CHAPTER – 5

National Level Coalition Politics In India Between 1977-2009

Before entering into the arena of national level coalition politics in India, we should first look at the relevance of the linkage between the state-level elections and the national election in India. With the emergence of state politics as the principal theatre of effective political choices and the main battleground of contest, political preferences and choices made at the national level appear to be the derivative outcome of primary loyalties shown by the electorate in state politics. However, national level electoral choices, are neither a mere reproduction nor simply an aggregation of those made in the arena of state level politics. State-level electoral preferences, though influence the outcomes of national level elections, cannot be its sole determinant.¹ Issues revolving around state politics are not the only concerns to the voters in national elections, where successes and failures of the national government in solving important national issues are also taken into consideration, though they look at the national issues in terms of state politics. For instance, the 'Posco' movement at Jagatsinghapur in Orissa is an anti-Special Economic Zone (SEZ) movement. But to the local people, the movement appears to be an anti-eviction movement against forceful grabbing of land by the Orissa state government for the installation of steel industry under SEZ.² Economic meltdown across the world, global terrorism, the unfolding torture on the Sri Lankan Tamils committed by the armed forces of that country, the Telangana issue in Andhra Pradesh, the Civil Nuclear Deal between India and the USA, terrorist attack in Mumbai are some of the remote issues that may receive differential responses in different states.³

Globalization has brought in a sort of domino effect which binds the global with national and through regional down to local. Up to 1989, national issues used to considerably influence the outcomes of the national elections, but have shifted along with the shifting of the principal arena of political contestation. As states have become the hub of political contest, state as well as regional or local issues have come to override the national issues considerably. Some state-level issues evoke strong feelings and prepare the ground for political realignment. Acquisition of agricultural land against the will of the farmers in Singur and Nandigram in West Bengal, reservations for Marathas in

² SEZ refers to specific territories demarcated by the state governments with the concurrence of the Central government for the establishment of big industries. Enterprises located in these territories are exempted from customs duties, income and excise taxes. They are also enticed with some other privileges like supply of water and electricity free of cost or at a subsidized rate. What is most notable is that the labourers shall have no right to associate in trade unions within the precincts of the SEZ.
Maharashtra and for Gujjars in Rajasthan, illegal migration from Bangladesh into Assam etc. are ardent issues that bring political parties closer to one another against the ruling party or the ruling front. Local developmental issues, closely connected with specific constituencies, such as drinking water, electricity, public health and sanitation, condition of roads, administrative highhandedness etc. are seldom published in the national media. Nevertheless, these concrete issues have a large impact upon the outcomes of the election. "In fact, these quotidian-issues have an even greater chance of making a difference in those elections, in which real local concerns are not swept away by national wave."\textsuperscript{4} The Congress, campaigning around its current \textit{aam aadmi} (common man) slogan, does not reverberate and influence political thinking of the people in the same manner as it did with the slogan of \textit{garibi hatao} (eradicate poverty) in 1971. The demand of the opposition parties for the unearthing of black money stashed away by politicians in foreign banks and bringing it back, does not arouse a feeling of abhorrence as the Bofors scandal did in the 1989 elections. For this, both the media and the political parties are equally responsible. Media – newspapers and television channels – which are supported by one or the other political parties – so, they lose independence and neutrality. Most of the political parties do not want to mobilize the voters around serious national issues but are inclined to highlight those issues which have an easy access to the people. But this inclination of the political parties confines the scope "of political imagination and of political judgment of the people."\textsuperscript{5}

Sometimes, voting at state-level may substantially differ from national level in case the ruling party in the state is not an active player in national politics or the political actors playing a leading role at national level politics fail to occupy a relevant and substantial political space in state politics. Regional parties, if they tie themselves with the prime actor of the alliance operating at the national level, may gain political mileage.\textsuperscript{5}

Thus, though the arena of state level politics provides the basic channel of political contestation, the pattern of preferences at the national level elections may vary, sometimes there may even be systematic variations. The occasional differences of electoral choices between the two levels of elections in different states may explicate the point. For example, in Bihar, the Congress secured 29 seats out of 39 in the 2004 Lok Sabha elections. But, after the 2005 Bihar assembly polls, a BJP-Janata Dal (United) coalition government took the helm of the state affairs. Similarly, in the 2004 Lok Sabha elections, the Congress and the BJP were logged in a straight fight in all the four Lok Sabha seats in Himachal Pradesh. Three seats went to the Congress and one to the BJP. But unexpectedly, the BJP emerged there as the ruling party for the first time with a commanding majority of its own in the 2007 assembly elections. The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) of Mayawati fielded 79 candidates for Lok Sabha seats in Uttar Pradesh in the 14\textsuperscript{th} Lok Sabha polls of 2004 and won in 19 seats only, whereas the same party swept

\textsuperscript{4} Yogendra Yadav, "Are we going through a useless election?", \textit{The Hindu}, April 27, 2009.
\textsuperscript{5} \textit{ibid.}

Maharashtra witnessed a seat-sharing understanding between the ruling Congress and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) in the state elections in 2004 that benefited from the bonhomie with the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government at the Centre. In some of the smaller states, especially the hill states in the north-east of India, people are being influenced to vote for a party closely tied up with the ruling party at the Centre during state elections.
the May 2007 state assembly elections terminating the era of fractured mandates, hung assemblies and coalition governments which had plagued Uttar Pradesh since 1993 and Mayawati occupied the highest political office in the state on her party's own strength.

Electoral verdicts of some state assembly polls held in 2008 contradict the normal trends of having coalition governments in the states. The assembly election, held in Karnataka in 2008, paved the way for the installation of a single-party government, run by the BJP, with the support of Independent legislators. The BJP registered victory in 110 seats in the 224-member House. Five states of Delhi, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Mizoram went to the assembly polls in November 2008. The BJP retained power in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh with a comfortable majority, though it failed to prevent the Congress from retaining power in Delhi for the third consecutive term. In Delhi, the Congress secured 42 seats in the 70-member strong assembly, leaving 23 to the BJP. In Rajasthan, the Congress captured 96 seats out of the total 200 of the assembly against the BJP's tally of 78 seats and wrested power from it. Falling short of absolute majority, the Congress roped in six BSP-members who had defected from their party shortly after being elected to the assembly on the BSP tickets. In Mizoram, the Congress pulled down the Mizo National Front (MNF) from power after a decade by making a clean sweep over it with 32 of the total 40 seats. The MNF had to remain satisfied with just three seats as against 21, achieved by it in the last election. "The outcome of these elections is expected to have wide-ranging ramifications for both the national parties as well as for the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government at the Centre."6

Sometimes, the regional parties themselves change sides or shift allegiance to a new perceptible winner. To change allies, to forge new alliances and to break the existing ones to their advantage have become almost a routine work for most of the regional parties. They do so in order to maximize dividends from electoral politics. In Tamil Nadu, the two major regional parties – the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and their state-level minor coalition partners, have switched over their allegiance from one national party to another in making alliances both in the state and at the Centre. The AIADMK brought the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK), the Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK) and the BJP under its fold as an allied combination which won 30 out of 39 Lok Sabha seats in the state in 1998. In the 1999 Lok Sabha elections, all these small parties, breaking ties with the AIADMK, rallied behind the DMK which joined the BJP-led National Democratic Front (NDA). Naturally, the AIADMK had to tie up with the Congress in the 1999 Lok Sabha elections and grabbed ten seats, while the Congress achieved only two. In 2004, the DMK decided to snap its ties with the NDA assuming the descending popularity of the BJP among the Tamil voters and joined the Congress-led UPA. The DMK, the Congress, the MDMK, the PMK, the CPI and the CPI (M) unitedly fought the 2004 Lok Sabha elections in Tamil Nadu and the combined strength of all these parties was 39. The AIADMK and the BJP contested the 2004 Lok Sabha elections as an allied

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force, making no impact upon the election results in that state. Any one of the two parties failed to achieve even a single parliamentary seat in that state. The Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS) of Andhra Pradesh resigned from the Union Council of Ministers in 2006 in protest against the UPA government's unwillingness to take forward their demand for a separate Telangana state. Shortly after the resignation from the Union government, the TRS withdrew support from the UPA without causing immediate threat to it but certainly raising its reliance on Left support. Some weeks ahead of the 15th Lok Sabha elections of 2009, the TRS had decided to join the Third Front, led by the Left. The PMK, a constituent of the Congress-led UPA government at the Centre and a crucial ally in Tamil Nadu state politics, dissociated itself from the DMK-led front and decided to join the AIADMK camp which was a part of the Third Front. In Orissa, following the failure to reach a seat-sharing agreement between the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) and the BJP, the former had unilaterally terminated its 11-year old ties with the NDA and decided to join the Third Front only after the declaration of the 2009 Lok Sabha election results. In Bihar, a seat-sharing understanding was agreed upon between the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and the Lok Jan Shakti Party (LJP) for the 15th Lok Sabha polls. Under the pact, the RJD and the LJP were to contest in 37 parliamentary seats (RJD 25 and LJP 12) out of 40, leaving three to the Congress. In Uttar Pradesh, the Samajwadi Party (SP) allotted seventeen seats to the Congress. Expressing discomfort with the decisions unilaterally taken by the RJD and SP chiefs, the Congress decided to contest in the majority number of seats on its own to revive the lost ground and to rejuvenate the party in those two states. Not only this, in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand, the RJD, the LJP and the SP formed a pre-electoral alliance mainly with the object of acting as a pressure group in the post-poll scenario to prevent the installation of a BJP-led NDA government or a government headed by Mayawati at the Centre. The NCP pitted candidates against the Congress in more than 40 Lok Sabha seats across the country except in Maharashtra and Goa where it had an alliance with the Congress.

In the changing pre-electoral equations immediately prior to the Lok Sabha elections of 2009, the three leading aspirants for power – the UPA, the NDA and the Third Front, far from being tightly knitted optimal alliances, "ended-up with sub-optimal alliances." In 2004, the BJP-led NDA effectively contested in 434 Lok Sabha seats including 163 of its allies. In 2009, the BJP had lost its former allies, viz. the Trinomool Congress (TMC), the BJD, the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), the AIADMK, while it found new partnership in the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), the Rashtiya Lok Dal (RLD) and the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD). As a result of losing so many former allies, the number of seats effectively contested by the NDA in 2009 came down to 356 (BJP 270, allies 86) In 2004, the Congress and its allies occupied the first position in 425 seats of which 110 seats were contested by the allies. Instead of going for a nation-wide pre-poll pact with its former allies, the Congress decided to form state-based alliances with the dominant regional parties. But the Congress' strategy of forming state-wise alliances with its existing allies did not succeed and it had to lose its existing allies like the RJD, the LJP, the SP and the Janata Dal (Secular). It has been rightly observed: "It is tempting to

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An alliance will be optimal when the alliance partners either win or come second in the seats, effectively contested by them.
conclude that the alliances failed because the negotiators were not skilled, because the big partners were not accommodating, because the small ones were over-ambitious and so on."8 The Indian political leaders do not want to realize the basic truth that in a vast and diverse country like ours, political power has been distributed among diverse social and political groups, is 'coalitional in nature.' "This could take the form of a formal coalition among different political parties. Or it could take the form of a political party that is itself a coalition, as the Congress was in its heyday."9 The NDA has come to be reduced in size because of its failure to accommodate diverse groups within its fold. The Congress, on the other hand, has always been reluctant to share power with other parties. It was forced to pursue coalitional strategy as a means of sharing power in the changing political situations of the country, but has not yet been mature enough to acclimatize itself with the strategy of coalition politics. The constituents of the Third Front confuse separateness with diversity. Each of them follows a separate agenda. As elections are state-bound, minor regional parties like the AIADMK, the TDP, the TRS, the JD (S) etc. can hardly contribute anything to one another as partners. The Third Front does not present an integral vision of a diverse India.

Sub-optimal alliances have a consequential impact upon the formation of the government which largely depends on post-poll alliances where political actors are inclined towards flouting the popular mandate to fish in troubled waters. In case of pre-poll alliances, voters are endowed with the opportunity of either accepting or rejecting the allied parties. Optimal alliances, unlike sub-optimal alliances, broaden the scope for popular choice.

Coalition politics, having much reflective implications for the formation of national government, first evolved in 1977 with the experiment of the Janata government that came to power for the first time at the Centre was the United Front (UF) government of 1996. During the first two decades of electoral politics – the period that was known as the era of the first electoral system - there was hardly any difference between the national and state level elections and the Congress was in a position to win both the elections almost with the same margin. During this time, national politics, instead of being derived from state politics, constituted the principal arena that outstripped state politics. State elections were closely associated with national political events that inspired the Union governments to dismiss the democratically elected state governments, calling for frequent holding of assembly elections in 1972, 1977-78, 1980, 1984 and 1990. The general elections of 1967 and 1977, being swept by anti-Congress waves, registered a higher percentage of voting turnout (61.3 % in 1967 and 60.4 % in 1977) than in the previous elections. Voters' turnout during the first decade of the inauguration of the electoral system in India was 45.7 % in 1952, 47.7 % in 1957, and 55.4 % in 1962. Voting turnout went up to 64.3 % in the 1985 general elections when the country was reeling under the trauma caused by the sudden assassination of Indira Gandhi. The 'Indira wave' shattered the opposition and swept the election in favour of the Congress which obtained three-fourths majority with 415 seats in the 542-member strong Lok Sabha. The third electoral system, marked by 'reconfiguration and differentiation' started to prevail around the

8 ibid.
9 ibid.
beginning of 1990s. Socially disadvantaged groups who constituted traditional support bases for the Congress, as the Hindu OBC, Dalits, Adivasis and the Muslims, had participated in larger numbers than the upper Caste Hindus in the last four Lok Sabha elections held in 1996, 1998, 1999 and 2004. Caste or community-wise participation of diverse social groups were as follows: Upper Caste Hindu – 58%, Hindu OBC – 59%, Dalit – 63%, Adivasi – 58% Muslim – 59%.

This participatory upsurge from the marginalized sections of the society has transformed the character of the Indian democracy over the last two decades.

However, the national parties and their leaders have not been able to realize the upsurge and accommodate it into the mainstream politics. There is virtually no major difference in the outlook of the two main national parties – the Congress and the BJP. Except for the fact that secularism and Hindutva divide them, both the parties are the champions of an integrated Indian nationalism in opposition to the vision of multiple nationalism or multicultural diversionism as envisaged by some regional parties. Both advocate a strong Centre and centralization of power against the forces of decentralization. The failure of the national parties to accommodate multiculturalism into the mainstream politics and their efforts for strengthening the centripetal forces against the units residing in the fringe of politics, that is against the regions or the states, have led to the enormous growth of territorial and community-based parties and opening-up of wider of political space for the articulation and aggregation of diverse interests and aspirations of the various hitherto neglected social groups and communities living in different regions of the country. Leaders of such regional and community-based parties have already strengthened their bargaining position vis-à-vis the national government for their states and communities, by using their clout to influence the formation of coalition governments as well as the formulation and implementation of governmental policy at the national level.

This has also brought about a substantial change in the social fabric of the power elites. Political power is now moving in a descending order and it has come down to the communities, so far neglected and excluded from the arena of politics, a large number of political leaders and elected representatives originate from there. Politics in India today speaks more in regional language than in national language and is embroiled in state politics instead of national. In terms of caste orientation and the caste composition of their leadership and mass base, both the Congress and the BJP have come to be predominantly upper caste parties. Substantial loss of support base of the Congress amongst the lower castes have resulted in the emergence of numerous parties that are representing the lower castes and the middle castes, such as the BSP and the SP in Uttar Pradesh, the RJD and the LJP in Bihar, the DMK and the AIADMK in Tamil Nadu etc. On the other hand, the BJP has not been able to widen its social base amongst the lower castes because of its upper caste-oriented Hindutva ideology. The endless process of regionalization, the emergence of new region and community-based parties, the configuration of political forces on the basis of numerous variables and the dominance of regional issues over the national issues in case of the national elections have compelled

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the so-called national parties to enter into alliances with the regional parties that have been playing an important role in the formation of governments both in the states and at the Centre.

This turn of events has led to a paradigm shift at the national level. Coalition politics at the national level against the backdrop of all possible permutations and combinations emanating from pre-poll understanding and post-poll realignment of the political actors must be examined in detail. Three decades had already been over since independence in 1977 when India was pushed to the brink of coalition politics.\(^{11}\)

Though the Congress government, led by Indira Gandhi, was reduced to a minority, but it managed to survive with the support extended to it by the DMK, the CPI, the Akali Dal, the Muslim League and some Independent members. In December 1970, Indira Gandhi decided to take fresh mandate from the electorate and recommended the dissolution of the Lok Sabha before the expiry of its stipulated term of five years and the tenure of the minority government that survived between November 1969 and December 1970 came to an end. The 1971 parliamentary elections were the first of its kind that added a new attribute to electoral politics in which elections to the Lok Sabha were separated from the elections to the state assemblies for the first time and the political parties fought the electoral battle making the national issues the chief electoral plank of their campaign. However, it must be noted that Indira Gandhi's minority government was not a coalition government, as it was a single-party government that needed external support to sustain itself. The Emergency of 1975-77 gave a fillip to "the forging of the first federal coalition to capture power at the Centre."\(^{12}\) In June 1975, Justice Jagmohan Lal Sinha of the Allahabad High Court, on an election petition filed by the Socialist Raj Narain, dismissed Indira Gandhi's election to the Lok Sabha from the Rae Bareli constituency in 1971 finding her guilty of corrupt election practices. The Court prohibited her from holding elective office for six years. Nevertheless, Supreme Court allowed her to stay in the office of the Prime Minister and to speak in Parliament, but at the same time, seized her voting right.

The defeat of the Congress in the Gujarat assembly elections brought another serious setback to her. The Janata Party formed government in Gujarat in alliance with the Congress dissidents, led by Chimanbhai Patel. Jayaprakash Narayan launched a movement against the misdeeds committed and the repressive measures undertaken by the Congress regime during the seventies. The opposition parties demanded her instant resignation from the Prime Minister's office. Jayaprakash Narayan, in a massive rally, in New Delhi on 25 June 1975 appealed to the people not to cooperate with the government and to stall all the functions of the autocratic regime that had no moral right to govern the country any more. He gave a call for "a revolution, a total revolution [and] this is not a movement merely for the dissolution of [legislature] but one [aiming at] changing the

\(^{11}\) In 1967, Congress was reduced to a minority government. The struggle for power from 1969 in a big way led the way to a split after 85 years of its existence. For history of the break up of Congress see Congress Bulletin, June-July, 1967, pp.83-133.

unconstitutional, illegal and immoral political authority.\textsuperscript{13} An 'internal emergency' was proclaimed in India the same night in the name of bringing back normality to the deteriorated law and order situation that the country was reeling under.

Thousands of opposition leaders and activists of different parties and organizations across the country were detained during the Emergency. Jayaprakash Narayan, Ashok Mehta, Atal Behari Vajpayee, Lal Krishna Advani, Morarji Desai, George Fernandes, Samar Guha, Rabi Ray, Madhu Limaye, Madhu Dandavate and the Congress dissidents like Chandra Sekhar, Mohan Dharia, Ram Dhan, Murasoli Maran, Raj Narain and Joytirmoy Basu were some of the prominent detainees. Twenty-six political organizations like the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) and many other ultra groups, the Rashtriya Sayamsevak Sangh, the Ananda Marg and the Jamait-e-Islami were declared illegal organizations. Strict censorship was imposed upon the press and a presidential order was issued to suspend the right to move the courts for the enforcement of the fundamental rights. Articles 14, 21 and 22 were also suspended to throttle the voice of the Opposition. Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) was strongly applied to throw detained persons into prison without showing any reason for their detention. Assembling of five or more persons in some place was prohibited under section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code. Indira Gandhi herself admitted:

The state of emergency was proclaimed because the threat of disruption was clear and imminent [from the movement the opposition parties undertook] … These were not the actions of a lunatic fringe to be ignored. [Instead] they were deliberately planned and [opposition parties] were ready to adopt extra-constitutional methods and deliberately cross those limits and self-restraints which are basic to democracy. To permit them to go ahead would have meant conniving at the beginning of disintegration of the bonds that hold the country together.\textsuperscript{14}

When Mrs. Gandhi announced the decision of holding fresh elections to the Lok Sabha on 18 January 1977, the four opposition parties viz. the Congress (Organization) [Congress (O)], the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS), the Bharatiya Lok Dal (BLD) and the Socialist Party informally merged to form the Janata Party on the initiative of Jayaprakash Narayan who spearheaded the opposition politics at that time. These parties also had an electoral understanding with the CPI (M). Thus, for the first time, the opposition parties had mobilized almost all the anti-emergency forces against the formidable monopoly of the Congress across the country before the election except for the CPI and the AIADMK – the allies of the Congress. Three expelled members of the Congress – Chandra Sekhar, Krishna Kant and Ram Dhan also – decided to join the Janata Party. It was almost at the same time that Jagjivan Ram, one of the senior-most members of the Central cabinet and an Indira loyalist, H. N. Bahuguna and Nandini Satpathy – former Congress Chief Ministers of Uttar Pradesh and Orissa – respectively, with some others defecting from the Congress on 2 February 1977 formed a new political party called the Congress For Democracy (CFD). The CFD, unlike the four other parties, did not abandon its separate identity but joined the Janata Party as an ally for the March 1977 Lok Sabha elections. The Swatantra Party also became a constituent of the Janata Party on 24 January 1977. The Shiromoni Akali Dal (SAD), the DMK and the CPI (M)

\textsuperscript{13} The Times of India, 26 June, 1975.

\textsuperscript{14} Norman Cousins interview with the Editor of the Sunday Review on August 1, 1975, quoted by Bipan Chandra, In the Name of Democracy: JP Movement and the Emergency, Penguin, New Delhi, 2003, p.77.
decided to support the Janata Party to avoid any split of opposition votes so that a straight fight could be given to the Congress and its allies, the CPI and the AIADMK. Since the Janata Party was not formally created by a legal merger, the Election Commission refused to grant it a legal recognition immediately.

On January 20, 1977 the leaders of the above mentioned parties assembled in New Delhi and decided to release a common list of candidates to contest the elections jointly with a common programme. Morarji Desai, as the leader of the Janata party, stated that they would like to fight the election throughout India with a common symbol of ploughman-within-wheel (chakra-haldhar), originally allotted to one of its constituent parties, the BLD. As the BLD had no organization in Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry, the Janata Party contested there under the symbol of a charkha of the Indian National Congress (Organization). For these reasons, the official reports of the Election Commission referred to the Janata Party in 1977 as the BLD, the official name under which it contested the election. The Election Commission recognized the Janata Party as a national party and granted it the symbol of chakra-haldhar only after the election when the above mentioned four parties formally merged on May 1, 1977.

Different parties released their election manifestos separately between 8 and 21 February 1977.\textsuperscript{15} Congress (Ruling) was the first to do so by highlighting its achievements in various fields over the past decades and blaming the opposition parties for the Emergency. The manifesto upheld the enactment of the Forty-Second Amendment, arguing that the exigencies of the situation compelled the government to amend the Constitution "to overcome the various obstacles put by economic and political vested interests, and not for the purpose of increasing the power of the executive at the expense of the judiciary or the legislature."\textsuperscript{16} In reply to the oppositions' offensive campaign against the Congress, Mrs. Gandhi said that "votaries of the rule of the jungle" were now parading "as the saviours of democracy in the country".\textsuperscript{17}

On 10 February 1977, the Janata Party released its election manifesto that contained three 'charters': political, economic and social. The political charter committed to emancipate the people 'from the bondage of fear' by revoking the proclamation of the external emergency of 1971 and the internal emergency of 1975; to repeal MISA and other 'black laws' antagonistic to democracy; to revoke the anti-democratic Forty Second Amendment; to restore fundamental freedoms, including that of the press; and to release the emergency detenus. The thirteen-point economic charter promised to abrogate the right to property from Part III of the Constitution of India and to make it an ordinary legal right; to affirm the right to work and full employment within ten years. The agriculture sector was sought to be given maximum priority. The fifteen-point social charter called for reform of education and eradication of illiteracy. The CFD that contested the election separately released its manifesto promising judicial probe into the 'administrative excesses' of the Emergency and abolition of arbitrary and anti-democratic laws.

\textsuperscript{15} Granville Austin, \textit{Working A Democratic Constitution}, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, pp.399-400.
\textsuperscript{16} \textit{The Hindustan Times}, March 1, 1977.
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{ibid.}
On 16 March 1977 the country went for the sixth Lok Sabha elections in which the Congress was virtually washed out from north India and was close to be wiped out barring the two states of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan where it secured two seats, one from each state. In the west, the Congress witnessed a mixed verdict. In Gujarat, the Congress won 10 seats out of 26 and in Maharashtra it got victory in 20 seats out of 48. In the south, however, the Congress performed much better, gaining 41 of the total 42 seats in Andhra Pradesh, 26 of the total 28 seats in Karnataka, 11 out of 20 in Kerala and 14 of the total 39 seats in Tamil Nadu. Thus, the Congress improved its position in South India with an increase of 22 seats in 1977 over its previous achievement of 70 seats in 1971.

### Results of the Sixth Lok Sabha Elections, 1977

<table>
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<th>PARTY</th>
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<th>VALID CONTESTED</th>
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<td>3</td>
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The nature of the parties that became united to form the Janata Party well indicates the fact that the Janata Party that held power at the Centre for more than two years (from March 1977 to July 1979) was "a hastily assembled coalition of quite different opposition parties and groups united mainly by their opposition to Indira Gandhi and the Emergency."\(^\text{18}\) The opposition parties, being motivated by anti-Indira and anti-Emergency feelings, forged unity among themselves for political expediency and quite obviously the division among them began to manifest as soon as they had achieved the common goal of defeating the Congress and its leader Indira Gandhi. Given the discrete nature of the Janata Party, such a division was not unnatural for it was "a motley coalition, dominated by the Congress (O), which was in fact a conservative, but secularist faction of the Congress Party."\(^\text{19}\) The other important constituent of the Janata Party was the Bharatiya Jan Sangh, a Hindu chauvinist party, that basically represented the middle class, belonging to the upper castes, in the urban segments of north and central India. The third constituent, the Bharatiya Lok Dal, placed emphasis on articulating the interests of prosperous, small peasant proprietors primarily in the Hindi belt. Devolution of resources from the urban industrial sector to the rural agricultural sector constituted the focal point.

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\(^{19}\) *ibid.*
of its ideological thinking. The Socialist Party that had a well-based organization among the urban workers and rural poor in some regions of north India constituted the fourth important constituent of the Janata Party. Lastly, the Congress for Democracy, having a support base among the poor dalits in rural India, was an offshoot of the Congress emanating from factional politics within the Congress.

Though the Janata coalition captured power, the formation of the government created an impasse. The division among the constituents of the Janata Party became more acute once it went to select its leader who would take the chair of the Prime Minister. Morarji Desai of the Congress (O), Jagjivan Ram of the CFD and Charan Singh of the BLD staked their claim for the post of the Premier putting one behind the other. This aggravated the situation that created a stalemate for the Janata Party even prior to its taking over the charge of the government formally. Jayaprakash Narayan and Acharya J. B. Kripalani were entrusted with the responsibility of resolving the dispute but all their efforts came to nothing, as different constituents of the Janata Party held different views on this important issue. While the Young Turks and the others spoke in favour of Jagjivan Ram, the Congress (O) and the Jan Sangh preferred Morarji Desai. The BLD and some others wanted Charan Singh as their nominee. Of the three rival contenders, Jayaprakash selected the octogenarian Morarji Desai for Prime Ministership in view of his seniority and administrative experience. This frustrated the other two. Morarji Desai was ultimately sworn in as the Prime Minister on 24 March 1977.

Although the Janata party somehow managed to solve the crisis arising out of the crucial issue of election of its leader, the issue of cabinet formation "left a trail of bitterness." It had sown "the seeds of discontent because the two major constituents, especially the Jana Sangh, felt that they were "under-represented" in the Cabinet of 19-members, while the Prime Minister's group was over-represented" Claims and counter claims for important or chosen portfolios further vitiated the atmosphere.

The coalition was passing through tension and scuffle even after the formation of the Council of Ministers. The decision of the Janata government to dismiss nine Congress-ruled state governments and to hold fresh elections to the legislative assemblies of those states further deteriorated the situation. The Janata Party managed to secure absolute majority in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Orissa, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh in the elections of June 1977 and two of its constituents – the BJS and the BLD decided to take the chairs of the Chief Ministers by rotation. This unilateral decision of the BJS and the BLD dampened the spirits of the other constituents. In February 1978 the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Assam and Meghalaya went to assembly polls in which the Congress captured power in the first three states with an enormous victory. Charan Singh and Raj Narain acrimoniously criticized the Janata Party president Chandra Sekhar for the failure of the party in those three states.

However, the Janata-ruled state governments started facing wide ruptures from February 1979. The elevation of Charan Singh and Jagjivan Ram to the position of

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Deputy Prime Minister could not, however, contain the overall internal wrangling within the party. Though the faction, led by Charan Singh, still continued to be active within the party, it was defeated in the parliamentary party elections in May 1979. An unhealthy understanding between the BJS and the Congress (O) groups made it possible for them to capture all the six important party positions. Raj Narain had departed from the Janata Party on 23 June 1978 and announced the formation of a new party called the Janata (Secular). Narain's resignation from the Janata party sparked off enormous defection, leading to a substantial fall in the strength of the government.

The non-Jan Sangh constituents of the coalition, especially the Socialists, apprehended a danger from "the growing influence of the RSS in government"...that "left them ill at ease with the RSS from the very outset." Wary of it, the Socialists formulated a strategy to get rid of the clutches of the RSS in running the government and to keep the RSS under control. Motivated by this scheme, Madhu Limaye proposed an amalgamation of the RSS with the youth wing of the Janata Party to form a united volunteer organization. The RSS immediately snubbed Limaye's suggestion, categorizing it as 'insinuating' to the RSS because "the swayamsevaks are not volunteers who will spread the durries and fix the mike for some leaders to come and make speeches." It was devoted "to the inculcation of national character and eradication of untouchability, casteism, communalism, provincialism and linguism." The political leaders should understand that the RSS activists "are nobody's Boy Scouts." Limaye's apprehension came true. The RSS tied the members of the Jana Sangh together by the traditional values of its ideological philosophy. After a couple of years, matters came to a head over the issue of retaining connection with the RSS that ultimately resulted in a split in the Janata Party with Chandra Sekhar and Charan Singh in opposite camps.

During the monsoon session of Parliament, Indira Gandhi's Congress (I) and the Congress (U), led by Y.B.Chavan, brought a no-confidence motion against the Desai government on 9 July 1979 which was passed in the House. Apprehending his government's defeat in the no-confidence motion, Desai submitted his resignation in a letter addressed to the President Nilam Sanjiva Reddy on 15 July, but he did not advise him to dissolve the Lok Sabha. In a second letter, written to the President, Desai reminded him of the capacity of the Janata Party, still the single largest party in the Lok Sabha but having no absolute majority behind it, of exploring the possibilities of forming an alternative government of which it should not be deprived. However, Reddy refused to give any further chance to Desai "who had just tendered his resignation instead of facing the no-confidence motion in the House to form the Government."

Parliament was adjourned on 16 July 1979. Chandra Sekhar, the Janata Party president, asked Desai to step down as the leader of the Janata Parliamentary Party (JPP). But Desai refused to pay heed to the request and continued as the JPP leader to dissuade

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24 Ibid.
Charan Singh and Jagjivan Ram from holding the leadership of the same. Charan Singh resigned from the cabinet as Deputy Prime Minister, formed a new party, the Janata (Secular) and was elected its leader.

On 18 July 1979, the President invited Y. B. Chavan, the leader of the Opposition and of Congress Parliamentary Party (CPP), to form the government and reminded him of his ‘moral duty’ as the opposition leader to make an all out effort for the formation of a new government. Chavan, however, apprehending his inability to command majority in the House, declined to accept the offer.

The next day both Singh and Desai wrote letters to the President, expressing their willingness to form the government and challenged each other towards that end. Charan Singh asked for the support of the Congress (I) in a letter written to Indira Gandhi on 23 July. On July 24, the CPP informed the President of its decision to support Charan Singh in his attempt to form a government. Interestingly, "by a strange alchemy of politics, her sins seem to have been washed away; Mr. Charan Singh, the man who most assiduously sought to punish her for her Emergency misdeeds, and bungled the process, is now wooing her to attain power." 

On July 26, 1979, the President invited Charan Singh to form the government and asked him to test his majority in the Lok Sabha by the third week of August. The CPP even prior to the commencement of the session of the House decided to vote against the confidence motion, which made Charan Singh tender his government's resignation immediately, even without facing the floor of Parliament.

Jagjivan Ram, meanwhile, had been trying to bring down the Charan Singh government since he had assumed the leadership of the JPP. Ram and Chandra Sekhar, along with six Janata Chief Ministers, called on the President on the same day with a request to allow Ram to form the government. However, before the end of the day, Indira Gandhi called on the President to dissuade him from doing that, goading the President to dissolve the Lok Sabha on 22 August 1979 which brought an abrupt end to the Janata experiment.

The disintegration of the Janata Party led the Congress back to power in the seventh Lok Sabha elections, held in January 1980, with 353 seats in the 529-member strong lower House. The strength of the constituents of the one-time Janata Party was decimated to a significant proportion in contrast to their performance in the March 1977 general elections.

Results of the Seventh Lok Sabha Elections, 1980

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTY</th>
<th>CANDIDATES</th>
<th>VALID</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

25 *ibid*, p.27.
28 *ibid*, p.515.
The Jan Sangh, the most effective constituent of the former Janata Party, ditched it in the aftermath of the elections. It was an irreparable loss as the Jana Sangh provided the most viable support to the Janata Party coalition for its survival. In the 1984 general elections also, the Congress retained power at the Centre with a massive victory, securing 415 of the 542 seats of the Lok Sabha.

The second serious attempt to install a non-Congress coalition government at the national level was undertaken preceding the 1989 general elections with the formation of the National Front (NF) consisting of parties opposed to the Congress to accomplish "a historical responsibility to rid this country of the misrule of the Congress (I) led by a weak and blundering Prime Minister."29 The principal initiative to form a non-Congress

and non-BJP National Front was undertaken by V. P. Singh, a Cabinet Minister in the former Rajiv Gandhi government (1984-89) and N. T. Rama Rao, the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister and the president of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP). V. P. Singh, who held the important Finance and Defense Ministries in the Rajiv Gandhi government, came into conflict with Rajiv Gandhi over unearthing of the Bofors scandal as the Defence Minister. Upon the exposure of the scandal, Singh was sacked from the Defence Ministry in March 1987 and later from the membership of the Congress also. After having resigned, V. P. Singh along with Arif Mohammad Khan, Arun Nehru and some other Congress dissidents like Ram Dhan, V. C. Shukla, Satpal Malik formed "a nucleus of opposition to the government of Rajiv Gandhi", called the Jan Morcha (People's Front) on 2 October 1987 to carry on endless fight against a series of corruption in which Rajiv Gandhi and his family members were reported to be directly involved.

The Jan Morcha, formed by V. P. Singh as a platform to combat governmental and political corruption, continued to be a completely non-political front having 'no political' and 'electoral ambition', as was claimed by him. This campaign against corruption gained grounds in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and in some other states of north India, many non-Congress parties and groups like the Janata Party, the Congress (Socialist) and the Ajit Singh faction of the Lok Dal expressed their eagerness to join the Morcha. On 28 November, 1987, the Jan Morcha, the Congress (S), the Janata Party and the Lok Dal (A) assembled in New Delhi to release a fourteen-point Common Minimum Programme "which might constitute the core of the strategy to give the country an alternative policy, a new social order and a better tomorrow". Electoral reforms, removal of corruption from all levels of governmental machinery, decentralization of political and economic power and the introduction of a self reliant economy to eliminate rural disparity were some of the important issues of the fourteen-point programme. Addressing a rally in Bangalore to observe the successful completion of the full five-year term of the Janata government in Karnataka, the non-Congress Chief Ministers of Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Karnataka, Haryana and West Bengal, accompanied by some other opposition leaders, articulated the need for the formation of a viable anti-Congress front. Subsequent rallies and conferences, held by the opposition parties, resulted in the merger of the Lok Dal (A) and the Rastriya Sanjay Manch into the Janata Party. Similar drives were undertaken concurrently to bring other opposition forces within the fold of the Jan Morcha at that time. V. P. Singh's massive victory over the Congress (I) candidate Anil Sastri in the tightly contested by-election from the Allahabad Lok Sabha constituency in June 1988 added impetus to the combined effort of the opposition parties that was directed in ousting the Congress from power at the Centre. On 11 October 1988, the birthday of Jayaprakash Narayan, the Jan Morcha, the Janata Party, and the Devi Lal faction of the Lok Dal merged to form the Janata Dal. The Congress (S) and another faction of the Lok Dal, led by H. N. Bahuguna, maintained distance from the Janata Dal as separate political outfits. The floating of the Janata Dal signified a shift to a "centrist, secular alternative to the Congress" in the political panorama of India. It was recognized as a

distinct political party by the Speaker of the Lok Sabha in April 1989. It emerged as a national political party with the recognition of the Election Commission of India in October 1989 immediately before the ninth Lok Sabha elections of November 1989.

Similar moves were in progress even earlier under the leadership of N. T. Rama Rao to bind the opposition forces culminating into the formation of the seven-party National Front (NF) on August 6, 1988. Of the seven-party constituents of the National Front, the Jan Morcha, the Janata Party and the Lok Dal together formed the Janata Dal and the four other members of the front – the DMK, the TDP, the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and the Congress (S) retained their separate identities. Thus, the National Front was ultimately composed of the Janata Dal, the Congress (S), the AGP, the DMK and the TDP. V. P. Singh became the convener of the National Front and N. T. Rama Rao was unanimously elected its Chairman.

Leaders of the National Front approached political parties of all shades, ranging from Right to Left, to garner their support for the National Front. While N. T. Rama Rao held discussions with Jyoti Basu, the former Chief Minister of West Bengal, about the support of the left parties, V. P. Singh spoke to the BJP leaders to ensure their support for the National Front. Ideological incongruity between the two groups of the Indian Communists – the CPI and the CPI (M) on the one hand and the BJP on the other – hindered the process of forging unity in the opposition rank for some time in the early half of 1989, but was resolved in the second half of that year with the Election Commission's declaration of the elections scheduled to be held in November. The BJP president L. K. Advani announced his party's consensus on the issue of adjustment of seats with the Janata Dal and other constituents of the National Front. The left parties also requested V. P. Singh not to project his closeness with the BJP in the electoral campaign as it was impossible for them to openly support the BJP.

Thus, the Front constituents – many of whom were associated with the first non-Congress Janata government during 1977-79 - appeared to have agreed to submerge the internal differences among themselves mainly to politically combat the Congress. In other words, the non-Congress parties were convinced of the rewards of working together in circumstances where the Congress had lost its appeal. The changing political situation in the second half of the 1980s when several regional parties captured power in the states, therefore appeared to have created a wave supporting a non-Congress victory.  

Building unity in the opposition "was conceived as a three-stage process." First, the centrist non-Congress parties forged unity among themselves. The second stage was marked by the formation of the National Front consisting of "all non-left secular parties, regional and national." The second stage came to an end with the formation of the

In the Indian context, according to Vanik, centrism means "only those formation(s) which can appeal to a broad cross section of classes and castes could hope to come to power nationally. This has implied not the absence of ideology but a capacity for ideological flexibility; a general programme which seeks to be consensual and to avoid too close an identification with left or right."

Janata Dal first and then with the formation of the National Front. The third stage appeared when the Janata Dal-led National Front and the BJP agreed to contest the election jointly on the basis of one to one candidate in around 85 percent of the parliamentary seats. A similar understanding was reached between the National Front and the Communist Parties for a smaller number of seats for the 1989 general elections.

However, the results of the ninth Lok Sabha elections, held in November 1989, did not produce a clear mandate either against the authoritarian and dynastic rule of the Congress (I), or in favour of the National Front to govern the country.

**Results of the Ninth Lok Sabha Elections, 1989**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTY</th>
<th>CANDIDATES</th>
<th>CONTESTED</th>
<th>WON</th>
<th>VOTE %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 BJP</td>
<td></td>
<td>225</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>11.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 CPI</td>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 CPM</td>
<td></td>
<td>64</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>6.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 ICS(SCS)</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 INC</td>
<td></td>
<td>510</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>39.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 JD</td>
<td></td>
<td>244</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>17.79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 JNP (JP)</td>
<td></td>
<td>155</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 LKD (B)</td>
<td></td>
<td>116</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATIONAL PARTIES :</td>
<td></td>
<td>1378</td>
<td>471</td>
<td>79.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STATE PARTIES :</td>
<td></td>
<td>143</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REGISTERED</td>
<td></td>
<td>926</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Unrecognised) PARTIES :</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDEPENDENTS :</td>
<td></td>
<td>3713</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL :</td>
<td></td>
<td>6160</td>
<td>529</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The bonanza of the Congress that slid down from 415 seats in 1984 to a mere 197 in 1989 virtually gave it no chance to form a government even with the support of its electoral allies. This election depicted two small differences from 1977, making the situation somewhat complicated: first, the Congress did not face a complete disaster in north India as it did in 1977, for it had secured about forty additional seats from that region; and second, in 1977, the Janata Party was set in gaining absolute majority on its own because of the merger of the BJS with the Janata Party. This time, as the BJP had contested the election as a separate political unit, three distinct groups of non-Congress members appeared in Parliament, viz., the National Front which was virtually identified with the Janata Dal; the BJP and the Left. The only possibility, under such circumstances, seemed to be the formation of a National Front government banking on the support of both the BJP and the Left from outside the government.

The Congress, falling short of the required majority did not stake its claim to form the government and decided to play the role of the Opposition. Being optimistic about the formation of the next government, the opposition parties started hectic political activities to that end. The National Front presidium met in New Delhi and constituted a five-
member committee with N. T. Rama Rao, V. P. Singh, Devi Lal, Ajit Singh and Arun Nehru to start dialogue with all non-Congress (I) parties. The committee members discussed with the leaderships of the BJP and the left parties to get their support for the National Front. The four major left parties – the CPI, CPI (M), RSP and Forward Bloc declared their unconditional 'outside support' to the National Front if it formed the government. The BJP also decided to render "general but critical support" to the front to run the government without taking part in it. It is interesting to note that the Left and the BJP, being two diametrically opposite political forces, did not hesitate to come together "under a broad coalition of parties to keep the Congress at bay by any means." Both of them decided to support the National Front government from outside, rather than participating in the government, as a tactical means for enhancing their support base and influencing governmental policies, remaining in the mainstream politics of India. Their aversion to participate in the V. P. Singh government was governed by the idea that it would tarnish their image. It was understood long before that the Left and the BJP would continue to uphold solidarity in the National Front till it would be politically convenient for them and this was what actually happened when withdrawal of support of the BJP from the government led to its collapse.

Like the Janata Party experiment of 1977-79, the National Front also experienced teething troubles over the issue of leadership. Though V. P. Singh appeared to be the most favourite choice for the Janata Dal Parliamentary Party (JDPP) leadership and the Prime Ministerial candidate, Chandra Sekhar, the 'Young Turk' of the 1970s, and Devi Lal, a 'heavyweight' from Haryana, were in the race for the Prime Ministerial office. But the long cherished aspirations remained unfulfilled as the JDPP, in a meeting held in the central hall of Parliament on December 1, 1989 under the Chairmanship of Madhu Dandavate, elected V. P. Singh as its leader. A significant section of the Janata Party was exceptionally critical of V. P. Singh's election to that post, since he, as a minister of the cabinet that sanctioned Emergency, was placed on the same rank with those who were the champions of the authoritarian regime imposed by Indira Gandhi. Thus, the kernel of contention among the constituents of the National Front were implanted in the very beginning.

Ramaswamy Venkataraman, the President of India, invited Rajiv Gandhi, the leader of the single largest party, the Congress (I), to form the government. In the absence of comfortable majority in the Lok Sabha with 197 seats of its own and having no intention to form a minority government with the cooperation of other political parties, Rajiv Gandhi declined to form the government. The President next called on V. P. Singh, the leader of the second largest party, the Janata Dal, to form the government and stipulated that Singh would have to take a vote of confidence in the Lok Sabha within thirty days of his assuming office and Singh won the confidence motion in January, 1990.

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V. P. Singh was sworn in as the Prime Minister on 2 December 1989 and just a few minutes after taking the oath of office, Singh surprised everybody by designating Devi Lal as his deputy in a move to stem differences.

Nevertheless, the National Front government was submerged in crises within a few weeks of assuming office. Both internal as well as external problems hastened its disaster. "Ever since the National Front government took office, it has been clear that the danger to its stability lay not where minority governments usually flounder- the uncertain support of allied parties outside the government. Rather, this government was most likely to be endangered from within". Chandra Sekhar got both the Left and the BJP by his side in condemning the government over its industrial policy. However, the most interesting thing was Devi Lal extending his support to Chandra Sekhar on this particular issue which hinted at the expected realignments within the Janata Dal. Two days later, the patriarch of Haryana suddenly changed his stand, saying that the policy was not as disastrous as Chandra Sekhar was making it out to be, that in fact it was the best possible move in the present circumstances.

The most serious internal problem came in 1989 over the issue of Devi Lal's son Om Prakash Chauthala, the Chief Minister of Haryana whose election was alleged to be rigged and he was forced to resign goading Devi Lal to resign too. Chouthala won a second time to be the Chief Minister in July 1990 but his reinstallation sparked off protests from within the Janata Dal. The government was on the verge of collapse which could only be stalled at the nick of time. However, this proved to be an omen for Janata Dal and the National Front.

Two issues brought about radical changes in the political realignment of India when the National Front government was in power at the Centre. One was the reservation of seats in government services for the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) on the lines of reservation for the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) as recommended by the Mandal Commission in 1980. The second issue was concerned with the upsurge of Hindutva that the BJP used as an electoral plank, seeking to protect the interests of the Hindu majority community. The philosophy of Hindutva provided a political constituency for the BJP which was, till then, a centrist political party like the Congress.

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The Mandal Commission's recommendations assumed national importance in 1990, ten years after the submission of its report to the government. The two foregoing successive Congress governments – one led by Indira Gandhi and the other by her son Rajiv Gandhi, did neither publish the Mandal Commission's report nor attempt to implement its recommendations in anticipation of the violence that would evoke by the publication of reservation policies in general and the difficulties that the government might have faced in implementing such divisive policy at the national level in particular. The Janata Dal, under the leadership of V. P. Singh, made the Mandal Commission's report a national issue by avowing its promise to implement its recommendations if the party were voted to power and included this agenda in its electoral manifesto in 1989. Coming to power, Singh announced on 7 August 1990 his government's decision to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission of reserving 27% jobs in the government for the OBCs in addition to 22.5% job quota reserved for the SCs and STs and on 13 August, Singh issued a formal order to that end.

This created a cumbersome situation for other members of the coalition, particularly the BJP. It could not forthrightly abandon the reservation policy of the V. P. Singh government in apprehension of losing enormous votes of the OBCs who constituted the largest vote banks (52%) of the country. The BJP, being a supportive party of the National Front government, was not consulted by V. P. Singh in making such an important policy decision. The BJP contended that though they were not against the Mandal Commission's report, they were in opposition to the specific instance and the modus operandi in which the policy decision had been taken. Rajiv Gandhi, the then leader of the Opposition, slammed V. P. Singh for his unilateral action in Parliament, but the Congress, as the opposition party, failed to deny the political importance of the Mandal Commission's recommendations in the vote bank politics.

The government's decision triggered off anti-Mandal violence and unrest in north India and many other parts of the country, leading to attempted suicide by upper caste students of universities and colleges by setting fire on themselves. On September 19, 1990, a Delhi University student Rajeev Goswami attempted self-immolation and following him, youths of different cities of northern India, from Ambala to Lucknow, attempted the same in quick successions within the next month. Police firing and clashes that accompanied the widespread protest took the life of another 100 people. These protests, which continued for a period over two months, shattered the strength and credibility of the V. P. Singh government.

The proposed implementation of the Mandal Commission's recommendations infuriated the upper and middle caste groups of the privileged Hindu population of both the rural and urban areas. They found their social, cultural and economic predominance to be threatened "by ascending groups of peasants, traders, and entrepreneurs." This feeling of insecurity at the prospect of further shrinking of their job opportunities was also linked to a sense of 'depurification of values'. Lower-caste groups would come to

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occupy public dominion in larger proportions at the cost of merit and efficiency of the upper castes. It must be pointed here that "the anti-Mandal agitations and self-immolations of upper-caste students in north India in 1990 must be understood against this background of an established middle class, haunted by fears of what was seen as a "plebian" threat to its hitherto complacent way of life and social position." The National Front government's decision to implement the Mandal Commission's recommendations was politically motivated. It was directed towards politicizing caste sentiments of the low caste groups for victory in elections. The Mandal Commission was thus described "as a caste commission" that was seen "as a passport to power". Caste-based mobilization has been playing a vital role in legislative politics by enhancing more and more the number of seats of the regional and factional parties, representing particular caste groups. It was discernible in the increasing number of seats from approximately 21% in 1952 to 33% in 1998. Apart from polarizing people on caste sentiments more sharply than ever before, implementation of the Mandal formula led to disintegration in north India of "long established patterns of vertical mobilization, and placed in relief the outline of a new basis of horizontal cooperation of the disadvantaged social groups."

The following factors motivated it to execute the recommendations:
(a) to get the votes of the OBCs which constituted the majority of the Hindu and non-Hindu population of India;
(b) to dissuade Devi Lal, an arrogant Jat leader from Haryana, from his attempt to challenge the V. P. Singh government with rural-urban population;
(c) to divert the attention of the people from the controversial Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid issue that created a solid vote bank of the BJP among the Hindu upper castes, particularly after the rath yatra arranged by the BJP president L. K. Advani in October 1990;
(d) the government's realization was that none of the allies of the National Front would dare to oppose the implementation openly, if presented with a fait accompli.

The BJP leadership, on the other hand, ruefully noticed a major threat in the government's decision to implement the Mandal formula to its pursued agenda of forging unity in the major community and the 'Ramjanmabhoomi' agitation "which served as a rolling cry for several radical Hindu organizations like the Rastriya Sayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP)." The RSS and the VHP opposed the Mandal Commission's report, as it included certain Muslim communities in the OBC category. Simultaneously, it was beyond the capacity of the BJP to make a point-blank rejection of the Mandal formula that would damage the party's long pursued drive to form a support base among the lower caste groups. Being charged by the strong opposition of

46 ibid
51 Hansen, n. 45, p.164.
the RSS and the VHP to the 'Mandalization' of politics, the BJP decided to sever its relations with V. P. Singh and the National Front government and to rely more than ever before "on the platform of Hindutva and the Ramjanmabhoomi agitation, in order to oppose what was seen as the 'dangerously divisive effects' of the Mandal formula on a prospective Hindu majority nation."\(^{52}\)

While the Mandal issue played an important role in mobilizing the OBCs by affirming their separate identity and common cause, the mandir issue became a rallying point for the mobilization of the Hindus as against the 'others' as a homogeneous community. Explaining the rising strength of Hindutva, Nicholas B. Dirks observes:

Despite, the pressing and at last much discussed dangers of Hindu fundamentalism, right politics, and communalism across India, it is necessary to remember the role played by the controversy over Mandal in generating the political consensus that made Hindu fundamentalism more acceptable. It was in the wake of politicization of caste over Mandal that calls for Hindu unity over caste division began to be made by political leaders of the BJP. In addition, caste violence is as virulent as ever, in certain areas of India more than ever before, which suggests yet again that caste continues to haunt not just the modern self but the national project of India."\(^{53}\)

On 25 September 1990, Advani, the BJP president, launched his much hyped Rath Yatra with fanfare from the rebuilt Somnath temple in Gujarat with the distinct purpose of combating the challenge of Mandalization of Indian politics by drumming up support for the BJP from the Hindu community. Advani admitted that "The Mandal episode certainly put pressure on me particularly in my constituency, New Delhi, where these self-immolations [of students] had taken place. Parents used to come to my place daily. Why are you supporting the government? Withdraw your support. I felt that withdrawing our support on the issue of Mandal would be of an enormous benefit to the government."\(^{54}\)

Advani's Rath Yatra, as it was in the case of the Ram Shila puja, ignited serious tension and violence. It left many minor and major incidents of anti-Muslim pogroms in its trail. During the course of his journey from Somnath to Ayodhya, the advancement of Advani's rath was intercepted at Samastipur in Bihar where he was arrested by the Bihar police on 23 October. Advani's arrest prompted the BJP to withdraw support from V. P. Singh's National Front government and intensified the 'Ramjanmabhoomi' agitation which eventually led to the demolition of the Babri Masjid, two years later on December 6, 1992 and the communal riots in its wake. This virtually engulfed the country and helped the BJP to come to the national stage of politics in 1998 after a 13-day stint in 1996.

On October 23, 1990, the BJP informed the President of the withdrawal of its support from the National Front government and the President advised the Prime Minister to prove his majority in the Lok Sabha. This was the first instance of the President asking a Central government to seek such a vote and V. P. Singh, tabled a confidence motion on

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52 ibid.
54 The Hindustan Times, 21 September 1990.
7 November 1990 during the special session of the Lower House of Parliament, which he lost.

The pattern of voting on the confidence motion, however, revealed that the National Front government's defeat was due not simply to the anti-government votes cast by the BJP and the opposition Congress, but a splinter group of his own party, the Janata Dal, that also voted against the government defying the party whip served on them. The National Front had 146 members of its own in the Lower House of the Parliament and it controlled a total of 198 seats along with its leftist supporters in the 542-member Lower House, far short of a majority. The difference had been increased by the BJP and the opposition Congress party which had 85 and 197 seats respectively in the Lower House. Despite appeals of secularism against Hindu chauvinism, Singh lost the confidence vote by a hefty margin of 204 votes, 64 votes more than the combined strength of the BJP and the Congress. 142 votes were cast in favour of the government and 346 votes went against it. Singh needed 261 votes out of the total of 542 votes in the Lok Sabha for the survival of his government. He submitted the resignation of his government to the President. Thus, his minority government ceased to exist within 11 months from the date of its installation. Nevertheless, after having lost the confidence of the majority in Parliament, V. P. Singh urged the Speaker to disqualify 31 members from the House for casting votes against the government while it was seeking the confidence of the House apart from the 25 members already expelled from the Janata Dal on charges of being involved in anti-party activities. The purpose behind this was to reduce the rival group of the Janata Dal, the Chandra Sekhar-led Janata Dal (Secular), to a minority to create hindrance in the way of his move to form the government even with the support of the Congress (I). 55

Actually it was not possible for V. P. Singh to protect the government, even he had conceded the BJP's demand for the construction of the temple of Rama at the disputed site of Ayodhya. Because, in that case, the Left would have been compelled to withdraw support and the Chandra Sekhar-Devilal camp would have gathered greater moral strength to rebel against the government. At this juncture, Singh was left with no alternative option than to resign. That he tried utmost till the last moment to bring the BJP to his side as proved by the promulgation of the controversial ordinance. The real factors that brought about the fall of the V. P. Singh government were embedded in the social divisions, in the traditional rivalries between different political parties and between various factions with his own party. The balance of social forces, as they were reflected through different political forces of the National Front within the Parliament, weighed heavily against him to bring about the downfall of his government.

Before giving the opportunity to Chandra Sekhar to form the government, the President held consultations for two days after the resignation of V. P. Singh on November 7, 1990, with the political parties of all shades, right, left and central, about the formation of the next government. None of them agreed depicting a lack of confidence. The latent game of supporting and wining friendship from one's former adversaries

reveals the ulterior power game of all the parties.\textsuperscript{56} Ideologies like 'secularism' or 'good for the people' were used virtually by all to impress the public. The BJP favoured the holding of immediate elections instead of an interim government boarding on the Hindutva wave that catapulted it as a new political force at the national level. The JD (S) leader, Chandra Sekhar, declared that he would be able to form a stable government with the support of the Congress and produced evidence of support of 50-odd defectors from the Janata Dal and of 220 legislators of the Congress and its allies to his group in the Lok Sabha to stake his claim. The President, being satisfied prima facie with Chandra Sekhar's claim, invited him to form the government asking him to prove his majority by 30 November 1990. Thus, nearly a week-long uncertainty that prevailed over the formation of the succeeding government at the Centre was removed when Chandra Sekhar was sworn in as the country's eighth Prime Minister on 10 November 1990. He formed a minority government banking on the support of the Congress. Though Rajiv Gandhi assured the new government of his support for rest of the five-year term of the present Parliament, it was clear that the Congress would devote the next months planning to return to power by advancing elections sometimes next year.

The Congress expected that the new leader would not deviate from the ideologies and policies of the Congress. When Chandra Sekhar as the new Prime Minister moved the one-line confidence motion in the Council of Ministers on November 16, 1990, the House became a 'free for all' with scathing remarks targeted at the ruling party by most of the members cutting across political ideologies. Many new and old issues were brought up by both ruling and opposition to the utter embarrassment of the Prime Minister. It shows that given a single opportunity, even the close confidantes can go against one, if he is deprived of the seat of power. It must be pointed out that it was the Congress leaders that came to the rescue of the nascent government and severely criticized the V. P. Singh government.

Assured of the support of the Congress, Chandra Sekhar won the confidence vote by 280 to 214 votes with 11 abstentions. He garnered the support of 18 more MPs than was required to gain a simple majority in the House having an effective strength of 525 members.

Thus, anti-Congressism that tied together many political forces to oppose the Chandra Sekhar government without any ideological consideration lost its edge. In his speech, Vasant Sathe, a Congress leader, described anti-Congressism as a myth of those who use the notion as a pedestal for political purposes. The BJP and the left parties again came together to oppose Chandra Sekhar. The Prime Minister did not forget to remind the left parties of their close connections with him in the past, particularly during the last 11 months, when his ideological standpoint matched with theirs. But, at this moment, Chandra Sekhar and Devi Lal wanted to bring about a change in the leadership of the Janata Dal. But failing to do so, they walked out from the Janata Dal and formed the Samajwadi Janata Party, also known as the Janata Dal (Secular), on November 5, 1990 along with 61 dissidents of the Janata Dal. The Congress welcomed the split which came as a serious blow to V. P. Singh, 48 hours before his facing the confidence motion in the Lok Sabha on November 7, 1990. Chandra Sekhar, as the leader of the newly emergent splinter group, submitted a list of 50-odd members of his group to Speaker Rabi Ray. Chandra Sekhar and 24 other members were declared to be the "unattached" members of the House by the Speaker.

\textsuperscript{56} Chandra Sekhar and Devi Lal wanted to bring about a change in the leadership of the Janata Dal. But failing to do so, they walked out from the Janata Dal and formed the Samajwadi Janata Party, also known as the Janata Dal (Secular), on November 5, 1990 along with 61 dissidents of the Janata Dal. The Congress welcomed the split which came as a serious blow to V. P. Singh, 48 hours before his facing the confidence motion in the Lok Sabha on November 7, 1990. Chandra Sekhar, as the leader of the newly emergent splinter group, submitted a list of 50-odd members of his group to Speaker Rabi Ray. Chandra Sekhar and 24 other members were declared to be the "unattached" members of the House by the Speaker.
they had established a close nexus with V. P. Singh and had even forgotten their past links, which they had just till the other day, with Mulayam Singh Yadav whom they had now deserted. So it shows how often and how easily political leaders change sides and stance to gain a leverage.

It goes without saying that the Congress evolved the strategy of extending support from the outside to the minority government of Chandra Sekhar as it did not want to face the electorate so soon after the last election, the support of the Congress was similar to that the BJP and the Left Front extended to V. P. Singh's government.

The BJP described the deal between the Janata Dal (S) and the Congress as a 'grace period'. According to S. S. Bhandari, the BJP vice-president, a mid-term poll was inevitable. He said, "We are confident that even the Congress, which has extended outside support to the dissident Janata Dal group, would be soon fed up." In its two-day emergency meeting of the national executive of the BJP, the party decided to contest maximum number of seats if mid-term polls were declared and they issued directions to all their units to gear up the party machinery for facing such an eventuality.

A bleak prospect awaited the minority government, as misunderstandings on various issues developed between Chandra Sekhar and Rajiv Gandhi, the leader of the Opposition. Within a period of less than six months, the Congress Party, being exhausted with playing a supporting role, brought an allegation of police surveillance on its president Rajiv Gandhi. It had been reported that the Sikh militants, Muslim fundamentalists and some other extremist groups like the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) had threatened Rajiv's life. The Congress, therefore, did not take the surveillance issue lightly and raised a furore in the Lok Sabha. The Congress and its allies walked out from the Lok Sabha in protest against the vindictive attitude of the government. This led to continuous adjournment of the House in absence of a quorum. The decision of the Congress to stay out from the House came when Chandra Sekhar was to seek the approval of the House for the vote of thanks to the Presidential address to the joint session of both the Houses of Parliament. This situation posed a serious challenge to the stability of the government and it was quite obvious that the government might fall any moment. In spite of Chandra Sekhar's initiative, Rajiv Gandhi declined all the overtures for negotiation. Ultimately, Chandra Sekhar submitted his resignation to the President on 6 March 1991 and advised him to dissolve the Lok Sabha.

After Chandra Sekhar's resignation, as none of the political parties agreed to form a coalition government, the President dissolved the Lok Sabha on 13 March 1991 and ordered for fresh elections for the tenth Parliament. He also asked Chandra Sekhar to continue as the caretaker Prime Minister till the formation of the new government and he remained in that office till June 21, 1991.

In the next general elections, held in May-June 1991, the Congress emerged as the single largest party with 227 seats. The BJP, riding on the emotional wave of Hindu nationalism, secured 20.2% of votes and established its win over 119 seats.

57 Chand, n. 55, p.425.
Results of the Tenth Lok Sabha Elections, 1991

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<th>CANDIDATES</th>
<th>VALID</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CONTESTED</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 BJP</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 CPI</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 CPM</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
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<td>4 ICS(SCS)</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>5 INC</td>
<td>487</td>
<td>232</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 JD</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 JD(S)</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 JP</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 LKD</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
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<td>TOTAL :</td>
<td>8668</td>
<td>521</td>
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In the absence of Rajiv Gandhi, who was assassinated on May 21, 1991, during his election campaign at Perambudur in Tamil Nadu, P. V. Narasimha Rao was elected the leader of the Congress. The President invited him to form the government as the leader of the single largest party and Rao formed a minority government on June 21, 1991. He also won a critical vote of confidence on July 29, 1993. Surprisingly, the Narasimha Rao government could complete its full five-year term on May 16, 1996.

The progress that the BJP made in its electoral performance in the 1991 general elections could be envisaged vis-à-vis the two factors of Mandir and Mandal. First, there is no doubt that the Ayodhya issue contributed enormously towards widening the electoral base of the BJP by increasing both the number of seats as well as the percentage of votes. However, religiosity and new ethno-religious consciousness could not become a motivational factor in mobilizing the Hindus in all the cases. Second, the BJP's measured opposition to the recommendations of the Mandal Commission enlisted a further support for the party among the upper castes. On the other hand, members of the lower castes did not show any interest in the policies of the BJP. They were rather apathetic or even antagonistic to its propaganda.

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58 Paranjoy Guha Thakurta and Shankar Raghuraman, A Time of Coalitions: Divided We Stand, Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2004, p.317. It was alleged that Rao was able to muster majority votes in favour of his government by bribing a host of MPs, including four members of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) and thereby to convert the minority character of his government into a majority one.

Geographically also, the BJP till then, was not a national political party. The BJP candidates were elected from the Karimganj (SC) and the Silchar constituencies of Assam in the east. The party also won the Secunderabad seat of Andhra Pradesh and the four seats of Bidar (SC), Tumkur, Bangalore South and Mangalore from Karnataka in the south. Thus, though the party had expanded its base in the south and in the east to some extent, its centre of gravity was confined the heartland of the Hindi belt where it faced some unexpected reversals.

From the point of view of coalition, the political parties that contested the 1996 general elections constituted three distinct political combinations or groups. First, the Congress entered into a state-level seat adjustment with the AIADMK in Tamil Nadu and with some small allies like the Kerala Congress (Mani) and the IUML in Kerala. The BJP, the Shiv Sena, the Samata Party and the Haryana Vikas Party (HVP) formed the second political combination. The BJP alone contested 475 seats leaving 49 seats to its allies and receptive partners. In Maharashtra, the BJP supported its natural ally, the Shiv Sena, in 21 seats while it fielded its own candidates in the remaining 31 seats. 22 seats were left by the party in Bihar for the Samata Party and 4 for the HVP in Haryana. The United Front emerged as a Third Force consisting of the Janata Dal, the Left parties, DMK, Tamil Maanila Congress (Moopanar), Telugu Desam Party (Naidu), Samajwadi Party, Madhya Pradesh Vikas Congress (MPVC), All India Indira Congress (Tiwari), AGP, Karnataka Congress Party (KCP) and the Maharastrawadi Gomantaka Party (MGP). The JMM and the BSP refused to join any of the three political combinations formed by different political parties. They contested the election separately along with the Independents and others. Stability of the government, not corruption in public life, constituted the major plank on which the major political parties contested the general elections to the eleventh Lok Sabha held in early 1996. Almost all the major parties and combinations of parties argued that only a stable government at the Centre can ensure economic growth and prosperity of the country. The 1996 general elections were contested under "the eclipse of the so-called 'National Constituency' syndrome which dominated the national politics in the past two decades."60

Belying the expectations of the political parties, the 1996 general elections threw up a hung Parliament with no clear mandate for any political party to form the government. Though the BJP emerged as the single largest party with 161 seats, as against 140 seats of the Congress in the 543-member Lok Sabha, its share in the valid votes was lower than that of the Congress. The Congress gained 28.80 % of the total valid votes, while the BJP's share in the votes was 20.29 %. In this election the Congress was pushed down to the second position in Parliament for the first time after independence.

Results of the Eleventh Lok Sabha Elections, 1996

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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CONTESTED</td>
<td>WON</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
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<th></th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Seats</th>
<th>Votes</th>
<th>Votes %</th>
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<td>AIIC(T)</td>
<td>321</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>BJP</td>
<td>471</td>
<td>161</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>CPI</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>CPM</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>32</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>INC</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>28.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>JD</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>8.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>JP</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>SAP</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>1817</td>
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<td>69.08%</td>
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<td>(Unrecognised) PARTIES :</td>
<td>10636</td>
<td>9</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>13952</td>
<td>543</td>
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The reasons for the poor performance of the Congress in this election are not far to seek. Being dissatisfied with the leadership of Narasimha Rao, some prominent stalwarts defected from the Congress and formed their own parties. Leading party members were tainted in corruption. Non-viable electoral alliances were made in some cases, such as in Tamil Nadu, where the Congress entered into an ineffective alliance with the AIADMK of Jayalalitha. All these contributed to the disillusionment of the people to vote for Congress. Even the reforms instituted by Narasimha Rao in the economy of the country and its consequent impact on the living standards of the people together with the promise of stability, did not suffice to counterbalance the factors which worked against the party.

The BJP, being the single largest party, staked its claim to form the government. Meanwhile, the national executive of the Samata Party (SAP) which had 8 seats in the Lok Sabha took the decision to give issue-based support to the BJP and requested the President to allow the BJP to form the government. In keeping with convention, President Shanker Dayal Sharma invited Atal Behari Vajpayee, the leader of the BJP, on May 15, 1996 to form the government and asked him to construct parliamentary majority by 31 May.

The BJP leadership had the expectation that it would get the support of other parties, particularly that of a large number of smaller regional parties apart from the Samata party of George Fernandes, the HVP of Bansi Lal and its traditional ally, the Shiv Sena of Bal Thackeray, in forming the government on the basis of a Common Minimum Programme (CMP). With this in mind, Vajpayee, in his first address to Parliament as the Prime Minister, categorically affirmed that his government would strictly adhere to the provisions of the Constitution of India in running the administration of the country and would abstain from raking up the contentious issues like the Muslim Personal Law, Article 370 giving special status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir and the construction of a temple on the disputed land at Ayodhyay Thus, it became clear, that the BJP, under Vajpayee's leadership, started shifting from its ideological belief and adopted a moderate approach to the Hindu nationalist politics under the compulsions of coalition politics.
The Congress, being afraid of the emergence of the BJP as an alternative to it at the national level politics, joined hands with the left parties to overthrow the 13-day old Vajpayee government. On May 28, 1996, Vajpayee stepped down before he could be voted out of power in the confidence motion in the event of his failure to garner support for the government. It was a difficult task for the BJP to accumulate support for proving the majority of the government in the Lok Sabha because of the party's communal image committed to prop up Hindu nationalism and Hindu culture and thereby to establish a Hindu state. The congress and most other political parties, which upheld the so-called secularism of India, were reluctant either to join or support a BJP-led government in spite of Vajpayee's presenting a moderate and liberal democrat image to them. However, Vajpayee's resignation from the government well indicated the fact that "the BJP had won elections but certainly not the political power. The tactical unity of centrist and left-of-centre forces which the surge of Hindutva had made imperative in the 1990s presented the more immediate obstacle for a dominant BJP-led political formation at the centre."

The collapse of the Vajpayee government opened the door for another experiment of a Janata Dal-led United Front government at the Centre which assumed office on June 1, 1996, under the leadership of the sitting Janata Dal Chief Minister of Karnataka and a self-proclaimed farmer from that state, H. D. Deve Gowda. The UF was by and large a 13-party post-electoral alliance with the Janata Dal at the head. The other members of the UF included the Samajwadi Party, DMK, AGP, Tamil Maanila Congress (Moopanar), TDP, Madhya Pradesh Vikas Congress of Madhav Rao Scindia, Karnataka Congress Party, All India Indira Congress of N. D. Tiwari and the four left parties – the CPI, CPI (M), RSP and All India Forward Bloc. Interestingly, some of these parties fought elections against one another and depended on the support of the Congress for their survival. The Congress extended support from the outside to the UF government. The CPI (M), unlike the CPI which participated in the government, also gave external support to it. Chandrababu Naidu of the TDP was unanimously elected the chairman of the United Front.

The Congress was forced to support the United Front government for ideological compulsions to keep the BJP away from power. According to S. Jaipal Reddy, the UF spokesman, "the credit must be given to the Congress" for its sincerity in reinforcing the campaign against Hindutva. Explaining the ideological dimensions of the United Front government, he said that the United Front would maintain equi-distance from both the BJP and the Congress. The United Front came up with a CMP carrying a lengthy title 'Common Approach to Major Policy Matters and a Minimum Programme' which appeared to be the programmatic basis for the day-to-day affairs of the government. The left parties, including the CPI (M), played an active part in drawing up the CMP. The lowest common factor from amongst the manifestos of these thirteen assorted parties had been singled out by removing the inconsistencies from the manifestos of these parties.

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63 ibid, p.53.
However, the electoral mandate could have been of a different type if these parties came together to evolve a common manifesto before the elections and competed the elections on the basis of that common manifesto. But in a blatantly opportunist move, in anticipation of a hung Parliament, these parties followed a neatly compartmentalized pre and post-election strategies and kept their own pre-election manifestos to the barest minimum so that it becomes easier for them to respond to the requirements of making a patchwork after the elections.

Another interesting development took place at that time. The TDP, DMK, TMC (M) and the AGP hastily formed a Federal Front within the United Front with 58 MPs on May 31, 1996 immediately before assuming office by the United Front government. The Federal Front, a brainchild of the TDP leader and the then Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, was designed as a common platform of those regional parties to assert their positions in the Central government with the object of working together on common issues that would adversely affect the interests of those states.

The United Front government won the confidence vote on 12 June 1996, with the support of the Congress. Narashima Rao, the Congress president, promised his party's support to the United Front government saying that the Congress would not disturb the government as long as it would uphold the cause of secularism and fight against communal forces. Thus, a Congress-backed coalition government, consisting of thirteen parties committed to a Common Minimum Programme came into existence.

Nevertheless, within a very short time, Prime Minister Deve Gowda developed an acrimonious relationship with the left parties, especially the CPI and the CPI (M). The Prime Minister not only disregarded the so-called CMP, but also began to take decisions in his own capacity as the real executive of the country keeping the coalition partners in complete darkness. Behaving arrogantly he did not even feel the necessity of taking his Home Minister, Indrajit Gupta of CPI, into confidence while taking decisions on important issues, such as the imposition of the President's Rule in Uttar Pradesh. Again, Romesh Bhandari was appointed the Governor of Uttar Pradesh in spite of the two Communist parties opposing it.

So, the CPI (M) criticized the Deve Gowda government for flouting the CMP which, it thought, could have solved thousands of problems that the Indian masses were facing at that time. The CPI (M) also criticized the government's economic policies which, in its opinion, came to be largely determined by the dictates of the IMF or the World Bank and also for lacking transparency and accountability. Not only this, they targeted the Prime Minister for being more interested in politicking rather than making any serious efforts to deliver a good governance to the country. However, even under such circumstances, neither the CPI nor the CPI (M) showed the courage to dissociate themselves from the United Front, because they were apprehensive about the return of the BJP to power.
The Congress house was thoroughly discredited and divided on the issue of continuing its support or withdrawing it vis-à-vis the United Front government. The Congress would not like to go to a mid-term poll unless it was sure of defeating the BJP and reinstating its pre-eminence in Indian politics. At the same time, continuing support to the government for the rest of the term would only mean its own political bankruptcy. Sitaram Kesri, the new president of the Congress, had been thinking over withdrawing support to the UF government immediately after having consolidated his own position within the party. Many of the Congressmen, who were opposed to Kesri, were of the opinion that under any given situation it would not be proper for the Congress to withdraw support to the government as there was no guarantee that the Congress would get the support of the majority members in the Lok Sabha, especially in view of the present mood of the United Front members. Moreover, they also apprehended that the President might not invite the Congress for the second time keeping in mind the latter's refusal to form the government in June the previous year. In that case, withdrawing support would be suicidal for the Congress and would bring the BJP back to power. Thus it was the common bogey of BJP that kept them together.

Nevertheless, on 30 March 1997, Sitaram Kesri, handed over a letter to President Sharma informing him of his party's decision to withdraw support from the Deve Gowda government "with immediate effect" because they were being deprived of their share of governance that led to demoralization of the ground-level workers. It demanded the immediate resignation of Deve Gowda. However, the voices in the Congress were not unanimous and Sharad Pawar described the dramatic gambit of Kesri as a "bolt from the blue." Another important reason was the initiative of the government to investigate the involvement of a number of Congressmen in different unlawful activities.

BJP's continuous success in the elections and in the matter of winning crucial political allies lay behind this withdrawal story. The victory of the BJP in the Punjab and in the municipal elections in Maharashtra and Delhi pointed to its ground support and the formation of the government by the BJP in alliance with the BSP in Uttar Pradesh established the BJP as a shrewd political entity. Under such circumstances, there was hardly any justification in propping up a coalition which did not assume any serious measure to arrest the onward march of the communal forces.

Thus, as in other cases, here also, narrow political interest appeared to be more important than the collective interest of the country in taking up the issue of withdrawal of support. The Parties' concern as to how to shield and escape the allegations brought against their leaders like Narasimha Rao, Sitaram Kesri, K. Karunakaran and Sonia Gandhi. Kesri, in a drive to form a new Congress-led coalition, put forward his claim to form a government though the Congress had only 140 members of its own in the Lok Sabha. In this bid, Kesri hoped to get the support of some non-Left constituents of the United Front, such as G. K. Moopanar's Tamil Maanila Congress, the ruling Telugu Desam faction led by Chandrababu Naidu and Mulayam's Samajwadi Party. Both Moopanar and Naidu suffered humiliations at the hands of the Janata Dal leaders before and during the general elections. Samajwadi Party chief, Mulayam Singh Yadav, had

64 "Kesri Gambit" (Editorial), The Times of India, 1 April, 1997.
already expressed his cynicism against the United Front government led by H. D. Deve Gowda.

Following the Congress's withdrawal of support to the Gowda government, President Sharma advised him to convene a sitting of Parliament on 11 April 1997 to prove his majority on the floor of the Lok Sabha. The BJP leadership announced that it would not be staking its claim to form the government "at this juncture" and requested the President to verify the veracity of the claim of the Congress of majority before inviting it to form the government. Vajpayee not only discussed the situation with his party men but also with the allies like the Shiv Sena, Samata Party, Shiromoni Akali Dal and the Haryana Vikas Party. The BJP leaders reached a unanimous opinion that Kesri's attempt to form the government must be stopped and must be kept out at all cost because if he became successful in retaining the Premier chair, he would then automatically be chosen as the head of the caretaker government which would not protect their interest. The BJP also feared that after coming to power, Kesri might manipulate the corruption and other cases hanging on the head of the party president. The left parties too refused either to extend support or to join a Congress-led coalition government with Sitaram Kesri at the top of the government.

The 10-month old United Front coalition lost its stability with its resounding defeat on 11 April 1996 in a vote of confidence on the floor of Parliament. The power struggle that was set off less than two weeks ago when the Congress withdrew its support from the minority coalition, culminated in the defeat of the government by a vote of 292 to 158. Though Deve Gowda immediately submitted the resignation of his centre-left government, the President asked him to continue as the head of the caretaker government till alternative arrangements were made.

Gowda's resignation raised the hope for the installation of a new United Front governing coalition with the outside support of the Congress. Sitaram Kesri, the newly elected president of the Congress party, mooted a new political strategy to put the United Front into pressure. He declared that the Congress would support the proposed United Front government if it brought about a change in its leadership. The left parties highly objected to the conditional support that the Congress was intending to give to the upcoming government. They thought that by imposing conditions, the Congress was playing the game of political brinkmanship and pushing the country towards early elections. The United Front steering committee sent a message to the Congress of its willingness to solve the leadership question through a resolution, adopted in its meeting, chaired by its steering committee chairman and the CPI (M) general secretary Harkishan Singh Surjeet. The left parties-dominated United Front steering committee in which they had 53 members, resolved to take up the issue of changing the UF leadership and the formation of a new government for discussion with the Congress leadership only after the withdrawal of the letter that Kesri wrote to the President staking his claim to forming a government.
government. The left parties warned the UF that it should not take the Congress and its president into confidence because of the dubious role that the Congress played in the recent past. To them, Kesri was an opportunist who would not hesitate to dislodge the proposed UF government at any suitable moment. In order to prevent the Congress from taking the UF for a ride again, the UF should lay down some specific conditions before agreeing to accept the outside support of the Congress. However, the left parties were understood to have halfheartedly agreed to replace Deve Gowda to arrest the ascendancy of the communal forces at the Centre.

Once the UF decided to replace Gowda by a new one, leaders like Laloo Prasad Yadav and Inder Kumar Gujral of the Janata Dal and Tamil Maanila Congress president M.G. Moopanar started campaigning and persuasion for their own causes to become the Prime Minister.

The most exceptional incident that took place at that time was that Jyoti Basu, the Chief Minister of West Bengal and the country's most popular communist leader, was requested to assume the leadership of the new government as he appeared to be the most preferred choice for the post of the Prime Minister to the UF partners. The former Prime Minister V. P. Singh and even some Congressmen were reported to have pursued Basu to take up such a responsibility. This brought about a change in the attitude of the mainstream political parties towards the left parties. “This development underlined a sea-change in Indian politics as much as it did a change in the way the Left was perceived by the mainstream.”

Though Basu was willing to accept the offer in spite of his advanced age and ill health, he declined to accept the mantle of Prime Ministership as the CPI (M) Polit Bureau and the party's Central Committee expressed their views against participating in the government. After the rejection of the offer in its first meeting, V. P. Singh and others appealed to the CPI (M) leadership to reconsider its decision. Yet again, the party refused, by a majority decision, to join the government in which the party, due to lack of its majority in the government, would not be able to influence the policy decisions of the government. It was the second time Basu had done so, as he appeared to be the coalition's unanimous choice when the UF came into power at the Centre after the election in 1996. The CPI (M) patriarch became embroiled in controversy when he dubbed his party's decision against not accepting the Prime Ministership as a "historical blunder".

The stalemate that continued for more than a week after Deve Gowda had stepped down could only be removed when the Congress and the UF reached a compromise to choose Inder Kumar Gujral, a two-time Minister of External Affairs and an important Janata Dal leader, to be at the helm of affairs. Gujral was sworn in as the twelfth Prime Minister of India on April 21, 1997. He became the third Prime Minister since the May 1996 elections, leaving no party with a clear majority in the Lok Sabha. The President

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Some observers were of the view that it was a result of the tussle between the leftists of West Bengal and that of the capital that led Basu to miss the bus.
agreed to appoint Gujral the Prime Minister only after being assured that his government would last for a longer time than the previous two. On 22 April 1997, Gujral moved a confidence motion on the floor of Parliament to prove his majority in the House. The motion was carried through by voice vote. Only the BJP opposed it. Gujral's politics were challenged by the BJP as well as the Akali Dal but the Congress assured its support for the entire tenure. It was apprehended by the opposition that Gujral would be lenient to Congress caught in the web of investigations – for the very same reason, Congress lent its support.

However, within a few weeks in office, the Gujral government fell into a problem which came not from the Congress, but from his own party, the Janata Dal, over the fodder scam involving Laloo Prasad Yadav and his cabinet members in May 1997. The Prime Minister lent protection to Yadav against corruption charges. The CBI filed the first chargesheet covering conspiracy aspects of the fodder scam case against the Chief Minister of Bihar and 55 others on 23 June 1997.

The fate of the fragile United Front government came to be sealed within three months after the submission of the 17-volume interim report on the assassination of the former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi by the Jain Commission to the Union Government. Submitting its interim report on August 28, 1997, the Commission, severely indicted the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi and his party, the DMK, for helping the murderers of Rajiv Gandhi. Two former Prime Ministers, V. P. Singh and Chandra Sekhar, were also criticized by the Commission for their carelessness in assessing the threat to Rajiv's life and in not providing proper security to him. Justice Jain admonished Finance Minister P. Chidambaram for his duplicitous conduct.

71 With the anticipation of his declining position within the Janata Dal, Laloo Prasad Yadav left the party and formed his own party, the Rastriya Janata Dal (RJD), on July 5, 1997. Out of 46 members of the Janata Dal, 17 joined RJD. However, as the RJD decided to remain in the UF, the government, led by Gujral, was able to protect it from imminent danger that might have collapsed the government. Though Laloo had to step down from his position after the CBI designated court issued an arrest warrant against him, he was able to install his wife, Rabri Devi, as the Chief Minister of Bihar.

72 K. Vijaya Bhaskara Reddy, the then Union Minister of Law, Justice and Company Affairs, in a letter, dated August 8, 1991, addressed to the then Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of India, Ranganath Mishra, communicated the government's decision to appoint a Commission of Inquiry under the Commission of Inquiry Act, 1952, to enquire into the aspects other than those that had already been referred to the Verma Commission relating to the assassination of the former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. The terms of reference according to which the Commission would have to discharge its functions included: "(a) The sequence of events leading to and all the facts and circumstances relating to, the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi at Sriperumbudur (other than what is covered by the terms of reference for the Commission of Inquiry headed by Mr. Justice Verma); (b) Whether any person or persons or agencies were responsible for conceiving, preparing and planning the assassination and whether there was any conspiracy in this behalf and, if so, all its ramifications."

73 For details see the interim Report of the Jain Commission.

It must be mentioned here that though the connivance of the DMK government with the LTTE was brought to the knowledge of the National Front government by the intelligence departments, the National Front government, led by V. P. Singh, did not take effective steps to restrain it for some unknown reasons. The Commission was skeptical about whether V. P. Singh was swayed by the feelings of animosity and prejudice in making proper and adequate security arrangements for Rajiv Gandhi that could have protected his life. It came to be known that Chandra Sekhar also failed to provide high standard security coverage to Rajiv Gandhi that was needed under the changed threat scenario during his time.
Based on the deposition of what it called the key and credible witness, the Commission in its report identified the DMK for its close nexus with the leaders of the LTTE whose cadres killed Rajiv Gandhi.  

As expected, the interim report of the Jain Commission gained political momentum and created serious problems for the UF government. The interim report containing allegations against some important UF leaders and ministers in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case was a very sensitive issue to the Congress. Even during the premiership of P.V. Narasimha Rao, it was a major point of confrontation between Sonia Gandhi and Arjun Singh on the one hand and Narasimha Rao on the other. The tussle reached such a climax that Arjun Singh left the Congress criticizing Narasimha Rao for lingering the proceedings of the Jain Commission and for his non-cooperation with the Commission in providing necessary documents to it. It can be remembered that Arjun Singh and Narayan Dutt Tewari split the Congress on this major issue.

The UF realized it that the placement of the interim report in Parliament would immediately usher in the collapse of the government, as the main allegation was against the DMK which was an important partner in the UF government. Under such circumstances, it would be untenable for Prime Minister Gujral to retain the DMK in the UF. The Congress, on whose support the UF government rested, would never tolerate the persistence of the Tamil ruling party in the government. There was also the possibility that G.K. Moopanar's Tamil Maanila Congress might exploit the Jain report as an excuse for severing its ties with the DMK. Even so, the Tamil Maanila Congress would have to suffer the embarrassment of Jain's strictures on P. Chidambaram. At the same time, it was not unlikely, that the the other constituents might not accept the forcible exclusion of the DMK from the government at the behest of the Congress. If the regional constituents like the TDP, AGP and the left parties made it an issue, it would bring an end to Gujral's Premiership and of the United Front.

The Congress camp was divided, as in the past, on this vital issue as the interests of the Congress leaders differed widely. Sitaram Kesri, the Congress president, liked to soft pedal the issue for several reasons. The split in the Uttar Pradesh unit of the Congress created a panic in the Congress high command. which apprehended a similar split to occur at the Centre. Kesri's various activities corroborated with the reports of the media about the possibility of the emergence of such a split in the party. Beside this, a change in the strategy of the BJP also created a nervousness in the Congress high command.

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74 The Tamil Nadu government and its law enforcement authorities abetted the LTTE to receive all the essential ingredients like arms, ammunition, explosives, fuel etc. from Tamil Nadu in their struggle against the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) in northern Sri Lanka, according to the deposition of 110 witness over a period of five-and-a-half years. The LTTE sent personal emissaries to Karunanidhi to seek his active support in its battle against the IPKF after the DMK leader became the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu following his party's victory in the assembly election in January 1989. Though the Commission reprimanded both the Central government and M. G. Ramchandran's AIADMK government in Tamil Nadu for the initial softness that they exhibited towards Tamil militancy, it accused the DMK for continuing its support and assistance to the Tamil Tigers to carry on their subversive activities on the land of India even after 1987 Indo- Sri Lankan accord deployed Indian army in Sri Lanka to crush the Tamil Tigers.
Earlier, the BJP was in favour of mid-term poll at the Centre and in the states like Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat. But with the extension of the President's Rule in Uttar Pradesh beyond the constitutional limits, the BJP moved away from its earlier claim of holding mid-term poll and was forced to opt for an alliance with the BSP. Similarly the BJP was prepared for facing mid-term poll at the Centre. But taking note of the newest developments in the Congress after the split of the party in Uttar Pradesh, it decided to attempt the formation of a government at the Centre with its allies. Under such circumstances, Kesri's soft stand on Jain Commission report created a revolt in the Congress Party. The placement of the interim report gave rise to controversies of the inter-party and intra-party levels, especially within Congress.

Rattled by the simmering revolt in the Congress, Sitaram Kesri took a U-turn. Serving an ultimatum to the UF government, he warned it that the Congress would not hesitate to withdraw support from the government if it failed to table the report in Parliament on the opening day of the winter session scheduled to be commenced on November 19, 1997. Under the pressure of the Congress, the government ultimately tabled the Jain Commission report in both the Houses of Parliament on November 20, 1997. The leniency shown to the LTTE by DMK was censured by the report which Karunanidhi termed as "politically motivated". Thereafter, the Congress wanted the dismissal of three DMK ministers from the Gujral ministry which was opposed by most of the United Front constituents. Finally Gujral declined to dismiss them and criticized Congress. This led to the withdrawal of Congress support from the ministry on 28 November 1997. Within an hour of the withdrawal of the Congress support, Gujral tendered his resignation too and the President asked him to continue as the head of the caretaker government till March 19, 1998. As there was no possibility of forming an alternative government in any way either by the Congress or by the BJP, the President dissolved the Lok Sabha on December 4, 1998 and issued an order for fresh elections to be held within six months to constitute a new Parliament.

From that time onwards, a discussion of national politics has to bring in state politics as well because of the intertwining way they spilled over blurring the contours.

In 1998, three major combination of parties contested the Lok Sabha elections. They were, first, the BJP and its loosely affiliated allies, many of whom did not associate themselves with the Hindutva plank of the BJP; second, the Congress and its allies who were supposed to be the protagonists of the so-called secularism deploring every form of communalism; and third, the United Front comprising the DMK, the Janata Dal, the Samajwadi Party, the Tamil Mannila Congress, the CPI and some other left wing parties like the RSP and the Forward Bloc that advocated secularism and denounced communalism like the Congress. As expected, the 12th Lok Sabha threw up results which did not give a working majority to any single political combine.
### Results of the Twelfth Lok Sabha Elections, 1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTY</th>
<th>CANDIDATES</th>
<th>VALID CONTESTED</th>
<th>WON</th>
<th>VOTE %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 BJP</td>
<td>388</td>
<td>182</td>
<td></td>
<td>25.59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 BSP</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 CPI</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 CPM</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 INC</td>
<td>477</td>
<td>141</td>
<td></td>
<td>25.82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 JD</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 SAP</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATIONAL PARTIES</td>
<td>1493</td>
<td>387</td>
<td>67.98%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STATE PARTIES</td>
<td>471</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>18.79%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REGISTERED</td>
<td>871</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>10.87%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Unrecognised) PARTIES</td>
<td>1915</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.37%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>4750</td>
<td>543</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


After the declaration of results, the number of the constituents of the BJP-led coalition came down to thirteen parties. It was quite a difficult task for the BJP to accommodate the elected representatives of all these thirteen parties in the impending government. The final tally of the BJP-led coalition wedged to 251, falling short of 21 from the bare majority mark in the 543-member lower chamber of Parliament producing some uncertainty over the formation of the government.\(^75\) The National Conference and the TDP switched over their allegiance from the UF to the BJP-led coalition. Though the BJP was not able to form the government on its own, the party increased its previous tally of 161 seats of the 1996 general elections by a margin of 21 seats in 1998. The Congress failed to improve its previous position. It secured 141 seats in 1998 against 140 in 1996 signifying that the Congress maintained the status quo in its electoral performance without being a gainer or a loser.

In a hung Parliament, produced by the fractured mandate of the electorate in the 1998 elections, it was not clear as to which party or combination of parties was going to install a stable government at the Centre. Consequently, both the Congress and the BJP became frenzied to harvest the support of some parties, including Independents, in the post-poll political scenario. The Congress expressed its willingness, on March 3, 1998 to form a government with the support of the UF to arrest the BJP's return to power. However, the Congress, amidst opposition of some constituents of the UF as well as the strong objection from some of its own party units, desisted itself from running the race to form a government. It rather took a decision in its Working Committee meeting, held on March 5, to wait for the right time to come for the formation of the government. The Congress Working committee (CWC), thus, preferred to push the ball to the court of the UF for its decision either to support or oppose a BJP-led coalition government. The

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Congress appealed to all the democratic and secular political forces of the UF to ensure the defeat of the BJP-led government by casting their votes against the confidence motion and not simply by playing truant in the voting process that would ensure the survival of the government.  

The Congress was optimistic about the defeat the government in the confidence vote with the support of the UF constituents and to avail a chance to form a government in a precarious situation. The Congress, therefore, devoted all its initial efforts towards patching up all the anti-BJP forces to pull down the government. The CWC, speculating a power struggle in the party circle in the event of its getting a chance to form a government caused by the probable downfall of the government, decided to leave the controversial issue of selecting the leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party (CPP) to the choice of the party president Sonia Gandhi. However, on March 15, Sonia Gandhi publicly expressed the disinclination of the Congress to stake its claim to form a government for lack of necessary support.

As the United Front was too weak to take on the BJP, CPI (M) general secretary Harkishan Singh Surjeet, at Palakkad CPI (M) state conference in Kerala, floated the idea of supporting the Congress to prevent the installation of a BJP-led coalition government at the Centre. But Surjeet's idea was at once rejected by the Kerala party state secretariat leaders of all shades on the ground that reaching an understanding with the Congress at the Centre would not be a rational decision for the CPI (M) in view of the fact that such an initiative on the part of the party's general secretary might jeopardize the political equations in the state where the Congress appeared to be the main contender to the left parties in electoral politics. According to veteran CPI (M) leader Namboodripad, to strike an alliance with the Congress was not the right way to halt the progress of the BJP to the centre of power. The CPI (M) state secretariat of Kerala unit came to the conclusion that forging an alliance with the Congress would not return any positive result for the party in the states of West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura – the three states where the CPI (M) had established itself as the supreme political force. Left Democratic Front (LDF) convener and Politburo member V. S. Achutanandan contradicted Surjeet's proposition who thought that helping the Congress to form the government at the Centre would antagonize the party's lower rank cadres as that would go against their anti-Congress stance they had been pursuing for a long time. Even a moderate, like E. K. Nayanar, expressed the view that an alliance with the Congress at the Centre might put the party in shambles in the state, though he was keen to prevent the BJP from coming back to power in New Delhi. Keeping in mind all these apprehensions of the state party leaders, Nayanar disposed of the possibility of forming a Congress-led coalition government at the Centre despite the party's strong opposition to the return of the BJP to power describing it as the most serious threat to the integrity of the nation.

The CPI, on the other hand, was ready to extend unconditional support to the Congress for the installation of a Congress-led coalition government with anyone as Prime minister, including Sonia Gandhi.

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76 Askari H. Zaidi, “Sonia camp looks to UF to break impasse (Part 11 of 11), The Times of India, March 6, 1998.
Samata Party president George Fernandes himself was initially reluctant to join the BJP-led coalition government, but afterwards he assured his party's participation in the government which would be guided by a CMP to be formulated on the basis of the President's joint address to Parliament in June 1996. The President's address contained the agreed policies of the constituents of the government and avoided the contentious issues of the electoral manifesto of the BJP like scrapping of Article 370 conferring special status on Kashmir, construction of Ram Mandir at Ayodhya and introduction of Uniform Civil code for all the communities living in India. He also made it clear that his party would not demand any specific portfolio for its elected representatives in the new government. He thought that the UF should come forward to support the BJP-led coalition government. He also envisaged a positive role for the TDP in making the government.78

The TDP, in its politburo meeting, approved the party's decision not to support the Congress as it would create problems for the party in the state. The TDP, apprehending the loss of support of the Muslim community in the assembly elections, which were due in 1999, deferred the issue of supporting the BJP in its attempt to form the government. TDP chief Chandrababu Naidu expressed his discomfiture against Surjeet's idiosyncratic proposal of rendering support to the Congress in a fluid political situation – the proposal that was mooted by Surjeet himself without taking the United Front constituents into confidence. Surjeet and Mulayam incurred Naidu's anger for defending the actions of the Governor of Uttar Pradesh, Ramesh Bhandari. He also signaled his party's departure from the United Front in view of the developments that had sprung up in it. The TDP was planning either to sit on the Opposition or to support the BJP from outside by abstention in confidence vote and by extending issue-based support to it if exigencies so demanded. The TDP, like the Samata Party, was also contemplating to lay down some conditions, ranging from the dropping of the Ayodhya issue to the abrogation of Article 370 for its support to the BJP.79

The TDP was actually pushed into a tight corner over the issue of supporting the BJP at the Centre. As the Chairman of the United Front, Naidu had fallen into an embarrassing situation over the thorny issue of supporting the BJP. He had to keep in mind the challenges that the BJP had thrown to him in his home turf. The BJP's share of 24% of popular vote in the state could have upset his dream of coming back to power in the 1998 state assembly elections. The BJP was in need of additional support of about 20 more MPs to prove its majority in Parliament. The TDP had no political compulsions either to support the Congress or the BJP in their endeavour to form the government. But under the prevailing political stalemate at the Centre, the TDP could not mess around the hidden chance of forming a government in the new hung Parliament by maintaining an equilibrium from both the Congress and the BJP. Any attempt to do so would certainly send a wrong message to the voters of the state. The TDP was not in a safe political situation to shirk its responsibility of providing a working majority to the BJP to break the gridlock over the formation of the government. The BJP, apart from expecting the support of some Independents and smaller parties, also expected the TDP either to abstain

78 Suresh Nautigal, "George not keen on joining BJP Government", The Observer, March 5, 1998.
from voting or to stay neutral to ensure its victory in the confidence vote. The TDP, in due course, joined the BJP-led alliance without taking part in the government.

The most distrustful ally was Tamil Nadu-based regional party, the AIADMK. Jayalalithaa, the AIADMK supremo, was repeatedly changing her mind vis-à-vis her party's participation in the BJP-led coalition government. She was exerting pressure upon the central BJP leadership to get her demands approved in view of her allies' fabulous success in the Lok Sabha elections in the state. The allies, under her leadership, appeared to constitute the largest bloc of the BJP-led coalition at the Centre with a total of 30 members. Individual allocation of seats of the AIADMK-led alliance in the 12th Lok Sabha was: the AIADMK 18, the Janata Party and the Tamizhaga Rajiv Congress (TRC) 1 each. Jayalalithaa resorted to several volte-face one after another between March 8 and 15.

On March 8, an ecstatic Jayalalithaa avowed her party's unconditional support to the BJP-led government from outside. On March 10, the 12th Lok Sabha was constituted by the Election Commission of India with 539 members. Meanwhile, on March 7, the BJP selected Vajpayee as the Prime Minister aspirant. President K. R. Narayanan wanted to know from Vajpayee, the leader of the largest combined group in the Lok Sabha, whether he would be able to provide a stable government. The President demanded substantial documentary proof of support from Vajpayee.

The BJP claimed to have the support of 252 members of its pre-poll allies behind it. In calculating the numbers, the BJP, however, did not take into account the ensured support of 12 more MPs; 5 from the north-east, 4 from the Haryana Lok Dal and others from Independents who joined the BJP-led coalition after elections. The saffron alliance, thus, appeared to gain control over 264 MPs in the Lok Sabha. Taking the support of pre-election allies for granted, Vajpayee decided to meet the President on March 11 with letters of their support to stake his claim to form the government. But problems arose when the AIADMK, the PMK, the TRC and the Janata Party – four of the five state-level allies of the AIADMK in Tamil Nadu – did not send letters conveying their support for the BJP-led alliance even by March 11. The MDMK, another ally of the AIADMK, decided to support the BJP. It forwarded its letter of support by facsimile to the President. A copy of the letter was also forwarded to Vajpayee. Vajpayee deferred his scheduled meeting with the President to March 12 since he was not in receipt of letters from all the allies within the stipulated time. On that very day the AIADMK withdrew support from the BJP-led coalition demanding three cabinet berths in addition to three other ministerships.

On 14 March, Jayalalithaa brought an allegation against the BJP of showing up a demeaning attitude to her and her allies. She also criticized the BJP for creating a division between north and south. There were constant problems over the support or its withdrawal as well as over support from outside or inside between Jayalalithaa and the government. Actually, these were manifestations of her demands of withdrawal of all the corruption charges being forced on her as well as imbibing Subramanian Swamy in the

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cabinet. Vajpayee, however, appeared unfazed by Jayalalithaa's unrelenting pressure-tactics and did not comply.

The cliff-hanger over the formation of the government, that continued for over a week since the declaration of results, ended with Vajpayee, being appointed as the Prime Minister by President Narayanan on March 15. The President asked Vajpayee to prove his majority on the floor of the House within 10 days. Vajpayee was invited to form the government only after the AIADMK, the PMK and the TRC agreed to join the BJP-led coalition ministry and TDP leader Chandrababu Naidu's affirmation of remaining neutral in the confidence vote. Former Union Home Minister Buta Singh, who won the election from the Jalore constituency of Rajasthan as an Independent, promised his support to a BJP-led government without being a part of it. The BJP leadership decided to take oath on March 19, 1998.

As the BJP and its allies contested the 1998 general elections on the promise of presenting the nation a stable and effective government, they jointly published a 35-point "National Agenda for Governance" on March 17 to give effect to their assurances before the electorate. During the discussions on the government's National Agenda, Jayalalithaa took offence at Ram Krishna Hedge's refutation of her ambitious proposal to make Tamil as an official language. Finally, the National Agenda, signed by the leaders of the alliance partners, like A. B. Vajpayee, L. K. Advani, Jayalalitha, S. S. Barnala, Bansi Lal, Navin Patnaik, George Fernandes, Mamata Banerjee, Ajit Panja, R. K. Hedge, M. Sarpotdar, S. Ramadoss, Vazhapadi K. Ramamurthy, Vaiko, Subramaniam Swamy, M. M. Joshi and Jaswant Singh, was approved by both the Houses of Parliament.

Ministry formation appeared to be a really difficult task for the BJP as it had to reconcile the claims of its regional allies with those of its own senior party leaders. Moreover, Subramaniam Swamy's request to Jayalalithaa to allow him to cast a "conscience vote" during the confidence motion aggravated the situation. Swamy's name did not figure in the list of the ministers to be sworn in. On March 19, Vajpayee took oath as Prime Minister along with other 42 members of the Council of Ministers. The ministry was composed of 21 Cabinet Ministers of whom 10 were from the BJP, 9 from the pre-poll allies and 2 from Independents – Ram Jethmalani and Buta Singh. Among the allies, both the AIADMK and the Samata Party were allocated two Cabinet portfolios and the other partners of the coalition – the Akali Dal, the Lok Shakti, the BJD, the TRC and the Shiv Sena – one each. Mamata Banerjee's Trinomool Congress, another ally of the BJP from West Bengal, did not join the government and the BJP's sole winning candidate from West Bengal, Tapan Sikdar, was not included into the ministry.

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81 Devesh Kumar, "Vajpayee invited to form Government", The Indian Express, March 16, 1998.
82 For details see, "National Agenda For Governance: BJP & Alliance Partners", 18 March, 1998 at http://www.archives.in/nag/
The National Agenda concluded: "This National Agenda is a sincere and solemn covenant aimed at changing the content and culture of governance of this great nation, freeing it of the triple curses of hunger (bhooka), fear (bhay), and corruption (bhrastachar) and transforming it into a New India that is prosperous, strong, self-confident and at peace with itself and the world. We appeal for the cooperation of all parties and all sections of society in this great endeavour."
under the pressure of the Trinomool Congress. Another notable exclusion was BJP's Jaswant Singh who decided not to become a minister owing to the opposition of the *swadeshi* lobby within the BJP.\(^\text{84}\) The other 21 members, 13 of whom belonged to the BJP and 8 to its different allies, took oath as Ministers of State in the Vajpayee government. Thus, Vajpayee constituted a diverse cabinet representing all the 13 parties of the coalition. A Coordination Committee, consisting of 14 members of the pre-poll allies with Vajpayee and Jaswant Singh as its Chairman and Convener respectively, was set up on April 28 to resolve internecine squabbles in the coalition. The only excluding ally was the Janata Party, whose president Subramanian Swamy, was not included in the Coordination Committee. There were whispers in the AIADMK camp that the Coordination Committee might be used as a platform to pin down its topmost leader.\(^\text{85}\)

Though Jayalalithaa failed to drive a hard bargain with the BJP for getting her one-time political rival Subramanian Swamy accommodated in the all-powerful Finance Ministry, she was successful in wresting the commanding Departments of Banking, Revenue and Insurance within the Finance Ministry for her aide Raghavachari Krishna Kumar. This was imperative for influencing the investigations against her close associates and to be one step ahead of the DMK and Tamil Maanila Congress. This can be depicted as a blatant blackmail where corruption can be absolved for power equation.

Immediately after assuming the office, the most controversial issue that appeared before the ruling combination was the election of the Speaker of the Lok Sabha. The ruling front and the Opposition were divided on a common candidate acceptable to both. The BJP was keen on projecting a consensus candidate as Speaker and offering the Deputy Speaker's post to the Congress. While P. A. Sangma was projected by the Congress-UF combine, whom BJP welcomed, N. Chandrababu Naidu put G. M. C. Balayogi, a Dalit, to counter him. Finally the latter was elected the Speaker, a post that belonged to him till his death in 2002. However, this act was criticized by the disgruntled opposition members like Laloo Prasad Yadav and others. The House witnessed many a noisy scene which sparked off over caste differences that was politicized by the members.\(^\text{86}\)

Overcoming the initial hiccups, on March 28, the BJP-led government won the confidence vote by a slender margin of 13 with the last-minute support of the TDP. The nomination of Balayogi as the Speaker by the BJP hustled the TDP into supporting the government in the confidence motion. The National Conference, a member of the ruling front, abstained from voting leading to BJP's success.

However, uncertainty came to prevail over the stability of the government within one month since its victory in the confidence vote. The AIADMK's partnership with the BJP came under severe strain following the resignation of Union Surface Transport Minister Sedapatti R. Muthiah from the Vajpayee ministry directed by Jayalalithaa.

\(^{86}\) *The Indian Express*, March 25, 1998.
Muthiah and his close family members were charge-sheeted under the Prevention of Corruption Act for accumulating assets disproportionate to his known sources of income between July 3, 1991 and October 31, 1994 when he was the Speaker of the Tamil Nadu state assembly. Jayalalithaa demanded the replacement of Muthiah by another AIADMK nominee, C. Srinivasan, in the Union cabinet with the same portfolio left by the former. She even announced that N. Thambi Durai, Minister of State for Law and Justice, would look after the Surface Transport Ministry unless Srinivasan was inducted into the ministry during its next expansion. She also claimed that M. S. Niraikuthalan of the AIADMK and N. T. Shanmugam of the PMK would also be given berth in the Union ministry. N. Thambi Durai was given additional charge of the ministry previously looked after by Muthiah.

Jayalalithaa, on April 18, even served an ultimatum on the Prime Minister demanding the removal of Buta Singh, Ram Krishna Hedge and Ram Jethmalani, the three Cabinet Ministers of the Vajpayee government facing graft charges in different courts of law. Actually, Jayalalithaa had personal scores to settle with at least two of them. Ram Jethmalani and Lok Shakti Party leader Ram Krishna Hedge, because of their strained relations with the AIADMK supremo and her alliance partner, Janata Party president Subramanian Swamy, urged the Prime Minister to take stern action against Jayalalithaa even if that called for the withdrawal of the AIADMK's support to the government.

The Prime Minister intended to appease Jayalalithaa by asking Buta Singh to step down from the ministry. The government, however, refused to oblige Jayalalithaa's demand for the removal of the Union Commerce Minister Ramkrishna Hedge and Urban Development Minister Ram Jethmalani as no case was pending against them. Vajpayee and Advani, however, directed Hedge and Jethmalani to abstain from making open statements exposing the rumblings in the coalition. But they nonetheless continued diatribes against Jayalalitha in complete defiance of the directions. Buta Singh accused the Prime Minister of weakness in facing Jayalalitha and for forgetting his help in supporting BJP in times of need.

Not only the AIADMK but there were other allies also who expressed their unhappiness over the brinkmanship of the BJP while setting the government policies. The Samata party and the Shiromoni Akali Dal (SAD) accused the BJP of not even consulting them before taking decisions on issues like the Women's Reservation Bill and creation of some new states. They were more concerned with their respective state politics rather than the national one wherein the interests of their own states were deeply involved.

The BJP-led coalition also faced problem from another ally, the SAD which threatened to withdraw support if their demand for the exclusion of Udham Singh Nagar district, formerly a part of Nainital, from the proposed Uttarakhand state was not fulfilled. The Lok Sabha approved the Uttar Pradesh Reorganisation Bill to create a separate Uttarakhand state to fulfill the long-standing aspirations of about 70 lakh people residing in the Kumaon and Garhwal range of the Himalayas for over three decades. The Uttarakhand state, consisting of thirteen districts of Uttar Pradesh, viz. Pauri Garhwal, Tehri Garhwal, Uttar Kashi, Chamoli, Dehra Dun, Nainital, Almora, Pithoragarh, Bageshwar, Champawat
conceded. In 1995, the then Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, Mayawati, took the decision to constitute a separate district of Udham Singh Nagar in the Kumaon region of the state. A large number of rich farmers and big businessmen, many of whom were well-known politicians, industrialists and film stars, had developed vested interests over the years in the Terai belt by occupying vast tracts of farming land beyond the ceiling limit. They fervently opposed the inclusion of Udham Singh Nagar in the proposed Uttaranchal hill state under the apprehension of losing their unaccountable land, as, they conceived, the new state, if it was once created, would implement strict ceiling laws forcing them to evacuate land illegally possessed by them. Their apprehension was augmented by the declaration of the Uttrakhand Kranti Dal (UKD), established on 25 July 1979 to fight for a separate state composed of the hill districts of Uttar Pradesh, that the racket of the land mafia would be busted and they would be dealt with rigorously in the proposed new state.

As it was not possible for the BJP to reverse its early stand on Udham Singh Nagar, it floated a new idea of "Greater Uttarakhand" encompassing eleven districts of the Rohikhand region and that was supported by many. The very people who were against the idea were actually the support base for BJP, especially the business community. Fracas between the Samata Party and Akali Dal ripped the House over it. All along, one or the other allies were always threatening to walk out of the alliance. Even while the BJP and the allies tried to sort out the differences among themselves, RJD chief Laloo Prasad and Samajwadi Party president Mulayam Singh announced the formation of the Rashtriya Loktantrik Morcha (RLM) or the National Democratic Front (NDF) in Delhi on June 24 after a discussion with the AIADMK, some sections of the BJD, the Lok Shakti and the Samata Party – all that set for the emergence of a reconfiguration of the anti-BJP and secular forces. Buta Singh joined hands with the RLM hoping to oust the BJP-led government.

The launching of the RLM was a matter of grave concern to the BJP and the Hindutva combine making them worried about the survival of the government, specially in the face of constant threat by Jayalalithaa who was soft to the Congress. Chandra Sekhar also incited the Congress to pull down the BJP government. RLM became a platform that warmly welcomed the idea.

However, the CWC members expressed opposing views on the question of taking the advantage of the new political equation for political and personal reasons. Many Congress leaders, including senior CWC members Arjun Singh and A. K. Antony, opposed the idea of entering into an alliance with some disparate entities like the Samajwadi Party and the RJD for government formation as that would only help those parties to strengthen their footholds in the politically important states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar where the two parties had strong bases. Besides, the most problematic AIADMK, whose general secretary Jayalalithaa, kept herself persistently engaged in

and Rudra Prayag, Udham Singh Nagar and Hardwar, came into being on the political map of India as the country's 27th state w.e.f. November 9, 2000.

haggling with the BJP to concede her irreconcilable demands like the dismissal of the DMK government in Tamil Nadu, was in the new front. Arjun Singh and A. K. Antony were reported to have argued that joining such a coalition of disparate regional parties, though might serve the immediate and narrow political interest of dislocating the Vajpayee government, would not serve the long-term agenda of the Congress like the upgrading of the party organization at the national level. The failure of the Congress-led coalition, if it was at all installed following the defeat of the government in the confidence vote, to provide a better government, would be synonymous for its vulnerability making the path of its return to power greasy in near future and, in that case, the BJP would be the prime beneficiary.

On the other hand, some CWC members, such as Sharad Pawar, Manmohan Singh, R. K. Dhawan and Gulam Nabi Azad were of the opinion that the Vajpayee government ought to have been dissolved without any delay. In fact, Sharad Pawar had maintained a regular contact with Jayalalithaa on this issue. Former Finance Minister Manmohan Singh held confabulations, as a part of an alternative initiative, with Somnath Chatterjee, Jyoti Basu and some other left party leaders to judge the mind of the left parties pertaining to their support to a non-BJP government.

The Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, was personally unwilling to form a government with the support of the AIADMK because of her animosity with Jayalalithaa who ridiculed her debut in Indian politics hitting out at her foreign origin. Furthermore, the Sonia camp was reeling under the fear of losing the Congress president’s control over the party. Sharad Pawar and Sitaram Kesri had better equations with the leaders of the Samajwadi Party and the RJD. The Sonia camp apprehended that they might utilize the coalition partners in a prospective government to curtail the influence of Sonia Gandhi.

Though the Vajpayee government was temporarily relieved of the threat that the RLM could have posed to its stability, the BJP did not feel safe when it found five of its allies – the AIADMK, the TRC, PMK, the Lok Shakti and the Trinamool Congress – to remain absent from the Coordination Committee meeting. Differences, which were sought to be obliterated at the meeting, continued to siege the coalition given exposure to its vulnerability knowing that her demand for the dismissal of the DMK government would be admitted, Jayalalithaa abstained and she was supported by PMK, MDMK and allies.

Ramakrishna Hedge, the leader of the Lok Shakti, deputed Jeevraj Alva to attend the meeting on behalf of his party. Trinamool Congress leader Mamata Banerjee, who suspended her support to the Vajpayee government for a short while only to reinstate it later, also kept herself away from the meeting.

Strong demands from some of the coalition partners induced even some smaller partners to pursue the path of pressure tactics in putting forth their own demands at the Coordination Committee meeting like the Haryana Chief Minister Bansi Lal, with only

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one representative of his Haryana Vikas Party in the Lok Sabha, demanded a waiving of loans of Rupees 2,500 crore granted to the state by the Centre. Likewise, Punjab Chief Minister and Akali Dal leader Prakash Singh Badal wanted the Centre to enhance funds in its allocation for the border areas of the state and. Naveen Patnaik of the BJD claimed more funds from the Centre for Orissa.

Jayalalithaa was pestering the government with one issue after another like statehood of Pondicherry, sharing of the Cauvery water etc., apart from the toppling of the DMK government. However, on August 7, Jayalalithaa abruptly announced her party's decision to continue support to the government after the Chief Ministers of the four riparian states agreed on a scheme concerning the implementation of the 1991 interim award of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal and the institution of a River Valley Authority with the Prime Minister at the head. The Centre, on August 11, notified a scheme to give effect to the interim award of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal, thus allowing a respite to the scuffle.

The BJP, in a meeting with its allies on July 14, decided to contest the Lok Sabha Deputy Speaker's post on receiving assurance of support from them for its candidate. The TDP and the Haryana Lok Dal, which were supporting the government from outside, agreed to support a BJP candidate, the AIADMK having already made a similar promise. The BJP decided to field its three-time MP Rita Verma for the post. However, both the BJP and the Congress agreed to defer the poll at the last moment till the next session of the House not just to show any approbation for consensus or convention, but to avert the ignominy of losing their own candidate in the election. The Congress had already turned down the BJP's proposal for a consensus candidate and decided to field its veteran leader P. M. Sayeed to take on the BJP's candidate for the Deputy Speaker's post.

The BJP expected to get its candidate elected in the event of contest as the ruling coalition had a slender lead of only about 12 members over the Opposition in the Lok Sabha. However, all the political calculations of the BJP were tilted when Trinomool Congress leader Mamata Banerjee and the AIADMK went into reverse from their earlier commitment to support the BJP nominee on the ground that, by convention, the post should go to the Opposition. Whatever be the exact cause of such a reversal, it certainly had a severe impact on the state of cohesion in the ruling alliance. At one point, the BJP expressed its will to prop up Samata Party nominee Abdul Ghafoor, an MP from Bihar,

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V. P. Singh government instituted the Cauvery Water Dispute Tribunal on 2 June, 1990 as per the direction of the Supreme Court with its headquarters at New Delhi and chaired by Justice Chittatosh Mookerjee to look into the disputes that arose among the three states of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, and the Union Territory of Pondicherry over the distribution of water of the river Cauvery. The Cauvery Tribunal's award was invalidated by an ordinance by Karnataka. However, the Supreme Court struck down the ordinance and upheld the Tribunal's award which was subsequently incorporated into the Central Government's Gazette on 11 December, 1991.

91 The Indian Express, July 24, 1998.
but Jayalalithaa and Mamata Banerjee discarded that proposal. Besides, the Trinomool Congress indicated its penchant for the Congress nominee in a possible contest between Rita Verma and P. M. Sayeed. Under such circumstances, a possible defeat by the BJP candidate could not be ruled out.

On 11 December, Vajpayee called a meeting of the coalition partners as a last-minute effort to rally support for the BJP candidate. But all efforts became futile in the face of unwavering support of some of the allies for the Congress candidate that forced the BJP to pull out of the Deputy Speaker's election and to accept Sayeed as a consensus candidate. Thus, the BJP, despite being the single largest party in the Lok Sabha, failed to clinch the posts of both the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker by any kind of political manoeuvre. The Speaker's post went to Balayogi of the TDP that was supporting the government from outside and the Deputy Speaker's post rested with the Opposition Congress.

It must be pointed out here that issues not directly connected to politics also caused schisms like the transfer of M. K. Bezbaruah, the head of the Enforcement Directorate (ED). Actually, behind the transfer policy lay the question of defending some persons accused of breaking FERA. Time and again it brought to the open the network of corruption that engulfed the whole political arena from the Centre to the states. Even if not every body was corrupt himself, but to keep people around who would look at the interests of the political people were never transferred and those who would not, would be sent somewhere else.

In this connection, Jayalalithaa's accusation against the PMO, specially Pramod Mahajan, is a pointer. The Congress, as the main opposition party in the Lok Sabha, did not waste time to utilize the "extremely grave allegations" and corruption charges brought by Jayalalithaa against the PMO to earn political dividends from the enmity between the BJP and its principal ally, the AIADMK. The Congress demanded an all-powerful independent inquiry to look into the serious charges that engrossed the PMO in the transfer issue. Describing the allegations as unjustified, baseless and far from truth, the BJP spokesperson, Krishan Lal Sharma, turned down the Congress's demand for a high level query into the allegations. He pointed out to the Congress leadership that Jayalalithaa brought the allegations against the PMO in the wake of the Prime Minister's Independence Day announcement that hereafter the Prime Minister would come under the ambit of the Lok Pal.

On August 17, Jayalalithaa urged the Prime Minister to withdraw the transfer orders of the higher officials on the ground that Union Minister of State for Personnel and AIADMK representative K. M. R. Janardhanan had not been taken into confidence by the Centre before circulating the transfer orders. On August 19, Jayalalithaa took an intrusive turnaround and requested the Prime Minister to put back Bezbaruah in the ED as its chief. On August 20, the Union Cabinet decided to give a statutory status to the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) in pursuance of an earlier order of the Supreme Court. An ordinance to that effect was promulgated by the President on August 25. N. Vittal was

92 The Tribune, August 18, 1998.
appointed the Central Vigilance Commissioner on the first day of September, 1998. The Supreme Court, in its order on September 9, directed the Central government to reinstate Bezbaruah as chief of the ED. In order to put to rest the controversy, Bezbaruah, was taken back by the Union cabinet in the ED as its chief. This clearly shows how a single political leader can play havoc in the Union government due to the intertwined political interests.

That the Central government's dependence on regional politics came to be witnessed when on the eve of the assembly elections scheduled to be held on November 24 in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Delhi and Mizoram, the issue of seat adjustment led to an undesirable experience between the BJP and some of its coalition partners. Ramkrishna Hedge wanted to put up candidates of his Karnataka-based Lok Shakti Party in all those four states without virtually having any mass base in any of those states. The nonchalant attitude of the BJP towards the Lok Shakti Party, however, crumpled the bond between the two parties. The BSP decided to contest in a limited number of seats in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan and leave the residual seats to the Congress to ensure the defeat of the BJP. The RLM was also reported to reach a seat-sharing agreement with the Congress in Rajasthan. "Despite the electoral adjustments, one oft-repeated statement from the Congress (I) leadership – that there was no quid pro quo involved in the offer of support for the Congress (I) by the BSP and the RLM – puzzled political observers."93 Under the ambiguous terms of understanding, the Congress had decided to put up weak candidates in about 50 seats in Madhya Pradesh where the BSP had a better possibility to win. The same strategy was followed vis-à-vis the RLM in Rajasthan. The Congress contested the assembly elections in Delhi and Mizoram on its own without making any electoral deal with any other party.

On another front, CPI (M) general secretary Surjeet took initiative to launch a Third Front encompassing all the non-Congress secular forces. He held discussions with the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and DMK president M. Karunadhi and Tamil Maanila Congress leader G. K. Moopanar on this subject. The AGP also evinced interest in forging a Third Front. Surjeet emphasized the need to provide issue-based support to a Congress government at the Centre in the event of the downfall of the BJP-led government.

On November 25, polling was held in 626 assembly constituencies in all four states. The BJP and the Congress were in a virtual one-to-one contest in all the states except in Mizoram in North East where the Congress had a microscopic existence. Following virtually its one-sided victory, the Congress was posed to form governments by overthrowing the BJP from power in Delhi, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. In Delhi, a Congress government, led by Sheila Dikshit, was installed. The Congress wrested power from the BJP in Rajasthan after eight years and Ashok Ghelot was sworn in as Chief Minister. What appeared to be a great shock to the BJP was that the Congress took over the reins of power against all adversities in Madhya Pradesh for a second successive term under the leadership of Digvijay Singh. However, the success of the Congress did

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not go uninterrupted. The Congress suffered a severe electoral reversal in Mizoram, where it was able to retain only six seats with 29.77% votes, leading to an end of the Congress regime there after about ten years. The Opposition Mizo National Front (MNF) won 21 seats securing 29.44% votes and the Mizo People's Conference (MPC) bagged 12 seats and shared 20.44% of valid votes. The lone independent legislator, H. Rammawia, was supported by the MPC. The BJP drew a blank. Similar was the position of the Samata Party and the Janata Dal. Though the Samata Party was a partner of the BJP-led coalition at the Centre, in Mizoram, it contested the election alone. MNF president Zoramthanga led his party to victory and a MNF-MZPC partnership took the helm of the state with Zoramthanga as the fifth Chief Minister of Mizoram.

**November 1998 Assembly election results at a glance:**

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Significant reverses suffered by the BJP in its traditionally strong bases in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Delhi within eight months after its holding office at the Centre drew ire and hostile criticism not just from the party's insiders but that of the allies also. The BJP spokespersons proffered different alibis for its debacle in the assembly elections. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Madan Lal Khurana, in an interview with *Frontline*, refused to accept the interpretation that the verdict was a reflection of the non-performance of the BJP-led government at the Centre. Khurana said: This is one of those wild interpretations of the Congress (I). The elections were not a referendum on the Central Government but were fought on local and regional issues. It is true that we have not been able to highlight the achievements of the Vajpayee Government – such as its contribution to upholding probity in public life by introducing the Lok Pal Bill, its success in ensuring that no communal riots took place in the country, as also the strong steps it took to strengthen the defence preparedness. To defend the party's defeat, numerous excuses were offered but Khurana could not escape criticizing the failure of the BJP top brasses to provide good quality leaders. On the other hand, Sushma Swaraj accused the in-fighting between Khurana and Sahib Singh Verma for the poor performance. Home Minister L. K. Advani confessed that the government had failed to fulfill its electoral promises of delivering good governance to the people.

Comprehensive defeats of the BJP in the assembly elections to the three north Indian states did not spare the party from the blistering attacks of its mother organization, the RSS. As election results started to pour in, indicating the BJP lagging far behind the Opposition Congress, senior RSS leader Moropant Pingle made some caustic remark: "dump the BJP", "float a new political outfit" or "revive the good old Jan Sangh." "Something has to be done about the BJP. They are earning us a bad name", he regretted indicating the need for an overhaul of the policies of the BJP as it was ruining the credibility of RSS ideology among the masses. Another indication was that the RSS would not allow, among other things, unlimited indulgence to a particular type of secularism sponsored by Vajpayee. After the BJP's rout, the RSS would likely to come forward to assert itself and determine the tint of the course of action of the BJP for the time to come. All allies of the BJP depicted a variety of reactions in the wake of the election ranging from advice, admonishment to apathy.

Vajpayee had to work with enormous pressure from the allies which was reflected even in times of cabinet reshuffle, e.g. the induction of Pramod Mahajan and Jaswant Singh in the cabinet gave vent to the anger of the RSS. Jaswant Singh's induction was

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opposed by the Swadeshi lobby, specially regarding a meeting between Singh and US Under Secretary of State Strobe Talbott that paved the way for the controversial Insurance Regulatory Authority (IRA) Bill.

The RSS and its associates, including a large number of BJP MPs, appeared to be enthusiastic to dissociate themselves from the perceptible failure of the coalition and reverse to a distinct aggressive agenda. Union Minister of State for Sports Uma Bharati, a rabble-rouser, at a parliamentary party meet on December 1 prior to the commencement of the winter session of Parliament, castigated Vajpayee for the IRA Bill meant to open up the insurance industry to overseas private sector. She not only threatened to join the Swadeshi Jagran Manch's (SJM's) dharna on December 3 but to part with the Union cabinet if the government failed to comply with her request for the withdrawal of the IRA allowing 40 percent foreign equity in the insurance sector. She was supported by many MPs who criticized the government over this issue. "We came to power on a swadeshi agenda", they pointed out, "The Government's decision sends a clear message that we have buckled under pressure from foreign companies." Human Resource Development Minister Murli Manohar Joshi, BJP general secretary Sumitra Mahajan and others were among 70-odd BJP MPs who opposed the Insurance Bill. There were sit-in demonstrations and protest marches against the Bill.

Direct opposition by some influential BJP leaders to the IRA Bill made the situation more problematic for Jaswant Singh, the Finance Minister. Challenging the Bill, BJP general secretary and RSS ideologue Govindacharya argued that the Insurance Bill was not in tune with the party's manifesto which proscribed Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the domestic insurance sector. Even Home Minister Advani found raison d'être in the SJM's reservation against the Bill. He recalled that the party had vociferously objected to the Bill in the previous Lok Sabha.

RSS was pragmatic enough to realize BJP's weakness and endeavoured to bring back its dominance over the ruling party. It was surprising that even BJP president Kushabhau Thakre denounced the government's move which was against the BJP ideology. However, Vajpayee was unrelenting and asked Thakre to withdraw his statement against the government. But Thakre acted as a representative of the Sangh Parivar and stood firm. It could only be settled by the interference of Advani and Thakre was compelled to sign a statement in the form of an appeal to all the BJP MPs. "The Government", he added tamely, "is the last judge of the need for such a bill."

Away from the glare of publicity, the party and the government evolved an institutionalized mechanism to plug the communications gap in future to avoid similar type of stalemate like the IRA Bill. In the Coordination Committee meeting of the BJP and its allies, held on February 2, 1999 a joint statement was signed by Vajpayee, Advani, Thakre and some others on behalf of the BJP. The avowed intention was to put into effect what Vajpayee told the BJP National Executive in Gandhinagar on May 2,

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98 Arati R. Jerath, "BJP hardliners gang up against reforms", The Indian Express, December 2, 1998.
1998: "The Government will not run the party. It is the party which will run the
Government, which is working with a spirit of consensus."

The guidelines that aimed at ensuring the smooth functioning of the government were to include:

1. Establishment of a programme monitoring unit and redressal grievance cell involving both
PMO and party.
2. Daily interaction between PMO and party office to ensure a common media policy.
3. Ministers to spare an hour each week for BJP workers and the appointment of one party
functionary in each minister's office.
4. Holding daily meetings between Vajpayee and Advani besides fortnightly meeting among
Vajpayee, Advani, Thakre and Sudarshan.
5. Ensuring that different wings of the Sangh Parivar – VHP, SJM, BMS – work broadly in
tandem.
6. Projecting Vajpayee as a people's man. Reviving morning darbar and organizing at least one
public meeting each month.
7. Consultation with party and RSS on policy decisions and political appointments.
8. Interaction between the Party and its allies at the grassroots."

In spite of the guidelines, it was difficult to implement the policies due to the
recurrent tensions among the allies as well as RSS intervention in the day to day affairs of
the government. That the RSS was not to let off the BJP alone was evident from the
review of the performance of the coalition government by the 10 December Chintan
Baithak and passing a resolution by the Sangh's karyakari mandal reiterating BJP's
deviation from the path of Swadeshi. The RSS thought that opening up the domestic
insurance sector to the foreign companies and through the Patents Bill were 'betrayal' to
the country – for it threatened the nation's economic sovereignty and self reliance. The
Congress found an opportunity to weaken both BJP and RSS under the circumstances and
helped the Prime Minister against the RSS. Top brasses of the Congress calculated that
the electoral machinery of the BJP would come to suffer a serious setback without the
campaigning of the RSS cadres for it and the RSS would also be reduced to a mere
cultural organization with the political achievement of the BJP.

Jayalalithaa was again dissatisfied with the limited expansion of the cabinet where
people of her choice could not be inducted but three of the BJP members could. Trinomool Congress leader Mamata Banerjee, though not so implacably belligerent as Jayalalithaa, did not miss the opportunity to slam the government for its failure to rein in
the soaring prices of essential commodities and she resigned from the coordination
committee as a mark of protest. She also criticized the government's disinvestment
anti-people policy in public sector leading to the closure of eight units rendering lakhs of
people jobless in the country. Trinomool Congress's decision to observe December 6 as a
black day to commemorate the demolition of the Babri Masjid discomfited the BJP.
Mamata Banerjee participated in an Opposition-sponsored nation-wide protest rally to
condemn the brutal attacks on Christians in Gujarat and Orissa, demanded the resignation

100 ibid.
101 ibid.
102 Neerja Chowdhury, "Cong. hopes to widen Atal-RSS rift by backing PM on key issues", The Indian
Express, December 19, 1998.
103 The Hindu, November 4, 1998.
of the Union Home Minister L. K. Advani for his failure to save the lives of an Australian missionary and his son in Orissa. She also demanded the dismissal of the BJP government in Gujarat for its inability to provide security to the minorities and of the BJP-Shiv Sena ministry in Maharashtra on cricket issue. These not only show the flimsy ties that BJP had with Trinamool but also points out Mamata Banerjee's bid to retrieve the ground lost by her party in state politics.

The fluid character of all the political parties came into the open when, after the November 1998 assembly elections in the three states and Delhi, many political parties wanted to come nearer to the Congress to look for an alternative Congress-led government at the Centre. The Trinamool Congress, the Uttar Pradesh Loktantrik Congress (UPLC), the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi, the Manipur State Congress and the Sardar Congress of Gujarat – the five breakaway groups of the Congress which supported the BJP – floated the Progressive Alliance in a meeting, held in Delhi on December 10. They declared that they would not hesitate to support the parent organization at a proper moment. The Progressive Alliance, however, decided to continue support to the Vajpayee government in the larger interest of political stability and to avoid turbulence in the BJP-ruled states of Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra. Obviously, these parties appeared to act as a pressure group within the BJP-led front albeit many of its leaders, including its chairperson Mamata Banerjee, declined this. Suresh Kalmadi of Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi and Naresh Agarwal of UPLC hoped to strike a strategic understanding with the invigorating Congress. The launching of the Progressive Alliance enhanced the BJP's concern also to some extent.

Another striking development was the meeting between Sonia Gandhi and the former Prime Minister H. D. Deve Gowda. They met to evolve the possibilities of cooperation between the Janata Dal and the Congress at the national level and in some states like Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh where the Janata Dal was lacking a strong base. Nevertheless, Sonia Gandhi made it clear to them that the Congress would not be active to destabilize the BJP-led government at the Centre.

Commenting on the CPP meeting, the party spokesman Shivraj Patil said that the Congress would not play any significant role to bring down the Vajpayee government or to terminate the life of the Lok Sabha, although it was guessed that Sonia Gandhi would prefer a mid-term poll than to run a coalition government, calculating that the Congress would emerge as the single largest party in the next elections that would certainly enhance its bargaining capacity in relation to other secular forces. The leaders thought that it would not be easy for the Congress to run a coalition government of such varied parties as the AIADMK, the SP and the CPI (M) with only 141 members of its own..

In the meantime, Jayalalithaa came nearer to the Congress. On December 5, she welcomed Sonia Gandhi's decision to keep 33 per cent organizational posts in the Congress reserved for women. Jayalalithaa's sudden announcement on December 7 that the AIADMK-led front consisting of the AIADMK, the MDMK, the PMK, the TRC and the Janata Party did no longer exist, confounded the BJP that was in alliance with this. She also announced that her party had yet an alliance with Subramanian Swamy's Janata
Party and new fronts would come into existence before the Lok Sabha elections. However, she overruled the possibility of the resignation of two AIADMK ministers from the Union cabinet in near future and said publicly that her party would desist from making it necessary to hold mid-term polls to the Lok Sabha.

The situation was further aggravated when, on December 11, the AIADMK took part in a strike, called by the Opposition, to protest against the economic policies of the BJP. The BJP was also under fire from Jayalalithaa, unpredictable as ever, for its alleged attempt to create divisions among the AIADMK allies in Tamil Nadu.

The Union Petroleum Minister and TRC founder Vazhapadi K. Ramamurthy took a harder stance on Jayalalithaa's warning vis-à-vis the non-existence of the AIADMK-led front. He declared that the TRC would continue to remain in the BJP-led alliance even if an alternative government under the leadership of the Congress clinched power at the Centre in the next general elections. He reminded the AIADMK chief of her early indifference to the unanimous decision taken by the MDMK, the PMK and the TRC to withdraw support to the BJP-led government.

The BJP fell into an exceptionally awkward position when a group of MPs, belonging to the DMK, met the Prime Minister on December 11 under the leadership of the former Union Minister and DMK leader T. R. Balu with an appeal to withdraw an affidavit relating to the establishment of Special Courts for the 46 corruption cases against Jayalalithaa filed by Hari Singh, Under Secretary in the department of Personnel and Training before the Supreme Court. BJP government yielded to it and most political parties in Tamil Nadu expressed their anguish over the Centre's decision. They alleged that the Centre intended to delay the progress of judicial proceedings to shield Jayalalithaa from all the offences she had committed during her regime as Chief Minister and thereby to save the BJP-led government in office. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and DMK president M. Karunanidhi said that the Centre's action was tinged with political motivations and his government would go ahead to explore legal avenues to offset the Centre's notification.

The proposed expansion of the Council of Ministers, overdue from November last, was put on hold by the Prime Minister abruptly on January 12, 1999 amidst pressures and conflicting demands faced by the ruling coalition from the allies as well as within the BJP. Distribution of portfolios turned out to be a difficult process in the face of tug of war by allies for coveted departments. What came out in the open was the respective interests of the allies to serve their own states and scuttling the Union government if need be. It was enough to indicate that Vajpayee's hands were fettered with limitations in picking up candidates even from his own party, while forming the ministry.

The sporadic attacks on Christian in many parts of the country and unwarranted meddling of the members of the Sangh Parivar in governmental affairs claimed its first ministerial victim when former Union Minister for Parliamentary Affairs and Tourism

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104 *The Indian Express*, January 14, 1999.
Madan Lal Khurana resigned from the Vajpayee cabinet on January 30, 1999. However, the act was alleged to be machinated by the RSS or at the behest of the Prime Minister himself to save the ministry. The in and out of the members revealed a tale of inner fighting of the Parivar and BJP.\(^{105}\)

The resignation of Mohan Guruswamy, adviser to Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha, added to tension that had gripped the BJP since the resignation of Khurana. Guruswamy tendered his resignation on February 3 from the twin-jobs of Officer on Special Duty (OSD) in the Finance Ministry and adviser to the Finance Minister in protest against the government's failure to implement the party manifesto and the attacks against Christians. Actually, there was a tussle between him and the Finance Minister that resulted in it.\(^{106}\) The abrupt resignation of Guruswamy spurred the Congress to claim the government to bring into light all the facts behind his resignation for the sake of public interests obviously to fish in troubled waters.

Though the BJP, being persuaded by its allies, showed an eagerness to instill a sense of moderation and accountability in governance, its fellow ideological diehards intended to walk along the opposite way. The VHP, in its three-day Dharma Sansad (Religious Parliament) commencing from February 5 at Ahmedabad, seemed to scoff at Vajpayee's efforts to make the BJP responsive to the sensitivities of its ruling partners, to obviate the complexities in normalizing bilateral relations between India and Pakistan, and his disliking to introduce appropriate legislation outlawing the practice of conversion.

The Dharma Sansad appeared to give a call to the ruling BJP to set its sight on staging a comeback to the Hindutva plank that enabled it to emerge as the single largest party. The VHP worked out a 40-point Hindutva agenda, including the construction of a Ram temple at Ayodhya and announced plans to establish a Hindu vote bank by forming public opinion and rallying support for it. The VHP's inherent purpose behind building up a Hindu vote bank was to liberate the party from the clutches of its allies upon whose support the government depended heavily for its survival. Among other things, the Dharma Sansad demanded the release of a White Paper on religious conversions perpetrated by Christian missionaries to put in danger the country's unity and integrity.\(^{107}\) The items included in the agenda of the VHP gave a clear indication that the VHP had a comprehensive plan to reinforce Hindu fundamentalism further than keeping the BJP in power.\(^{108}\)

\(^{108}\) The VHP made it clear that it was not inimical to the Christians so long as their activities would not impinge on their loyalty to India. The Dharma Sansad held the view that conversion ought to be forbidden by law as it was repugnant to the spirit of the Indian Constitution, though re-conversion should be encouraged by the government since that was a method to bring back the converted masses to the original credo of the nation.
A new bone of contention appeared between the BJP and the AIADMK over the removal of the Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat who was stripped of his responsibility by the Defence Minister George Fernandes on alleged security grounds. Ahead of his removal from his post on December 30, Admiral Bhagwat came out with a printed document filled with explosive information and references to Fernandes and his factotums about their connection with the insurgents of Kashmir that set murmur and discussions in official, political and media circles. The document also contained various substantive issues, including scams and deals, affecting the national security.109

The removal of Bhagwat proved the flashpoint in the already strained relations between Vajpayee and Jayalalithaa. Jayalalithaa chastised the Defence Minister and the Prime Minister on the Bhagwat issue.

The tense relationship between the BJP and the AIADMK moved from bad to worse soon after Jayalalitha met Sonia Gandhi on March 29, 1999. This was a part of the calculated move to dislodge the Vajpayee Government with the backing of the Congress. The presence of the former Prime Ministers, P. V. Narasimha Rao, H. D. Deve Gowda and Chandrasekhar, added special significance.110 Jayalalithaa declared that the AIADMK would continue to be a partner of the coalition, provided the government accommodated her demands of reinstating Bhagwat and simultaneous dismissal of George Fernandes and the formation of Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) to find out the truth behind the incident. She insolently hinted at cutting off the AIADMK's ties from the BJP-led coalition and striking a deal with the Congress before the next Lok Sabha elections. "The AIADMK was the engine. BJP was only the driver. The AIADMK could push the driver out, and drive the train on its own. The train would go on even if some bogies dropped out. Even if all the bogies dropped out, the engine could go to the next railway station and attach itself to another train and move on",111 she blatantly declared. The hardliners of the ruling party, Advani, Mahajan and Thakre, intended to isolate Jayalalithaa.

Jayalalithaa held an emergency meeting of her party in Chennai to chalk out its next move against the Centre's action of non-compliance with her demands and declared that Thambi Durai and Janarthanan would submit their resignation from the Union cabinet the next day.112 Swamy met Jayalalithaa on April 6 in Chennai and persuaded her to withdraw support to the government before April 15 when Parliament would meet. He tried to make the point clear to her that the Congress would not take any initiative to topple the government until she withdrew the support. He also told her that the Congress might hesitate to move a no-confidence motion against the government. She could push the ball to the court of the Congress by withdrawing support at the earliest. Explaining the strength of different political parties in the Lok Sabha, he asserted that the government would bound to collapse in the event of trial of strength. The arithmetical calculation was that the AIADMK, the RLM, the left parties, the Congress and a few smaller parties had a total strength of 271 members in the Lok Sabha, while the BJP-led

111 ibid.
112 ibid, April 6, 1999.
alliance had 254 seats. Even if the BJP and its allies became able to rally the support of all the 16 members of the DMK, the Tamil Maanila Congress and the BSP, who were indecisive either supporting or opposing the government, the combined strength of the Opposition would outnumber that of the government. The withdrawal of support, according to Swamy, would force Vajpayee to seek a confidence vote which he would definitely lose.

With the resignation of AIADMK ministers, Jayalalithaa announced her party's withdrawal from the coordination committee of the BJP. Reacting to that a BJP statement said: "The entirely unholy, illogical and burdened with contradictions gang up that our opponents are trying to forge is nothing but a flagrant and open subversion of the mandate of 1998." The Congress, taking stock of the latest developments within the coalition, refrained from taking any adverse comment against Jayalalithaa with the hope of getting her support in its initiative to form the subsequent government followed by the estimated downfall of the Vajpayee government.

Hectic political activities started in the national capital with leaders like Harkishan Singh Surjeet and Mulayam Singh Yadav trying to mitigate differences in the opposition ranks. Even the Haryana Lok Dal-Rastriya (HLD-R) chief, Om Prakash Chautala, declared that his party would vote against the government once it would face the floor of Parliament despite the BJP's wholehearted effort to obtain Chautala's support.

Jayalalithaa too sprang into feverish political activities through negotiations with the MPs of different political shades, including the RPI, the IUML, the Kerala Congress (M), the RJD and the National Conference. However, the CPI (M), the CPI and the DMK vehemently opposed any alternative arrangement with Jayalalithaa playing a key role. The last straw came to the ruling BJP on April 14 when Jayalalithaa sent a letter to the President apprising him of her party's decision to withdraw support to the Vajpayee government amid uncertainty over the formation of any future government. Soon after, a host of opposition leaders from different parties called on the President urging him to ask the Prime Minister to move a confidence motion in the Lok Sabha to test the majority of the government and the President acquiesced to the proposal on the same day.

The President, however, received harsh criticism from different corners for his action, which to many, was unconstitutional and undemocratic that he could have avoided had he asked the Opposition to table a no-confidence motion against the government. The number of supporters of both the government and the Opposition side was nail-bitingly close with 266 for the government side and 267 for the Congress-led Opposition side on that day. While the DMK ditched the third force by deciding to back the government, its ally in the state, the Tamil Maanila Congress, was expected to abstain from voting criticizing the Congress for not seeking their support. The Left had already changed its approach towards the AIADMK and new alignments were in the anvil on the political spectrum.

113 The Indian Express, April 10, 1999.
Both the ruling and the Opposition sides tried hard to tilt the scale to their own favour. The BJP triumvirate – George Fernandes, Pramod Mahajan and P. R. Kumaramamgalam – had to take in the numerous actors from Jayalalithaa, Sonia Gandhi, Mulayam Singh Yadav, Harkishan Singh Surjeet, Sharad Pawar, Laloo Prasad Yadav and the lot. A special role was ascribed to the Independent MPs who could play important part in confidence vote where the fight was neck to neck.

The last minute somersault of the five-member BSP whipped up the fall of the government. Though Mayawati, while participating in the parliamentary debate on the confidence motion on April 16, announced her party's decision to remain absent from voting, the next day, however, in a sudden turnaround BSP members voted against the government causing its termination.\textsuperscript{114} Although Mayawati depicted it as a revenge against BJP's earlier actions, actually it was a political arrangement with Congress in Uttar Pradesh that led to it.

Chautala's HLD (R), which had withdrawn support from the Vajpayee government in February 1999 over irreparable differences, was another party that performed a similar deceptive role. Chautala, who used to maintain regular contact, with Jayalalithaa to instigate her to be more hostile against the government, on April 16 with 24 hours to go before the crucial vote on the motion, rejoined the BJP. Though he had earlier joined the Third Force, he was dissatisfied with its total dependence on Congress. However, the ulterior motive for Chautala to join BJP was the willingness exhibited by the same to accept some of his demands.

Arithmetic came to prevail over all aspects of moral values even after the vote of confidence was taken. Even personal relationship played an active role in politics like Ram Vilas Paswan becoming sympathetic to BJP owing to his rivalry with Laloo Prasad Yadav.

Saifudeen Soz of the National Conference voted with the Opposition in complete defiance of the official stance of the party to honour his promise he had taken that day to combat the communal forces. "It was the commitment that I displayed",\textsuperscript{115} he said. The National Conference leadership, he added, was moving away from its "responsibility to fight the BJP",\textsuperscript{116} though, as a result, he was expelled from his party.

Two days after the Vajpayee government had lost the confidence motion in the Lok Sabha, Congress president Sonia Gandhi and AIADMK chief Jayalalithaa discussed the feasibility of forming an alternative regime. Also separate consultations were meanwhile under way at different party levels to evolve parallel processes.\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{114} The BSP wanted to cover up its actual strategy to avoid split in its ranks that the BJP would have caused by any fair or foul means as it did with the Uttar Pradesh unit of the BSP in October 1997 to confirm its grip in power.
\textsuperscript{115} n. 113.
\textsuperscript{116} ibid.
The four left parties – the CPI, CPI (M), RSP and the Forward Bloc – held a meeting in camera to decide the strategy on the subject of the best possible use of the combined strength of 48 members of their own in the Lok Sabha in an extremely fluid situation. While the two Communist parties were known to lend support to a Congress-led government from outside without taking the risk of being a part of it, the two smaller partners, the RSP and the All-India Forward Bloc, which together accounted for a crucial grouping of seven seats in the Lok Sabha, refused to either support a government led by the Congress or to participate in a government of which the Congress would be a partner.

The RLM, an alliance between the RJD and the SP, made it known that it had some reservations about joining a government led by the Congress. Samajwadi Party chief and RLM leader Mulayam Singh Yadav was against the formation of a minority government led by the Congress. He also took an initiative to mobilize support for the installation of a government led by Jyoti Basu, but the initiative was nipped in the bud as the central leadership of the CPI (M) refused to consider this proposal. The Congress also turned down the proposal.

The Congress wanted to form a minority government, supported from the outside by other secular forces, which it considered to be the only alternative means to give the country the assurance of a stable government. The Congress thought that compulsion of politics, stemming from its alliance with parties like the RLM, SP and RJD for short-term political gain, might impinge on its future plan.

Although the Janata Dal had surmounted yawning reservations and a division within the ranks to vote against the motion of confidence tabled by the Vajpayee ministry in the Lok Sabha, but almost immediately it was weighed down by infightings. Paswan made a pointed reference to Laloo Prasad and his RJD in connection with corruption and refused to recognize the Laloo-Mulayam combination as a single political entity with four other MPs of the Janata Dal, including two former Prime Ministers H. D. Deve Gowda and I. K. Gujral, unexpectedly agreed to support a Congress government.

The Tamil Maanila Congress publicly declared that it would neither join nor support a political formation that would include the AIADMK.

However, as all the efforts of the Opposition parties to put up an alternative government failed, the President dissolved the 12th Lok Sabha on April 26, 1999 and ordered fresh elections. Vajpayee remaining the head of the care-taker government till alternative arrangements were made.

The BJP realized the inevitability of building national-level coalitions with regional parties of diverse interests far ahead of the Indian National Congress. Whilst the Congress was averse to coalitions at the Centre, it had even acclimatized itself to this unavoidable tendency of Indian party politics. It was not easy for the Congress to think itself as being a natural party of governance. Sonia Gandhi’s valedictory speech at the

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brainstorming session of the Congress, named as *Vichar Manthan Shibir*, at Panchmari of Madhya Pradesh in September 1998 demonstrated the Congress’ disposition towards coalition politics.

Friends, there has been much talk about the Congress’ attitude towards coalition government. The fact that we are going through a coalitional phase at national level polities reflects in many ways the decline of the Congress. This is a passing phase and we will come back again with full force and on our own stream. But in the interim coalitions may well be needed. … In the last few months, I get the feeling that the country, fed up with over two years of non-governance, is waiting to give us another chance. 119

The Congress was set for an imminent split on May 16, 1999 with senior Congress leaders Sharad Pawar, P.A. Sangma and Tariq Anwar raising dissenting voices in the CWC meeting against Sonia Gandhi’s ambition for becoming a Prime Ministerial candidate. In a letter circulated among the CWC members, they demanded that the Congress should promise in its electoral manifesto to bring an amendment to the Constitution of India providing that the posts of the President, the Vice President and the Prime Minister of the Indian Republic shall only be open to the country's natural-born citizens and foreigners shall be debarred from holding such posts. Taking it as a personal vilification directed to her, Sonia Gandhi abruptly stepped down from the post of the party president. A high drama of sycophancy and rapprochement followed that resulted in her reinstatement as the Congress president. The trio of Pawar, Sangma and Anwar, after being expelled from the party on 20 May 1999 for their anti-Sonia stance, launched a new political outfit named the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). 120

However, the real motive behind the formation of the NCP was, in all probability, to improve the career prospects of Pawar and Sangma whom the Congress organization had been trying to corner. They proceeded to float the new party with palpable support from the capitalist sugar barons and rich sugar farmers in Pawar’s home turf in western Maharashtra and sizeable Christian vote that Sangma could drag in his home state, Meghalaya. Anwar could possibly bring some Muslim votes in Bihar and the adjacent states for the newly launched party. The split could adversely affect the electoral prospects of the Indian National Congress.

The 13th Lok Sabha elections distributed over five different phases took place from September 5, 1999 to October 3, 1999. The main fight was confined between the

119 Thakurta and Raghuraman, n. 58, p.161.
120 The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) was formed on 25 May 1999 in New Delhi by Sharad Pawar, P. A. Sangma and Tariq Anwar with hundreds of their followers. Sharad Pawar was elected the president, and P.A. Sangma and Tariq Anwar, the party’s general secretaries. The NCP proclaims itself as a progressive secular party that stands for democracy, Gandhian secularism, equality and social justice and federalism. It positions itself as a moderate, centrist alternative to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC). At the time of its formation, the NCP also absorbed the Indian Congress (Socialist), which traced its origin to anti-Gandhi Congress of 1977-78. The Indian Congress (Socialist) was born out of a split in the INC. Initially the party came to be known as the Indian National Congress (Urs), led by D. Devraj Urs. It broke away from the parent party in 1978 following Indira Gandhi’s drubbing in the 1977 general elections. The name of the party was changed to Indian Congress (Socialist) in 1981 when Sharad Pawar assumed the office of the party president. In 1986 Sharad Pawar and his Indian Congress (Socialist) rejoined the INC. One factional group, led by former Assam Chief Minister Sarat Chandra Sinha, broke away from the Indian Congress (Socialist) in 1984 and formed a separate party known as the Indian Congress (Socialist) – Sarat Chandra Sinha. This faction merged with the NCP in 1999. However, the party's residual faction, led by Kadannapalli Ramachandran, is existing as a partner of the Left Democratic Front (LDF) in Kerala.
24-party BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA)\textsuperscript{121} and state-based alliances that the opposition Congress sewed up with some regional parties in a few states. The Congress, led by Sonia Gandhi, sought to project the prospect of forming a single-party government of its own at the Centre and desisted from forging alliance as such at the national level except for those with the AIADMK in Tamil Nadu, the RJD in Bihar and its traditional coalition partners – the Muslim League and the Kerala Congress (Mani) – in Kerala. A third force, being reduced to the Left Front and the remnant of the Janata Dal (Secular) of Deve Gowda was also in the race. SP chief Mulayam Singh Yadav and NCP supremo Sharad Pawar’s effort at one point to integrate the third forces before the elections was doomed to failure.

The ruling BJP and its allies met on May 15 to work out the strategy for fighting the Congress-led coalition in the upcoming general elections and formally christened their coalesced group as the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) The NDA decided to contest the elections under the leadership of the former Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, on the basis of a common agenda without exterminating their separate identities. The TDP, the Trinamool Congress and the National Conference, being apparently scared of losing popular support among the Muslim community in their own states, deriving from their alignment with a party of Hindu-right orientation like the BJP, kept away from this meeting at first but finally joined the alliance.

It is interesting to note that after the disintegration of the BJP-led government at the Centre in April 1999, new political alignments came to the fore in Tamil Nadu state politics.\textsuperscript{122} The DMK, after its general council’s meeting in Chennai on July 2, formally decided to join the NDA marking an end to the three-year old DMK and Tamil Maanila Congress alliance. The breakdown of this alliance had no effect on the DMK-TMC-CPI coalition government in Pondicherry headed by DMK leader R.V. Janakiraman.

The CPI, in its National Council's meeting held in Calcutta between 5 and 7 June, decided to part with the Pondicherry coalition government opposing DMK’s move to line up with the BJP-led NDA flouting the popular mandate.

The PMK, the MDMK and the TRC, allies of the AIADMK, deserted it over its decision of withdrawing support from the BJP-led government. The Tamil Maanila

\textsuperscript{121} The National Democratic Alliance (NDA), led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), is a centre-right combination consisting of ideologically and programmatically dispersed parties. The NDA was formed for the first time in May 1998 with Sharad Yadav as Convener and Atal Behari Vajpayee as honorary Chairman. At the time of its formation, thirteen political parties came under its umbrella. They were: BJP, Samata Party, AIADMK, Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK), Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK), Tamizhaga Rajiv Congress (TRC), Janata Party, Trinamool Congress, Biju Janata Dal (BJD), Shiromani Akali Dal (Badal), Shiv Sena, Lok Shakti (LS). In 1999, prior to the 13\textsuperscript{th} Lok Sabha elections, the NDA successfully strengthened its bastion by bringing many other parties within its fold, increasing its strength to 24. The following parties constituted the NDA in 1999: BJP, Janata Dal (United), Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), Arunachal Congress, Trinamool Congress, Akhil Bhartiya Lok Tantrik Congress, BJD, Democratic Bahujan Samaj Morcha, DMK, Himachal Vikas Congress, Indian National Lok Dal (INLD), Jammu and Kashmir National Conference, Janatantrik Bahun Samaj Party, Lok Jan Shakti Party, MDMK, M.G.R. Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, Manipur State Congress Party, PMK, Shiv Sena, Shiromani Akali Dal (Badal), Sikkim Democratic Front, TDP, Rastriya Lok Dal, Independent (Maneka. Gandhi).

Congress, the CPI (M) and the CPI, which were with the DMK, reconsidered their equation with the DMK in the background of its switch over to the NDA. While the CPI and the CPI (M) sided with the AIADMK, the TMC showed aversion to patch up with the AIADMK keeping in view the AIADMK's past record. The IUML, the Indian National League (INL) and the Tamil Nadu Muslim Munnetra Kazhagam (TMMK) pledged support to the AIADMK-led front. The Congress tried hard to rope in the Tamil Maanila Congress into the Congress-AIADMK fold. The Tamil Maanila Congress had some problems in going along with the AIADMK. It may be remembered that a section of the Congress left the party under the leadership of Moopanar in April 1996 to form the Tamil Maanila Congress against the party's decision to forge an alliance with the AIADMK in Tamil Nadu.

Besides the DMK, another major group that joined the NDA in July 1999, was a large faction of the Janata Dal (JD). The JD was sharply divided over the issue as to whether it should join the BJP-led NDA or not. The JD Chief Minister of Karnataka, J. S. Patel, took a unilateral decision to join the alliance. Patel's decision, while taken up for consideration in the party's national Political Affairs Committee, was challenged by the bulk of the members; but another faction, led by Sharad Yadav, rejected the majority view and expressed solidarity with the Patel group emphasizing the need to strike a deal with the NDA. Two allies of the former Vajpayee government, the Samata Party and the Lok Shakti, formally declared their merger with the rebel Janata Dal in a 'unity rally' in Bangalore on 7 August, 1999 and formed a new party, the Janata Dal (United) [JD (U)]\(^{123}\)

In an interrelated development on that day, the Election Commission (EC) proscribed the Janata Dal factions to use the name of the party and it froze the wheel symbol. The EC temporarily recognized both the factions as national parties. On August 8, the EC awarded the Sharad Yadav faction the name Janata Dal (United) and the arrow symbol. The Lok Shakti and the Samata Party contested the 13\(^{th}\) Lok Sabha elections under the common name and symbol. The JD (U) aligned itself with the NDA.

The remaining faction of the Janata Dal, led by Deve Gowda, formed a left-of-the centre party which came to be known as the Janata Dal (Secular) [JD (S)]. The JD (S), which was basically formed out of its opposition to the BJP, not only stayed away from the NDA, but maintained equidistance from the congress-led alliance. The JD (S) contested the elections under the symbol 'farmer driving tractor'.

Though the JD (U) joined hands with the NDA, its entry into the NDA was not, however, smooth. Despite having the combined support of the BJP allies and even the implicit consent of Vajpayee, its struggle for alignment with the NDA was disrupted by a dominant section of the BJP leaders who showed loyalty to Advani. This section, having been directed by the RSS and other Sangh Parivar members, strongly opposed the admission of Sharad Yadav and J. S. Patel into the NDA. They even blamed Vajpayee for BJP's escalating dependence on the Dal formation that included the Samata Party and the Lok Shakti. The Sangh Parivar even alleged that Vajpayee facilitated the amalgamation of the socialist forces seeking to strengthen his own position in the coalition vis-à-vis the


RSS’s strong exception to the inclusion of the JD (U) in the BJP-led NDA. The support of the Trinamool Congress, the National Conference and the Akali Dal for the new political formation carried credibility to the RSS’s charges against Vajpayee. Vajpayee turned the tables on his critics and detractors – making possible the entry of the JD (U) into the NDA. The main electoral arena pitted the BJP and its allies against the Congress with Vajpayee and Sonia Gandhi projected over parties or issues.\textsuperscript{124}

The Vajpayee-led NDA recorded an emphatic victory with 304 seats and 41 percent of vote in the 545-seat Lok Sabha. BJP's allies played the key role in steering the NDA's victory in the elections. The BJP won in 182 constituencies, but its allies captured 122 seats. For the first time since 1984, the BJP had not been able to increase the number of seats in the Lok Sabha nor its share of popular vote. The Congress and its allies secured 136 seats and 34 percent of vote. The Congress alone secured 28.30 percent of votes and 114 seats, 27 seats minus from the last elections. It was the worst performance of the Congress since independence. The party had failed to stitch successful alignments and two of its principal allies – the AIADMK and the RJD performed badly in their own states. The AIADMK won 10 seats and the RJD 7. The left parties captured 42 seats.

\textbf{Results of the Thirteenth Lok Sabha Elections, 1999}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTY</th>
<th>CONTESTED</th>
<th>WON</th>
<th>VOTE %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 BJP</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>23.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 BSP</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 CPI</td>
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<td>4 CPM</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 JD(S)</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 JD(U)</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATIONAL PARTIES :</td>
<td>1299</td>
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<td>67.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STATE PARTIES :</td>
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<td>26.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REGISTERED</td>
<td>654</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Unrecognised) PARTIES :</td>
<td>1945</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL :</td>
<td>4648</td>
<td>543</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The 13th Lok Sabha was constituted on October 10, 1999,. Vajpayee, as the newly elected leader of the NDA, called on President Narayanan on October 11 to stake his claim to form the ministry. The President invited him on the same day to form the government without being required to provide him with any prima facie proof of majority support in the House or without asking him to seek a vote of confidence within a

\textsuperscript{124} In addition to making Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin an important issue of its electoral campaign, the BJP sought to capitalize Vajpayee's success in the Kargil war. To challenge Sonia Gandhi in Bellary, a Lok Sabha constituency of Karnataka, the BJP put up one of its heavyweight female candidates, Sushma Swaraj. Sonia Gandhi also contested the Amethi seat of Uttar Pradesh. She won both the seats but retained the Amethi seat from where Rajiv Gandhi was elected.
stipulated time as before. On October 13, a 70-member oversized Council of Ministers, consisting of 25 Cabinet Ministers, 7 Ministers of State with independent charge and 37 Ministers of State, was sworn in, headed by Vajpayee, who stepped in his third stint as the Prime Minister.\textsuperscript{125} There was no hiccup this time in the formation of the ministry, as it was possible to avoid unnecessary delay in processing the installation of the government that Vajpayee experienced in 1998 from the errant ally, the AIADMK. All the allies of the NDA sent their letters of consent to Vajpayee authorizing him to choose the members of his cabinet before his meeting with the President.

This time the BJP was in a much stronger position which was reflected in a greater share of government portfolios among the BJP MPs who held two-thirds of the total ministerial portfolios. The portfolios of Yashwant Sinha, Pramod Mahajan and Jaswant Singh remained unchanged. The remaining portfolios were distributed among the allies proportionately to their strength. The TDP, despite being the second largest partner of the NDA after the BJP, did not represent it into the ministry, but extended only outside support to the government. The JD (U) was over-represented in the cabinet as a consequence of the inclusion of Sharad Yadav and Ram Vilas Paswan into the NDA coalition. Union Commerce Minister Ramkrishna Hedge and Union Industry Minister Sikander Bakht were dropped. The 1999 Council of Ministers was larger than that of 1998, with 69 Ministers, compared to 43 in 1998.

The NDA government, from its very inception, sought to pursue opening up policies to meet the challenges thrown by the global economy. Liberalizing economy, both internally and externally, and connecting India physically, constituted the major policy concerns for Vajpayee.

Assembly elections, held simultaneously with the general elections for the corresponding parliamentary constituencies in Sikkim, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh as well as those in Bihar, Orissa, Haryana and Manipur in February 2000, demonstrated that while the BJP was still the most successful political party in the country, its influence was far from being unchallenged. In Maharashtra, the Congress-NCP alliance wrested power from BJP-Shiv Sena coalition in October 1999. In the February 2000 assembly elections of Bihar, Orissa, Haryana and Manipur, the Congress suffered a rout and the BJP also failed to emerge as the principal party in any of the four states. The BJP was put in serious challenge in Bihar, where Laloo Prasad Yadav's RJD suffered debacle in the general elections but performed exceptionally well in the assembly elections and formed government with the support of the Congress. By contrast, in Haryana, the BJP and its allies retained power and in Orissa they deposed the Congress government. In Manipur, the Manipur State Congress Party emerged as the single largest party. Moreover, the Prime Minister faced difficulties in tackling the allies of the NDA e.g., over the arrest of Bal Thackeray. Further, Vajpayee was targeted by RSS over Hindu nationalism and for side tracking the \textit{Swadeshi} agenda. The BJP endeavored to bring the Indian economy at par with the global economy, so it dealt with the IMF, GATT, World Bank, WTO and Transnational Corporations through mechanisms mostly preferred by them. It is interesting to note that the BJP's economic policy and performance in the changed global

\textsuperscript{125} \textit{The Hindu}, October 12, 1999.
circumstances bore practically no perceptible distinction from that of the previous Congress regime.126

The BJP-led NDA government, being fortified by vast majority in the Lok Sabha, approved the introduction of the long-pending Insurance Regulatory Authority (IRA) Bill, re-christened as the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA) Bill, in its first cabinet meeting held on October 20, 1999. It sought to open up India's insurance sector to foreign and domestic private players to tap fund for development in infrastructure. The left Parties and the RSS with their offshoots protested against the Bill.127

As the government had no majority in the Rajya Sabha, it aimed to rope in the Congress before the IRDA Bill was taken up in that House for its consideration. The Congress promised to support the Bill subject to four amendments.128 As the government was open to concede the demands of the Congress to take it on board, the latter threw its weight behind the government when the Bill was taken up in the Upper House on December 7, 1999 for its approval. Meanwhile, the Bill was ratified in the Lower House on 2 December 1999. With the assent of the President the Bill became an Act and came to be effective from April 19, 2000.129

Another major shift, brought about by the NDA government under the mounting pressure of globalization, was the opening up of the economy to imports of foreign goods, including consumer items, as that would accrue benefits to India. The motive behind this was to entail an integration in foreign policy between diplomacy and trade occurred at that time. But in reality, India was forced to lift quantitative restrictions (QRs) on the import of a large number of commodities ranging from consumer items to agricultural and capital goods under the pressure of the United States, European Union and some other advanced industrialized countries.130

Reference must also be made to the bilateral agreement signed between India and China on the latter's accession to the WTO on 22 February 2000.131 The agreement came

128 The Congress proposed amendments regarding insurance in all sectors with a thrust on social benefit.
http://www.commerce.nic.in/wtoagchina.htm seen on June 10, 2013.
into operation on 11 December, 2001 – one month after China accepted the Doha protocol on 11 November 2001. China's entry into the WTO created hope as well as caution for Indian industry. Chinese entry was envisaged to strengthen the voice of developing countries in the WTO and enable them to articulate their demands of greater protection to domestic industries. India and China are competitors at the international level in the same export markets. Therefore, Chinese entry would invariably augment the bout of competition between the Indian and the Chinese products and confront the traditional Indian markets of such commodities as textiles, tea and jewellery. It is true that China's glaring entry into Indian markets would force India to go in for a second-generation market reforms. Labour market reforms, interest rate structure reforms and basic infrastructure reforms would lead to escalation of production and competition by reducing costs.

The landmark free bilateral trade agreement signed on 28 December 1999 between India and Sri Lanka, paving the way for large-scale liberalization of bilateral trade between the two countries, came into force on March 1, 2000.132

The BJP-led coalition government and thereafter the NDA government led by the same party, which were in power at the Centre in a row for six years starting from March 1998, went into putting up a 'paradigm shift' in the 1998-2004 tranche of disinvestment.133 Presenting the 1998-99 Union budget in the Lok Sabha on June 1, 1998 the Union Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha gave a clear picture of the government's stand on disinvestment by making some important declarations. The budget for 1998-99 had taken a credit for realizing Rs. 5,000 crores from disinvestment in the current financial year. The Union government decided to bring down the government's shareholding to 26 per cent in public sector enterprises (PSEs) in the generality of cases. However, in cases of PSEs, which were undergoing scanning for strategic sale, the government decided to retain the bulk of equities in those PSEs.

In a big boost to the privatization programme of the BJP-led government, the Central budget for 1999-2000 affirmed unflinchingly for the first time that 'privatisation and not merely disinvestment',134 would be the bedrock of the public sector policy. The Central government decided to go on with its existing strategy towards PSEs 'encompassing a judicious mix of strengthening of strategic units, privatising non-strategic ones through gradual disinvestment or strategic sale and devising viable rehabilitation strategies for week units.135 The Union Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha, during his budget speech on 27 February 1999, proposed to raise Rs. 10,000 crores for the Centre through disinvestment programme to finance the requirements of social and infrastructure sectors, to enhance the productivity and profitability of these enterprises and also to improve the situation in domestic capital markets. The government had

continued to give budgetary support to Central PSEs for rationalising manpower under the Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS), but that would be restricted steadily to loss making enterprises.

By November 1999 when the term of the Disinvestment Commission ended, it had completed examination of all 58 public sector units referred to it by the government, barring 6 cases, which were already under reference to BFIR prior to their reference to the Commission. The Commission recommended trade sale in 8 PSUs, strategic sale in 24, offers of share in 5, no disinvestment in 1, deferment of disinvestment in 11 and closure or sale of assets in 4 cases. The government, till August 1999, had accepted the Commission's recommendations in 9 cases, awaited its recommendations in 30 cases and deferred in 1 case. The government had so far implemented the recommendations of the Commission in 2 cases and the implementation was underway in 11 cases.136

Though privatization of some PSEs was the leitmotif of the government, one newspaper had pointed out "nothing has been privatized and the disinvestment programme that was supposed to raise Rs. 10,000 crores is sputtering."137 This is precisely due to the attempts of vested interests in the bureaucracy and political levels to retain control of public sector enterprises and the enormous patronage that goes with it. As yet another newspaper had said: "The ruling class united in its determination to resist any dilution of executive authority in favour of autonomous quasi-government bodies. The ministers and the civil services infrastructure control over 2.10 lakh crores in PSU assets. But to expect that they could collaborate enthusiastically in any effort that immediately culminates in dismantling this apparatus and sign their own warrant of extinction is naiveté of the highest order."138

The NDA government, in its first budget for 2000-2001, outlined a roadmap that could help drive reforms for privatisation. By 2000, the government's policy on disinvestment of public sector took a distinct shape that included restructuring and reviving potentially viable PSUs; closure of non-viable PSUs; bringing down government's stake to 26 per cent or lower, if necessary, in all non-strategic PSUs; and full protection of the interests of employees and workers.139 But these policy initiatives failed to serve the desired purposes as the disinvestment programme was hampered by the paucity of adequate resources under National Renewal Fund, strong resistance of workers from PSUs to opt for the VRS and delay in selecting the public enterprises for disinvestment. In order to overcome the problem associated with implementing the Voluntary Separation Scheme (VSS) in the sick and non-renewable PSUs, the government took the decision to put into effect mechanisms to mobilize resources from markets against the security of the assets of these PSUs and the funds, so collected, would be used to provide an adequate security-net to workers and employees coming under the scope and ambit of the VSS.

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A new Department for Disinvestment was set up in December 1999 as a nodal agency to evolve a systematic policy approach to disinvestment and privatisation and to give a new thrust to this programme.upholding the importance of strategic sales in identified PSUs. Establishment of an independent Ministry for Disinvestment proved the NDA government's unwavering thirst for effecting disinvestments in the PSUs more rapidly than its previous counterparts.

The NDA government reconstituted the Disinvestment Commission on 24 July 2001. In November, the Union Cabinet also set up a new Cabinet Committee on Economic Reforms to speed up second generation reforms. The NDA government's disinvestment drive could have come to a standstill, though not absolutely derailed, in October 2002 with the game plan of three Union ministers aimed at putting an abrasion on privatisation. In early September, the Union Minister for Disinvestment, Arun Shourie, had to concede some conciliatory grounds to his anti-disinvestment cabinet colleagues on the proposed disinvestments in the two profit-making public sector giant oil companies – the Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL) and the Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL). The Minister was forced under duress to put on hold the divestment programme in HPCL and BPCL for the next three months in an attempt to narrow down the differences within the cabinet with a revised proposal, especially in view of the demand put forth by the newly-elected Samata Party chief, George Fernandes, for giving a rethink to the spree of disinvestments that were going on in the NDA government. Fernandes launched an attack on the government over its disinvestment policy at the National Executive in New Delhi on September 1, 2002 insisting on the imperatives for the review of the existing policy mainly on security grounds. However, members of the Samata Party differed in their opinion on the party's approach to the NDA government.

Fernandes had some scores to settle with Railway Minister Nitish Kumar and taking advantage of the difference of opinion between Vajpayee and Advani over the disinvestment issue, he started to revive his falling position in the Samata Party and also in the NDA. Taking along the Petroleum Minister Ram Naik and Human Resource Development Minister Murli Manohar Joshi with him, Fernandes intended to chalk out plans for curbing the disinvestment drive of the government.

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140 The Disinvestment Commission was reconstituted vide Ministry of Disinvestment Resolution No. 11012/1/2000 Admn. dated 24th July, 2001 initially for a period of two years with Dr. R. H. Patil, chief of the Clearing Corporation of India, as the new Chairman along with four Part-time Members and one Member Secretary. Shri N. V. Iyer, Shri T. L. Sankar, Dr. V. V. Desai and Prof. K. R. S. Murthy were appointed as the four part-time Members of the Commission. G. Ganesh continued to be its Member Secretary. The terms of reference were almost the same as before. The Disinvestment Commission in 25 reports submitted between February 1997 and March 2004 recommended disinvestment through strategic sale in 59 cases, disinvestment other than strategic sale in 32 cases and closure was suggested in case of 4 PSUs. The term of the Commission was subsequently extended till 31st October 2004. The Commission ceased to exist from 1st November, 2004.

141 For detail of disinvestments in different concerns see Naib, n.133, pp.237-241.

142 The Hindu, September 2, 2002.
The anti-disinvestment lobby secured the support of the RSS in their battle against Shourie. RSS chief, K. S. Sudarshan, pulled up the government for its inconsiderate disinvestment policy and threatened ministers and officials holding anti-swadeshi stance with the possibility of being driven out from their positions. All that were meant for the dismissal of Arun Shourie and the dissenters seemed to be itching to join hands with the Congress for their purpose.

Leaders of different political shades within the NDA construed Vajpayee's stand on disinvestment in their own way. Those who contradicted Vajpayee on disinvestment issue, thought that his authority in the ruling NDA was at a low ebb and they even went to the length of visualizing a post-Vajpayee era in the BJP. On the other hand, leaders, close to Vajpayee, felt that he had taken the right decision in acceding to the dissidents' demand for a review of the government's existing disinvestment policy. With the polls looming in the background in Jammu and Kashmir and Gujarat in November-December 2002 and in the four states of Himachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura in February 2003, it was a rough ride for the Prime Minister to move forward with disinvestment overlooking the dissenting views of different constituents of the NDA, including his own party, the BJP. Besides, anti-disinvestment agitation gathered strength by other allies within the cabinet and by the Sangh Parivar and the Opposition outside the cabinet. The struggle fomented by the divergent views about disinvestment within the cabinet was 'the Prime Minister's proxy struggle to establish his authority'.

With the ending of the three months' time limit, Arun Shourie presented in Parliament a revised set of proposals on disinvestment in the oil companies on December 9, 2002. The minister's announcement about the government's resolution to move ahead with the process of privatisation of public sector oil companies in general and the sale of equity in the HPCL and the BPCL in particular, rocked Parliament forcing an adjournment in the Rajya Sabha and a walk-out by the Opposition in the Lok Sabha. The decision to fine-tune the disinvestment policy with a compromise formula was taken on December 6 at an informal meeting presided over by the Prime Minister. It was decided that the government would sell equity in the HPCL to a strategic partner, involving a transfer of management control, while equity in the BPCL would be sold through the public offer of shares leaving management control in the hands of the government.

Shourie's compromise formula met with serious challenges from the members of the Opposition benches. They argued that the HPCL and the BPCL were set up by the Acts of Parliament in 1974 and 1976 respectively. The executive could not be the sole authority to dilute government's stake in these oil companies bypassing the approval of Parliament. If it did so, that would be as good as the revocation of the two Acts of Parliament. Manmohan Singh and Pranab Mukherjee, the former Union Finance Ministers, in the Rajya Sabha questioned the validity of the government's action to repeal the nationalisation of the two oil companies without resorting to legislative measures.

144 The Hindu, December 10, 2002.
Shourie set aside the Opposition's view claiming that once incorporated, the companies' functions came to be guided by the provisos of the Companies Act and disinvestment falling short of a share transaction did not require prior sanction of Parliament. However, taking cognizance of the evasive attitude of even the members of the treasury benches towards his proposal, Shourie promised to obtain an authoritative opinion of the Attorney-General (AG) of India before going on with his plan. This promise, which Shourie made probably 'as a ritualistic concession to the authority of Parliament', backfired on him before long.

Before the crucial meeting of the CCD slated to be held on December 27, the Ministry of Disinvestment spelt out openly the course of action for disinvestment in the two public sector oil companies through the media. The government wanted to bring down its stake in the HPCL to 15 per cent from the existing 51 per cent by disposing of 34 per cent equity to a strategic partner and keeping 2 per cent equity reserved for allotment to the employees of the company at a concessional one-third price. And so far as the BPCL was concerned, the government planned to divest not less than 38 per cent of its current 66 per cent stake through a public offering and to reserve 2 per cent shares for being allotted to the company employees at the same lower rate resulting in the reduction of government holding to 26 per cent.

The CCD meeting was envisaged by many as an intended effort of Shourie to avoid debate over the advisability of strategic sale drifted by him. It was speculated that to acquire a green signal of the CCD for carrying out his much lobbied agenda of privatisation, he would have to admit defeat elsewhere. It was also assumed that he would have to concede the right of other PSUs to bid for the disinvested shares of HPCL and BPCL. Privatisation, in that case, would have no implication, as big PSUs like IOC and ONGC – with huge turnovers and comfortable cash reserves – would then come forward to purchase the shares on offer.

But as the speculation reached the culmination, the outcome of the CCD meeting let down Shourie. The CCD decided that the government would not accomplish disinvestment in HPCL and BPCL until it received the opinion of the AG on their legal status. Petroleum Minister Ram Naik set the tone of the meeting reminding the committee that the Minister of Disinvestment should act in compliance with his assurance that he had given to Parliament. Deputy Prime Minister Advani also spoke in the same voice. Noting the overtones of the views expressed by different members of the committee, the Prime Minister urged the decision to be further deferred to avoid any untoward incident of irregularity in the disinvestment exercise of HPCL and BPCL.

The government, on receiving the AG's opinion, decided to go slow with the privatization of these two profit-making and asset-rich government companies awaiting a debate in the Lok Sabha on the issue. Petroleum Minister Ram Naik exuded confidence that the government would continue to hold its equity in HPCL and BPCL and a final

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decision in this respect would be taken after the matter being discussed in the House sometime after the budget session.\textsuperscript{146}

The government's decision to proceed with the disinvestment of HPCL and BPCL in principle and reliance on the legal opinion given by the AG, without tabling that opinion in Parliament or otherwise making it public, had sparked a surcharged political atmosphere in Parliament leading to a showdown of strength between the Opposition and the government. Two NDA partners, the Samata Party and the JD (U), joined the ranks of the Opposition, comprising the Congress and the left parties, to attack the disinvestment policy. As soon as the Lok Sabha assembled on April 24 morning, the House witnessed a noisy scene with the vociferous Opposition members demanding a statement from the government on the justification behind the proposed disinvestment of HPCL and BPCL.

The government's main concern was alliance management in case the Opposition remained unyielding in seeking a discussion under Rule 184 of the Rules of Procedure of Parliament which necessitated a vote after debate. As the government was apprehending that the alliance partners would snipe at it on the issue of privatisation, the government resorted to the pre-emptive moves at coordination to outmanoeuver the combined effort of the Opposition to put the disinvestment issue on the boil during subsequent debates in Parliament.

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The government's disinvestment drive suffered a setback in September 2003 with the landmark judgment of the Supreme Court rejecting the government's decision to disinvest in the two oil majors without parliamentary approval as \textit{ultra vires}\textsuperscript{148} as PSUs created by an Act of Parliament, could not be sold out until such selling was ratified by Parliament.\textsuperscript{149}

\textsuperscript{146} The Tribune, March 9, 2003.
\textsuperscript{147} Lok Sabha, \textit{Bulletin-Part I (Brief Record of Proceedings)}, No. 304, April 24, 2003. \url{http://www.parliamentofindia.nic.in/ls/bulletin1/03/240403.html} seen on June 20, 2013.
\textsuperscript{149} Accepting the writ petitions filed by the Centre for Public Interest Litigation (CPIL) and the Oil Sector Officers' Association (OSOA) challenging the government's decision to disinvest stake in HPCL and BPCL without Parliament's approval, a two-member Bench of the Supreme Court comprising Justice S. Rajendra Babu and Justice G.P. Mathur ruled on September 16, 2003 that the government cannot go ahead with disinvestment in the two oil companies "without appropriate parliamentary legislation." (AIR 2003 SC 250). The judgment of the apex court in the cases of the two oil companies seemed to be a reversal of its early pronouncement in the 2002 BALCO case. But it was not so. The primary issue involved in the BALCO case was regarding the validity of the government's decision to disinvest and transfer 51 per cent
two oil companies, but also obfuscated the future of other Central and State PSUs awaiting disinvestment. The judgment and the controversy surrounding it sounded a great caution for the Centre as to the legality of going down the strategic sale route in the case of profit-making PSUs. A compromise within the ruling front appeared to set the process back on track in 2003 with a successful offering of 25 per cent of government's share in Maruti Udyog Limited through Initial Public Offering (IPO) on 12 June, then appeared to be renewed momentum. But the Supreme Court's ruling in the two oil companies' disinvestment case cast a shadow of doubt on the government's much propagated disinvestments policy for the time to come.

The NDA government found itself discomfited with the Supreme Court's ruling asking the government to seek parliamentary ratification before going for disinvestment in HPCL and BPCL and efforts to thrash out the broad contours of the disinvestment policy in the light of the new development did not pay off. The CCD met on October 3, 2003 with the Prime Minister to preside over it. The CCD meeting was preceded by hectic confabulations between Disinvestment Minister Arun Shourie and Law Minister Arun Jaitley followed by another discussion between Shourie and Deputy Prime Minister Advani on how to break the impasse. The CCD discussed the action plan finally prepared by the Law Ministry on the basis of detailed option paper submitted to it by the Department of Disinvestment but the CCD meeting failed to arrive at a conclusion on the breaking up of IOC. Instead, three alternatives came up for elaborate discussion in the meeting. The three options were: i) Judicial option – to go back to the Supreme Court for a review of its decision or for clarification on how the government should proceed with the disinvestment of the already identified PSUs. ii) Legislative option – to resolve the gridlock through arriving at a parliamentary consensus in favour of privatizing HPCL and BPCL. iii) Executive option – to explore the option of which other PSUs could be divested instead of HPCL and BPCL. A three-member committee was constituted with Disinvestment Minister Arun Shourie, Petroleum Minister Ram Naik and Law Minister Arun Jaitley. The committee was asked to go into further details of the options and to place its views before the cabinet within a period of three months.150

However, these options could not solve the problem. The only reasonable option for the government could be to mark PSUs other than HPCL and BPCL for disinvestment through the executive route. Filing of a review or clarification option appeared to be politically dangerous. An adverse ruling of the review Bench could have been the cause of major embarrassment for the NDA coalition in the election year. Moreover, welcoming the ruling of the highest court of the land, the Opposition parties, especially the Congress and the Left, flayed the government alleging that the government was purposefully diluting its stake to control the burgeoning fiscal deficit. Some of them even accused the government of protecting the interests of a section of the industry and a particular group in the oil sector. Many allies in the ruling NDA were not favourably disposed towards the government's disinvestment policy. To evolve a consensus in Parliament over the subject of disinvestment in the two oil corporations was equally

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of shares of BALCO. The question that arose for consideration in this case was, whether such a decision to disinvest was amenable to judicial review.

difficult in view of the existing configuration of the Upper House of Parliament in terms of members of each party represented in the House. The Congress, as it was the largest party in the Rajya Sabha with 64 members, decided to fight against oil sector privatization with all possible forces in the Upper House.

**Party-wise break-up of seats won by different political parties in the Rajya Sabha from 1996-98 to 2002-2004 (January) is given below:**

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<td>Total</td>
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Source: *Political Complexion of Rajya Sabha* (Table-iii, Chapter 10), p.299.

Though much of the reforms, put forward by the government prior to the WTO Agreement on Agriculture (AoA), had left the country's agricultural sector almost untouched with only a little direct effect on it, "the sector was affected indirectly by devaluation of exchange rate, liberalization of external trade and disprotection to industry.\(^{151}\) The new accord requiring "progressive reduction of market access barriers, export subsidies and domestic support\(^{152}\) in trade and production made it imperative for the Government of India to look forward for a comprehensive coordinated policy approach, not piecemeal approaches, to tackling the newly emerging threats of liberalization and globalization having long-term implication on Indian agriculture. With this thought in mind, the government came out with its first ever "technologically sound, economically viable, environmentally non-degrading and socially acceptable"\(^{153}\) National Agriculture Policy, integrating and coordinating 28 on-going Central schemes.


\(^{152}\) Anwarul Hoda, "WTO Agreement on Agriculture and India", Anwarul Hoda (ed), *WTO Agreement and Indian Agriculture*, Social Science Press, New Delhi, 2002, p.16.


[http://agricoop.nic.in/agpolicy02.htm](http://agricoop.nic.in/agpolicy02.htm) seen on June 22, 2013.
Among other major objectives, the National Policy on Agriculture sought to attain a growth rate of more than 4 per cent per annum over the next two decades. The CPI (M) and other left parties vehemently criticized policy making it responsible for the abject poverty and dehumanizing living conditions of hundreds of thousands of farmers forcing them to commit suicide.

The NDA government has brought about a policy shift in Indian agriculture from a Food First Regime to an Export First Regime, encouraging huge diversion of acreage and resources towards exportable cash crops. Besides having a detrimental effect on the food security front, unbridled conversion to cash crops which have higher costs of production, in the backdrop of declining institutional credit, made the peasantry vulnerable to debt traps. The high rates of suicides committed by peasants during the tenure of the NDA was an outcome of a combination of export-oriented agriculture and declining institutional credit, which were results of the NDA government's policies.

It needs to be understood that for each suicide committed by a farmer there were hundreds of others who were on the verge of doing so. Acute distress engulfed the agrarian economy, not only in states like Andhra Pradesh, from where the maximum suicide cases were reported, but also in states like Punjab, Haryana and Western Uttar Pradesh, which were hitherto considered to be relatively prosperous states. It is a great irony that the NDA government, which has been squarely responsible for this agrarian distress, is shouting from rooftops about a 'feel good factor' working in its favour across the country.

The functioning of the Public Distribution System (PDS) was the basic issue of economic platform discussions at the BJP's National Executive Committee meeting in early November 2001. A committee headed by the former Rajasthan Chief Minister, Shekhawat, took a critical view of the on-going policy position and argued for a major overhaul in policy matters. Of course, by that time, stockpile of food grains had increased over 65 million tones. Proper distribution of this added stock through PDS became a highly warranted political liability for the BJP. However, it was difficult for the BJP at that time to stop the flow of subsidy to Punjab, given the imminent assembly election in that state where the BJP was not in a secure position to win the election.

The BJP's preferred position had been incredibly unpopular with the states, including many of those ruled by some NDA partner. They argued that the Centre should not reject or defer the flow of subsidies until better facilities could be made available to them. BJP allies in Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab and West Bengal – the INLD, TDP, Akali Dal and Trinamool Congress – all opposed the proposed changes in subsidies on food and fertilizer. Others argued that given the paucity of funds available to the states for developmental works, the devolution of responsibilities to the states in the midway only would attract the collapse of PDS. Kerala Chief Minister A. K. Antony expressed his angst against the Centre, arguing that they were "tantamount to the abdication by the

154 The Union Agriculture Minister Nitish Kumar presented in Parliament on July 28, 2000 India's first ever National Policy on Agriculture seeking to uplift the rural sector in all areas taking into consideration the challenges arising out of economic liberalization and globalization.


For the BJP, this appeared to be an economically fascinating and politically expedient solution, as the states would then be blamed for the collapse of the PDS system.

In a further embarrassment to the BJP, already plagued with problems thrown up to it by its front organisations and dissenting allies in its way of going ahead with a range of policy issues, explosive revelation of defence scams, supported with video footage, by internet news service tehelka.com on March 13, 2001 rattled the ruling NDA to a great extent. The sting operation, christened the ‘Operation West End’ by the Tehelka Investigative Team (TIT), unearthed unbridled corruption at the higher echelons of the Indian government dragging morally degenerate politicians including the BJP president Bangaru Laxman and Samata Party president Jaya Jaitley, high-ranking army officers and middlemen into the high-profile defence scams that gripped the whole nation. Trinamool Congress chief and Railway Minister Mamata Banerjee not only quit the Union cabinet but from the NDA as well, leaving the ruling dispensation aflutter, demanding Fernandes' resignation from the Union cabinet on the Tehelka issue that reflected his alleged shenanigans in the Defence Ministry. Mamata Banerjee was vociferous in her opposition to Fernandes' continuance as Defence Minister seemingly to try and seize the moral high ground on transparency in governmental affairs. Though fight against corruption, that encompassed the government threatening its very integrity and credibility, surfaced on the agenda for her departure from the NDA, the real reason for adopting such tough stand against the ruling alliance lied somewhere else. A mercurial Mamata Banerjee dared to distance herself and her party from the blemished NDA as part of her efforts to make a dent in the vote shares of the Left Front in the crucial May 2001 assembly elections in West Bengal and to establish her party as a force to reckon with in West Bengal state politics.

Ramkrishna Hedge's Lok Shakti also parted company with the ruling NDA in protest against allowing tainted Samata Party leader George Fernandes to continue as the NDA convener. Senior BJP leader and Union Minister for Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution Santa Kumar pressed for the resignation of the party's Dalit president Bangaru Laxman even at the cost of being tagged as anti-Dalit. Bala Saheb Thackery of the Shiv Sena, a dependable ally of the BJP, criticised the cronyism of the government and wanted Brajesh Mishra, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, and others who had demeaned the Prime Minister's Office. Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister and TDP chief Chandrababu Naidu, though expressing his party's willingness to remain within the NDA, threatened tough action against corruption.

A great deal of speculation has gone into the reasons for Banerjee's resignation from the Union cabinet. Two main reasons being: first, that concerns the vote shares of the various parties and the second, more speculative, concerns Banerjee's evaluation of the political impact of Hindutva (especially on the nearly quarter of the West Bengal population which is Muslim), the adverse economic impact of the reforms on workers, peasants, small businesses, pensioners and other people dependent on small savings, etc., and the Tehelka episode.

wanted the truth to come out through a commission of inquiry. Both Bangaru Laxman and Jaya Jaitley, being in the eye of political storm for their alleged involvement in the shady defence deals, submitted their resignations following party directives. Fernandes was forced to quit the Defence Ministry under pressure from some unyielding allies like the BJD, the JD (U) and the TDP. The Prime Minister ordered a judicial inquiry to look into the scams that had put the NDA government on the spot. Spectacular departure of the Trinamool Congress contingent from the NDA with its 8 MPs, coming shortly after the PMK had walked out of the NDA and the Union government, decimated the government's strength to 262 with members of its core allies continuing support to it. The reduced strength, that pushed the government close to the brink, rendered the government's endurance susceptible to the continuous outside support of the TDP. Excessive dependence of the government on the TDP for retaining power led to intensify the latter's influence in monitoring policies of the government. The PMK, having 5 MPs, dumped the ruling alliance and removed its two ministers from the Union Council of Ministers to join the AIADMK-led front in February 2001 in the run-up to the upcoming assembly elections in Tamil Nadu due in May. Within a little while since the AIADMK-led front had clung on to power in Tamil Nadu, relation between the AIADMK and the PMK reached a simmering point with the advancement of the July 2001 biennial elections to the Rajya Sabha. Animosity between the two parties came to the fore when AIADMK General Secretary and Chief Minister Jayalalithaa refused to lend a sympathetic ear to PMK leader Dr. S. Ramadoss who wanted his son Dr. R. Ambumani to get elected to the Rajya Sabha from Tamil Nadu. That pejorative decision of Jayalalithaa led to the disintegration of the AIADMK-PMK alliance in Tamil Nadu without hampering the existence of the state government. Ramadoss ditched Jayalalithaa to wriggle out of the sticky situation in which he received "humiliating treatment" and gross indifference from Jayalalithaa despite all-out efforts by Ramadoss during election campaign to drum up support for the AIADMK-led front in Tamil Nadu. The PMK, four months after it had withdrawn from the NDA, came back to it in July 2001. It is important to note here that Mamata Banerjee's temporary alienation from the NDA too was nothing but crass political opportunism. Unsupportive political vibes for the Trinamool Congress, reflected in its poor performance in the May 2001 assembly elections in West Bengal with the Congress in tow as an electoral ally, constrained her to rejoin the NDA in August that year. In that election, the Trinamool Congress-Congress combine secured 86 seats (Trinamool Congress 60, Congress 26) against the Left Front that romped home to victory with 199 seats.

166 ibid, August 28, 2001.
The turn of events that followed in the aftermath of the Tahelka affairs provided a grand opportunity to the opposition parties for working out a strategy to push the BJP-led NDA government on the back foot. However, the opposition parties, including the Congress, failed to evolve a common course of action against the government due to variance in opinion among themselves. The four major left parties, viz., the Samajwadi Party and the JD (S) – once aligned to the foregoing United Front – gathered at Samajwadi Party president Mulayam Singh Yadav's New Delhi residence on March 15, 2001 to discuss the course of action to be taken for giving a new lease of life to the quiescent People's Front, also known as the Lok Morcha. The JD (S), mainly based in Karnataka, joined the People's Front to revive its sagging fortunes and thereby added some geographical diversity to it. That the future of the new scheme to rejuvenate the fledgling People's Front was heading towards a dead end became evident when some regional partners like the AGP, the INLD, the BSP, the RJD and the TDP – each of whom had already formed new political equations – chose to stay away from the meeting. Though the Congress had veered towards coalition over the years and realized its inexorability in varied political context, it was still dragging its feet on settling its mind on that issue. The CPI (M) leadership minced no words in expressing their consternation at the wavering Congress lacking direction in forming a coalition at the Centre with other parties. Surjeet lashed out at the Congress for its apathy towards the political exigency of forging a coalitions contending that the Congress "should prove its sincerity on the question of forming coalitions and fighting the economic policies of the NDA Government. The Lok Morcha will soon emerge as a 'powerful force', which would channelise the resentment of the people on the economic policies of the BJP-led Government."  

Early experience has shown that CPI (M)-led third force, consisting of non-BJP and non-Congress political parties, would be a mere rhetoric and a gimmick unless the former assumes a pan-Indian character like the Congress or the BJP to give an effective and qualitative leadership to bring regional and other left parties under its umbrella and to hold them together, specially in a bipolar party system in Indian national scenario. Political-Organisational Report adopted at the 17th Party Congress of the CPI (M), held at Hyderabad from March 19-24, 2002 dealt in detail with this objective.  

Meanwhile the NDA constituents held anti-Tehelka rallies in Mumbai, Bangalore, Lucknow and Bhubaneswar between April 1 and April 15, 2001 to express solidarity with the BJP and Samata Party offset the challenges the opposition parties had thrown to the government in the wake of the Tehelka. But it could not yield any remarkable result as the allies were not always there to lend support for self interest. The DMK steered clear of the rallies apprehending its downside effect on the forthcoming assembly elections in Tamil Nadu as its participation in the anti-Tehelka rally would be an attempt to reach out to tainted persons that would scar its anti-corruption campaign on which it was banking to face the assembly polls in the state. The TDP refrained from joining the rally arguing its case of being a non-formal ally of the NDA and extending only issue-based support to the government from outside. The JD (U), another ally, decided not to join the Bangalore rally on April 5. JD (U) leader and former Union

Minister Ramakrishna Hedge even declared that he was contemplating of severing connections with the NDA in protest against allowing tainted Samata Party leader George Fernandes to continue as the convener of the NDA. Another important ally, the Shiv Sena, which presented itself in the Delhi rally, curiously, had nothing to do with the Mumbai rally scheduled to be held on April 8 as the rally had to be withdrawn at the behest of Shiv Sena supremo Bala Saheb Thackeray. Lack of cohesion, partly emanating from the despondency and grievances among the allies and partly from the failure of the ruling NDA to act in response to their grievances, raised question as to the intrinsic capacity of the NDA to buttress the crumbling alliance itself.

The PMK returned to the NDA in July 2001 and the Trinamool Congress in August after bitter experience bringing on dejection that they had felt in their new association with the AIADMK and the Congress in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal respectively. Though the homecoming of the two allies added “the benefit of numbers” to the ruling elite at the Centre, it did not bring in much cheer to the NDA leadership as a new problem was brewing for it from another ally – the INLD of Om Prakash Chautala in Haryana – over the inclusion of RLD leader Ajit Singh in the ruling dispensation. Ajit Singh, the Jat leader who joined the NDA in July 2001, was rewarded with a slot in the Union cabinet as the Minister for Agriculture in return for his electoral pact with the BJP for the upcoming UP assembly elections. Ajit Singh's entry into the NDA upset the apple cart of INLD supremo and Haryana Chief Minister Om Prakash Chautala who wanted to undermine the clout of the former as a 'kisan leader'. Chautala, regardless of his veiled criticism against the NDA, continued to stay in it as no alternative coalition that could ensure better payoffs was available to him at that moment. Both the Jat leaders, Ajit Singh and Chautala, had played the card of regional and caste politics in the name of setting up a separate state in western UP in the run-up to the forthcoming assembly elections of UP. Ajit Singh tried to garner support for 'Harit Pradesh' for which he had been spearheading the movement for over two decades. Thus, the deal between Chautala and Ajit Singh complicated NDA politics.

With hardly any possibility of regaining power in UP, the BJP rested heavily on its alliance with Ajit Singh having sway over the majority of Jat voters of western UP. On the other hand, Chautala's weight in the NDA government at the Centre could not be altogether ignored in view of his party's strength in the Lok Sabha, as the INLD had five MPs in the Lower House. Moreover, the BJP itself was divided on the contentious issue of dividing UP for a second time. While Chief Minister Rajnath Singh expressed his willingness to handle the sensitive issue with an open mind, top BJP leaders decided to put the issue on the back burner for the time being apprehending a probable fall in the party's support base in that region where the Muslims shared about 41 per cent of the total population. The BJP and the RLD eventually fought the assembly elections as a combined force ignoring Chautala's challenge.

The Convener of the NDA and Samata Party leader Fernandes was reinducted in the Council of Ministers in October 2001 by Vajpayee, giving him a clean chit in the Tehelka affairs, even before the Commission submitted the final report. "There is no case against Fernandes. He had resigned on his own. Nothing incriminating against him has come to light during the proceedings of the Venkataswami Commission. Even the notice given by the commission to him does not relate to any charges.\textsuperscript{173}" Mamata Banerjee made a dramatic volte-face from her earlier opposition to Fernandes saying "There could not have been a better choice. The NDA will definitely be strengthened particularly at a time when the country needs a full time defence minister.\textsuperscript{174} Although the Opposition cried foul over the Prime Minister's siding with Fernandes – but what made him indispensable to the NDA was his ability as 'trouble shooter' whenever it had cropped up between the BJP and some other ally of the NDA. He had played a crucial role in bringing a disgruntled ally back to the ruling dispensation whenever they had walked out of it, whether it was the PMK or the Trinamool Congress.

The Congress and the left parties took exception to Fernandes' reinduction in the Defence Ministry. Congress president Sonia Gandhi rapped the NDA government on 15 October 2001 for entrusting the responsibility of the country's security to Fernandes who had to quit on corruption charges. "There are other able and experienced persons who could take over this responsibility", she pointed out and added that "such an attitude over the country's security was shameful\textsuperscript{175} The All India Congress Committee (AICC) chief spokesperson, S. Jaipal Reddy described Fernandes' reinstatement as "distortion, perversion and subversion of all norms and forms of public life.\textsuperscript{176} Reddy criticized Vajpayee for showing complete disregard for public morality and submitting to the pressure of detractors in bringing Fernandes back to his previous position. The Congress decided to draw public attention to this issue through campaigns.

The Polit Bureau of the CPI (M), in a Press Statement issued on 15 October 2001, expressed its strong reservation against Fernandes's reinduction in the Union cabinet, by pointing out by that action the BJP-led government had lost all credibility which was an "opportunistic combine.\textsuperscript{177}

In the state election, new political equation that developed through the alliance between the BJP and the RLD did not augur well for a beleaguered BJP in UP. The irony was that the BJP lost the polls in UP. In the 2002 assembly elections, the BJP failed to win a plurality of assembly seats for the first time since 1991 and finished with 88 seats as the third largest party in the 403-member Vidhan Sabha. Though Mulayam Singh's Samajwadi Party emerged as the single largest party with 143 seats, it could not form a

\textsuperscript{173} The Telegraph, October 16, 2001.
\textsuperscript{174} ibid.
\textsuperscript{176} ibid.
government due to opposition of both the BJP and the BSP.\textsuperscript{178} The BSP finished a distant second bagging 98 seats, ten more than the BJP and the Congress recorded its worst performance in recent years winning a mere 25 seats, 8 less than its previous tally. 14 seats went to Ajit Singh's RLD, while Chautala's INLD was completely washed out with no scoring.\textsuperscript{179} Two months of deal-making had followed the February elections which had left no party with majority in the Lower House of the UP state legislature. A BSP-BJP coalition government was installed in May 2002 with Mayawati as the Chief Minister who assumed office for the third time and "succeeded in the novelty of completing more than one year in office for the first time."\textsuperscript{180} The BJP joined the BSP-led Mayawati government to widen its support base among lower-caste Hindus. However, the alliance collapsed in August 2003 following withdrawal of support by the BJP.\textsuperscript{181}

The Punjab, Uttaranchal and Manipur also went to polls along with Uttar Pradesh in February 2002. Election results of all these states\textsuperscript{182} showed a serious debacle for the BJP which was in power at the Centre. In the Punjab, the Congress made a resounding victory with 62 seats in the 117-member House and wrested power from the SAD-BJP combine which jointly captured 44 seats (SAD 41 and BJP 3 ). In Uttaranchal, the Congress won the first assembly polls and the party was in majority with 36 seats in the 70-member House. The BJP had to remain satisfied with only 19 seats out of 69 contested by it. In Manipur, the Congress became the largest party with 20 seats, while the Federal Party of Manipur (FPM) came second with 13 seats in the assembly consisting of 60 members. The Secular Progressive Front (SPF), a post-electoral alliance formed by the Congress, the Manipur State Congress Party (MSCP), the CPI and the NCP, instituted a Congress-led government, ending the nine-month long spell of the President's Rule.

A massive communal flare-up in Gujarat following the Godhra carnage,\textsuperscript{183} that rocked the entire nation, put the BJP in a piquant situation. 58 persons traveling by the Ahmedabad-bound Sabarmati Express were burnt alive in coach No. S-6 at Godhra Railway Station on the morning of 27 February 2002. The resulting riots led to the trouncing of the BJP in the assembly elections in four states, bruised the party's image at national and international levels. The backdrop, in which the ghastly Godhra genocide took place, could be traced in early 2002 when the RSS, the ideological parent and mentor of the BJP, demanded that the Centre should transfer 67 acres of 'undisputed

\textsuperscript{179} Statistical Report On General Election, 2002 To The Legislative Assembly Of Uttar Pradesh, Election Commission of India, New Delhi, pp.16-19.
\textsuperscript{180} Christophe Jaffrelot, \textit{Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability}, Permanent Black, Delhi, 2005, p.157.
\textsuperscript{181} Mayawati's relation with the BJP turned edgy ever since the Taj Heritage Corridor controversy came to the fore. The fall of the Mayawati government paved the way for Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav to form the government in September with the support of Independents and other small parties. The BJP, which wanted to avert fresh election, remained in the background but called the shots through 37 disgruntled legislators of the BSP who joined the Samajwadi Party to make Mulayam to the seat of power.
\textsuperscript{182} See the 2002 Assembly election results of the Punjab, Uttaranchal and Manipur at the Election Commission's website www.eci.nic.in.
land around the site of the razed Babri Masjid to the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas for building the Ram temple and set a deadline of March 15 for this. VHP organised 'kar seva' (voluntary labour) at Ayodhya to that end. Most of the 'kar sevaks' were drawn from Gujarat which was incidentally the only BJP-ruled state at that time. About 2000 volunteers from Gujarat thronged Ayodhya to render 'kar seva'. The VHP and the Bajrang Dal, backed by the BJP, called for a state-wide bandh on 28 February and an all-India strike on 1 March 2002 to avenge the Godhra pogrom. The strikes inflicted intensive violence on Muslims resulting in massive communal riots in the state spreading over 26 cities and small towns including Ahmedabad, Baroda and Rajkot. Curfew was clamped on all these cities and towns. The Saurashtra region, which had largely been free from communal tensions in the past, this time could not keep itself away from communal conflagration. The BJP, instead of grappling with the issue of post-Godhra situation and assuaging the victims' fears, tried to hush up the "imperfectly hidden complicity" of the Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi in the post-Godhra carnage.

In a rare show of solidarity, the opposition parties, cutting across the Right-Left spectrum, moved a censure motion to corner the Vajpayee government on the Gujarat issue that put the BJP in a somewhat arduous situation. Ram Vilas Paswan's Lok Janshakti Party was the first to strike a blow to the ruling NDA on that issue and he resigned from the Union cabinet as Coal Minister on April 29, a day before the Opposition-sponsored censure motion being tabled in the Lok Sabha for debate. Apprehending that others might follow, the government garnered support from the allies. Calculations were rife and concerns both for BJP as well as for their respective regional parties initiated the policies..

Discussing the censure motion, the ruling NDA came in for scathing attack from both the Opposition and its own allies for failing to halt bloodbath in Gujarat even two months after the Godhra carnage. Opposition members led by Congress president Sonia Gandhi demanded immediate change in the leadership of the state. They targeted the Prime Minister accusing him of shielding Narendra Modi, the Chief Minister of Gujarat, and indulging in double speak by shifting his statement on the Gujarat issue. Priya Ranjan Dasmunsi, S. Jaipal Reddy of the Congress, and Somnath Chatterjee of the CPI (M) targeted the Prime Minister. TDP's K. Yerrannaidu and Mamata Banerjee of Trinamool Congress were more against Modi than Vajpayee.

The Home Minister assured them that he would convey their concern to the Prime Minister. "Insofar as the issues raised by Shri Somnath Chatterjee, quoting from the White Paper of the BJP, are concerned," the Home Minister said, "I can only say that these are matters which I have referred to and replied in detail before the Liberhan

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Commission. Nevertheless, the Opposition members were not satisfied with the Home Minister's answer and they staged a walk out.

Polemics raged the House over the warding of a fresh resolution drafted by the Deputy Leader of the Congress, Shivraj Patil, and the censure motion had a rough ride when it was put to vote in the Lok Sabha on the insistence of the Opposition. Contradicting all the hopes of the Opposition, the motion was disapproved with 276 members opposing it against 182.  

A similar motion, admitted by the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha on 24 April 2002 under Rule 170, also entails voting like Rule 184, came up before the House on 2 May 2002 for its consideration. Discussions on the motion continued on 3 and 6 May. The motion was unanimously adopted in the Rajya Sabha on 6 May.

It must be noted here that political compulsions appeared to be the overriding concern to the NDA partners in choosing their votes for or against the censure motion rather than the intrusive impact of their actions on the coalition. With two years left for the next assembly elections in Andhra Pradesh, the TDP, which was in power in the state since 1994, tiptoed around the issue of the censure motion and was mindful of the possibility of losing substantial Muslim votes in the state to the Congress. Though the TDP abstained from voting in the censure motion, its nonstop outside support to the NDA government impacted badly on its performance in the 2004 assembly elections in which the Congress swept the polls bagging 185 seats of its own and a three-fourths majority of 226 seats (TRS-26, CPI(M)-9 and CPI-6) in the 294-member House. The Congress wrested power in the state breaking the over nine-year rule of the TDP in Andhra Pradesh. The Trinamool Congress, still recovering from the debacle in the West Bengal assembly elections held in 2001, had no electoral compulsion and voted for the government. The National Conference had a problem akin to that of the TDP. Elections in Jammu and Kashmir were due in late 2002 and the party could not dare to alienate itself from the state's majority Muslim community. At the same time, the party faced double anti-incumbency backlash – being in power both at the Centre and the state. The DMK, which was critical of the government over the Gujarat holocaust, was forced to vote with the government because it did not want to be bracketed with its arch rival, the AIADMK, on the contours of political divide. JD (U) Parliamentary Party leader Devendra Prasad Yadav's willful abstention from voting, though he was present in the House, reflected a clear division within the party. Prasad, not being inducted in the cabinet, was at loggerheads with the party president and Union Labour Minister Sharad Yadav over the party's stand on the censure motion.

The censure motion was a litmus test for the survival of the government. Although the government did survive, it would be flawed to assume that it gathered strength after the debate. In the past, the BJP had shown the guts to shrug off preposterous demands by the allies. But this time, the allies, hitherto supposed to be

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187 *ibid.*
188 *The Tribune*, May 2, 2002.
reliable, began to play truant. If anything, the voting pattern of the allies in the censure motion proved that many alliance partners were forced to vote with the government as they had no choice but to stick to the NDA despite the BJP's firm attitude towards Hindutva. The Opposition remained united and though there was no change in the number of Opposition members, the censure motion boosted their morale.

In the Rajya Sabha, the government associated itself with Rule 170 motion and thereby deprived the Opposition of its advantage of numerical superiority that flummoxed the left parties. However, by endorsing the motion the government also committed itself to taking certain steps in the state under Article 355 of the Constitution. The government patched up unanimity in the Rajya Sabha to save its face or to quiet down the charged Opposition as it was not in majority in that House.

The inner contradiction became exposed as the BJP's mood vacillated between two diametrically opposite choices – secular credentials and Hindutva – according to needs. While Vajpayee primed for the need of upholding his secular image to earn the faith of the NDA partners, the BJP, led by Modi in Gujarat, needed Hindutva to win elections in the state. Though elections in Gujarat were not due in 2002, reinforcement of the rioters' organisations at the highest level signified that the assembly elections were imminent in the state. Preparation for holding early elections was underway by the Hindu nationalist movement "with strong-arm tactics."  

But this aim was nullified by the Election Commission and later by the Supreme Court on the grounds of deteriorating law and order situation, and riding on the wave of "aggressive nationalism", the BJP returned to power with a landslide victory in December 2002. The party won 127 seats out of a total of 182 in the House, totally crushing the Congress challenge. The Congress, which hoped to give at least a close fight to the ruling party, ended with 51 seats, two less than what it had won in 1998 and 12 less than its strength when the assembly was dissolved in July. The JD (U) and Independents won two seats each. The left parties drew a blank. Under the spell of Modi's carefully cultivated aura of being a hard-core Hindu nationalist, the BJP not only improved its earlier best of two-thirds majority with 121 seats in the 1995 elections, but also crossed the 50 percent threshold in its vote share for the first time, registering an absolute majority both in terms of seats won and the votes polled by the party. Modi took over the reins of the state government as Chief Minister on 22 December 2002. Though the BJP did not succeed in establishing Hindu rule either at the Centre or in Gujarat, it was alleged that "the BJP's rise weakened the already threatened position of Muslims within the Indian regime."

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Nevertheless, the withdrawal of the National Conference from the NDA brought problems for the government. Advani's hard-line approach to the All Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC), being incompatible with the peace-making approach of Vajpayee, was not acceptable to the parties aligned with the BJP-led NDA. Though the National Conference was a coalition partner at the Centre, a note of discord crept into the relations between the two parties that held different views about initiating a dialogue with the APHC. The condemnation of the 'healing touch policy' of the PDP-Congress government by the BJP's central leadership as being 'terrorist friendly' widened the disagreement between the National Conference and the BJP.

The withdrawal of the National Conference from the NDA was not surprising as it fell out with the Central government over the latter's assistance to the Mufti Mohammad Sayeed-led People's Democratic Party (PDP)-Congress coalition government and pulled out of the NDA severing its five-year-old ties with the same. There appeared to be a widespread belief among National Conference activists that the Prevention of Terrorist Activities Act (POTA) and communal riots in Gujarat could have been handled in a better way sensing the Muslims' vociferous opposition to the party supporting the Vajpayee government on such contentious issues. They believed that the party's hopes for winning the next parliamentary elections, scheduled to be held in 2004, could have been frustrated by the objections raised by the Muslims against the party's excessive hobnobbing with the BJP.

Though the opposition parties were well aware of the fact that the government could not be pulled down amidst its majority in the House, Sonia Gandhi moved the motion with an eye to the November-December 2003 assembly elections in Mizoram, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Delhi. The opposition parties visualized a precipitous decline in the NDA's fortunes in these elections due to the failures of the Centre in different spheres of governmental responsibilities. The ruling coalition was expected to bring forward the general election to early next year providing its convincing win in some of the states going to polls. However, the BJP scored a striking performance in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. The term of the 13th Lok Sabha was to expire on 19 October 2004, but, it was dissolved on 6 February 2004, eight months and twelve days before the expiry of its term, setting the stage for the next parliamentary elections. Elections for the 14th Lok Sabha were declared to be held in four phases, on April 20 and 26 and May 5 and 10 of 2004.

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195 The National Conference joined the NDA in 1998 to secure the maximum possible assistance from the Centre for the development of the state. But the excessively close link with the Centre did not augur well for the party's image. The party was under siege since its defeat in the October 2002 assembly elections that brought a PDP-Congress coalition government to power. The activists of the National Conference accused Vajpayee and Advani of hijacking the party's interests in the name of holding free and fair elections in Jammu and Kashmir.
197 Talluru Sreenivas, Globalization And Emerging India, Discovery Publishing House, New Delhi, 2006, p.31.
It is interesting to note that the election to the 14th Lok sabha, like the previous ones, was not necessitated by the collapse of the incumbent government. The NDA government decided to go to election in advance to influence the electorate, especially the middle class voters, by a projected feel-good factor and widen chances of getting more votes rather than to avoid immediate collapse. Advani undertook the 'Bharat Uday Yatra' in March-April 2004 before the parliamentary elections in an attempt to mobilize support for the BJP-led NDA coalition under the ruse of the BJP's grandiose 'India Shining' slogan. He began his yatras from Kanyakumari of Tamil Nadu on 10 March 2004 and entered Amritsar in Punjab on March 25. After five days' hault, Advani kicked off the second phase of his yatras from Porbandar of Gujarat that culminated at Puri in Orissa on 14 April touching the four corners of India. Advani was over-confident of the NDA securing a majority in the forthcoming parliamentary elections. He hoped that the government’s achievements on the development plank including India's improved relations with both the United States and Pakistan; all-time high popularity of the Prime Minister; and upward movement of the economy with a steady increase in the foreign exchange reserves and growth in the GDP; construction of nationwide network of world-class highways and revolution in telecommunication would favour the NDA to retain power at the Centre. Furthermore, the BJP scored an impressive performance in the three of the four assembly polls in December 2003 beyond its wildest dreams and formed governments in Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, except Delhi which went to the Congress. Advani was also enthused by media reports and opinion polls predicting an easy win for the NDA, provided that elections were held during the first half of 2004.

However, the 'India Shining' slogan turned to be a high drama without any significance. The blown of picture took no notice of the burgeoning problems of massive unemployment, de-industrialization, illiteracy, poor health, inadequate housing and nose diving poverty and communal tensions of organized riots.

The year 2004 went down as a landmark in the annals of the history of the Congress Party since it had veered off its half-a-century-old political tradition of contesting elections on its own. The Congress, following a conscious decision to adopt a coalition strategy, forged an electoral alliance for the first time on broader spectrum with like-minded parties to remain in the saddle of national politics. The Congress and its allies, won a euphoric victory in May 2004 and rode to power ending the BJP-led NDA rule at the Centre to usher in a new regime by post-electoral alliance, called the United Progressive Alliance (UPA). The 19-party UPA combine won 222 seats based on 36.53 per cent of votes. The NDA, this time a 13-party coalition, captured 189 seats and 35.88 per cent of votes, with its lead party, the BJP, winning 138 seats (down by 44 seats) and 22.16 per cent of votes (down by 1.6 per cent). The UPA won the elections by a whisker in terms of percentage of votes, but gained 33 seats more than the NDA, thanks to the first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system of the country. Right choice of partners in forging electoral alliances gave the Congress a clear edge over the BJP to be the single largest party short of a clear majority. The BJP lost vote share in part because of the dissatisfaction of India's rural poor and socially marginalized communities with the 'India Shining' slogan.

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Shining’ slogan of the BJP that failed to fulfill the substantive needs of their everyday life. The prosperities of splendid city life had not filtered down to them. The Congress gained vote share in part because of the appeal it made to the rural poor and minority community voters for establishing a secular and progressive government.199 The true nature of the newly formed UPA was reflected in “a variety of intrastate spatial alliances as well as ideological commonalities (anti-BJP) and ideological compromises (on economic policy between the Congress and the left).”200

Results of the Fourteenth Lok Sabha elections - 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTY</th>
<th>CANDIDATES</th>
<th>VALID</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CONTESTED</td>
<td>WON</td>
<td>VOTE %</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 BJP</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>22.16%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 BSP</td>
<td>435</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5.33%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 CPI</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.41%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 CPM</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>5.66%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 INC</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>26.53%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 NCP</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.80%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATIONAL PARTIES :</td>
<td>1351</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>62.89%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STATE PARTIES :</td>
<td>801</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>28.90%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REGISTERED</td>
<td>898</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.96%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Unrecognised) PARTIES :</td>
<td>1351</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>62.89%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDEPENDENTS :</td>
<td>2385</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL :</td>
<td>5435</td>
<td>543</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Net Effect of Change in Alliances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Congress Alliance (UPA)</th>
<th>National Democratic Alliance (NDA)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seats</td>
<td>Vote (Per Cent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New allies added in 2004</td>
<td>49 6.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliances of 1999 dropped</td>
<td>3 2.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net Gain/Loss (+) (-)</td>
<td>+46 3.52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: New allies of the Congress are: NCP, TRS, DMK, MDMK, PMK, LJNP, PDP and JMM
Old Congress allies now dropped include: RLD and AIADMK
New allies of the NDA are: AIADMK, SDF, MNF, IFDP and NPF
Old NDA allies now dropped include: DMK, MDMK, PMK, INLD and LJNP
LJNP (Lok Janshakti Party) was formed after the 1999 Lok Sabha Elections and in 1999 it was a part of JD (U).


199 Susanne Hoeber Rudolph and Lloyd I. Rudolph, "Congress Learns to Lose: From a One-Party Dominant to a Multiparty System in India", Edward Friedman and Joseph Wong (eds), Political Transitions in Dominant Party Systems: Learning to Lose, Routledge, Oxon, 2008, p.34.
On May 15, 2004, Sonia Gandhi was unanimously elected the leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party. Preliminary discussions between Sonia Gandhi and President Kalam on May 18 over formation of the government fuelled speculation in the political circle that Sonia Gandhi could, in all possibilities, be India's new Prime Minister. BJP leaders tried to whip up an anti-Sonia emotion on the ground of her foreign origin to pre-empt her endeavour toward clinching the country's top political post. Sonia put all the speculations at rest by making a startling declaration that she would not take over as the Prime Minister and nominated her party colleague, Oxbridge-educated economist, Dr. Manmohan Singh for that. Moreover, it was rather a well thought-out plan on her part to establish her commanding authority behind the scenes stemming from her position as the UPA Chairperson – the lynchpin in the left-leaning UPA coalition government. She had the political wisdom to realize that the left parties, by ingenious devices, would exert pressure on the government at the Centre to keep it on tenterhooks on different issues and thereby create resistance to its smooth sailing in order to achieve narrow political objectives of their own. She thought that as the UPA Chairperson, she would be able to wield considerable political clout to influence governmental decisions in such a way as to retain cohesion within the coalition by sorting out differences among its stakeholders – the Congress and its allies and the left parties as well. Sonia's qualms about the left parties became real when they withdrew support to the Manmohan Singh government on the eve of the controversial Indo-US nuclear deal. “In fact, Sonia did not renounce everything. In a master stroke, while she allowed Manmohan Singh to essentially run the government, she did have the last word on important policy decisions. She was also about to create an instrument through which she could pursue her aspirations for empowering the poorer sections of society: her own policy unit.”

With the external support given by 61 members of the left parties, the Congress-led UPA formed a government on 22 May 2004 with Dr. Manmohan Singh at its head. The new government consisted of 28 Cabinet Ministers, of whom 18 were from the Congress, 39 Ministers of State among whom ten were given independent charge. The DMK had the second largest stake in the cabinet with three Cabinet Ministers followed by two of the RJD and one each from the NCP, the LJP, the TRS, the JMM and the PMK. The lion's share of eight of the ten ministers with independent charge went to the Congress, while the NCP and the RJD shared the other two. Of the 29 Ministers of State, sixteen were from the Congress followed by five from the RJD, four from the DMK and one each from the NCP, the TRS, the PMK and the Indian Union Muslim League. As the leading party of the alliance, the Congress got the largest share of 42 ministers in the Council of Ministers. The RJD got eight, the DMK seven, the NCP three, the PMK and the TRS two each and one each went to the LJP, the JMM and the Indian Union Muslim League.

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201 In actuality, it was no 'inner voice' that directed her to take such a step but she had to alienate the traditional Indian mind with a xenophobia that prompted her to set up Dr. Singh as a satellite.

Party-wise allocation of government portfolios, 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Cabinet Minister</th>
<th>Minister of State</th>
<th>Minister of State</th>
<th>Council of Ministers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Independent charge)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJD</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DMK</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCP</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMK</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LJP</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JMM</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IUML</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


CPI (M) Central Committee, in its meeting held on 16-17 May 2004, decided to extend outside support to the Congress-led UPA government without joining it. It further resolved that decisions on the proposals for the Common Minimum Programme (CMP) would be finally accepted only after their proper examination by the Polit Bureau of the party. The Central Committee ruled out the party's alliance with the Congress in these elections in consideration of the pro-bourgeois economic policies followed by the Congress over a long period. The CPI (M) was against shouldering the responsibility of the liberal economic policies of the Congress-led UPA government "in the name of functioning a stable government."203 The decision of supporting the government from outside was consequential to the concrete tactical line adopted by the party in the 17th Party Congress. The CPI (M) had three objectives as election strategies: "the defeat of the BJP-led alliance, formation of a secular government at the Centre and strengthening the CPI (M) and the Left in parliament."204 By supporting the government from the outside, they would have an effective control over the functioning of the government and to share the payoffs without taking the risk for the lapses of the government.

Like its predecessor, the UPA (on May 27, 2004) came out with a comprehensive CMP, unanimously accepted by all its allies.205 The UPA government was committed to fulfill during its five-year tenure the promises made in the CMP which was based on the six basic principles of governance. These were:

1. to preserve, protect and promote social harmony and to enforce the law without fear or favour to deal with all obstructionist and fundamentalist elements who seek to disturb solidarity and peace.


205 Inclusion of pro-people policies in the CMP was defended by interpreting the outcome of the 14th Lok Sabha elections as the people's mandate for 'secular and progressive forces, for parties wedded to the welfare of the farmers, agricultural labour, weavers, workers and weaker sections of society, for parties irrevocably committed to the well-being of the common man across the country.'
2. to ensure that the economy grows at least 7.8 per cent in a sustained manner over a decade and more in a manner that generates employment so that each family is assured of a safe and viable livelihood.
3. to enhance the welfare and well-being of farmers, farm labour and workers, particularly those in the unorganized sector and assure a secure future for their families in every respect.
4. to finally empower women politically, educationally and legally.
5. to provide for full equality of opportunity, particularly in education and employment, for scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, OBCs and religious minorities.
6. to unleash the creative energies of entrepreneurs, businessmen, scientists, engineers and all other professionals and productive forces of society.

The Central government constituted a National Advisory Council (NAC) in June 2004 with Congress president and UPA Chairperson Sonia Gandhi as its head to oversee the progress of the implementation of the CMP of the government. The UPA-Left Coordination Committee was set up in August 2004 as a forum to reduce tensions between partners and to minimize chances of airing differences publicly. Left parties in the Lok Sabha had formed a separate Coordination Committee to maintain daily contact with the UPA Coordination Committee. The CPI (M) had a three-pronged approach to the government – first, it wanted the government to formulate policies within the ambit of the CMP already approved by it; second, the party would oppose decisions taken by the government flouting the CMP or public interest; and third, the Left Front would continue to articulate alternative policies and not confine itself just to the CMP.

The Prime Minister, on May 27, 2004 disbanded the Ministry of Disinvestment without scraping the Department of Disinvestment which was brought hereafter under the supervision of the Finance Ministry. Reviewing the NDA government’s disinvestment policy, that ignited controversy in several cases for lacking in transparency, the UPA government laid stress on selective privatization following a transparent process of evaluation.

The UPA government had a bumpy ride as it was saddled with the twin problems of keeping the left parties in good humour to sustain their support needed for the government to remain in power and of accommodating diverse interests of its own constituents to avert schisms and tensions within the ruling coalition. That the left Parties’ support to the government might not be taken for granted in all cases became apparent from their disapprobation of the budget proposals made by Union Finance Minister P. Chidambaram in his budget speech for the fiscal 2004-2005. In what could be construed as a direct challenge from the left parties to the government’s drives for reforms in the economy, the Polit Bureau of the CPI (M) expressed concern in a statement issued on July 8, 2004.
Politics in states doing this time depicted that in the wake of the assembly polls in Maharastra, held in October 2004, there developed an ugly confrontation between the Congress and the NCP – two major allies of the polls – that reached a feverish pitch with both the parties sparring over the appointment of Chief Minister in the state. The Congress-NCP combine jointly won 140 seats in the 288-member assembly – Congress 69 and NCP 71. The last seat for the alliance went to the Republican Party of India (Athavale).

Results of the Maharastra Legislative Assembly Elections, 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parties</th>
<th>Number of seats contested</th>
<th>Number of seats won</th>
<th>% of valid votes polled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BJP</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>13.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSP</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPI</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPM</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INC</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>21.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCP</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>18.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHS</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>19.97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RPI (A)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IND</td>
<td>1183</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14.05%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


People's mandate, as reflected in the election results, claimed the moral high ground for the NCP to get in the Chief Minister's post. The NCP emerged as the single largest party in the elections. The Congress, however, candidly refused to honour the NCP’s rightful claim to its cost. The persistent stand-off between the two allied partners over the highly sensitive issue was resolved with both the parties reaching a compromise over formation of the government in the state. Following the compromise, Congress leader Vilasrao Deshmukh was appointed as Chief Minister and R. R. Patil of the NCP became the Deputy Chief Minister.\(^{209}\)

There is nothing new in the demands of coveted portfolios by the ministers but regional politics came to the forefront over this. Centrifugal tendency, arising out of pressure-tactics used by regional partners to strengthen their position inside the coalition, outstripped the Prime Minister's ability to arrest its presence landing the government in a piquant situation on numerous occasions. It was not only the left parties which created problems for the government, but a clutch of smaller constituents of the ruling camp also dared to browbeat the Prime Minister in accepting their dictates. Forcible return of JMM supremo and the sacked Union Minister of Coal Shibu Soren [who was dropped from the Union Cabinet previous July after a Jharkhand court indicted him in connection with his alleged involvement in the 1975 Chirudih massacre case] to the Union Cabinet in November 2004 against the will of the Prime Minister was a glaring instance to that effect. Barely some hours before the Prime Minister admitted defeat to Soren’s pressure,
the Executive Committee of the JMM passed a resolution in which it threatened the UPA government that either Soren be reinducted into the cabinet or the government would be thrown into problems. Soren's best trump card was the ensuing assembly elections in Jharkhand which were due early 2005. Keenness of the Congress to capture power in the state roping in the support of the JMM forced it to bow down to the pressure of the JMM without any resistance.

Again, TRS chief K. Chandrasekhara Rao escalated pressure on Prime Minister Manmohan Singh accusing that Congress had misled him about conceding his demand for a separate Telangana state. His mission was to have a Telangana state by carving out a stretch from Andhra Pradesh. He hoped that the Congress would put its weight behind him to realize his political agenda in recognition of his contribution to bring the Congress back to power in Andhra Pradesh in May 2004. But he noticed to his utter dismay the deprecatory role of the Congress in conceding his demand after its enormous victory in the May 2004 parliamentary elections and the assembly elections of Andhra Pradesh – taking him for a ride. With his patience wearing thin, Rao threatened to launch an agitation to strengthen his demand. Improved position of the TRS in both the elections compared with the previous polls increased the party's maneuverability to toughen its stand on Telangana. The TRS won 26 seats in the state assembly and five out of six in the Lok Sabha. The DMK created a public row that it would not join the Manmohan Singh government unless they got all the seven ministries promised to them by the Prime Minister.

Results of the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly Elections, 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Number of seats contended</th>
<th>Number of seats won</th>
<th>% of valid votes polled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BJP</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSP</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPI</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPM</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INC</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>38.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TDP</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>37.59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIMIM</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JP</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRS</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6.68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IND</td>
<td>872</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6.57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


However, the TRS, even with its increased strength, failed to gain strategic position in the Congress-led coalition governments in the state and at the Centre. The new equation was not helpful for the party to attain its goal without delay. Overwhelming victory of the Congress left it "free from any dependence on its ally, the TRS, both in the state and at the Centre."210

210 "TRS is both winner and loser in AP", The Times of India, May 14, 2004.
That the winning of an election and forming a government did not prepare the same for work but as a means to retain the seat of power, could be proved by the fervent action of the UPA. The Prime Minister played safe by reshuffling the portfolios of three ministers – Shibu Soren of the JMM, K. Chandrasekhar Rao of the TRS and Sis Ram Ola of the Congress. Ram was made the Labour and Employment Minister. It was observed that "such a clumsy and ad hoc arrangement had become necessary in order to accommodate various ministerial aspirants whom Singh could hardly say no to given his own vulnerability to the minimum of pressure from the Congress Party’s allies. When the pursuit of power supersedes all other norms and concerns, what you get is a government led by a gentleman PM who is answerable to so many bosses beginning with his maker in 10 Janpath to her minions in the Congress Party and further afield in every small faction and group that forms part of the hydra-headed animal called the UPA.”

P. Chidambaram, the Union Finance Minister, eulogized the performance of the government during the presentation of the 2005-06 Union Budget, but the left parties, while welcoming the pro-people and pro-poor proposals, did not conceal their concerns over its negative aspects.

The government's commitment to reforms received a serious blow as its own allies and the left parties opposed legislations to revamp the pension sector and patent laws and staged a walkout when the Bill was introduced on 21 March 2005. Some even threatened to vote against the Bill. On the Patents (Amendment) Bill, 2005, the government faced opposition from the NDA as well as its own allies in the Left and the RJD.

After hectic last-minute negotiations initiated by the ruling party's Lok Sabha leader Pranab Mukherjee and Commerce Minister Kamal Nath, the left parties agreed to help pass the crucial Patents (Amendment) Bill, 2005 on the basis some amendments to the original Bill. But they shared deep reservations about the government's wisdom about the PFRDA Bill, 2005 and refused to budge.

The Patents (Amendment) Bill, 2005, meanwhile, was passed on March 23, 2005. Kamal Nath moved 15 official amendments to the Bill to accommodate the concerns of various sections. There was an obvious compromise and the government gave into the demands of the Left. Interestingly, the NDA, which originated the Bill when it was in power and then introduced it in December 2003; staged a walk out.

The UPA government put disinvestments on the back burner, apparently to avoid confrontations with the Leftist allies. Four days after celebrating its anniversary in power, the government on 26 May 2005 came up with a decision to divest 10 per cent of its stake

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in Bharat Heavy Electrical Limited (BHEL), a Navaratan public sector undertaking, to mop up around Rs. 2000 crore. With 10 per cent disinvestment, government equity in BHEL would come down to 57.72 per cent from its previous holding of 67.72 per cent. Though disinvestment had always raised controversy, the government took the initiative at a time when Parliament was not in session.

The Left was implacably opposed to offloading government's stake in profitable PSUs. Brushing aside the opposition from central trade unions and the left parties, the government moved ahead with the disinvestment proposal discounting the hard reality that the government's survival was dependent on 'the solid support given by the left parties on the assurance that it would adhere to the commitment given in the CMP'.

Though disinvestment had always raised controversy, the government took the initiative at a time when Parliament was not in session.

In the wake of the opposition of the left parties to disinvestment in BHEL, the government had decided to offload 8 per cent shareholding in Maruti Udyog limited (MUL) to raise about Rs. 1,000 crore. The government sold the share in early 2006 at Rs. 678.40 per share for Rs. 1567.60 crore to eight public sector banks and financial institutions. The first disinvestment drive undertaken by the Manmohan Singh government took place in the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) whose 5.25 per cent stake was sold out.

In pursuance of its commitment to liberalize the FDI regime in the telecom sector, the government decided to enhance the FDI ceiling from 49 per cent to 74 per cent in certain services, such as basic, cellular, unified access services (UAS), national/international long distance, V-SAT, Public Mobile Radio Trunk Services (PMRTS), Global Mobile Personal Communication Services (GMPCS) and other value added services. In effect, FDI to the extent of 74 per cent would be made directly or indirectly in the operating company or through a holding company with the remaining 26 per cent to be owned by resident Indian citizens or an Indian company. As at present, FDI up to 49 per cent would continue to be on the automatic route. Though the cabinet initially approved the increased FDI ceiling in February, the proposal was held up to bring in clarity on some major issues, such as ensuring security while carrying out repairs to imported equipment and initial relaxation for complying with the new norms. After introducing some modifications, the government had to approve the revised proposal again in October 2005.

In a major development in the banking sector, the government threw open the asset reconstruction companies (ARCs) to FDI in November 2005. It was decided to

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permit FDI up to a maximum of 49 per cent in the equity capital of ARCs. While a maximum foreign equity of 49 per cent in ARCs was permitted, investments by foreign financial institutes was disallowed. In case of over 10 per cent of equity held by an individual, the ARCs would require to comply with the provisions of the Securitisation and Regulation of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002.\textsuperscript{218} Interestingly, this significant step in continuation of reforms in the banking sector came within a day of the US Treasury Secretary John Snow's arrival in India. The US had been pressing for opening up of India's financial sector. With 49 per cent FDI allowed in ARCs, the Indian market was opened to foreign banks and ARCs which have been keenly waiting in the wings to enter the Indian market.

The government cleared the implementation of the Agreement for the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) in December 2005 with effect from 1 January 2006. The basic objective of SAFTA was to reduce existing tariffs within stipulated time frame to promote trade among South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries. India, being the larger and relatively developed economy, would be providing concessions to the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) such as Bangladesh and the Maldives, including a mechanism for compensating revenue loss due to reduction in duties, technical assistance. The rules of origin clause was also cleared as well as a sensitive list of items that were not covered by the trade liberalization.

In an important step towards enhancing economic reforms, the government came up with a comprehensive package to make FDI easier and simpler in several key areas including retail, power trading, processing and warehousing of rubber and coffee, diamond and coal mining, airports and petroleum infrastructure. 51 per cent FDI in single-brand retail was allowed for the first time in January 2006,\textsuperscript{219} leading to tough competition in the Indian retail market. An FDI inflow of US $ 194.69 million (Rs. 901.64 crore) was received between April, 2006 and March, 2010, comprising 0.21 per cent of the total FDI inflows during the period under the category of single-brand retailing.

Giving clear signals that the UPA would not give way to the pressures of the left parties, the Manmohan Singh government wanted to put the reform agenda back on track by deciding to divest 10 per cent of its stake in the profit-making National Aluminum Company Limited (NALCO) and Neyveli Lignite Corporation Limited (NEL)\textsuperscript{220} but it ran into rough weather with the left parties and their affiliated trade unions attacking the government on its disinvestment policy. The CPI (M) and other left parties submitted a comprehensive note to the government and the Congress leadership in June 2006, setting out "the areas of concern of the Left parties, the differences in key areas and what should

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{219} Manish Telikicherla Chary, India: Nation On The Move, Universe Books, USA, 2009, p.207.
  \item \textsuperscript{220} The Hindu, June 23, 2006.
\end{itemize}
They alleged that over the two years the UPA government had on several occasions taken decisions on liberalisation and privatisation ignoring the views of the UPA-Left Coordination Committee. The note reads the following:

Since the inception of the Coordination Committee, the Left Parties have submitted 19 notes on various policy matters for consideration. The experience of the working of the Coordination Committee has been that the discussions on these issues have generally not led to any satisfactory conclusions. Only in a few instances have the discussions produced results and a common understanding. The Left Parties are concerned that the Coordination Committee becomes merely a forum for talking out issues without producing any concrete results. This note is being submitted with a view that an overall discussion after a considered response from the UPA side will help us to decide how to proceed in the future.

The government reversed its early decisions at the prodding of the DMK – a key ally of the UPA – threatening to withdraw support to the government on Neyveli share disinvestment issue. The BJP accused the Prime Minister of making a compromise with the DMK to stay in power. And the Chambers of Commerce, too, reacted unfavourably to his decision.

State problems brought to the national arena created hitch in the alliance. The demand for separate statehood for Telangana, propped up by the TRS, has always been a sticking point with the UPA and the Congress that strained the ties between the two parties. The TRS and the Congress contested separately the September 2005 civic polls in Andhra Pradesh. In a major setback to the TRS, which had won in two municipalities, the Congress gained control – against expectation – over 74 of the 96 municipalities and nine of the 11 corporations in the state.

### Results of Andhra Pradesh Civic Bodies Polls, 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Number of Municipalities Won</th>
<th>Number of Municipal Corporations Won</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INC</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TDP</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRS</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BJP</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPI (M)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>96</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The Congress notched up further success in the Mandal Parishad Territorial Constituency (MPTC) and Zilla Parishad Territorial Constituency (ZPTC) elections of 2006. The TRS won 381 MPTC seats, 662 less than it had in 2001, and the Congress won 8234 seats, 2583 more than last time. In the ZPTC elections, the Congress picked up 675 seats, 229 more than last time, while the TRS sank to 25 from the 84 it won in the last

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221 Karat, n. 203, p.327.
election. All these meant a big gain for the Congress and a corresponding loss for the TRS in the jointly contested rural bodies elections.

Elections for Mandal Parishad Territorial Constituencies – 2006

Results – Party-wise Breakup

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of MPTCs</th>
<th>BSP</th>
<th>BJP</th>
<th>CPI</th>
<th>CPM</th>
<th>INC</th>
<th>TDP</th>
<th>TRS</th>
<th>Other Parties</th>
<th>Independents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>14580</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>5651</td>
<td>6351</td>
<td>1043</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>724</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>16130</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>8234</td>
<td>6165</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>590</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No Nominations: 03
AIMIM: 03; Janata Party: 4; CPI (ML) (L): 1

Elections for Zilla Parishad Constituencies – 2006

Results – Party-wise Breakup

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of ZPTCs</th>
<th>BSP</th>
<th>BJP</th>
<th>CPI</th>
<th>CPM</th>
<th>INC</th>
<th>TDP</th>
<th>TRS</th>
<th>Other Parties</th>
<th>Independents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>1094</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>512</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>1097</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>675</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: Elections to MPTCs and ZPTCs were held in two phases on June 28 and July 2, 2006. Voting did not take place in three MPTCs. Gram Panchayat elections were held on non-partisan basis in three phases on July 29, August 2 and August 6 of 2006.

The overall results of urban and rural local bodies' polls disheartened the TRS leadership as they reflected a complete rejection of the separatist move launched by the party to gain political mileage over the Congress. Disastrous scoring by the TRS in the aforesaid elections put the Congress in a comfortable position to delay the process of initiating the much needed steps to implement the long cherished demand of the TRS. The TRS failed to get the Congress on board to push forward its demand since it had joined the UPA. The TRS had nothing further to lose. In fact, here was a chance for the TRS to rise to the occasion and take bold steps to strengthen the movement for a separate Telangana state. Thus, TRS president KCR and party leader A. Narendra quit the Union Cabinet on August 22, 2006. KCR announced his resignation from Karimnagar Parliament Constituency the following month, challenging Congress MLAs and MPs from the Telangana region to seek a fresh mandate on the statehood issue. After quitting the Union Cabinet, the TRS leadership was out to evolve ways to further sensationalise the Telangana issue. KCR's decision to force a showdown at this juncture could be seen as a part of this strategy. On September 23, the TRS withdrew support to the UPA government. KCR's resignation from the Lok Sabha necessitated by-election to Karimnagar Parliament Constituency.

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224 The Hindu, August 23, 2006.
225 ibid, September 13, 2006.
226 ibid, September 24, 2006.
KCR and his party heated the campaign for the upcoming Karimnagar by-election to the Lok Sabha, focusing on the Telangana issue. A reporter in the *Deccan Herald* writes: Rarely has a by-election to the Lok Sabha generated so much political heat as the Karimnagar poll because the stakes involved for all parties in the fray are very high.227

**Bye-Election of Parliamentary Constituency of Andhra Pradesh, December 2006**

**Parliament Constituency – 37-Karimnagar**

Detailed Result

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Votes</th>
<th>% of votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>K. Chandra Shakher Road (Elected)</td>
<td>TRS</td>
<td>378030</td>
<td>47.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>T. Jeevan Reddy</td>
<td>INC</td>
<td>176448</td>
<td>22.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>L. Ramana</td>
<td>TDP</td>
<td>170268</td>
<td>21.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Chennamaneni Vidyasagar Rao</td>
<td>BJP</td>
<td>21144</td>
<td>2.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Mazhar Mohiuddin</td>
<td>IND</td>
<td>11184</td>
<td>1.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>B. Ravindra Prasad Yadav</td>
<td>IND</td>
<td>9155</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>K.S. Menayya</td>
<td>BSP</td>
<td>8578</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Yasala Lingam</td>
<td>IND</td>
<td>5264</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Kadem Prabhakar</td>
<td>IND</td>
<td>5202</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Kadakuntla Dasaratham</td>
<td>IND</td>
<td>3544</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Bolusani Krishnaiah</td>
<td>IND</td>
<td>1931</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Bommeravana David Mudiraj</td>
<td>IND</td>
<td>1712</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Taher Kamalkhundmiri</td>
<td>IND</td>
<td>1472</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In the Bobbili parliamentary constituency, as against the solid vote block of the TDP, the ruling Congress was in a dishevelled state. Yet it scraped through the by-election. Congress candidate Jhansi Lakshmi Botcha wrested the seat from the TDP. She defeated the TDP nominee, Appalanaidu Kondapalli, by a narrow margin of 157 votes. With the TDP losing the Bobbili parliamentary by-elections, its strength in the Lok Sabha was reduced to four, compared to five of the TRS.

**Bye-Election of Parliamentary Constituency of Andhra Pradesh, December 2006**

**Parliament Constituency – 3-Bobbili**

Detailed Result

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Votes</th>
<th>% of Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jhansi Lakshmi Botcha (Elected)</td>
<td>INC</td>
<td>334321</td>
<td>47.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Appalanaidu Kondapalli</td>
<td>TDP</td>
<td>334164</td>
<td>47.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Pakalapatti Sanyasiraju</td>
<td>BJP</td>
<td>14837</td>
<td>2.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sambayya Soru</td>
<td>IND</td>
<td>7833</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Lanka Seshubabu</td>
<td>IND</td>
<td>3997</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


211
Mere winning in an election does not give sufficient political space to a separatist movement but the success or failure of such a movement depends on the existence or non-existence of a large number of factors operating within the political process. In this context, Dean E. McHenry, Jr. of Claremont Graduate University has commented:

The role of elections in fostering or undermining separatist movement is contingent upon such a wide range of factors that they appear to constitute relatively unique clusters in each case. Among the factors that constitute the clusters are the degree to which political parties can be lured to believe that the separatist area is a vulnerable vote bank and support for separation is necessary to tap it; whether a party holds the balance of power at the center and/or in the state; the strength of pro-separatist factions within existing political parties; the strength of party loyalty relative to the strength of the aspiration for separation; the degree to which inhabitants of the separatist area support separation; the significance of a separatist area to the rest of the state; whether the election is a local election or one that links the area to the rest of the state or the center; the ability of non-separatist parties to "buy off" separatist leaders; the ability of separatist leaders to incite followers; the divisiveness of internal struggles in other parties...the list might go on and on.\(^\text{228}\)

In 2008, the TRS came back in an active mood and planned to reinforce further the Telangana statehood movement. Four MPs of the TRS resigned from the Lok Sabha on March 3, 2008 in protest against the delay in conceding its demand in order to escalate pressure on the Congress as the promise made by it had turned to dust. 16 MLAs and 3 MLCs of the party followed suit and dared the Congress legislators from the Telangana region to quit and go to the electorate for fresh mandate on the Statehood issue. Meanwhile, 10 of the 26 TRS legislators in the 294-member assembly had turned rebels and dissociated themselves from the party.

The sub-regional party set March 6, 2008 as deadline for the Central government to make its stance clear on the Telangana issue. They even threatened to withdraw their membership from Parliament in case the government failed to take a decision on the politically sensitive issue during the stipulated time. The TRS fixed March 6 as the cut-off date for resignation en masse as the party wanted to utilize the Budget Sessions of Parliament and assembly to focus on the seriousness of their action. They also wanted to give a 50-day latitude to the government as to how it would implement the statehood issue.\(^\text{230}\) However, the TRS MPs, MLAs and MLCs implemented the resignation threat before March 6, forcing by-elections.

Four Parliament and 16 assembly seats, left vacant by the TRS members, went to the by-elections on 29 May 2008. In the by-elections, the TRS suffered a setback in its

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\(^{229}\) The Indian Express, 2 June 2008.

\(^{230}\) ibid.
bastion where it retained two of the four Lok Sabha seats and the Congress and the TDP shared one each. The TRS won seven of the 16 assembly seats. Adding to the woes of the TRS, the Congress and the TDP snatched five and four assembly seats respectively. Dismal scoring by the TRS in the crucial by-elections signified that majority voters of the Telangana region questioned the standard of leadership of the TRS in their battle to achieve a separate state for Telangana. People appeared to have not approved the party’s tactics of going to frequent polls on the same statehood issue.

Results of Parliament Bye-Elections, Andhra Pradesh, May 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constituency</th>
<th>Winning Party</th>
<th>Votes</th>
<th>% of Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adilabad</td>
<td>INC</td>
<td>323109</td>
<td>41.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karimnagar</td>
<td>TRS</td>
<td>269452</td>
<td>36.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanamakonda</td>
<td>TRS</td>
<td>315310</td>
<td>41.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warangal</td>
<td>TDP</td>
<td>287323</td>
<td>34.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results of Assembly Bye-Elections, Andhra Pradesh, May 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constituency</th>
<th>Winning Party</th>
<th>Votes</th>
<th>% of Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Therlam</td>
<td>TDP</td>
<td>55863</td>
<td>74.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jadcheria</td>
<td>INC</td>
<td>45175</td>
<td>37.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vikrabad (SC)</td>
<td>INC</td>
<td>67814</td>
<td>53.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musheerabad</td>
<td>INC</td>
<td>34795</td>
<td>34.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secunderabad</td>
<td>TDP</td>
<td>50031</td>
<td>41.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khairatabad</td>
<td>INC</td>
<td>254676</td>
<td>66.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siddipet</td>
<td>TRS</td>
<td>76270</td>
<td>67.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dommat</td>
<td>TRS</td>
<td>42345</td>
<td>39.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramayampet</td>
<td>TDP</td>
<td>49341</td>
<td>38.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellareddy</td>
<td>INC</td>
<td>46841</td>
<td>39.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dichpalli</td>
<td>INC</td>
<td>39756</td>
<td>37.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khannapur (ST)</td>
<td>TDP</td>
<td>40219</td>
<td>37.19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mydaram (SC)</td>
<td>TRS</td>
<td>62123</td>
<td>45.60</td>
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<tr>
<td>Huzurabad</td>
<td>TRS</td>
<td>53547</td>
<td>44.72</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kamalapu</td>
<td>TRS</td>
<td>54092</td>
<td>44.53</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cheriyal</td>
<td>TRS</td>
<td>45288</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ghanpur (SC)</td>
<td>TDP</td>
<td>39663</td>
<td>35.76</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alair (SC)</td>
<td>TRS</td>
<td>45867</td>
<td>39.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: By-elections to Therlam and Khairatabad Assembly constituencies were caused by death of sitting MLAs.


The TDP faced an internal crisis in June 2008 when former Home Minister of Andhra Pradesh and TDP Polit Bureau member T. Devender Goud resigned from the assembly and the TDP along with another leader E. Peddi Reddy, articulating his grievances against the party’s failure to take a positive stand on the Telangana statehood
In July 2008, he formed a new political outfit, called the Nava Telangana Praja Party (NTPP), to stir up the sentiments of the people of Telangana against the injustice perpetrated on them by successive governments for the past five decades.

The NTPP was launched at a time when there was mounting pressure on the Congress and TDP leaders to take a Telangana-specific decision before the impending national elections. Goud floated the new political outfit in an effort to make a dent in the TRS’s OBC vote bank that showed a downward move in the recently concluded by-elections. Though backward communities constitute half of the total population of Andhra Pradesh, state politics has been dominated by upper community groups. It is not that the minority Reddys and Kammass alternatively run the state administration, all the top public positions are held by the Reddys. TRS president K. Chandrasekhar Rao belongs to the Velama community, known for its social autocracy in Telangana.

Meanwhile, there was an upsurge of the another upper agrarian community, Kapus, who had started working as the next power bloc. Telugu superstar Chiranjeevi, a Kapu, formed the Praja Rajyam Party (PRP) on August 26, 2008 as an alternative to the Congress and the TRS to fight for Telangana statehood. The NTPP, however, merged with the newly founded Praja Rajyam Party when it realized that the two pro-Telangana sub-regional political entities would not get enough political space with Telangana statehood as the main agenda in the upcoming assembly and national polls scheduled for holding in 2009. After its defeat in the 2009 elections, the NTPP returned to the TDP's fold.

In Andhra Pradesh, the ruling Congress was on shaky ground. Chief Minister Y. S. Rajasekhara Reddy, who was to face the assembly elections as well, seemed to be coasting along on pro-poor schemes when the TRS parted ways with the Congress last year at the Centre and in the state. The TRS joined a grand alliance with the TDP, the CPI (M) and the CPI to defeat the Congress for denying statehood for Telangana. But what could be the game-changer in the State was Chiranjeeve's Praja Rajyam Party.

The results of 2009 elections to Andhra Pradesh assembly and Lok Sabha seats from the state indicated that the Telangana issue did not work for the four-party grand alliance forged by the TDP to rout the Congress in the elections. Chief Minister Y. S. Rajasekhara Reddy romped home for a second consecutive term after he led the ruling Congress to a comfortable majority in the assembly and a spectacular victory in the Lok Sabha elections. The Congress won 156 seats out of 294 assembly seats, besides delivering to the UPA a large contingent of 33 MPs from out of 42 Lok Sabha seats in the state.

The results came as a serious setback to the TDP and its president N. Chandrababu Naidu, who had hoped to return to power riding on the back of the grand

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231 The Hindu, July 24, 2008.
232 ibid, July 12, 2008.
234 The Indian Express, August 27, 2008.
alliance. Naidu, however, improved his party's tally of assembly seats from 47 in 2004 to 93 and MP seats from five to six. But the alliance as a whole was rejected as it was replete with contradictions. The TRS proved to be a drag on the alliance as it could win only 10 of the 48 assembly seats it contested, while the CPI won four and the CPI (M) only one. The left parties drew a blank in the four Lok Sabha constituencies they contested and the TRS won just two.

Chiranjeevi's Praja Rajyam Party also received a jolt as it could win only 18 assembly seats, while the party chief himself lost in the Palacole assembly constituency though he won the Tirupati seat.

**General Elections to the Lok Sabha, 2009 – Andhra Pradesh**

**Performance of Winning parties**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>No. of Seats Won</th>
<th>Valid Votes polled in favour of the Party</th>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Telugu Desam</td>
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<td>3.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>All India Majlis-E-Ittehadul Muslimeen</td>
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<td>3,08,061</td>
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</table>

**General Elections to Andhra Pradesh Legislatively Assembly-2009**

**Performance of Winning parties**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>No. of Seats Won</th>
<th>Valid Votes polled in Favour of the Party</th>
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<td>Independent</td>
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Publication of the final report of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDTh)\(^{235}\) in February 2007 flared up politics over the Cauvery water apportionment issue. The CWDTh submitted its keenly awaited final report on February 5 under Section 5 (2) of the Inter-State River Water Dispute Act, 1956 to the Central government, fixing


the share of water of the river Cauvery among the riparian states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, and the Union Territory of Pondicherry. The proceeding over the politically sensitive issue went on for over 16 years. The final order of the CWDT was expected to resolve the dispute over the share of the Cauvery water between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. But the initial reaction of leaders of political parties and organizations of various spectrum did not go in that way.236

In the final award, Tamil Nadu emerged as the highest beneficiary. It received something more than its expectation. The Tamil Nadu government and people of the state were pleased with the award. For Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi, the decision came at the right time. Having failed to break the ice with his Kerala counterpart on the Mullaperiyar Dam issue, Karunanidhi did not miss the occasion. He claimed the credit for the clemency that the Tribunal showed to the state. Opposition leader and AIADMK general secretary Jayalalithaa, however, defused Karunanidhi's claim by some nitpicking, saying the state should move to the Supreme Court to get its proper share. Pondicherry also welcomed the award.

Across the border in Karnataka, emotions ran high and the public cried foul at the order, seeing it as a mark of deprivation and injustice to Karnataka and its people. Chief Minister H. D. Kumaraswamy called an all-party meeting to decide on whether the government would file an appeal against the order even as the Akhila Karnataka Gadi Horata Samiti, an umbrella organization of pro-Kannada groups, announced a state-wide bandh on February 8. Some peripheral Kannada groups like Kannada Rakshana Vedike and many self-styled native saviours assembled in different parts of the state to show off their strength by forcing the government to shut down schools and colleges.

The JD (S)-BJP coalition government, headed by Kumaraswamy, was indecisive over its future course of action on the Tribunal's award even after two weeks of its publication. The lack of seriousness was also evident from the fact that the all-party meeting, summoned to discuss the controversial order, had to be adjourned without taking any decision and the adjourned meeting was yet to be convened. The opposition Congress did not show any eagerness to seek quick response from the government as it did not want to create an embarrassing situation either for the party, or its president Sonia Gandhi.

Politics on Cauvery water reached a crescendo when Union Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting M. H. Ambareesh resigned from the Central ministry and Parliament on 14 February, following alleged injustice the Tribunal had shown to Karnataka in deciding the state's share in the Cauvery water.237 This was the first political fallout of the verdict that most Karnataka politicians saw as going against state interest. His resignation also followed the demand of farmers from his Mandya parliamentary constituency, the heartland of the Cauvery basin, that he should quit his ministerial post.

It may be argued that Ambareesh could have effectively articulated Karnataka's case to the Centre by his capacity as a Union Minister. But he had opted for resignation as he received little support from his Congress colleagues. Besides, he was not even a Cabinet Minister. The existence of a strong Tamil Nadu lobby in the UPA could have queered his pitch.

Ambareesh, who hails from Vokkaliga community of the old Mysore region of south Karnataka, was inducted into the Central ministry in October 2006 – a month after the change of guard in Karnataka. His induction into the ministry was propelled to send out a message to the JD (S) which had withdrawn support to Dharam Singh-led Congress-JD (S) coalition government last January and formed government in coalition with the BJP. The real objective was to wean away Vokkaligas who constitute a strong support base for former Prime Minister H. D. Deve Gowda and his son, Chief Minister H. D. Kumaraswamy in that region.

Ambareesh’s resignation upended the spirit of other leaders, MPs and MLAs of both the Congress and the JD (S) of the old Mysore region. It has been found that both the parties considerably rely on the support of Vokkaligas to win elections. It can be recalled that in the 2004 assembly elections the JD (S) picked up most of the seats in the old Mysore region. The “ambivalent stand” of the Karnataka government on the award might impinge the prospects of the JD (S) to share power in the state the next time. It is needless to say that the BJP, with which the JD (S) shared power in the state for some time, formed government in Karnataka in 2009.

Under Section 5 (3) of the Inter-State River Water Dispute Act, 1956, the Central government as well as the party states, sought further clarification or guidance about the final report of the CWDT. The Tribunal took up the petitions of the party states for consideration on 10 July 2007. Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala filed Special Leave Petitions (SLPs) against the Tribunal’s aforesaid decision dated February 5, 2007. The Supreme Court had granted Special Leave. In this background, the Tribunal decided that the applications filed by the party states should be listed for orders and finally be disposed accordingly after disposal of the appeals pending before the Supreme Court. Preliminary hearing of SLPs was held before the Supreme Court on 28 July 2008 and the Court passed the order that these appeals may be put up before a three-member Judge Bench in November 2008. However, the matter did not come up for hearing again and SLPs are yet to be disposed by the apex court of the land. If the matter came up for hearing by an extended Bench of the Supreme Court, it could have further complicated the situation.

Apart from the political game of the coalition partners in the ruling or opposition groups, we can now turn our attention to an important factor that occurred at about the

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238 Ramakrishna Upadhya, "Will Ambareesh's move shake up others?", *The Deccan Herald*, February 17, 2007.
239 n. 235.
same time. Lefts were not a full fledged partner of the UPA. Still they wanted to manipulate the alliance which they ultimately failed to do.

Withdrawal of support of the Lefts from the Manmohan Singh government in July 2008 owing to their sharp disagreement with the government over the controversial Indo-US civil nuclear deal, which was in progress since its negotiation in July 2005, made the UPA-Left policy distance more obtrusive than ever before. The United States changed the course of its nuclear policy towards India and other friendly Asian States in the wake of China's first nuclear weapons detonation in 1964. US President Lyndon Johnson and senior officials in the Department of State and Pentagon secretly considered the possibilities of providing them with nuclear weapons under US supervision to protect them from any serious Chinese threat. However, the United States dropped the plans as it 'unified around a policy of strict nonproliferation' amid apprehensions of the negative impacts of the proliferation on its military and diplomatic power, and set out instead to prevent further proliferation.

The United States imposed sanctions on India in the wake of her first nuclear test in 1974 at Pokhran in Rajasthan. The sanctions were intended to choke India's pursuit of nuclear weapons – a pursuit, the United States feared, that could lead other regional powers like Pakistan to also seek similar capabilities. New Delhi's subsequent refusal to buckle under mounting pressure from the United States to dump its nuclear weapons and sign the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) had kept India largely outside the nuclear regime – a system of regulated transfer, trade, and monitoring of nuclear technology – that had developed over the last three decades. India, which was one of the original sponsors of the proposal for the NPT, became one of the most fervent critics of the treaty. Once an admirer of arms control agreements like the test ban and missile freeze, and a keen advocate of even partial agreements like the Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT) of 1963, India by the mid 1970s, defended against most nuclear arms control arrangements. New Delhi strongly opposed the inherently uneven and discretionary nature of the NPT that allowed the privileged five nuclear weapon states (NWSs) to legitimately deploy nuclear weapons while precluded other states to do so. India's nuclear test in 1974 prompted the United States to constitute under its leadership a 46-member Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) – an international export control regime for nuclear related trade. The NSG continues to exist as a "western promoted group" to coordinate and control the export of advanced nuclear technology to the nuclear potential States. Washington further tightened its own export laws with the 1978 Nuclear Nonproliferation Act seeking to bring the peaceful nuclear activities of non-nuclear weapon states, including India, under the safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

India's concern for vertical proliferation by the major powers along with their persistent opposition to horizontal proliferation of non-nuclear weapon states had its origin in the recommendations of the Gilpatric Committee. The Committee was appointed by the Johnson administration in November 1964 after China's nuclear test in October that year 1964 to reconsider the needs of a systematic nuclear policy. The United States continued to wield pressure on India on the nuclear issue even after the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Changed scenario in global politics since 1991 onwards had not desisted the United States from its continuous efforts to consolidate its dominance in South Asia. India and the United States locked horns over geopolitical ambitions in South Asia in the semi-unipolar order. This was most forcefully articulated by the Bush regime in 1992 in the now infamous Draft Defence Planning Guidance Paper prepared for the then Defence Secretary, Dick Cheney. This paper showed that the United State was determined 'to make its first strategic priority to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival, either on the territory of the former Soviet Union or elsewhere, that poses a threat on the order of that posed formerly by the Soviet Union'. The United State's ambition to control the entire world seems pertinent, giving its overwhelming power and reach across the globe. However, the remarkable point was that the draft paper was not addressed to all and sundry regional powers. Rather the United States made it clear through the draft paper that its target was to dampen India's resilience for establishing her supremacy over other States in South Asia and the Indian Ocean.

India has not yet signed the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) as it failed to address all of India's prime concerns. India has long opposed a Nuclear Test Explosion Ban Treaty, but wanted a genuine Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty without any ambiguities. A Nuclear Test Explosion Ban Treaty, according to India, could merely allow the continuing expansion and refinement of existing nuclear arsenals through sophisticated laboratory techniques. India holds that mere expression of intent is not enough to bring the NWSs to the negotiating table, and demanded the inclusion of a time-bound framework in the treaty for total nuclear disarmament. The lack of the commitment on the part of the NWSs to eliminate their nuclear arsenals within a specific timeframe forced India to stay out of the CTBT and oppose it when the treaty was taken up for consideration in the United Nations General Assembly.

246 Recalling its resolution 50/65 of 12 December 1995, in which the United Nations General Assembly declared its readiness to resume consideration of the item 'Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty' (CTBT) before the fifty-first session in order to endure the text of a comprehensive test ban treaty, the Assembly adopted on 10 September 1996 the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, as contained in the document A/50/1027 of the Conference on Disarmament. It opened for signature at UN Headquarters in New York on 24 September 1996, when it was signed by 71 States, including five of the eight nuclear-capable States. As of September 2009, 150 States have ratified the CTBT and 32 States have signed but not yet ratified it.
Consequently, it seems that India now had no problem in joining the CTBT. The major problem that continued to exist was internal and linked to the pressure of domestic politics. The Gujral government built up 'national consensus'\textsuperscript{248} by whipping up patriotic sentiments in the country against the CTBT. It argued that the country's security would be imperiled and sovereignty compromised if India entered the CTBT. It was not possible for its government to reverse its stand immediately and build up another national consensus favouring India's participation in the CTBT. The existence of political compulsions and their impact on decision-making cannot be ignored.

The USA began to change its own nuclear policy towards India since the emergence of India as an influential economy and military power on the world stage during the 1990s. India's "vibrant economy, military power, pluralist society and cultural influence"\textsuperscript{249} have encouraged the United States to get India as an increasingly important regional partner in South Asia so that it could have a strategic counterweight to China in that region. Many analysts find a convergence of geopolitical interests on many fronts between India and the USA, including the area of Asian power balances as such.

President George W. Bush pushed forward the initiatives launched by President Bill Clinton in 2000 to develop full nuclear cooperation between India and the US. The two countries inked a ten-year defence framework agreement in 2005 to facilitate expanded bilateral security cooperation. The USA and India also signed an "open skies"\textsuperscript{250} agreement in April 2005 allowing unlimited civilian flights between them. India also moved closer to the USA. It supported President Bush on International Criminal Court and missile defence, provided assistance to the US operation in Afghanistan by protecting the US assets transiting the Malacca straits, voted twice with the US against Iran at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and even came near to sending troops to Iraq.\textsuperscript{251} Strengthened ties culminated in an announcement in July 2005 of a "global partnership",\textsuperscript{252} including full civilian nuclear cooperation between India and the USA.

The Indo-US nuclear deal, negotiated between President Bush and Manmohan Singh in Washington DC on 18 July 2005, announced potentially major departures in the nuclear policies of the USA and India. President Bush promised to win Congressional approval to amend US laws and policies on nuclear technology transfer and to work for


\textsuperscript{250} C. Raja Mohan, "India and the Balance of Power", \textit{Foreign Affairs}, Vol. 25, No. 4, July-August, 2006, p.27.

\textsuperscript{251} "Joint Statement between President Bush and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh", The White House Office of the Press Secretary, Washington DC, July 18, 2005.

changes in international controls on the supply of nuclear fuel and technology that heretofore had blocked full nuclear cooperation with India. In seeking to end restrictions on such cooperation, the United States wanted India to be accepted globally as a responsible possessor of nuclear weapons even though India has not joined the NPT. For its part, India continued to "assume the same responsibilities and practices" as the recognized nuclear weapon states. As part of these responsibilities and practices, India agreed to identify and separate its military nuclear facilities and programmes from civilian ones in a phased manner and to put all civilian facilities under IAEA safeguards. India also agreed to sign and adhere to an Additional Protocol with respect to civilian nuclear facilities, to work with the United States for the conclusion of a multilateral Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT) and to extend its moratorium on nuclear testing. The deal would allow the US access to and supervision of Indian civilian nuclear facilities. In return, India would be allowed access to nuclear technology and fuel from the US.

The Indian government felt the urgency to get the deal approved by Parliament as President Bush's term in the US was to come to a close soon and the Bush Administration itself was exercising its own pressure to get this deal done before they went out of office. But the Opposition in India thought otherwise.

The BJP thought that India stands to lose its sovereignty, and more ominously, the US would come to exercise control over Indian foreign policy. The Left too shared this fear. Moreover, the Left's ideological opposition to anything American is well known. Under the circumstances, the Left struck first and withdrew their support from the UPA government on July 8, 2008. The Prime Minister had no alternative but to seek a vote of confidence in his government. The Congress was tired of the Left for long and actually was looking for an excuse to get rid of them from the coalition as they (the Left) kept obstructing economic liberalization. The vote on the confidence motion, moved by the Prime Minister on the Indo-US nuclear deal, was set for July 22, 2008, preceded by a two-day parliamentary discussion. In the confidence vote, the ruling coalition secured 275 votes as against 256 by the Opposition. Even after the withdrawal of support by the left parries, the government managed to survive its full five-year term with the support of some smaller parties and Independents. After the May 2009 parliamentary elections, the Congress-led second UPA government was installed under the leadership of Manmohan Singh.

As it transpires from the above discussion about the policies undertaken by the NDA as well as the UPA-I, during their regimes, no outstanding disparity could be detected. Although there were differences of approach, the outcome was almost similar. Moreover, when it comes to the operational or functional aspects, interestingly not much can be distinguished. Apart from perhaps the dynastic inclination of the UPA or the gerontocracy of the NDA, both the coalition groups have much in common. Irrespective

253 ibid.
254 Communist Party of India (Marxist), "Left parties withdraw support to the UPA government" (Press Statement), New Delhi, July 8, 2008.
of their professed ideology and goals, there are some constraints of coalition system that have compelled the Congress and the BJP-led governments to adhere to the same techniques. Both of them cherish the goal to the seat of power and find out the ways to retain the same which has given rise to insurmountable corruption and misgovernance within the country.

Coalition politics in India have actually come to be governed by the Laswellian idea about 'Who gets What, When and How'. In the existing political ambience, the national parties have become the power-brokers in the aftermath of their constantly eroding support base in different regions of the country. They are broking power for the regional parties only for the purpose of retaining power. The regional parties, on the other hand, are the power-seekers in the sense that they are constantly asserting regional aspirations and demands in the national agenda in the name of coalition politics.