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The Akali factor: on BJP-SAD alliance in Punjab

With its alliance in Punjab, the BJP admits the need to take a back seat in some States

The Shiromani Akali Dal has been among the most steadfast allies of the Bharatiya Janata Party, the two parties having been in coalition since 1998. It comes as no surprise that they have aligned again in a seat-sharing arrangement in Punjab for the Lok Sabha election, with the Akalis as the dominant partner to contest 10 seats in the State and the BJP contesting the other three. In 2014, the alliance won 35% of the vote to secure six of the 13 constituencies in a tripartite contest. The Congress, which won three seats, will seek to build on its victory in the Assembly elections in 2017 as State-level incumbents usually enjoy some momentum going into a national election. The Akali-BJP alliance took a beating in the Assembly election after having been in power for two terms, but still managed a substantial 30.6% vote share, which could keep it competitive in the Lok Sabha election. There is also the emergence of the Aam Aadmi Party as a viable contestant in the State (especially in the southern Malwa region). For the BJP, a coalition with the Akalis, despite being allotted only three seats, was therefore an imperative. As with its other coalition partners such as the Shiv Sena, the alliance in Punjab too went through degrees of rough weather, but there was too much at stake for seat-sharing talks to fail. Besides reasons of arithmetic, the SAD also presents a strong and traditionally anti-Congress position in its ideological core, tinged with a certain degree of sectarianism. This coheres well with the overall vision of the BJP.

In allocating a larger share to the Akalis in Punjab, the AIADMK and other partners in Tamil Nadu, besides retaining its alliance with the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, the BJP has signalled its awareness of the efficacy of coherent pre-poll coalitions based on the party's strengths in these States. The BJP-led National Democratic Alliance has seen some attrition since 2014, with the loss of the Telugu Desam Party. But it has compensated with additions such as the Janata Dal (United), besides the retention of other allies. Even though it has projected a certain personalised form of administration with Prime Minister Narendra Modi being the dominant face of the government, the BJP is crucially dependent on the support of its allies. In the last five years, the party has steadily lost parliamentary by-elections and its current tally in the Lok Sabha is below the majority mark. Only with the support of the allies does the NDA now have a comfortable majority. The BJP might scoff at attempts made by the Opposition to form a grand coalition and portray them as an incoherent mishmash of organisations, but the fact that coalitions in Indian politics are here to stay is not lost on its leadership.

WORD	MEANING	SYNONYMS
Steadfast	Resolutely or dutifully firm and unwavering	Loyal, Faithful, Committed, Devoted, Dedicated
Allies	A state formally cooperating with another for a military or other purpose	Associate, Colleague, Friend, Confederate, Partner
Coalition	A temporary alliance for combined action, especially of political parties forming a government.	Alliance, Union, Partnership, Affiliation, Bloc, Caucus
Tripartite	Shared by or involving three parties.	
Substantial	Of considerable importance, size, or worth	Considerable, Real, Material, Weighty, Solid, Sizeable
Viable	Capable of working successfully; feasible.	Workable, Feasible, Practicable, Practical, Applicable, Usable
Imperative	Of vital importance; crucial	Vital, Crucial, Critical, Essential,
Ideological	Based on or relating to a system of ideas and ideals, especially concerning economic or political theory and policy.	
Tinge	A tendency toward or trace of some color	Tint, Colour, Dye, Stain, Shade, Suffuse
Sectarianism	Excessive attachment to a particular sect, or party, especially in religion.	
Coheres	Be united; form a whole	Stick Together, Hold Together, Be United, Bind, Cling, Fuse, Form A Whole

Attrition	The process of reducing something's strength or effectiveness through sustained attack or pressure	Weakening, Debilitation, Enfeebling, Sapping, Attenuation
Scoff	An expression of scornful derision	Mock, Deride, Ridicule, Sneer
Portray	Describe (someone or something) in a particular way.	Represent, Depict, Characterize, Describe, Present
Mishmash	A confused mixture.	Umble, Mess, Confusion, Hotchpotch, Hodgepodge

Hanoi hiccup: on Kim-Trump summit

Despite the collapse of talks, the U.S. and North Korea must persist with CBMs

The abrupt end of talks between U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in Hanoi is clearly a setback to attempts to find a peaceful solution to the Korean nuclear crisis. Both sides cut short a two-day summit on the second day on Thursday without even signing a joint communiqué. They also gave conflicting versions on why the talks collapsed. Mr. Trump said Mr. Kim insisted on a full withdrawal of American sanctions in return for the closure of only one nuclear facility. However, North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong-ho later said Pyongyang had sought only partial sanctions relief in return for dismantling the Yongbyon nuclear site, the North's main facility. Whatever the actual reason, one thing is clear: the bonhomie between the two leaders after last year's Singapore summit was missing in Hanoi. After the Singapore meet, both sides had agreed to have "new U.S.-DPRK [North Korea] relations" and establish a "lasting and stable peace regime" on the Korean peninsula. Pyongyang had also promised to work toward "complete denuclearisation". No such comments about the future course of the peace process were issued this time. The North Koreans have ruled out any immediate plans for a future meeting between the two sides.

A part of the problem was the failure of both Washington and Pyongyang in following up on commitments made in Singapore. A few weeks ahead of that summit in June, North Korea had announced a complete freeze on nuclear and missile tests as a reconciliatory gesture. It had asked the U.S. to reciprocate — its main demand was a formal declaration of an end to the 1950-53 Korean War, but the Trump administration refused to do so. Lack of confidence-building measures too blunted the momentum created in Singapore. When U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo first visited Pyongyang, Mr. Kim refused to meet him. Later, the American intelligence community reported that North Korea continued its ballistic missile programme after the first Trump-Kim summit. With these problems still in place, the second summit between the leaders was announced. Any hopes of clinching a big agreement in Hanoi fell as both sides stuck to their respective demands. However, the setback need not necessarily bring the peace process to a halt. Mr. Trump himself has said denuclearisation is a long process. The freeze on nuclear and missile tests that Mr. Kim announced is still in place. The Korean peninsula has been calm, while inter-Korean relations have markedly improved. Before the Hanoi summit, there were reports that the U.S. would declare an end to the Korean war and that both countries would open liaison offices in each other's capitals as part of normalisation of ties. They should go ahead with such measures and build confidence and mutual trust while also taking a phased approach to dealing with more contentious issues such as denuclearisation.

WORD	MEANING	SYNONYMS
Hiccup	An involuntary spasm of the diaphragm and respiratory organs, with a sudden closure of the glottis and a characteristic sound like that of a cough.	~
<u>Abrupt</u>	Sudden and unexpected.	Sudden, Immediate, Instantaneous, Hurried, Hasty, Quick
Communiqué	An official announcement or statement, especially one made to the media.	~
Dismantling	Ake (a machine or structure) to pieces	Deconstruct, Disassemble, Break Up, Strip, Strip Down
Bonhomie	Cheerful friendliness; geniality.	Geniality, Congeniality, Conviviality, Cordiality, Affability, Amiability
Reconciliatory	Intended or likely to restore friendly relations.	~
Reciprocate	Respond to (a gesture or action) by making a corresponding one.	Do The Same, Do The Same In Return, Respond In Kind, Return The Favour
Blunted	Of a cutting implement) not having a sharp edge or point	Not Sharp, Unsharpened, Dull, Dulled, Worn, Worn Down, Edgeless