

## The BJP's hegemonic narrative

**Focus is not on the BJP's dubious methods of destabilising elected governments, but on the disarray in the Congress**

Ever since the colossal defeat of the Congress in the 2019 general election, there has been a ceaseless debate in the media and in political circles about the future of the Congress party. The defection of Jyotiraditya Scindia to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the replication of a similar script by Congress leader Sachin Pilot has intensified this debate which centres around the leadership, organisational and ideological challenges confronting the Congress. After Rahul Gandhi's resignation as Congress President in July 2019, the party has witnessed disintegration in States including Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. Several prominent leaders have quit the party and joined the BJP. Defections, splits and electoral decline are not new phenomena in the party's long history, but the crisis the Congress faces in the wake of two massive defeats in the last two Lok Sabha elections is unprecedented and has clearly been aggravated by its inability to resolve the leadership issue.

A clutch of young(ish) leaders close to Mr. Gandhi have resigned. These leaders have caught the media's attention more than many others who have quit in the last one year. The narrative in sections of the media built around these rebellions is that the Congress mishandled the crisis and the concerns of these leaders regarding the party's functioning. The dominant argument is that the Congress lacks inner party democracy and hence cannot keep young leaders in its fold. Sections of the mainstream media blame Mr. Gandhi for the crisis and want him to vacate space to make way for other leaders.

### Two important dimensions

Big-ticket leaders leaving the Congress should be a matter of concern for the party. But to view Mr. Pilot's rebellion in Rajasthan as only the result of failure of leadership and organisational politics misses two important dimensions of this crisis. Mr. Pilot was willing to sacrifice the government, of which he was the Deputy Chief Minister until a few days ago, because he has differences with Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot. Even though he says he is not joining the BJP, Mr. Pilot does not put much distance between himself and the party. Mr. Pilot made it clear that he was unwilling to settle for anything less than the chief ministership even though he has the support of just 18 MLAs. Mr. Pilot is heading a minority faction but making claims to the top job is a sign of the neoliberal times we live in where ambition trumps commitment to party and ideology.

The narrative in sections of the media that younger leaders are not allowed to grow in the Congress is not evident from the career graphs of some of these leaders. They had been given top posts by the Congress. That they still chose to rebel is an aspect disregarded in the narrative built up around them. Many of them are exiting the Congress with alacrity because the party is out of power and is not in a position to offer the loaves and fishes of office to leaders waiting in the departure lounge. When the party was in power it could adjust and accommodate conflicting interests and ambitions in multiple ways but it is much harder to do so in Opposition. The BJP, on the other hand, is routinely able to attract disgruntled leaders to its side. Arguably, it has given in to Mr. Scindia's huge demands in Madhya Pradesh to attract Mr. Pilot in Rajasthan. The bottom line is this: Mr. Pilot's escapade into Haryana couldn't have taken off without the BJP's support. His jaunt to ITC's Best Western can't be passed off as a struggle for inner party democracy in the Congress.

The second and more important dimension of the Rajasthan crisis is the concerted effort mounted by the ruling party to topple the Congress government in the State. The pursuit of this single-minded objective amid the pandemic has been given short shrift in the loud narrative of sections of the media. Since 2014, the BJP's stated objective of a Congress-free India has seen attempts to unsettle and unseat

Congress governments in several States. One of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's first statements after taking over as the chairman of the BJP's election campaign committee in 2013 was the declaration that getting rid of the Congress would be "the solution to all problems facing the country". "The Congress party is a burden on this nation," he said. Since coming to power in 2014, the BJP has been using various means, notably money power and the coercive power of state agencies, to achieve this goal by bringing down elected Congress governments in State after State.

### Hunt for power

We have seen many States witnessing a change of guard. In 2016, in Arunachal Pradesh, the BJP backed the rebel Congress faction when deep cracks surfaced within the ruling party. The BJP lost the election but managed to replace the Congress government with its own in Karnataka (in 2019) and in Madhya Pradesh (in 2020). In 2019, the Congress emerged the single largest party in Goa, but the BJP was quick to cobble together a coalition and form a government. Now Rajasthan is on the cusp of change though the game is not over yet.

In Goa, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh, scores of Congress legislators were allegedly lured into deserting the Congress which enabled the BJP to gain power after losing in elections. These reports are in the realm of speculation but one thing is clear: the BJP is not short on resources for financing defections given its absolute power at the Centre. The Association of Democratic Reforms estimates that a whopping 95% of all electoral bond money before the 2019 election went to the BJP. The Congress received less than 10% of bond money. The loss of so many State governments further reduces the party's financial power and the opportunity to generate funds.

Although the BJP disclaims authorship of this long-running drama, Rajasthan's political crisis has underlined once again its unscrupulous hunt for power. Given its enviable record in forming governments through political defections, the perception that a government with a clear majority is being deposed may not really matter to the party. However, it should matter to the media. But the media spotlight is not on the BJP's dubious methods of destabilising elected governments, but on the disarray in the Congress, which allows the BJP to get away even with constitutional transgressions. Thus far, the Congress has managed to save its government in Rajasthan. Regardless of the final outcome, an obvious conclusion to draw from this crisis would be that the Congress party has to put its house in order to stop further desertions and breakup. It has to bring an end to the unmitigated drift and elect a new president and begin the process of rebuilding the party.

That so many in the media have seen Mr. Pilot's unhappiness with the Congress as an example of a talented politician being forced to jump ship to the BJP shows that the BJP's narrative is completely hegemonic. That so many in the political class (including Congress politicians) and the media are echoing the same line (as though it's a party line), and are willing to overlook the majoritarian might of the BJP, the illegitimacy of the power grab, and the wholly unjustified attempt to dislodge an elected government betokens a debasement of politics and a disregard for democratic norms that should concern us all.

### Meanings of Difficult Words:

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| ❖ <b>hegemonic</b> (adjective) – dominant, commanding, authoritative.                      | ❖ <b>disarray</b> (noun) – disorder, chaos, disorganization, disunity.       |
| ❖ <b>narrative</b> (noun) – a representation of a particular situation; portrayal/account. | ❖ <b>colossal</b> (adjective) – huge, massive, very big.                     |
| ❖ <b>dubious</b> (adjective) – suspicious, questionable, doubtful.                         | ❖ <b>ceaseless</b> (adjective) – constant, continuous, unending/unrelenting. |
| ❖ <b>destabilise</b> (verb) – undermine, weaken, damage, unsettle, upset.                  | ❖ <b>defection</b> (noun) – desertion, absconding, decamping.                |

- ❖ **replication** (noun) – duplication, reproduction, reoccurrence.
- ❖ **intensify** (verb) – escalate, raise/increase, aggravate, worsen.
- ❖ **centre around** (verb) – focus, concentrate, pivot, be based.
- ❖ **ideological** (adjective) – relating to a system of ideas.
- ❖ **confront** (verb) – trouble, bother, burden, beset, cause trouble to.
- ❖ **disintegration** (noun) – breakdown, fragmentation, collapse.
- ❖ **phenomenon** (noun) – occurrence, event, happening.
- ❖ **in the wake of** (phrase) – as a result of some event, especially an unpleasant one; aftermath, as a consequence of.
- ❖ **unprecedented** (adjective) – not done or experienced before.
- ❖ **aggravate** (verb) – increase, worsen, exacerbate, compound.
- ❖ **clutch** (noun) – group, collection, set.
- ❖ **rebellion** (noun) – defiance, disobedience, dissent, nonconformity, subversion.
- ❖ **lack** (verb) – be in need of, need, require, be short of.
- ❖ **fold** (noun) – group, community.
- ❖ **mainstream** (adjective) – accepted, established, recognized.
- ❖ **make way** (phrase) – clear the way, allow through, move aside, make room.
- ❖ **dimension** (noun) – aspect, feature, element.
- ❖ **big-ticket** (adjective) – major, high-class, exclusive, prominent/important.
- ❖ **matter of concern** (phrase) – something which causes worry.
- ❖ **make clear** (phrase) – explain, clarify, elucidate.
- ❖ **faction** (noun) – group, division, sector.
- ❖ **neoliberal** (adjective) – relating to an ideology that emphasizes individual interests; (In general, it is relating to an economic policy model that supports value of free market competition by the private sectors which with little government control over it).
- ❖ **trump** (verb) – surpass, outdo, outperform, outshine, eclipse.
- ❖ **ideology** (noun) – beliefs, ideas/opinions, principles.
- ❖ **rebel** (verb) – challenge, oppose, defy, refuse to obey.
- ❖ **disregard** (verb) – ignore, take no account of, pay no attention to; dismiss.
- ❖ **build up** (phrasal verb) – establish, set up, form.
- ❖ **alacrity** (noun) – readiness, eagerness, willingness.
- ❖ **the loaves and fishes** (phrase) – (material) benefits or rewards as a motive for action. (“the loaves and fishes” phrase is relating to the story describing about a miracle that Jesus fed multitudes (a large crowd or gathering) spiritually (not physically)).
- ❖ **accommodate** (verb) – adjust, adapt, attune, get used, get accustomed.
- ❖ **disgruntled** (adjective) – aggrieved, dissatisfied, unhappy/disappointed.
- ❖ **arguably** (adverb) – possibly, conceivably, maybe, potentially.
- ❖ **give in** (phrasal verb) – give way, yield, submit, succumb, comply.
- ❖ **take off** (phrasal verb) – become functional, start out, commence, embark, launch into.
- ❖ **jaunt** (noun) – day out, trip.
- ❖ **pass off** (phrasal verb) – take place, happen/occur, be completed, be carried through.
- ❖ **concerted** (adjective) – coordinated, collaborative, joint; forceful, intense, strong.
- ❖ **mount** (verb) – organize, prepare, arrange, set up.
- ❖ **topple** (verb) – unsettle, unseat, bring down (from a position/power).
- ❖ **pursuit** (noun) – hunt, push, quest, search.
- ❖ **single-minded** (adjective) – determined, resolute, purposeful.
- ❖ **amid** (preposition) – in the middle of, surrounded by; during.
- ❖ **pandemic** (noun) – the worldwide spread of a new disease; The illness spreads around the world and typically affects a large number of people across a wide area.
- ❖ **short shrift** (noun) – quick dismissal.
- ❖ **get rid of** (phrase) – remove, discard, eliminate, wipe out.

- ❖ **means** (noun) – method, way, procedure.
- ❖ **notably** (adverb) – especially, particularly, strikingly, markedly.
- ❖ **coercive** (adjective) – authoritarian, overbearing, tough/harsh, high-handed.
- ❖ **back** (verb) – support, endorse, approve, advocate.
- ❖ **crack** (noun) – split, break, fracture, rupture.
- ❖ **surface** (verb) – appear, come up, emerge.
- ❖ **cobble together** (phrasal verb) – prepare hastily, put together roughly, patch together.
- ❖ **on the cusp of** (noun) – a point where something will change from one state to another.
- ❖ **scores of** (noun) – a lot, a large number, great quantities.
- ❖ **allegedly** (adverb) – supposedly, purportedly, reportedly.
- ❖ **lure** (verb) – tempt, persuade, attract, coax, win over.
- ❖ **desert** (verb) – abandon, leave, give up.
- ❖ **realm** (noun) – area, field, domain (of activity).
- ❖ **speculation** (noun) – prediction, guesswork, opinion/thought.
- ❖ **whopping** (adjective) – huge, massive, very large.
- ❖ **electoral bond** (noun) – an electoral bond is designed to be a bearer instrument like a Promissory Note – in effect, it will be similar to a bank note that is payable to the bearer on demand and free of interest. It can be purchased by any citizen of India or a body incorporated in India. it allows limitless, secret donations to political parties, including (and especially) by corporations.
- ❖ **disclaim** (verb) – deny, refuse to accept, reject.
- ❖ **authorship** (noun) – creator, producer, deviser, maker (of a work).
- ❖ **underline** (verb) – emphasize, underscore, highlight.
- ❖ **given** (preposition) – considering, taking into account, bearing in mind.
- ❖ **enviable** (adjective) – desired, admirable, favoured, sought-after.
- ❖ **perception** (noun) – understanding, discernment, recognition/ realization; interpretation.
- ❖ **the spotlight** (noun) – the public attention, the focus of public/media; the public eye.
- ❖ **get away with** (phrasal verb) – escape blame for, escape punishment for.
- ❖ **transgression** (noun) – infringement, contravention, breach, violation.
- ❖ **regardless of** (phrase) – irrespective of, without consideration of, notwithstanding, in spite of.
- ❖ **put one's house in order** (phrase) – to find a solution for one's own problems before going and trying to solve others' problems.
- ❖ **desertion** (noun) – defection, absconding, decamping.
- ❖ **unmitigated** (adjective) – absolute, complete/ total, unconditional, categorical.
- ❖ **drift** (noun) – an unwelcome movement or development.
- ❖ **jump ship** (phrase) – to leave an organization that you are working for, especially in order to join another.
- ❖ **echo** (verb) – repeat, say again, restate, reiterate.
- ❖ **overlook** (verb) – miss, fail to notice; disregard, neglect/ignore.
- ❖ **majoritarian** (adjective) – relating to a philosophy that states that a majority (sometimes categorized by religion, language, social class, or some other identifying factor) of the population is entitled to a certain degree of primacy (priority) in society, and has the right to make decisions that affect the society.
- ❖ **might** (noun) – strength, force, power.
- ❖ **illegitimacy** (noun) – lack of authorization by the law.
- ❖ **grab** (noun) – an act of getting something unethically.
- ❖ **betoken** (verb) – indicate, mean/denote, represent.
- ❖ **debasement** (noun) – degradation, devaluation, reduction (of rank/status).
- ❖ **disregard** (noun) – indifference, non-observance, negligence, lack of attention.