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Index

Clarity and purpose: The Hindu Editorial on the BJP's electoral juggernaut	2
Promise and pragmatism: On Jacinda Ardern's term as New Zealand PM.....	4

CLARITY AND PURPOSE: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE BJP'S ELECTORAL JUGGERNAUT

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Elections, Election Commission and the Electoral Reforms in India Incl. Political Parties

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January 20, 2023 12:20 am | Updated 01:00 am IST

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The [Bharatiya Janata Party](#) (BJP) has unveiled its road map for the next general election at its national executive which also [extended the term of party president J.P. Nadda](#) to June 2024. Under his presidency, the party's electoral performance has been impressive, notwithstanding the recent loss in Himachal Pradesh, his home State. Mr. Nadda has termed the extension of his tenure a 'privilege and honour' and an 'immense responsibility'. The power commanded by the president is dependent on the occupant in the BJP. Mr. Nadda draws his authority from the confidence he enjoys of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah who are the ultimate decision makers. This is not unprecedented for the party — A.B. Vajpayee and L.K. Advani were more powerful than party presidents. The party has called upon its cadres to work towards winning all nine Assembly elections due in 2023. The BJP is in power, singlehandedly in Tripura and as part of coalitions in Nagaland and Meghalaya, three States for which [elections were announced](#) on Wednesday. The [party is also trying to emerge as a serious contender for power in Telangana](#) for the first time, retain power in the key States of Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh, and recapture Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. The Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir is also likely to have its first election in 2023, where the BJP is experimenting with a new brand of politics.

The BJP has said it practises "a politics of saturation and governance of saturation" — possibly alluding to the relentless campaigns around government schemes that target various constituencies. At the national executive, the party noted with glee that a series of controversies and missteps, from demonetisation to Goods and Services Tax, and the Rafale defence deal to Pegasus snooping, did not damage the party. It said all these were failed attempts by the Opposition to discredit the Modi government. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi is trying to build a new politics against the BJP through his Bharat Jodo Yatra, but Opposition politics is caught in confusion and rivalries. The BJP is clearly counting on the continuing popularity of Mr. Modi into yet another season of victories to be capped with a third consecutive Lok Sabha win in 2024. The party also has a clear strategy for mobilisation. Mr. Nadda emphasised the persistent outreach of the party towards the Other Backward Classes, Scheduled Tribes and Dalit communities. Traditionally an upper caste dominated party, the BJP has made deep inroads among other segments. The party is also focusing on new regions such as West Bengal and Telangana for expansion. Success has not made the BJP complacent.

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PROMISE AND PRAGMATISM: ON JACINDA ARDERN'S TERM AS NEW ZEALAND PM

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

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Jacinda Ardern's time in office as New Zealand's Prime Minister was rattled by several successive challenges. At 37, the Labour leader came to power in 2017, promising a "transformational change". Nearly six years later when she leaves office, she would be better remembered for her handling of crises such as the coronavirus pandemic, the far-right terror attacks on mosques in Christchurch and volcanic eruptions. Ms. Ardern offered a leadership model rooted in empathy and moral values — the way she handled the Christchurch shootings is a case in point. Her approach towards the pandemic was initially popular, which helped Labour sweep the 2020 legislative elections. New Zealand's per capita death rate from COVID-19 is among the lowest in the developed world. The way she announced her resignation also won her praise — that there is "not enough in the tank" for her to continue in the top office — which made her stand out in a world where not many leaders relinquish power easily. Chris Hipkins, a former Minister for COVID response in Ms. Ardern's Cabinet and a troubleshooter for the Prime Minister, will succeed her and lead Labour in the 2023 election.

While her leadership style is widely praised, particularly among liberal sections across the world, there are also questions on whether Ms. Ardern made good on the promises she made to the electorate. New Zealand is one of the most expensive countries to live in. In 2017, Ms. Ardern vowed to tackle the country's housing crisis by constructing 1,00,000 homes, but only a fraction has been built in the past five years. Housing prices remain extensively high, while high inflation has left a hole in household budgets. Her promises to address child poverty (New Zealand has one of the worst rates of child poverty in the developed world) and tackle inequality (the top 10% control nearly half of the country's household net worth) have fallen flat. Besides, continued lockdowns and COVID measures even when neighbouring Australia opened up turned a chunk of Ms. Ardern's early admirers away from her. The slide in her popularity hit Labour's election prospects which prompted many within the party to question her leadership. According to a December poll, Labour's support stood at 33%, while 38% backed the centre-right National Party, the main opposition. It was against this background that Ms. Ardern announced her resignation. Mr. Hipkins now has only eight months to steady the ship and reverse the public mood, a tall ask. He should blend Ms. Ardern's empathetic politics with a strong economic vision that would address New Zealand's structural economic problems while keeping its social harmony intact.

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