



**THE HINDU CENTRE**

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Politics and Public Policy



Interview

## Caste alliance is not the bedrock of our philosophy: Sachin Pilot

Vidya Subrahmaniam

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Rajasthan Congress President Sachin Pilot during an interview, in New Delhi on December 18, 2015. File photo: Shanker Chakravarty

*Congress party chief in Rajasthan, **Sachin Pilot**, makes out a litany of charges against the incumbent Vasundhara Raje Government, accusing it, among other things, of irregularities in allotting mines and neglect of critical agriculture issues leading to, for the first time in Rajasthan, a spate of farmer suicides. On the Congress's national vision, and whether his party has a counter to the BJP's aggressive Dalit-OBC outreach, his answer is: "I think it is wrong to put people in baskets and say this is an issue of Dalits, or Dalit votes. The way I look at it, tribals, Hindus, Muslims, Dalits, forwards, backwards, if you leave these categories, there*

*are only two categories in India. There are the extremely well-off and the not well-off. People who have access to resources and those who don't. In the don'ts, the majority may be Dalits, backwards, tribals and minorities" Excerpts from an interview to Vidya Subrahmaniam, Senior Fellow, The Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy.*

**At the time of the 2013 election to the Rajasthan assembly, the Vasundhara Raje-led Bharatiya Janata Party had brought out a black paper alleging huge corruption by the incumbent Congress government. Now you have leveled charges against the Vasundhara Raje government.**

Her Government actually went back on the charges and retained many of our decisions. Not just this. Her government went back on the principle promise made by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to provide corruption-free governance. Take its decision on mines. Between November 2014 and January 2015, the state government allotted as many as 653 mines, amounting to 95,000 bighas of land, on a first-come-first-served basis without reference to the Government of India (GOI). This violated the central government guidelines <sup>1</sup> as well as the spirit of the Supreme Court judgments on allocation of natural resources which require the state action to be "unbiased, without favoritism or nepotism, and to be in pursuit of promotion of healthy competition and equitable treatment". By an ordinance dated January 12, 2015, the GOI amended the earlier Mines and Minerals Act and made prior approval of central government and competitive bidding compulsory for allotment of mines <sup>2</sup>. However, the State government rushed with the allotments in order to beat the January 12, 2015 cut-off. About a 100-odd mines were allotted on the midnight of January 11. The notings in official files show that they were cleared with as many as ten officers signing on the same day.

**Didn't the Rajasthan Government crack down on this?**

When the Congress party got wind of it, we took up the matter with the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) and the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), and organised protests in Delhi. The local BJP leadership initially brushed off our objections and argued that unlike the Congress government which was stuck in a policy paralysis, they wanted to move fast with decisions and hence the mining allotments. But then the government itself cancelled the allocations and handed over the matter to the state Lok Ayukt (LA) for investigation. The LA in Rajasthan does not have the powers to investigate the Chief Minister which is why we wanted a CBI inquiry. Tell me isn't corruption proved by the cancellation of allocations and asking the LA to investigate?

**How do you link this with the Chief Minister? Besides, a search shows that the State Anti-Corruption Bureau did arrest top officials, including Ashok Singhvi, the then Principal Secretary, mines.**

“ *There has been a spate of farmer suicides in Rajasthan, which had never before witnessed farmer suicides.* ”

The secretary was jailed and all the blame was put on him. But the question is: Can a secretary to the state government allocate 95,000 bigas of mining land without the role of the political leadership? Also, Ashok Singhvi was arrested in a single matter of reinstatement of mines in Chittor. This case has no link with the 653 mines. There are numerous others cases in water, irrigation and PWD where we have caught irregularities.

Besides this, there is another issue for which the Rajasthan government is to be fully blamed: The agrarian crisis that is now being talked about nationally. Importantly, there has been a spate of farmer suicides in Rajasthan, which had never before witnessed farmer suicides.

**Is that so? That is odd considering how drought-prone the State is.**

Yes, it might surprise you but Rajasthan did not record a single farmer suicide until recently. We used to hear about suicides in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Telengana, but never in Rajasthan, despite the fact that of its 68 years in existence, the State has had 60 drought years. But during the current BJP regime, as of March 2017, 61 farmers had committed suicide. In the last one and a half months alone, nine farmers have committed suicide out of which four were from the Jhalawar-Baran region which is the political stronghold of the Chief Minister and her son and MP, Dushyant Singh. Two farmers committed suicide in Jhalawar which is her constituency.

But sadly, the government has been in denial about these suicides, attributing them to other reasons like family disputes, mental problems, property issue and so forth. Worse, because of this denial, Rajasthan alone of the major affected states has not benefited from farm loan waivers. In 2008, the UPA government waived loans across India for small and medium farmers amounting to a total of 72,000 crore, and this was done without political motives We did this for everybody without looking at which party is ruling which state.

In Uttar Pradesh, the BJP said, 'You vote for us we will waive your farm loans'. So loans amounting to Rs.30,000 crore was waived only because the BJP won the elections. Subsequently, pressure came on Maharashtra government which also waived loans. Punjab and Karnataka too have waived loans. My question is what sin have the farmers of Rajasthan committed that they have not been given a waiver? I'm not saying waiver is a panacea for all ills in the agriculture sector. But if farmers across the country are getting the benefit of waivers why not those in Rajasthan? But I will not rest until I get justice for our farmers. Farming is the backbone of our economy; our rural folks are in severe crisis. These are the consequences of three and a half years of Vasundhara Raje rule where she has not only allowed corruption and ignored the farm sector, she has refused to accept that the suicides were caused by farm distress, So who is worst hit by all this? The people of Rajasthan. The State BJP is so powerful today, it has all 25 MPs and 163 MLAs. Expectations were that with this kind of majority, Rajasthan will get special category status, will get drought relief money. Leave alone waivers, there are 10 lakh farmers today waiting for relief for crops hit last year by hail storm. They asked for Rs. 11,000 crore from the government and they got Rs.900 crore. As a result, 10 lakh people today are still awaiting relief.

Added to this are Delhi's policies. In December 2016, the GOI abolished import duty on wheat which disincentivised the Indian farmers and made them uncompetitive. (In March 2017, the GOI introduced a 10 per cent duty)

### **What explains this?**

I don't know. There is nobody representing farmer interests in Government of India or Rajasthan. People in government are disconnected from farm issues both at the Centre and Delhi. People keep saying the Congress has done nothing for 60 years. But they forget. How did the green revolution happen? How did the white revolution happen? If today we are totally self sufficient in food production, it is because of the vision of the leadership in the 1960s, the 1970s and the 1980s. The Modi government has completed three years in office and the Raje Government nearly four. How long will they keep blaming the Congress? What does the BJP have to show for its years in office. Tell me two initiatives of the government, either at the Centre or in Rajasthan, that are pro-farmers? Blaming the Congress is no solution. We have gone. They are ruling most of north India now.

Take the Rajasthan government's procurement policy. They announced the Minimum Support Price for government agencies. But in actual fact there is little procurement. The farmer waits four days in the *mandi* and finally succumbs and sells his produce at one-fourth the price to

the private dealers. Farmers mortgage their land and get into a debt trap. In what appears to be a deliberate strategy, procurement targets are always missed and nobody is reprimanded for it.

For Rajasthan farmers to get out this cycle, they need more cold storages, better farming technologies, more cash crops. For three years now, Vasundharaji has not announced a single rupee of bonus whereas Rajasthan has always got a per quintal annual bonus.

### **How does this square with the BJP's promise of increase in MSP plus 50 per cent profit?**

Forget 50 per cent profit, they have not even increased the MSP. During UPA years, the MSP registered an average annual increase of 8 to 12 per cent while the corresponding figure for NDA is one to five per cent <sup>3</sup> .

**You have painted a dismal picture. How is that the Congress has not highlighted all this? Where is any of this in the media, the public space? All we know or have heard about is the Lalit Modi connection. But the media seems not to want to follow that trail.**

Where corruption and irregularities are concerned, including the Lalit Modi issue, there are investigative agencies. There is the Enforcement Directorate, the Interpol.

### **Are they investigating?**

(laughs) The law will run its own course with one eye open one eye shut. If these agencies are so proactive, why have they taken no action against Shivraj Singh Chauhan on Vyapam? Sadly, people are still talking about issues like *Ghar Wapsi*, love *jihad*, beef ban, what time Mr.Yogi Adityanath feeds his cows and so forth. Mainstream media is today completely focused on emotive issues. The BJP's propaganda machinery is so strong that real issues have got sidelined by demonetisation, GST, the Prime Minister's foreign visits etc. Reduction in food inflation was a big promise. But why are food prices increasing? Why are there no jobs?

I have not met a single shopkeeper or businessman or real estate dealer who says he is hiring people. In IT sector, there are devastating losses in jobs. Where are the jobs?

**Why is there an impression of infighting in the Rajasthan Congress? That there are two factions, run by you and (former Chief Minister) Ashok Gehlot respectively? What is wrong with the Congress?**

There is nothing wrong with the Congress. But please understand the mind of the BJP which is using all the power at its command to keep the focus on divisive issues. Now Rajasthan is not that talked about in the power corridors of Delhi. But that doesn't mean people in the state are unaware. In my state I have used the social media and the local regional press to put across our party's point of view.

**What about the specific charges you have made?**

We have made the charges and the investigation is with the Lok Ayukta. But it has no teeth, no power. Rajasthan is the only state in India which has a cow welfare ministry. But the minister of cow welfare does not have an office or a budget or staff. Five thousand cows died in the government-run cow shelter of Hingonia last year. See, the cow occupies a special place in our history and in our culture.

“ *The cow has a special place in our ancestry, our culture and our ethos and our belief system. But nobody in the Congress has done politics around the cow. If there is a law against cow slaughter, we respect it.* ”

**So this is the other thing. Isn't there a lot of confusion in the Congress on issues like this? Cow slaughter, beef ban?**

No. The cow has a special place in our ancestry, our culture and our ethos and our belief system. But nobody in the Congress has done politics around the cow. If there is a law against cow slaughter, we respect it. In India, cow slaughter is banned in most states and we respect that law.

**Aren't the lynchings and attacks a direct result of the ban?**

No, please hear me out. Once a law is established and if a person deviates from the law, he or she must be punished and tried. But who will perform that function? Who will do the investigation and trial? It is the government, the police, and the courts. It can't be self-styled

justice delivery people. I'm against that. The cow slaughter ban has been there for decades. Why has it become an issue now? Because it has been politicised.

“ *Whose is that invisible hand that is giving these gaurakshaks patronage? Where is the aggression coming from? Why did this not happen three years ago? There is somebody, somewhere supporting these people, right?* ”

**Once you say 'I worship' the cow, the *gaurakshaks* will understand it to mean that those who don't (worship) should be attacked.**

But why didn't this happen before? Why suddenly now? Whose is that invisible hand that is giving these *gaurakshaks* patronage? Where is the aggression coming from? Why did this not happen three years ago? There is somebody, somewhere supporting these people, right? The Prime Minister has commented thrice on the *gaurakshaks*, once even describing them as *goondas*. The point is. what is happening on the ground? Under the watch of the Raje government, innocent people have been lynched in the name of cow protection and they keep changing the inquiry from one place to another. The victim's family is still waiting for justice.

**Are you referring to the Pehlu Khan case? <sup>4</sup> What is the progress in that?**

Nothing. Investigations are going on. The real culprits are still at large. This is mockery of the system, right? And the home minister of the State makes a statement that both sides were at fault when the inquiry had not even started. That means that the inquiring officer knows which way to tilt.

**Are you in favour of the beef ban?**

I think every state has the right to decide what it wants to do. If there is law in place in a state we must respect that. But in other places in India, where they consume beef, the North East, Kerala, etc., there is no such law.

**But within Maharashtra and other states, there might be beef eaters. Doesn't an overarching law amount to interfering with the food-habits of the people?**

Generally, I believe that government, irrespective of the political party heading it, must not focus its time and energy on what people must eat and not eat. That's not the job of the

government. The government's job is governance, law and order, delivery of justice etc. And that's what they should do. But if there is a law established in a state, if there is a cow slaughter ban in a state, and it has been there for 20, 30 years, so be it. But once that law is broken, or is seen to be broken, it is the agencies of the state that must act and not these self-styled people who are now giving the country a bad name. And now the Prime Minister has spoken of his concern but on the ground, his governments aren't taking any action. And it cannot be by accident. It has to be by design. Mr. Modi is a very powerful man. If he can demonetise currency notes overnight, I'm sure he can call up a few *gaurakshaks* and fix this problem.

**So how do you see your prospects in your State? If the Congress has a chance anywhere in the immediate future, it is in Rajasthan.**

In the 2014 Lok Sabha election, the Congress polled 30 per cent and BJP 55 per cent in Rajasthan. A year and half ago, in the panchayat polls, which are the biggest elections after the Lok Sabha elections, Congress polled 45 per cent and BJP polled 46.5 per cent. So the 25 percentage point-gap came down to less than two points. In 2015, we had elections to four assembly seats, all held by the BJP and we won three.

**So how do you explain the defeat in the Dholpur assembly by-poll?**

In Dholpur, we did not lose to the BJP. We lost to the State government. Dholpur is Vasundhara Raje's home. Dholpur and Agra are 18 kms apart. The by-election was held just after the Uttar Pradesh assembly election where the BJP had a massive victory. Some of the Yogi euphoria transferred to Dholpur. But more importantly, it was an election where government machinery was massively used. Election law bans the presence of political leaders and workers in a constituency for 48 hours before the start of polling. This cooling off is essential to ensure free and fair polling. My 200-odd workers and I left the place as required. But just as campaigning was drawing to an end, Vasundharaji sprained her ankle and decided to stay in her house in Dholpur. I complained to the EC and the next day a medical board was constituted comprising government doctors. The government doctor advised her bed rest for three days coinciding with the cooling off period. If she had actually sprained her ankle, which I'm sure she had, she could have been airlifted to Jaipur which has better medical facilities. But she stayed there for three days until the elections were over while there was no one from the Congress there.



“ *The BSP MLA from Dholpur is convicted for murder which forces him to vacate the seat. The BJP fields his wife, who is an accused with him in another case, on the same seat and Mr. Khushwah manages somehow to stay in Dholpur jail while his wife is campaigning.* ”

By the way, what caused the vacancy in Dholpur? It was caused by the conviction for life of the sitting MLA from the Bahujan Samaj Party, B.L Khushwah. He was convicted on December 9, 2016 for a 2012 murder. He and his wife are also accused in a chit fund case. Yet, the BJP didn't think twice before inducting his wife, Shobha Rani, into the party and giving her the party ticket. Is this the party with the difference? Matters don't stop here. Prison rules are clear that convicts undergoing life imprisonment must be in a central jail. But for two months during the election, Mr. Khushwah was in Dholpur jail, shifting later to the ICU of a local hospital. You see what I mean? The BSP MLA from Dholpur is convicted for murder which forces him to vacate the seat. The BJP fields his wife, who is an accused with him in another case, on the same seat and Mr. Khushwah manages somehow to stay in Dholpur jail while his wife is campaigning. I complained to the EC and finally they shifted him to the central jail in Ganganagar, 800 km away.

**This is actually quite funny.**

Why has he lost the seat? It's because he has been convicted for murder. His wife also has multiple FIRs against her because she was a director in a chit fund company he ran. When you file your nomination, you have to disclose the details of all FIRs against you. But she didn't do it <sup>5</sup>.

**You have proof for this?**

Yes, of course. For the Chief Minister, this election was about her personal prestige. More than a dozen ministers camped in Dholpur. The full administrative machinery was at her disposal.

**If she is so powerful, how are you going to fight the 2018 state election?**

She can do this on one seat but not on all 200 seats.

**What is your strategy for the coming election? What is the alternative model you speak of?**

I don't think criticizing the BJP is enough. We must hold them to account but we must also present to the people of Rajasthan a better alternative. I'm going to enunciate very clearly when we go to the polls that this is what the Congress party stands for; if you vote us in, this is what we will do in education, labour reform, health, in sanitation, in urban development, and in job creation. And we will draw up guidelines so that the people get exactly what we proposed.

**This sounds like a manifesto.**

No. A manifesto is a list of promises released on poll eve. I'm looking at a vision for Rajasthan. One is Rajasthan's untapped potential. We have not been able to create jobs. For job creation, we need to incentivise small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) which we have been overlooking. We are looking at large MNCs, government investments but SMEs are ignored. We have to incentivise them because job creation is the only way Rajasthan can go forward. Tourism etc can be part of it.

Farming issues are important. The other is urban renewal. We don't have a grand plan to transform the urban city centres. There is the problem of deteriorating water situation. The next big issue in Rajasthan is going to be water. Not just irrigation water but also drinking water. I don't think we have a clear policy on water management, conservation.

I think young people of Rajasthan today are moving beyond caste lines. Young people need a message of empathy and inclusion in a tangible manner and job opportunities.

**This brings me to the question of vision, nationally and in the State. You have seen what the BJP has done in terms of cooption of castes. The BJP used to be a Brahmin-Bania party. Now at every level they are recruiting Dalits and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and giving them leadership roles. As a result, there has been a complete transformation in the composition of the party's vote bank. The irony is that the Congress was the catch-all, umbrella party. Why is the Congress not able to give greater political representation to the socially excluded?**

With its 150-year history, the Congress has in its DNA a narrative that is wholesome and positive and accommodating of all views. The BJP has actually become an election-winning

machine. It has no ideological connect. In Kashmir, they have tied up with the People's Democratic Party in order to get the post of deputy chief minister. What happened to Article 370? The situation in Kashmir is very worrisome. They took a strong stand on Kashmir because they wanted votes in the cow belt. But in Kashmir, they have made a complete volte-face. So, to say the BJP has something to offer ideologically is complete rubbish. Whether on international security or even the economy, all they have to offer is only propaganda. I don't know of any smart economist who has said that demonetisation was so essential that we couldn't do without it. The Goods and Services Tax is not what we had envisioned. We wanted a cap at 18 per cent. The BJP opposed us on this for seven years. Today, 28 per cent tax is a must. One nation, one tax has six taxes.

**Before we come to that, let's look at diversity. What is the Congress doing for Dalits who used to be your solid vote bank? Dalits left the Congress for the BSP and they are now going to the BJP because the party has made outreach to them a priority. So what is your policy for them?**

I think it is wrong to put people in baskets and say this is an issue of Dalits, or Dalit votes. The way I look at it, tribals, Hindus, Muslims, Dalits, forwards, backwards, if you leave these categories, there are only two categories in India. There are the extremely well-off and the not well-off. People who have access to resources and those who don't. In the don'ts, the majority may be Dalits, backwards, tribals and minorities. But I'm not going into that.

**But you have to admit that there are aspirational expectations in all the castes. Representation has become an important issue. When the BJP nominated Ramnath Kovind to be President, it sent out a big signal to the Kori community and via that to other backward communities.**

India has become one country because there was space for everyone to be represented – tribals, people of the North East, Lakshwadeep, Jammu Kashmir. Everyone had space. Today the so-called geographical fringe, religious fringe, social and cultural fringe are feeling left out because they haven't got space in mainstream policy-making. Congress has the bandwidth to take along the people on the margins. When I use the phrase have-nots, it is not about being poor, that is too simple a classification. I use it in the sense of empowerment, sense of stakeholderhood. If you take that away, you will have fault lines opening up, which has already begun to happen. Most of those making statements in the BJP are MPs and MLAs. You cannot get more mainstream than that.

**Do you not agree that Congress needs to be more representative in terms of giving leadership roles to the socially deprived? Dalits have faced and continue to face institutional prejudice which cannot be tackled by reservation alone.**

But when have we not done that? Compare where we were 50 years ago to the situation today. In this period, the Congress has represented and given leadership to every section of society, every part of India. But overall, I agree that we are losing votes, whether of tribals or Dalits, and the BJP is now eating into these votes.

**But these are people who were your core voters. They were with you for years. What are you offering them? The secret of Narendra Modi's 2014 victory is that he stoked up the aspirations of voters, especially young and deprived sections, making them believe in themselves.**

That was just rhetoric. You look at the numbers. In the ten years our government was in power, 140 million people were lifted from abject poverty to above the poverty line. Whether it is the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Right to Education, Right to Food or loan waiver, we were way ahead in offering welfare. That along with eight per cent GDP growth. Where are the results on the ground in this government?

**MGNREGA was a fantastic programme. You enacted a range of empowering, transformative legislation. But somehow all of this has been overshadowed by the promise Modi held out and continues to hold out. Shouldn't you be able to say that this is what we did and this is what we will do?**

People don't doubt our performance. But the communication and messaging need to be more robust.

“*Congress has never been a caste-based party. Regional parties can be purely caste-based organisations.*”

**You don't agree that the party needs to build a solid caste coalition? Both to increase representation and to get votes.**

We understand the compulsions of electoral politics. But caste combination and social engineering cannot be the bedrock of our philosophy. That can be a tool to win elections. But

our politics cannot be based on that. Congress has never been a caste-based party. Regional parties can be purely caste-based organisations.

**At the same time, you have to reach out to people who are economically poor and socially backward. Caste and poverty overlap. Their aspirations, their feelings have to be addressed.**

For the Congress today, the most worrying and most important aspect is how to move forward. Yet, look at our record. The Congress party, while standing up for welfare, has also been a party that has been very pro-reform and for a liberalised economy. See, a welfare state can only function if the other part of the economy is doing very well. That is the uniqueness of the Congress party. While we appear to be of a left-of-centre orientation, we still have progressive minds in the Congress who can bring about transformational change, and say that the economy has to grow at a certain per cent for us to sustain ourselves. So, that balance of doing what is required and still having your heart at the right place, that is unique to the Congress. You want the economy to grow. I'm not against making profit but I oppose crony capitalism, ugly profits, distortion of the market to suit a few monopolies, unfair competition, excluding some people, and having a mindset that does not get affected by the tragedies around us. Look at what is happening around us. I'm not talking only about the mob lynchings. That is criminal. I'm talking about school dropouts, malnourishment, farmer suicides, distress sales, these are things that must bother policy makers.

“ *You can imagine how young Indian minds are. And I think they have realized that the future is not about mandir -masjid politics, its not about Dalit versus upper caste, it's about delivery, maintaining law and order, being true to what you said you stood for.* ”

**Is it your case that caste coalitions will not last long without delivery on the ground?**

Absolutely. India's median age is 24 (2011 census) and I am 39 years old; I'm 15 years above the median age. You can imagine how young Indian minds are. And I think they have realized that the future is not about *mandir-masjid* politics, its not about Dalit versus upper caste. It's about delivery, maintaining law and order, being true to what you said you stood for. If you have those basic qualities as a party or a leader, you will sustain yourself and win. But there are also some negative forces which want to live off emotive issues, which want to cover up

their non-delivered promises by managing the ecosystem around them. They (the BJP) have compromised umpteen times on their ideology.

**They have also taken many defectors.**

Oh, yes. Toppling elected governments through defections in the North East, in Uttarakhand. I mean, they have a majority government. They should be really doing a lot more on what they have promised instead of trying to decimate any opposition voice. So, being anti-BJP has become being anti-India. Certificates of patriotism can't be handed out by BJP headquarters, right? It is my country, my Constitution, my faith. I have nothing to prove to anybody.

**The problem is they have succeeded in doing this. BJP equal to army equal to nationalism equal to flag and this has been internalised by large sections. The Opposition is in disarray and has no answer.**

One must not get disheartened. People of India are wiser than we think they are. We shouldn't think that this propaganda and marketing will last for all times to come. People may be less educated, less informed but they will react to political decisions that impact their lives; the rhetoric and propaganda can become counter-productive. It happened in Delhi, Bihar, and Punjab where people voted against the BJP. It is not like the BJP has not lost elections. They formed governments in Goa and Manipur but we all know how they manipulated that.

**Even if disillusionment eventually sets in, don't you think the Congress needs to be smarter than it is now to capture it and convert it into votes?**

The Congress won two general elections back to back in 2004 and 2009 and completed ten years in office. In 30 years, no party has done that

**But things have changed since ...**

Can you look at things in isolation? Just because the Congress lost 2014, does it mean it is going to lose all elections for all time to come? No never. I'm telling you with all the responsibility I have in the party that we are going to win the coming state elections.

**The Congress by itself?**

We are going to win Rajasthan for sure. In Gujarat also things are going to fall in place. Madhya Pradesh is ripe for the taking.

## **Don't you need to form an opposition coalition?**

We have the opposition coalition.

**Where is it? It is breaking up. Look at Nitish Kumar and that is where the smartness comes. If you had fielded Meira Kumar before they chose Kovind, you'd have outsmarted the BJP.**

Everybody is smart in hindsight. But there are circumstances compelling a certain course of action.

**In several places like Goa and Manipur, you missed the chance to form a government by a whisker. It is clear that the Congress needed to be more pro-active.**

I accept this. We have to be seen to be more pro-active. We perhaps are but are not being able to communicate that to the people. Things are changing. In the next few months there will be more changes in the organisation.

**What about the leadership? It is increasingly becoming apparent that Rahul Gandhi may be nice and sincere but doesn't have the instincts or stamina for the long, hard fight. You need to be tough as nails to take on Modi and (BJP chief) Amit Shah.**

That's a perception created by sections in the social media. Rahul Gandhi was unanimously elected vice-president and we have elections for the Congress president in October. You are far more despondent than you ought to be.

## **What is the Congress doing to stitch a match-winning alliance?**

**“** *But let me tell you one thing. It is the Congress and the Congress party alone that can take on the BJP nationally.* **”**

We are taking up the right issues. We are stitching alliances where they are required. Seventeen parties met together in Delhi and we decided on the presidential nominee. But let me tell you one thing. It is the Congress and the Congress party alone that can take on the BJP nationally. Don't also forget how the CBI (Central Bureau of Investigation) and ED (Enforcement Directorate) have been selectively used and misused against the regional

players. But 2019 is two years away. If anyone thinks the BJP is going to come back to power by the same tactics they have adopted so far, they are hugely mistaken.

**But look at how well they have done since then. By some reckoning, Modi is more popular today than he was earlier.**

People have short memory. Today, India is part of G7 and G20, not because of 2014 but because of the hard work done over 30-40 years. Whether it is the Mission to Mars or Delhi Metro or India's longest tunnel on the Jammu-Srinagar highway, none of this happened in the last 36 months. But they have managed to create the perception that they have done all this. I most respectfully want to submit to you that this is false.

**Of course it is false. The question that arises again and again is: What are you doing about it? What is your answer to the BJP's 'New India' slogan?**

We will go straight to the people, we will use technology, whatever is needed.

**Who will lead the party in Rajasthan?**

We will do it collectively. I'm the captain of the team and I'm benefiting from the experience and hard work of my seniors. I'd be doing a disservice to the party if I don't tap into their experiences. We've got enough from the party. It is time to give back.



## Endnotes:

*[All URLs were last accessed on July 19, 2017]*

- 1.^ [Government of India, Ministry of Mines.](#)
- 2.^ [prsindia.org](#), 2017. "[The Mines and Minerals \(Development and Regulation\) Amendment Bill, 2015](#)".
- 3.^ [Table of comparison based on Government of India website.](#)
- 4.^ [Undisclosed FIR against of BJP mla from Dholpur.](#)
- 5.^ Mander, H, 2017. "[A country for the cow: The chronicle of a visit to cow vigilante victim Pehlu Khan's village](#)", [scroll.in](#), April 24.

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