

NOTE

Third Front—A Brake?

Bharat Jhunjhunwala writes :

The common man does not exist in the radar of the BJP. Prime Minister Vajpayee was content flaunting false government statistics about generation of employment. He was not willing to listen to even friendly critics-so enamoured was he with his IAS cronies. The Congress has done no better. It gave green light to the eating of jobs by big companies. It has supported forcible land acquisitions for SEZs. It is promoting hydropower projects that impose unrecorded costs on the people while providing booty to dam companies. The tyranny of the market unleashed by the Congress has decimated the livelihood of the farmer, weaver, cobbler and potter. The voter sees the Employment Guarantee Scheme as a half-hearted effort to apply bandages to the wounds inflicted by the selfsame government. This is the ugly 'human face' of the Congress party.

The second source of dissatisfaction is the sacrifice of nation's self-esteem. The BJP had done well in the eyes of the 'nationalists' in making the nuclear explosions and fighting the Kargil war. But this was diluted somewhat by it implementing the IMF agenda. Vajpayee, for example found the time to release a book written by IMF officials but not to release a book on Swami Vivekananda. Congress has followed the rich countries' agenda even more vigorously. It has opened the economy to multinationals and made the nuclear agreement. This loss of self-esteem has not gone well with the voter.

The third area of dissatisfaction is religious schism. The Congress has not displayed respect towards the Sikhs and BJP towards the Muslims. The BJP has not even been respectful towards the Hindus. It first initiated breaking of the Ram Setu and has now taken a vow to kill the Ganga. For these reasons the voter is set to apply the brake on the two major parties. This will be good for the country because it will force a rethink on the pro-rich pro-West model of development that the BJP and Congress are implementing.

The upper classes of the country are nervous about increased role of the Third Front after the elections. First concern is with regard to stability. The market has not forgotten the two years of unrest that followed reservations for OBCs initiated by the V P Singh Government. But the market is short-sighted. It fails to appreciate the fact that India has been saved from domestic unrest of the type that has engulfed Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, in part, because of these caste-based reservations. Caste-based politics has provided a safety valve for expressing one's dissatisfaction. The present model of development has failed the common man. The upper classes have their air-conditioned malls but the common man is losing his job. The BJP and Congress have no road map for reaching the fruits of development to the common man. It is likely that the Third Front will take measures that will provide such relief and, in the process, create instability for the present and stability in the long run, just as OBC reservations have done. The country will certainly face short term economic upheaval with increasing clout of the Third Front. But, this will become the basis of changing course towards a long term sustainable development model. It matters little whether the influence of the Third Front will sustain. Even a temporary stop will give people

an occasion to examine whether they are on the right course. The upper classes should know that stability of the country is today threatened by increasing inequality and unemployment. □□□