

Chavan's critics say that he has the very rare ability to unite all the Congress MLAs from Mumbai. The 'damage', Congress leaders reputations of these leaders, said a former Congress minister. "Whatever the exit polls may suggest we are going to have good number in BJP alliance in Maharashtra.

The Needle's Eye



CHAITANYA KALBAG

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Kalki Narendra Modi Flies on a Jat Plane

When our prime minister rode on horseback to the Vaishno Devi shrine in Jammu last week, one swooning supporter could not contain himself and tweeted: "When I saw Modi on a white horse on way Maa Vaishno Devi the avatara of Kalki (sic) flashed my mind. What a leadership". Devout Hindus believe that we are passing through the Kali-yuga, when evil rules the earth and corruption, cruelty and chaos engulf us. Into that moral decay will ride Kalki, the last incarnation of Vishnu, astride a white horse and wielding a brilliant sword.

Modi was indefatigable. He was incandescent. He was indispensable. He was the main item in the Bharatiya Janata Party's do-or-die campaign to win power in Haryana, where the BJP was fighting both the Congress and the Indian National Lok Dal, and in Maharashtra, where voters were spoilt for choice, with the Congress, the Nationalist Congress Party, the Shiv Sena and the Maharashtra Navnirman Samiti also prying in their garish windows. Was it any wonder that Modi's return to the campaign trail had to be presented as the Second Coming?

Now don't get me wrong. Narendra Modi was not waving

any sword from his steed, and described himself modestly as a small man who wants to do big things for small people when he spoke in Manhattan a couple of weeks ago. There is little doubt about the moral decay around us that Modi says he will clean up, while urging his fellow Indians to use toilets, stay clean, and put their noses to the grindstone. On Thursday he launched the Shram Suvridha portal and extolled the virtues of labour and of blue-collar jobs. For a skill-starved nation, these are urgent priorities. We are awash in an ocean of underemployed and unemployable young people who will likely end in genteel poverty because they were too proud to dirty their hands.

Just when you think he is all trucked out, Modi springs back with another zinger. At typical speed, he has adopted the biometric, Aadhaar-based online system that Harkhand pioneered and turned it into the attendance.gov.in portal, where 62,175 central government employees had registered until Wednesday, 30,343 of them were present. Only 36.5 per cent got to work before 9 a.m. Good to have this granularity, but is it too much to imagine that babus of a certain rank and below will soon be re-



ANIRBAN BORA

Hooda & DLF

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quired to wear uniforms, made perhaps in prison shops manned by politicians jailed for corruption and moral depravity? A little more needs to be done to keep them there. Om Prakash Chautala of the Indian National Lok Dal, jailed with his son for corruption, was let out on bail and then yanked back into Delhi's Tihar Jail last weekend because he

sophistry. Anxious to win the Jat vote, Narendra Modi praised khaps, the village caste councils that enforce the most primitive, retrograde and misogynistic social norms. Modi also courted the Dera Sacha Sauda, the "social welfare and philanthropic" organisation whose leader Gurmeet Singh Ram Rahim Insaan faces rather nasty criminal charges.

No stone was left unturned, even if there were worms under every one of them. The man kicking over most of the stones was the BJP's Amit Shah, the capo di tutti capi, the boss of all bosses who has sworn to make India "Congress-mukt". Until this week the Congress party ruled nine states if you take away Maharashtra where Prithviraj Chavan's government fell just before the election. The BJP ruled five. If the BJP wins outright victories in both states, as exit polls predict, we will see Modi at his imperial best, anointing new and very likely untried chief ministers as he did Anandiben Patel in Gujarat. Already by the evening of polling day Maharashtra BJP chief Devendra Fadnis was speaking like a chief minister-elect, and quibblers like Pankaj Munde had quietened down. When it was clear

that right-wing Maratha politics had been trumped by Modi's caste-agnostic development message, Uddhav Thackeray began to make conciliatory noises. But the Shiv Sena boss will at best be a tributary, a vassal, if Modi wins big.

A clear victory in Haryana is important: a coalition would present Modi with the Hobson's choice of embracing the unsavory Chautala. But who will Modi name to the top post there? If he plumps for Susma, he will lose one more minister from his already overworked cabinet. It was fitting that the final act for Bhupinder Singh Hooda in Haryana should coincide with a body blow for one of his cronies, Gurjeon's biggest developer DLF. Last weekend the Securities and Exchange Board of India said DLF was guilty of misdeemeanours in its July 2007 IPO and banned the company as well as its promoter K.P. Singh, his son and daughter and three other executives from the capital markets for three years. If you had bought a DLF share on January 11, 2008 at Rs 1186, you would have lost 90 per cent of your money by Thursday which was Global Handwashing Day. Is there a parable in there about the rise and fall of power, patronage and plunder under Congress rule?