

By Sidharth Mishra



The Budget session of the Parliament has ended. The members of Parliament are more or less off to their constituencies. Several would also perhaps be preparing for a summer break with families. However for the 24-hour television news channels it would not be vacation time. With politics being their staple diet and parliamentary intrigues having taken a break for the summer, the channels being bereft of headlines to air are already doing to death the analysis of the one-year of Narendra Modi government. Being a keen follower of the media, the Prime Minister, knowing full well what would lay in store for him on his return from the tours of China, Mongolia and South Korea, set the ball rolling on the discussion of his performance during the lengthy interaction with the Indian community in Shanghai. He told the expatriates last week quoting lines from a popular Hindi song that the “bad days are gone.”

This invited an instant rebuttal from Congress spokesperson Sandeep Dikshit who blamed the Prime Minister for his inability to rise beyond what he claimed was the quintessential mindset of corporate-level politics. Dikshit, a former member of Parliament, rebuked the Prime Minister for running down his predecessor government, while being on foreign soil.

Dikshit’s diatribe against the Prime Minister summarily reflects the state and actions of the Opposition party in the past one year. Dikshit could not fault the Prime Minister for anything more than a breach of protocol, which may not hold much meaning today for a generation, which aspires to be integrated into the global community.

I was also amused to find that the other day former Union Minister and spokesperson for the Manmohan Singh government, Manish Tewari highlighted the statements of BJP dissidents to score a brownie point vis-a-vis the performance of the Modi government. Tiwari, with his impeccable pronunciations, talked about the failures of the Modi government and then made references to the scathing criticisms unleashed by former unions ministers Arun Shourie, Ram Jethmalani and Subramanian Swamy.

This triumvirate of Shourie, Jethmalani and Swamy is better known for fanatically pursuing the ideology of anti-Congress-ism and practising politics purposefully antagonising the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty. If a Congress spokesperson, that too somebody who gets a boost of adrenalin from his loyalty to the “Nehru-Gandhi khandan”, looks to the triumvirate for intellectual

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inspiration, it means the Congress party itself has failed to rigorously articulate what its role should be on the Opposition benches.

This is reflected best in the uncertainty which continues to plague the party at the highest echelons of its leadership. In these very columns, a few weeks back we had discussed how the gimmicks and histrionics of Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi, peddled as earnest politics on his part by his party leaders, would not have any significant long-term impact. Doing politics just for the sake of television rating points is increasingly making the role of the Congress as that of a fringe party in the current political scenario.

Today the ruling BJP finds itself pitched in close turf battles with regional parties. It is either increasingly engaged in constructive dialogue or acrimonious debates with leaders like Mamata Banerjee, K Chandrashekhar Rao, Nitish Kumar, Akhilesh Yadav and Arvind Kejriwal rather than anybody in particular in the Congress. In making Rahul Gandhi the sole engine of its campaign against the Narendra Modi government, the party has so far reaped poor dividends. In fact, it has not even brought it to the starting point of a campaign, forget about getting anywhere near its destination.

The Congress party so far has adopted the lethargic strategy of countering Prime Minister Modi by arm-twisting the Government in the Rajya Sabha, where the Opposition MPs outnumber those on the treasury benches. However, the politics being played on the floor of the Upper house has not found even a semblance of an echo in the hinterland. There are several states scheduled to go for polls in less than a year's time, including the politically significant ones like Bihar and West Bengal. The Congress, however, is nowhere in the mix of things.

The Congress party has no electoral strategy and wherewithal to generate confidence that it could have any role in these states. Ever since the last Lok Sabha polls, Congress governments in the states have fallen like a house of cards one after another. All these states would now be sending either BJP or the NDA (the ruling alliance) representatives to the Lok Sabha. The end result, therefore, would be that the party would lose its majority in Rajya Sabha too. What would the Congress then do to counter the present ruling dispensation?

The challenge for any leader is to make his team rise from the ashes like the Phoenix. Unfortunately the Congress so far has been left grappling with its dilemma of whether it needs to continue with the status-quo of reposing faith in a model, which is increasingly redundant, moth-eaten and emasculated by the infirmities of its leadership, or whether to dismantle it. The collective party leadership has to energetically innovate to regain its lost position of prominence; it cannot do it by being a pale mimic of Arvind Kejriwal.

The government, however, cannot take comfort in the fact that the principal Opposition is in

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ruins. The BJP leadership has quite a plateful on its hands fighting with a rejuvenated Janata Parivar combination in Bihar and an extremely combative Mamata Banerjee in West Bengal. Though it has been able to form governments in Haryana, Jharkhand and Jammu and Kashmir, its performances in the assembly polls has not matched its performance during the Lok Sabha polls.

Some political analysts point out that to better the Lok Sabha 2014 performance would be an uphill task of sorts. However, the BJP government has to strive to keep the promises it made to the people. Narendra Modi came to power courtesy a tidal political wave, ironically his party itself has never strived to achieve those high levels of performance. To retain power, he has to show the same levels of energy to generate a similar wave, a wave which as of now seems to be definitely on the wane.

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