

# 10 IDEA EXCHANGE

## NEWSMAKERS IN THE NEWSROOM

Mainstream parties are, unfortunately, at this point in time, becoming irrelevant. Getting together with the other parties, not for election's sake, but to stop bloodshed, that can't be ruled out"



### WHY MEHBOOBA MUFTI

Since June last year, when the Mehbooba Mufti-led PDP-BJP government crumbled in J&K, the state has plunged into political crisis. After six months of Governor's rule, the state is now under President's rule. In November, Governor Satya Pal Malik dissolved the Assembly after the PDP, supported by the Congress

and its arch rival NC, staked claim to form the government. The past few months have also seen a rise in violence in the Valley, especially in Mufti's constituency in South Kashmir. The former CM admits her party's alliance with the BJP led to more anger among the youth, leading to an increase in militancy



"There has been no dialogue (with the Centre since the split with BJP), there aren't many channels for it... At this point in time, my focus is Kashmir, the people of Kashmir, instead of Delhi"

**MUZAMIL JALEEL:** Since 2016, when you took over as Chief Minister, many people have been killed in action by security forces in Kashmir. Now that you are not in power, how do you assess the situation in the state?

The situation is quite grave, people are getting killed every day. One of the reasons for aligning with the BJP was to address the situation and come up with some kind of solution to the problem, to stop the death and destruction. Basically, all governments in Delhi so far have tried to fight violence with violence. But, unfortunately, when a boy picks up a stone, and is ready to face the gun, we fail to understand what has led him to do that. What is it that fascinates a young boy, a 10-year-old, to join militancy? He gets killed by the time he is 14... Unfortunately, nobody in Delhi, except for (former prime minister Atal Bihari) Vajpayeeji, has tried to address this with confidence-building measures.

We took the unusual decision of aligning with the BJP in the hope that we will be able to address the problem. But, unfortunately, it did not happen that way and things went from bad to worse, and I should accept it. People had really high hopes from the PDP. They thought Mufti saab (late Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, former CM) will be able to repeat what he had done from 2002 to 2005. Mufti saab tried to persuade (Prime Minister) Modiji to look at Kashmir through the prism of humanity, as Vajpayee did... to reach out not only to Kashmiris, but also to Pakistan. When we say separatists and Pakistan are a part of the problem, we have to work out ways to engage with them, so that they also become a part of the solution. That is why we joined hands with the BJP, but what we had intended did not happen. That led to more disillusionment among the youth, more anger and violence...

**MUZAMIL JALEEL:** You have referred to your alliance with the BJP as "suicidal". Can you elaborate?

We aligned with the BJP knowing that it will destroy our credibility, that it's going to affect our party, that we could just go down the drain in the next election... In fact, the PDP was formed with the intention to facilitate the resolution of the Kashmir issue, and that's what Mufti saab did as Chief Minister in his first term. In his second term, he wanted to repeat the same things, knowing that going with the BJP will be suicidal. However, he aligned with the BJP and had an Agenda of Alliance with a roadmap for confidence-building measures.

**MUZAMIL JALEEL:** Recently, when you tried to form a government in J&K with the National Conference and Congress, you were accused of taking instructions from Pakistan.

It's not new. If you see television debates, that's how most channels project things. This is something my father wanted to change — that it's only separatists who can talk about the Kashmir issue and mainstream parties should only talk about *bijli, paani, sadak* (electricity, road and water). In Kashmir, it's not like that. My father tried to mainstream the Kashmir issue. He put it on the table in a way that you could think of a resolution of the Kashmir problem without secession. So we talk about open borders, we talk about having some kind of joint advisory council, we talk about pre-1947 routes... But whenever you talk about resolution of Kashmir's problems, engagement with Pakistan, you are dubbed as ISI or Pakistani and things like that.

When we tried to get together (with the NC and Congress), our intention was to safeguard Article 35A (providing special rights and privileges to permanent J&K residents), which is not being protected in the way it was when I was in power. Also, many of the orders that have been passed in the last five-six months by the Governor's office are more or less anti-Article 370 (granting autonomous status to J&K)... We wanted to take things in our own hands. Members of the Congress, NC and PDP were also being poached. They were being lured with money and promises of ministerial berths. I'm not talking about Delhi but the local leadership in J&K. They were threatening our people, our MLAs, through the National Investigation Agency and other things. All this brought us together.

**PVAIDYANATHAN IYER:** One is not certain about when elections will take place in J&K. Do you think there is a possibility of this three-party alliance contesting together?

At this point in time, whether mainstream parties get together or not, is not the priority. What people are really concerned about now is how to stop the bloodbath. Mainstream parties are, unfortunately, at this point in time, becoming irrelevant. Getting together with the other parties, not



PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti with Deputy Editor Muzamil Jaleel in *The Indian Express* newsroom. Abhinav Saha

## 'UPA did not take up from where Vajpayee left, we aligned with Modi govt but he too lost the opportunity'

PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti says she will carry the burden of people who died under her watch, says her father could risk alliance with BJP, not her, calls for a dialogue with separatists, Pakistan, says NIA's actions in Valley are alienating people, and hopes for polls in J&K along with the general elections

for election's sake, but to stop this bloodshed, that can't be ruled out.

**VANDITA MISHRA:** When you talk of getting together with the BJP, you often mention Vajpayee, and the time your father spent with him. However, Narendra Modi has always been seen as the opposite of Vajpayee. What led the PDP to believe that Modi would do the same for Kashmir as Vajpayee did?

We took him (PM Modi) at his word. Whenever he would talk about Kashmir, he would assure us that he will resolve the Kashmir issue, walk in the footsteps of Vajpayeeji — *Kashmiriyat, Jamhooriyat* and *Insaniyat*. But, unfortunately, the Prime Minister could not rise to the occasion. He was not able to send the message which my father expected. Kashmir has been a big challenge for every prime minister, but Modiji got such a huge mandate after such a long time. And Mufti saab was there on the other side, he joined hands with him, for the resolution of the Kashmir issue. It was a golden opportunity which he unfortunately lost. He could not look beyond winning elections.

**SANDEEP SINGH:** How do you see Pakistan's role in the situation in Kashmir? There are terrorist encounters, there is infiltration...

You can't deny Pakistan's role, and that there is infiltration. But in Kashmir, if a militant is killed or a 14-year-old child is killed, he belongs to us. So it is the duty of our country's leadership to reach out to Pakistan and ensure that this bloodshed is stopped. It's not people in Pakistan who are getting killed — it's our security forces, our policemen, our children. We have to find a better idea to replace the idea which fascinates these young boys, that encourages them to fight the Army, the security forces, with stones, and at times even without stones in their hands. There have been these encounters where militants have been killed, but the idea still exists. I have seen many mothers who now don't cry when their children are killed, they celebrate it. They are not celebrating the death of their sons, they are celebrating the idea behind it. That is a very dangerous thing. They keep saying that Imran (Pakistan

PM Imran Khan) is a proxy for the Pakistan army. If they think so, then it is better that they talk to him, because then the army and Imran Khan will be on the same page. This is an opportunity for our country to reach out to them.

**AMRITH LAL:** The Kashmir story so far has been told by mainstream political parties. It's the same story, whether it is the BJP or the Congress. Have you ever thought of telling the Kashmir story to the non-political sections of India?

I think I should do that because there is a need to tell the country what is happening. The discourse on television is not helping. It is further alienating Kashmir from the country and the rest of the country from Kashmir. We need to change the discourse, and for that I may have to go to more places and talk to people about it.

**MUZAMIL JALEEL:** The criticism in Kashmir is that when mainstream political leaders come to power, they preside over the killings and that when they are out of power, they start saying this is wrong. This is happening in your own constituency in South Kashmir. Many people were killed under your watch, thousands were injured.

The PDP was formed to find a solution to the problem in the state, and that is why we even joined hands with the BJP. If you go through our Agenda of Alliance, you will find a roadmap similar to the four-point

formula of General Pervez Musharraf and Vajpayee — open all the routes, connect Kashmir to Central Asia, to Pakistan, have some kind of joint advisory council from both Kashmiris without changing the borders, without conceding any territory to the other side. These are the confidence-building measures we had put in the Agenda of Alliance. But, unfortunately, the BJP did not live up to the expectations.

**MUZAMIL JALEEL:** Is it possible for you to go to Pulwama today? What would you tell the people there?

I can tell them that whatever we did, was done in good faith, to help the situation but, unfortunately, things did not go the way they were intended to go. That is something we will have to explain to the people. Also, many deaths took place during my tenure. How and what happened doesn't matter; people died. I will always carry that burden with me, I will always look back with grief. I can't say that I could have prevented it because the situation was so volatile... When Burhan Wani was killed (July 8, 2016), so many people came out on the streets, they attacked Army camps, police stations, knowing that there is going to be retaliation. It is not about Burhan Wani or a militant, it is the idea behind Burhan Wani that we need to address, and only that can help us.

**AAKASH JOSHI:** You said last year that the Centre is using the National

Investigation Agency (NIA) to coerce and threaten PDP legislators to leave your party. Can you elaborate?

The use of the NIA is not really helping. It is further alienating the people. I know I will be branded anti-national for saying this, but Syed Salahuddin's sons are not militants or stone-pelters, they are just common citizens who were left by their father 30 years ago. They were very young at the time and their mother brought them up with great difficulty. (Last year, the NIA arrested Hizbul Mujahideen chief Salahuddin's son Shakeel Yousuf, who worked as a laboratory assistant at a government hospital, in a terror funding case. His brother Shahid, who was working in the J&K Agricultural Department, was also arrested in the same case). Similarly, Afzal Guru's hanging also alienated Kashmiris. He was hanged without even being allowed to meet his family, his body was not returned.

**ABANTIKA GHOSH:** Are you open to an alliance with the BJP in the future?

I don't think so. My father had the stamina and also the heart to take such a huge risk. I don't think I can.

**ANANTHAKRISHNAN G:** On Article 35A in the Supreme Court, nothing has happened in the last four years since the Modi government came to power. Both of you have had an excellent rapport in court...

No, basically, when 35A was in the courts, I met the Prime Minister and the Home Minister because we had apprehensions about the Central government's attorney general giving some kind of twist to the case. I told them very clearly that you cannot fiddle with Article 35A as you have committed yourself to it in the Agenda of Alliance. I was given an assurance that nothing will be done to it. After the Governor's rule came into force, the case was adjourned citing panchayat elections. This made Kashmiris very apprehensive about the future — are they going to amend Article 35A, or will they dilute it? These apprehensions are still there. You must understand that Kashmiris have been fighting for the past 70 years to get something more. My father would always

say that we have our own Constitution, our own flag, residuary powers, and that we should try and protect what we have before people start fighting for something more. So what we have, the clothes we wear, if you try to even take that off, how will it work?

**ANANTHAKRISHNAN G:** There is an argument that behind this veneer of Kashmiriyat, is actually a religious problem — of a religious identity — and that is why the Pandits were forced to leave Kashmir.

Firstly, if that was the case, Kashmiris would not have rejected the two-nation theory and aligned with secular India. They would have gone to Pakistan. Then, as a Muslim-majority party, we aligned with the BJP.

As far as the Pandits are concerned, I would say it's a golden opportunity for our Prime Minister to take up the issue of visits to the Sharada Peeth (temple in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir) with the PM of Pakistan. That will allow them (Pandits) to visit Kashmir and then go to Sharada Peeth. It will be a starting point. For me, it will be the biggest confidence building measure for Kashmiris to start returning to Kashmir.

**MUZAMIL JALEEL:** You have also spoken about the return of the pro-government militia Ikhwan in the Valley. Were you talking about politics or in terms of the military?

Both. There are certain tumcoats, I don't want to name them, who are trying to tell Delhi that let us constitute Ikhwan and use them both politically, and on the ground, to tackle the situation (in Kashmir). There have been three deaths during the last five months which are not accounted for. Who killed them? This used to happen earlier... unidentified gunmen would come and kill. Maybe they were overground workers, and maybe, politically, they belonged to the other side. So this political Ikhwan, as well as the security Ikhwan, is being advised by some people in Kashmir...

**MUZAMIL JALEEL:** Do you think Assembly elections in the state will be held soon?

I can't say... Ideally it would be good to have it along with the general elections. We need to have a government in place to stop these backdoor orders.

**LALMANI VERMA:** In the interest of Kashmir, whose government do you want at the Centre — that of the BJP, Congress or a third front?

The UPA government was in power for 10 years, but they did not take up from where Vajpayee left. Then we aligned with the Modi government, but he too lost the opportunity. So, at this point in time, I am not really hopeful. If Modi couldn't do anything with such a huge mandate... the Congress is always on the backfoot, it is put on the backfoot by the BJP... When the BJP accuses them of sharing *biryani*, they start clarifying that no we didn't do it. It was only Vajpayee who could do what he wanted, without looking over his shoulder.

**PVAIDYANATHAN IYER:** What has been your approach towards the Centre, the ruling party, since you parted ways with the BJP? Has there been any dialogue since?

There has been no dialogue, there aren't many channels for it. The Central government is very important as far as the resolution of the Kashmir problem is concerned, whosoever is in power. However, at this point in time, my focus is Kashmir, the people of Kashmir, instead of Delhi.

**ABANTIKA GHOSH:** There has been a lot of talk recently about Rahul Gandhi being projected as the Opposition's prime ministerial candidate. What are your views on that?

I think, with time, Rahul Gandhi has started doing his job. Anything is possible in our democratic country. If Modiji can become the prime minister — he comes from a very humble background — anybody can. H D Deve Gowda saab became PM, so many other people did, so why can't Rahul Gandhi become PM?

**AAKASH JOSHI:** The Army chief has been very vocal about political issues. How do you see that?

I don't think it is a good sign for the country. The Indian Army is one of the most disciplined armies. Unlike Pakistan, the Indian Army has never interfered in politics. Unfortunately, in the past few years, we have seen them play to the gallery, before and sometimes after retirement, for a career in politics. It is not good for the country.



"I have seen mothers who now don't cry when their children are killed, they celebrate it. They are not celebrating the death of their sons, they are celebrating the idea behind it. That is a very dangerous thing"



ACROSS THE AISLE



P CHIDAMBARAM

In the last three years, the rate of Gross Fixed Capital Formation has been stagnant at 28.5 per cent, and it will be about the same in 2018-19. The low growth rate is the main cause of lack of new jobs. If we believe the CMIE numbers, there is not only growing joblessness, 11 million jobs were lost in 2018. The current unemployment rate is 7.3 per cent

# Taking stock at beginning of year

The Christmas-New Year-Pongal/Sankranti holidays and festivities must have rejuvenated the hard-working people of India (except members of Parliament who were called to work during many of those days!). A new year effectively began on January 15. I have a hunch that the year will mark a turning point for the polity and the economy of the country.

Four months from today, a new government will be in office (according to the people's verdict). Nothing that the present government will do between now and April 30 will alter the state of the economy radically. Hence, the position at the beginning of 2019 is likely to be the position when the next government takes office. So, let's take stock of the economy.

## FISCAL STABILITY

The two most commonly used indicators are worrisome. The government did not meet the targeted fiscal deficit (FD) last year and is unlikely to meet the target of 3.3 per cent in 2018-19. It is apparently falling short on net direct tax collection and the Centre's share of GST. It hopes to garner some money by dipping into the GST compensation reserve, by *faux*-disinvestment and by 'persuading' the governor of the RBI to part with Rs 23,000 crore as interim dividend.

The current account deficit (CAD) is a lost battle. As against a CAD of 1.9 per cent of GDP in 2017-18, it will certainly be between 2.5 and 3.0 per cent in 2018-19. Merchandise exports in December

grew by only 0.34 per cent, imports declined by 2.44 per cent, yet the trade deficit was USD 13.08 billion.

The next fiscal year will start with more debt and less foreign exchange reserves.

## LOW GROWTH RATE

Demonetisation was on November 8, 2016, in the third quarter of 2016-17. In the eleven quarters ending December 2016, the rate of growth of GDP had been 7.7 per cent. The rate of growth in the subsequent seven quarters ending September 2018 declined to 6.8 per cent. In the first half of 2018-19, the rate was 7.6 per cent but the CSO has estimated that in the second half it will decline to 7 per cent.

The low growth rate is because of the low investment rate, especially by the private sector. In the last three years, the rate of Gross Fixed Capital Formation has been stagnant at 28.5 per cent, and it will be about the same in 2018-19. The low growth rate is the main cause of lack of new jobs. If we believe the CMIE numbers, there is not only growing joblessness, 11 million jobs were lost in 2018. The current unemployment rate is 7.3 per cent.

## FARM SECTOR DISTRESS

Every indicator of the agriculture sector underlines the distress faced by farmers. The sectoral growth rate in the four NDA years has been -0.2, 0.6, 6.3 and 3.4 per cent. The Economic Survey 2017-18

admitted that, after four years, 'the level of real agricultural GDP and real agricultural incomes has remained constant'. The anguished cry of the farmers reflects the reality: wholesale prices of farm produce are depressed (latest example is onion); MSP is a chimera and not available to most farmers; the crop insurance scheme has robbed farmers and enriched the insurance companies; MGNREGA is no longer demand-driven and is underfunded; gross capital formation in agriculture was -14.6 per cent in 2015-16 and rose by 14.0 per cent in 2016-17, meaning that it remained at the level of 2014-15; mounting debt has crippled farmers, making farm loan waiver an imperative; and the average monthly income of a farmer household of Rs 8,931 captures their poverty.

## INDUSTRY AND EXPORTS

The way to become a middle-income developed country is through industrialisation. Agriculture cannot sustain 45 per cent of the work force; nor can it be the main source of livelihood for 60 per cent of the population. It is industry and exports that will create jobs. Both are languishing today. The Index of Industrial Production has remained between 122.6 in April 2018 and 126.4 in November 2018. Approximately 927 projects are stalled, of which 674 are in the private sector. According to the CMIE, investment intentions have declined from Rs 25,32,177 crore in 2010-11 to

Rs 10,80,974 crore in 2017-18. It seems that as far as the industry sector is concerned, banks are unwilling to lend and promoters are unwilling to borrow. Since April-June 2016, credit growth to industry has been appallingly low. It was negative in four successive quarters and crossed 2 per cent only in two of the ten quarters.

The performance of exports is worse. Merchandise exports have not crossed USD 311 billion in any of the NDA's four years. Relative to the peak of USD 315 billion in 2013-14, the growth rate has been negative. Among the worst hit during this period are the two job-creating sectors of 'textiles & allied products' and 'gems & jewellery'.

## HOW THE WORLD VIEWS INDIA

The world has recognised India's potential but is dismayed by the current state of the economy. In 2018-19, up to January, FPI and FII have pulled out Rs 94,259 crore, divided almost equally between equity and debt. The sovereign bond rate on December 31, 2018, was 7.3 per cent. Evidently, the boast of 'fastest growing economy' has few takers in the rest of the world.

We place our hope and trust in the government that the people will elect in May 2019.

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FIFTH COLUMN



TAVLEEN SINGH

# Myths and science

IT DID not help that China landed a spacecraft on the dark side of the moon while the Indian Science Congress was being held. But, even without this happening, this assembly of the best and brightest of Indian scientists would have sounded like a bad joke. Credit for this goes to the Vice-Chancellor of Andhra University who read a paper at this conclave that claimed that stem cell and test tube technologies were so evolved at the time of the Mahabharata that it was possible for one woman, Gandhari, to produce a hundred Kaurav sons without this extraordinary birthing feat killing her off. This was not the only startling 'scientific' information presented by G Nageshwar Rao. He also claimed for India the theory of evolution on the grounds that the 10 avatars of Vishnu came before Charles Darwin.

Tempting though it is to mock Mr G Nageshwar Rao, it needs to be said that his claims were of a piece with other 'scientific' claims made in recent times. The Prime Minister himself said, at the opening of a medical facility, that plastic surgery must have been known in ancient India for Shiva to have given his son Ganesha the head of an elephant. Other senior ministers have claimed that the Internet existed in ancient India. As did airlines. Ravana apparently had a fleet. These 'scientific' discoveries from ancient India inspired a judge to claim that peacocks were immaculately conceived by a peahen drinking the tears of her 'husband'.

As one of only a handful of political columnists who has openly supported Narendra Modi, I feel the need to explain why these idiotic claims annoy me enough to write a column about them. Having spent my growing years in the company of secular, socialist, westernised Indians who had a disdain for all things ancient Indian, mostly because they knew nothing of them, I was hoping that the advent of Modi would bring a renaissance. Sushrut is actually celebrated all over the world as the first plastic surgeon but Indian children grow up without knowing of his life or his skills. They also grow up without any knowledge of ancient India's contribution to mathematics, architecture, philosophy and literature. The only way to bring about an Indian renaissance is for these things to be examined and taught so that renewal becomes possible.

Unfortunately, the advent of Modi has brought to the fore the daftest kind of Hindus filled with prejudice and imbued with an inferiority complex so deep that revivalism is their only resort. Revivalism alas is the opposite of a renaissance. In any case, no renaissance has ever been led by people with an inferiority complex because they need revivalism to prove that they were superior once.

The Hindus trying to establish their superiority today are also those who hate Muslims because from their history books they have learned that Muslim conquerors destroyed ancient Indian texts, libraries, temples and universities. This did happen but it is stupid to blame Muslims today for what happened then. Is it not good enough to know that although India was broken in the name of Islam, the Islamic Republic that resulted is considered a failed State? India has managed to do better economically, politically and even otherwise.

Hindus who have found their voice since Narendra Modi became Prime Minister seem obsessed with Muslims and Pakistan. Or they may have noticed that it is China that India needs to compete with. *The Economist* last week said this of China's scientific achievements: 'An analysis of 17.2m papers in 2013-18, by Nikkei, a Japanese publisher, and Elsevier, a scientific publisher, found that more came from China than from any other country in 23 of the busiest fields, such as sodium-ion batteries and neuron-activation analysis. The quality of American research has remained higher, but China has been catching up, accounting for 11% of the most influential papers in 2014-16.'

So can we please awaken from our mythical dreams and start dealing with the world as it is today? Can we begin by ensuring that no more idiotic claims are made at conferences that are addressed by the Prime Minister and that are supposed to be the highest scientific gatherings in India. It is terrific that we are aiming, as the Prime Minister reminds us often, to send a spacecraft to the moon in the next couple of years, but can we pay attention to the Chinese one that is already there?

The main reason for many of modern India's failings, like our inability to provide clean drinking water, are to do with our failures in the field of science. We need for this to change. We certainly need for people in high academia to stop making the sort of claims you expect from sardus in the Kumbh Mela, who have not allowed science and reason to penetrate their Himalayan caves.

Follow Tavleen Singh on Twitter @tavleen\_singh

INSIDE TRACK



COOMI KAPOOR

ENEMY WITHIN

The recent rumbles in HD Kumaraswamy's government, nicknamed Operation Lotus, have not been caused by the BJP, which knows it is well short of a majority. It was due to the infighting between Congress stalwarts, former CM Siddaramaiah and senior minister DK Shivakumar. Siddaramaiah, who was once in the JD(S), feels Kumaraswamy has marginalised him. At one point, Siddaramaiah reportedly suggested to Rahul Gandhi that it made better sense to pull out from the government since the non-performing JD(S) will handicap the Congress in the parliamentary polls. Because of Siddaramaiah's manoeuvres, some seven Congress MLAs went missing. A panicky CM approached a few BJP MLAs to counter Siddaramaiah's move. In a bid to guard its flock, the BJP whisked all its MLAs to a resort in Gurugram. The topple bid ended with the MLAs resurfacing. But Siddaramaiah made his point that he can be ignored by the ruling alliance at its peril.

CASTE ASIDE

It is a mistake for the BSP-SP alliance in UP to count its chickens before they hatch. The *gathbandhan* may have the arithmetic of caste on its side, but there are other imponderables. True, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has proved to be a liability unable to enforce law and order, but BJP chief Amit Shah does have some aces up his sleeve. Most assume that the BJP will prioritise the Hindutva card, but in fact the focus of the campaign is more likely to be development. In the last eight months, the Central government has made a big push to fast-track the Prime Minister's key programmes in Uttar Pradesh, in co-ordination with select state ministers. The funds for building toilets, houses for the poor and gas cylinders have shot up. UP Power Minister Shrikant Sharma, who is in regular touch with the PMO and Power Ministry in Delhi, has been remarkably successful on the electricity front, increasing the state's supply in peak season and ironing out problems in the grid and power distribution to the remote interiors. Union Communications Minister Manoj Sinha points out that for the first time in 70 years the UP farmer can sleep at night during the sowing season because pumps now work during the day because of the availability of electricity. The Opposition counters that

the farmers now stay awake at nights chasing away cows from their fields.

INNER CIRCLE

Akhilesh Yadav refers to Mayawati as *buu*, but the BSP leader's real *bhatija*, Akash Anand, is often seen by her side of late. The cherubic-looking bespectacled Akash dressed in western clothing has proximity, but only time will tell whether the MBA from London also has clout. Another who has recently joined Mayawati's inner circle is Mohammad Jamil Akhtar. He is seen as a replacement for Naseemuddin Siddiqui, once described as the BSP's Muslim face. Naseemuddin was expelled more than a year ago reportedly for unauthorised fund collections. Akhtar, a former journalist, who authored a biography of Mayawati, knows that to survive in the BSP, he must keep a low profile and remain tight-lipped. His former colleagues in the profession have a tough time extracting any information from him.

WAIT YOUR TURN

The old order in the Congress has not yielded to the new, as was expected after the takeover of Rahul Gandhi as party president. Kamal Nath, 72, beat Jyotiraditya Scindia, 48, to the post of Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, and Ashok Gehlot, 67, bested an over-eager Sachin Pilot, 41, for chief ministership of Rajasthan. Gehlot remarked smugly that it had taken him 14 years after being appointed state president to become chief minister. Similarly, Anand Sharma's appointment as publicity in-charge for the 2019 campaign means that the high-profile, opinionated youngsters in the Congress media cell, from Randeep Surjewala, who heads the division, to social media in-charge Divya Spandana find their noses slightly out of joint. Sharma believes that a media campaign has to rely more on conventional communication through television and newspapers, rather than social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook, which are viewed by a minor segment of voters. He is also keen that an overall media policy is adhered to by all spokespersons, so that mavericks do not cross the line.

LOOKING ELSEWHERE

The Congress was made such a paltry offer by Mayawati in UP that the Grand Old Party felt it was beneath its dignity to accept. It believed it could do better fighting on its own. But veteran Congress leaders from UP appear pessimistic about their prospects. Both Raj Babbar, UP Congress president, and former cricketer Mohammad Azharuddin, the working party president in Telangana, are reportedly keen on contesting instead from the Mumbai North West constituency, since Priya Dutt has opted out.

HISTORY HEADLINE

# Why the JNU story won't die



RAKESH BATABYAL

NOT TOO long ago in the history of the Republic — 1974 to be precise — a large body of students entered the lobby, and later the room of Vice-Chancellor G Parthasarathy, the founding head of Jawaharlal Nehru University, a man charged with the setting up of a world-class university, and announced that they were *gheraoing* him. They wanted the barriers of gender separating the girls' and boys' hostels to be done away with, as it smacked of a feudal society based on patriarchy. They were expressing the most progressive ideas agitating the young mind — the gendered barricades encompassing society. Parthasarathy, who had interacted with the most powerful people in the world, found this group of students, many of whom did not even speak English (the language of the diplomatic elite that he was familiar with), more powerful than all who had come before — they were students, yet their demands were not for their own interests, nor even for something euphemistically called national interest. They were protesting for something which in their minds they thought would make society better all-in-all. He did not ask for the police, did not hide them, neither was he demurred — he talked to them about social, bureaucratic and other miscellaneous issues that would not permit such a great idea to be immediately pursued in a traditional society; it would in fact be harmed through the vicious constrictions of traditional society. Its time would come, though, one fine day, and then the society would remember the pioneers — those JNU students. Such was the spirit embodied in the foundation of the university that is JNU. There are many other instances that reinforced these values and established the spirit of dissent and dialogue that became the signature of this great institution.

In the mid-1980s, a Dean of Students introduced a register for women students/guests entering the men's hostel, where the purpose of visit was to be recorded. Many uncharitable remarks made the administration understand its own lack of practical wisdom, and this rule was never strictly enforced.

Then, in the late 1980s, an ever-watch-



Last week, Delhi Police filed a chargesheet against then JNU Students' Union president Kanhaiya Kumar and nine others. Archive

ful body of students discovered that a senior official was drawing salary from two sources. In the pre-RTI age, they made efforts to get at the source. The Vice-Chancellor, a stickler for rules, had to disown the officer; at no point was a student either issued a show-cause notice or shown the door.

In the early 1990s, students wanted to strike against the administration and they were sitting on a hunger strike when the Vice-Chancellor himself joined them in the strike, saying this was his cause too. Professor Yoginder K Alagh, the Vice-Chancellor, was no mean scholar and knew that the students were not demanding something out of the world.

Thus, through such acts, the young were indicating the new and emerging mores, which led to the university not being ossified. Teachers had their individual political and intellectual predilections and students too had their own, but one saw the campus, like the nation, carry on with the variety and colour of these differences.

There were shouts and slogans to drown the other, but they were more a demonstration of intellectual prowess than threats to physically eliminate the other. When the State imposed Emergency in 1975, JNU students became part of street agitations. Their refusal to allow then prime minister Indira Gandhi into the campus is the stuff of legends.

The story of an institution is a story of shared memories and shared ideals. JNU,

as it has grown in the last 50 years, is one such great story. Within this story lay millions of small lives and their careers as they have woven the narrative of this country in the last half century.

A university reflects the character of a nation: its moral self, its confidence and its resolve to face the world. When we sat at the table in our hostel mess, when we all talked about our larger vision and smaller plans — about fighting the capital and its sway, our resolve to finish off shades of Apartheid or the discriminating caste hierarchies — we were speaking of the society and for a future society. The shared memories of those talks, of the politics that gave us the language to express those visions and plans, are small stories in the big world.

As the University celebrates its 50th anniversary, it is these shared memories of the collective self that will keep the beauty of the institution intact. All that is beautiful needs to be cherished and the memories are those beautiful things that direct us towards a great future. It is unfortunate that those who do not cherish the memory and what JNU stands for, are at the helm of affairs today. But memories fortunately cannot be killed, only repressed in some circles.

The writer was a student in JNU in the '90s, and now teaches at Centre for Media Studies at the School of Social Sciences. He is the author of JNU: The Making Of A University

OUT OF MY MIND



MEGHNAD DESAI

THE HOUSE of Commons has seen nothing like what happened on Tuesday, January 15. Two-and-a-half years after the referendum on whether to leave or stay in the European Union and the shocking result to leave — Brexit — the climax came when Prime Minister Theresa May put her negotiated deal to vote. Parliament had been discussing various aspects of the deal under one or another excuse. British

# The British Armageddon

Parliamentarians can bring the Executive to answer questions and listen to criticisms in a variety of ways. In Indian Parliament the backbencher has no freedom and is at the mercy of the Whip of the Party. Not so in Westminster.

The vote was scheduled for last December but it looked to the government that the atmosphere was febrile. On one issue, publishing the advice of the Attorney General in full which the government had refused to do, the House moved a motion that the Executive was in contempt of Parliament. In the vote, the government lost 311-315, by just four votes. But it was a signal. Perhaps May thought that after the Christmas holidays better mood may prevail.

No such luck. At 202-432, the government suffered the biggest defeat ever recorded after Universal Adult Franchise was introduced. One-third of the Conservative Party MPs voted against their own government.

When the referendum result was declared, Parliament endorsed it by passing a motion recognising it as binding. It was known that whenever the deal (The Withdrawal Agreement runs to 600 pages plus) was decided, the European Parliament would have to ratify it. So why not the British Parliament? The government was forced to concede that Parliament would have 'a meaningful vote'. Of course only the House of Commons matters as it is elected and the

House of Lords is not.

The most remarkable thing about the result is that the country is utterly calm. There are peaceful demonstrators around Parliament for each side — for Leave and for Remain. But there are sophisticated alternatives. Leave but not totally. The UK can stay in the Customs Union but not be part of the EU, as Norway has done. That would require exiting but negotiating, in fact, to remain, in all aspects except free movement of labour. There are banners for a No Deal Exit, Hard Brexit. It is all good-natured.

The pressure is immense on May to come up with a deal which commands a majority in the House of Commons. But the House is divided, as is every major

party, indeed the country is divided. Some would like a second referendum, but that is hardly likely to give a clearer result than last time. If it ignored the result of the first referendum, who can trust the House of Commons to deliver on the second?

It is the biggest political crisis I have witnessed in my 50-plus years of living in the UK. But I am also confident that a solution would be found sooner or later. The political system is adversarial but not antagonistic. There is goodwill and trust in the system. The party system could break up or members could leave one and join another party. We may end up with one Remain Party and one Leave Party. But a solution will be found democratically.