

Refugee Review Tribunal

AUSTRALIA

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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Question

Please provide information on the Bharatiya Janta Party in India.

RESPONSE

Please provide information on the Bharatiya Janta Party in India.

The *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP), meaning Indian People's Party, was formed in 1980. It is renowned as a Hindu nationalist party, espousing the term "Hindutva" meaning cultural Hindu nationalism. It also belongs to a group of Hindu fundamentalist organisations referred to as *Sangh Parivar* ("family of associations") who are said to be inspired by the ideology of the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS). The RSS is a paramilitary Hindu communal group which has been banned three times by the government in 1948, 1975 and 1992. The bans were subsequently lifted each time as the Supreme Court of India declined to uphold them. Since its inception, the BJP has been closely associated with the RSS and derives many of its members from the cadre of the RSS.

The BJP led the Indian government between 1998 and 2004. In the general election to the 14th *Lok Sabha*, the BJP was defeated by the Indian National Congress (INC) and its electoral alliance, known as United Progressive Alliance (UPA). The BJP currently leads the opposition as head of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). At the state level the BJP heads the governments of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. It also rules in the states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Nagaland, Orissa and Karnataka through its National Democratic Alliance partners ('Bharatiya Janata Party' 2006, Wikipedia, 26 August http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bharatiya_Janata_Party – Accessed 30 August 2006 – Attachment 1).

The *Political Handbook of the World 2005-2006* provides a comprehensive description of the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP). The pertinent extracts follow in detail.

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The *Bharatiya Janata* (Indian People's) Party was formed in April 1980 by the bulk of *Janata's Jana Sangh* group which opposed efforts by the *Janata* leadership to ban party officeholders from participation in the activities of the National Volunteer Corps (*Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* – RSS), a paramilitary Hindu communal group. By 1982 the BJP was generally regarded as the best organized non-Communist opposition party and in fact held more *Lok Sabha* seats than *Janata*. In August 1983 the party entered into a National Democratic Alliance with the *Lok Dal* that remained in effect through the *Rajya Sabha* elections of March 1984 but was abandoned prior to the *Lok Sabha* balloting in December 1984, at which the BJP's representation fell to two seats.

The BJP experienced a dramatic revival of fortune in 1989, winning 88 *Lok Sabha* seats, and supported the National Front government of V.P. Singh until October 1990, when BJP leader L.K. Advani was detained in connection with the Ayodhya temple dispute. The Party's legislative representation rose to 119 in 1991 as the leading component of an electoral alliance that included *Shiv Sena* (below). Despite a major setback at state elections in December 1993, it recovered strongly thereafter, rallying Hindu discontent with the Congress (I) government's enthusiasm for market disciplines and also finding support for its anti-Muslim populism. Its castigation of ministerial corruption became less convincing when Advani was named as a recipient of illicit payments in the great scandal of early 1996, even though he denied any wrongdoing. Having emerged from the April-May *Lok Sabha* election as the plurality party, with 161 seats, it formed a minority government that was led by Atal Bihari Vajpayee and included *Shiv Sena* representatives. However, the administration resigned after 13 days rather than be defeated in a confidence vote. In 1997 the party tried to expand its support through moderating its Hindu nationalist image and forging ties to state and regional parties. At the 1998 election it again emerged as the plurality party, winning 181 seats, with Vajpayee then cobbling together a governing coalition. In 1999 it won 182 seats, and Vajpayee succeeded in forming his third government.

In May 2001 the BJP absorbed the Progressive Manipur state Congress Party (PMSCP), a breakaway faction of the Manipur State Congress Party (MSCP). The MSCP itself, which had one *Lok Sabha* seat in 1999 as a component of the NDA, merged with the BJP in August 2003. In February 2002 the BJP had also absorbed the M. G. R. Dravidian Progressive Federation (*M.G.R. Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam-MGR ADMK*, named after AIADMK founder M.G. Ramachandran), a 1997 offshoot of the AIADMK that in 1999 had won one lower house seat from Tamil Nadu as part of the NDA. In March 2004, with the next *Lok Sabha* election approaching, the Chhattisgarh-based *Rashtriya Janatantrik Dal* of former NCP leader V.C. SHULKA also joined the BJP.

Confounding expectations, the BJP-led NDA fell to Congress and its allies at the 2004 *Lok Sabha* elections, with the BJP winning only 22 percent of the vote and 137 seats. At the state level the BJP headed the governments in Chhattisgarh, Goa, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan as of July 2005.

Leaders: Atal Bihari VAJPAYEE (former Prime Minister), Kushabhau THAKRE (President), Lal Krishna ADVANI (President), Jaswant SINGH, Sanjay JOSHI, Shivraj Singh CHAUHAN, Narendra MODI (Chief Minister of Gujarat) (Banks, A.S. et al (ed.) 1999, *Political Handbook of the World: 2005-2006*, CSA Publications, New York, p.513 – Attachment 1).

The *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) has an official website which can be accessed through the following link (<http://www.bjp.org/>).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

Topic Specific Links

Bharatiya Janata Party website <http://www.bjp.org/>

Indian Elections website <http://www.indian-elections.com>

Search Engines

Google search engine <http://www.google.com.au/>

Databases:

FACTIVA (news database)

BACIS (DIMA Country Information database)

REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)

ISYS (RRT Country Research database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)

RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments

1. 'Bharatiya Janata Party' 2006, Wikipedia, 26 August
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bharatiya_Janata_Party – Accessed 30 August 2006.
2. Banks, A.S. et al (ed.) 1999, *Political Handbook of the World 2005-2006*, CSA Publications, New York, p.513. (MRT/RRT Library)