

No Proof Required

BJP - The Robotic Opposition

By

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(*Indian Express*, Dec 3rd, 2011)

Blurb: BJP's existential crisis: To exist is to oppose ?

Just a week ago, the UPA government and the Congress party were in complete shambles. Nothing they could do was right, and this failure to perform had been going on for more than a year: corruption, 2G scams, Team Anna, high inflation, low growth. Manmohan Singh, former reform Finance Minister, had done no economic reform worthy of India, or his name, for the last seven years that he had been Prime Minister. He seemingly had no support within his own party - the rank and file of the Congress has never looked kindly to any reform, political or economic - or outside. All of his supporters had joined the erstwhile category (full disclosure – myself included).

Today, several of us believe (myself included) you don't need to say myself – implied in “us” that Singh is the genuine (reform) king. What did he do to achieve this transformation in literally a week? Not much – but he has shown that he can introduce reforms. And bowl a googly or two. And even be an all-rounder by stumping the BJP-led opposition. Many of us now find Mr. Singh, and the Congress, worthy of our support. Much rather support a flawed king than a robotic opposition.

As I have speculated before, there seem to be not one, but several Congress moles within the BJP. Otherwise what else explains their continuous attempts to commit slow political suicide? It is actually worse than suicide: the dismemberment of body and faculties so aptly captured by that evocative Indian phrase “*apne pair pe apne kulhadi*”. It is not just scoring an own goal – it is axing one's feet so you can't score, period.

But what got the BJP into this funny (for those watching) enough bracketed asides! despair? The Prime Minister, who the BJP, and all of us, had accused of severe policy paralysis, actually came up with an economic reform policy – FDI in multi-brand retail. This policy was accompanied by enough caveats to defend any onslaught. The BJP should have seen this, but (stupidly?) did not. Minimum of \$ 100 million investment, half in infrastructure, only cities above 1 million to be eligible, 30 percent sourcing from small enterprises, etc. The real brilliant googly of the reform was the stipulation that the allowance of multi-brand retail was subject to permission from each individual state. In other words, each state Chief Minister

would be ultimately responsible for allowing, or forbidding, FDI retail to enter his/her respective eminent domain.

As soon as the policy was announced, the strangest of bedfellows, BJP and the Communists, were up in (each other's) arms. The former, a nationalist, religion based, opportunistic economic policy party. The latter derive their reason for existence from economic doctrines which proliferated in the 19th century. It is also a secular party; unless Marx is considered God or religion. So left and right, chalk and cheese, opposite extremes – anything but bedfellows. Yet, in the two major moves of Congress in seven years in power – the nuclear agreement and FDI in retail – the BJP has jumped into the open arms of the communists. The two are so far apart, that one party is completely lacking in “principles”: good or bad, the lack of principles is shockingly disappointing. Is it shocking, really?

What makes the BJP jump so shocking (old refrain: Communists ask BJP to jump – BJP asks: how high?) is that it had brought forward both of the policies much before the Congress was even dreaming of doing so. The BJP PM, Mr. Vajpayee (SOS – your party desperately needs you) had introduced the idea of both the nuclear bill, and the idea of FDI in retail. Now, nine years later, one of the more respected leaders of the BJP, Mr. Arun Jaitley, has been reduced to opposing the Congress initiative on the grounds that it - FDI in retail - is an idea whose time has *not* come. Let us see – in 2002, the middle class in India was only about 20 percent of the population, and per capita GDP was \$ 476. In 2011, the middle class is close to half the population, and per capita GDP at \$ 1300, is more than two and a half times the 2002 level. In rupee terms, per capita GDP at Rs. 75000, is more than triple the 2002 level of Rs. 24000. So, if one were to understand the BJP correctly, opening up the economy is something one does in reverse. Or, phrased differently, economic development is to start off rich, and regress to poverty. I thought that was the Communists' idea of development.

FDI in retail is likely to be a huge game-changer. For starters, after this embarrassment, the BJP will have to introspect and fire those leaders responsible for its regression into a party of the opposition, for the opposition, by the opposition and for the sake of opposition. It will have to fire the leaders responsible for opposing something that they literally could do nothing about.

FDI in retail is an executive decision, and the government has every right to introduce it, and do so without consulting parliament. The BJP has tried to wiggle out of its axed pain by questioning the timing of the decision. The bill should have been introduced after the end of the winter session is the BJP refrain. And why – so we could conduct important “in the name of the nation” business.

This objection comes with one arm being axed, the feet having been gone long before. For the first three days, on one pretext or another, parliament was not allowed to function by the BJP and Communists led opposition. So let me see – no business is being conducted, so please do not decide on anything while we refuse to do our job. I just don't get it.

No political party in India has even the minimum amount of principles, which is precisely why the few principles a party has should be zealously protected. A party should stand for at

least *something*. But, when you lose the precious few principles in possession, you have lost the rationale for even being in opposition.

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