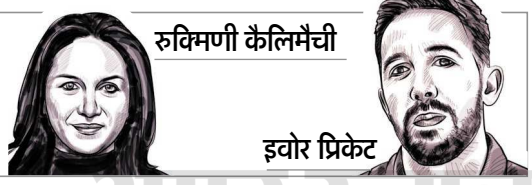


आईएस के आखिरी गांव में



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बघुज गांव में आईएस के बचे-खुचे लड़ाकों की घेरबंदी कर ली गई है। पिछले महीने अमेरिकी नेतृत्व वाली गठबंधन सेना इस पर कब्जा जमाने ही वाली थी कि उसने लड़ाई रोक दी। फिलहाल दोनों पक्षों के बीच बातचीत जारी है। वार्ता इसलिए जरूरी है, ताकि जवानों की सुरक्षित अदला बदली हो सके और स्थानीय नागरिकों को कोई नुकसान न हो।

सीरिया में इस्लामिक स्टेट द्वारा कब्जा किए गए आखिरी गांव में जो लोग दिखाई देते हैं, उन्हें नारंगी रंग से रंगी दो चट्टानी फर्शों पर बैठने के लिए कहा जाता है-एक में सीरियाई लोग बैठते हैं और दूसरे में इराकी। अपने बच्चों के साथ पदों में ढकी औरतें अलग बैठती हैं, उनमें भी सीरियाई और इराकियों को अलग-अलग बांट दिया गया है। यहां भागकर आने वालों में से कुछ इस तरह घायल हो गए कि अमेरिका के नेतृत्व वाली गठबंधन सेना के सामने उनका आत्मसमर्पण कराने के लिए उन्हें गर्दों में लिटाकर खुले इलाके में लाना पड़ा। सुबह बखराबंद गाड़ियों में विशेष अमेरिकी बल के जवान यहां पहुंचे। जिन लोगों पर आईएस के लड़ाका होने का संदेह था, उन्हें एक कतार में खड़े होने के लिए कहा गया। उनके हथियार छीन लिए गए और सैनिकों तथा खोजी कुत्तों ने उनकी तलाशी ली। उसके बाद उनकी उंगलियों के निशान लिए गए, तस्वीरें खींची गईं और उनसे बातचीत की गई।

पिछले दो सप्ताहों में बघुज गांव से हजारों लोग बाहर निकले हैं। इराक और सीरिया में आईएस के कब्जे वाला, जिसका कुल क्षेत्रफल ब्रिटेन के बराबर था, यह

आखिरी गांव था। इस्लामिक स्टेट अब अतीत बन चुका है। कुछ ही दिनों में इसके लड़ाके तीन से दो गांवों और आखिर में एक गांव तक सीमित रह गए। अब आईएस के आतंकी जिस जगह छिपे हैं, उसका क्षेत्रफल सेंट्रल पार्क जितना बड़ा है। पश्चिम में सीरिया के सैनिक उनका मुकाबला कर रहे हैं। दक्षिण में इराक की सीमा है, जहां इराकी सैनिकों की दीवार है। उत्तर और पूर्व में अमेरिकी समर्थन वाली कुर्दिश और अरब सेना, जिसे सीरियन डेमोक्रेटिक फोर्सिंग कहा जाता है, उन्हें कड़ी चुनौती दे रही है। चूंकि आईएस के बचे हुए लड़ाकों पर शिकंजा कसता जा रहा है, ऐसे में, इससे जुड़े लड़ाके अब अपनी जान बचाने की कोशिश में लगे हैं। इस रोगिस्तानी इलाके में जो लोग अब बचे हुए हैं, वे इन लड़ाकों के परिवार हैं, जिनमें आतंकीयों की कई बीवियां और बच्चे शामिल हैं। वे कहते हैं कि भोजन के अभाव में उन्हें ईसाई मत से इनकार कर दिया। इसी वजह से उन्हें उनके बिशप ने पादरी के पद से बर्खास्त कर दिया।



स्वीडिश और रूसी भी हैं। यह बताता है कि एक समय विदेशियों में आईएस का कितना बड़ा आकर्षण था। इसने एक समय सौ देशों के करीब 40,000 लोगों को लड़ाका बनने के लिए दुप्रेरित किया था। इन संदिग्धों में से कुछ को जेल में ले जाया गया। जबकि बहुसंख्यकों को, जिनमें महिलाएं और बच्चे थे, उत्तरी सीरिया के कुछ शिविरों में रखे जाने की बात कही गई है। पिछले महीने जब बघुज पर कब्जा करने की पूरी तैयारी थी, तब अचानक अमेरिकी नेतृत्व वाले गठबंधन ने हमले रोक दिए। दरअसल गठबंधन और आईएस के बचे हुए लड़ाकों के बीच बातचीत चल रही

है, ताकि वे लड़ाके बिना लड़े ही आत्मसमर्पण कर दें। पिछले दिनों वहां पत्रकारों को जमीनी हालात दिखाने के लिए तथाकथित जीरो लाइन पर ले जाया गया। वहां गठबंधन सैनिक चाय पीते और वीडियो देखते हुए दिखाई पड़े। हथियारबंद गठबंधन सैनिकों की तैनाती वहां नहीं थी, जैसे कि संघर्ष विराम लागू हो चुका हो। सीरियन डेमोक्रेटिक फोर्सिंग के प्रवक्ता मुस्तफा बाली कहते हैं कि आईएस के प्रतिनिधियों ने उनसे सुरक्षित गलियारा देने की गुजारिश की थी, लेकिन उनकी वह मांग खारिज की जा चुकी है। दोनों पक्षों के बीच चल रही बातचीत में डेमोक्रेटिक फोर्सिंग के कई दर्जन जवानों को आईएस के कब्जे से रिहाई की मांग भी शामिल है। पिछले दिनों एक वीडियो जारी किया गया, जिसमें डेमोक्रेटिक फोर्सिंग के एक जवान का सिर काट दिया गया दिखाया गया है। 'हम आखिरी सांस तक लड़ेंगे', मुस्तफा बाली कहते हैं। हालांकि अमेरिकी अधिकारी कहते हैं कि सुरक्षित गलियारा प्रदान करने की आईएस की मांग अभी तक खारिज नहीं की गई है। आईएस ने इसके अलावा एक ट्रक भोजन की भी मांग की है। आईएस से बातचीत

विवादास्पद है, लेकिन पिछले चार साल से अधिक समय में इस उखाड़ा फेंकने की प्रक्रिया में कई बार उसके साथ वार्ता की कोशिश हुई है। आईएस से वार्ता का मकसद यही रहा है कि कैदियों की सुरक्षित अदला बदली हो तथा स्थानीय आबादी को कोई नुकसान न पहुंचे। हिरासत में ली गई औरतों में से एक अमाल मोहम्मद अली-सूसी कहती हैं कि वह आईएस की कट्टर समर्थक थी, लेकिन भूख ने उसे आत्मसमर्पण के लिए मजबूर कर दिया। स्कूल में पढ़ने वाली तुकी की एक लड़की कंबल ओढ़े बैठी हुई है। मोटर हम्मले ने उसे चलने-फिरने से मजबूर कर दिया है। ऐसे ही छह साल के एक घायल बच्चे को अमेरिकी स्वयंसेवकों ने फर्स्ट एड स्टेशन पर पहुंचाया है। लेकिन एक पैरामेडिकल स्टाफ के मुताबिक, लड़ाके के बचने की उम्मीद कम है, क्योंकि उसकी नाड़ी बहुत धीरे-धीरे चल रही है। उसी दोपहर को सुरक्षा बलों ने एक मृत औरत को दफनाने के लिए कब्र खोदी। उसके पास तीन और कब्रें खोदी गईं हैं। इनमें उन्हें सुपुर्द-ए-खाल किया जाएगा, जो आईएस के सपनों को साकार होते नहीं देख सके।

महात्मा गांधी अयोध्या पर क्या कहते?

1921 में गांधी पहली और आखिरी बार अयोध्या गए थे। उन्होंने शहर में स्थित मंदिरों में से किसी में जाना जरूरी नहीं समझा। लेकिन वहां एक जनसभा को संबोधित करते हुए उन्होंने असाधारण रूप से कड़े शब्दों में हिंसा की निंदा की।



रवींद्र दुबे

सियासी विभाजन रेखा खत्म करते अफसर

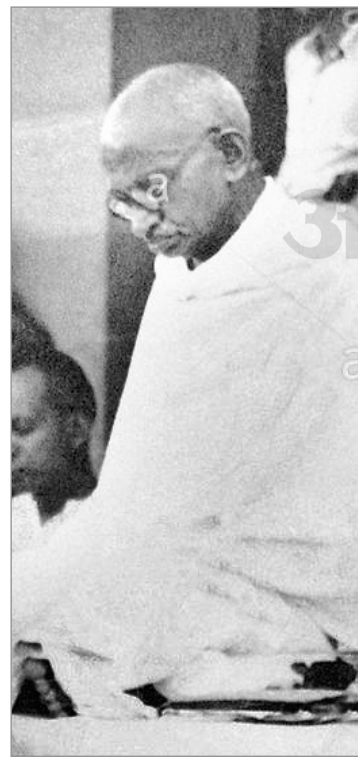
पिछले दिनों कोलकाता की घटना ने साबित कर दिया है कि अफसरशाही और राजनेताओं के बीच की विभाजन रेखा किस कदर धूमिल हो गई है। पश्चिम बंगाल के पुलिस आयुक्त राजीव कुमार से पूछताछ के लिए गई सीबीआई की टीम को कोलकाता की पुलिस ने बजाय सहयोग देने के गिरफ्तार कर लिया और राज्य की मुख्यमंत्री ममता बनर्जी इसके खिलाफ धरने पर बैठ गईं। अब इसमें राजनीति चाहे जो रही हो, इस बात की ध्वनि बड़े जोर से सुनाई दी कि मुख्यमंत्री येन-केन-प्रकारेण अपने पुलिस प्रमुख को बचाना चाहती हैं। लेकिन क्यों? पश्चिम बंगाल का शारदा चिट फंड घोटाला कई सालों से सुर्खियों में है और सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने उसकी जांच के आदेश दिए थे। सीबीआई की टीम इसी सिलसिले में कुमार से पूछताछ करने पहुंची थी। बहरहाल, इस विवाद का अंत सुप्रीम कोर्ट के फैसले से ही हुआ।

इस विवाद से उपजा गर्दा गुबार जब नीचे बैठा, तो बात यही सामने आई कि अफसरशाही चाहे खाकी में हो या सफारी में, उसके और राजनीतिक कार्यपालिका के बीच का अंतर काफी सीमा तक कम हो चुका है। वरना एक राय की मुख्यमंत्री को अपने अधिकारी के बचाव में धरने पर बैठने की जरूरत नहीं पड़ती। यह बात अन्य राज्यों पर भी लागू होती है। आईएस अधिकारी भ्रष्टाचार के गंभीर आरोपों के बावजूद बच जाते हैं। यह राजनीतिक मिलीभगत के बिना संभव नहीं है। वैसे भी भारतीय प्रशासनिक सेवा (आईएसएस) के निहितार्थ कई हैं। आईएसएस यानी 'आई एम सेफ' या फिर 'आई एम सुप्रीम'। जनहित के कार्यों के लिए 'आई एम सॉरी'। और अगर राजनीतिक आका बहुत कड़क हो तो 'आई एम सर'। राजनेताओं द्वारा अफसरशाही के इस्तेमाल के अनेक उदाहरण हैं। एक राज्य के मुख्यमंत्री स्थानीय निकाय के चुनाव में कई दलदलों का पता काटना चाहते थे। उन्होंने यह काम जिले के कलेक्टर को फोन कर उसके सुपुर्द कर दिया। कलेक्टर महोदय ने वार्डों की स्थिति में परिवर्तन कर दिया। यानी जो वार्ड सुरक्षित थे, उन्हें सामान्य में बदला और सामान्य को सुरक्षित में। इसके लिए उन्होंने एक अनोखा तरीका अपनाया। तम्बोला या हाउसी के प्लास्टिक के कुछ चुनिंदा अंकों को उन्होंने डीप फ्रीजर में रखवा दिया। जब वे काफी ठंडे हो गए तो उन्हें दूसरे अंकों के साथ मिला दिया। इस प्रक्रिया का शुभारंभ उन्होंने एक राजनेता से करवाया। फिर क्या था, सारे ठंडे अंक निकाल कर उन्होंने चुनिंदा वार्ड बदल दिए और मुख्यमंत्रीजी के काम को सफलतापूर्वक अंजाम दे दिया। कहने की जरूरत नहीं है कि भ्रष्टाचार के अनेक आरोपों, अनेक जांचों और पदोन्नति नकारे जाने के बावजूद ये



अफसरशाही के लिए तो फिर भी प्रशासनिक सुधारों का प्रावधान है, लेकिन वे अर्थात् लगते हैं। जरूरत है, इन्हीं सुधारों की तर्ज पर राजनीतिक सुधारों की। लेकिन इन सुधारों के लिए आयोग कौन बिठाएगा और उनकी रिपोर्ट पर अमल कौन करेगा?

अधिकारी महोदय आज उसी राज्य के मुख्य सचिव हैं। राजनेता भी ऐसे 'सुविधाजनक' अधिकारियों को मलाईदार पदों से नवाने के अलावा उनकी पदोन्नतियों में मदद करते हैं और भ्रष्टाचार के मामलों में उन्हें बचाते हैं। सरकार से इजाजत लिए बगैर कोई भी एजेंसी किसी भी आईएसएस अधिकारी के खिलाफ कार्रवाई नहीं कर सकती। ऐसी अधिकारियों की एक लंबी चीड़ी फेहरिस्त है, जिनके खिलाफ गंभीर आरोप होते हुए भी उनका आज तक बाल भी बांका नहीं हुआ है। अफसरशाही के लिए उनका करियर ही सब कुछ है। राजनेताओं का करियर ही गारंटी है। उनके लिए वे कुछ भी कर सकते हैं। राजनेताओं को भी सिद्धांतवादी अफसरों के बजाय ऐसे लोग चाहिए होते हैं, जो उनके कहने पर कुछ भी कर सकें। लिहाजा यह गठबंधन पिछले कई सालों से फल-फूल रहा है। मजेदार बात तो यह है कि उदाहरण को छोड़कर उपरोक्त सभी बातें भारतीय बाबू राज पर हार्वर्ड बिजनेस स्कूल के एक अध्ययन में कही गई हैं। इसमें इस बात पर शोध किया गया है कि अल्पकालिक चुनावी अनिश्चितताओं के चलते सत्तासीन राजनेता दीर्घकालीन करियर महत्वाकांक्षाओं वाले अफसरशाहों से किस तरह काम लेते हैं? वे उन पर तबादले की तलाश क्यों करते हैं और बदलते हुए महत्व की पदस्थापनाओं के प्रशासनिक अंकुश का प्रयोग करते हैं। इस शोध ने इस बात को भी प्रसंगिक पाया है कि कौशलयुक्त अफसरशाह- जिन्हें कोई भी काम करवाने में महारत हासिल है - उनके तबादले भी कम ही होते हैं और उनकी पदस्थापनाओं के महत्त्व में भी कोई कमी नहीं आती। अध्ययन ने यह भी पाया है वे अफसरशाह जो राजनेताओं की ही जाति के होते हैं, काफी फायदे में रहते हैं। उन्हें अच्छी पदस्थापनाएं मिलती हैं। इन सब बातों से यह भी पता चलता है कि सरकार द्वारा गठित प्रशासनिक सुधार आयोग भी महज औपचारिकता बनकर रह गए हैं और उनकी रिपोर्ट सरकारी दफ्तरो में धूल खा रही हैं। पहले और दूसरे प्रशासनिक सुधार आयोग के गठन के बीच का अंतर इस बात को और भी रेखांकित करता है। पहला प्रशासनिक सुधार आयोग 1966 में गठित हुआ था। इसके अध्यक्ष तत्कालीन सांसद मोरारजी देसाई थे। आयोग ने अपनी 20 रिपोर्ट 1970 के मध्य में दे दी थी। दूसरा प्रशासनिक सुधार आयोग 31 अगस्त, 2005 को गठित हुआ जिसके अध्यक्ष वीरप्पा मोहोली थे। इस आयोग ने भी अपनी 13 रिपोर्ट सरकार के समक्ष प्रस्तुत कर दी हैं। लेकिन प्रशासनिक सुधार जहाँ के तहाँ हैं। अफसरशाहों के लिए तो फिर भी प्रशासनिक सुधारों का प्रावधान है, लेकिन वे अर्थात् लगते हैं। जरूरत है, इन्हीं सुधारों की तर्ज पर राजनीतिक सुधारों की। लेकिन इन सुधारों के लिए आयोग कौन बिठाएगा और उनकी रिपोर्ट पर अमल कौन करेगा?



वर्ष 1932 में एक युवा ईसाई पुरोहित वेरियर एल्विन को उनके चर्च से बाहर निकाल दिया गया था। ऑक्सफोर्ड में पढ़े-लिखे एल्विन मध्य भारत में गाँवों के बीच जा बसे थे। वह आदिवासियों की शिक्षा और स्वास्थ्य सुरक्षा पर तो ध्यान देना चाहते थे, लेकिन उन्होंने उनकी खुद की पारंपरिक परंपराओं के सम्मान के बाहर उन्हें ईसाई मत से जोड़ने से इनकार कर दिया। इसी वजह से उन्हें उनके बिशप ने पादरी के पद से बर्खास्त कर दिया।

गांधी और रवींद्र का राष्ट्रवाद

राष्ट्रवाद सामाजिक, सांस्कृतिक, भौगोलिक, आर्थिक और धार्मिक आधार पर टकराव पैदा नहीं करता, बल्कि नागरिकों के हितों का संरक्षण कर राष्ट्र को उन्नति की राह पर ले जाता है।

पिछले कुछ वर्षों से राष्ट्रवाद पर समाज के प्रत्येक हिस्से में संवाद और बहस जारी है। बहस और संवाद तक तो बात ठीक है, पर बात की तह तक न पहुंचकर आरोप-प्रत्यारोप किसी भी समाज के लिए घातक है। राष्ट्रवाद जोड़ने की एक ऐसी प्रक्रिया है, जिससे देश के नागरिकों का परस्पर प्रेम और आपसी सौहार्द बढ़ता है। राष्ट्रवाद सांस्कृतिक, सामाजिक, आर्थिक, भौगोलिक, ऐतिहासिक और धार्मिक आधार पर टकराव पैदा नहीं करता, बल्कि नागरिक के हितों का संरक्षण-संवर्धन कर राष्ट्र को उन्नति की राह पर उन्मुख करता है। चाणक्य कहते हैं, सुखस्य मूलं अर्थः अर्थात् सुख का मूल अर्थ है। क्या टकराव से या एक दूसरे को नीचा दिखाने से राष्ट्र को अर्थ से परिपूर्ण करना संभव हो पाएगा?

योगदान था। भारत के गुणसूत्र की संरचना में अहिंसा और सहिष्णुता का समावेश है। इतनी विभिन्नताओं का सम्मान करना ही राष्ट्र को एक सूत्र में रख सकता है। यदि भाषा, संप्रदाय, जाति, रंग, लिंग, धर्म और भौगोलिक आधार पर टकराव होंगे, तो भारत छिन्न-भिन्न हो जाएगा। कोई व्यक्ति क्या पहनेगा, क्या खाएगा, किस तरह की जीवन शैली अपनाएगा, किन परंपराओं में विश्वास रखेगा, कौन-सी भाषा का इस्तेमाल करेगा, यदि इसकी स्वतंत्रता है, तो निश्चित ही हम टकराव रचना समाज एवं देश को मुक्त करेंगे। यदि देश में एक संप्रदाय या जाति द्वारा दूसरे संप्रदाय या जाति को सीमाओं में बांधने की कोशिश की जाएगी, तो इसके भयावह परिणाम होंगे। समूहों द्वारा सीमाएं निर्धारित करने से बंधन बढ़ता है। मनुष्य हमेशा बंधन तोड़ने की कोशिश करता है। अतः जिस राष्ट्रवाद में बंधन होगा, वह कभी भी राष्ट्र को अशुभ नहीं कर पाएगा।

भारत जैसे विशाल देश में संविधान का पालन करके ही हम आगे बढ़ सकते हैं। यदि रखना चाहिए कि हिटलर ने भी जातीय श्रेष्ठता रूपी हथियार का इस्तेमाल कर जर्मनी पर कब्जा जमाया था। फिर जर्मनी किस अधोगति को प्राप्त हुआ, यह किसी से छिपा नहीं है। कौन व्यक्ति भारत माता की जय, वंदे मातरम, जय हिंद, जय भारत और

हिट्लर ने भी जातीय श्रेष्ठता रूपी हथियार का इस्तेमाल कर जर्मनी पर कब्जा जमाया था। फिर जर्मनी किस अधोगति को प्राप्त हुआ, यह किसी से छिपा नहीं है। कौन व्यक्ति भारत माता की जय, वंदे मातरम, जय हिंद, जय भारत और



हिंदुस्तान जिंदाबाद बोलेगा, यह व्यक्तियों को स्वयं तय करने दीजिए। भारत की सच्ची सेवा यदि एक आम नागरिक संविधान सम्मत तरीकों से कर रहा है, तो उसे यह स्वतंत्रता जरूर मिलनी चाहिए कि वह राष्ट्र के प्रति अपने आदर, प्रेम और सद्भाव को किस तरह से प्रकट करना चाहता है। सरकारों का कार्य नागरिकों की भलाई करना होना चाहिए, न कि उन्हें नारों में उलझा कर मूल मुद्दों से ध्यान भटकाना। यदि सरकारों विकास, कानून-व्यवस्था, मूलभूत संरचना, सीमाओं की सुरक्षा, देश की एकता और अखंडता का कार्य बेहतर तरीके से नहीं कर पाती, तो यह राष्ट्रवाद या राष्ट्र सेवा कदापि नहीं हो सकती। देश के नौजवानों को रोजगार, किसानों को बेहतर दाम, व्यापारियों

को बेहतर कर संरचना, महिलाओं की पूर्ण सुरक्षा, जातिगत एवं धार्मिक विद्वेष को बढ़ावा न देना, प्रेस की स्वतंत्रता, भौगोलिक सीमाओं की रक्षा करना और संविधान की रक्षा करना ही सच्चा राष्ट्रवाद है। राजनीतिक दलों एवं नेताओं को राष्ट्रवाद की इसी कसौटी पर कसा जाना चाहिए। खेल, सिनेमा के अनुवाद के साथ, संचार क्रांति, आवागमन के साधन और विभिन्न तरह के परिधानों ने देश को जिस तरह एकीकृत किया है, ठीक उसी तरह एक भौगोलिक क्षेत्र के खानपान के दूसरे क्षेत्र में उपलब्ध होनी ही राष्ट्र एकीकृत आ जा है। विद्यालयों एवं विभिन्न विश्वविद्यालयों में जिस तरह से एक क्षेत्र का विद्यार्थी दूसरे भौगोलिक क्षेत्र में शिक्षा हेतु आ-जा रहे हैं, उससे भी राष्ट्र की भावना और मजबूत हो रही है।

आजादी का इतिहास देखने पर पता चलता है कि तत्कालीन नेताओं ने आजादी प्राप्त करने हेतु अपने-अपने मार्ग पर चलने का फैसला किया, पर एक मार्ग पर चलने वाले ने दूसरे मार्ग पर चलने वाले नेताओं को कभी राष्ट्रद्रोही नहीं कहा। उनको भी नहीं, जिन्होंने आजादी के इतिहास में अपना कोई योगदान नहीं दिया। यह सत्य है कि आजादी के समय के नेता आज के राजनीतिक चरित्रों से ज्यादा राष्ट्रवादी और सच्चे देशभक्त थे। अतः देश के नागरिकों को गांधी और रवींद्रनाथ, दोनों के राष्ट्रवाद से प्रेरित होना चाहिए। दोनों के राष्ट्रवाद का अध्ययन करने से यह पता चलता है कि जिस राष्ट्रवाद में मानवता और करुणा का समावेश नहीं है, वह निश्चित ही हमें विनाश की ओर धकेलता है। देश के राजनेताओं के लिए एक आम नागरिक के हित को साधना और भय मुक्त समाज की रचना करना ही सच्चा राष्ट्रवाद है। जो इन विचारों से सहमत हैं, वे राष्ट्रवादी हैं और जो असहमत हैं, वे भी राष्ट्रवादी हैं।





प्रदूषित नदियों की संख्या में वृद्धि

गत वर्ष सितंबर में नदियों के मूल्यांकन के आधार पर सीपीसीबी ने अपनी रिपोर्ट पेश की, जिसमें कहा गया है कि बीते दो वर्षों में प्रदूषित नदियों की संख्या घटने की बजाय बढ़ गयी है. इस मूल्यांकन के अनुसार,

302 से बढ़कर 351 हो गयी है प्रदूषित नदियों की संख्या.

34 से बढ़कर 45 हो गयी है गंभीर रूप से प्रदूषित नदियों की संख्या.

351 प्रदूषित नदियों में से 117 महाराष्ट्र (53), असम (44) तथा गुजरात (20) में हैं. यह रिपोर्ट यह भी कहती है कि महाराष्ट्र, असम तथा गुजरात की नदियों की तुलना में बिहार और उत्तर प्रदेश के कई नदी खंड कम प्रदूषित हैं.



यह विडंबना है कि जिन नदियों ने लाखों सालों से हमें गले लगा रखा है, जो जीवनदायिनी हैं, वे जीवनरेखा कही जानेवाली सदावीर नदियां आज मर रही हैं. एनजीटी के लाख प्रयासों के बावजूद देश की नदियां औद्योगिक कचरा कहे या फिर औद्योगिक रसायन युक्त अपशिष्ट से मुक्त नहीं हो पायी हैं. जो नदियां प्रदूषण मुक्त हो पायीं हैं, उनमें निजी प्रयासों की बहुत बड़ी भूमिका है. सरकार दावे करती नहीं थकी कि वह गंगा-यमुना सहित देश की अधिकांश नदियों को प्रदूषण मुक्त कर देगी. गंगा-यमुना पहले से और भी अधिक मैली हैं और वे अब नदी नहीं, गंदे नाले का रूप अख्तियार कर चुकी हैं. जब गंगा-यमुना आज तक प्रदूषण मुक्त नहीं हो पायी हैं, जो बढहाली की जीती-जागती मिसाल हैं, तो देश की बाकी नदियों की शुद्धि की उम्मीद बेमानी नहीं तो और क्या है.

बढ़ रहा प्रदूषण

केंद्रीय प्रदूषण नियंत्रण बोर्ड की मानें, तो देश की तकरीबन 521 में से 323 नदियों की हालत इतनी बुरी है कि उनके पानी में नहा भी नहीं सकते हैं. इन नदियों की बढहाली का आलम यह है कि इनके पानी में ऑक्सीजन की मात्रा लगातार घटती जा रही है. इनमें बीओडी 3 मिग्रा प्रति लीटर से भी कहीं ज्यादा है. मानक के अनुसार पीने के पानी में अधिकतम बीओडी दो या उससे कम होना चाहिए और नहाने के पानी में यह तीन से किसी भी कीमत पर अधिक नहीं होना चाहिए. सबसे अधिक प्रदूषित 33 नदियों में देश की सबसे पूज्य पुण्यखलिला, मोक्षदायिनी और पतितपावनी नदी गंगा और यमुना भी शामिल हैं. इनके अलावा गुजरात की अमलाखेड़ी, खारी, हरियाणा की मारकंडा, मध्य प्रदेश की खान, बेतवा,

उत्तर प्रदेश की वरुणा, घाघरा, काली और हिंडन, आंध्र की मुंसी, महाराष्ट्र की भीमा सर्वाधिक प्रदूषित नदियों की सूची में शीर्ष पर हैं. गोमती और पांडु जैसी तो असंख्य हैं. प्रदूषण नियंत्रण बोर्ड के अनुसार, देश की 198 नदियां स्वच्छ पायी गयी हैं. ये सभी दक्षिण-पूर्व भारत की हैं. अकेले महाराष्ट्र की तकरीबन 45 से अधिक नदियां बुरी तरह प्रदूषित हैं. बोर्ड भले यह दावा करे कि दक्षिण-पूर्व की नदियों की हालत उत्तर भारत की नदियों के बनिस्बत काफी अच्छी है, जबकि हकीकत यह भी है कि नदियों की बढहाली



में मध्य प्रदेश, गुजरात, कर्नाटक, केरल और पश्चिम बंगाल, उत्तर प्रदेश, उत्तराखंड, झारखंड भी पीछे नहीं हैं. बोर्ड का मानना है कि नदियों के किनारे बसे अधिकांश शहरों में सीवेज ट्रीटमेंट प्लांट न होने के चलते नदियों में प्रदूषण बढ़ रहा है. नदियों में प्रदूषण का अहम कारण सीवेज है.

ऑक्सीजन की मात्रा घटी

बीओडी बढ़ने की भी अहम वजह सीवेज ही हैं. इसके अलावा कचरा, इंसान एवं पशुओं के शव और फूल-पत्तियों का प्रवाह भी नदियों में बीओडी

की मात्रा बढ़ा कर नदियों के संतुलन को बिगाड़ने में अहम भूमिका निबाहता है. इनके खाल्मे में काफी बड़ी मात्रा में ऑक्सीजन खर्च होती है. यही वजह है जिसके चलते नदी में ऑक्सीजन की मात्रा लगातार कम होती चली जाती है.

गंभीर बीमारियों के खतरे

दुख इस बात का है कि प्रदूषण नियंत्रण बोर्ड औद्योगिक प्रदूषण के बारे में बिल्कुल मौन है, जबकि देखा जाये तो देश की अधिकांश नदियों के प्रदूषण में उद्योगों के रसायनयुक्त अवशेषों की प्रमुख भूमिका है. पर्यावरण विज्ञान केंद्र का शोध-अध्ययन इसका सबूत है कि देश की नदियों में मानक से ज्यादा खतरनाक विषैले तत्व मौजूद हैं. इसके चलते वे विषैली हो गयी हैं. देश की तकरीबन 445 नदियों के अध्ययन में पाया गया है कि उनके प्रदूषण का स्तर असामान्य है. उनमें भारी निर्धारित मानक से कई गुना ज्यादा हैवी मेटल मौजूद हैं. उनका पानी पीने लायक तक नहीं है. यदि सिलिसिलेवार जायजा लें, तो पता चलता है कि देश की तकरीबन 137 नदियों में आयरन, 69 में लेड, 50 में कैडमियम और निकल, 21 में क्रोमियम और 10 में कॉपर अधिकतम मात्रा में पाया गया है. हालात की गंभीरता का अंदाजा इससे लग जाता है कि इसके चलते लोग लीवर सिरोसिस, डायबिटीज, हृदय रोग, गुर्दा रोग, अनीमिया, फेफड़े, सांस, पेट के रोग, जोड़ों में दर्द, सीने में खिंचाव, बेहोशी, मांसपेशियों में दर्द, खांसी, थकान, उच्च रक्तचाप, कैंसर, अल्सर, हड्डियों की बीमारी व डायरिया के शिकार होकर मर रहे हैं. सबसे बुरी हालत गंगा और ब्रह्मपुत्र की है, जिसका पानी सबसे ज्यादा गंदा है.

नदियों का सवाल सबका है

नदियों का सवाल प्रकृति और पर्यावरण से जुड़ा है. नदियों के बिना मानव जाति ही नहीं, जीव-जंतु यानी संपूर्ण प्राणी जगत अपूर्ण है. युग परिवर्तन के

साथ-साथ नदियों के प्रति हमारी सोच में भी बदलाव आया है. नदियों की बढहाली उसी सोच का नतीजा है. हमारे यहां नदियों की पूजा होती है व उन्हें मां मानते हैं. अधिकांश मेले नदियों के तट पर ही लगते हैं. अर्धकुंभ-कुंभ इसके सबूत हैं. यहां अहम सवाल यह है कि नदियां प्रदूषण मुक्त होंगी या नहीं. वे अखिल बहनी चाहिए. यह बेहद जरूरी है. नदियां जितनी जल्दी शुद्ध हों, उतना ही उनके और देश के भविष्य के लिए अच्छा है. लेकिन, इस सच्चाई को झुठलाया नहीं जा सकता कि राष्ट्रीय हरित अधिकरण द्वारा देश की नदियों को बढहाली से उबारने की खातिर की गयीं लाख टिप्पणियों, सरकार को दी चेतावनियों और अधिकारियों को अपने दायित्व के ढंग से निर्वहन न किये जाने को लेकर बार-बार फटकारने के बावजूद, नदियां और बढहाल होती चली गयी हैं.

कौन करेगा साफ?

राज्य गंधी सरकार ने अपने कार्यकाल के दौरान सबसे पहले गंगा के शुद्धीकरण की शुरुआत की थी. दस-बारह साल पहले यमुना को टेम्स बनाने का वायदा किया गया था. आज भी यमुना में 860 मिलियन लीटर गैलन सीवर का पानी रोजाना यमुना में गिराया जा रहा है. मोदी सरकार आने के बाद साल 2014 में नमामि गंगे मिशन की शुरुआत हुई. उसके बाद उमा भारती ने तवी नदी के उद्धार का बीड़ा उठाने का वायदा किया. लेकिन, दुख है कि न गंगा साफ हुई, न यमुना साफ हुई और न तवी. ऐसे में देश की अन्य नदियों की शुद्धि की आशा कैसे की जा सकती है. नदी मामलों की जानकार डॉ साफिया खान का कहना है कि हमारे मनीषियों ने नदियों को धर्म के साथ इसलिए जोड़ा कि मानव धार्मिक भावना के वशीभूत हो जीवनदायिनी मान कर उनकी पूजा करे, उनको रक्षा करे, उनको दूषित न करे. यही वह अहम वजह रही जिसके चलते नदियों के किनारे मेले लगना शुरू हुए. कुंभ, अर्धकुंभ इसके जीवंत प्रमाण हैं. लेकिन, आज उस भावना का सर्वत्र अभाव है.

- बीते दिसंबर गंगा के हाल पर बायोलॉजिकल वाटर क्वालिटी एसेसमेंट (2017-18) की आयी रिपोर्ट (जिसे केंद्रीय प्रदूषण नियंत्रण बोर्ड (सीपीसीबी) ने सार्वजनिक किया था) की मानें, तो बीते वर्ष मॉनसून के पहले की अवधि (प्री-मॉनसून सीजन) में गंगा के गुजरने के 41 स्थानों में से 37 स्थानों पर इस नदी का जल मध्यम से गंभीर स्तर तक प्रदूषित पाया गया.
- प्री-मॉनसून के दौरान इन 41 में से महज चार स्थानों पर ही नदी जल या तो स्वच्छ था या हल्का प्रदूषित, वहीं मॉनसून के बाद की अवधि में 39 में से केवल एक ही स्थान पर (केवल हरिद्वार में) गंगा का पानी स्वच्छ था.
- 2016-17 के प्री-मॉनसून की अवधि में गंगा नदी के 34 क्षेत्रों में मध्यम दर्जे का प्रदूषण देखा गया, जबकि इसके तीन क्षेत्रों में गंभीर प्रदूषण दर्ज किया गया. इस रिपोर्ट में यह भी कहा गया है कि उत्तर प्रदेश की दो मुख्य सहायक नदियां पांडु और वरुणा नदी गंगा में प्रदूषण के स्तर को बढ़ाने के लिए जिम्मेदार हैं.
- गंगा नदी की मुख्यधारा में, हालांकि एक भी स्थान गंभीर रूप से प्रदूषित नहीं था, लेकिन अधिकांश स्थानों में प्रदूषण का स्तर मध्यम था.
- गंगा के संरक्षण, संवर्धन व स्वच्छता कार्यक्रम के लिए एनआरसीपी (नेशनल रिवर कंजर्वेशन प्लान) के तहत 2007-08 में 251.83 करोड़ और 2008-09 के दौरान 276 करोड़ रुपये खर्च किये गये. नीति आयोग की एक रिपोर्ट के अनुसार, मौजूदा सरकार ने भी वर्ष 2015 में सिर्फ गंगा संरक्षण यानी नमामि गंगे योजना के लिए 21,000 करोड़ की धनराशि स्वीकृत की थी.

कचरे व सीवेज से प्रदूषण

बीते वर्ष दिसंबर में सीपीसीबी की सितंबर 2018 में आयी रिपोर्ट के हवाले से लोकसभा में बताया था कि 351 नदी क्षेत्रों में से 323 क्षेत्रों के प्रदूषण का मुख्य कारण अशोधित और आंशिक रूप से शोधित कचरा व सीवेज (मल, गंदा पानी, नाले का पानी आदि) हैं.

मानक से अधिक भारी धातु हैं देश की 42 नदियों में

बीते वर्ष केंद्रीय जल आयोग (सीडब्ल्यूसी) ने ग्रीष्म, शरद व मॉनसून के दौरान देश की नदियों जल के नमूने लिये थे. इन नमूनों के अध्ययन में सीडब्ल्यूसी ने देश की 42 नदियों में विषैले भारी धातुओं (शीशा, निकल, लौह, तांबा, क्रोमियम, कैडमियम) की संख्या मानक से अधिक पाया. जबकि गंगा में पांच भारी धातु क्रोमियम, तांबा, निकल, शीशा व लौह और अर्कावती, ऑरसैंग, राप्ती, साबरमती, सरयू व वैतरणा में चार भारी धातु मानक से कहीं अधिक मात्रा में पाये गये. अध्ययन के दौरान नदियों के साथ-साथ बनाये गये 414 स्टेशनों के नमूनों की जांच के बाद जो नतीजे आये, उससे पता चला कि 168 स्टेशनों का पानी सिर्फ इसलिए पीने योग्य नहीं है, क्योंकि उनमें लोहे की अत्यधिक मात्रा मौजूद है, जबकि 136 के पानी को इस अध्ययन में पीने योग्य माना गया.



The great disruptor

Netflix's rise has been phenomenal

Alfonso Cuarón's Roma marked a number of firsts for Netflix when the 2019 Oscar nominations were announced. The black-and-white, autobiographical drama not only received the streamer's first best picture nomination, but also nabbed its first nominations for best director, best actress in a leading role, original screenplay, foreign-language film, production design, sound editing and sound mixing. In all, Netflix's Spanish-language production received an incredible 10 nominations. Netflix has also joined the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), which is the world's most influential entertainment lobby, with members including Walt Disney Studios, Paramount Pictures, Sony Pictures Entertainment, Twentieth

Century Fox Film, Universal City Studios, and Warner Bros Entertainment. Neither event surprised the cognoscenti.

Netflix's entry into the MPAA was overdue. Its output of some 82 films and 700 original television shows is more than the combined output of any five other MPAA members. Apart from scale, the content generation is truly global, spread across 21 nations, and sourced in many languages. Roma is not an outlier — a high percentage of Netflix's content receives critical acclaim, quite apart from being popular. The company now has close to 150 million global subscribers, and its streaming services and content libraries are available in every major nation except China. By some estimates, Netflix's subscribers consume 20 per cent of

global bandwidth on any given weekend. The growth has been phenomenal. The streaming service has picked up over 30 million subscribers in the last 12 months. Revenues have grown by over 35 per cent in 2018, crossing the \$16 billion mark, with operating profits almost doubling to \$1.6 billion. Netflix does have substantial debt — about \$8.5 billion — on the balance sheet, and it is cash-flow negative due to its huge spend. Nevertheless, investors love the stock, which has outperformed other tech giants such as Facebook, Apple and Google in the past year. It is an amazing track record, especially when you consider that Netflix entered the business of original content-generation as recently as 2011.

It started as a DVD-rentals outfit, back in 1997. It has transformed itself multiple times to stay ahead of technological change. First, it moved from being a DVD rental service to become a streaming service in the United States. Then it moved from sourcing content to producing it. In its journey to becoming a global streaming service, which delivered its

own in-house content, it tiptoed past regulators in multiple jurisdictions, avoiding major trouble by sticking to entertainment. It also adapted to different flavours of the internet, handling slow connections in India, and coping with unfair local competition in places without net-neutrality. Indeed, Netflix has been accused of pusillanimity because it bends over backwards to avoid trouble by self-censoring. This happened, for instance, when comedian Hasan Minhaj's criticism of the Saudi regime was not broadcast in the Kingdom. But the focus on entertainment also avoids the fake news scandals that have rocked Facebook, Twitter and Google. Netflix has, therefore, successfully straddled the entertainment and tech universes, combining business models and techniques in a manner unlike any other company. It uses a subscription model similar to that of Hollywood studios and TV channels.

But it also uses data science as effectively as Amazon, Facebook or Google to guess what its viewers enjoy watching. Its algorithms sort

viewers into thousands of different "taste clusters". This is done reportedly by adapting an astrophysics program originally used to classify the spectrums of stars. It has proved remarkably successful in commissioning content that works locally and, globally, with appropriate subtitling. Narcos is popular in India while Latin Americans like Sacred Games.

This evolutionary process has made it a massive and serial disruptor. Netflix disrupted the home DVD-rental market. It disrupted conventional TV programming with its streaming services. It disrupted the global model of content generation and commissioning where even the biggest studios stuck, by and large, to their own turf. Ironically some analysts feel that the success will sooner, or later, lead to trouble with regulators if it crowds out free-to-air, public-service broadcasters. But until such an eventuality comes to pass, Netflix will retain a unique identity as the only company that is a member of both FAANG (Facebook, Apple, Amazon, Netflix and Alphabet's Google) and the MPAA.

Donald Trump: Economic czar?

It is not fair to downplay President Trump's achievements by citing post-war growth rates

SITHARAM GURUMURTHI

Ever since Donald Trump assumed charge as the President of the United States on January 20, 2017, not a single day passes without some controversy or the other. Trump's outspoken criticism of top leaders of his Nato allies is well known. His firing of almost all the top echelons of his administration has not even spared the secretary of state. His own election campaign is under the scanner with the Robert Mueller investigation reaching an advanced stage. At the same time, it is necessary to reflect on the performance of the US economy during the last 25 months, which has received comparatively little coverage in the media.

Mr Trump in recent months has been saying "We have the best economy we have ever had in the history of our country". According to the *Washington Post*, Mr Trump has repeated this at least 40 times. When he took charge in January 2017, he vowed to achieve a growth rate as high as 6 per cent. According to the US department of commerce, the economy grew at an annualised rate of 3.2 per cent in the third quarter of 2017. GDP growth reached an annualised rate of 4.2 per cent in the second quarter of 2018. Though this is the best for several years, it was still less than the 4.9 per cent achieved in the third quarter of 2014.

Daniele Polunbo, a data journalist, draws attention to the fact the Dow Jones Industrial Average not only rose to record highs throughout 2017 in a run that stretched back to August 2016, but broke through the 20,000 mark for the first time 10 days after Mr Trump's inauguration. It is now close to 25,000. Oil has fallen by double digits, with the US becoming a net exporter in November 2018 for the first time in 75 years. Similarly, Standard & Poor's 500 Index and the Nasdaq also reached historical heights.

Corporation tax cuts prior to Christmas 2017 gave a big boost to US shares coupled with Mr Trump's US-centric policies, clampdown on the bureaucracy and promises of investment in infrastructure have been cited as factors responsible for this phenomenon. According to the October 2018 report of the Reality Check Team of BBC, the Dow reached record highs under the Trump Presidency "largely unfazed by geo-political risks like rising trade tensions with China and Trump's decision last year to ditch the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade deal".

The unemployment rate in September 2018 was 3.7 per cent, the lowest since 1969. In fact, the downward trend had started during the Barack Obama years. According to Ryan Sweet of Moody's Analytics, the US now has a greater proportion of older and better educated workers, both of whom tend to have lower unemployment rates. According to Mr Sweet, the unemployment rate was below four per cent in 2000 and demographic changes since then would suggest the current rate should be even below the 3.7 per cent in September 2018. African American unemployment levels have also registered record low levels. In May 2018, unemployment for black Americans fell to 5.9 per cent, the lowest since the 1970s. Ivanka Trump proudly tweeted that the unemployment rate for women was at a 65-year low.



On February 1, the labour Department reported that payroll has increased by 304,000 in January, which was about 130,000 more jobs more than what economists in Wall Street had been predicting, notes John Cassidy in the *New Yorker*. The job gains were widely spread across the economy, with construction, health care, retail and leisure, and hospitality showing particular strength. The report also said wages are still rising at an annualised rate of more than three per cent, while consumer price inflation is falling, because of cheaper energy prices. That inflation-adjusted wages are rising, is the key point according to Mr Cassidy.

If Mr Trump wants to go down in history as the greatest jobs-producing president of the US, he will have to create more than 18.6 million jobs, estimates Kimberly Amadeo in the January 28 issue of *The Balance*. While Bill Clinton created many jobs, Mr Trump will have to create at least 32.7 million jobs to beat the record of President Franklin D Roosevelt, who had increased the number of jobs by more than 21 per cent. Ms Amadeo notes that the construction industry makes the most efficient use of federal dollars to create jobs. A study by the University of Massachusetts at Amherst found that \$1 billion spent on public works created 19,795 jobs, which was better than defence spending, which created 8,555 jobs at the same cost.

Mr Trump's plan is to create jobs by eliminating outsourcing and bringing jobs back from Japan, China and Mexico. The US lost 34 per cent of its manufacturing jobs between 1998 and 2010. Many were outsourced by US companies to save money while others were eliminated by new technology

(robotics, artificial intelligence and bio-engineering). Mr Trump's thrust on infrastructure development (the "Rebuild America" programme) envisages spending \$200 billion over 10 years to match \$800 billion in business spending. While this will create one million apprentices in two years, it also requires the approval of Congress.

Mr Trump's critics, however, hold that GDP growth was much higher in the 1950s and 1960s.

Megan Black, assistant professor of history at the London School of Economics, notes that the post-war era witnessed tremendous economic growth, most notably in manufacturing, agriculture, transportation, trade, finance, real estate and mining, and back in the 1950s, the unemployment rate was even lower than the current rate of 3.7 per cent.

According to Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody's Analytics, "We are experiencing a boom now but it is increasingly likely it will bust early in the next decade when the fiscal stimulus fades, and the economy struggles to manage the much higher interest rates." Mr Zandi predicts that the next recession will arrive on June 20, 2020.

It is not fair to downplay Mr Trump's achievements by citing post-war data. There is no denying the fact that Mr Trump has transformed the US into a booming economy in less than two years.

The writer was a Staff Member of the International Monetary Fund, Washington DC

Intermediary liability law needs updating

SUNIL ABRAHAM

There is a less charitable name for intermediary liability regimes like Sec 79 of the IT Act — private censorship regimes. Intermediaries get immunity from liability emerging from user-generated and third-party content because they have no "actual knowledge" until it is brought to their notice using "take down" requests or orders. Since some of the harm caused is immediate, irreparable and irreversible, it is the preferred alternative to approaching courts for each case.

When intermediary liability regimes were first enacted, most intermediaries were acting as common carriers — ie they did not curate the experience of users in a substantial fashion. While some intermediaries like Wikipedia continue this common carrier tradition, others driven by advertising revenue no longer treat all parties and all pieces of content neutrally. Facebook, Google and Twitter do everything they can to raise advertising revenues. They make you depressed. And if they like you, they get you to go out and vote. There is an urgent need to update intermediary liability law.

In response to being summoned by multiple governments, Facebook has announced the establishment of an independent oversight board. A global free speech court for the world's biggest online country. The time has come for India to exert its foreign policy muscle. The amendments to our intermediary liability regime can have global repercussions, and shape the structure and functioning of this and other global courts.

While with one hand Facebook dealt the oversight board, with the other hand it took down APIs that would enable press and civil society to monitor political advertising in real time. How could they do that with no legal consequences? The answer is simple — those APIs were provided on a voluntary basis. There was no law requiring them to do so.

There are two approaches that could be followed. One, as scholar of regulatory theory Amba Kak puts it, is to "disincentivise the black box". Most transparency reports produced by intermediaries today are on a voluntary basis; there is no requirement for this under law. Our new law could require an extensive transparency with appropriate privacy safeguards for the government, affected parties and the general public in terms of revenues, content production and consumption, policy development, contracts, service-level agreements, enforcement, adjudication and appeal. User empowerment measures in the user interface and algorithm explainability could be required. The key word in this approach is transparency.

The alternative is to incentivise the black box. Here faith is placed in technological

solutions like artificial intelligence. To be fair, technological solutions may be desirable for battling child pornography, where pre-censorship (or deletion before content is published) is required. Fingerprinting technology is used to determine if the content exists in a global database maintained by organisations like the Internet Watch Foundation. A similar technology called Content ID is used pre-censor copyright infringement. Unfortunately, this is done by ignoring the flexibilities that exist in Indian copyright law to promote education, protect access knowledge by the disabled, etc. Even within such narrow application of technologies, there have been false positives. Recently, a video of a blogger testing his microphone was identified as a pre-existing copyrighted work.

The goal of a policy-maker working on this amendment should be to prevent repeats of the Shreya Singhal judgment where sections of the IT Act were read down or struck down. To avoid similar constitution challenges in the future, the rules should not specify any new categories of illegal content, because that would be outside the scope of the parent clause. The fifth ground in the list is sufficient — "violates any law for the time being in force". Additional grounds, such as "harms minors in anyway", is vague and cannot apply to all categories of intermediaries — for example, a dating site for sexual minorities. The rights of children need to be protected. But that is best done within the ongoing amendment to the POCSO Act.

As an engineer, I vote to eliminate redundancy. If there are specific offences that cannot fit in other parts of the law, those offences can be added as separate sections in the IT Act. For example, even though voyeurism is criminalised in the IT Act, the non-consensual distribution of intimate content could be criminalised, as it has been done in the Philippines.

Provisions that have to do with data retention and government access to that data for the purposes of national security, law enforcement and also anonymised datasets for the public interest should be in the upcoming Data Protection law. The rules for intermediary liability is not the correct place to deal with it, because data retention may also be required of those intermediaries that don't handle any third-party information or user generated content. Finally, there have to be clear procedures in place for reinstatement of content that has been taken down.

The writer is executive director, Centre for Internet and Society

Disclosure: The Centre for Internet and Society receives grants from Facebook, Google and Wikimedia Foundation

OTHER VIEWS

RBI's rate cut signals desire to bolster growth momentum

But MPC fails to flag fiscal slippages, which can hurt private investment

Barely four months after the Reserve Bank of India switched its monetary policy stance to one of "calibrated tightening", signalling interest rates were set to trend higher, it has reversed direction. Not only did the RBI's monetary policy committee unanimously opt to revert to a "neutral" posture, but the rate-setting panel unexpectedly decided, by a 4-2 majority, to cut the benchmark repo rate by 25 basis points, to 6.25 per cent. The MPC's reasoning has been fairly straightforward. With Consumer Price Index-based inflation having continued to slow and projected to stay well below the medium-term target of four per cent till at least the October-December quarter, the MPC saw an opportune moment to pivot to a growth-supportive stance. That there is a need to bolster economic momentum is evident from the RBI's downward revision of the forecast for growth in the first half of the next fiscal year. The projection has been lowered to a range of 7.2-7.4 per cent, from 7.5 per cent posited in the RBI's December statement, as moderating global growth and slowing overseas demand add uncertainties to the prevailing domestic imbalances.

Inexplicably, however, the RBI's policy statement fails to



make any mention of its hitherto abiding concern about fiscal prudence. With the Interim Budget showing some slippage from the fiscal roadmap and projecting a budget deficit of 3.4 per cent for both the current financial year and the next, the risk of government borrowing crowding out private investment demand remains tangibly real.

The Hindu, February 8

The timing seems political

Why grill Robert Vadra now?

Faith in the fairness of police investigations is in short supply in India. The Enforcement Directorate — an investigative agency, like the discredited CBI — questioned Robert Vadra, the husband of recently-appointed AICC general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, for six hours on Wednesday and again on Thursday. It appears the allegation of money-laundering and the possession of properties in London has been made against Ms Gandhi's husband. He has denied these allegations in detailed replies and has alleged a "witch-hunt". The BJP, on the other hand, held a press conference on Wednesday at which it alleged that Mr Vadra made money illegally in petroleum and defence deals when the

UPA was in power, and used earnings from these transactions to buy the London properties. The saffron party offered no proof. But what is evident is that India sent no letter rogatory to the British authorities to investigate Mr Vadra's suspicious dealings, if there were any, in that country. So it's not clear on what basis the ED is building its case. The question is apt to be asked if pulling her husband in for questioning is the government's way of degrading the charismatic Ms Gandhi as an effective election campaigner against the BJP, especially in Uttar Pradesh, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Lok Sabha constituency is located.

The Asian Age, February 8

A ticking time bomb

Unemployment data deeply worrying

The suppressed National Sample Survey Office report on employment in India bears some deeply worrying evidence apart from the rising unemployment rate. One such is the decline in the labour force participation rate, which measures the ratio of people employed or actively seeking employment to the total working age population. This ratio has been falling systematically and sharply in India, from 63.7 per cent in 2004-05 to 55.9 per cent in 2011-12 to 49.8 per cent in 2017-18. The ratios for men and women taken separately have both fallen. Roughly three-fourths of the male working age population is included in the LFPR while only a quarter of working age females are employed or are

actively seeking work. This obviously is of concern since India is supposed to have a demographic dividend with a large proportion of young people entering the labour market. However, the report reveals that the LFPR for youth in the age group of 15-29 years has also declined from 44.6 per cent in 2011-12 to 38.2 per cent in 2017-18. The unemployment rate for this age group is estimated to be an alarming 27.2 per cent in 2017-18. Looking at the big picture in India, there is, evidently, an employment crisis. Tweaking data will not change any of these facts. The Centre is sitting on a potentially inflammable social problem.

The Telegraph, February 8

Opinion

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2019

A CONFIDENT GOVERNMENT would have let the Interim Budget be the non-event that it should be, but confidence is one quality that is in short supply in the present BJP-led NDA government. Just look at the lugubrious faces of the BJP members of Parliament, especially those from the states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Uttar Pradesh and you will agree with me.

So, Prime Minister Modi decided that the occasion of presenting the Interim Budget will be converted into a significant event. The interim finance minister — like a player who has earned his first India cap — tried to convert it into a spectacle. The idea was to inject *josh* (spirit or enthusiasm) into the government's swansong. The result, unfortunately, may be very different from what was intended by the Prime Minister and the interim finance minister.

The brazenness

The promises have begun to unravel. Let's look at the Big promise of ₹6,000 per year, in three instalments, to every farmer owning land of 2 hectares or less under a scheme called PM-KISAN. The government tried to pull the wool over the eyes of the Election Commission (EC) by making the scheme retrospective from December 1, 2018! How is that possible? Will the government credit the first instalment of ₹2,000 into the farmer's bank account retrospectively from December 1, 2018, and direct the banks to pay interest from that date? The EC may plead helplessness about the first instalment if it were disbursed before the Election Code kicked in, but, if the EC did not stop the second instalment, the people will conclude that another key institution has been undermined or taken over.

The bribe

Now, to the merits of the PM-KISAN scheme: every marginal and small farmer — owning land of 2 hectares or less — is covered. That constitutes 86.2% of the total agricultural holdings in the country. While who is covered is important, who is not covered is equally important

- The owner farmer, whether he is a cultivating farmer or an absentee landlord, is covered and will get the money;
- The tenant-farmer is not covered;
- The farm labourer is not covered;
- The non-farm rural poor, like petty shopkeeper, hawker, carpenter, goldsmith, hairdresser etc, are not covered;
- The urban poor are totally excluded.

The owner-farmer's family, including the absentee landlord's, will get a grand sum of ₹17 per day. I am not mocking the scheme; it is the government that is heaping insult on the farmer after inflicting injury on him by raising the prices of diesel, electricity, fertiliser, seeds etc, levying GST on farm equipment like tractors, harvesters and threshers, and denying fair prices for his produce.

Will ₹17 per family per day alleviate the distress or poverty of a farmer-household? Obviously not. In many states the sum of ₹500 per month (or ₹6,000 per year) will be less than the pension for the aged or the disabled or widows. If ₹17 per day or ₹2,000 as the first instalment is not a sufficient poverty-alleviating measure, what is it? In plain and simple language, it is cash for votes. The government will give money to the voters on the eve of elections to win their votes — an art



ACROSS THE AISLE

P Chidambaram

An account for votes!



Finance minister Piyush Goyal with MoS finance minister Shiv Pratap Shukla arrives in the Parliament to present Interim Budget 2019-20 in New Delhi

perfected by some political parties using ill-gotten money. Under PM-KISAN, government money will be used for the first time to bribe voters.

Do state governments have updated and verified land ownership records? On the one hand, the government wrote to the states on February 4 asking them to update their land ownership records; on the other hand, on the same day, the secretary declared that the first instalment will be disbursed immediately and the government may disburse the second instalment too before the elections. The secretary is supposed to be the keeper of government's secrets!

The boast

The other big promise was the pension plan — actually another pension plan after the first one, the Atal Pension

Joyana, flopped. The old contributory plan was launched in May 2015 and, until December 2018, could enroll only 1.33 crore subscribers. There were few who could understand the complex matrix of defined contribution that promised a defined benefit as well as return of the corpus contributed by the subscriber. The new plan is seemingly simpler but the contribution of ₹55 to ₹100 per month for a very long and presumably unbroken period (31 to 42 years) for an assured pension of ₹3,000 per month on attaining the age of 60 years does not make economic sense. If the maximum age for enrolment is 50 (as can be inferred from his speech), the interim finance minister knows there will be no payout for 10 years. I suppose with that knowledge and with no hope of enrolling 10 crore labourers and workers

as proposed, the interim finance minister set apart only ₹500 crore! (By the way, apart from paragraph 37 of the Budget speech, where is the allocation mentioned in the Budget documents?)

There were other boasts about Open Defecation Free districts and villages, electricity to every household, free LPG connections, and MUDRA loans becoming job-creators — notwithstanding the fact that each of these claims has been exposed as untrue by field reports from academics, NGOs and journalists.

Altogether, the Interim Budget revealed that the BJP's strategy for the Lok Sabha elections is 'Boast and Bribe the voters'.



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INSIDE TRACK

COOMI KAPOOR

Pawar games

The three main issues which will dominate the Opposition's campaign in the 2019 election will be joblessness, farmer distress and the 'attack on democratic institutions' by the BJP government. Fighting against communalism and corruption, as represented by the Rafale deal, will be of secondary importance. This was the consensus among the representatives of 21 parties which met in Delhi on January 31 to discuss the use of EVMs in elections. It was the first time so many parties had met to formally chart out a common minimum agenda. Later, Rahul Gandhi voiced the views of the Opposition at a press conference. But the next day, Sharad Pawar, accompanied by Arvind Kejriwal, Derek O'Brien, Farooq Abdullah and Chandrababu Naidu, held a second press conference on the same subject. The message seemed to be that it should not be automatically assumed that Rahul is the sole spokesperson for the Opposition. Adding grit to the mill, on Wednesday night, Pawar held a dinner with representatives of all political parties, including Congress leaders and the BJP's Nitin Gadkari, at his house.

Bill shelved?

It appears that the BJP has shelved plans to get the controversial Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016, and the triple talaq Bill passed. Pressure from NDA allies over the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill has mounted. Both Bills did not figure in the list of business placed before the Rajya Sabha Business Advisory Committee last week. Since the Budget Session ends on February 13, there is little time left. True, the BJP can always spring a surprise, as it did with the Bill for 10% reservation for economically weak in the general category which was announced only at noon on the day of the presentation. But the PM will be out of the capital next week.

Lacuna in party

In a television interview last year, Akhilesh Yadav remarked jocularly that there was place for Amar Singh in the party, but would uncle Amar leave the PM? Singh took this to imply that the SP leader is feeling the absence of the party's key brains trust, fund collectors and organisational chiefs, Shivpal Yadav, Naresh Agarwal and Singh. Actually, Akhilesh's real concern is father Mulayam Singh Yadav. Now 79, 'Netaji' is sitting quietly at home with his second wife Sadhana, and sending mixed signals. Singh suggests that it may not be a simple

question of caste arithmetic in Uttar Pradesh, as the media assumes. "What happens to the 40 BSP, 40 SP candidates who expected tickets and are now jobless?" he asks mischievously, referring to the fact that many who were promised tickets would not be obliged in the alliance.

Pricking press

Amit Shah has no love lost for the media. Which is probably why he held his press conference at 10:30 am last Sunday to announce that the party was organising 7,000 boxes to be taken around the country for people to put in suggestions for the party's manifesto. Sunday mornings are sacrosanct for newsmen, who seldom stir out before noon, particularly in Delhi's chilly winter. But the BJP president could hardly be ignored, so bleary-eyed journalists turned up in strength. Shah talked down to the media, cut journalists short in the middle of questions and even suggested to one woman scribe that instead of wasting time she should simply put her advice into one of the BJP's suggestion boxes. Rajnath Singh, who is the head of the manifesto committee, barely spoke, since Shah monopolised the mike.

Game of numbers

With the tussle between Mamata Banerjee and the BJP hogging all the attention, few noticed that the numbers at the CPM rally in Kolkata last Sunday was in fact much higher than Mamata's much touted United India rally for opposition leaders from all over the country two weeks earlier at the same venue. CPM general secretary Sitaram Yechury tweeted videos of the two rallies as proof. The Bengali media did not interpret it as a revival of the Left. One conspiracy theory is that Mamata had secretly helped with infrastructure for the rally of her arch foe. It is in the TMC's electoral interest that the CPM retains its base of 20% vote share so that the BJP, which is increasingly been viewed as her main rival, does not benefit. The other theory is that the BJP itself helped swell the numbers in order to hit out at the common foe. Both explanations sound far-fetched. Perhaps the real reason the CPM supporters outnumbered the TMC gathering was that, on the day of the TMC's rally, police security for the many visiting *Mahagathbandhan* leaders was so stringent that several roads to the venue ground were blocked, and buses bringing in participants had per force to park several kilometres away.

Southern comfort

It's frigid in north India. Golfers longing for a bit of sun and balmy climes should be heading south

OVER THE TOP

Meraj Shah



"YOU SHOULD COME over to my village. The Peermade Club Golf Course is close by and it's practically empty on most days," said Ouseph Chacko, observing with more than some amusement my extended practice swing sessions every evening. Chacko and I were on a four-day road trip from Delhi to Goa last week and experienced, in that order, the blistering chill of the extended cold wave that's raging in north India; the almost-perfect cool climes of Udaipur; and, finally, the ideal temperate zone along the coast, all the way from Daman and Diu down to Goa.

Now, Chacko, who till recently lived in Mumbai, has relocated his ancestral village—an hour's drive from Kochi. Still, remote as it is, I was taken aback because I'd never heard of Peermade GC. Readers will appreciate that as someone who's been playing and writing about the game for over two

decades now, there are hardly any lay-outs in the country that are completely unknown to your columnist. It was also perhaps the first time I'd heard 'village' and 'golf course' used in the same sentence. I mean, yes, there are villages that figure as landmarks en route to golf courses on the outskirts of Gurugram, but these hamlets also have residents who drive luxury cars and own condominiums in the tonier parts of town. But 'village' in his case, Chacko assured me, was not a euphemism.

To cut to the chase, I'm taking up Chacko on his invitation and heading down to Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Coorg to play some golf later this month. A number of courses have been added to my itinerary over the past week of planning my trip and shortlisting places and layouts. It's a veritable treasure trove, the coffee terroir in the south, when it comes to quaint layouts, most of them harking back to the colonial era. So, for the benefit of golfers in the national capital, who are longing for a bit of sun and balmy climes, here's a short, and by no means comprehensive, list of courses that I'm going to be teeing it up at down south.

I'm going to start in Kerala's capital city Thiruvananthapuram that has a



In Madikeri, the Coorg Golf Links beckons golfers with picture-perfect vistas and the ideal weather for golf

historic nine-hole layout. Members argue that it's the oldest golf course in the Commonwealth and, while the jury is still out on that one, there's no doubt that the Trivandrum Golf Club is one of the oldest in the country. Once part of the Maharaja of Travancore's hunting lodge, the course's clubhouse has been deemed a heritage structure by the Archaeological Survey of India. Barely

an hour's drive from the beaches of Kovalam, the promise of sun, sand, surfing and golf is precisely the foil needed to Delhi's grey, gloomy skies.

From Kerala, I'm going to move north to the foothills of the Western Ghats in Tamil Nadu and set up base in Coimbatore. With six golf courses within 200 km, the city is strategically located for someone looking to take a

golfing holiday in the south of India, each offering a completely unique golf and holiday experience. Amongst the lesser-known clubs on my shortlist are the Kovai Hills GC, Wellington Gymkhana, CIAL GC and Jayachamaraja Wadiyar Golf Club.

I'll start with Coimbatore GC: this par 72, 6973-yard golf course has matured over the last three decades into one of India's most challenging tracks. The main test of this track, as well as the panoramic vistas that it offers, is on account of its location in the Palakkad pass—where the Western Ghats break for a few kilometers and allow a constant gale to buffet the course all year. The Coimbatore GC probably is the windiest course in the country to tee it up at and the greens are amongst the finest you'll find.

The weather in Coimbatore, other than for two months in the summer, seldom crosses the mid-30s (centigrade) and the golfing season never ends.

From Tamil Nadu, I'll travel further north into Karnataka, but instead of heading for Bengaluru's tried-and-tested bouquet of golf courses, make a beeline for the quaint historic courses in Coorg. Mercara Downs, located in Madikeri, the capital region of Coorg, was established by the British over a century ago. This parkland course offers golfers a glimpse of links golf, with its wide open fairways, rolling hills and menacing bunkers. Apparently, the

course retains its original layout and harks back to how golf was first played at the very beginning in Scotland—the home of golf.

Also in Madikeri is the Tata Tea GC—a nine-hole facility located amidst the rolling hills of the company's sprawling 20,000-acre tea estate. Although it's a private course, I've been assured that the management is usually kind enough to accommodate itinerant golfers who make the journey to tee it up here. A surefire way to get a tee time is apparently to book a stay at one of the numerous Victorian-era bungalows around the course.

Given the surfeit of courses in the region, my itinerary has been increased from a week to a fortnight. And I've yet to accommodate some of the better-known courses in the region that include the Ootacamund Gymkhana Club, Coonoor GC and Kodaikanal Club. Even though I've played at these courses in the past, it seems a shame to give them a miss when travelling in the region. Chacko tells me that the weather seems fine and fair, and that I must extend my trip for as long as possible to include the art Biennale that's going on in Kochi. At this rate, I might just end up following his cue and relocating down south. Heck, if you can live in a village and play golf, then that's a picture of bucolic bliss if there ever was one!

A golfer, Meraj Shah also writes about the game

10 IDEA EXCHANGE

NEWSMAKERS IN THE NEWSROOM

I don't think the BJP did it (the raid), I don't think the CBI did it, I think it is Amit Shah and (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi's BJP that did it. There is a distinction. This duo will do anything"



ABANTIKA GHOSH: What made Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee sit on a three-day dharna for the Kolkata Police Commissioner?

To understand that story I will have to take you back to the day when Akhilesh Yadav and Mayawati announced their alliance in Uttar Pradesh, and what happened a few hours after that — the CBI landed up. Then you have to go back to Chandrababu Naidu's TDP, how the CBI was sent to harass and hassle him and his senior MPs, or you have to go to Arvind Kejriwal's time, and see how he was harassed by the CBI, or you have to go back to the number of times the Congress party has been hassled and harassed.

I don't think the BJP did it, I don't think the CBI did it, I think it is Amit Shah and (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi's BJP that did it. There is a distinction. This duo will do anything... They have seen that in their internal polls they are somewhere between 150-160 (seats in the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections).

In Kolkata, 41 CBI officials landed up... Forget his name, he is the Police Commissioner of Kolkata. Nothing happened between 2014-2019, and few weeks before the elections they do this. The Chief Minister went and sat on dharna in support of the state administration. She is also the Home Minister. These are the times we live in and we will take these guys head on. Basically, this is political vendetta against your political opponents. It's so obvious.

HARISH DAMODARAN: But why were the policemen sitting on dharna?

They were not sitting on dharna. The Kolkata Police Commissioner (Rajeev Kumar) had 41 CBI officials outside his house. Then, the Chief Minister, within an hour, decided to sit on dharna to show solidarity with the state administration, not only for those in Bengal, but for every IAS and IPS officer, and to tell Modi and Shah that you cannot run your banana republic like this. So they (the policemen) were there for an hour and then they moved on. Some pictures may have gone out and worked as bad optics... But I think the bigger picture, the bigger message was to save institutions, save the Constitution.

RAVISH TIWARI: While talking about CBI action in your earlier answer, you missed out one party. Was that deliberate or a slip?

It was a slip. I could also mention the DMK and I could also mention Lalu Prasad. I think the message is very clear. In my eight years in Parliament, I have never seen this kind of engine-powered, united, cohesive, egos-in-their-pockets (Opposition) moving ahead...

I will give you examples. It started on January 19 (at the Opposition's 'United India' rally in Kolkata). The Congress president couldn't be there, but there were Congress leaders. That is one. Number two: there was a very important meeting on January 19, off camera, where the 22 parties worked out a document to send to the Election Commission. It's crucial. Some of the parties that signed on the document are rivals in their states. The third thing is what is happening in Parliament, and the fourth thing is what happened at the Kolkata dharna. More things will be unfolding next week.

RAKESH SINHA: How do you respond to the BJP's charge that choppers flying their leaders to West Bengal are not being allowed to land?

We have done some research. We figured that 72 per cent of the seats where Yogi Adityanath campaigned, they (the BJP) lost. Why on earth would we not want Yogi Adityanath to come to Bengal? We welcome him, Shivraj Singh Chouhan... We have enough data to suggest that when BJP leaders come without translators, from Delhi or wherever else, that actually helps consolidate the Trinamool votes. They don't understand the culture. It's like, you know, at one point, actors from Mumbai would come to Bengal to receive awards, and they would say 'Mishiti Doi!'. Same way BJP leaders now come and say 'Sonar Bangla'. But Bengal is more than mishiti doi and Sonar Bangla.

They are trying to create hype where there is none. Now if there is a helicopter problem, it may be once or twice, after that come...

ABANTIKA GHOSH: The PM has called the Opposition 'mahamilavar'. He also spoke about BC as Before Congress, and AD as After Dynasty.

What mahamilavar? They are a jumla jodi, a party of two, Shah and Modi. As for BC and AD, it can also be 'Before

WHY DEREK O'BRIEN

Last week, West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee's dharna to protest against CBI's raid on Kolkata Police Commissioner Rajeev Kumar's residence, turned into a show of Opposition unity. Politicians such as Andhra Pradesh CM N Chandrababu Naidu and RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav joined the Trinamool chief at the dharna site. "This is not

the Trinamool's dharna. This is a political 'satyagraha' — it was organised to save our democracy, our Constitution, our federal structure..." Mamata said. Rajya Sabha MP Derek O'Brien says that after the January 19 rally, the TMC chief's protest has further strengthened the Opposition's resolve to take on the BJP



"In my eight years in Parliament, I have never seen this kind of engine-powered, united, cohesive, egos-in-their-pockets (Opposition) moving ahead... More things will be unfolding next week

'None of us in the Oppn are expecting 272 seats... But it is match on. We have got the momentum'

TMC Parliamentary Party leader (Rajya Sabha) Derek O'Brien calls CBI action against Kolkata Police Commissioner "political vendetta", denies cracks in Opposition's unity, asserts foundation of next govt will be laid down by states, and says the BJP is not a threat in Bengal



Trinamool MP Derek O'Brien with Senior Assistant Editor Abantika Ghosh in The Indian Express newsroom. Gajendra Yadav

Chowkidaar' and 'After Dhokha'. We can also come up with clever lines if we want.

On a more serious note, they (the BJP) promised to double farmers' income. What you have promised in 2014, you haven't done in 2018, and now in 2019 you say give us till 2022. You come to my state, we promised to double farmers' income in our manifesto in 2011. Now, in 2019, from Rs 90,000 we have taken it to Rs 3,05,000 per year. We have trebled the income.

Another example is the difference between West Bengal's Kanyashree scheme, and the Centre's Beti Bachao programme. The budget for Beti Bachao every year is Rs 100 crore — about Rs 3 crore per state. So in the last five years, you have spent Rs 500 crore on the programme. But how many lives have you touched? West Bengal's Kanyashree, which won the United Nations award, has a budget of Rs 6,500 crore. Lives of 15 lakh girls have been touched. And then Modi and Shah come to Bengal and tell us that Kanyashree is a copy of Beti Bachao. Kanyashree started two years before Beti Bachao. These are the things they can't debate.

During the recent joint sitting of Parliament, the loudest thumping of desks in Central Hall came from the Treasury Benches when the words 'surgical strikes' were mentioned. Did those thumping their desks know that the current defence budget (Rs 3 lakh crore) is merely 2.5 per cent of the GDP — the lowest since the 1962 war? Did those thumping the desks know that the PMO was running parallel negotiations with the French government in the Rafale deal?

I have to give credit to Modi on three things. He is a good one-way orator. He won't take questions. He makes big promises but he doesn't keep them, and he is the prince of deception and the grandfather of corruption. There is enough in the public domain, but no one discusses his corruption.

DEEPTIMAN TIWARI: The CBI says that for the past two years they have been sending summons, they have been asking for documents, and seeking cooperation in the Saradha

investigation.

There are five letters written by the Police Commissioner of Kolkata, offering himself for questioning to the CBI. It is in the public domain. Four letters have been written by the CBI asking people to appear as witnesses, but they are all wonky in terms of dates. Someone has been asked to appear before the CBI on August 20, but the letter is dated September 5. It's blatant political vendetta.

Tomorrow, I may get a CBI notice for saying something against Shah. Our fight is not with the CBI. It is with the Centre. But the more you provoke people in the Trinamool and Mamata Banerjee... We are not chicken-hearted, we will take you on. But we will not be like you when we are controlling these things in a few months from now. We have to be gracious.

India is a Union of states and, in the coming months, the government at the Centre will be one whose foundations are laid by the different states.

LIZ MATHEW: After Mukul Roy, another Trinamool leader has switched sides to the BJP. The BJP says there are more Trinamool leaders who will join them.

Mukul is a traitor. One or two MPs will go, they have been suspended from the party. I have never fought an election, I am in the Rajya Sabha, but Mukul's track record is even better. He has fought one election in the Assembly,



and lost that by 25,000 votes. So who are we talking about?

LIZ MATHEW: Are there more?
Not that I know of.

LIZ MATHEW: Political observers have noted that the weakening of the Left and the Congress has strengthened the BJP's position in West Bengal. So is there a proposal for all the parties to come together and fight the BJP in the state?

No. The Trinamool is fighting all the 42 (Lok Sabha) seats in Bengal. Also for the Left... their rally was held recently... it was a fair rally.

AVISHEK G DASTIDAR: There is a theory that the Trinamool is creating the BJP hype in Bengal so that the Muslim votes in the state do not get divided.

We are not doing anything of that sort. The BJP, CPM and Congress in Bengal are working together, whether it is official, unofficial, we don't know... However, in Delhi, with the Congress... we are all on the same page. Our focus is going to be jobs, agriculture, breakdown of institutions and corruption.

RAVISH TIWARI: On the ground, which party is your competitor in West Bengal?

The BJP, CPM, Congress. You can inter-

"BJP, CPI(M), Cong in Bengal are working together... However, in Delhi, with Congress... we are all on the same page. Our focus is jobs, agriculture, breakdown of institutions and corruption

pret it in any order. The bigger picture is that we have to do what it takes to remove Shah-Modi BJP from Delhi, including the much easier job of choosing a leader of that coalition after we have the requisite numbers.

ABANTIKA GHOSH: About the January 19 rally, the BJP said it was a stage full of prime ministers. You called it 'United India'. There is a perception that 'United India' is already disunited and that the Trinamool is unhappy with Rahul Gandhi being at the helm.

No. You have to understand that 22 parties signed the document that was submitted to the Election Commission. The Congress party raised the Rafale issue. (On February 8) in Parliament, the five-page Rafale document prepared by the Congress... the Trinamool was distributing the leaflets. So the focus is much bigger. The focus is 'Save India, Save Democracy, Save the Constitution'.

LIZ MATHEW: The Prime Minister has said that the Congress has outsourced its job to the Trinamool...

If you want me to give a clever line in retort, I can say the BJP has outsourced the party to Shah and Modi. If you talk to the people in the BJP they will tell you a lot of things. My observation is that Amit Shah and Narendra Modi are fighting this election on two fronts. They are fighting against a united Opposition and they are fighting another election within their own party.

AVISHEK G DASTIDAR: The coalition UPA II government, towards the end, wasn't a stable one. Some credit for this also goes to the Trinamool Congress. Now you are again pitching for a coalition government.

Nobody pitches for a coalition government. A coalition evolves. The other thing is that the government will be formed by 272 MPs who can come and pledge support. Let's not get carried away. They (the BJP) say, 'We will sweep Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan'. This is hype. My guru in advertising, David Ogilvy, had a simple lesson. He would say you could go to a family and sell a pressure cooker

and they will buy it from you. But the problem is when you have to get them to repurchase that pressure cooker. This is the BJP's problem. Great packaging and marketing delivered in 2014. Now they are painting the pressure cooker up, patching it up.

RITIKA CHOPRA: What is the Trinamool's stand on going back to the ballot paper system?

The stand of the 22 political parties is the same. Since you (the Election Commission) cannot provide 100 per cent VVPAT, we all agreed to 50 per cent. So it will be 50 per cent VVPAT on a random basis.

The ideal thing to do would be to go back to the ballot paper. All the parties in discussion in Kolkata and New Delhi were practical. They thought 50 per cent was a fair number to ask for. Some parties may have said something else earlier, but they have now agreed to the document that was submitted to the Election Commission. And I think that the results getting delayed by two or three days is fine till we get the right results.

AAKASH JOSHI: You said there is a danger to the Constitution from Amit Shah and Narendra Modi. Is there an ideological problem with the Sangh? In case there is a situation where the current prime minister is not there, would you join the coalition?

I am going to tell you what's going to happen without being arrogant or making predictions. The NDA will get 150-160 seats. They will try to get to 272. So these situations that you mention are impossibilities. Nothing of this sort will arise. Once the numbers come in from Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Bihar — these are major states — and everyone will give their letter of support, then anything can happen.

None of us (Opposition parties) are expecting 272. The BJP may claim they are getting 340 seats. As far as I have seen since January 19 to now, this is match on. I think we have got the momentum. We want to focus on what we have in common than what we don't have in common. Eventually, what matters is how many seats you win.

DEEPTIMAN TIWARI: There have been allegations against the Trinamool in the Saradha and Rose Valley chit fund scams. There was the Narada sting operation as well.

Narada came out one month before the 2016 Assembly elections. The tape was played across every channel. What happened to the Trinamool after that? We won 211 seats out of 290. You throw unsubstantiated muck at that white sari of Mamata Banerjee, no one in Bengal will believe you.

DEEPTIMAN TIWARI: What about the allegations of the Chief Minister selling her paintings to chit fund scam companies? The CBI has sent notices in this regard to many people, including you.

The Chief Minister has made public statements regarding this matter. She paints. She donated all her paintings to Jago Bangla, the Trinamool Congress's weekly newspaper. Jago Bangla sold the paintings in a public exhibition. The money came into the account. There is no secret here. Some companies which might have bought the paintings went belly up.

DEEPTIMAN TIWARI: With the CBI questioning Kolkata Police Commissioner Rajeev Kumar, are you going to see another dharna?

This country is in a dangerous situation. Sitting on dharna is similar to satyagraha. Mamata Banerjee doesn't see if something is going to help the Trinamool or not. When we started the Singur protest on December 4, 2006, every political party said this is drama. Today, after 14 years, whatever the Trinamool said... every political party now has a similar view on land. Farmers are getting the best deal on land. The Supreme Court of India endorsed whatever we said. Mamata Banerjee is known for her conviction. Singur is one example.

ACROSS THE AISLE



P CHIDAMBARAM

A CONFIDENT government would have let the Interim Budget be the non-event that it should be, but confidence is one quality that is in short supply in the present BJP-led NDA government. Just look at the lugubrious faces of the BJP members of Parliament, especially those from the states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Uttar Pradesh and you will agree with me.

So, Prime Minister Modi decided that the occasion of presenting the Interim Budget will be converted into a significant event. The interim finance minister — like a player who has earned his first India cap — tried to convert it into a spectacle. The idea was to inject josh (spirit or enthusiasm) into the government's swansong. The result, unfortunately, may be very different from what was intended by the Prime Minister and the interim finance minister.

THE BRAZENNESS

The promises have begun to unravel. Let's look at the Big promise of Rs 6,000 per year, in three instalments, to every farmer owning land of 2 hectares or less under a scheme called PM-KISAN. The government tried to pull the wool over the eyes of the Election Commission (EC) by making the scheme retrospective from December 1, 2018! How is that possible? Will the government credit the first instalment of Rs 2,000 into the farmer's bank account retrospectively from December 1, 2018,

If Rs 17 per day or Rs 2,000 as the first instalment is not a sufficient poverty-alleviating measure, what is it? In plain and simple language, it is cash for votes. The government will give money to the voters on the eve of elections to win their votes — an art perfected by some political parties using ill-gotten money. Under PM-KISAN, government money will be used for the first time to bribe voters

An account for votes!

and direct the banks to pay interest from that date? The EC may plead helplessness about the first instalment if it were disbursed before the Election Code kicked in, but, if the EC did not stop the second instalment, the people will conclude that another key institution has been undermined or taken over.

THE BRIBE

Now, to the merits of the PM-KISAN scheme: every marginal and small farmer — owning land of 2 hectares or less — is covered. That constitutes 86.2 per cent of the total agricultural holdings in the country. While who is covered is important, who is not covered is equally important

- The owner farmer, whether he is a cultivating farmer or an absentee landlord, is covered and will get the money;
■ The tenant-farmer is not covered;
■ The farm labourer is not covered;
■ The non-farm rural poor, like petty shopkeeper, hawker, carpenter, goldsmith, hairdresser etc, are not covered;
■ The urban poor are totally excluded.

The owner-farmer's family, including the absentee landlord's, will get a grand sum of Rs 17 per day. I am not mocking the scheme; it is the government that is heaping insult on the farmer after inflicting injury on him by raising the prices of diesel, electricity, fertiliser, seeds etc, levying GST on farm equipment like tractors, harvesters and threshers, and denying fair prices for his produce.

Will Rs 17 per family per day alleviate the distress or poverty of a farmer-household? Obviously not. In many states the sum of Rs 500 per month (or Rs 6,000 per year) will be less than the pension for the aged or the disabled or widows. If Rs 17 per day or Rs 2,000 as the first instalment is not a sufficient poverty-alleviating measure, what is it? In plain and simple language, it is cash for votes. The government will give money to the voters on the eve of elections to win their votes — an art perfected by some political parties using ill-gotten money. Under PM-KISAN, government money will be used for the first time to bribe voters.

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THE BOAST

The other big promise was the pension plan — actually another pension plan after the first one, the Atal Pension Yojana, flopped. The old contributory plan was launched in May 2015 and, until December 2018, could enroll only 1.33

crore subscribers. There were few who could understand the complex matrix of defined contribution that promised a defined benefit as well as return of the corpus contributed by the subscriber. The new plan is seemingly simpler but the contribution of Rs 55 to Rs 100 per month for a very long and presumably unbroken period (31 to 42 years) for an assured pension of Rs 3,000 per month on attaining the age of 60 years does not make economic sense. If the maximum age for enrolment is 50 (as can be inferred from his speech), the interim finance minister knows there will be no payout for 10 years. I suppose with that knowledge and with no hope of enrolling 10 crore labourers and workers as proposed, the interim finance minister set apart only Rs 500 crore! (By the way, apart from paragraph 37 of the Budget speech, where is the allocation mentioned in the Budget documents?)

There were other boasts about Open Defecation Free districts and villages, electricity to every household, free LPG connections, and MUDRA loanes becoming job-creators — notwithstanding the fact that each of these claims has been exposed as untrue by field reports from academics, NGOs and journalists.

Altogether, the Interim Budget revealed that the BJP's strategy for the Lok Sabha elections is 'Boast and Bribe the voters'.

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FIFTH COLUMN



TAVLEEN SINGH

Modi's farewell speech

LAST WEEK the Prime Minister made what could be his last speech in the Lok Sabha. He tried to sound feisty and fighting fit but sounded defensive and vulnerable. This was because he wasted time listing the failures of Congress prime ministers. This was unnecessary because they are history and you, Narendra Modi, are the first Prime Minister in 30 years to be given a full mandate by the people of India. Recent polls indicate that a full majority will be hard to get next time and we may even be in for a spell of rule by a government of what you correctly called 'mahamilavat'. Mega-adulterated goods.

Adulterated is an unusual word in politics but not a bad one for the leaders in the coalition that seeks to defeat Modi. This ensemble does not include leaders with shining records. Half of them have entered politics not for reasons of public service or through a political process but because their Daddy or Mummy bequeathed them political parties. Those who do not come from the hereditary stream mostly have serious charges of corruption against them and yet this caboodle dominates the narrative for 2019 because the 'secular' left media is on their side. Modi failed to discover that in national politics the media's support matters.

In a recent interview he said he had been unable to please 'Lutyens Delhi'. His handful of supporters in the media spit the word Lutyens out as if it were singularly responsible for all Modi's failures. The truth is that Modi's failures are of his own making. I noticed that in his long speech last week he did not mention demonetisation once. Nor is this mentioned any more on the campaign trail. Could it be because it marks the exact moment when Modi began to falter? It was a seriously bad idea and was one of the main reasons why the economy began to slow down. The other reason was Modi's failure to understand that for jobs to be created you need masses of private investment from rich Indians and he should ask himself why this did not happen.

In the last years of the Sonia-Manmohan government, Indian businessmen were treated like criminals and major projects put on hold or closed down. This happened even as huge welfare programmes were created to give every Indian cheap foodgrain and unemployed rural Indians dole in the guise of guaranteed jobs. Had this money been spent on creating real jobs in rural India, it may have changed the face of this country. This is what people like me hoped Modi would do. He chose instead to digitise the welfare programmes he inherited with the idea of making them less leaky but without noticing that it would cause immense suffering for people who lived many kilometres away from the nearest bank.

Having said this, it also needs to be said that Modi's great achievement is that he has managed to drag India, kicking and screaming, into the digital age. This is no small achievement, but its benefits will only be felt long after the coming election in which Modi could be defeated for one reason and one reason alone: jobs. Whatever his officials tell him about how well his schemes to 'start up' India are doing, the truth is that unemployment today is higher, according to reliable recent data, than it has been in decades. This is why political leaders in the coalition that hopes to defeat Modi are strutting about so smugly these days.

Modi has other achievements that he can be proud of. The Swachh Bharat programme has been a spectacular success. It has changed social behaviour in huge swathes of rural India. Those who mock Modi for spending so much energy on building toilets have forgotten that open defecation is the cause of many horrible diseases. These are diseases that permanently stunt and disable children. So if rural India today has thousands of districts that have managed to end the disgusting practice of open defecation, it is a major achievement.

The point I am making is that Modi did not need to sound defensive at all in his speech. His achievements are many and anyone who travels in rural India can see them. There are roads where none existed before, gas connections and electricity available to people who never dreamed such things were possible and there are pucca homes where once there were mud huts. These are real achievements.

As someone who has criticised him in this column for his mistakes, let me admit that when I compare him with those who seek to unseat him, he looks good. In the name of 'secularism' we have in that maha-caboodle leaders whose politics are founded on caste, creed and a sickeningly obvious desire to be in politics for personal gain. They make Modi look like a real leader.

Follow Tavleen Singh on Twitter @tavleen_singh

INSIDE TRACK



COOMI KAPOOR

PAWAR GAMES

THE THREE main issues which will dominate the Opposition's campaign in the 2019 election will be joblessness, farmer distress and the 'attack on democratic institutions' by the BJP government. Fighting against communalism and corruption, as represented by the Rafale deal, will be of secondary importance. This was the consensus among the representatives of 21 parties which met in Delhi on January 31 to discuss the use of EVMs in elections. It was the first time so many parties had met to formally chart out a common minimum agenda. Later, Rahul Gandhi voiced the views of the Opposition at a press conference. But the next day, Sharad Pawar, accompanied by Arvind Kejriwal, Derek O'Brien, Farooq Abdullah and Chandrababu Naidu, held a second press conference on the same subject. The message seemed to be that it should not be automatically assumed that Rahul is the sole spokesperson for the Opposition. Adding grist to the mill, on Wednesday night, Pawar held a dinner with representatives of all political parties, including Congress leaders and the BJP's Nitin Gadkari, at his house.

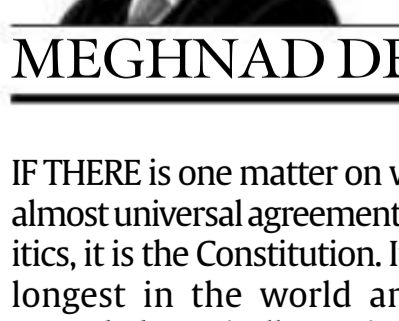
BILL SHELVED?

It appears that the BJP has shelved plans to get the controversial Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016, and the triple talaq Bill passed. Pressure from NDA allies over the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill has mounted. Both Bills did not figure in the list of business placed before the Rajya Sabha Business Advisory Committee last week. Since the Budget Session ends on February 13, there is little time left. True, the BJP can always spring a surprise, as it did with the Bill for 10 per cent reservation for economically weak in the general category which was announced only at noon on the day of the presentation. But the PM will be out of the Capital next week.

LACUNA IN PARTY

In a television interview last year, Akhilesh Yadav remarked jocularly that there was place for Amar Singh in the party, but would Uncle Amar leave the PM? Singh took this to imply that the SP leader is feeling the absence of the party's key brains trust, fund collectors and organisational

OUT OF MY MIND



MEGHNAD DESAI

IF THERE is one matter on which there is almost universal agreement in Indian politics, it is the Constitution. It is one of the longest in the world and has been amended practically continually since the day after it was promulgated. There have been frequent debates about changing it fundamentally, most recently during the Atal Bihari Vajpayee era. There is also a frequent cry, as it happened last week of 'Constitution in Danger'.

chiefs, Shivpal Yadav, Naresh Agarwal and Singh. Actually, Akhilesh's real concern is father Mulayam Singh Yadav. Now 79, 'Netaji' is sitting quietly at home with his second wife Sadhana, and sending mixed signals. Singh suggests that it may not be a simple question of caste arithmetic in Uttar Pradesh, as the media assumes. "What happens to the 40 BSP, 40 SP candidates who expected tickets and are now jobless?" he asks mischievously, referring to the fact that many who were promised tickets would not be obliged in the alliance.

PRICKING PRESS

Amit Shah has no love lost for the media. Which is probably why he held his press conference at 10.30 am last Sunday to announce that the party was organising 7,000 boxes to be taken around the country for people to put in suggestions for the party's manifesto. Sunday mornings are sacrosanct for newspersons, who seldom stir out before noon, particularly in Delhi's chilly winter. But the BJP president could hardly be ignored, so bleary-eyed journalists turned up in strength. Shah talked down to the media, cut journalists short in the middle of questions and even suggested to one woman scribe that instead of wasting time she should simply put her advice into one of the BJP's suggestion boxes. Rajnath Singh, who is the head of the manifesto committee, barely spoke, since Shah monopolised the mike.

GAME OF NUMBERS

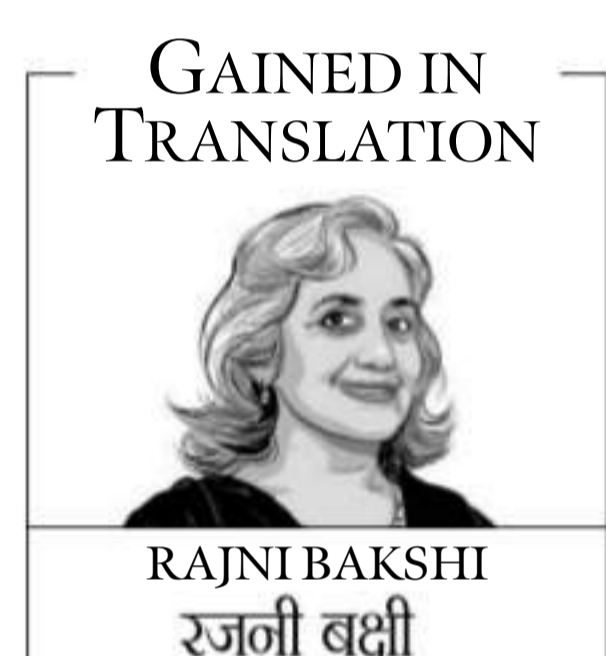
With the tussle between Mamata Banerjee and the BJP hogging all the attention, few noticed that the numbers at the CPM rally in Kolkata last Sunday was in fact much higher than Mamata's much touted United India rally for opposition leaders from all over the country two weeks earlier at the same venue. CPM general secretary Sitaram Yechury tweeted videos of the two rallies as proof. The Bengali media did not interpret it as a revival of the Left. One conspiracy theory is that Mamata had secretly helped with infrastructure for the rally of her arch foe. It is in the TMC's electoral interest that the CPM retains its base of 20 per cent vote share so that the BJP, which is increasingly being viewed as her main rival, does not benefit. The other theory is that the BJP itself helped swell the numbers in order to hit out at the common foe. Both explanations sound far-fetched. Perhaps the real reason the CPM supporters outnumbered the TMC gathering was that, on the day of the TMC's rally, police security for the many visiting Mahagathbandhan leaders was so stringent that several roads to the venue ground were blocked, and buses bringing in participants had per force to park several kilometres away.

Power of Centre against that of states

The issue is the power of the Centre against that of the states, or the nature of federalism. Few people remember that as late as July 1946, the proposed Constitution of India (undivided) was going to be a Confederate one with powerful Provinces whose elected heads were called Prime Ministers and a weak Centre with Defence, Foreign Affairs and Currency among its subjects. The Government of India Act 1935 was the basis for the 1946 elections which created the Legislative Assembly which became the Constituent Assembly.

Partition changed everything. Instead of a Union of powerful Provinces and weak Centre, the Constituent Assembly chose a strong Centre with states whose boundaries could be altered by the Centre. There

Gandhi's art of disagreement



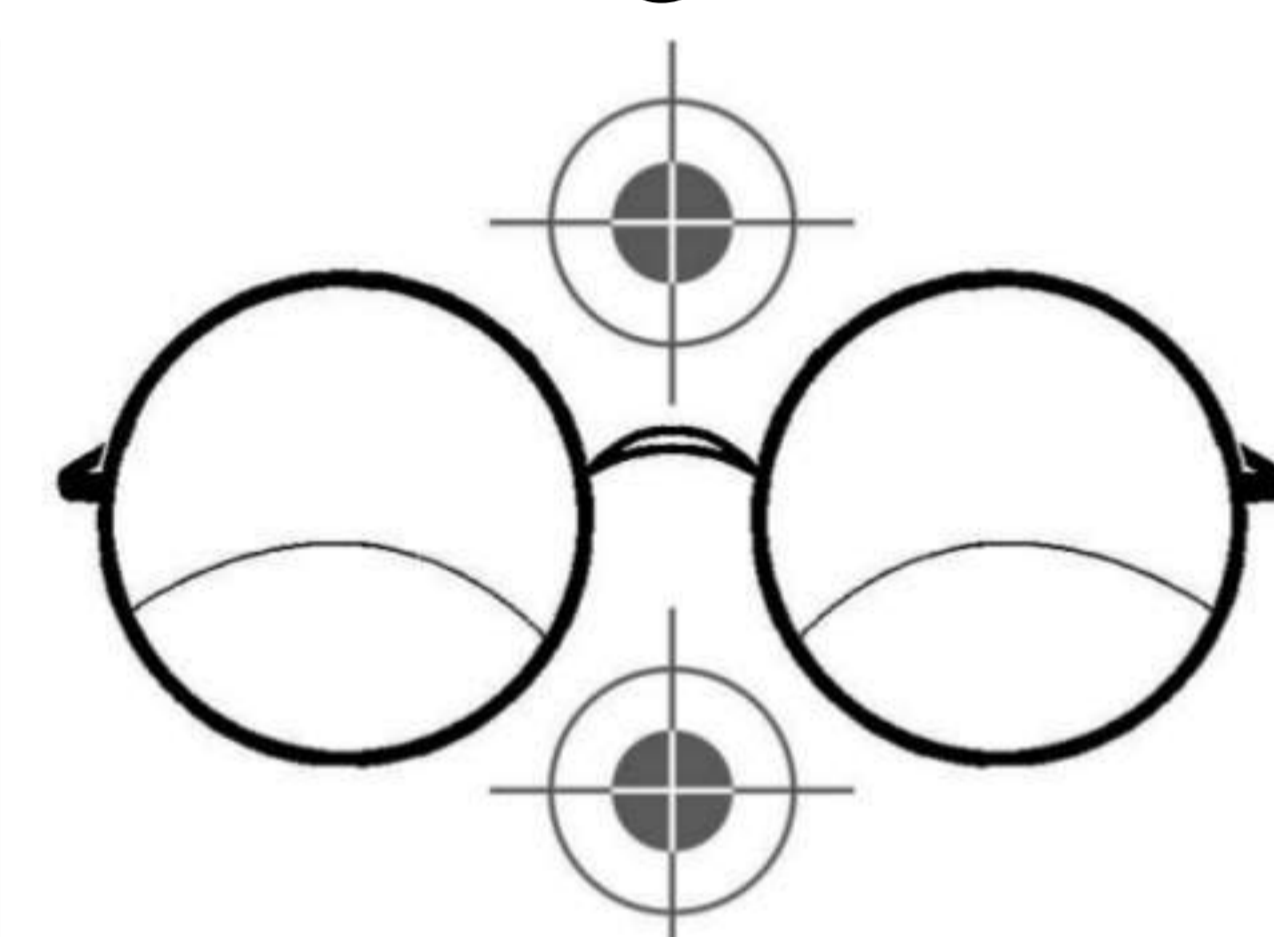
RAJNI BAKSHI

ON THE evening of October 30, 1947, exactly three months before Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was shot dead, one person who had come to the prayer meeting on the lawns of Birla House objected to verses from the Quran being included in the prayers. A majority of the people present were in favour of the entire multi-faith prayer and they compelled the person who had objected to leave. The entire episode deeply pained Gandhi. He said all are welcome to the prayer meeting, "but after coming here it is not good manners to raise any objection".

This was no mere difference of opinion on some fleeting issue of the moment. The objector was striking at the very heart of what was most dear to Gandhi — prayer, and acknowledging that all faiths are paths to the same divinity. Yet even this did not prevent Gandhi from approaching the objector with empathy and seeing that there was pain behind his anger. At the same time, Gandhi firmly stood his ground: "...I am helpless because it (verses from the Quran) is an inseparable part of my prayer."

This story does not offer any easy copy-paste solution for our times. But it is potentially an entry point for reflecting on the art of disagreement. Diversity of views and convictions has been an essential part of what has brought our species this far. The scale of viciousness and open hatred over social media may be new but the problem itself is very old. Historically, disagreement has led to a wide range of responses — from killing, shouting down or ignoring opponents to listening and attempting dialogue with the "other".

Gandhi's life and politics brought forth a truth that ordinary people knew instinctively — namely, that a mat-bhed, difference over an issue, need not become a man-bhed, a division of hearts. Among the millions who lined up to pay respect to Gandhi's ashes, many would have disagreed with him on many specific issues but that paled in comparison with the glow left behind by his art of disagreement. Current projections of Gandhi's assas-



C R Sasikumar

sin, Nathuram Godse, as a hero are essentially about obliterating the vital difference between disagreement over an issue and a division of hearts.

In this context, what are the key lessons from Gandhi's experiments with the art of disagreement? First we must recognise, if not celebrate, that Gandhi's practice was not perfect. This is why it is human, accessible and replicable. For instance, Gandhi's differences with BR Ambedkar over separate electorates are perhaps the best known instance where Gandhi fell short. Gandhi's fasting onto death on this issue had an internal and authentic logic, but it acted upon Ambedkar as a form of coercion and laid the grounds for a lingering bitterness.

Here then is just one version of Gandhi's key gains in the art of disagreement. One, engagement with the other's views is always possible and worthwhile. Two, this can and must be done while being true to the fundamentals of your own conviction. Three, this requires a willingness to both listen deeply to the "other" so as to decipher their underlying concerns and anxieties and to respond accordingly.

Of course, all of the above is possible only if we seek power with others rather than over them. When there is confidence in power with others then there is potentially strength in agreeing to disagree. It is when we crave power over others that disagreement veers towards fatal conflict and any reduction in the polarisation seems threatening because a resolution of the conflict becomes anathema.

Gandhi was able to cultivate the art of disagreement not because he was drawing on modern liberal values but because he located himself in the spiritual traditions of the Indian subcontinent. Seeing all faiths

as different paths leading to the same truth was only one part of this legacy. More importantly, he was rooted in the conviction that when primacy is given to the spiritual domain then our worldly disagreements become proportionally small and fleeting.

Therefore, the shouting down of the man who objected to the Quran verses was a form of violence. That evening, on October 30, Gandhi refused to have the prayer meeting. But he was clear that "disappointing 300 persons for the sake of two or three is also a kind of violence".

So the next day the multi-faith prayer gathering proceeded complete with verses from the Quran. In case anyone objects, Gandhi had said earlier, the rest of those gathered must put up with the objection without anger: "Because you are in the majority, you should not think that you can ignore the people who are protesting..."

Having refused to drop the Quran verses from his prayers Gandhi invited any objectors to meet him later and explain how he was harming the Hindu religion. "Personally, I think I have only done some good to Hinduism. Through this practice of reciting from the Quran I am able to draw my Muslim friends nearer to me." After the prayer meeting, Gandhiji thanked the objectors for remaining silent and complimented the rest for tolerating their protests.

Three months later, the objector took the form of Godse and killed Gandhi. It is for each one of us to decide whether it was violence or ahimsa that was victorious on the Birla House lawns on January 30, 1948.

This is an abridged text of the 46th Vishnu Shastri Chiplunkar Memorial Lecture delivered at Ruia College, Mumbai on January 24. Abridged and translated from Hindi by the author

ence when Jyoti Basu ruled supreme. States' demand for revenue sharing was accommodated by successive Finance Commissions, but on political matters the power equation between the Centre and states alters with personalities. There is no redress except via the Supreme Court. When the Centre was weak during 1988-1998, the Supreme Court gathered lot of power to itself and became autonomous, as its system of Collegium shows. It has not given up that power despite a Constitutional amendment to establish a National Judicial Appointments Commission. Here the disproportionate weakness of the principal opposition party has helped the court. Lately, the fissures within the topmost judges and the cavalier attempts to impeach the Chief Justice

of India have done no one any good. The system may not be broke but it is not working as expected. The most recent fracas, between the West Bengal CM and CBI, has shown once again that it is not rules of established practice that govern Centre-state relations. Luckily, the Centre showed restraint and did not slam President's Rule as in the old Congress days, but the fact remains that the balance between the Centre and states is not as was assumed in 1949. States are developing tariff barriers when it comes to jobs and reservations wanting to favour their 'native sons of the soil', as the most recent example of Madhya Pradesh shows. This will only grow as the NRC issue in Assam demonstrates. The glue of the Constitution is drying up.

WHO

Rajeev Kumar,
officer in Centre-State
crossfire

A 1989 batch IPS officer, Kolkata Police Commissioner Rajeev Kumar hogged the limelight along with West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for the better part of this week. After a CBI team arrived to search Mr. Kumar's south Kolkata residence, Ms. Banerjee launched a sit-in, 13 years after she launched a fast during the Singur crisis. In 2006, it was against the Left, in 2019 it was directed against the right, the BJP. But this time the Supreme Court walked the middle path, halting Mr. Kumar's imminent arrest, calming Ms. Banerjee and her counterparts in Delhi.

Why is he the target?

Launching the dharna in the city centre, Ms. Banerjee said it was "her duty to protect her officers." But the Opposition trained guns on Mr. Kumar, with the BJP alleging that he had not furnished two crucial items – a red diary and a pen drive – seized during raids on the Saradha Group's office. The office, at Midland Park in Salt Lake, falls under the juris-

dition of the Bidhannagar Commissionerate, and Mr. Kumar was its first Commissioner. Ms. Banerjee blocked the CBI-Kumar interaction to "protect herself," said Union Minister Prakash Javadekar. The allegation was refuted by the main accused in the Saradha scam case, the group's chief Sudipta Sen, who has been in prison since 2013. The CBI, in a 17-page affidavit filed in the Supreme Court, alleged that Mr. Kumar "destroyed, destructed and tampered with the material primary evidence in form of CDRs [call data records] while handing over the same to the CBI on 28.6.2018."

Is he close to the CM?

When Ms. Banerjee stormed to power in 2011, she kept her distance from Mr. Kumar, who was known to be close to Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, the outgoing Chief Minister. But Ms. Banerjee soon changed her opinion on Mr. Bhattacharjee's "blue eyed" officer. Last Sun-

day, as she began her protest, she described Mr. Kumar as among the "best in the world." He studied engineering at the University of Roorkee, now an IIT, preceding the decade when India opened itself to foreign investments in



ILLUSTRATION: J.A. PREMKUMAR

the early 1990s. Western Uttar Pradesh's Kumars, with many teachers in their family, shifted to Chandausi, where Mr. Kumar's father joined a local college as a professor of social science. On completion of college, Mr. Kumar appeared for the civil services examination and cleared it. Mr. Kumar's Roorkee-induced specialisation in technical intelligence, a rare feat among IPS officers, helped him grow in the ranks. He played a major role during the Left Front government in nabbing leaders connected to various people's movements, like Chhatradhar Mahato. During that time, Ms. Banerjee, then in the Opposition, repeatedly alleged that Mr. Kumar was engaged in surveillance against the Left's political opponents. But once in power, Ms. Banerjee considered Mr. Kumar an asset. A fitness enthusiast like the Chief Minister, Mr. Kumar was reinstated in the Special Task Force with the responsibility of technical intelligence. At the time when

the Saradha scam exploded and investors hit the streets in protest, it was Mr. Kumar who partly diffused the anger by arresting Sudipta Sen and his associates from Kashmir, tracking wireless devices. The Chief Minister was convinced of his ability to address complex situations and Mr. Kumar was soon elevated to the rank of CP of Bidhannagar Commissionerate, investigating the Saradha scam. The investigation – and his role in handling it – has landed him in trouble.

What lies in store?

The CBI began questioning Mr. Kumar in Shillong on Saturday. Depending on the nature and volume of evidence, the CBI may seek to vacate the stay on his arrest, issue a warrant and take him into custody. The key question, however, is how Ms. Banerjee responds to the challenge. Will she succumb to pressure or be more combative? We will have to wait and watch.

SUVIJIT BAGCHI

WHAT

The lowdown
on Mallya's
extradition

WHAT IS IT? Earlier this week, Britain's Home Secretary Sajid Javid signed the order for Vijay Mallya's extradition to India to face charges of fraud and money laundering, following the judgment handed down by Westminster Magistrates Court Chief Magistrate Emma Arbuthnot in December. She concluded there was a *prima facie* case against Mr. Mallya, rejected the argument that the case was politically motivated, and labelled him a "gla-

morous, flashy, famous, bejewelled, body-guarded, ostensibly billionaire playboy." India wants to bring criminal action against Mr. Mallya, whose business interests have ranged from aviation to liquor, for defaulting on over \$1.4 billion in loans Kingfisher took out from Indian banks. Authorities argue misrepresentations were made to acquire those loans, while Mr. Mallya had no intention of repaying them and sought to squirrel away funds and use them in ways that were not permitted by the terms of the loans. However, the ample opportunities for appeal available to Mr. Mallya – who has indicated his intention to pursue them – means the entire process could take another two years, estimates Pavan Reddy, managing partner at Zaiwalla & Co. in London.

WILL HE BE ALLOWED TO APPEAL? The signing of the order means the appeal process can now be kick-started.

Mr. Mallya has two weeks from the signing of the order to seek permission to appeal to the High Court, at which stage that application will be considered by the judge on paper over a 21-day to 3-month period, explains Ms. Reddy. If he manages to get permission to appeal, the appeal process should begin within 76 days, though with options for seeking extensions available to both sides, the appeal could take 6-8 months to begin with. If – following the paper consideration – the judge denies permission to appeal, Mr. Mallya can push for an oral hearing, which could add a further three months to the process. If at this stage, permission is still refused that would end his appeal options.

HOW LONG WILL THE PROCESS TAKE? He can seek permission to appeal to the Supreme Court – at first instance from the High Court, and if unsuccessful he can seek permission from the Supreme

Court itself. If successful at this stage, he would have 28 days to file an appeal, with the ensuing appeal taking over 6-9 months more, estimates Ms. Reddy. He could apply as a last resort to the European Court of Human Rights though such appeals are only granted in very rare cases, she notes. In 2014, only 4 of 833 applications for appeal were granted. The 2003 Extradition Act says he must be extradited within 28 days of the court of appeal's decision (or when appeal proceedings are discontinued). If the deadline (including any extension) is passed without the extradition happening, he could apply to be discharged from extradition, unless the Home Office could provide a good reason for any delay.

WHAT CAN INDIA DO? While the applications for permission to appeal can't be speeded up, an expedited appeals process can be requested if leave is granted, which would

involve pushing for an early date in the court's diary.

Grounds, of course, vary significantly, and include suggestions that the person is being pursued for political motivations because of race or religion and so on.

Others include the passage of time, and rules against double jeopardy. While it is not common for extradition appeals to succeed, last year India successfully appealed a Westminster Magistrate Court's ruling that discharged the alleged bookie Sanjeev Chawla, who India had been seeking to extradite over the 2002 cricket match fixing scandal.

As per the guarantees offered to the Chief Magistrate, if Mr. Mallya is extradited, he will be held in Barrack 12 of the Arthur Road Jail in Mumbai – with certain assurances of space, daylight and medical facilities – both ahead of any trial and after any conviction.

VIDYA RAM

WHY

are quakes
happening
at Palghar?

What happened?

■ Since November, Maharashtra's Palghar district has experienced dozens of small earthquakes. As on February 6, a seismometer located around 70 km from Palghar and operated by Gujarat's Institute of Seismological Research (ISR), recorded 74 quakes, with 26 measuring between 1 and 1.9 on the moment magnitude scale (Mw), 39 measuring 2 and 2.9, and nine measuring over 3, according to ISR director Sumer Chopra. This pattern of several small earthquakes occurring in a brief time-window is called an earthquake swarm. "It is like a swarm of people. There is no leader, and all of them are similar [in magnitude]. So, there is nothing like a foreshock or mainshock," says Vineet Kumar Gahalaut, director of Delhi's National Centre for Seismology (NCS).

Why is it a worry?

■ The epicentres of the current swarms haven't seen such activity in the past. Why it is occurring now is a mystery.

However, swarms are common in peninsular India and mostly harmless because of their low magnitude. In fact, a city called Jawhar in Palghar district has experienced swarms several times earlier, Dr. Gahalaut said. Another vulnerable region is Amaravati in Maharashtra, which saw swarm activity last August. Subsequently, the NCS set up seismometers in the region. They found that most earthquakes there were very shallow: they originated from within a few kilometres below the surface. Further, the tremors stopped soon after the monsoon. The researchers concluded that the swarms were related to the monsoon, and were attributable to a phenomenon called "hydro-seismicity."

Whether the Palghar quakes are a swarm, however, will only be clear after they stop. Researchers will then categorise them based on the distribution of the magnitude. Even if the magnitude distribution so far suggests a swarm, said Dr. Gahalaut, this will change if a big earthquake follows. If and when that



happens, the temblors so far will be called foreshocks. Because there is no way to predict whether such a large quake will follow, Palghar residents must be careful.

Why is this happening?

■ In "hydro-seismicity," which is hy-

pothesised as the reason for swarms in peninsular India, water from heavy rainfall enters small fractures in rocks. This raises the pressure within them. A study from the ISR in 2008, published in the *Journal of Geological Society of India*, estimates that with every 10 metre rise in groundwater, pore pressure increases by 1 bar. This pressure is released in earthquake swarms. However, such activity typically starts in June and dies down in December, said Dr. Chopra. In Palghar's case, it has continued into February. This raises questions about the mechanism behind it. In general, quakes are caused by geological faults, or cracks in the earth's crust across which rocks get displaced. There are plenty of faults along the Konkan coast of India (where Palghar lies), although how many of these are active isn't known. In 2007, a *Current Science* study by researchers from IIT-Bombay suggested that swarm activity along the west coast was due to a major fault parallel to it. Dr. Gahalaut said, however,

that more evidence is needed to determine the extent of this fault and how active it is.

What next?

■ Palghar falls in Zone 3 of the seismic zoning map developed by the Bureau of Indian Standards. This means that buildings here must be able to withstand earthquakes of intensity 5.5-6.5 on the Medvedev-Sponheuer-Karnik (MSK) scale. Intensity is a qualitative measure of how people experience earthquakes, rather than the energy released, which is measured by the magnitude scale, said Deepankar Choudhury, a civil engineer at IIT-Bombay. In earthquakes measuring 5.5-6.5 on the MSK scale, people are frightened and run outdoors, and heavy furniture can move. Buildings that follow the BIS codes are likely to survive swarms and even larger quakes. So, it is crucial for the code to be implemented stringently.

PRIYANKA PULLA

WHEN

3
February 2019

Off track: Seven people died and several others were injured on February 3 after 11 coaches of the Delhi-bound Seemanchal Express derailed in Vaishali district of Bihar. Survivors recalled hearing a deafening bang and being flung off berths. Initially, officials suspected that the accident happened due to a "rail fracture" or a fault on the tracks. However, the reason has not yet been confirmed and a probe has been launched. On February 1, in the interim Budget for 2019-2020, the government announced a massive allocation for the Railway's capital expenditure, at ₹1.58 lakh crore. Presenting the Budget, Finance Minister Piyush Goyal, who also holds the Railways portfolio, said the Railways had "experienced the safest year in its history" in 2018. He said the launch of the first indigenously developed and manufactured semi high-speed Vande Bharat Express (Train 18) will give passengers a world class experience in speed, service and safety. Picture shows rescue workers looking for survivors. ■ REUTERS



WHERE

In Northeast,
air links
shrinking

The day Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation for the first civilian airport in Arunachal Pradesh, Jet Airways operated its last flight on the Guwahati-Aizawl route. By withdrawing from Mizoram, the private airliner joined an expanding list of flight operators that have suspended operation from new and existing routes in the geographically challenged northeastern region. This has undermined New Delhi's ambitious flagship regional connectivity scheme UDAN, an acronym for the Hindi phrase *Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik* meaning 'let the common man fly.'

Why was the flight terminated?

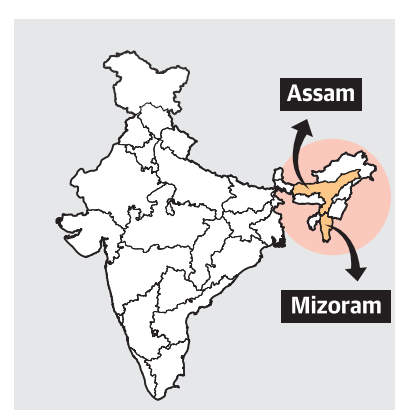
Mizoram's Lengpui Airport, 32 km from the capital Aizawl, took a little more than two years to be completed in February 1998. It soon became the busiest airport in the region after the ones in Assam's Guwahati, Manipur's Imphal and Tripura's Agartala. But the airlines began withdrawing operations for reasons such as safety, maintenance and

viability. If an accident made Northeast Shuttles stop its Cessna flights in 2011, losses made Kingfisher Red withdraw a year later. Air India ended its Guwahati-Aizawl flights as did SpiceJet in less than a year after its inaugural flight in October 2016. Jet Airways, once the only private airline flying to and from northeastern India, withdrew from Aizawl on February 10. The airline attributed it to non-viability of the route because of fuel price rise, a depreciating rupee and a difficult pricing environment.

Is only Mizoram affected?

No. Jet Airways withdrew from Imphal and Assam's Silchar and Jorhat, along with Aizawl. Much before the first round of UDAN was launched in April 2017, private airlines had withdrawn from Nagaland's Dimapur.

The Hyderabad-based Air Deccan, which won exclusive rights in the UDAN bidding to connect Meghalaya capital Shillong to Aizawl, Agartala, Silchar, Dimapur and Imphal, operated only 10



flights to Agartala and Dimapur in May 2018. The Delhi-based Zoom Air operated between Assam's Tezpur and Kolkata for only three months, till July 2018, before withdrawing owing to "technical issues." And from September 1, 2018, SpiceJet suspended its operation from Agartala, six years after Jet Airways and a few other small airlines had withdrawn.

Has the demand gone down?

According to Zoliana Chhakhchhuak, Aizawl-based head of a regional tour operators' association, viability is often cited by airlines, despite a passenger occupancy rate of 60-70% in most flights, and more people in the region flying than ever before.

While some of the smaller airports have flights connecting Kolkata and Delhi, the withdrawal of service to and from Guwahati – the hub of communication – is expected to affect tourism, a sector that has capitalised on peace in the region. Airlines and the Airports Authority of India (AAI) agree that the passenger volume has doubled in the last five-six years from Guwahati and other popular airports in the region. But improved road and rail connectivity, they said, have become a bane for smaller airports.

For instance, a two-hour drive brings a passenger from Shillong and an overnight train trip brings one from Dimapur to Guwahati.

Where is connectivity headed?

The Ministry of Civil Aviation announced the opening of 92 air routes in the region in the second round of UDAN in November 2017. Bidders snapped up six airports – Rupsi, Jorhat, Lilabari and Tezpur in Assam, and Tezu and Pasighat in Arunachal Pradesh – and 12 routes, of which only two are operational. In May 2018, Air India started a flight between Guwahati and Pasighat in Arunachal Pradesh with VIPs, including Chief Minister Pema Khandu, on board. The militarily strategic airport, which allows Sukhoi 30 to land and take off, has had very few civilian flights. AAI officials say UDAN, in its current form, is difficult for smaller airlines to sustain. Aviation experts say the scheme has not been able to add wings because it is aimed more at reaping political benefits than increasing connectivity. Furthermore, it does not have enough incentives for airlines to ignore the issue of viability.

RAHUL KARMAKAR

A compass for navigating contemporary art

Among the gimmicky installations and concept artworks at the India Art Fair, some pictures take you towards your north pole



PASSING BITE

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Every year, Delhi's art season throws up all sorts of odd things. Nowadays there are art events in the NCR all across the year but the so-called season is in the cooler months, from mid-October to mid-March. However, a bit like the magnetic North Pole that's currently playing catch-me-if-you-can, the exact epicentre of the season can be hard to pinpoint. An early winter show can define a particular season, or a big retrospective of a big-name artist at a museum might yank the point into March, but one steady fulcrum is the India Art Fair (IAF) that usually takes place in end January/early February, with all the shows and events that are clustered around that sales jamboree.

For this year's IAF, the Arterati landed in force from out of town, while their local allies came out of the city's for-

trass-palaces. You could see them at various locations: looking sniffy in Khan Market, long-ball air-kissing in the lounge of the Taj Mansingh, piling out of SUVs and stumbling about trying to find the cleverly disguised entrance to the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, and so on. You can easily identify these bipeds by the bright orange sunglasses (even at night) and the generally outlandishly expensive and unsuitable designer pelt in which they are covered. At the Fair itself, you see a few of them in the exclusive VIP lounge, not too many foreigners, and not too many proper Arterati, but a lot of the Indian nouveaugarchs who are clearly discovering new and unique ways of spending their ill-gotten crores. As soon as your group approaches the lounge (your own card having been acquired by dint of a friend being a part of the official proceedings), the young women at the desk put you through the questionnaire: 'What car do you drive, sir? Umm, usually Uber, sometimes three-wheeler.' 'Oh. And which model of our brand would you be looking to purchase, ma'am?' 'None, at least not in this life. No, wait, maybe I can afford one at Hamley's toy shop, I'll go look.' 'Okay ma'am, okay sir, thank



you, can I take that card? It's one-time use only. Thank you, this way please.'

Through the grids

Entering the lounge you feel as though you've stumbled into some ill-conceived art installation. At the centre of the space is the fattest, most obscene staukampfwagen the sponsoring brand produces. Inside it is the suited salesman trying to show off all the bells and whistles to two gangsta-consumed chaps from Chandigarh. Around the

'car' mill the potential buyers and waiters with international cuisine canapes that tend towards the vegetarian. You look at the SUV and you can just see it, as still as it is now, embedded in the slow-moving car park that is the Mehrauli-Gurgaon Road at 6 p.m. on a Wednesday in April – you can just see this shiny thing in that oceanic traffic-jam, preening like some godman, with dirty Ubers and spluttering autos surrounding it like worshipful bhaktas.

After this vision, even the worst art

on display outside should like a relief. But as you wander through the grids A, B and C and then the projects section of the expo, you do feel as though you are examining cross-sections of the internal organs of a large, dismembered creature called Indianartnow, with all its anxieties and stress having caused various kinds of 'art' to come into being like ulcers and cysts, leading to multiple organ failure in the beast. However, as you move from stall to gallery stall, you also come across a few gems hiding in all the posey, moribund dress – a small oil by Raza here, a lovely early canvas by Madhavi Parekh there or a series of photos by Simryn Gill.

Some rewards in the maze

Away from the Art Fair crowds, the big KNMA retrospective of Arpita Singh's work spanning half a century is quietly rewarding. For a while you can be lost in the maze of rooms hung with good, old-fashioned water-colours and oils, the form of the two dimensional 'flat work' centuries-old, but the images painted upon them like fresh maps and scans of the last few decades. As you slowly make your way through the rooms you can see the explorations becoming

deeper, some lines becoming more playful, other things – a figure, a colour combination or the use of stencils – beginning to work rhythmically, coming up again and again like the samm of a raga.

At Vadehra Art Gallery you come across a practitioner from an earlier era – the great Benode Behari Mukherjee. Again, just the flat work hung on the wall: a picture painted or drawn on paper, a surrounding mount, a frame and that's it. And yet, the dance of the brush, or the staccato stippling of pen and ink creates whole worlds, opens up wells of deep emotion. A series of landscapes, a suite of watercolours depicting the same flowers, figures against a mountainside brought alive by the most parsimonious deployment of brushstrokes. Nobody sensible can argue that only this drawing-painting of Benodebabu's and Arpita's is genuine art and that all the installery and concept-churning of the contemporary art world should be dismissed as gimmicks. But when searching for something that hits you, that moves you and makes you think, it's good to think of these pictures as being somewhere near your genuine north pole.

Bill shock for power producers

India's power woes have shifted from generation to distribution



ON THE OTHER HAND

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GETTY IMAGES/STOCKPHOTO



What happens if you don't pay your electricity bill? The power company cuts you off (unless you happen to be a politician, slumlord or goon), right? Now what happens if you happen to be the power company, and haven't been paying your bills to your supplier – the power generating company?

Ideally, the same rules should apply. After all, what is sauce for the goose must be sauce for the gander. Only, the same rules don't apply. All kinds of reasons are trotted out: power distribution companies (discoms) are essential utilities, electricity is a basic requirement, the discoms are all (or, almost all) owned by the government so the money isn't going anywhere, and so on and so forth.

The power problem

Usually, the generators tend to cave in and simply let the dues mount till they reach a point where they can't pay their suppliers or their employees and then the cycle of threat and bargaining starts. Last week's stand-off between India's largest power producer, NTPC, and the discoms of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Karnataka is a classic example.

Stuck with unpaid dues of over ₹5,838 crore, of which more than ₹4,100 crore were due for more than two months, NTPC threatened to "regulate" supply – effectively, reduce by over 3,400 MW the quantum of power it supplies to these three discoms – from midnight of February 5. Within a day, threat was kept in abeyance, with the three discoms promising to pay "as soon as possible", although no clear date was given. Needless to say, with all three States ruled by non-BJP parties or coalitions, there was considera-

ble political pressure to not make it seem like a BJP vendetta.

That may have solved the political problem, but it doesn't solve the power producer's problem. As of November 2018, the latest month for which data are available, the money owed by discoms to power producers was over ₹41,000 crore. That number will climb closer to the ₹55,000 crore mark, if you add the dues which are still within the 60-day credit offered by generators. Pending payments are growing at 29% per year.

This is clearly unsustainable. If power producers don't get paid, their only option is to go belly up or shut shop, since power distribution is, for all practical purposes, a monopoly. If you have only one customer and that customer isn't paying you, there's little you can do. This is one of the reasons why over 30,000 MW of capacity is currently under the "stressed asset" category and looking for resolution. With or without resolution, lenders are already facing a monumental haircut. If one adds productive, operational assets to this – because the buyer is not paying up – then we are looking at a systemic collapse.

Currently, the accumulated losses of discoms are in excess of ₹17,000 crore. But this is after two years of the government's Ujwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana (UDAY), instituted after the cumulative losses of discoms crossed ₹51,000 crore in 2015-16. Under the scheme, State governments took over the liability for half the accumulated losses, allowing the discoms to start with a near fresh slate. In return, discoms were expected to cut losses resulting from theft, non-metering and leakages to 15% of the total by March

31, 2019, while gradually increasing tariffs to cover the rest. With just a little more than a month left for that deadline, the loss figure is still over 20% – which means a fifth of the power produced doesn't earn a paisa – while tariff hikes and axing of subsidies hasn't happened.

India's power problem, long thought to lie on the generation side, has shifted to the distribution side. We are now comfortable on the generation side. But with State governments stubbornly refusing to change, using discoms as handy vehicles to push all kinds of populist agendas without actually having to spend their budget monies on it, the discoms have virtually reached the point of no return.

A workable solution

The Centre has taken several shots at solving this. Initially, privatisation was thought of as the panacea, but the experience with privatised discoms has been only marginally better (Mumbai-kars are up in arms over sharp bill increases after Gautam Adani bought out Anil Ambani's distribution utility there). Then the Modi government came up with UDAY. But clearly, UDAY too has just kicked the can down the road, since discoms haven't cleaned up their act.

In 2018, a high-level committee headed by the Cabinet Secretary suggested that public financial institutions like the Power Finance Corporation discount discom receivables and pay power producers. However, these institutions were wary of default by discoms and wanted the government to create a three-way arrangement with the Reserve Bank of India, such that flows to State government treasuries would be diverted to pay the institutions in case of default. This proved unworkable.

Now, yet another committee has been formed, which is of the view that discoms should go into a prepaid mode with power producers. This too looks unlikely. What also looks unlikely is a workable solution – unless the political class stops playing politics with power.

Whispers of the city

Around the world with a bagful of books



WORD COUNTS

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GETTY IMAGES/STOCKPHOTO

Ruskin Bond never tires of describing Landour, a little settlement high in the hills above Mussoorie in Uttarakhand's Garhwal where he's made his home for many decades; and his readers never fail to find something new in his descriptions as they fill in more details of the place in their imaginations. He does this by way of new stories, memoir and essays, through introductions to his books, and most curiously through the manner in which he constantly reassembles his writings in successive anthologies.

To read and love Bond is to look forward to finding a short story or narrative you've read before nestled among a different set of writings. I can read 'Time Stops at Shamli' or 'Voting at Barlowganj', to take just two of the pieces collected in his latest collection, *Landour Bazaar*, endlessly – but I never fail to experience a thrill of discovery when I find them in a new volume, with different Bond neighbours, as it were, in the table of contents. Serendipitously, the text feels just that tiny bit different each time, simply by being in new surroundings. In fact, it's long been a dream project to find all the anthologies of Bond's writings and map how different stories show up in different collections amidst old and new writing. The labour of tracking down each and every volume apart, I suspect the task is not doable for another reason – as happens spookily in his stories, the chase for his collected collections may bring the archivist to one trap door after another that take her to books no one else even knew existed.

Perhaps, Bond may also spice up the mapping project by updating some

essays. In the introduction to *Landour Bazaar*, for example, he describes how "the Garhwal Himalaya and the people who live on these mountain slopes in the mist-filled valleys have long since learned humility, patience, and a quiet resignation", with a familiar rhythm to their cheer-filled days but very tough lives – but he notes, with a tone of regret, the changes that have come to the legendary bazaar in the twenty or so years since he wrote the title essay. Yet, even as Mussoorie and Landour change, for countless readers who may make their way around these hill stations, what they see will be some unique combination of the actual landscape and the picture Bond has painted over time not just in his non-fiction, but especially in his fiction.

Transforming memory

No Ruskin Bond story is there in *Literary Landscapes: Charting the Worlds of Classic Literature*, a vividly illustrated volume edited by John Sutherland. He summarises it as "a collection of the world's most memorable fictionalised geographies". Sometimes the fictional touches don't just change our perception of a place, they actually alter the map. Patrick Modiano, who won the Nobel Prize for literature in 2014, had situated his 1997 novel *The Search Warrant* (Dora Bruder in the French original), set against the Holocaust and the German occupation of France during World War II, in the non-touristy quarters of Paris's 18th ar-

rondissement. It came full circle in 2015, when, as Catherine Taylor updates us, "the City of Paris named a promenade in the 18th arrondissement after Dora Bruder, the missing Jewish girl of Modiano's novel."

And as the Windrush issue comes back centre stage in Britain, it is instructive to map the London of characters in Trinidadian writer Samuel Selvon's 1956 novel, *The Lonely Londoners*. Kate McNaughton shows how the opening line of Selvon's classic uses not just imagery but also nuances of diction to contrast the London everyone is presumed to be familiar with the diverse 'Londons' various immigrants, specifically of the Windrush wave, occupy: "One grim winter evening, when it had a kind of unrealness about London, with a fog sleeping restlessly over the city and the lights showing in the blur as it is not London at all but some strange place on another planet, Moses Aloetta hop on a number 46 bus at the corner of Chepstow Road and Westbourne Grove to go to Waterloo to meet a fellow who was coming from Trinidad on the boat-train." Selvon and Barbadian George Lamming (*In the Castle of My Skin*, 1953) found the key for generations of West Indian, and other, writers to come, that to depict a place, language was key.

Cairenes, on their part, caution first-time visitors to their city to read Naguib Mahfouz before they set foot in the Egyptian capital or they'll never know it. Andrew Taylor recommends *Midaq Alley* (1947) to get a measure of the city's profile: "Mahfouz makes the alley much more than a setting for his characters. From the first page it is presented as a character in its own right, depicted through not just its physical appearance but the textures of its crumbling walls, the smells of spices and folk cures, the deep colors of a city sunset, and the intimate evening whispers as the daytime noises die down."

That's one of the reasons we keep going back to great works – to catch snatches of, among other things, "intimate evening whispers".

The vanishing of a writer

As the sins of the creator are foisted upon their work, writers craft a public persona superior to their own artistic creations



SERENDIPITIES

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A few days ago, I translated a verse by a mighty Indian poet – a sprawling banyan tree of literary consciousness – from his mother tongue to English. It is a sensitive, minor poem that avoids easy sentimentalism or glib endings. Then, I made a critical mistake. I looked up the poet on YouTube. For all of the poet's literary sensitivities on page, on stage, in the presence of an audience, he metamorphosed into a moralist who took it upon himself to catalogue the failings of society, all the while self-aggrandising his own commitment to literature and higher ideals.

To an extent, among the great crimes of humanity, the harmless vanities of a bureaucrat-poet are minor, almost in-

consequential. Yet, it rankled within.

A rogue's gallery?

For much of my adult reading life I have found myself admiring a book, only to later discover that in his personal lives the author was a moral skunk. There is, of course, a long history of this dichotomy – the yawning gap between luminous words and the wordsmith. Seneca was an obsequious slime ball in Nero's court who wrote stirring essays about honour and courage. The great Shakespeare, some evidence points, may have been in support of the Inclosure Acts which threw out tenant-farmers from British feudal estates. The greatness of T.S. Eliot is scarred by his anti-semitism. Ezra Pound and Curzio Malaparte became fellow travellers of Mussolini's fascism. Closer to our times, V.S. Naipaul declared that he became "a great prostitute man" as his wife lay dying. Lawrence Durrell's daughter topped off the description of her father as an "aggressive and demonic drunkard" with insinuations of incest. Gabriel Garcia Marquez, who spoke about human freedoms, enjoyed the friendship of Fi-



GETTY IMAGES/STOCKPHOTO

del Castro, who ran an authoritarian gulag state. Pablo Neruda, ever ready to make art out of the artlessness, confessed to raping his Sri Lankan manual scavenger, all the while admiring the "brimming cup of her breasts" during the attack. Despite knowing all this, it has never stopped me from reading, enjoying, and profiting from their works.

In our times, however, unlike any generation before, we are gifted with a

sort of radical transparency about the private lives of our favourite authors. Be it either through social media, newspapers, or archival works – we know more of those who produce our culture than any time before. The result is that our knowledge of a work of art comes coloured with the results of extraneous information. What do they sound like, are they liberal or conservative, is she a vainglorious fool or is he merely a gar-

den variety misogynist and so on. An outcome of this is an increasingly schizoid response about what is to be done: Should we suffer through mediocrities because they favour our political dispensation. Or, should those who transgress our norms about gender or religion or nationhood be accommodated despite our distaste on account of their abilities to unsettle and yet instruct. These are the questions that increasingly dominate not just our aesthetics but even our consumption patterns.

The logic of consumption in an age where artists and writers transform themselves into products also forces them to conform, to behave and speak in a certain manner, to ascribe to forms of progressive claims lest the consumer, and therefore the publisher, deem them unmarketable. The upside of this relentless pressure of the markets is evident – more voices now add to the collective noise. But the downside is that these voices are largely similar because they emerge out of the same production chain – born from similar creative writing programmes subject to similar editorial tastes and ultimately package

their own authorial self as a conscientious, sensitive liberal, secular and so on. Both the writer and his work become receptacles for low-cost virtue signalling.

Not for everyone

In today's environs, authors like Norman Mailer, prodigious in his talent but also one who stabbed his wife in a drunken fit, or Nirad Chaudhuri, who wrote euphonic prose that sought to please only Edward Gibbon and more expressly aimed to stir Indians out of their self-satisfied stupor – would be hard-pressed to find a place. This is not because we are more egalitarian today but because art and the artist have fused into a single marketable product. Anticipating this commingling, some like the great Thomas Pynchon or the pseudonymous 'Elena Ferrante' have simply chosen to vanish from the public eye. They are content to let only their words speak. The rest knowing very well that the sins of the creator will be foisted upon their creation muddle on, working to craft a public persona superior to their own artistic creations.

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

RBI's interest rate cut

As polls near, regulator goes pro-corporate

THE Reserve Bank of India (RBI) surprised market analysts by proposing an interest rate cut at its Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), the last before the General Election. The running conflict between two successive RBI Governors and the Centre and the setting up of the MPC after the first fracas have ensured that the RBI's deliberations will be politically scrutinised. That a handpicked bureaucrat as RBI chief was reversing the policy on keeping interest rates unchanged has added to the debate. The rate cut, on the surface, should provide a little relief to the EMI-paying middle class, whom the interim Budget has also sought to keep in good humour with tax breaks.

The RBI has spelt out many good reasons for the lower interest rate as the shift in its position from 'calibrated tightening' to 'neutral', which in simple words is feel-good signalling to the industry — that the danger of high inflation is over. That may be partly true. Headline inflation, primarily because of low food inflation, has been low but a flare-up in core inflation (non-food, non-fuel) and the expected slippage in fiscal deficit after the handouts in the interim Budget can quickly sink these expectations. The rate cut should spur policy action because contrary to the present government's political philosophy, most of the investment activity is due to spending of tax money on infrastructure while private investment remains sluggish.

Some straws in the wind suggest this is the case. These include the waiver of limit on foreign portfolio investors (FPI) in corporate bonds, easier external borrowings for insolvent corporates, clubbing of three kinds of in-trouble NBFCs to lower their borrowing costs and a higher limit for collateral-free agriculture loans. The key issues of transfer of RBI surplus reserves and relaxed norms for weak banks that led to Urjit Patel's resignation still remain to be settled. But the government's hands have been strengthened by recommendations from a Congressman-led Parliamentary Committee. Once the Centre has its way on these two issues, the surplus funds combined with the impact of the rate cut can improve the health of the Indian corporates in time for the elections.

Punjab's revenue woes

Govt in a spot as collection well short of target

DAYS before the Punjab Budget, fiscal indicators for the first three quarters (April-December 2018) of the ongoing financial year have painted a bleak picture of the state's revenue collection. The Congress government is well short of achieving the target of realising Rs 72,311.85 crore during 2018-19 — the state has earned Rs 38,384.92 crore (53 per cent) in the nine-month period. This is even lower than the 57 per cent collected in the corresponding period of the previous fiscal (2017-18).

A major cause for concern is the disappointing collection of GST, which had witnessed a chaotic rollout across the country in July 2017, months after the Congress came to power in Punjab. The revenue on this front has been only 47.21 per cent of the target till December. Last year, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley had himself admitted that the targets set for the states under the GST regime were 'unprecedentedly high' and 'almost unachievable'. Nevertheless, the unavoidable fact is that Punjab figures among the laggard states along with Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh and Himachal Pradesh. The toppers include Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Andhra Pradesh.

As this is the election year, the Capt Amarinder Singh government is expected to refrain from announcing fresh taxation or new ways of additional resource mobilisation. This will be in stark contrast to the 2018 state Budget, which had bypassed the populist route by coming up with a development tax on income tax assesses and a tax for funding social security schemes. Strict tax compliance and fiscal discipline might be easier said than done, but the ruling Congress can't keep blaming its predecessor all the time for all its financial woes. Revenue leakage needs to be plugged at various levels, while officials who go soft on defaulters should be brought to book. With the revenue deficit for 2018-19 already in the vicinity of Rs 9,000 crore, the government needs to get its fiscal act together sooner than later to strengthen the state's case for a long-pending special package.

Theatre of the absurd

Mamata's antics have her audience divided, and somewhat sceptical



SHIV VISVANATHAN

ACADEMIC ASSOCIATED WITH COMPOST HEAP

A MOMENT of crisis is a moment's return to the roots. History returns to its roots when the primordial and archetypal people respond by enacting what they do best. This is true for Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. When the BJP threatened her with a CBI inquiry, she responded in the way she knew best. She returned to the theatre of street politics announcing she was starting a satyagraha against the BJP's violation of the Constitution.

Mamata Banerjee is an archetypal performer. It is her ability to confront CPM violence through street-level politics that won her power. She returns to the streets every time that power is threatened.

Street theatre, as Mamata plays, has a simplistic structure. There is Mamata playing the Joan of Arc against the forces of evil. It is a world of black and white and eventually it is power and the message of her histrionics that win the day. The melodrama plays out as she recharges like Aeneas, as she renews her contract with the people. There is neither subtlety nor complexity. The script has to stay simple, the drama has to remain stark for the result to be predictable. The audience, like a chorus, has to acclaim her. It is this perennial melodrama that has been the source of her strength and spell the magic of her career. It is satyagraha only in a nominal sense because such drama can ingest enormous degrees of violence, as the CPM learnt to its disadvantage.

When the BJP ushered in an investigation into the Saradha chit fund scandal, Mamata's response was predictable. She immediately claimed that the constitutional process was



NOT A CLASS ACT: Perennial melodrama is the source of Mamata's strength.

The Opposition played the perfect chorus: Mamata was embarrassing Modi and Rajnath. The middle class, however, was more circumspect.

breaking down, that the BJP was undermining critical institutions by misusing them to attack or embarrass the Opposition. This message found an instant echo in the likes of Chandrababu Naidu and Rahul Gandhi. Babu was, in fact, the first to object, claiming that it was a violation of constitutional politics. The Opposition played the perfect chorus to Mamata's theatre. At this stage, it did not mind that she was hogging attention. What was critical was that she was embarrassing Modi and Rajnath.

There was a violation of protocol, the CBI needs the West Bengal Government's permission to conduct an investigation. Mamata's magic wand turned it into a constitutional crisis, a threat to the future of federalism. On day one, she stole the show, especially as the media gave her all attention.

Time, even a few days, has a way of spoiling melodramas, which need new fuel from gossip and scandal; they need the immediacy of spoof to drive home the point. The audience has to respond in visceral ways. It cannot change and split into different constituencies because politics then

moves beyond the immediacy of street theatre. Instead of a knee-jerk narrative, Mamata, while receiving accolades, was confronting the ambivalence of the middle class. A chit fund is a middle-class wager into the future, its way of saving something for old age. What stunned many in the middle class was her refusal to investigate the fund. The middle class was suddenly sulking in the background. Their Didi was calling the wrong shots.

No one denied the power of the drama, the ridiculousness of a huge police posse taking the CBI officers to police station. One realised it was a surrogate war between West Bengal and the Centre, more the beginning of a call to battle against Modi.

One part of the audience gloated at the turn of events, coming soon after Priyanka's entry into the electoral arena. Mamata's call was a renewal cry of battle. Yet, there were sceptics in the wider middle class. Her audience was no longer in direct touch with her. Many dream of moving from the streets to a middle-class life. To them, her call for struggle seemed uncalled for. They interpreted it as a threat to

law and order. They read the script as one scandal meeting another. They, too, felt a distance from their favourite heroine. The middle class, probably remembering the Trinamool-CPM wars, was voting for a stability that made street theatre and street politics seem out of place. Something seemed wrong with her script. Her hunches were right, but the audience was changing. An audience changing or rethinking can be the greatest threat to a politician's career.

While Mamata was beating the constitutional dream, the BJP and the CBI were raising governance issues. A top court had handed over the probe to the CBI. As a result, it did not feel that the state government's permission was essential. The BJP emphasised that while Mamata was hysterical about federal rules, she was sanguine about chit fund corruption.

The Saradha scam is an old one, surfacing in 2013. What was damaging was that the key player, Sudipto Sen, had invested equally in the political realm. Saradha represented a dream gone wrong. Mamata did not distance herself from it. To be fair, Sen cultivated relations with the Congress and was even a great patron of the Kolkata police, distributing motorcycles to patrol policemen. There was a touch of weakness here in Mamata that became a large chink as the BJP decided to investigate.

What Kolkata then had was multiple theatres. A chit fund scandal. A crisis of federalism. A clarion call to the Opposition to rally around Mamata. It was the case of too many scripts competing for the same space.

Fortunately for all contestants, the SC intervened, directed the police to cooperate, but warned the CBI not to arrest any cop. It gave relief to all sides, both parties claiming victory. In one sense, it was an anticlimax. A butter ad caught the spirit when it appealed to both sides. But this will be a temporary respite. She can only be 'utterly, butterfly Mamata'. Now for the next round between Mamata and the BJP as the pace of the elections heats up.

The last of Janus generation

AK MARIA

WE are a limited edition, the first and the last, extremely unique and will be extinct within two-three decades. We are the ones born within 10-15 years of Independence. We opened our eyes in a free India, filled with euphoria of newly acquired freedom, along with the disruption and agony of Partition.

We grew up steeped in patriotic fervour, truth and probity in public life. We were inspired by freedom fighters and our leaders, their turmoil, trials, tribulations and honesty.

We are the ones who could easily drink water from any well, hand-pump, railway station tap. We grew up

without any pollution, adulterated foods, artificially ripened/coloured vegetables and fruits. We are the last to use *dhela, taka, anna; chhatank, seer, mound*. We grew up with invaluable postcards, inland letters, telegrams; saw their demise, and are now equally adept at emails and social media messaging.

We walked to school, studied in hot and humid classrooms, sitting on the floor; and are now happy with our grandchildren going in AC buses to AC classrooms. We are the last ones who wrote on wooden *takhtis*, slates, and later with nib-pens; and are now equally at home with the stylus.

We grew up in large joint families, had multitude of siblings; and are now at ease with our progeny having two

kids or one child. We, who could never raise our voice against our parents, especially fathers, are uncomfortable at the behaviour of present-day kids.

We grew up with the All India Radio, fascinated by B&W television sets; were elated with colour TV. We used to rue only a single channel and now don't know what to do with so many channels and high-tech TVs. We saw the rise and fall of EPs, LPs, 2-in-1s and VCRs. We grew up in the times when getting a telephone connection was a Herculean task and possessing one a status symbol. We are now impressed with a billion Indians possessing mobile phones.

We spent our childhood and youth longing for imported goods; even soaps and socks; and are now enjoy-

ing the luxury of everything available locally. We contributed our bit fully when the country fought three major wars, but now feel disturbed by the disrespect shown to guardians of our freedom. We have seen an impoverished, starving India of the sixties, having a weekly one-meal fast by the whole nation; advent of the Green Revolution and are now appalled at the enormous wastage of foodgrains due to improper storage.

We have experienced both sides. We have had a ring-side view of a poor, semi-clad, barefoot, mostly illiterate country's tremendous scientific and technological progress, and its riches. But are also seeing the severe degradation of social and moral values.

We are the Janus generation.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

In politics, nothing happens by accident. If it does, you can bet it was planned that way. — Franklin D Roosevelt

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 1919

A Grave Blunder.

THE reasons advanced at the Bradlaugh Hall meeting left no doubt as to the unwisdom and impolicy of proceeding with the Rowlatt Bills. The President of the meeting, Mr. Manohar Lal, M.A., Bar-at-Law, in an impressive speech, summed up the grounds on which the whole country takes exception to the repressive legislation. Pandit Rambhaji Dutt Chaudhri, who moved the first resolution, in a powerful speech which carried the whole assembly, explained the position of the province in relation to Government. Their studied silence in regard to matters of controversy during the days of war, in response to the appeals of the Viceroy and the Lieutenant Governor, should not, he said, be taken to mean that they would not insist, by every legitimate means in their power, to obtain their full share in swaraj. The time had come when Government should realise its responsibility and give them their rights. It was futile for Government to depend on repression which had invariably failed in every country.

The Reforms and British Commerce.

WE have examined the assurance by the Viceroy to the Indian Civil Service and have seen that the assurance, while it ought to satisfy the Services, must cause anxiety to India herself. The remark applies to his assurance to British commerce. First: "The legislation on which British commerce in the main depends is mainly all-India in character. Inasmuch as these will remain with the Government of India, they will retain indisputable authority." Second: Even if some matters do pass into the hands of the Provincial Government, there are, the safeguard of "the previous sanction of the Governor General" and "triple veto of the Governor, the Governor General and the Crown."

Nothing holy about it

Refer to 'God's own man' (*Nous Indica*, Feb 8); Pope Francis has proved that a holy life is not gloomy or solitary, but a life regulated by divine truth. It is living above the world while still living in it. His acknowledgement of the abuse of nuns by priests has raised his status. Here in our country, many so-called holy men, put behind bars, do not confess to their acts of omission and commission. They harp on their innocence by offering myriad pleas. Their blind followers do not see anything wrong in them despite their conviction. That makes the *babas* flourish, leading a life of leisure, pleasure and luxury. Moreover, they enjoy the patronage of politicians because of which they don't have any qualms in committing heinous crimes. They have become a bane of Indian society.

TARSEM S BUMRAH, BATALA

Rajniti of religion

Apropos the article 'God's own man' (*Nous Indica*, Feb 8), there is a vicious circle in India of ashrams, deras, church and other places of worship. These are seen as vulnerable targets to provide

votes to unscrupulous politicians. In lieu of the guarantee of votes, politicians provide them with a *suraksha chakra* for their sinister activities. In this way, *rajniti* and religion go hand in glove. Instead of purifying *rajniti* of its *tamas*, religion itself is getting more and more de-religionised by gradually losing whatever *satavic* element that existed. As a result, our democracy is on the road to 'demon-crazy' and needs a surgical strike for its survival.

SURENDRA AJNAT, BANGA

Keep the word

A promise, written or verbal, is a commitment and must be redeemed gracefully. Politicians should make only those promises which they can fulfil. PM Modi had made many big promises, including the rehabilitation of Kashmiri Pandits in the Valley; grant of citizenship rights to displaced persons from west Punjab, living in Jammu; and bringing back black money. I am reminded of an Urdu verse: *Na-aihl (incompetent) hai voh aihl-e-siyaast ki nazar mein/Vaadah se kabhi jisko mukarna nahin aata.*

BHAGWAN SINGH, QADIAN

Use car sparingly

Apropos the article 'Save thy planet' (Jan 5), indeed, it is the need of the hour. We are adding to the earth the baggage of cars and thus burdening it. The incessant air pollution due to vehicles and noise pollution is making the environment unhealthy. The number of vehicles is multiplying every day. A bigger car means more pollution. For the sake of a healthy environment and for our own children, we should try to skip using our cars a few times each day. For nearby chores, a little walk or a bicycle ride won't hurt, rather it would boost good health, clean air and less traffic. Try it!

ABHIRUCHI KALIA, MOHALI

What a great thought!

Congratulations to Amarjot Singh, an NRI of Nawanshahr for setting a unique example of keeping the wedding ceremony occasion simple ('No limo, roadways bus for NRI wedding'; Jan 20). By doing so, he has become a role model for youths of marriageable age, to not waste money on lavish weddings and donate something to the poor and needy. Will the youth learn something? If yes, his aim will be fulfilled.

SK KOCHHAR, KAPURTHALA

Wasteful ads

Full-page, half-page advertisements by politicians are now irritating people. What miracle has CM Jai Ram Thakur of Himachal or the Captain of Punjab performed that they want to show to people? In Punjab, teachers are on the roads, employees are waiting for the Sixth Pay Commission recommendations, farmers are committing suicide, and pensioners are crying for DA instalments. The government has money for its ministers and for useless advertisements, but not for the public. Why don't they cut their own expenses and delay the salaries of ministers?

SUKHWANT BHULLAR, CHANDIGARH

Her world

A girl child must find a conducive and congenial atmosphere to bloom and blossom. She must be imparted with proper education, healthcare and equal opportunity to grow and prosper in every sphere of life. Awakened citizenry ought to probe, report and prevent all instances of neglect, maltreatment discrimination, prejudice and malnutrition concerning the girl child.

JARNAIL SINGH BRAR, BATHINDA

Pakistan fits into China's bold naval plans



LT GEN SYED ATA HASNAIN (RETD)
FORMER GOC, 15 CORPS, KASHMIR

build five carriers and launch them by 2025-30, bringing the number to six or seven. One of the current holdings, the Liaoning, a refurbished erstwhile Russian ship, is the one which China's official media says will be handed over to Pakistan.

Will Pakistan pay for the carrier? Given its cash-strapped economy and the fact that debt servicing of CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) loans commences this year, and annually could amount to \$4 billion, it is doubtful that it will pay anything. However, the idea of giving Pakistan a carrier must strategically appeal to China. The reason can be traced to China's power deficit in the Indian Ocean. For commencement of deployment of a capable blue-water navy, China needs a carrier group on either side of the Straits of Malacca. The power deficit is an outcome of a major but erroneous decision taken at the foundation stage of modern China. Deng Xiaoping, who fathered China's modernisation and rise, accorded the lowest priority to modernisation of the military, placing more emphasis on agriculture, technical education and industry.

Within the military, the PLA was placed at the higher rung. What the leadership did not realise then were two facts. First, to maintain China's growth rate, it needed a continuous flow of energy to keep the industrial production increasing year on year. Second, the economy could only flourish if the flow of goods from the thousands of factories could be continuously ensured to markets far abroad. For both, secure sea lanes of communication (SLOC) were required, right from the Suez and the Persian Gulf to the Straits of Malacca and through the South China Sea to China's eastern



CAUTION: Development of the Gwadar Port and the Chinese navy's westward move can pose a threat to India.

Pakistan seeks acquisition of military power beyond its economic sustainability. It lacks maritime capability essential to secure its ports at Gwadar and Karachi. With an aircraft carrier, it can have a chance of contesting the much superior Indian Navy's expected attempts at a blockade of Karachi.

seaboard. Deng and the subsequent leadership made the cardinal error of not commencing the early modernisation of PLAN, which could ensure balanced contestation against potential adversaries whose combined naval power could block China's energy and container traffic, thus starving its growth. That would be a major red line against China's tolerance, but no sensible nation ever wishes an adversary to come near a potential sensitivity such as a red line.

Domination of both the East and South China Seas is not as big a challenge because of the proximity of Chinese naval bases. It is the security of the SLOC in the Indian Ocean which could pose a problem, should the standoff against potential adversaries

reach such a contingency. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands, just west of the Straits of Malacca, combine to bring about the Malacca effect, a deep perception of insecurity in the Chinese strategic matrix. Although China has been making attempts at securing bases in South Asia to overcome this disadvantage, the fructification of these to a level of placement of naval assets has yet to be reached. It has, however, secured for itself a foothold in Djibouti by leasing the Port of Doraleh.

With perceived anti-China security equations in the making ('Quad' being one of them), China is looking at options. Deployment of a carrier group off Djibouti will be perceived as a naked show of strength, although

the US has recently moved a carrier group into the Middle East to threaten Iran and secure its assets against Russian threats. This is a momentary development; in the long run, China needs partnerships with navies that can extend its interests in the west Indian Ocean. For this, the Pakistan navy fits the bill.

Pakistan seeks acquisition of military power beyond its economic sustainability. With a 6.5 lakh-strong army and a reasonably powerful air force, it lacks maritime capability, essential to secure its ports at Gwadar and Karachi. With a carrier, it can have a chance of contesting the much superior Indian Navy's expected attempts at a blockade of Karachi. It could also draw out the Indian Navy further into the Arabian Sea and even threaten a part of Indian trade, energy traffic and offshore assets.

Pakistan's submarine capability of five diesel-powered vessels is being bolstered by the reported sale of eight submarines (none nuclear-powered) by China, four of which are likely to be provided by 2023 and four more by 2028. India has 15 submarines (two nuclear-powered), and two more conventional ones are likely to be inducted. However, it is not the immediate future that India needs to be concerned about. It is with the further development of Gwadar Port and creeping boldness of the PLAN to move westwards with fuller capacity that will pose a greater threat.

Lastly, while the strategic partnership with the US looks upon the extended Indo-Pacific region, the relationship appears more centred on the Pacific segment and less on the Indian Ocean. This potential fructification should spur India to more meaningful security in the west Indian Ocean.

Reciprocity hallmark of interim Budget



TS RAMAKRISHNAN
PUBLIC POLICY ANALYST

THERE were several interesting announcements in the interim Budget, of which two stand out.

First, financial support of Rs 6,000 per annum in three instalments, directly transferred into the bank account of farmers with landholdings up to 2 hectares. The Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme would benefit 12 crore farmers and cost Rs 75,000 crore annually to the exchequer. There was immediate criticism that this financial aid amounts to just Rs 17 per day for the farmer. Both the Centre and state governments have been supporting the cause of farmers through various welfare schemes, be it subsidised seeds, manure, pesticides, low-interest loans to buy farm equipment, crop insurance in the form of Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana or an increase in the minimum support price (MSP) for some crops. The governments of Telangana and Odisha have already announced and implemented support schemes on the lines of Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi. So, Rs 6,000 per year is not a stand-alone gesture for the farmers. Moreover, it will be given to medium and small farmers. Why? Any welfare scheme should be a targeted one, not universal. It is the small farms that achieve much higher productivity than the big ones.

The most critical problem the NDA government faced when it came to power was the double-digit inflation arising out of the Consumer Price Index (CPI). The Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of inflation was 10.1 per cent between 2009 and 2014. The basket of



GRATITUDE: The government has rewarded farmers' efforts to improve crop productivity.

food items alone constitutes about 60 per cent of the CPI. In 2014, the price of pulses reached Rs 200 per kg and the prices of fruits and vegetables showed enormous fluctuations. The various schemes that were announced by the Union Government to increase the production of pulses and other farm produce have been well utilised by the farmers. They produced grains, pulses, vegetables and fruits that have outpaced the demand. The surplus production of agricultural commodities contributed significantly to keep the food inflation, and hence the overall inflation, in check. The CAGR of inflation in the past four and a half years is 4.6 per cent. The price rise, which is normally the most prominent poll issue among the electorate, is not a plank in the 2019

General Election. The government knows that this became possible due to the tireless efforts of farmers in improving farm productivity. Hence, as a mark of respect, the government decided to pay Rs 6,000 to small and marginal farmers.

The second key announcement is the income tax rebate given to those who earn up to Rs 5 lakh per annum. Since 2014, the NDA government increased the minimum taxable income from Rs 2 lakh to Rs 2.5 lakh, decreased the tax rate from 10 per cent to 5 per cent for the income range of Rs 2.5 lakh and Rs 5 lakh, and introduced the standard deduction of Rs 40,000. Given the low inflation in the past four years, the benefits announced by the government are more than enough. Then, why did the

government announce a rebate of income tax for those who earn up to Rs 5 lakh per annum? After demonetisation, the government has been promoting digital transactions through Universal Payment Interface (UPI) like BHIM. Then, it introduced GST to bring those who have been evading indirect taxes into the tax ambit. These structural reforms were essentially aimed at taxing those who evade taxes (direct and indirect) and thereby reducing the tax burden on the salaried class whose income tax component was deducted at source. As per a report prepared by the Income Tax Department, for every \$100 that the US government is supposed to receive as income tax, it gets \$80, whereas the Indian government receives only Rs 25 for every Rs 100 it expects to get. However, due to GST, which tracks the movement of goods from raw material to finished products through electronic trailing, indirect tax evasion is now difficult; with proper accounting of business and trade, direct tax evasion also becomes tough. Even after reducing GST substantially compared to the previous component of central excise and sales tax or value-added tax, indirect tax collections are robust. Once the GST regime is streamlined, the taxable income would increase as tax evasion would reduce further, leaving scope for the government to reduce the tax burden.

By giving income tax rebate to those who earn up to Rs 5 lakh, the government has conveyed to the people that if

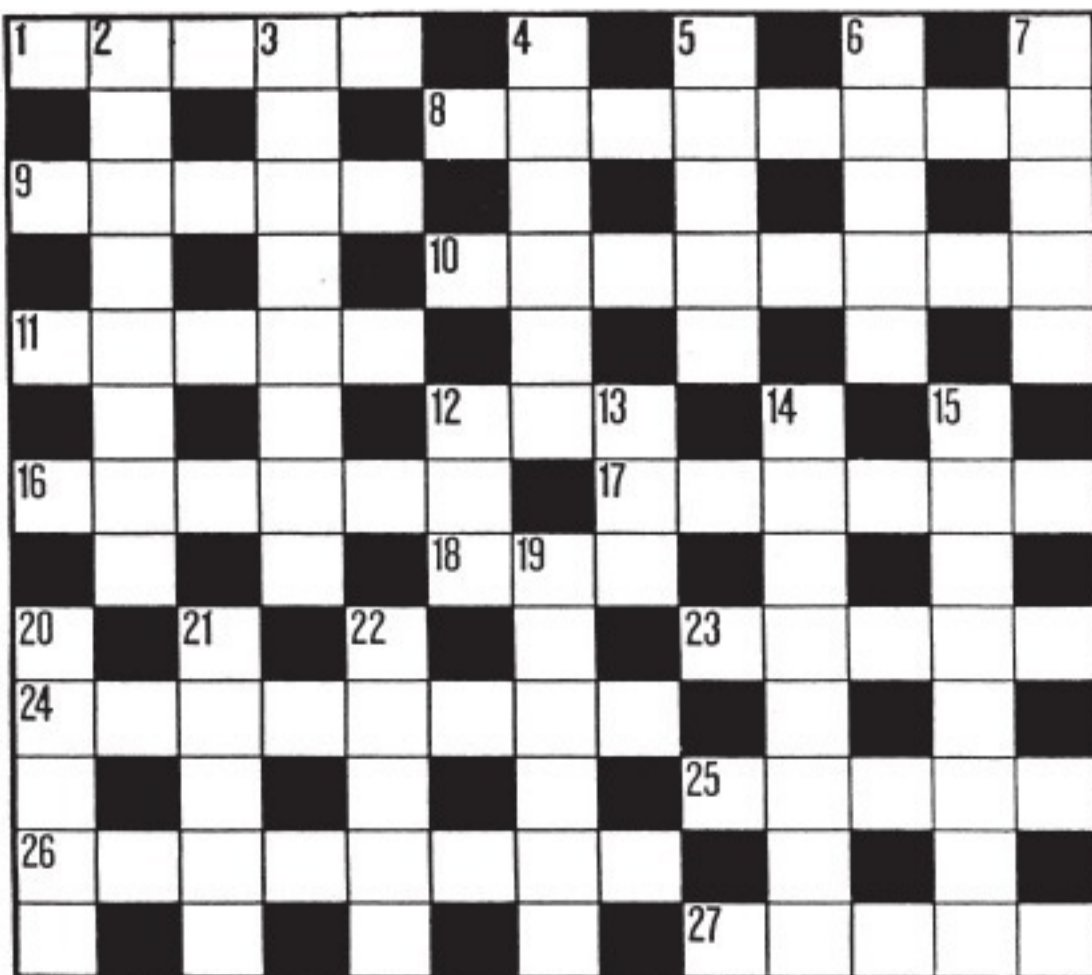
they cooperate in expanding the tax base and be honest taxpayers, it would be reciprocated in the form of tax cuts.

Income tax for those who earn up to Rs 5 lakh is nil. But, what about those who earn one rupee more than Rs 5 lakh? Don't they have to pay Rs 13,021 as income tax? There are many provisions, such as standard deduction of Rs 50,000, deduction of Rs 1.5 lakh through Section 80C, deduction of Rs 50,000 through the National Pension Scheme, and deduction of Rs 2 lakh (interest on the housing loan). With the utilisation of these exemptions, people earning as much as Rs 7-9 lakh will get full rebate from income tax and not just those who earn only up to Rs 5 lakh.

Earlier governments followed the approach of collecting taxes from those who were left with no option but to pay taxes, such as the salaried class, and burdened them with more taxes, while hardly making efforts to bring to book the tax evaders. This government has brought systemic changes so that all those who do business pay indirect taxes and all those who earn pay taxes as per their income tax bracket. A good and effective government should show gratitude to those sections of the population that pay taxes honestly and increase productivity (farmers in this case) and be strict and harsh with those who evade taxes. Through the interim Budget, the government's message is clear: We respect and reward all those who contribute sincerely to the nation's development.

The Union Government's announcements for small farmers and salaried taxpayers are aimed at acknowledging their sincere contribution to the nation's development. Financial aid of ₹6,000 per year for farmers is not a stand-alone gesture. Both the Centre and state governments have been supporting their cause through various welfare schemes.

QUICK CROSSWORD



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

Across: 1 In question, 6 Visa, 10 Award, 11 Regretful, 12 Eruption, 13 Earth, 15 On paper, 17 Cropper, 19 Endless, 21 Missing, 22 Aroma, 24 External, 27 Hysterics, 28 Built, 29 Rate, 30 Ascendancy.
Down: 1 Ivan, 2 Quadruped, 3 End up, 4 Terrier, 5 Organic, 7 Infer, 8 All the rage, 9 Generous, 14 Forefather, 16 Prepared, 18 Privation, 20 Species, 21 Matisse, 23 Onset, 25 Rabid, 26 Stay.

ACROSS

- 1 Temporary difficulty (5)
- 8 Go on a spree (4, 2, 2)
- 9 Approach under cover (5)
- 10 Utterly exhausted (5, 3)
- 11 Postpone (5)
- 12 Prefix for new (3)
- 16 Southeast African country (6)
- 17 Loiter (6)
- 18 A cover (3)
- 23 Traitor (5)
- 24 Naturally (2, 6)
- 25 Cheerful (5)
- 26 Alone (2, 6)
- 27 Sordid (5)

DOWN

- 2 Virtually assured (2, 3, 3)
- 3 Blind alley (3-2-3)
- 4 Holy (6)
- 5 State of high excitement (5)
- 6 Lower oneself morally (5)
- 7 Flood (5)
- 12 Zero (3)
- 13 Aged (3)
- 14 From now on (2,6)
- 15 In each year (3,5)
- 19 Treat with contempt (6)
- 20 Leisure pursuit (5)
- 21 Pungent (5)
- 22 Overly decorative (5)

SU DO KU

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

V. EASY

CALENDAR

FEBRUARY 9, 2019 SATURDAY

- Vikrami Samvat 2075
- Shaka Samvat 1940
- Magh Shaka 20
- Magh Parvishite 27
- Hijari 1440
- Shukla Paksh Tithi 4, up to 12:26 pm
- Sidha Yoga up to 12:03 pm
- Uttarabhadrapad Nakshatra up to 5:30 pm
- Moon in Pisces sign
- Gandmool start 5.30 pm
- Vasant Panchmi.

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

FORECAST

SUNSET:	SATURDAY	18:05 HRS
SUNRISE:	SUNDAY	07:08 HRS
CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	20	05
New Delhi	20	06
PUNJAB		
Amritsar	18	05
Bathinda	19	05
Jalandhar	18	05
Ludhiana	18	05
HARYANA		
Bhiwani	20	05
Hisar	21	04
Sirsa	20	05
HIMACHAL PRADESH		
Dharamsala	14	05
Manali	08	-01
Shimla	11	-01
JAMMU & KASHMIR		
Jammu	21	06
Leh	02	-05
Srinagar	06	-02
UTTARAKHAND		
Dehradun	21	06
Mussoorie	13	-01

TEMPERATURE IN °C

