

A PARTING NOTE**The BSP's resolve to go it alone in the U.P. by-polls does not come as a surprise**

The Opposition appears to be in meltdown mode following the BJP's sweeping victory in the Lok Sabha election. Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati announced on Tuesday that her party's alliance with the Samajwadi Party stands terminated for now, and that it would contest the coming by-polls in 11 Assembly constituencies in Uttar Pradesh on its own. The SP and the BSP were rival poles in U.P. politics until the 2017 Assembly elections, when the BJP wrested power with an impressive majority. Ms. Mayawati and the Yadav family at the helm of the SP had a long history of mutual animosity, which also mirrored the tense relations between Dalits and Other Backward Classes, their respective social bases. With their very existence under threat from the BJP's ability to aggregate a host of populist issues around the Hindutva theme and woo Dalit and OBC caste groups, the BSP and the SP buried the hatchet to form an alliance, which included the Rashtriya Lok Dal, ahead of the Lok Sabha election. The alliance appeared to be doing well with victories in three key by-elections, but the general election results came as a rude surprise for them. They won only 15 of U.P.'s 80 seats, while the BJP took 62. The vote share of the alliance was significantly lower than the combined strength of the individual parties in 2014.

It should not have come as such a surprise. The collapse of backward caste politics has been in the making in U.P. Voters had begun to view the BSP, the SP and the RLD as cabals for good reason. Numerous members of the two families had captured power using the SP and the RLD as vehicles of personal profiteering. Slogans of social justice could no longer hide the emptiness of their politics. Transfer of power from generation to generation and laterally to a host of relatives did not merely mock the ideal of social justice but also questioned the public's common sense. With voters waiting for an opportunity to shake them up, the SP, the BSP and the RLD were no match to the BJP's ideological, organisational and monetary might. Ms. Mayawati rightly pointed out that Yadavs, the core base of the SP, did not rally behind it this time. Similar was the case with Jats, the RLD's core base. The appeal of the BJP's Hindutva and the welfarism agenda cut across castes, but the degeneration of backward caste politics enhanced it. Ms. Mayawati has not ruled out the possibility of an alliance with the SP in future. The dominance of upper castes in the BJP is too glaring to be missed, and caste fissures could return. But in their present form the SP and the RLD do not inspire trust among erstwhile supporters, though the BSP cadre is relatively more committed. The rising tide of Hindutva has challenged long-held assumptions in politics and the churn could last a while

<u>Words</u>	<u>Kind</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Sweeping victory	Noun	Overwhelming victory, complete victory
Announce	Verb	Pronounce, declare, assert, proclaim, herald

Alliance	Noun	Association, union, confederation, consortium
Terminate	Verb	Bring to an end, conclude, wind up, cease, axe
Rival	Noun	Opponent, challenger, competitor, contender
Wrest	Verb	Snatch, wrench, cease, grab, pull, jerk, dislodge
At the helm		In control, in charge, responsible
Animosity	Noun	Enmity, hostility, animus, at loggers head, at daggers drawn
Woo	Verb	Attract, entice, pay court to
Bury the hatchet		Make peace
Cabals	Noun	Clique, faction, coterie, ginger group
Profiteer	Noun	Over change, racketeer, cheat someone
Degeneration	Noun	Downfall, degenerate, reprobate, corruption, debauchery
Enhance	Verb	Boost, increase, augment, vitalize
Glaring	Adj.	Dazzling, blazing, bright, blinding
Fissures	Noun	Opening, crevice, crack, breach, fault
Erstwhile	Adv.	Former, old, past
Churn	Noun	Stir, agitate, beat, whip, whisk

BETRAYAL OF THE MANDATE

The Sena overplayed its hand in Maharashtra, and a fresh poll seems the best course now

The political drama in Maharashtra that continued unabated since the Assembly election results on October 24 has been brought to an end, albeit temporarily, by the imposition of President's rule. The Maharashtra verdict was unambiguous and in favour of the BJP-Shiv Sena pre-poll alliance, but the partners could not agree on the terms of power sharing, leading to prolonged haggling between them. The Sena's claim for the Chief Minister's post initially appeared to be brinkmanship to extract a hard bargain with the BJP but it tripped over its greed and intrigues. The Sena is the BJP's oldest ally and both are bound by a competitive adherence to Hindutva. The Sena's claim was also not justified by the verdict — it got 56 seats of the 288, while the BJP won nearly double that figure. The BJP, ensconced at the Centre and ever willing to use power to constrain its adversaries, did not relent. The Sena overplayed its hand by parting with the BJP and quitting the Union government. It miscalculated the alternative scenario of leading a State government with the support of the Congress and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP).

The idea of a Congress-NCP-Sena coalition government is toxic. The NCP and Congress fought in alliance, and as Sharad Pawar said, got a mandate to sit in the Opposition. Post-poll coalitions are a legitimate route to government formation when the legislature is hung but the situation in Maharashtra is far from it. There were two pre-poll alliances, one got a clear majority and the other clearly lost. If the Congress and NCP want to keep the BJP out of power for ideological reasons, handing over power to a more virulent strain of Hindutva would be disingenuous. The formation of an NCP-Congress-Sena government, whatever may be its facade, will not only be a betrayal of the mandate but also be indefensible in ideological terms besides being suicidal tactically. Such an alliance, if at all formed, would not be stable or sustainable. All these parties will be rightly blamed for being opportunistic and devoid of political convictions. The BJP will be the sole beneficiary of such a thorough delegitimisation of the entire Opposition spectrum in Maharashtra. In the inevitable mid-term election that will happen sooner rather than later, opportunists will pay a price. The Congress and the NCP would be better off losing this opportunity and leave the birds of the same feather to potentially flock together again. That said, it was inexcusable of the Governor to not give the Sena or the NCP adequate time to explore the possibility of an alternative government. While a government without the BJP might lack moral or political legitimacy, the Governor should have exhausted all avenues before recommending President's rule. The BJP must be hoping to pressure the Sena back into the alliance, but the best course now seems a fresh election.

<u>Words</u>	<u>Kind</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Unabated	Adj.	Uncontrolled, without any reduction
Albeit		Through / although
Imposition		Imposing, foisting, forcing, obtruding
Verdict	Noun	Judgement, adjudication, adjudgement, ruling
Unambiguous	Adj.	Clear, explicit, limpid, lucid, coherent
Alliance	Noun	Association, union, league, compact, entente
Prolonged	Adj.	Continuous, lengthy
Haggling	Noun	Barter, bargain, negotiate, quibble
Brinkmanship	Noun	Shrewdness, politics, astuteness
Intrigue	Noun	Plot, conspire, scheme, manoeuvre, connive, collude
Adherence	Noun	Attachment, commitment to a person / cause, belief
Ally		Combine, couple, amalgamate, merge, join
Ensnare	Verb	Settle, install, establish, lodge, position
Constrain	Verb	Restrain, hinder, impede, curb
Relent	Verb	Change one's mind, do a u-turn, back down

Toxic	Adj.	Venomous, vicious, noxious, poisonous
Coalition	Noun	Alliance, union, partnership, caucus, affiliation
Legitimate	Adj.	Legal, lawful, licit, according to law
Virulent	Adj.	Poisonous, toxic, venomous, noxious, deadly, lethal, fatal
Strain	Noun	Tension, tightness, tautness, shear, tensivity
Disingenuous	Adj.	Dishonest, deceitful, dissembling
Facade	Noun	Front, frontage, face, aspect, elevation
Indefensible	Adj.	Inexcusable, unjustifiable, unjustified
Opportunistic	Adj.	Exploiting, immediate, opportunities
Convictions	Noun	Belief, opinion, view, thought, ideal
Spectrum	Noun	Range, ambit
Inevitable	Adj.	Unavoidable, inescapable, unpreventable, predestined, predetermined
Explore	Verb	Traverse, travel over, tour
Avenues	Noun	Line, path, direction, approach, route