

The Elections in India and Pakistan

Dietmar Rothermund

Both India and Pakistan experienced in 1993 elections which constituted a watershed in the political landscape of these countries. In both cases the elections were precipitated by momentous political events and were not just held because the periods of office of the respective legislatures expired. In fact, these elections were due to the sudden dismissal of the respective governments in the midst of great controversies.

The Indian elections were only provincial and not national ones, but they concerned four states with a total population of about 330 Mill. The four state governments of Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh had been formed by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which was held responsible for the destruction of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya in December 1992. In fact, only the Government of Uttar Pradesh was directly accountable for what happened at Ayodhya. The simultaneous dismissal of the other three state governments was an overreaction of the central government. It seemed politically unwise, because the BJP could claim that it had been wronged and thus detract attention from the destruction of the mosque. However, as the election results showed later on, this move proved to be opportune for the central government.

The BJP was actually caught on the horns of a dilemma. The destruction of the mosque deprived it of a target which had been very useful for it in the recent past. It also showed that it condoned violence which was not popular with the propertied sections of its electorate. The dilemma was revealed at the end of February when the BJP staged a major rally in New Delhi at the time of the budget session of the national parliament. Confronting the Government of India on its homeground in the capital was not easy. The BJP needed to demonstrate its strength but at the same time it had to avoid violent clashes so as not to spoil its reputation even more. The national leaders of the BJP therefore adopted a low posture, got themselves briefly arrested in New Delhi and were satisfied with registering their protest in this way. Moreover, the measures proposed by the Finance Minister in presenting the budget conformed to the economic programme advocated by the BJP all along and therefore the BJP could have no objections to it. At the most it could complain that the government was stealing the BJP's thunder in this field.

In looking for political issues on which to attack the government the BJP was therefore restricted to accusations of corruption. As this is always endemic in the political system, the opposition can easily raise this issue whenever it feels fit to do so. In addition to the hardy perennial of the alleged Bofors-kickback there was a juicy new case: The Bombay broker Harshad Mehta who was responsible for the sensational stock market scam of 1992 announced in June 1993 that he had handed over a suitcase containing 10 Mill. Rupees to Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao in 1992. This generous donation had preceded the scam. Narasimha Rao denied that he had received the money, but donations to political parties are not illegal in India and, in fact, all parties need them, because election

campaigns are very expensive. At any rate, Narasimha Rao survived a no-confidence motion based on this allegation, but the BJP continued to use this issue as a stick with which it could beat him and his party.

The Outcome of the Indian Provincial Elections of November 1993

The outcome of the elections in the four states then came as a great surprise as the BJP lost control of all the four state governments which it had held earlier. In Himachal Pradesh and in Madhya Pradesh there were straightforward contests between the BJP and the Congress and the latter won large majorities in both assemblies, in Himachal Pradesh 78 and in Madhya Pradesh 54 per cent of the seats whereas the BJP captured only 8 and 35 per cent respectively. In both states the swing towards the Congress was particularly striking as it had held only 12 per cent of the seats in Himachal Pradesh and 18 per cent in Madhya Pradesh when those state governments were dismissed in 1992, whereas the BJP had held 65 and 69 per cent respectively.

In Rajasthan the BJP stood its ground much better than elsewhere. The percentage of the seats it occupied receded only from 47 to 43 per cent, nevertheless this loss deprived it of the chance to form a government. The surprise was the recovery of the Congress which increased its share of the seats from 25 to 37 per cent and therefore should be able to head a coalition government.

In Uttar Pradesh, the largest Indian state, the outcome of the elections was crucial for the fate of the Government of India. The BJP had held 50 per cent of the seats in that state and its share receded to 42 per cent. But unlike in Rajasthan this was not accompanied by a swing towards the Congress whose political fortunes in Uttar Pradesh declined even further. It had held 11 per cent of the seats earlier and only obtained 6 per cent this time. The rising star on the political horizon of this state is Mulayam Singh Yadav who earlier belonged to the Janata Party but then left this sinking ship and formed his own Samajwadi Party and teamed up with Kanshi Ram and his Bahujan Party. This electoral alliance bagged 39 per cent of the seats and is thus in a position to head a coalition government. But cobbling together a viable coalition will not be easy, because it would have to include both the Congress and the Janata Dal which together hold 12 per cent of the seats, or it would have to find support among independent candidates who jointly hold only 7 per cent of the seats.

The only resounding success of the BJP in the recent elections was achieved in Delhi which has just become a city state with its own legislative assembly and state government. Here the BJP captured 70 per cent of the seats and the Congress only 20. The Congress was badly split here and some of its leaders were tainted due to their alleged participation in the anti-Sikh atrocities of 1984. The BJP was also riven by factions, but Madan Lal Khurana, who headed one faction emerged as the victor and was sworn in as the first Chief Minister after this memorable round of elections in Northern India.

Next to the rout of the BJP in the four states mentioned above, the steep decline of V.P. Singh's Janata Party is the most striking outcome of these elections. This severely impairs V.P. Singh's position as a national leader. Perhaps the only chance of this party is to drop V.P. Singh and follow the rising star of the rebel, Mulayam Singh Yadav. In fact, it was rumored in Delhi before the elections that V.P. secretly hoped for a defeat of Mulayam in Uttar Pradesh as he

was quite aware of this emerging challenge to his leadership. Actually the election results confirmed his worst fears.

Another challenge posed by the outcome of the elections concerns the Congress which at first sight seems to be the major beneficiary of this round of provincial elections. But in Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh Congress faces two rather different problems of coalition-making. In Rajasthan it must head a coalition government as it surely would not wish to "tolerate" a minority government formed by the BJP. In Uttar Pradesh its strength is insignificant but its support is essential for a coalition government headed by Mulayam Singh Yadav. The Congress has generally been averse to entering into coalitions with other parties. It has always managed to occupy the centre of Indian politics. Joining coalitions deprives it of its "centrist" credibility as it has to opt either for a "left" or a "right" partner. Therefore it will be very interesting to watch how these problems will be solved in Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.

The Antecedents of the Dismissal of the National Government in Pakistan

In Pakistan the dismissal of the government which led to the elections was due to a clash between Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and President Ishaq Khan. Sharif actually owed his post to a collusion of the President and the army. Ishaq Khan had dismissed Benazir Bhutto and installed Sharif in 1990. They subsequently clashed over the appointment of the Chief of Staff. General Asif Nawaz Janjua whom Ishaq Khan had appointed as successor to General Mirza Aslam Beg was supposed to be an enemy of Sharif, and when he suddenly died in January 1993 his widow alleged that Sharif's advisers had poisoned him. Ishaq Khan then appointed General Adul Waheed Khan - again without consulting Sharif. The Prime Minister retaliated by threatening to deprive the President of the extraordinary powers vested in him by the amendment of the constitution introduced by Zia-ul Haq in 1985. Before he could make much headway in this, Ishaq Khan dismissed him on April 18, 1993. But on May 26 the highest court of the country declared this dismissal as illegal and ordered Sharif's re-instatement.

The court was obviously motivated to do this by the prior admission of General Beg that he had advised the court in 1988 after Zia-ul Haq's death not to order the re-instatement of Prime Minister Junejo who had been dismissed by Zia. Obviously the judges did not want to repeat this scenario and General Waheed Khan was also not interested in following the precedent set by Beg. In fact, Waheed Khan proved to be very diplomatic. When Ishaq Khan and Sharif clashed again after Sharif had resumed his office, he persuaded both of them to stand down so as to clear the path for fresh elections. An interim President and an interim Prime Minister governed the country in the meantime. Moeen Qureshi, an expert who had served with the World Bank, proved to be an excellent Prime Minister and would have probably been the most successful candidate in the elections if he had joined the campaign. But he only wanted to be a caretaker - and did more in a few weeks than most Prime Ministers have done in years. He introduced a bold programme of liberal economic reform but it was all based on ordinances which the future government would have to back by legislation.

The Elections and the Government of Benazir Bhutto

The national elections in October 1993 resulted in a "hung parliament". Neither Benazir Bhutto nor Nawaz Sharif gained an absolute majority, but Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) bagged a few seats more than Sharif's Muslim League. Thus Bhutto managed to form a government with the support of some independents and smaller parties. In the subsequent provincial elections, the PPP won in the Panjab and in Sindh whereas Baluchistan and the North-West Frontier Province opted for the Muslim League. But in the presidential elections of November 13, 1993 the PPP attained a major victory. Farooq Ahmed Khan Leghari, Foreign Minister in Bhutto's cabinet, got 274 votes against only 168 for the acting President Wasim Sajjad, who was backed by the Muslim League. The new president who is the chief of the Leghari tribe and a big landowner in Dera Gazi Khan District has been a staunch PPP-man for twenty years of which he spent four years in prison. He immediately announced that he would welcome a constitutional amendment which would deprive him of the controversial powers which Zia had introduced in 1985. But Sharif who had earlier staked his political career on the abolition of these powers was now playing truant and no longer wished to support the constitutional amendment for which a two thirds majority would be required. This is probably a "tit for tat" as Bhutto refused to back his move earlier this year when she was in the opposition. But leaving these powers in the hands of a president who belongs to the PPP is obviously not in the interest of Sharif's party and therefore he might change his mind in due course.

The political events of 1993 have strengthened the hold of democracy in Pakistan. General Waheed Khan has played his cards very well by supporting democracy rather than ushering in army rule once more. The PPP has good reasons to be grateful to him for the way in which he handled the crisis. For once President, Prime Minister and the chief of the army can operate on the same wavelength in Pakistan. Benazir Bhutto's immediate problem is how to back the reform programme ushered in by Qureshi by the necessary legislation. During the election campaign she had attacked several of the measures adopted by Qureshi, but it seems that she is now determined to follow the course set by the intrepid caretaker.