

By Sidharth Mishra



It's just three more days before the year ends. Prime Minister Narendra Modi can look back at 2016 with some satisfaction, and be at peace at least for the next three months before the results of the state Assembly polls in the four states of Uttar Pradesh, Goa, Punjab, and Uttarakhand come out. However, given the state of our federalism, it's unlikely that even adverse results for the BJP in the aforementioned state polls would impact the government at the Centre much. If we look back at the year, we do not see very many challenges which the government faced and have remained unresolved. The tasks which remain are the political battles to be fought at state level, where the issues vary from national one day to something very local the next day. With regional forces playing a dominant role in two of the major states going to polls, their focus certainly will be on local matters. Both Akhilesh Yadav, the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, and Sukhbir Singh Badal, Deputy Chief Minister of Punjab, are pushing hard to make the performance of their respective governments on the development front into a major poll issue. They, especially Akhilesh Yadav, who is in an adversarial position against BJP in the Uttar Pradesh, would want their personal charisma to do the talking and overshadow that of Narendra Modi.

The only count on which, given the present state of things, the Opposition can haul up the Centre is demonetisation. It has indeed shaken up the Indian economy - for good or bad, only time will tell. If the government manages to contain the crisis of cash by the time these states go to polls, this matter, too, would be resolved, at least as far as the common voter goes. Thus, it is very credible that halfway through his term, Modi continues to enjoy the high tide, whereas his adversaries, especially the Congress party, are unable to judge the right direction of the wind to make its boats sail.

On a more serious note, what were the major challenges faced by the Narendra Modi

government during the year? Going by the space and airtime given to them by newspapers and the news channels, protests on the few campuses, turmoil in Kashmir, tussle with the media, complaints of the judiciary, and the surgical strike, after demonetisation remained centrestage. The government's response in all these matters was so planned that it went to only consolidate the Prime Minister's grip over his ideological co-travellers.

There is no doubt that Narendra Modi is a keen student of modern Indian politics and history and he certainly doesn't want to suffer the disenchantment of India's right-wing, as in the case of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, even as he pursues policies to expand the party's base. While letting loose demonetisation he might have attempted to win over the poor but his policy of no soft-peddling in dealing with the largely Left-backed protests on the campuses, acting tough on separatist-backed demonstrations in the Valley, and going onto carrying out a surgical strike across the Line of Control to destroy the terror hubs, has certainly retained his following among the right-wingers.

He has been helped in his cause by a very flippant response from the principal opposition – the Congress. Party's leader Rahul Gandhi has wasted another year adding to the losses of the party. He has evolved into a figure who is unable to act without the crutches of advisors and his public pronouncements are never taken to be his own, and subsequently, not very seriously. This has also reflected on the political stance which the party has taken in the past year. The Congress party, thanks to long years of governance and political participation, always came out with very articulate and sagacious initial reactions to matters of national importance, which has now got muddled by the doings of its current leader -- Rahul Gandhi.

His "
khoon ki dalali

" (bartering soldiers' blood) comment on the surgical strike by the Army in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir, his competitive bad-mouthing of Narendra Modi with Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on the suicide committed by an ex-serviceman, and though on a lesser pitch, the brouhaha over the gunning down of the eight SIMI militants in Madhya Pradesh have only gone on to erode his credibility as a serious politician.

His recent uttering on exposing the Prime Minister's involvement in a corruption case did not cause a tremor, as he had promised, but only a whimper. In fact, he could be advised to read TS Eliot's famous poem, "The Hollow Men". He should ask his tutors (maybe a Mani Shanker Aiyer or a Shashi Tharoor) to tell him why Eliot ends the poem with the following lines, "This is the way the world ends; This is the way the world ends; This is the way the world ends; Not with a bang but a whimper."

If the Congress party has to persist with Rahul Gandhi as its leader, it must counsel him to take a leaf or two out of the politics of seasoned opposition satraps like Nitish Kumar and Naveen Patnaik, or for that matter Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav, who has shown great political skills to emerge as an erudite leader from the crisis which his government and the party faced from the old guard. All these leaders hold their horses and let loose their aggression at the right time.

Year of consolidation for Modi

Written by Administrator

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Till the time Rahul Gandhi decides to follow politics of shoot-and-scoot, which is characteristic of AAP's Arvind Kejriwal and suits their repertoire best, the Prime Minister could be assured of little challenge to his position.

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