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WORDLY WISE
AND ALL THE INSECTS CEASED IN HONOR
OF THE MOON.
— JACK KEROUAC

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

THE BEST TRIBUTE

To honour Bhupen Hazarika, government must listen to his son, withdraw the divisive citizenship amendment bill

FEW IN INDIA would dispute cultural icon Bhupen Hazarika's credentials to be honoured as a Bharat Ratna. His son, Tej Hazarika, however, has questioned the Narendra Modi government's decision to bestow the honour while piloting a divisive legislation in the land of Bhupen Hazarika's birth. In a statement issued from New York on Monday, he said: "I believe that my father's name and words are being invoked and celebrated publicly while plans are afoot to pass a painfully unpopular Bill regarding citizenship that is actually undermining his documented position". The BJP should heed Tej's critique of the Citizenship Amendment Bill even if it dismisses the suggestion that the Bharat Ratna to Bhupen Hazarika was a balancing act by its government to assuage the anger in Assam.

Bhupen Hazarika would never have approved of the citizenship bill, his son has said: "He would never have endorsed what appears, quite transparently, to be an underhanded way of pushing a law against the will and benefit of the majority in a manner that also seems to be grossly un-constitutional, un-democratic and un-Indian". The Northeast has been more or less united in its opposition to the proposed amendment to the Citizenship Act that aims to make it easy for non-Muslims from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan to get Indian citizenship. Civil society groups have long held that the amendment is divisive because it privileges religion as a criterion of citizenship and that it will upset the region's demographic balance and undermine the 1985 Assam Accord. If Parliament passes the amendment, the cut-off date for non-Muslim migrants in Assam to qualify for Indian citizenship would become December 31, 2014 as against 1971 in the Assam Accord. Political parties and state governments in the Northeast, too, have responded to the street protests and shutdowns and BJP allies in the region have threatened to quit the NDA if the Centre stays with the amendment.

Bhupen Hazarika's artistic vision, while deeply humanistic and cosmopolitan, was rooted in the cultural landscape of Assam. His invocation of the region's rhythms made him a people's poet. He opposed the Emergency and championed the Assam movement in the 1980s. Tej Hazarika's remark that the government is pushing a "painfully unpopular Bill" which undermines his father's "documented position" should be read in this context. When he says that "adopting the Bill at this point in the manner in which it is being proffered, now or in the future, will ultimately have the sad and undesirable effect of... disrupting the quality of life, language, identity and power balance of the region", he echoes the fears and anxieties of many in the Northeast. The government shall continue to turn a deaf ear to these voices at its own peril. It must recall the amendment Bill is yet to be passed by Rajya Sabha. That, surely, would be the perfect tribute to Bhupen Hazarika.

JACK IN THE BOX

Parliamentary Committee is skirting core issues of social media regulation. Preemptory summons to Twitter CEO is a pointer

OVER THE LAST four-odd years, the halo around social media has dimmed, in India and the world. With greater recognition of platforms' function of disseminating information — and issues like bias and the incendiary role propaganda can play — regulators are faced with complex questions: Should entities like Twitter and Facebook be treated merely as ideologically-agnostic tech platforms or as publishers with algorithmic editors? Unfortunately, rather than attempting to build a regulatory framework around a considered engagement with such questions, the Parliamentary Committee on Information Technology appears more concerned with optics, as its notice to Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey, after he reportedly did not heed its invitation the first time, indicates. To make matters worse for it, the Committee is unlikely to gain the upper hand even in the perception battle.

While parliamentary committees often call in experts, this kind of posturing is ill-judged. There is the obvious question of enforcement: Twitter is headquartered in San Francisco, and Dorsey can refuse to appear. More worrying, however, is the perception that Twitter and its senior leadership is being singled out for political reasons. Political leaders, across the ideological spectrum, have been losing "followers" over the last year as Twitter has been cleaning out fake accounts and bots to prevent the spread of fake news. Earlier this month, members of Youth for Social Media Democracy had protested against Twitter's "anti-right wing attitude" and made a written submission to BJP leader and committee chairman Anurag Thakur. Twitter has refuted the allegations of bias, claiming its "trends" are determined by the velocity and volume of what users are discussing.

It may well be the case that the Committee wants to enforce some accountability from those who actually set policy at Twitter in its quest to "safeguard citizens' rights on social/online news media platforms". But here, the parliamentary committee would do better to take a leaf out of the government's book vis a vis WhatsApp, which was seen to be facilitating rumours that contributed to lynchings and mob violence. With consistent pressure leading to self-regulation, WhatsApp has taken steps, including curbs on bulk messages as well as a public education campaign to alert users to the dangers of rumour. That ongoing endeavour was made possible without making an issue of summoning Mark Zuckerberg.

NO SMALL MATTER

Be warned: Insects of the world are going extinct

SOME YEARS from now, an aspiring Kafka trying to write the destiny of a Gregor Samsa, may struggle to come up with the "giant insect" Samsa could metamorphose into. As a recent global scientific study has revealed, all of the planet's insects could go extinct within a century. There would literally be no immediate frame of reference for insects in the human mind.

The study, 'Worldwide decline of the entomofauna: A review of its drivers', has been published in the journal, *Biological Conservation*. Researchers discovered that over 40 per cent of insect species could go extinct in the next few decades — this extinction rate is eight times faster than that of mammals, birds and reptiles. Lepidoptera, Hymenoptera and dung beetles (Coleoptera) are the taxa most affected. Intensive agriculture, agro-chemical pollutants, invasive species and climate change are listed as significant triggers. Lepidoptera, the order of insects that includes butterflies and moths, seems to have suffered the most. Bees (belonging to the Hymenoptera order) have been equally hard hit. Incidentally, the EU had last year banned Neonicotinoids — compounds that comprise the most popular type of insecticides. In 2017, a worldwide study published in the journal *Science* showed that 75 per cent of honey samples collected across multiple countries contained neonicotinoid insecticides. Studies closer to home have substantiated the grim narrative of bee colonies disappearing.

All insects help to maintain the intricate balance nature has in place. Many invertebrates, for example, including a host of insects, are particular about the kind of soil they inhabit. Their absence can be a serious indicator of soil health. Conservation initiatives should try to create more visible awareness of such studies and the tangible impact they will have on human life if such a slide in insect numbers worldwide continues unabated.



SUHALS PALSHIKAR

Pseudo-social justice

Policy is not based on assessments of deprivation — it merely addresses specific groups

THE GUJJARS of Rajasthan are back on the streets. This could be seen as an attempt to corner the newly-formed Congress government in the state. Both Congress and BJP have had the taste of Gujjar wrath earlier. It could also be seen as an extension of intra-party factionalism playing out in the open for the Congress. Nevertheless, the renewed agitation alerts us to the larger complications facing policy-making. Reservation appears to be the only answer to all our socio-economic complications. Thus, over and above party competition and internal factionalism, the Gujjar agitation represents the difficulties and distortions that have crept into the reservation regime. And it is not the only agitation of this type.

A similar agitation is waiting to happen in Maharashtra — by the Dhangar community, over their demand for inclusion in the ST category. Unrest among the Patidars of Gujarat and Jats of Haryana is simmering and can explode any time into another round of agitation for reservation. At the same time, the Bombay High Court is hearing a petition demanding that the state's decision to extend 16 per cent reservation to Marathas be stayed/struck down. The apex court, similarly, is hearing a petition against the constitutional amendment extending reservations to economically weaker sections. Petitions over expansion of reservation beyond 50 per cent are already pending before the court. Thus, even as reservation appears to be the only solution for demands by many communities, the reservation regime is becoming more and more litigation-prone.

For staunch proponents of reservation, these troubles can be resolved by doing away with the 50 per cent cap altogether. The latest amendment giving reservation to the poor has already opened the doors for such parliamentary adventurism. It has done away with the constitutionally permitted gatekeeping mechanism of social and educational backwardness and opened up reservation to everyone — irrespective of social backwardness.

In other words, the solution is to free the reservation policy of the chains of constitutional reasonableness as mandated by the judiciary. This overemphasis on the idea of reservation is marked by four critical aspects that signify a move away from the constitutional scheme of positive discrimination.

One, as we recently witnessed in Parliament, there is a complete absence of genuine debate on the question. No party could take a nuanced position on the issue of "reservation for poor". In a sense, this is only to be expected if one considers the political

What is common between the demands of Jats, Gujjars, Marathas, Dhangars, Patidars, etc on the one hand, and the recently effected coup against the Constitution through the quota-for-poor amendment is a public admission of the absence of imagination and innovation in the field of policy-making. Post-Mandal, the first section to ignore the possibilities of imaginative policies for social justice consisted of the intellectuals. In their haste to brand parties as pro-social justice and anti-social justice, they latched on to reservation as the only policy tool to address social injustice.

fallout of such nuance. Post-Mandal, there has seldom been any serious review or re-examination in our public political life of the way in which the reservation policy is moving. The political arena is much more strongly affected by this new consensus that quietly took shape in the post-Mandal era. So much so that, recently, a lawyer arguing on behalf of the petitioners challenging Maratha reservation was manhandled outside the court. No political party or politician can raise questions about the matter. This is a classic case of consensus as closure. There is a complete closure of the public debate on reservation.

Two, over the quarter century since Mandal, the reservation regime has expanded in many directions. Ironically, most of the times, expansion has contributed to the delegitimation of the original idea behind reservation. When the reservation policy went beyond SCs and STs, despite the fact that the expansion was justified, it effectively diluted the sharpness of the tool — that it would be employed for extreme cases of discrimination and exclusion. Down the line, when different communities began to claim that they are backward and deserving of reservation, the political clout of these communities and their relatively less deprived conditions meant that the logic of discrimination got diluted. Finally, when the idea of reservations is used to address economic infirmity, the entire basis of the reservation policy gets displaced.

Now, the reservation policy will no more be seen as an intermediate tool to address ingrained social injustice in the Indian social order. As a result, the moral basis of the reservation policy is almost lost. The enabling provision in the Constitution was predicated on the logic that the social order is fundamentally unjust and therefore the state should intervene in favour of the most oppressed sections to enable them to compete in the public sphere and stake their claims for a share in public power. This logic is no more applicable. Instead, the logic now is that there are different groups in society and they need to be accommodated, as far as possible, in a proportionate manner (as I argued earlier too, 'The New Reservation', Indian Express, August 1, 2018). This new logic implies that reservation is not a remedy for traditional social ills but a routine policy tool to arrange political and administrative power.

Three, and paradoxically, while reservation for economically weaker sections delegitimises social justice as the basis for reservations, at the same time, the post-Mandal churning has brought forward caste as the primary basis for making claims on the state.

Not the injustice perpetrated by the caste system, but caste in itself has emerged as the primary social group for which demands are made, robbing policy-making of the more justifiable bases of deprivation. Instead of an expectation that policy should be directed at and based on some agreed ways of assessing deprivation and its amelioration, now policy can be based merely on the fact that it addresses specific groups. Besides, such public display of caste claims leads more to strengthening identity than ensuring advancement. The identity excess this has brought about has been seldom taken into consideration but effects of this development spill over beyond the policy realm. India's entire public discourse and political calculus are deeply influenced by single-caste considerations. Caste and caste identity are not new factors but the traction they have now received not just in political calculations but in more routine social relations and personal identifications is a new factor in shaping the public sphere.

Finally, the language of pseudo-justice being popularised by the "quota-for-poor" policy is symptomatic of a larger failure. It replaces the principle that welfare should be the basic *raison d'être* of public policy, it hides the colossal failure of the state in handling questions of poverty and deprivation and, at the same time, it indicates a dead end in policy making.

What is common between the demands of Jats, Gujjars, Marathas, Dhangars, Patidars, etc on the one hand, and the recently effected coup against the Constitution through the quota-for-poor amendment is a public admission of the absence of imagination and innovation in policy-making. Post-Mandal, the first section to ignore the possibilities of imaginative policies for social justice consisted of the intellectuals. In their haste to brand parties as pro-social justice and anti-social justice, they latched on to reservation as the only policy tool to address social injustice.

The political players were quick to succumb to the temptation of postponing the substantive social justice agenda in favour of decorative policy measures of limited effect. In the process, the fundamental task of politics that it throws up alternatives and enables the imagination, got stunted. We have a consensus on reservation and yet social groups continue to agitate for reservation — representing the closure of imagination in public policy-making.

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ABHISHEK MISHRA

THE CONFESSION

Government's resort to populism in budget indicates failure to address critical issues

AS WE APPROACH the national election, we face a crucial choice. We have before us a clash between two ideologies that have been at odds since our foundation but have intensified to appalling levels in recent times: "Inclusive nationalism" founded on social justice, universal welfare and communal harmony, and "divisive nationalism" marked by the rabid pursuit to create and perpetuate sectarian divisions and fundamentalist authoritarianism.

The upcoming election is a grand battle to decide which version of nationalism will prevail. It is also an opportunity to choose. Divisive nationalism prioritises abstract notions, such as identity, greatness, and honour. Inclusive nationalism is focused on two very simple, and I believe, achievable goals — prosperity and equality for all. In order to confirm this, we need not look further than this budget and the policies under the BJP government.

Unemployment is at an all-time high, there is wide-spread agricultural distress and farmer suicides are on the rise, crime is rampant, the situation of women and children is

a major area of concern, industrial activity is sluggish, manufacturing has almost stalled, current account deficit is higher than the government's own stated objective, minimum support price remains inaccessible for farmers, sugarcane farmers continue to fight for what is their right.

The government is so embarrassed about its failure on the job creation front that it has stopped releasing data on employment and farmer suicide rates. The budget speech did not even talk about the number of jobs created and tried to divert attention by quoting proxy EPFO numbers, which change with changes in the criteria for registering. Even when data is released, it is untrustworthy, and selective. Why else would the two highest placed members of the National Statistical Organisation resign in protest?

The Samajwadi Party government in Uttar Pradesh was already giving Rs 6,000 per annum to almost 5.5 million women, which we had planned to increase to 10 million families and Rs 12,000 per annum. Budget provisions of Rs 6,000 per annum for each eligible farmer

falls well short of this target. In housing, allocation per house needs to be doubled, at the very least: Our government was spending almost Rs 3.25 lakh per house.

This was an election interim budget, not a development budget. The government has resorted to worn-out populist policies, indicating that it has failed to solve, and in fact worsened, the critical issues that our great nation faces. Why would we need large, mostly superficial, sops for farmers if the government hadn't failed to double farmer incomes, as promised? We wouldn't need superficial tax cuts if the government hadn't caused great hardship to the poor and the middle-class through demonetisation and a botched implementation of GST.

It's time to return to ground realities, and focus on specific deliverables. We will be great if we are prosperous, we will be honoured if every individual is equal, in terms of opportunity and access.

The writer is a former Uttar Pradesh minister and member of the Samajwadi Party

FEBRUARY 13, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO



IRAN TAILSPIN
IRAN'S NEW REVOLUTIONARY government reported that resistance by Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's armed forces has ended, but it was having trouble controlling its own supporters. Thousands of armed youths roamed Teheran threatening symbols of the monarchy. Three generals were reportedly slain. Ayatollah Khomeini appealed to his followers for order. Khomeini's 14-year fight to convert Iran to an Islamic republic succeeded after two days of bloody street fighting in Teheran.

JAMMU CHAOS
OVER 90 STUDENTS and teachers were in-

jured, 30 of them seriously, when police entered the Jammu University campus and two boys' colleges and beat up all who came in their way. Thirty students have been arrested. The Kashmir armed police and CRP men entered the university campus at 11 am, chasing a group of stone-throwing youths, who had taken shelter near a college adjoining the old university campus, after about 200 teargas shells failed to calm them.

BHUTTO ON ZIA
FROM HIS DEATH cell in the district jail, Rawalpindi, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto has held out two olive branches, one to foreign powers, another to his political opponents at home.

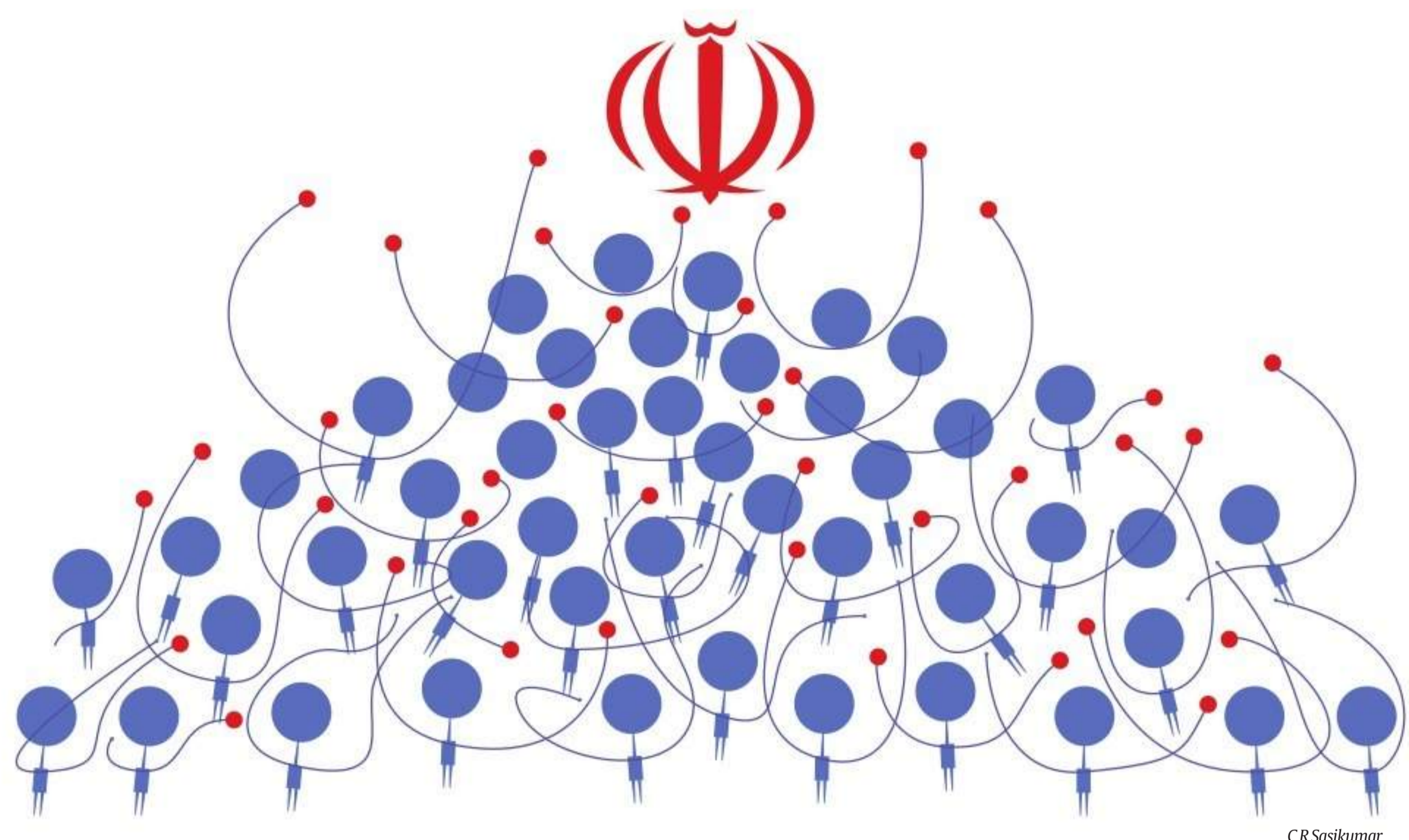
To foreign powers he says: "I am aware of the importance of global politics" and "I have vision enough to begin anew without any rancour for the past". To his opponents at home he says the hour calls for "a comprehensive political settlement" and for "quiet and sincere negotiations between brothers". But Bhutto remains implacable towards one enemy especially, General Zia-ul-Haq. He makes the angry demand that "the curse and stigma of martial law needs to be withdrawn without delay". He exposes the misdeeds of martial law under Ayub, Yahya Khan and Zia, but against Zia he makes the very serious allegation that he is destroying the very basis of Pakistan.

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WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"France's decision to withdraw its ambassador from Italy points to the deeper divisions that threaten a troubled continent."

—THE GUARDIAN



C R Sasikumar

The young are talking back

Forty years after the Islamic Revolution, Iran's regime is increasingly challenged by its people



RAMIN JAHANBEGLOO

FEBRUARY 2019 MARKS the 40th anniversary of the Iranian Revolution, one of the major events of the 20th century and a momentous development in the modern history of Islam. The revolution opened a new chapter for political Islam in the late 20th and early 21st centuries and had a deep impact on revolutionary movements across the globe, especially those that were using the Islamic frame of reference for political activism. In fact, the "religious dimension" of the Iranian Revolution, through its dependence on Islam, was well-established in the decades leading up to the uprisings of 1978. We can refer here to the notion, popularised in the 1970s, that Iranians should return to their cultural roots by resisting the hegemonic influence of the West.

Hasty or emotionally-motivated understandings of the causes of the Iranian Revolution and the Shah's downfall generally tend to focus either on the undemocratic nature of the Shah's regime or on the economic gap between the rich and the poor in Iranian society of the 1970s. These factors also existed in some other Islamic countries — Morocco, for example — but they did not end up in a revolution and many dictators in these countries, including Hassan II of Morocco, died in their beds, without being forced, like the Shah of Iran, into exile.

Moreover, by the end of 1979, it was becoming increasingly apparent that a rigorous interpretation of Shi'ite Islam by Ayatollah Khomeini and the Iranian clergy was becoming the text of the law. The immediate consequence of this development was the establishment of a theocratic state with the institutionalisation of the power of the "faqih" (jurist), who was supposed to possess the necessary charismatic author-

ity and political astuteness to rule the Islamic Republic. However, the establishment of the Velayat-e-Faqih (the rule of the jurist) could not put an end to the tensions between republicanism and authoritarianism, which had existed since the early days of the Iranian Revolution.

Since its inception, the Islamic Republic was dogged by tensions between two concepts of sovereignty — the divine and popular. The concept of popular sovereignty — derived from the indivisible will of the Iranian nation — is inscribed in Article 6 of the Islamic Republic's Constitution. The article mandates popular elections for the presidency and parliament. But the concept of divine sovereignty, which is derived from God's will through the medium of the imam, is bestowed on the existing "faqih" as the rightful ruler of the Shi'ite community. However, in the past 40 years in Iran, the idea of sovereignty of God on Earth has been less about what Michel Foucault called "the introduction of a spiritual dimension into political life" and more about the theologisation of politics.

As such, the first decade of the Iranian Revolution was marked by Khomeini's theological governance and by the violent elimination of opposition groups and the enforcement of ideological controls on the Iranian population. The success of the ayatollahs against different social, ethnic, religious and political groups and minorities can be attributed to several factors. First, the Islamists enjoyed far greater support among the masses. Second, extraordinary economic and political measures were tolerated by the Iranian population because of the eight-year war with Iraq. Last, but not least, the Islamisation of Iranian society was a way for the ayatollahs to elicit the support of the bazaar and traditional socio-economic groups for whom the prospect of a "leftist revolution" was even more worrying.

Despite the forceful post-revolutionary imposition of Islamic values and ways of living and the insertion of cultural politics into the everyday lives of young Iranians in the name of Islamic purity, the Iranian youth — especially young women — have not identified with the conservative values of the

Islamic regime. Moreover, the republican idea of popular sovereignty has found its place through social networks and is evident in the political activities of Iranian civil society — the women's rights movements, the students' movements, the online networks of young people and the work of dissident intellectuals and artists are good examples of such activism.

Today, more than 60 per cent of the Iranian population is under the age of 30. The image of Iran as a monolith does not reflect the mindset of those who have been fighting for change since the past 40 years. For nearly six million educated youngsters — many of whom have left Iran for the US, Canada, Australia and different parts of Europe — lack of jobs and the absence of social freedoms and everyday opportunities are the principal reasons of discontent and rebellion.

In the past 10 years, many protests in Iran — notably the Green Movement of 2009 — were products of the activities of the urban middle-class youth. But more recently, the turmoil in Iranian cities has largely been driven by disaffected young people in rural areas and small towns. They see it as a chance to express their frustration with the country's economic problems, which are a fallout of Iran's financial and military involvement in the conflicts in Syria and Yemen.

In the past 10 years, many protests in Iran — notably the Green Movement of 2009 — were products of the activities of the urban middle class youth. But more recently, the turmoil in Iranian cities has largely been driven by disaffected young people in rural areas and small towns. They see it as a chance to express their frustration with the country's economic problems, which are a fallout of Iran's financial and military involvement in the conflicts in Syria and Yemen.

Iran today is very much like the Soviet bloc before the fall of the Berlin Wall. The ideology of the Iranian Revolution has burnt out. Iranian youngsters are disenchanted. The Islamic Reform Movement has failed to fulfill popular demands and spontaneous riots occur in major cities of Iran almost every year. The winds of change have begun to blow but those riding the hungry tiger of the Iranian Revolution do not dare dismount it.

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Who will pay for sops?

Government's claim that structural changes to the economy are paying off, and that is being used to give back to the people, is problematic



ARUN KUMAR

THE INTERIM UNION Budget 2019 is no less than a full budget with changes in taxation and announcement of lucrative schemes for various sections of the population. The recent losses in three major assembly elections rang alarm bells for the ruling dispensation. With the general election around the corner, it had to act to regain the support of various segments of the population. The government's policies in the last five years have caused distress to farmers, youth, small businesses, the cottage industries sector and minorities.

Small and marginal farmers will get Rs 6,000 per year. Concessions on credit and crop insurance to farmers have been announced. There is a pension scheme for unorganised sector workers. The lower middle classes have got concessions in income tax. The upper middle class has got concession in taxation on a second house. There are schemes for the SCs, STs, women, nomadic tribes and senior citizens.

There is no proposal for additional taxation. Given that in the current year, tax collection was lagging behind and the fiscal deficit was running way ahead of the target — 114 per cent in the seventh month itself — next year could be worse with additional expenditures but no proposals for raising additional revenue. More taxes are not sought to be raised lest some section feels hurt and that is undesirable in an election year. The rich could have been taxed more through a wealth tax or a cess on corporation tax. Actually, the corporates were expecting a reduction in the tax rate from 30 per cent to 2 per cent, announced two years back, but they would be happy that the tax rate has not gone up.

The budget shows only a marginal rise in the fiscal deficit to 3.4 per cent in spite of the planned new expenditures and tax concessions. But if the revenue projections turn out to be incorrect, the deficit would indeed be higher.

Is the government now reaping the benefits of the structural reforms that it carried out in the last five years — demonetisation, digitisation and GST? In the budget speech, it was claimed that demonetisation has expanded the tax base, leading to higher direct tax collection. Digitisation and GST are also supposed to do the same by expanding the tax base. It is claimed that the number of tax filers has doubled in the last few years, but the direct tax to GDP ratio has risen by 0.3 per cent last year — hardly much of a rise.

The GST collection this year is short by about Rs 1 lakh crore. Thus, tax collection is not showing high buoyancy. Non-tax revenues are also not very buoyant. There was pressure on the RBI to announce a special dividend and pass on revaluation reserves (a few lakh crore) to the government. This did not materialise due to resistance from the RBI. The government wanted this money to

announce big concessions. The wonder is that without this, many concessions have been announced and without the fiscal deficit rising.

All budgets indulge in creative accounting and the current one is no exception. There is no harm in announcing higher revenues and higher expenditures. One can always correct these figures subsequently. Public memory is short and few remember last year's figures.

Given the recent controversy on unemployment, creation of new jobs, GDP and its growth rate, the data pertaining to the Indian economy has become highly suspect. Most are incredulous that the rate of growth has been shown to be the highest in the year of demonetisation since, by all accounts, the economy was badly hit, starting November 2016. It hardly recovered when it was again hit by a structurally-flawed GST. The unorganised sector has been declining since then.

Unfortunately, the data for the unorganised sector comes with a big lag and it is implicitly assumed to be growing at the same rate as the organised sector. So, the government can claim that the economy was not impacted by the shocks. But, as this author has argued before, if the data from the private surveys is taken into account, the rate of growth of the economy would turn out to be around 1 per cent and not 7 per cent to 8 per cent. This slow growth is consistent with the problems relating to employment, the cottage sector and farmers.

Data also vitiates budgetary calculus. So, tax revenue growth is sluggish because of the low rate of growth. But if the rate of growth is around 1 per cent, shouldn't the problem be more acute? Not really, because most of the taxes are paid by the organised sector which is growing.

Effective direct taxes are paid by about 1.5 per cent of the population even though about 6 per cent of the population files tax returns. Ninety-five per cent of the GST is paid by 5 per cent of the businesses in the country, according to the finance minister. Small businesses are largely exempt and do not have to register or they are under the Composition Scheme.

Thus, if tax collection has not suffered more despite the rate of growth falling to 1 per cent, it is due to the growth of the organised sector. Clearly, to the government and the economy, the unorganised sector matters less and less.

The government claims that the structural changes it brought about are paying dividends, which are being used to give back to the people. But these changes hurt the vast unorganised sections way beyond what is now sought to be given back. The drop in the rate of growth to around 1 per cent means lakhs of crores of income lost by these sections. While the increase in inequality does help raise some resources, that is inadequate to fund the various schemes now announced. It required creative accounting in the budget.

All this points to the belief among the rulers that in economic terms, the majority matters little. However, their votes count. So, near the elections they have to be appeased with some sops. The coming elections will once again be a test of such a hypothesis.

The writer is Malcolm Adiseshiah Chair Professor, Institute of Social Sciences

VIEW FROM THE RIGHT

MAMATA'S STRATEGY
ON THE RECENT stand-off between the CBI and state police in Kolkata, the editorial in *Organiser* declares that in politics, every political leader or party uses "policies, strategies and perception management" to ensure "authoritative allocation of values" according to their own political interests. The way Mamata Banerjee chose to target the CBI, and Chandrababu Naidu becoming an important ally in this endeavour, needs further scrutiny, claims the editorial. It adds that "she (Banerjee) tried to block the investigation (into the Sharada scam) by central agencies even in the earlier stages, and the reasons are obvious."

"Rajeev Kumar, the IPS officer who investigated the scam as the head of SIT and who allegedly did not hand over all the relevant evidence to the CBI, can be the obvious ally in the cover-up. Naturally, Mamata did not want CBI to get into this for which she effectively staged and used the political drama. The optics that Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee wanted to convey are very obvious. She wants to play the victim

card to invoke Bengali pride by playing Centre vs State and most importantly, to establish herself as the most formidable challenger to the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi (sic)," says the editorial. It also claims that the Congress is the biggest loser in this game, as it cannot afford to support or oppose Banerjee.

BANGLADESH'S DEBT
AN ARTICLE IN *Organiser* claims that the stiff opposition to the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill 2019 by certain political parties, even after it went through the scrutiny of a joint parliamentary committee and its subsequent adoption by the Lok Sabha, is surprising. It asserts that on the whole, "this bill is an important initiative which would not only render justice to large number of persecuted children of Mother India but can also deliver a body blow to vote-bank politics."

"The people and parties of Assam have a special responsibility. History will not forgive them if they fritter away the advantage of this momentous initiative because of their myopic views," the article counsels. It adds that the government would do well to enlist Bangladesh's support for the effective implementation of the Bill. From time to time, the Bangladesh prime minister has expressed gratitude for India's help to her country's liberation struggle. India has continued its "good gestures" ever since, through various measures such as giving

more than its fair share of Ganga waters through the Farakka barrage, investments in connectivity projects, lines of credit of a few billion dollars, conceding larger areas to Bangladesh in exchange for border enclaves, etc.

"In return, India can make a legitimate request to Bangladesh to help with the repatriation of her people. Friendship cannot be a one-way traffic. Moreover, her help would also be critical to ensure that the outflow of religious minorities is prevented in future. If the Bangladeshi government is not confident of stopping persecution of its minorities by the extremists, both countries may work together in finding 'out-of-the-box' solutions to the problem," reads the article.

The article also asks the "agitating people of Assam" to consider the fact that most political parties who are opposing the Bill have been opposing the National Register of Citizens (NRC) as well. "These parties want 'status quo' in the state at any cost. Further, there is widespread notion of manipulation of 'legacy data' on ground. If it is true, the NRC may not address their concerns," the article claims and adds that "the Centre has a well-thought out holistic plan to protect the interests of Assamese people against the "demographic invasion" from Bangladesh.

CONGRESS CONSPIRACY
THE EDITORIAL IN *Panchjanya* suspects a political conspiracy behind the recent incident

in Aligarh, where a saffron-clad woman — allegedly a leader of the All India Hindu Mahasabha — on January 30 pumped three bullets into a poster of Mahatma Gandhi. The Aligarh police subsequently made arrests in the matter. The editorial condemns the act and adds that it might be a political conspiracy to discredit on saffron organisations. That this incident was meant to trigger political outrage could not be ruled out, given the timing of the act. It also claims that the Congress party "tried to blow the matter out of proportion with statements and agitations in protest to create outrage against the BJP and Sangh Parivar".

The editorial says that a provocative and condemnable act carried by a little-known Hindu organisation was used "against the political leadership of the country and its biggest social organisation". "This move is not new for Congress. It has used this move for generations, slandered Hindu society, divided society and conducted massacres to stay in power. What had happened after the assassination of Gandhi? Chitpavan Brahmins were killed by Congress hooligans in Maharashtra. Congress leaders and workers were found indulging in the killing of Sikhs after the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984," alleges the editorial. It suggests that there is a need to be wary of such cheap propaganda at the time of elections.

Compiled by Lalmani Verma

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POPE LEADS THE WAY
THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'When the road darkens' (IE, February 9). Pope Francis's acknowledgment of the sexual offence charges the Church is facing is a positive sign for Christianity. Whenever any wrong happens, the best way to deal with it is to accept mistakes and take corrective actions. Cover-ups do injustice to victims and the religion.
Nishant Parashar, Chandigarh

POLITICS AND LAW
THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Shadow boxing in Kolkata' (IE, February 9). The Centre-state row ensued after the CBI officers were barred from entering the Kolkata police commissioner's residence by the state's police. There is little doubt that both the CBI and Bengal police have now become the unfortunate victims of the political needs of the Centre and state governments. It appears that for both the issue became a matter of prestige. Mamata Banerjee is likely to gain substantial political capital by calling the acrimonious face-off with the Centre an assault on Bengal.
Lal Singh, Amritsar

IN-TRANSIT PEACE
THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Welcome step back' (IE, February 7). The VHP's decision to defer any Ram Mandir agitation appears to have been arrived at

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD
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to avoid politics on the issue. For the last few years, there has been a concerted move by headline Hindu groups to build pressure for the Ram Mandir. But the Sangh parivar may have realised that building a crescendo around the Ram temple could prove counter-productive for the Modi government. However the temple issue will remain relevant.
PL Singh, Amritsar