



Congress and cow

The Madhya Pradesh government's use of the NSA for cattle offences is out of line

The detention of five people under the National Security Act in Madhya Pradesh last week, all of them alleged to have committed offences related to cattle laws, amounts to gross misuse of a law meant solely to prevent activities that endanger the country's security or public order. India has unfortunately become habituated to the abuse of preventive detention laws. In recent times, they have been wrongly invoked against political dissenters and vocal critics, with total disregard for constitutional freedoms. The latest instances point to a new form of misuse. This is possibly the first time that a law that provides for a maximum of one year in prison through an executive order without trial or bail is being used against those suspected of offences against cows. The implications are terrifying. It means that law-enforcers will stop at nothing to demonstrate ideological adherence to majoritarian beliefs. This poses a grave danger to the freedom of movement and vocation, as well as the dietary choices, of sections of society that do not share the majority community's reverence for the cow. In the first case in Khandwa district, the police, who recovered a cow carcass, traced three men who had allegedly killed the animal. In the second case, authorities in Agar Malwa district claim there was some disturbance due to two men who were allegedly transporting cows. The ostensible reason to book them under the NSA is that they were likely to cause disruption of peace. This is too flimsy a ground to invoke so stringent a law, especially when there is no evidence of security or order being under grave threat.

In its order last year directing a series of measures against mob violence and public lynching, of which those transporting cows were frequent victims, the Supreme Court had warned against the dangers of a socio-political framework based on disrespect for an inclusive social order, and wanted the state to take preventive and remedial measures. In its apparent eagerness to prevent incidents that may lead to a communal backlash, the Madhya Pradesh government is detaining potential victims to prevent them from indulging in provocative acts! In invoking the NSA in respect of minor offences, solely out of fear of aggressive protests by right-wing Hindu groups, the Congress regime in Madhya Pradesh is displaying utter cravenness. It is not clear why the police is not content with prosecuting them under laws that ban cow slaughter. There is some unease among Congress leaders over these actions of the party's new government in the State. However, it is not enough for the party to voice mild disapproval of the Kamal Nath regime's actions: its leadership has to denounce the gross misuse of the law to mollify cow vigilantes and the short-sighted aim of neutralising the BJP's campaign that the Congress is against Hindu beliefs. The State government must revoke the detention.

No zero-sum games

India and the U.S. must work to halt trade hostilities urgently

There are alarm bells in India over a possible decision by the U.S. Trade Representative to withdraw the Generalised System of Preferences status. Under this, India is able to export about 2,000 product lines to the U.S. under zero tariff. The revocation of the GSP, which was first extended to India in 1976 as part of a global concession by the U.S. to help developing countries build their economies, will be a blow to Indian exporters, and the biggest in a series of measures taken by the Trump administration against India to reduce its trade deficit. President Donald Trump's case on what he calls "unequal tariffs" from India rests on the trade relationship in favour of India: Indian exports to the U.S. in 2017-18 stood at \$47.9 billion, while imports were \$26.7 billion. The measures are in line with Mr. Trump's campaign promises. On the matter of Harley-Davidson motorcycles, he spoke directly to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on at least three occasions, demanding that India zero out tariffs to match U.S. rates on Indian motorcycles. In March 2018, the U.S. began imposing tariffs on several Indian products, and in April, the USTR began a review of India's GSP status, based on complaints of trade barriers from India it had received from the dairy industry and manufacturers of medical devices. In November the U.S. withdrew GSP status on at least 50 Indian products.

In retaliation, India proposed tariffs of about \$235 million on 29 American goods, but has put off implementing these five times in the past year in the hope that a negotiated trade settlement will come through. The latest deadline expires on March 1. India has also attempted to address the trade deficit with purchase of American oil, energy and aircraft. There have been dozens of rounds of talks between officials over the past few months, but no breakthrough. U.S. officials say the decision on data localisation for all companies operating in India, and the more recent tightening norms for FDI in e-commerce have aggravated the situation. Both sides should work towards calling a halt to trade hostilities and speed up efforts for a comprehensive trade "package", rather than try to match each concern product by product. The U.S. must realise that India is heading into elections, and offer more flexibility in the next few months. India must keep in mind that the larger, global picture is about U.S.-China trade issues, and if a trade deal with the U.S. is reached, India could be the biggest beneficiary of business deals lost by China. The visit of U.S. Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross to India this week will be watched not as much for substance, as for signals that New Delhi and Washington understand the urgency in breaking the deadlock.

Caught between two extremisms

Wahhabi influence and Hindu nationalism are responsible for the radicalisation of a small segment of Muslim youth



MOHAMMED AYOOB

News reports about occasional acts of terrorism outside of Jammu and Kashmir, which for historical reasons forms a special case, attributed to young Indian Muslims have appeared intermittently in the press. In addition, several recent reports suggest that global jihadi organisations such as the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) have recruited a few Indian Muslim youth primarily by exploiting the latter's local grievances to serve their own global goals.

Many analysts, Indian and foreign, had assumed until recently that Indian Muslims were immune to extremist propaganda because of both the syncretic and moderate nature of Indian Islam and the democratic and secular character of the country which made them feel they were equal participants in the political process. Both these assumptions are now problematic, as several factors have been at work in the past three decades that challenge this conventional wisdom.

Wahhabi influence

The first is the increasing influence of Saudi Wahhabism and related forms of Salafism on Islam as practised in the Indian subcontinent. This is the result of several inter-related variables but the most important of these is the vast increase in employment opportunities in the energy-rich West Asian countries following the oil

boom of the 1970s. This resulted in many Indians of all faiths temporarily locating to these countries in search of higher earnings. While a much larger number of Indians belonging to other religions moved to West Asia in search of lucrative jobs, both white and blue-collar, the religio-cultural impact of the encounter with the fundamentalist form of Islam followed in these countries, especially Saudi Arabia, on a section of Indian Muslim emigrants was qualitatively different.

Several of these temporary migrants returned to India enamoured with the obscurantist ethos of these oil-rich countries. This fascination was publicly exhibited above all in the adoption by a section of Muslim women, often under patriarchal pressure, of an ultra-conservative dress code, including the niqab, or full face covering, popular in Saudi Arabia and some other West Asian countries. This dress code is very different from the traditional concept of purdah (covering up or modesty) practised by conservative Muslim families in the Indian subcontinent.

Protected by Sufism

But this display of presumed orthodoxy constituted merely the tip of the iceberg. The impact of Wahhabi/Salafi Islam on the mindset of a segment of returnees, who also passed on their preferences to a much larger group of relatives and acquaintances already impressed by the former's newly acquired prosperity, was more profound. Islamic beliefs and practices among some Indian Muslims began to approximate the harsh Wahhabi dogma, which stands in stark contrast to the indigenous version of Islam in India. The vast majority of Muslims in the Indian subcontinent belong to the Hanafi sect based on



the most liberal school of Islamic jurisprudence.

Moreover, traditionally Indian Islam has been greatly influenced by Sufi teachings and is, therefore, tolerant and accepting of religious diversity. Visitors to major Sufi shrines, such as those of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti in Ajmer and Nizamuddin Aulia in Delhi, where people of all confessions come to pray and seek blessings, can testify to the syncretic spirit of Indian Islam. Consequently, it harbours natural defences against extremism in belief and practice. The ideological infiltration of Wahhabism/Salafism has eroded some of these defences and made a section of Muslims more insular and, therefore, open to extremist ideas.

Equally important, the spectacular rise of Hindutva or Hindu nationalism from the 1990s has had a major psychological impact on a section of Muslim youth, prompting their estrangement from the national mainstream. Inter-religious riots in which Muslims suffered disproportionately had been common in India since Independence. In some cases the police killed Muslim youth in fake encounters. The Hashimpura massacre in Uttar Pradesh by members of the Provincial Armed Constabulary in 1987 was the most macabre example of such incidents.

However, until the 1990s the vast majority of Indian Muslims

treated such occurrences as aberrations and their belief in the secular and non-discriminatory character of the Indian state remained unshaken. The demolition in 1992 of the Babri mosque by a Hindu mob under the direction of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) luminaries and the riots that ensued, in which scores of Muslims lost their lives, shook the confidence of many Muslims in the secular character of the Indian state. What was most galling was the Central government's apathy in the face of this brazen act of mob violence despite the fact that it had been forewarned. This event began the process of alienation among a section of Muslim youth from the Indian state.

This feeling grew exponentially a decade later in 2002 with the massacre of about 1,000 Muslims in Gujarat under BJP rule to avenge the death of 59 kar sevaks who were burnt to death in a train at Godhra after an altercation with local Muslims. What added insult to injury was the inaction, or, as the Human Rights Watch report on the bloodbath put it, the refusal of the state machinery to protect Muslim citizens.

More recently, the disenchantment caused by these earlier events has been reinforced by the lynching of several Muslims in northern and central India on the pretext that they were taking cows for slaughter or eating beef. The lynching of Mohammad Akhlaq in Dadri, in western Uttar Pradesh, in 2015 on suspicion that he had stored beef in his house was the most chilling example of such incidents. It was followed by additional acts of mob violence carried out with relative impunity by the so-called gau rakshak (cow protector) vigilantes. Such incidents have led to a widespread feeling among In-

dian Muslims that the state, instead of providing security to them, now colludes with those determined to intimidate them into submission. This series of actions and reactions makes it evident that the growth of Hindu nationalism has acted as a major stimulus for the radicalisation of a section of Muslim society in India and that the two phenomena feed off each other.

Onus on governing elites

Opinion leaders and religious scholars from within the Muslim community have the primary duty to confront and defeat the malign Wahhabi-Salafi influence on Indian Muslims in order to preserve the liberal and syncretic nature of Indian Islam thus pre-empting the spread of extremist ideology among Muslim youth. However, the impact of the growth of Hindu nationalism on the Muslim psyche can be countered only by the policies and actions of the governing elites at the Centre and in the States. Only they can take concrete steps, such as quick and impartial action against those responsible for creating mayhem in the name of religion, to reassure Muslims that the state will not shirk its responsibility of providing them physical security and ensuring that they are treated with fairness and dignity. This will be the best antidote to the percolation of radical ideas among Muslim youth by removing their sense of alienation from the Indian state that in the long run can threaten the country's security.

Mohammed Ayooob is University Distinguished Professor Emeritus of International Relations, Michigan State University and Non-Resident Senior Fellow, Center for Global Policy, Washington DC

The solution is universal

Strengthening the MGNREGA would be more prudent than a targeted cash transfer plan like PM-KISAN



RAJENDRAN NARAYANAN & DEBMALYA NANDY

Rural distress has hit unprecedented levels. According to news reports, unemployment is the highest in 45 years. To allay some misgivings of the distress, one of the announcements in the Budget speech was that "vulnerable landholding farmer families, having cultivable land up to 2 hectares, will be provided direct income support at the rate of ₹ 6,000 per year".

This cash transfer scheme has been called Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN). The Ministry of Agriculture has written to State governments to prepare a database of all eligible beneficiaries along with their Aadhaar numbers, and update land records "expeditiously". The letter further states that changes in land records after February 1, 2019 shall not be considered for this scheme.

A comparison

Undoubtedly, farmers' distress needs urgent attention but let's see if the PM-KISAN is a reasonable solution. Let us first compare some basic numbers with the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). For example, if two members of a household in Jharkhand work under MGNREGA (picture) for 30 days, they would earn ₹10,080 and

a household of two in Haryana would earn ₹16,860 in 30 days. Jharkhand has the lowest daily MGNREGA wage rate, and Haryana the highest. Put simply, a month of MGNREGA earnings for a household is more than a year's income support through PM-KISAN anywhere in the country.

PM-KISAN is a targeted cash transfer programme and MGNREGA is a universal programme. Any rural household willing to do manual work is eligible under the Act. According to the 2011 Socio-Economic and Caste Census, around 40% of rural households are landless and depend on manual labour. The landless can earn through the MGNREGA but are not eligible for the PM-KISAN scheme. Notwithstanding the meagre amount, the PM-KISAN might be pitting the landless against a small farmer.

Further, it is unclear how tenant farmers, those without titles, and women farmers would be within the ambit of the scheme. There is also substantial evidence to demonstrate that universal schemes are less prone to corruption than targeted schemes. In targeted programmes, it is very common to have errors of exclusion, i.e., genuine beneficiaries get left out. Such errors go unrecorded and people continue to be left out. It is in some of these contexts that strengthening an existing universal programme such as the MGNREGA would have been a prudent move instead of introducing a hasty targeted cash transfer programme.

The Agriculture Ministry's letter states that "funds will be electron-



ically transferred to the beneficiary's bank account by [Government of India] through State Notional Account on a pattern similar to MGNREGS". There are important lessons to be learned from the MGNREGA implementation. The Centre has frequently tinkered with the wage payments system in the MGNREGA. It's creditable that timely generation of pay-orders have improved, but contrary to the Centre's claims, less than a third of the payments were made on time. And in contempt of the Supreme Court orders, the Centre alone has been causing a delay of more than 50 days in disbursing wages.

Field realities

Moreover, repeated changes in processes result in a hurried bureaucratic reorientation on the ground, and much chaos among workers and field functionaries alike. Field functionaries are pushed to meet stiff targets. Being short-staffed and inadequately trained, this results in many technical and unforeseen errors. A case in point is the rushed manner in which Aadhaar has been implemented for the MGNREGA.

Several MGNREGA payments have been rejected, diverted, or frozen as a consequence. In the

last four years alone, more than ₹1,300 crore of the MGNREGS wage payments have been rejected due to technical errors such as incorrect account numbers or faulty Aadhaar mapping. There have been no clear national guidelines to rectify these. There are numerous cases of MGNREGS payments getting diverted to Airtel wallets and ICICI bank accounts. In a recently concluded survey on common service centres in Jharkhand for Aadhaar-based payments, it was found that 42% of the biometric authentications failed in the first attempt, compelling them to come later. This continued harassment faced by people would have been a more humane question to address rather than brushing them aside as "teething problems" and build a new scheme on similar shaky platforms.

The success of the PM-KISAN is contingent on there being reliable digital land records and reliable rural banking infrastructure – both are questionable at best. While ₹75,000 crore has been earmarked for this scheme, the MGNREGA continues to be pushed to a severe crisis. The MGNREGA allocation for 2019-20 is ₹60,000 crore, lower than the revised budget of ₹61,084 crore in 2018-19. In the last four years, on an average, around 20% of the Budget allocation has been unpaid pending payments from previous years. Thus, subtracting the pending liabilities, in real terms, the Budget allocation has been lower than 2010-11. Despite a letter to the Prime Minister by citizens and MPs in January 2019, (as of February 8) all MGNREGA funds have been ex-

hausted. While the country stares at an impending drought, workers languish in unemployment. The MGNREGA is neither an income support programme nor just an asset creation programme. It is a labour programme meant to strengthen participatory democracy through community works. It is a legislative mechanism to strengthen the constitutional principle of the right to life. That the MGNREGA works have demonstrably strong multiplier effects are yet another reason to improve its implementation. Despite all this, the MGNREGA wage rates in 18 States have been kept lower than the States' minimum agricultural wage rates. This acts as a deterrent for the landless. Yet, work demand has been 33% more than the employment provided this year – underscoring the desperation to work. By routinely under-funding this Act, the Bharatiya Janata Party government continues to undermine the constitutional guarantee.

In an employment programme, adequacy of fund allocation and respectable wages are crucial, so meaningless claims of "highest ever allocation" and other dubious claims through a management information system are unhealthy for democracy.

At a time of such acute distress, does it not behove the Central government to improve the existing universal infrastructure of the MGNREGA before plunging into a programme pretending to augment farmers' income?

Rajendran Narayanan teaches at Azim Premji University, Bengaluru. Debmalya Nandy is a social worker

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Rafale deal revelations

It was surprising that *The Hindu* should have printed half-truths without ascertaining the full details, and given ammunition to Congress President Rahul Gandhi who has exhausted his torrent of abuse against the Prime Minister and has only been looking for additional material with which to denigrate the country's leader (Page 1, 'Exclusive', 'MoD protested against PMO undermining Rafale negotiations', February 8). The ethics of journalism warrant that the comments by the then Defence Minister should have also been published. Mr. Gandhi is only misleading people with 'shoot and scoot'

comments for his political gains. His unjustified and abusive comments against the Prime Minister will surely rebound on him and the Congress party.

R.V. REDDY,
Secunderabad

■ An indelible impression has gained currency that there is some hidden agenda/motive behind the publication of the "exclusive". Officials associated with the Defence Ministry and the Indian negotiating team have categorically denied the charge of the Prime Minister's Office having been involved in parallel negotiations. The highest court of the land too did not find anything adverse in the

deal. There is not even an iota of evidence to show any kickback/quid pro quo. Then why jump the gun and cry foul? Defence procurement deals and negotiations are highly classified and are not subjects for discussion and debate in the public domain. As a well-wisher, I find it disturbing that the paper's enviable image of upholding the highest standards of professional journalism stands tarnished.

S. SESHADRI,
Chennai

■ I am shocked by letters from some readers castigating *The Hindu* for its revelations. As a long-time reader, I appreciate the efforts of the paper to bring out the truth in the public

domain – which no other media outlet has done. Notwithstanding stout denials from the government, there remain unanswered pertinent questions. The common man wants to know: how a new company was preferred over a well-experienced defence public sector unit; why there was a three-fold increase in the price of the jets and whether the private company which has now been given the contract is indeed capable of meeting its contractual obligations in light of the problems being faced by its parent company.

J. ANANTHA PADMANABHAN,
Tiruchi

■ That the then Defence Minister – who is naturally a

part of the politics of his party and its government – tried to soothe the concerns raised by his Ministry officials is neither surprising nor pertinent to the report. The report was specifically about the negotiating team's concerns and frustration over the PMO's interference. Those readers who appear to be "disappointed" that the *Hindu*'s "standards", "reputation" and "credibility" have been "besmirched" should well remember that it was this very same newspaper that exposed the corruption in the Bofors deal. It is hypocritical if these readers who are reverential about this paper's reportage on Bofors back then, feel angry now over the reporting on

the Rafale deal. Instead, as it was then, the government is now morally bound to order an impartial inquiry. 'Rafale' is an issue that has everyone, political or otherwise, asking for answers.

S. SANKAR,
Thiruvananthapuram

On Test cricket

Muttiah Muralitharan, the world's highest wicket-taker in Test cricket, may feel that Test cricket will slowly lose its charm ('Sport' page, February 10). But for true cricket fans, Test cricket is real cricket. An ODI or a T20 match is a game of chance. Test cricket is a game of skill.

K. PRADEEP,
Chennai

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Links beyond boundaries

To insist that the Aryans were a distinct people is to impose present-day borders on the remote past



ROMILA THAPAR

Problems with the definition of 'Aryan' continue even though the term was first used a couple of centuries ago, writes eminent historian Romila Thapar in the foreword to Which Of Us Are Aryans: Rethinking the Concept of Our Origins. In the book, Professor Thapar and other scholars and experts critically examine the Aryan question by analysing history, genetics, early Vedic compositions, archaeology and linguistics, and challenge various myths and theories doing the rounds. Professor Thapar examines the definition of 'Aryan', its earliest use in Vedic and Iranian compositions, and the change it underwent. An extract:

In any discussion of the 'Aryan' a good place to begin with would be to set out the space and time of the subject. In terms of space we tend to think only of the geography of the Indian subcontinent and the boundaries of pre-Partition India as they existed for British India. The focus is then narrowed down to north-western India. But the geographical area of the archaeological and linguistic evidence is far more extensive. The links therefore are way beyond just the boundaries of north-west British India and involve some familiarity with more distant cultures.

In terms of archaeology, the more extensive earlier reach was that of the Harappa Culture or the Indus Civilisation. From Shortughai in the Pamirs, evidence of Harappan settlements extends all the way south to the Indus plain and further to the Arabian Sea, westwards into Baluchistan and Makran and touching the Indo-Iranian borderlands, and eastwards into Punjab and Haryana. More recently finds have been located in Oman in the Arabian peninsula, particularly in the vicinity of copper mines. The Harappans were known to have had trading relations with the Gulf and Mesopotamia. People of the ancient past did not confine themselves to one place. They travelled, migrated, traded and communicated

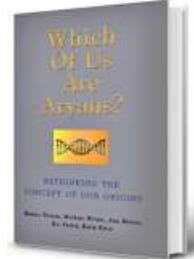


"Varieties of Indo-Aryan and Indo-Iranian speakers can only be given an approximate geographical location which is not as firm as that of archaeological cultures." A furnace discovered at an Indus Valley Civilisation site in Binjor, Rajasthan. • V. V. KRISHNAN

across vast distances. This would probably have been too vast an area to host a single, unified culture. We have to consider the possibility of a multiplicity of cultures and societies, some fairly isolated and others in close contact but possibly functioning under a recognised and similar sociopolitical rubric.

Covering extensive areas

Varieties of Indo-Aryan and Indo-Iranian speakers can only be given an approximate geographical location which is not as firm as that of archaeological cultures. The geographical area of all these languages is extensive but not all are referred to in the same text and they vary with the text. The wider geography of Proto-Indo-European takes a different direction from that of the Harappa Culture. Northern Syria and Anatolia are the locations possibly linked to Proto-Indo-Aryan, north-eastern Iran is the location for Old Iranian linked to the *Avesta*, and the speakers of Indo-Aryan as known from the *Rig Veda* are restricted to the Indo-Iranian borderlands and Punjab up to the Doab, which is geographically a small area. The history of the Indo-Aryan language has been extended backwards in time to the ancestral language of Indo-European and this brings in adjoining parts of Central Asia. The presence of Indo-Aryan in the Ganga plain is attested to in the post-Rig Vedic period.



■ Which Of Us Are Aryans: Rethinking the Concept of Our Origins
Romila Thapar and Others
Aleph
₹499

Thus although the focus is often only on the Punjab we should not forget that there was also a large area of West Asia and Central Asia that had a bearing on this history, even if the Indo-Aryan of the *Rig Veda* was not spoken in such a vast geographical area. The need for familiarity with the archaeological and linguistic history of other areas further complicates the problem. The geographical overlap between the Harappan sites and the place names associated with Indo-Aryan and Indo-Iranian is a limited area covering virtually only the Indo-Iranian borderlands and the Punjab. The thrust of the Harappan locations is southwards with maritime links westwards along the Persian Gulf, whereas the Indo-Aryan speakers show up overlaid and move south-eastwards to the Ganga plain.

The chronology of the two is also different. The time bracket covers many centuries. There are some dates well established among historians and archaeologists. The Harappan urban cultures, referred to as the

Mature Harappan, date from about 2600 to about 1700 BCE, after urbanism slowly peters out. The *Rig Veda* is generally dated to the period after the decline of urbanism and would therefore date from about 1500 BCE or a couple of centuries later. The subsequent Vedas – the *Samaveda*, *Yajurveda* and *Atharvaveda* – relating also to the Ganga plain are dated to the early first millennium BCE.

Placing the Vedas

However there are those who differ and would like to date the *Rig Veda* to 3000 BCE or even earlier and identify its culture with the Harappan cities. They maintain that the Aryans are indigenous and there was therefore not even a migration of any kind, let alone any invasion as was thought in the nineteenth century. To maintain this position it is even said that the *Rig Veda* is prior to the Harappa Culture or that the authors of the Harappa Culture were Rigvedic Aryans. These views have become a matter of rather extensive controversy to say the least. This latter chronology, apart from not being able to muster firm evidence, creates huge problems for the historian. The discrepancy between Harappan urbanism and Rigvedic agro-pastoralism negates equivalence. Such an early chronology for the *Rig Veda* would, for example, create a gap of at least 1,500 years between the *Rig Veda* and the other Vedas and therefore break what is known to be the continuity between the four Vedas. Taking it back to the third millennium BCE creates major problems of parallels and correlations with archaeological evidence. It leads to a long chronological hiatus between the first and the later three Vedas – the *Samaveda*, *Yajurveda* and *Atharvaveda* – as the dating of these to the first millennium BC remains firm.

The insistence that the Aryans were a distinct people and that they were indigenous to the territory of British India is to impose present-day boundaries on the remote past, which makes the statement anachronistic. Concepts such as 'indigenous' and 'alien' have to be precisely defined, which they are not in this case, and the definition has to conform to the time context for when it is being used.

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FROM THE READERS' EDITOR

Major investigations are never stand-alone stories

It takes several reports on a topic to give us the larger picture



A.S. PANNEERSELVAN

What are the crucial journalistic takeaways from the two in-depth reports by N. Ram on L'Affaire Rafale, "Modi's decision to buy 36 Rafales shot the price of each jet up by 41%" (January 18, 2019) and "Defence Ministry protested against PMO undermining Rafale negotiations" (February 8, 2019)? When this newspaper broke the Bofors story, there were questions posed to the Congress government and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. But in the case of the Rafale stories, some readers, instead of questioning the government and the Prime Minister, are questioning journalists and journalism.

Rafale takeaways

First, let's understand the context in which these stories were published. The ruling government had submitted a note to the Supreme Court that said the negotiations were conducted only by the seven-member team led by the Deputy Chief of Air Staff. There was no mention of the involvement of the Prime Minister's Office. This was repeated by the Defence Minister in the Lok Sabha on January 4, 2019. The major objection to Mr. Ram's first story was that the report did not say anything new and was therefore not an exclusive one. The crucial finding of that report was that it firmly established that the cost of each aircraft went up by 41% because of distributing 'non-recurring' costs attributed to the 'design and development' of 13 India-Specific Enhancements over 36 instead of 126 aircraft. The report also established that the government did not leverage the counter offer from the Eurofighter Typhoon consortium.

One of the contributors to this newspaper, K.R.A. Narasiah, took strong exception to the February 8th report, which showed how parallel negotiations by the Prime Minister's Office weakened the Indian negotiating team's position. He wrote: "It is a pity that N. Ram, a seasoned and respected journalist, shot from the hip in his anxiety to discredit the Modi government in the Rafale deal. In fact, conveniently omitting the portion of

the note by the Defence Minister, the entire report gives a twisted meaning and has brought down the reputation of *The Hindu* by several notches."

It is important to recognise that the note from the Defence Minister does not contradict the arguments of *The Hindu's* story but, in an oblique manner, validates it.

Let's also look at the dates to understand the sequence of events. On November 24, 2015, Deputy Secretary S.K. Sharma put out a note registering protest against the parallel negotiation by the Prime Minister's Office. On December 1, the then Defence Secretary, G. Mohan Kumar, made this official notation in his own hand: "RM may pl. see. It is desirable that such discussions be avoided by the PMO as it undermines our negotiating position seriously." To this, then Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar responded on January 19, 2016: "It appears PMO and French President office are monitoring the progress of the issue which was an outcome of the summit meeting. Para 5 appears to be an over reaction. Defence secretary (G. Mohan Kumar) may resolve the matter in consultation with principal secretary to PM."

negotiating position seriously." To this, then Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar responded on January 19, 2016: "It appears PMO and French President office are monitoring the progress of the issue which was an outcome of the summit meeting. Para 5 appears to be an over reaction. Defence secretary (G. Mohan Kumar) may resolve the matter in consultation with principal secretary to PM."

Drips and drabs

In a different report, "Four reasons why the attacks on *The Hindu's* Rafale story are shallow and self-implicating" (<http://bit.ly/RafaleAnalysis>), Varghese K. George explains the salient features of serious and ongoing investigative reportage. He explains how no single report on a topic is the last word on it and that investigative stories come in dribs and drabs. Mr. Parrikar was careful in his note and used the word "appears" only with reference to Para 5. Further, he did not reject the fears of his bureaucratic colleagues when it came to Para 4, which read: "The discussions between Diplomatic Adviser to the French Defence Minister and Joint Secretary to PM tantamount to parallel negotiation."

The stories gain importance because they draw our attention to the fact that both the Supreme Court and Parliament have been deliberately misled. N. Ram's relentless journalism shows how our systems are not transparent and lack accountability. It has helped to call out the deliberate lies and the weakening of our legal institutions governed by the growth of the jurisprudence of the "sealed cover".

readerseditor@thehindu.co.in

SINGLE FILE

The art of the state

In his address, Amol Palekar was only shedding light on the state's insidious takeover of institutions of culture

VAISHNA ROY



Constitutional values are undermined every time someone who is invited to speak at a government or public event is cut off because her opinion is unpalatable. Yet this is the very nadir that freedom of speech in India has now reached. First, there was the unseemly cancellation of renowned writer Nayantara Sahgal's talk in January. This weekend, actor and director Amol Palekar's address at the opening of an exhibition in memory of artist Prabhakar Barwe at Mumbai's National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA) was interrupted.

As this government completes its fifth year in power, the attempts to shut down criticism are getting stronger. The difficulty lies in reconciling this fear of public disapproval with the barrage of factoids that paint a rosy picture of the achievements of the last few years. If this were indeed so, how easy it would be to say, "Speaker, do your worst. We can prove every one of your accusations wrong."

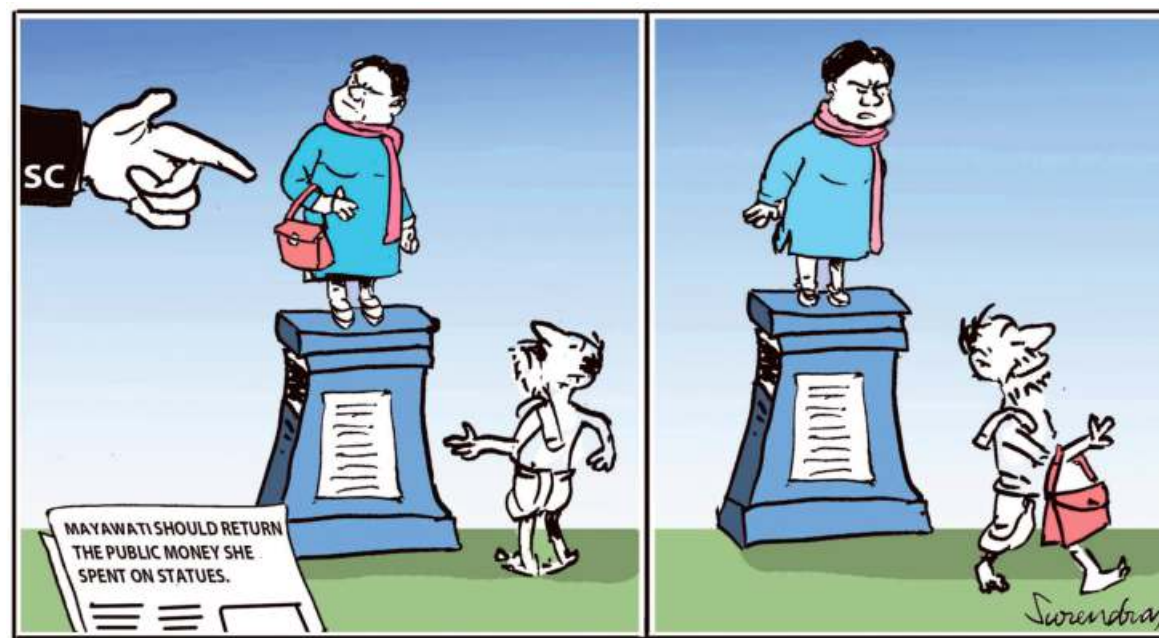
Mr. Palekar in his speech quoted the artist Rene Magritte: "We must not fear daylight just because it almost always illuminates a miserable world." But that's exactly what the authorities seem to fear nowadays: daylight. What else was Mr. Palekar doing but shedding light on the state's insidious takeover of institutions of culture and learning? He was expressing concern that the Culture Ministry, having dissolved local committees of advisory artists, might now directly decide which artists will be allowed to exhibit at the NGMAs, when he was rudely interrupted by curator Jesal Thacker.

Anyone who imagines the government should be allowed to handle arts and culture has not met the bureaucrats regularly posted as heads of art institutions and museums. For these officials, from ministries as varied as agriculture or health, these are punishment postings. Still, the worst that the arts and culture faced under the Congress was corruption and indifference. To that is now added a system of surveillance to vet everything for ideological compliance.

In 2015, the government took over the autonomous Lalit Kala Akademi (LKA), and it took three years for a non-bureaucrat chairman to be carefully placed, while most regional LKAs still don't have full-time heads. Decisions on everything from light bulbs to wall paintings are ferried from Delhi. The two regional NGMAs in Bengaluru and Mumbai scramble similarly for permissions from Delhi. Vague accusations are made in hushed tones, and ideological backgrounds discreetly checked.

There is a general feeling among the populace, perhaps fuelled by signals from the highest offices, that any criticism of the government is tantamount to criticising the country. Interestingly, NGMA director Anita Rupavatham echoed this idea. When she took the mic after Mr. Palekar was shut down, she said, "You should appreciate that this is the NGMA, a government gallery." In other words, the silencing, if not criminalising, of criticism is now complete.

The writer is an Associate Editor at *The Hindu*



DATA POINT

Discernible shift

Assembly elections held close to the Lok Sabha polls have, with caveats, provided indications of the mood of the electorate. Srinivasan Ramani tallies Assembly poll results from 2017 and 2018 onto Lok Sabha seats and compares these with seat tallies in the 2014 Lok Sabha election. The BJP registers a drop in seat terms based on this exercise

<p>Uttar Pradesh 2014 Lok Sabha: BJP+ 73, SP: 5, Cong.: 2, BSP: 0 2017 LS segments: BJP+ 71, SP: 5, BSP: 3, Cong.: 1 (extrapolated from Assembly results) 2017 Hypothetical 1: (BSP+SP+RLD alliance) BJP+ 30, BSP+SP+RLD: 50 2017 Hypothetical 2: SP+BSP+Cong.+RLD: 64, BJP: 16</p>	<p>Karnataka 2014 Lok Sabha: BJP: 17, Congress: 9, JD(S): 2 2018 LS segments: BJP: 13, Congress: 11, JD(S): 4 2018 Hypothetical: Congress+JD(S): 23, BJP: 5</p>
<p>Madhya Pradesh 2014 Lok Sabha: BJP: 27, Cong.: 2 2018 LS segments: BJP: 16, Cong.: 13</p>	<p>Chhattisgarh 2014 Lok Sabha: BJP: 10, Cong.: 1 2018 LS segments: Cong.: 10, BJP: 1</p>
<p>Rajasthan 2014 Lok Sabha: BJP: 25, Cong.: 0 2018 LS segments: BJP: 13, Cong.: 12</p>	<p>Gujarat 2014 Lok Sabha: BJP: 26, Cong.: 0 2017 LS segments: BJP: 21, Cong.: 5</p>
<p>Tripura 2014 Lok Sabha: CPI(M): 2, BJP: 0, Cong.: 0 2018 LS segments: CPI(M): 1, BJP: 1</p>	<p>Meghalaya 2014 Lok Sabha: Cong.: 1, NPP: 1 2017 LS segments: Cong.: 2</p>
<p>Nagaland 2014 Lok Sabha: NPF: 1 2018 segment: NPF: 1</p>	<p>Mizoram 2014 Lok Sabha: Cong.: 1 2017 LS segment: MNF: 1</p>
	<p>Punjab 2014 Lok Sabha: SAD+BJP: 6, AAP: 4, Congress: 3 2017 LS segment: Cong.: 12, AAP: 1</p>
	<p>Uttarakhand 2014 LS: BJP: 5, Congress: 0 2017 LS segment: BJP: 5, Cong.: 0</p>
	<p>Himachal Pradesh 2014 LS: BJP: 4, Congress: 0 2017 LS segment: BJP: 4, Cong.: 0</p>
	<p>Manipur 2014 LS: Congress: 2, BJP: 0 2017 LS segment: BJP: 1, Cong.: 1</p>
	<p>Goa 2014 LS: BJP: 2, Congress: 0 2017 LS segment: BJP: 1, Cong.: 1</p>

If all the hypothetical situations with current alliances are considered, BJP+ would trail in 97 of the 195 Lok Sabha segments that it won in '14, Congress+ would lead in 79 segments (in '14, it won 21 seats), others would gain in 41 segments that they lost in 2014

FROM THE HINDU ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 11, 1969

Karunanidhi's Cabinet

A seven-member Cabinet for Tamil Nadu, headed by Mr. M. Karunanidhi, was sworn in by the Governor, Sardar Ujjal Singh, at Raj Bhavan this afternoon [February 10, Madras]. All the seven Ministers were members of the previous Annadurai Cabinet. Mr. V.R. Nedunchezian, who was No. 2 in the previous Ministry and acted as Chief Minister after the passing away of Mr. Annadurai, is not in the new team. The Chief Minister, Mr. M. Karunanidhi, told newsmen that he was still striving his best to persuade Mr. Nedunchezian to join his Cabinet. The members of the new Cabinet are: Mr. M. Karunanidhi, Mr. K.A. Mathialagan, Mr. A. Govindaswami, Mrs. Satyavanimuthu, Mr. S. Madhavan, Mr. S.J. Sadiq Pasha and Mr. M. Muthuswami. The swearing in ceremony lasted 20 minutes. All the Ministers took the oath in Tamil.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 11, 1919

The New Germany. Coalition Cabinet.

According to "Vossische Zeitung", the German Cabinet will be composed of sixteen members, of whom Social Democrats shall have the President and Ministers of Defence, Labour, Economy, Nutrition and Demobilisation, and Democrats shall have the Vice-President and Ministers of Interior and Finance. The centre shall have the Ministers of Justice, Treasury and Posts, while Democrats and Social Democrats shall each have one Minister without portfolio. The Foreign Ministry shall be neutralised. A message from Berlin sates that the National Assembly will discuss the Bill regarding the German Empire's constitution on February 10th and will finish three readings on February 11th, so that the election of the President of Germany can be made on February 12th. The Cabinet will be formed immediately afterwards so that a legal Government shall exist on February 12th when negotiations regarding the prolongation of armistice will commence.

CONCEPTUAL Muscle hypertrophy

BIOLOGY

This refers to the increase in the size of the human skeletal muscles due to an increase in the size of the cells that make up these muscles. It is believed that muscle cells grow in size when they are exposed to a gradually increasing weight load that causes existing muscle cells to break down and grow into larger cells. A proper diet that is rich in protein and sufficient rest are considered necessary for damaged muscles to get repaired by the immune system and grow into cells with larger mass. The degree of muscle hypertrophy, however, may differ among individuals due to other factors like genetics which cause some people to easily gain muscle mass.

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<http://bit.ly/BiryaniVideo>