

NOTE

THE SAFFRON MARCH

Divakar N writes :

The recently concluded by-elections to 8 assembly seats, vacated due to resignation of elected representatives who were won over by BJP in its *Operation Kamala*, an euphemism for purchasing MLAs, has put the BJP government in firm saddle. The ruling clique has won 5 out of 8 seats, while the JDS has managed to succeed in its come-back efforts by winning other three seats. The Congress, with all its change in leadership and strategy has failed to score, thanks to the internal bickering and lack of leadership. The victory has not only boosted the moral strength of the ruling BJP but has also emboldened its efforts to carry on with its purchasing spree in the guise of *Operation Kamala*.

BJP's better performance in the Northern part of Karnataka, has more to do with the caste equations and role of money power. The assertion of Veerashaiva community and its backing has bolstered the BJP's campaign, while it has again failed to make any impact in the old Mysore region. Though elections were supposedly conducted in free and fair manner, there was no dearth of corrupt practices, as crores of rupees were doled out to the voters across the constituencies. The dissensions within the Congress have dealt a heavy blow to the party. The Congress Party has failed to gauge the impact of Siddaramiah's non-participation in the campaign. After merger of his party with the Congress before the previous elections, Siddaramiah was sidelined within the party power structure. Representing a strong Kuruba community, spread all over the state, Siddaramiah enjoys the huge support of AHINDA groups, which the Congress has failed to encash.

Though the BJP dwelt upon its development plank in the campaign, the fact that people had no credible alternative force is evident in the ultimate analysis. The 200 days of BJP rule has resulted in corruption reaching its zenith and all its development strategy is towards privatization of public sphere. Already the government has announced its intention of privatizing construction of rural roads and highways. Water supply network in Mysore has been awarded to a private firm from Jamshedpur. Public-private participation i.e. wholesale privatization has been the hallmark of BJP rule and lot of money is being pumped into the coffers of private sector.

But the worrying factor behind the strengthening of BJP is its communal onslaught and growing fascist tendencies. The Kandhamal incidents had their own echo in the state of Karnataka with many Christian institutions being systematically attacked over the months. Mangalore, a coastal district, has been the nerve centre of Sangh parivar activities. B V Seetaram, Editor of *Karavali Ale*, a vernacular magazine, has been hunted day in and day out by the Sangh parivar and recently he was arrested and handcuffed by the police, which led to large scale protests across the state. The office of *Karavali Ale* has been ransacked several times. Thousands of copies of the paper have been burnt in public, with no action being initiated against the culprits. Recently the office of PUCL state working President D'sa was attacked by the Bajrang Dal. The inmates of a jail in Mangalore were attacked brutally within the jail premises by Bajrang Dal members, who were later shifted to other jail, without being punished for their acts. Cultural policing is increasingly getting institution-sponsored. Recently a college bus, on a picnic, was attacked by the Bajrang Dal activists on the pretext that Hindu girls were taken to picnic along with the boys of other communities.

While the BJP government is crying itself hoarse for not getting an NSG unit to the state, to combat terrorism, it has failed to protect the minorities who are being hounded almost routinely by the Sangh parivar outfits. In a recent development eight Hindu boys have been arrested in connection with a bomb blast in Hubli court premises last year. Earlier the act was attributed to SIMI and LeT by the Hubli police. The suffocating atmosphere in Mangalore and stifling of democratic voices across the state is the worrying factor for all democratic forces. Added to this the state government has started Anti-Terrorism Campaign for school children by forming school level committees to educate the children about the ills of terrorism. The point at issue is that most of the members of these committees are Sangh parivar activists.

Though the Yadiyurappa government speaks of democracy and development, the reality is otherwise. The state is slowly but surely moving towards a kind of cultural fascism on the lines of

Gujarat. The BJP has succeeded in appropriating social spaces left by the progressive forces to garner support of different sections of the masses. □□□