine will have to be administered if India is to unite and move forward in harmony.

There can no good government if those in power are corrupt. Today there is political corruption for the purchase of power, there is bureaucratic corruption which often results in a nexus between civil servants and politicians and there is social corruption in which standards and norms of morality and social behaviour are bypassed. Political corruption arises out of two factors, one being the high cost of elections and the second being the temptation for making money which comes the way of politicians because we have moved away from a systems and laws based polity and entered an era of adhocism in decision making which promotes favouritism and nepotism. One is not arguing here that rules must be adhered to as

rigidly as they would be in a totalitarian State. However, there should be no toleration of deviation from rules which permits the granting of individual or collective favours. For example, in the allocation of natural resources rules must be adhered to because there is a scarcity value attached to such resource and, therefore, if undue discretionary powers vest in any authority, then there can be competitive bribe giving in order to corner a particular resource. This example can be multiplied into all fields, but it suffices to illustrate how the lack of rules, violation of rules, irrational decision making all add up to an environment in which corruption is bound to be endemic. If a position of power is cloaked within a system in which ad hoc decision making is prohibited, then the likelihood of that power being used for undue gain will be substantially reduced, if not eliminated. For us to end political corruption, therefore, the next government must seriously mull over the question of State funding of elections, coupled with electoral reforms which facilitate this, together with a greater emphasis on rationality in decision making, virtual elimination of discretionary powers except within well defined parameters and an insistence on rules being adhered to. The elected representatives have the power to change the rules, provided the Legislature accepts this, but even in the new regime of rules, the changed rules will apply evenly across the board and there will be no favouritism.

This theme needs to be carried further. One major cause of bureaucratic corruption is that there is excessive interaction between officials and citizens necessitated by unnecessary rules and regulations which force a citizen to approach the authorities even in petty matters. If corruption is to be ended there has to be a systematic and continuous review of all rules, of all orders, of all procedures in which a citizen is required to interact with a government servant or seek permission to do something. At every point of contact the government servant has an opportunity to delay matters, which means that a citizen who is seeking intervention even in an absolutely routine manner is forced to pay a bribe in order to make his file move. If all such points of contact are either eliminated, or made people-friendly, or have a built in schedule which ensures smooth movement of papers, with every deviation being easy to detect and also being punished, then the need to pay a bribe to have one's legitimate work done will substantially reduce. Also, because deviations from norms will be easy to detect government servants would be in some fear that if papers do not move quickly and citizens do not find legitimate redressal, then the official can be punished and in fact will be punished. One small example of how this works is from the Delhi Development Authority which decided in early 1978 that in the matter of a completion certificate of a building DDA would accept the certificate of any registered architect. There was a big uproar from the officials of DDA who saw a source of lucrative illegal gain slipping out of their hands, but the then head of the organisation insisted on pushing the reform through. Architects charge a fee but certainly not an extortionist fee because had they done so people would have gone to other architects. So long as the system lasted, which was approximately two years, the level of corruption on account of completion certificates dropped very sharply. There were almost no complaints in this behalf. Of course the reform did not survive after the departure of the then head of DDA, but it was indicative of what administrative measures can achieve in the matter of eliminating corruption. The new government, apart from following whatever policy it wants to in the matter of the Ombudsman (by whatever name called), investigation and prosecution of offences and other penal measures, must systematically, vigorously and consistently conduct department by department, office by office reform of all administrative procedures, take all administrative measures and put in place systems whereby the contact between citizens and officials is reduced to a minimum. One could commend here what the Rajkot Municipal Corporation did some years ago. It laid down norms of building

construction, put these on its website and then encouraged people to seek building permission by sending online applications. These were scanned by the computers of the corporation and those applications which adhered to the prescribed norms were immediately cleared and permission granted online. Except for commercial buildings and some very large structures, almost the entire work of giving building permission was computerised and the citizens neither had to pay a bribe nor face delay in the clearance of their building applications. What is more, because a plan which did not adhere to norms would be automatically rejected attempts to obtain permission for more than what was permissible became unsuccessful. This example shows that there is hardly any government activity which cannot be put into a system which itself discourages corruption and, perhaps, it is this, more than anything else which will eliminate corruption from this country. Kejriwal's Jan Lokpal will then become irrelevant.

No single essay can give a complete blueprint of government, nor cover every challenge which the new government will face and, therefore, this paper, too, will leave many areas untouched. Perhaps a follow up paper will be needed, perhaps subject matter specialists will come up with their own ideas and write their own papers, which the new government will at least read with care. However, one has to move beyond just administration and corruption and address economic issues also. In this behalf it might be worth starting with agriculture. This country is fortunate enough to have more than sixty percent of its land area consisting of arable soil. In China only ten percent of the land area is arable. Considering its climate, water resources, relative environmental health with zones ranging from sub arctic to hot tropical India should be the most important agricultural country in the world. Verghese Kurien proved that India can achieve great heights and his dream, to which he gave substance, has resulted in India being the biggest milk producer in the world. Dr. Y.V. Parmar, the first Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh, building on the foundations laid by the Stoke family in the Simla Hills and Major Bannan in the Kullu Valley, made India one of the biggest producers of apple in the world. We have led both the wheat and rice revolution. Given visionaries, given universities of the status of the Punjab Agriculture University, Ludhiana and the G.B. Pant Agriculture University, Pant Nagar, with high priority being given to cutting edge research and development in agricultural sciences, given proper management of water resources, given a marketing system and agro based industrial system which adds value to product, India can become the greatest agricultural country in the world and agriculture can make our nation and our farmers prosperous. Almost eighty-five crore people of India are farmers or are dependent on agriculture in one way or the other. Making a few crore city dwellers prosperous will not cause India to grow and develop, especially because urban based economic activities tend to be capital friendly and are not designed for equity. Making eighty-five crore Indian prosperous, with prosperity being spread over small farms, would give us enormous growth, but with equity and distributive justice. In a paper of this type one cannot give all the measures which would bring about such agricultural prosperity, but certainly the new government must give very high priority to agricultural growth and for this purpose to take a holistic view of everything which goes into agriculture so that those policies can be adopted which bring about across the board agricultural development in India and distribute prosperity right down to the last hamlet.

Closely linked with agriculture is the question of nonagricultural employment and urban growth. India is fortunately placed in that it still has a reasonable equilibrium in its settlement pattern from the smallest village right up to the largest metropolitan city. For example, mega metropolitan India accounts for about six percent of the entire population of

the country. There is, therefore, no primate city such as Bangkok in Thailand and Mexico City in Mexico. In fact the greatest potential of growth lies in our middle level towns and if we have an agricultural policy and programme which uses small town India as growth centres which could promote agricultural growth and rural wealth generation, then the equilibrium in settlements can be further strengthened. Now the urban policy would come closer to what has been recommended by the National Commission on Urbanisation. Basically what the Commission has said was that there are approximately 439 towns, mainly in the small and medium towns category, which have the best potential for growth, have a defined hinterland and whose development would cause simultaneous growth of the whole region. Urban policy should encourage the growth of these towns. The new government would have to take a fresh look at our urbanisation policy. We need not follow the Chinese model of urbanisation at the cost of rural development and in fact our policy of growth in tandem could well become the new paradigm of urban-rural growth in the developing world.

Apart from agriculture the other primary sector is the use of natural resources and the employment it provides. India, this ancient Gondwanaland which contains the oldest hill ranges in the world, the Satpuras, Aravallis and Vindhya is very rich in natural resources, in particular minerals. The ore lies buried beneath another great natural resource, our forests. How does one harvest the underlying minerals without damaging the forests? This is the great challenge which technology has to face and master. Without coal we cannot generate power, without iron ore, bauxite or copper bearing rocks we cannot manufacture steel, aluminium and copper. Without power, without these metals, we cannot build a major secondary sector of manufacturing industries and without manufacture we cannot promote accelerated growth. Here the challenge which the new government will have to face is how on the one hand to promote the secondary sector and on the other to do so in a manner which does not harm the environment or disturb the planetary eco system. This is not impossible to achieve, but it has to be done with care, caution and forward planning.

India made the mistake of following the tertiary sector route to fast economic growth. Good while it lasted, but now with a big question mark against it. China followed the secondary sector route and built up a huge industrial infrastructure and as a result thereof Chinese goods now dominate the world market. China also heavily encourages not only Foreign Direct Investment but also foreign companies setting up their industries in China. They had no inhibition about allowing multi-national companies from setting up shop in China, which accounts for China's accelerated growth. This has not been without a price, including heavy industrial pollution, but there is no doubt that the skill level of the Chinese people has increased because of the opportunities for industrial employment, the economy has grown and China is now a powerhouse driving the world economy. Without attempting to suggest the correct industrial policy to be followed it is still felt that the new government will have to very quickly decide on the path of industrial growth that it will follow so that the secondary sector becomes the engine of economic growth, quite apart from making India a very strong country in the matter of manufacture of goods of every description.

Closely linked with both agriculture and industry is the question of fundamental research, applied research and development. As agriculture improves, as industries grow, the need for research and development also grows, especially because in other countries the research sector is very powerful. The new government will have to adopt a research and development policy in which our research institutions move away from being organisations which merely validate imported technology and instead themselves become the centres of thinking, invention, innovation and then appropriate application. Japan's post Second World

War incarnation was based on research, especially in the field of electronics, communications and other forms of electronic applications. From being a nation of copycats Japan transformed itself into a nation of invention and innovation. We have to move in the same direction, which means that the new government will have to create an environment in which research and development are the prime movers of economic activity and growth.

All growth, all research, has to be built on two premises. The first is that India will be an educated nation and the second is that India will be a healthy nation. Let us face facts – our education system is in shambles. The entire school system is rotten to the core because we have steadfastly neglected all school education. There are a few good public schools; there are some good government schools of the Central School and Navodaya School genre but the majority of our government schools is ill housed, badly furnished and equipped, with very poor teachers, virtually no worthwhile pedagogy or class room teaching and students who may become semi literate but are certainly not educated. On this very weak base we have built an infrastructure of worthless colleges and universities, in which we have recognised the caste system by superimposing a few good central universities and some institutes of national importance such as the IISc, IISERs, IIMs, IITs and IIITs. Even these, because of expansion, are now woefully short of faculty. Almost none of our universities are engaged in any worthwhile research and without academic research no country can prosper. America's great strength is the research and innovation which flows out of the universities. By comparison our universities are a quagmire of sloth. The new government will have to give the highest priority to education in which funds will have to be found and measures taken to rebuild the system from school upwards. Education is not cheap but a nation which neglects education will be cheap and worthless because its manpower is uneducated. India cannot afford this.

With education goes health. One remembers how before about 1950 millions of workers, mainly in agriculture, lay sick with malaria and there virtually was no one to till the fields or run the factories. It is during the Second World War, when much of the fighting took place in the jungles of South East Asia, that the army realised that malaria is a more dangerous enemy than the Japanese and, therefore, very strict anti malaria measures were adopted to protect the health of the army. The National Malaria Eradication Programme did help to bring malaria under control and since then other communicable diseases have also received due importance. The eradication of polio and small pox are two success stories in the field of health. However, we have moved away from inexpensive health care in the public domain and are pushing more and more people into the hands of private health care. Because the private sector is expensive the most needy are now virtually outside health coverage and, therefore, whereas our best hospitals are amongst the best in the world, government hospitals are down in the dumps. The less said about rural health care the better. China has done much better than India in community health care and the new government will have to take a good hard look at our health care system with a view to universal coverage by affordable medical care.

One does not envy the new Prime Minister because he will carry with him the baggage of past misgovernment, which has left our infrastructure in shambles. However, if India is to prosper, its basic infrastructure will have to be vastly improved, especially in the matter of power, water supply and transport and communications. These are extremely capital intensive, but as our past experience has proved, these are all sectors in which a public-private participation model can work. The new government will have to see the extent

to which this model can be expanded and our infrastructure facilities improved to the level where they become facilitators of economic growth.

There are two areas of concern which must be addressed by the new government. The first is foreign policy, especially in the context of our neighbours and the developments in our neighbourhood. The Americans are clearly moving out of Afghanistan because that war is not sustainable. Will there be a democratic government in Afghanistan or, as is more likely to happen, will Pakistani backed extremist Islamic elements such as the Taliban take over the country? In the worst case scenario where does that leave India? Will Pakistan encourage extremist elements in Afghanistan to join hands with terrorist organisations in Pakistan to target India? Is there anything that we can do in the immediate future and in the long run to protect our investment, our interests and our influence in Afghanistan? How do we deal with cross border terrorism? How do we counter growing Chinese influence in our neighbouring countries such as Nepal and Sri Lanka? How can we help the Tibetans to regain their autonomy and even sovereignty? How do we keep militarily aggressive China at bay in Tibet, Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh? What should be our policy towards the changing scenario in Russia and the former (now independent) republics of the Soviet Union? What should our policy be vis-à-vis the United States of America, both in terms of Indo-US relations and in the larger context of India, Russia and China relationships? There are many foreign affairs experts who would be only too happy to advise the new government. What the new government will have to do is put together various inputs and then arrive at the best policy which suits India's interests. One has not covered the entire field of foreign relation in the above discussions, but they do highlight the areas of immediate concern to us. Let it be noted that Kashmir is not mentioned because it, like Arunachal Pradesh, is non-negotiable.

One might end this paper with a reference to our defence policy. Let the new government very quickly decide what form of coordination machinery we should have to ensure proper integration of the armed forces in dealing with the question of national security. This has to begin with a strengthening of the office of the National Security Advisor and the National Security Council. Let us at least ensure that there is focused intelligence gathering, analysis and input into national policy both in terms of internal security and security of the nation against external threats. Then government must address the question of whether the present arrangement of a Chiefs of Staff Committee headed by the senior most Service Chief should continue or should there be a Chief of Defence Staff who has overriding powers over the three Services and acts as Principal Military Advisor to Government. Then the government must address the question of equipment of the armed forces. It is well known that the Army is short of guns and armour, even its infantry weapons are outdated, the weapons platforms of the Navy, whether in the air or on the surface or under water, are ageing and require very quick modernisation and replacement. The Air Force has been howling for combat aircraft, a demand not being fulfilled for years on end for lack of acquisition. Can such Forces be depended upon to protect India?

Let us completely overhaul the system of acquisition of weapons. Let it begin with each Service Chief convincing government of the need to acquire a particular weapon system. The source of acquisition should also be included in the proposal. Once government accepts the proposal it must provide a budget and place it at the disposal of the Service Chief concerned. The rules relating to acquisition, the procedures to be followed and precautions to be taken must be clearly defined and codified. Thereafter the Service Chief in question should set up an acquisition committee in which the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Finance must be represented. Let this committee have the final powers of acquisition and

unless a convincing case is made out of irregularity or misdemeanor, let the decision of the committee be final. Every acquisition of weapons raises complaints about corruption. We may investigate these complaints but we must not stop acquisition of a system which has been found to be best suited to the Service concerned. If there is wrongdoing let it be punished, but ex post facto. We cannot deprive our armed forces of necessary weaponry any more. That is why the new government will have to streamline the process of acquiring weapons, ensuring honesty but eliminating delay. Fat lot of good is it for the country to claim honesty whilst its submarines are sinking under the weight of their own obsolescence.

In ending let it be stated unequivocally that the main challenge before the new government is to prove that it is in fact a government and not a bunch of nincompoops who have neither the will to govern, nor the authority, nor the energy.
