

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

SC Bench on Ram temple

Let politics not cast shadow over judicial process

THE Supreme Court has finally stilled the impatience of the Hindutva crowd with the setting up of a five-judge Bench to hear the socially and politically divisive Ram janmabhoomi-Babri masjid dispute. The Bench was to be reconstituted after the retirement of then Chief Justice Dipak Misra in October. The perceived delay raised political temperatures. They also increased pressure on PM Modi for an out-of-court sleight that would forestall the 2019 election narrative from revolving around issues such as jobs and farmers' problems where the BJP has fallen short on its promises. The lack of any perceptible movement would have made many in the BJP uneasy as well, for it opens the party to charges of promising the Ram temple as an election-time bait.

The RSS, more than other Hindutva organisations, has backed the PM's statement asking for the judicial process to take its own course and his subsequent assurance in a TV interview that 'after the judicial process is over, whatever be our responsibility as government, we are ready to make all efforts.' The PM's statement is also in tune with the 2014 election manifesto that — to be fair to BJP — had not promised a temple but only to 'explore all possibilities' to facilitate its construction within the framework of the Constitution. However, there have been persistent 'independent voices' that pin hopes on the present government if the judicial process takes time.

The impatience makes it appear as if the Hindutva groups are seeking a judicial closure. They seek to paper over a sorry chapter during which naked, majoritarian muscularity triumphed over the law of the land. If the circle is ever squared, there should be matching impatience over the slow pace of another related trial — for demolishing the masjid. In fact, the delayed criminal conspiracy case against several serving Union ministers is more unconscionable and its judgment should have ideally come before the present title suit. A handful of weeks before the General Election is notified, it is crucial to maintain a distinct dividing line between judicial processes and politics of the land.

Judgment day for dera chief

Hope floats for slain journalist's family

BACK in 2002, a journalist dared to tell the unpleasant truth about a mighty sect head. In his evening, aptly titled *Poora Sach*, he published an anonymous letter — written to then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee — about the alleged rape of *sadhvis* at Sirsa's politically patronised Dera Sacha Sauda. His voice was silenced, predictably, with bullets. Ram Chander Chhatrapati was shot at outside his residence in Sirsa. After a struggle lasting four weeks, he lost the battle for life.

Over 16 years later, judgment day is nigh. The CBI special court in Panchkula is set to pronounce its verdict in the murder case on Friday. Dera chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim, who is serving a 20-year term in Rohtak's Sunaria jail for the rape of two of his followers, will make an appearance before the court through video-conferencing. The once-bitten-twice-shy Haryana authorities seem keen to avoid a repeat of the mayhem triggered by his conviction in the rape cases on August 25, 2017. The Manohar Lal Khattar government had come under fire for grossly mishandling the situation and allowing a sea of dera supporters to invade Panchkula. The post-judgment violence had claimed over 40 lives, besides the loss of government and private property worth crores of rupees.

The Chhatrapati family, which has bravely refused to bow before the sect all these years, is hoping that its long wait for justice and closure will finally end. The developments are also being watched closely by the country's journalistic fraternity, which remains vulnerable to threats or worse for calling a spade a spade. India's ranking on the World Press Freedom Index-2018 was a lowly 138 (out of 180 countries), one place below Myanmar and one above Pakistan. Several journalists, including Gauri Lankesh, have lost their lives in recent years for taking on radicals. Many others have been browbeaten into self-censorship by unleashing prosecution proceedings on them. The sorry state of affairs will only worsen for the fourth estate if it's let down by the judicial system.

Rush for the Afghan pie

Bigger challenges are emerging with Trump firm on troop pullout



G PARTHASARATHY
FORMER DIPLOMAT

GIVEN his distaste for military interventions abroad, President Trump has announced his decision to expedite withdrawal of US forces from Syria and Afghanistan. His critics say this would amount to betrayal of US allies. Despite criticism, it now appears clear that the US intends to progressively reduce and end military land operations in Afghanistan. It has already reduced its military presence to 14,000 troops, with plans to halve the number in a short period. A swift military takeover by the Taliban would raise security concerns in India, given the past Taliban role in colluding with the hijackers of IC 814. The Taliban has also provided training facilities and bases for groups like the Jaish-e-Mohammed, which was responsible for the attack on India's Parliament.

Pakistan continues to provide the Taliban military and intelligence support, together with bases on its soil. Taliban vice-president Sirajuddin Haqqani resides in and operates from Pakistan. An economically vulnerable Pakistan, whose foreign exchange reserves have dwindled to \$6 billion, however, faces huge international pressure, from friends and foes alike, to end this support. The Financial Action Task Force is turning the screws on Pakistan, to end its support for terrorism, or face sanctions. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have offered to provide financial support to Pakistan, amounting to around \$6 billion for oil imports. But Pakistan realises that its economy would collapse, without US-backed IMF assistance. The US has linked such assistance to the ISI ending support to terrorism.

China may claim to be generous, but across Pakistan, there is a growing feeling, similar to that in countries like



EXIT MODE: US plans to scale down its military presence have made allies nervous.

India is averse to equating a constitutionally-elected government with a medievalist, armed insurgent group.

Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Malaysia and Kenya, that China leads every 'aid' recipient into a 'debt trap'.

It is crucial for New Delhi to continuously assess how diplomacy surrounding the 'endgame' of American withdrawal from Afghanistan plays out. The withdrawal will inevitably lead to a greater role for the Taliban in Afghanistan's national life. The Afghan government is concerned that Trump's instinctive and ill-advised 'Tweet Diplomacy' can have disastrous results in Afghanistan and its neighbourhood.

The Taliban now controls, or actively contests, the government's control in around 45% of Afghanistan's territory. The Afghan security forces are taking heavy casualties, losing on an average 30-40 members every day. Important urban centres like Ghazni have been taken over by the Taliban for days. Presidential elections in Afghanistan have been postponed, following US pressure. President Ghani responded strongly on December 26, with the appointment of two former intelligence chiefs, firm opponents of ISI-sponsored terror, to key positions. Amrollah Saleh, a Tajik and erstwhile Ahmed Shah Masood loyalist, has been appointed interior minister; and Asadullah Khalid, a Pash-tun, who was seriously wounded in a Taliban attack, is the new defence minister. This is an important move, reiterating the government's resolve, evidently with US backing, to take on the Taliban strongly.

These developments have been accompanied by frenetic diplomatic activity by Pakistan's foreign minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi, purporting to demonstrate that Pakistan is making every effort to involve major powers — notably, the US, Russia and China — in a quest for peace and stability in Afghanistan. This has accompanied the appointment of Zalmay Khalilzad, an Afghan-American, with vast experience of Pakistani machinations in Afghanistan, as Trump's envoy, to coordinate American contacts with external powers and all major parties in Afghanistan, including the Taliban. External powers are, however, treading on one another's toes in this effort. A conference convened in Moscow by Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov, without any senior official American participation, saw formal participation by the Taliban, Pakistan, China and Central Asian republics. India made common cause with the Afghan govern-

ment and was not represented at the conference by serving government officials, but by former diplomats. India made it clear that it will not formally endorse any initiative that equates a constitutionally-elected government in Afghanistan, with a medievalist, armed insurgent group.

There are now several countries with a finger in the Afghan pie. The Taliban has an 'office' in Qatar, set up with US blessings. Teheran has been having a secretive 'dialogue' with the Taliban. These Iranian contacts with the Taliban, undertaken with Pakistan's 'approval' and 'facilitation', gathered momentum after the death of Taliban founder Mullah Omar. A Taliban delegation visited Iran last month for formal discussions with Iranian leaders. In the meantime, the US has brought in Saudi Arabia and the UAE to facilitate talks with the Taliban. The first round of talks involving representatives of the US, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Pakistan and the Taliban were held in Abu Dhabi in December. The US has evidently decided that the UAE and Saudi Arabia are more useful in such talks than Qatar, which hosts a Taliban 'office'.

Rivalries between Russia, China and the US have spread across the Islamic world, pitting countries like the UAE and Saudi Arabia on the one side, with Turkey, Iran and Qatar on the other. Uncertainties in Afghanistan's neighbourhood are set to make the Afghanistan-Pakistan region even more volatile, especially given the persecution of Muslims in China's neighbouring Xinjiang province. A growingly bankrupt Pakistan, now persuaded that its economy could collapse without an IMF bailout, is trying to balance contradictions between its support for the Taliban and other radical groups on the one hand, and its desperate need for assistance from the US, Saudi Arabia and the UAE on the other.

New Delhi, in turn, will have to not only deal with rivalries between Islamic countries across its western neighbourhood, but also deal with the pressures arising from policies of the US, Russia and China.

Doesn't quite ring a bell

RITU KUMAR

EVERY phone booth of yore possessed a distinct whiff of romance, had a story when communication wasn't as easy as it is today. It was a keeper of secret conversations and confessions. Many movies captured phone-booth moments and many real love stories bloomed into rapturous romance here.

For much of the 20th century, public call office (PCO) and STD booths saw their heyday: they were iconic, steadfast and a necessary installation of modern life, from bustling cities to small towns. But a booth now is a relic of a seemingly ancient civilisation. As the mobile phone use exploded

and pay phone was increasingly linked to crime, the booths began to disappear. What was once a vital part of society has nearly gone extinct. Talking about phone booths in the presence of the new generation is reminiscing old songs of a bygone era.

I have candid memories of a phone booth. Whenever I was sent on an errand from home, I took a coin slyly and went to a booth to talk to my friend, with whom I had already fixed the time to talk. I used to rush there, stand in a queue, waiting eagerly for my turn. If the person inside the glass box took more than usual time, the next waiting in the queue opened the door without preambles, so one was forced to hang up

and walk away, grumbling sheepishly, as others gave amused glances. Fond memories of those days make me chuckle — how I dialled triumphantly and gossiped while others awaited their turn. It reminds me of Aamir Khan's scene in *Dil Hai Ki Manta Nahin*, where he haggles with his editor inside a pay-phone booth.

These booths have been active participants in joys and sorrows that families shared with dear ones, providing easy and user-friendly access to people to communicate in an emergency and otherwise. They enabled people travelling long distances to halt anywhere and call back home to inform of their wellbeing. The brainchild of telecom

technocrat Sam Pitroda, the booth became the livelihood of many who opened PCOs. But with affordable mobile telephony, the PCO is in people's pockets now. The few that one can find in small places look like historical monuments, dilapidated and deserted. Others are either shut down or have expanded to sell other goods. On our mobile phones we can call, WhatsApp, Google. Romance has turned into a textual relationship. Letters have been replaced by 'smileys' and other symbols.

Phone booths have gone now, perhaps to be found in a movie as a prop or in the new age preserved as a décor antique — an artefact of communication and conversation of a bygone era.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

The best thinking has been done in solitude. The worst has been done in turmoil. — Thomas A Edison

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, FRIDAY, JANUARY 10, 1919

The Reformer's Business.

THE hardest part of the reformer's business, said Sir William Duke in the course of his speech at the Caxton Hall "At Home," is to change the point of view of the ryot, to persuade him that every part of the body politic has its own share of responsibility. This is what the authors of the Reforms report have said in a passage: "We believe profoundly," they say, "that the time has come when the sheltered existence which we have given India cannot be prolonged without damage to her national life; that we have a richer gift for her people than any we have yet bestowed on them; that nationhood within the Empire represents something better than anything. India has hitherto attained: that the placid pathetic contentment of the masses is not the soil on which such Indian nation will grow; and that in deliberately disturbing it we are working for her highest good."

The People's Bank in Liquidation.

The new Liquidator of the People's Bank has declared a dividend of six annas in the rupee to the creditors this month and he hopes to pay up sixteen annas to the creditors over the next few months. One may recall the wording used by Mr. Dignasse in his report for the year ending 30th September, 1916, in describing the progress of the liquidation. A sort of hope of the creditors being discharged by the payment of sixteen annas in the rupee was no doubt held out there, but the Liquidator took care not to hint at anything in the way of a time-limit. He stated that the process "must take time, and, although it is proposed to distribute further dividends annually, it is probable that, for three years, such dividends will not exceed the rate of Re 0-1-4 in the rupee each."

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Real 'Ram rajya'

Gandhiji preached that 'there is no religion higher than truth and righteousness'. All religions have yearned to instil moral values among followers, but sadly, the golden rule of conduct common to all religions — tolerance — has taken a back seat, giving rise to mayhem. The recent announcement by the PM regarding a new national honour for National Unity, on the lines of Padma awards, is a light at the end of the tunnel, which might stir up some sweetness into a bitter concoction. May the real essence of all religious preachings overwhelm hatred and may our country scale great heights in attaining real unity rather than just in records of statues! May the real 'Ram rajya' prevail.

HARSHVARDHAN SINGH, KANGRA

Meghalaya mine tragedy

It has been weeks that miners are stuck in an illegal mine at Jayantia Hills of Meghalaya. We should hang our heads in shame. We are more concerned about animal welfare than humans. The SC has to intervene to call in the Army. Why are our politicians afraid of facing the truth? This is a man-made tragedy and they are responsible for it.

COL JASPAL SINGH (RETD), LUDHIANA

Indus dolphin

In the report 'Wildlife dept proposes heritage tag for Beas' (Jan 4), it was desired that the Indus dolphin be declared the 'state aquatic animal' to safeguard it from disappearing in Punjab. The Government of India has already declared 'platanista gangetica dolphin' as national aquatic animal, through a notification by the Ministry of Environment and Forests in 2010. Indus river dolphin, platanista gangetica minor — common name 'bhulan' — is a subspecies of platanista gangetica dolphin. The Wildlife (Protection) Act has not been amended and the Indus dolphin, found in Harike, is not included as a sub-species in the Act.

GURMIT SINGH, MOHALI

Ahmadiyyas in Pakistan

Refer to 'Persecuted in Pak, Ahmadiyyas at home in Qadian' (Dec 31); no doubt, Ahmadiyyans in Pakistan are treated harshly, and are not regarded as Muslims. Years ago, I visited Pakistan as part of a jatha. At Panja Sahib, sitting in a shop, I told its owner that I was from Qadian. He turned up his nose, saying Ahmadiyyas were faithless and not *ummah*. He proudly said some of them living in his locality were driven out. At Lahore, a Maulana placed

his hands on my shoulders and asked where I was from. When I said Qadian, he thundered: '*Shaihr-e-kuffaar sey* (from the city of *kuffirs*)'. I told him that they followed Islamic tenets as faithfully as other Muslims. He said they did not regard the Prophet as *khatm-ul-mursaleem* (God's last messenger). When I said *shair-e-milat* Allama Iqbal's elder brother Ata Mohammad was an Ahmadiyya, and there was no bad blood between them, he went away murmuring something unintelligible.

BHAGWAN SINGH, QADIAN

Misleading facts

The report 'Persecuted in Pak, Ahmadiyyas at home in Qadian' (Dec 31) had factual errors. The community faces persecution in Pakistan and some other countries, but it has received recognition in 212 countries. To suggest that Pakistani Ahmadiyyas feel at home only in India can be misconstrued. They are at home in Qadian due to its spiritual ambience. The report states Rabwah was the headquarters of the community before Partition. Qadian was the headquarters since 1889, when the community was formed. Loyalty to India has been stressed as part of the takeaway of the event. The fact that members from 48 countries were

present makes it prone to misinterpretation. Islam is equivocal on loyalty to one's country. The report said pros and cons of other religions were not discussed. The convention gives an opportunity to people from other religions to share their beliefs. Lastly, in the article 'Nobel Laureate was ill-treated', it is stated that the advent of Mirza Ghulam Ahmed as the promised Messiah and Mahdi was contrary to Islam. The advent of Mirza was proscribed by the Prophet.

K TARIQ AHMAD, MEDIA INCHARGE, AHMADIYYA MUSLIM COMMUNITY (INDIA)

Will PM foot bill?

PM Modi was to visit Gurdaspur on January 3. His visit made me poorer by Rs 2,500. My old batchmates had planned a reunion at Jalandhar on December 29. We were supposed to stay at a resort due to intense fog. I booked a room in the VIP guesthouse of Jalandhar. On December 26, I was told that all government/semi-government rest houses in Jalandhar had been taken over by the administration in the name of security and all bookings had been cancelled. Why should a commoner suffer? I had two options: stay in a hotel and pay Rs 2,500 or cancel my visit. Perhaps the PM should send me Rs 2,500, which he can afford!

NARESH RAJ, PATIALA

Self-inflicted wounds on terror front



AJAI SAHNI

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, INSTITUTE FOR CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

THE year 2018 was an uncertain one for India with respect to terrorism. Sharp gains were registered in several theatres, and significant reverses in others. More dangerously, an undercurrent of growing potential risk enlarged in wide areas, including many that had seen sustained state consolidation over the past years.

At least 941 terrorism and insurgency-linked fatalities were recorded by the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) across the country last year, against 805 in 2017. The surge in casualties was principally in Jammu and Kashmir, up from 358 in 2017 to 451 in 2018. In the Maoist belt, the toll rose from 332 to 415. The North-East, with a multiplicity of degraded insurgencies continuing to provoke occasional violence, witnessed 72 deaths in 2018, while these were 103 in 2017. Punjab, which had seen no Khalistani terrorism-linked fatalities between 2008 and 2015, has registered deaths in this category each year since, with three persons killed in 2018 (one incident), six in 2017 (five incidents) and three in 2016 (three incidents). However, 34 persons have died in Pakistan-backed Islamist terrorism-linked incidents in Punjab in recent years — 10 in the Dinanagar (Gurdaspur) attack of 2015; 22 in the 2016 Pathankot airbase attack; and two infiltrators in 2017.

The sustained escalation in J&K, after violence bottomed out with 117 fatalities in 2012, has largely been the consequence of polarising politics and continuous policy failures, primarily on the part of the present dispensation at Raisina Hill, culminating in the imposition of President's Rule. It is significant that recourse to this desperate measure has been considered necessary in the state after over 22 years. The state was under President's Rule between 1990 and 1996, at a time of enveloping chaos. 1996 saw as many as 2,903 terrorism-linked fatalities in J&K, the highest figure till that point. The situation worsened in 2001-03, with deaths exceeding 3,000 each year, and peaking at 4,507 (2001), and yet President's Rule was not considered necessary. While the casualties have been rising steadily since 2013, the state is nowhere near the conditions of breakdown that could have justified this move.

Other indices of policy failure in J&K are in evidence. With 451 killed in terror-related violence in 2018, this is the highest number in a decade (the figure was last exceeded in 2008, with 541 killed). Civilian fatalities at 86 are the highest last year since 2007, when 164 civilians were killed. While the government is eager to highlight the rising number of deaths of terrorists in the state (259 killed last year), the security forces lost 95 personnel in 2018. With constitutional politics in suspension, partisan mischief led by the ruling party in New Delhi is mounting. With Assembly and parliamentary elections due in a few months, disruptive politics can only intensify, with a concomitant escalation in violence.

While the total fatalities in Maoist-affected regions did register a significant escalation between 2017 and 2018, rebel casualties accounted for the entire increase (from 150 to 231). Both



BLOODBATH: 451 people were killed in terror-linked violence in J&K in 2018, the highest figure in a decade.

Terrorist and insurgent threats across India have substantially been contained. Where a measure of escalation is being registered, it is abundantly clear that this is the result of intentional destabilisation with a view to achieving short-term, partisan political gains, principally as a result of communal polarisation.

civilian and security forces' deaths registered a marginal decline, from 109 to 108, and from 76 to 75, respectively. Unsurprisingly, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has reduced its list of 'worst Maoist-affected' districts from 36 in 2017 to 30 last year, and of Maoist-affected districts from 126 to 90. There has, moreover, been a growing number of surrenders and arrests, indicating increasing demoralisation among Maoist forces. By and large, the process of consolidation against the Maoist insurgency is continuing apace, though the rebels retain capacities to inflict occasional and devastating attacks on the security forces.

According to the SATP database, with just 72 fatalities, 2018 recorded the lowest figure in the North-East since 1992. The previous low of 103 deaths was registered in 2017. At its peak, the North-East accounted for 1,696 insurgency-linked deaths in 2000. The toll in 2018 included 18 civilians, the lowest registered in this category since 1992. The maximum number of civilians killed in a year, 946, was in 2000. Nevertheless, polarisation on religious and linguistic lines has sharpened in Assam in particular and the region at large ever since the Supreme Court-monitored exercise of updating the National Register for Citizens (NRC) was initiated in 2015 to identify bona fide residents of Assam. The final draft NRC, published on July 30, 2018, has tentatively identified over four million persons whose nationality is suspect. Earlier, the first draft NRC, published on December 31, 2017, had left out 14 million people. Tension had mounted further due to the Centre's ill-conceived move to push through the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016, which would legalise citizenship of 'persecuted minorities' — specifically including Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians — from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan who had entered India before December 31, 2014. The Bill has

already provoked significant mass political mobilisation and has been picked up by the militant United Liberation Front of Asom-Independent (ULFA-I) as a bone of contention. Any destabilisation in this sensitive region can only be bad news for the future.

Islamist terrorism outside J&K has been on the wane since 2008, though a rash of arrests across Delhi and Uttar Pradesh by the National Investigation Agency on December 26, 2018, revived the spectre of the Islamic State (IS, aka Daesh). The discovery and neutralisation of the incipient Harkat-ul-Harb-e-Islam (Movement for the War of Islam) underlines two sharply contrasting realities: first, that Daesh, with its apocalyptic vision and startling public brutality, retains some power to seduce elements on the extremist fringes of the Muslim community in India; and second, this mobilisation is of exceptionally poor quality, with conspiracies exposed at incipient stages, and with rudimentary capacities to do harm. Partial data compiled by the SATP indicates that at least 310 persons from India connected to Daesh have been identified since 2014. Of these, 88 have travelled to Iraq and Syria; 153 have been arrested; another 69 have been 'detained', counselled and released. 2018 recorded 41 arrests in connection with Daesh activity.

Terrorist and insurgent threats across India have substantially been contained. Where a measure of escalation is being registered, it is abundantly clear that this is the result of intentional destabilisation with a view to achieving short-term, partisan political gains, principally as a result of communal polarisation. These are self-inflicted wounds for which private citizens and security personnel pay the highest price, even as the most unprincipled of political players secure transient profit.

The monk who doesn't know his calendar



RAJESH KOCHHAR

HONORARY PROFESSOR, MATHS DEPT, PANJAB UNIVERSITY

Yogi Adityanath facetiously asserted that there was nothing incomplete in Hinduism. There is nothing incomplete or vague about the mathematical fact that six is half (ardh) of 12. In the UP CM's scheme of things, no unique term is now left to denote the Kumbh event held every 144 years.

BEGINNING with Makar Sankranti (January 15), Prayag (Allahabad) will celebrate Ardh Kumbh on a gigantic scale. The Uttar Pradesh Government, led by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, has unnecessarily changed the traditional nomenclature and designated the event as Kumbh. It is ironic that while so much time, money and energy are being expended for the sake of tradition, long-established nomenclature is being changed on a whim.

The Kumbh Mela has been included by UNESCO on its representative list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, noting that it is the largest peaceful congregation of pilgrims on earth. The mela is celebrated at four sites on the banks of rivers: Haridwar, Ujjain, Nashik-Trimbak, and Prayag. Every 12 years, the event is celebrated as Purna Kumbh. Half way through it, every six years, Ardh Kumbh is celebrated. Prayag also holds Maha Kumbh after 12 cycles of Purna Kumbh — every 144 years.

Kumbh was celebrated at Trimbak (Nashik) in 2015 and at Ujjain in 2016. Ardh Kumbh was held in Haridwar in 2016. Prayag celebrated Kumbh in 2013 and is holding Ardh Kumbh this year.

The choice of the venues is sought to be explained through a Puranic story known as *samudra manthan* (ocean-churning). To prevent the pot of *amrit* (nectar) obtained through churning from falling into the hands of *asuras*, it was carried from place to place by the



ARBITRARY: As the CM's writ runs only in UP, the pan-Indian description would be fragmented, with Prayag following a different nomenclature for its Kumbh than the other locations.

devas. In the process, drops fell at four places, which in turn became the Kumbh Mela sites. While the standard story does talk of the pot of nectar from the ocean, its linkage to the mela seems to be an afterthought. In any case, the story does not explain the timing.

The timing is fixed astronomically. The celebrations are in honour of Jupiter, which has an orbital period of about 12 years. For the event to occur, Jupiter should be in a specified zodiacal sign (*rashi*).

Jupiter spends a year in one *rashi*, but the celebrations do not last that long. To narrow down the time span, help is taken from the sun and the

moon. To describe the path of the sun, the zodiacal list is headed by Aries (*Mesh*). For some reason, in the case of Jupiter, the most important *rashi* is Aquarius (*Kumbh*). While Aquarius is depicted as the water-man, its Indian equivalent is the water pot.

The term Kumbh has come to be used in two distinct senses: to denote the *rashi* proper and as a general description for the congregation. Strictly speaking, there is only one Kumbh, namely the one at Haridwar, when Jupiter is actually in Aquarius (and the sun in Aries). The congregations at Nashik and Ujjain are not Kumbh but *Simhasth*

because in both cases Jupiter is in Leo (*Simha*). That is why the two events are never more than a year apart. *Simha rashi* is important because it falls midway in Jupiter's 12-year orbit from Aquarius to Aquarius. The Ujjain event takes place when the sun is in Aries while Nasik waits for the sun to keep company with Jupiter in Leo.

The official website of Prayag Kumbh 2019 states, without quoting any source: "Lord Brahma performed *yaajna* here for creating the universe." Even though the Prayag Kumbh Mela is the largest and most famous, it is probably the youngest. While the other three events are named after Jupiter's actual position in the sky (in Aquarius or Leo), the Prayag event is named after Kumbh in the sense of a congregation. The tradition of an annual Maghi Mela on the occasion of Makar Sankranti appears to be very old. At some stage, a bigger 12-yearly event came to be celebrated on Makar Sankranti when Jupiter is in *Mesh* or the following *rashi*, *Vrishabh* (Taurus).

While releasing the logo for the Prayag-2019 event, Yogi Adityanath facetiously asserted that since there was nothing incomplete in Hinduism, Ardh Kumbh would be designated as Kumbh, and the Kumbh as Maha Kumbh. His argument would have carried weight if the name Ardh Kumbh had been given by non-Hindus!

There is nothing incomplete or vague about the mathematical fact that six is half (*ardh*) of 12. In Yogi Adityanath's scheme of things, no

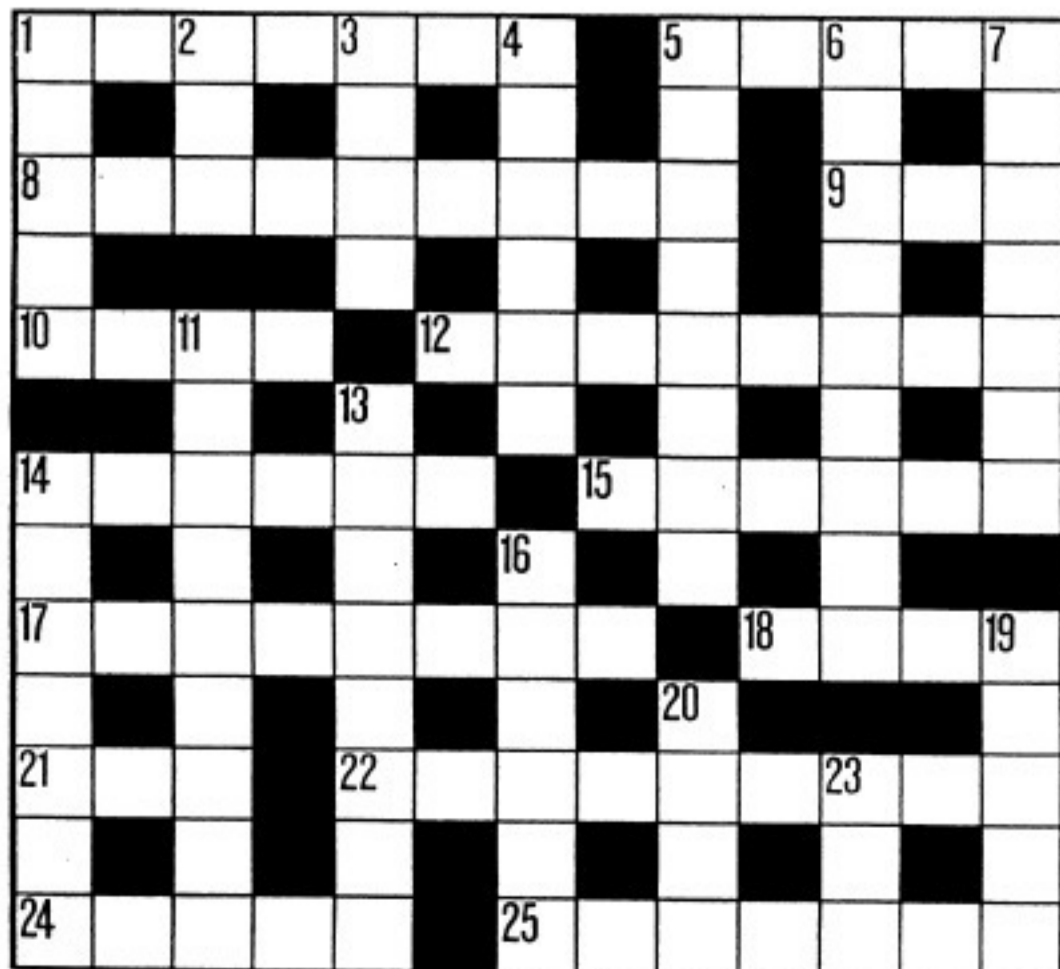
unique term is now left to denote the event held every 144 years.

Also, since the order cannot be implemented retrospectively, it will create confusion between the description of past and present congregations at Prayag. Thus, a Kumbh was celebrated in 2001 and 2013 and is again being held in 2019. Finally, since the Chief Minister's writ runs only in UP, the pan-Indian description would be fragmented, with Prayag following a different nomenclature for its Kumbh than the three other locations.

As a matter of policy, a government should desist from unilateral action on matters involving tradition, culture and religion. There are indeed calendar matters that would benefit from government interest. Because of differences among traditional astronomers, Kumbh was celebrated in Prayag in 1965 as well as 1966. The UP Government should call a meeting of traditional *panchang* makers, Sanskrit scholars and modern astronomers to find out why this happened and to ensure that there is unanimity on the timing of the Kumbh.

All over India, Makar Sankranti is nominally celebrated as Uttarayan (northward turning of the sun) or winter solstice, even though it has already taken place around December 21. Because of errors in the Vikrami calendar, Makar Sankranti keeps moving to later dates. There is a need to reform the traditional calendars to bring the 'calculated' sky in consonance with the observed sky.

QUICK CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- Matter-of-fact (7)
 - Place visited by devotees (5)
 - Large Southern Ocean bird (9)
 - The Lion (3)
 - To cure (4)
 - Absolute ruler (8)
 - Response (6)
 - To goad (6)
 - Asked (8)
 - Profound (4)
 - Period of history (3)
 - Shapeless (9)
 - To handle (5)
 - Sailor (7)
- DOWN**
- Steal game (5)
 - Sphere (3)
 - Prefix for against (4)
 - Flowering bulbous plant (6)
 - Wrong designation (8)
 - English Romantic poet (9)
 - Champion of a cause (7)
 - Connect in one's mind (9)
 - Pertinent (8)
 - Very old (7)
 - Change for the better (6)
 - Baffling question (5)
 - Stimulus (4)
 - Acknowledge (3)

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION
Across: 1 Applause, 5 Half, 9 Run up, 10 Rivulet, 11 Intemperance, 13 Thesis, 14 Assail, 17 Go by the board, 20 Abscond, 21 Truth, 22 Toll, 23 Trinidad.
Down: 1 Awry, 2 Penance, 3 Appreciation, 4 Script, 6 All in, 7 Fatherly, 8 Every so often, 12 Stagnant, 15 Aground, 16 Vendor, 18 Basil, 19 Shed.

SU DO KU

3	8	4			
1		6		5	
			3		
		7	2		9 5
5	8				7 1
6	9		5	1	
		8			
		4		3	6
			7	3	2

HARD

CALENDAR

JANUARY 10, 2019 THURSDAY

- Vikrami Samvat 2075
- Shaka Samvat 1940
- Posh Shaka 20
- Posh Parvishite 26
- Hijari 1440
- Shukla Paksh Tithi 4, up to 5.22 pm
- Vya Yoga up to 6.29 am
- Shatbhisha Nakshatra up to 5.54 am
- Moon in Aquarius sign.

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

5	1	9	2	8	6	4	3	7
4	3	6	5	7	9	1	8	2
7	2	8	3	1	4	6	9	5
9	6	3	7	2	5	8	4	1
1	7	4	8	9	3	5	2	6
2	8	5	4	6	1	9	7	3
8	5	7	6	4	2	3	1	9
3	9	2	1	5	8	7	6	4
6	4	1	9	3	7	2	5	8

FORECAST

SUNSET: THURSDAY 17:38 HRS
 SUNRISE: FRIDAY 07:21 HRS

Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Cloudy	Rainy	Foggy
CITY	MAX	MIN		
Chandigarh	20	10		
New Delhi	20	07		
PUNJAB				
Amritsar	19	07		
Bathinda	20	07		
Jalandhar	19	06		
Ludhiana	21	10		
HARYANA				
Bhiwani	19	09		
Hisar	20	08		
Sirsa	19	08		
HIMACHAL PRADESH				
Dharamsala	11	01		
Manali	05	-02		
Shimla	08	0		
JAMMU & KASHMIR				
Jammu	16	06		
Leh	01	-10		
Srinagar	03	-02		
UTTARAKHAND				
Dehradun	21	06		
Mussoorie	13	03		

TEMPERATURE IN °C