

# Away from the noise, voters continue to repose faith in the BJP

**W**e live in interesting times. The political Opposition in India, which has faced repeated electoral setbacks over the last six years, is sensing an opportunity in the wake of the ongoing farmers' protests in parts of North India. The leaders of the protest are seeking a withdrawal of the agriculture bills that were discussed and passed in Parliament. Over the last few days, the protests have taken an ugly personal turn, with some people demanding the head of the Prime Minister (PM).

In the midst of these protests, what is India's political barometer saying? Four results, each in a different part of India, give a glimpse of the mood on the ground.

First, let us go to Hyderabad, India's high-tech city. Sometime in mid-November, the Telangana government, in a bid to stun the Opposition, declared December 1 as the date of the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) elections. The ploy was clear; catch the Opposition — the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) — unprepared and win the polls. The campaign was brief but high-pitched. But the results stunned commentators and promises to change the direction of Telangana politics. The BJP, which had four seats in the 2015-2016 round of polls, climbed up to a record 48. Unlike last time, when BJP and Telugu Desam Party fought the polls together, the BJP went alone this time. Telangana Rashtra Samithi's tally crashed from 99 to 56. The BJP's vote share also shot up, winning the support of the poor, middle class and all those affected by the apathy of the state government in the wake of the floods.

This win is noteworthy because the BJP was never a force in Telangana. As late as 2018, the principal opposition was Congress. This, combined with the Dubbaka win, puts the BJP firmly in the race to win the assembly polls in 2023. The GHMC polls were held using paper ballots, thus not even offering the EVM excuse to cynics.

If the urban expanse of Hyderabad tells a story, so does the rural landscape of Rajasthan. The Congress is firmly in the saddle here and assembly elections are still three years away. Thus, when zila parishad and pancha-

yat samiti polls were held, the view on the ground was that the Congress would sweep. The results, again were stunning. The BJP is in control of 13 districts now and Congress has only five. Be it the regions of the state Congress chief, top ministers and even Sachin Pilot, the Congress performance is underwhelming. In the urban elections that followed too, the BJP's fight was spirited. Those who voted in Rajasthan were broadly farmers, rural folk, and labourers. Parts of Rajasthan border the sites of the farmer protests too. Yet, the results are there for all to see.

The people of Assam were waiting to share their story. The Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) voted recently and in these polls, the BJP and its ally, the United People's Party Liberal, have won a majority, winning nine and 12 seats respectively. This election saw on-ground coordination between the Congress and All India United Democratic Front, but the voters did not bless them. The voters in the BTC polls included a significant number of tribal voters. Their faith remains

unbroken in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), the BJP, and Narendra Modi.

Besides expanding in newer areas, in Goa, where the BJP has been in power since 2012, the party has done exceedingly well in the zila panchayat elections. The Congress is not even close to a strong showing. Goa, as we know, has a significant Christian population.

From rural area to tribal areas, urban parts to cosmopolitan coastal landscapes, India is giving a message. Diverse electorates, diverse elections are giving the same message — that India's prime issue in 2020 is development and only a Modi-led NDA can provide it. The PM's handling of the pandemic, emphasis on economic reform, the support given to the poor have struck a chord with the voters. The Opposition, which wanted to make each of these elections a verdict on PM Modi or the farm bills have had to eat repeated helpings of humble pie. India is moving to an era where the politics of good governance and stability are scoring over manufactured agendas and vested interests.



Prakash  
Javadekar

*Prakash Javadekar is a Union minister  
The views expressed are personal*