

### Kamala Harris, Democratic hopeful

Kamala Devi Harris is a 54-year-old American senator from California, of Indian and African descent, and candidate for President of the United States in 2020. Ms. Harris announced her candidacy on Martin Luther King Jr. Day (January 21) and launched her campaign in Oakland, California, a week ago. She is the second African-American woman (and the first Indian-American) in the Senate and first Indian and African (Jamaican) woman to have been California's Attorney-General. Ms. Harris, when asked about her firsts, often quotes her mother as saying, "You may be the first to do many things, but make sure you're not the last."

#### Where did she grow up?

Ms. Harris was born in Oakland, California, to two Ph.D students at the University of California, Berkeley - Shyamala Gopalan from Chennai, who was studying nutrition and endocrinology and eventually became a breast cancer researcher, and Donald Harris from Jamaica, who was studying economics and went on to become a professor at Stanford. The two met during the civil rights movement and would take Kamala and her sister Maya on marches. They divorced when Harris was seven. Harris's Indian grandfather, P.V. Gopalan, was a diplomat with the Government of India

fighter and her grandmother was an activist for birth control in India. "She was the purest form of the Harris women-...we're all diluted versions of my grandmother," Ms. Harris told Vogue last year. "My mother, grandparents, aunts and uncle instilled in us the pride in our South Asian roots," Ms. Harris

and a former freedom

writes in her memoir The Truths We Hold, released this January, adding, "My mother understood very well that she was raising two black daughters... and she was determined to make sure we would grow into confident, proud, black women." Ms. Harris attended a prominent black college, Howard University, and is a member of the country's largest black sorority, Alpha Kap-

#### Where does she stand? In 2004, Ms. Harris became San

pa Alpha.

Francisco's District Attorney, and in 2011, California's Attorney-General. Ms. Harris's contradictory stances as a public prosecutor have drawn criticism from many on the left. She has been praised for her efforts to reduce re-

cidivism through education and training, introducing racial bias training for police officers and for not backing California's Proposition 8 (a ban on same sex marriage). She has been criticised for her hardline positions on crime. Most notably, while Ms. Harris is personally against the death penalty - in 2004 she did not seek the death penalty for a man who had killed a police officer - she defended the death penalty's presence on the statute book in California in 2014, when she was Attorney-Gener-

#### What is her platform?

Ms. Harris's campaign slogan is 'Kamala Harris, for the people,' the words she first said as a public prosecutor, introducing herself in court. Ms. Harris has said she is an advocate of Medicaid for All (her proposal to get rid of private health insurance was controversial and her campaign staff later presented a softer position on this) and will provide the largest middle-class tax cut in history. She also spoke out against big banks and corporations, alluded to the unfairness of tax giveaways for the rich, spoke of uniting Americans and making education a fundamental right at her campaign launch.

#### What is in store?

It is hard to tell at the moment how Kamala Ms. Harris will fare in the 2020 race. Harris has to first win the Democratic nomination - no mean feat as the field is diverse and crowded and new candidates continue to declare their interest (Cory Booker, an African-American Senator from New Jersey, declared on Friday that he would run). A Politico/ Morning Consult poll conducted on January 25-27, before Mr. Booker announced his candidacy, ranked Ms. Harris as the third favourite candidate of Democratic voters, below former Vice-President Joe Biden and Independent Senator from Vermont Bernie Sanders.

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN

### WHAT

### The lowdown on MGNREGA funding



WHAT IS IT? The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) scheme has been allocated ₹60,000 crore in the Budget for 2019-20. It is less than what was spent on the scheme in the current year, that is, the revised estimate for 2018-19, which stands at ₹61,084 crore. In his Budget speech, Finance Minister Piyush Goyal noted: "Additional

amount would be provided, if needed."

The original 2018-19 Budget allocation

for the scheme, a lifeline for landless la-

bourers and rural workers, was ₹55,000 crore. However, by the end of 2018, 99% of the funds had been exhausted. A number of States already had a negative net balance. The activists protested that people were being denied work in several States. The Rural Development Ministry, which administers the scheme, asked for a supplementary allocation and was granted ₹6,084 crore in early January, taking the revised estimate for the year to ₹61,084 crore.

A look at the fund-**HOW DID THIS COME ABOUT?** ing patterns over the last decade shows this

is not the first time allocations for the scheme are lower than what was spent in the previous year. In most years, supplementary allocations later in the year have ensured that the final amount spent has risen at least incrementally each year. However, the revised estimates for 2012-13 were actually lower than the previous year, while the

amount spent in 2014-15 was exactly the same as in the previous year. When MGNREGA funding is adjusted for inflation, a bleaker picture appears, making it clear that both the UPA and NDA governments have short-changed the scheme for several years now. In 2011-12, the revised estimate was ₹31,000 crore. For the next four years, the inflation-adjusted amount spent on the scheme was lower than ₹30,000 crore in 2011 terms. The current allocation of ₹61,084 crore drops to just ₹41,013 crore in 2011 terms, when adjusted for inflation using the Consumer Price Index for rural labourers.

**WHY DOES IT** Rural workers are **MATTER?** being discouraged from

registering with the scheme, being denied work even when they do register, and are facing long delays in payment of wages even when they do get work. Researchers, activists and elected representatives blame this on the lack of sufficient funding. The promise of the MGNREGA is to enhance livelihood security by providing at least 100 days of wage employment a year to households that want it. If work is not provided within 15 days, applicants are entitled to an employment allowance. Thus, work is a legal entitlement under the scheme and funding should be demand-driven.

However, researchers have found a widening gap between demand and supply of work. A study of 3,500 panchayats in 2017-18 found that the employment provided was 32% lower than the work demand generated. Researchers calculated that in order to meet the registered work demand last year, the scheme should have had an allocation of ₹76,131 crore. Workers are also facing weeks- and months-long delays in payment of wages, often without compensation. Finance Ministry documents admit that one of the causes is the

non-availability of funds.

The future funding sit-**WHAT LIES** uation is bleak, given that AHEAD? the government's "highest

ever allocation" tag disguises the pending liabilities. If the total allocation of ₹61,084 crore had come through on the budget day, the scheme would still have a negative net balance of ₹3,270 crore, according to its financial statement on February 1. The next two months are the peak season, and workers have been promised an additional 50 days of work in drought-hit areas. Researchers predict that the deficit could grow as high as ₹12,000 crore by the end of this financial year. With Central money running out, States have also been asked to use their own funds to pay workers over the next two months, with the promise of an April refund. These deficits and liabilities will eat into the allocation for next year, slashing the amount available for new works in 2019-20.

PRISCILLA JEBARAJ

### WHY 7

### parties in Tamil Nadu are against 10% quota



What is their stand? The 103rd Constitution Amendment, through which the Centre has introduced a 10% quota for the economically

weaker sections among communities that do not enjoy any other form of reservation, has drawn near universal opposition from almost all major parties in Tamil Nadu. When it was introduced as the 124th Constitution (Amendment) Bill in Parliament, the AIADMK, the ruling party in the State, and considered to be friendly towards the BJP, spoke out against it in both Houses of Parliament. Its MPs walked out during the vote. Kanimozhi, DMK MP, moved a motion to refer the Bill to a select committee, but it was defeated. R.S. Bharathi, organising secretary of the DMK, has challenged the amendment in the Madras High Court. The Viduthulai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK), an ally of the DMK, has moved the Supreme Court against it. D. Veerasekaran, an advocate who belongs to the Dravidar Kazhagam, has also approached the High Court.

Why is there such opposition? Tamil Nadu is a pioneer in providing reservation in employment and education as a social justice measure. Its backward classes reservation history goes back to 1921. For historical and ideological reasons, therefore, the concept of social justice in the State is anchored firmly in the belief that reservation is a tool to ameliorate the conditions of sections of society that had been discriminated against in the past and that had suffered deprivation of employment and educational opportunities on account of their social backwardness. Here, reservation is seen not merely as an exception to the equality clause in the Constitution, but is considered an important and essential component of equality. In other words, equality acquires deeper meaning only if social injustices of the past are undone through preferential treatment for backward classes and other affirmative action programmes.

What are their principal objections? The first and foremost objection to the 10% reservation for the economically poor in other classes is that it cannot be

used as a poverty alleviation measure. The amendment to the Constitution to add an enabling provision for extending quotas on economic grounds is seen as a perversion of the idea of social justice. So far, only social and backwardness and educational backwardness were valid grounds for reservation. Many in Tamil Nadu believe economic disadvantage among sections of the advanced castes can be addressed through other measures such as job creation, provision of scholarships and financial concessions. However, carving out a quota among government jobs and educational opportunities cannot be a just solution. One principal reason is that a family's economic condition is variable, whereas social status based on caste or community cannot change. Someone getting a new job, a promotion or an additional breadwinner in the family may result in a change in a person's economic status. On the other hand, the social disability caused by being born in a particular caste cannot be easily undone.

Are there any other apprehensions? Yes, there are fears that this will lead to

shrinking of opportunities for those already enjoying reservation. A significant section of the population is already covered by the State's total reservation of 69% for the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes, the backward classes, the most backward classes and denotified communities.

The backward class quota has a subquota for backward class Muslims and the Scheduled Caste reservation has a sub-quota for Arundhatiyars, considered the worst-off among the Scheduled Caste. All of them are eligible to contest on merit under open competition too. The open quota may now come down by 10%. Further, there are fears the courts may insist on the 50% judicial cap on total reservation, and may order a cut in the caste-based quotas to accommodate the economic

K. VENKATARAMANAN

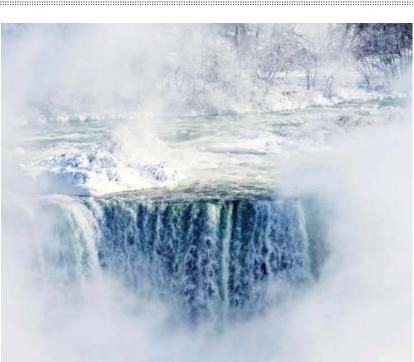
quota.

### WHEN

# January 2019

Deep freeze: Tens of millions of Americans braved Arctic-like temperatures on Thursday as low as minus 49 degrees Celsius that paralysed the U.S. Midwest and were blamed for 21 deaths. News agencies said warmerthan-normal weather was on the way, but that offered little comfort to the homeless enduring a chill that caused frostbite in minutes. The cold has been blamed on a phenomenon called the 'polar vortex'. Meteorologist Mark Chenard said a polar vortex refers to the upper level jet stream that circulates around both the North and South Poles, keeping the coldest air there. When that iet stream occasionally weakens and buckles, he told Reuters, it disrupts weather patterns — bumping warmer air into Alaska and pushing cold winds down into the U.S. Midwest and East Coast. Pictures show ice flowing in the Merrimack River as it heads to the Atlantic Ocean in Newburyport, Massachusetts, and the impact of freezing temperatures on the Horseshoe Falls in Niagara in Canada. • AFP, AP





### WHERE

### Maharashtra struggles to amend **APMC Act**



The Maharashtra government's attempt to amend the Maharashtra Agriculture Produce Marketing (Development and Regulation) Act, 1963, has hit a roadblock again. It had to withdraw the Bill from the Legislative Council even after it was passed by the Assembly. The amendment Bill has been in the works for over 14 years and owing to its politically and economically important stakeholders, who are farmers, traders and 'mathadi' workers (head loaders), the government has struggled to push through the changes.

### What is the problem?

After it was passed in the Assembly last November, the Mumbai and Pune APMCs called a strike, alleging that the proposed amendment severely limited their powers. One of the important amendments the Bill seeks to bring about is to free essential items from the purview of APMCs and allow them to be sold outside.

Farmer organisations such as the Shetkari Sanghatana, formerly led by Sharad Joshi, support this amendment. "Sharad Joshi always said that the APMC Act is one of the main reasons why farmers are prey to the monopoly of traders," said Anil Ghanvat, president of Shetkari Sanghatana.

### What are the changes?

The Bill also has a provision that the

APMCs can continue to levy cess/market fee on the produce brought and traded in their mandis, but cannot charge anything on goods traded outside. The traders' lobby had said no levy should be charged if the produce was sold outside. Following the meeting between the stakeholders and the government, sources said a compromise was reached to abolish this levy altogether. One of the amendments that was opposed by traders and farmer organisations was the direct payment to farmers from traders for purchase of more than ₹2 lakh, bypassing the Adta (the middleman). According to both, the Adta plays an important part as an assurer to both parties, and eliminating his role would be harmful to traders as well as to farm-

Maharashtra is the second State after Bihar to attempt such amendments. While Bihar scrapped it altogether, Maharashtra is trying to do the same, by first allowing traders or processors to deal directly with farmers. Neither they

nor the farmers will have to go to the APMC yards to buy and sell their produce. The buyers can directly buy from farmers based on the price quoted by them. Unable to get the Bill cleared in both Houses of the Legislature, the government in August 2016 de-listed fruits and vegetables from the purview of the APMC through a resolution. Further, it was expanded to all farm products. Apart from the government claim that farmers will get a better price after the amendment, it believes that the competitive environment will help the APMCs improve their infrastructure as well as their quality of service to attract farmers. According to Mr. Ghanavat, farmers will go to the market which gives them a better price, be it private buyers or the APMCs.

### How many APMCs are there?

Maharashtra has 306 APMCs. The APMC Act had made it mandatory for farmers to sell all their crops in the mandi within a geographically delineated market area under a particular committee's jurisdiction. A few lakh traders and head loaders survive on these committees. It is alleged that local political interests drive all the decisions taken by the APMCs. The supporters of the Bill claim that political compulsions have forced successive governments not to push for the amendments.

Shashikant Shinde, leader of the head loaders and one of the MLAs opposing the Bill, said it is being introduced to serve the interests of multinational companies. According to him, the APMCs provide a mechanism which ensures at least a minimum support price for the farmers' produce, and outside the APMCs, farmers will be forced to sell at a price quoted by companies.

The State government will continue to hold meetings with the stakeholders, and is likely to present the Bill, approved by all, in the budget session from February 24.

ALOK DESHPANDE



A ND-NDE

# What about some human intelligence first?

To consider AI as a replacement for human intelligence is to repeat the age-old mistake of expecting god to solve problems without humans making any effort



THE CONTROVERSIAL INDIAN

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Artificial intelligence (AI) is all the rage these days. A recent article noted that 'robots' - shorthand for AI in the tabloids - will be able to write a fiction bestseller within 50 years. I suppose that would be shocking to me as a novelist if most fiction bestsellers were not already being written by 'robots'. Or so one feels, keeping publishing and other vogues in mind: a bit of this, a bit of that, a dash of something else, and voila, you have a bestseller!

#### Intelligence and skills

In that sense, perhaps the rise of AI will make us reconsider what we mean by human intelligence. This discussion has been neglected for far too long. Take my field: literature. The Chinese company, Cheers Publishing, lately offered a collection of poems written by a computer program. So, are poets, generally considered to be suicidal in any case, jumping off cliffs in droves as a consequence? Well, this is a selection from one of the AI poems I found online: "The rain is blowing through the sea / A bird in the sky / A night of light and calm / Sunlight / Now in the sky / Cool heart / The savage north wind / When I found a new

Yes, there are aspiring poets – and sometimes established ones - who write like this, connecting words centripetally or centrifugally to create an effect. I think they should have been pushed off literary cliffs a long time ago. Because this is not poetry; this is just the technique of assembling words like poetry. There is a difference between the intelligence required to write poetry and the skills required to write it. That poetic intelligence is lost without the required poetic skills, but the skills on their own do not suffice either.

The fact that lines like this, written by AI, can be considered poetry does not reflect on the intelligence of AI. It reflects on the intelligence of those read-

ers, writers, critics, editors, publishers and academics who have not yet distinguished between gimmickry and mimicry on the one side and the actual freshness of a chiselled line on the other.

But this is a small example. Surely, AI might also make us discover our basic lack of intelligence in other areas, including that of considering something like IQ to be a sufficient index of human mental capacity! Because if we think that AI can replace human intelligence,

then we are simply not thinking hard enough.

#### Work and leisure

One of the major failures here is that of considering intelligence to be something different from and raised above the activity of living. This leads to the misconception that intelligence can be relegated to something else – say, a robot – without becoming something else. Human intelligence cannot be passed on to something else: What is "passed on" is always a different kind of 'intelligence'. (I would call it cleverness, until further evidence to the contrary.)

Even the arguments that AI – or, as in the past, robots - can enable human beings to lead a gloriously workless existence is based on a similar misconception. Because human intelligence is embedded in human existence, 'work' as human activity in the world is not something human beings can do without. The fact that we resent 'work' at times and in hard and boring jobs, often all the time - does not change this. What we resent is not acting in the world ('work') but being made to act in the world against our better and natural inclinations ('salaried work,' mostly). To think that AI and robots can just create a lifetime of 'leisure' for human beings is to not know what human beings are. It shows a lack of intelligence.

It is because human intelligence is embedded in human living and acting that human beings have the ability to adopt contradictory positions, or no position at all. From the perspective of 'pure' intelligence, this seems to be a flaw. But it is only a flaw if one divorces intelligence from living and acting in the world, for the latter often throws up situations of unresolvable ambiguity and ambivalence. In different ways, both religion and literature know this - and that is the reason why they retain a central role in human consciousness

There is much that we can do with AI, just as there is much that we have done with the wheel. But to consider AI a replacement for human intelligence - or humanity - is to repeat an age-old mistake. This mistake relates to god. No matter whether god exists or not, it has always been a mistake to expect him to 'solve' problems without human effort. The Prophet of Islam is said to have once told a man who claimed that he believed in Allah so much that he never tied up his camel: "First tie up your camel and then believe in Allah." Buddha, pressed to answer if there was a god, supposedly replied: "It would make no difference to mankind in the world."

It is ironic that the often atheistic fans of AI who believe that it is 'The solution' are making the same mistake that some of the religious made in assuming that god can be 'The solution' - without ongoing and intelligent human effort.

## A Non-Defamation Agreement

How to protect oneself legally, logically and semantically against a defamation suit



G. SAMPATH is Social Affairs Editor, The Hindu

For some time now I've been meaning to write a candid, courageous, noholds-barred article naming every name and exposing every sordid detail about a defence deal involving flying objects that shall, for the moment, remain unnamed. Please don't think I'm spineless. In any case, when was the last time anyone saw a spine on Indian soil? In 1857? It's just that my lawyer keeps warning me that in India, speaking the truth can bankrupt you and land you in jail. Frankly, I don't get it.

#### - Firing defamation suits

Like you, I also keep reading in the papers about this crony capitalist whose full-time hobby is filing defamation suits. Again, I'm not naming him only because my lawyer insists that I don't. He says I may end up attracting a ₹56,000 crore defamation suit against me and the IT guy who helped me write this column by fixing my laptop when it crashed in terror after the opening sentence.

But tell me something. If your character is truly without blemish – it has to be, in order to be eligible for defamation, since you can't defame someone whose reputation is already faecal matter – how will binge-filing defamation suits help? In fact, if someone uses defamation suits like an AK-47 – going dhar-dhar-dhar against anyone and everyone - it would be counterproductive. This person would end up with the reputation of being a defamation maniac, which, if you ask me, is not something you'd expect from a paragon of virtue. As Shakespeare said, reliance on defamation suits provokes

suspicion. Personally, I am not a judgmental person. If you want to make money by

compromising India's defence interests, who am I to judge? As a patriotic taxpayer, I do not mind it in the least if my income tax helps a fellow Indian to pay off his debts.

But as my lawyer explained to me, with criminal defamation, the process IS the punishment. I finally understood why my favourite novel, Franz Kafka's The Trial, is called "Der Process" in German. Because it's the process, stupid!

So before I speak my mind on this defence deal, I wish to protect myself legally, logically and semantically against the faintest possibility of a defamation suit. Also, the way things are with the Mongolian judiciary (just to be clear, when I say Mongolian, I mean Mongolian), I don't want my fate sealed in an envelope.

### **Terms and conditions**

Therefore I'm not taking any chances. I want you to read carefully the terms and conditions under which you are consuming this column. I am grateful to my lawyer for drawing up this Agreement at such short notice and without even charging GST. Here goes:

1. This column that you are reading is a de facto Non-Defamation Agreement (NDA) between you (hereinafter referred to as 'you') and the column's author (hereinafter called 'me').

2. All the provisions of this Agreement are effective as of the date of publication of this column or your date of birth, whichever is earlier, and shall remain in force until you and/or your

reputation die(s), whichever is later.

3. Pursuant to (1) above, through the act of reading this column, you have entered into a legally binding Agreement with me, whereby you are deemed to have sworn on your mother and/or father/guardian, as applicable, that you will never, ever, either directly or through a proxy, file a defamation suit against me or any of my friends, family members, ex-girlfriend(s), or any other individual, organisation, mammal or reptile, pliable or otherwise, who claims to be, or has ever been, a journalist.

4. You acknowledge that Indian defamation laws are nonsense and that anyone who thinks of using them against anyone should pre-emptively drown himself or herself in a vat of double-toned cow urine.

5. If ever you feel an irrepressible urge to file a defamation suit, you will do so only after fulfilling two conditions: (a) Watch The Accidental Prime Minister and Toilet: Ek Prem Katha back-to-back five times without a single toilet break; (b) sing the first 18 lines of 'Vande Mataram' without any mistakes and without using words like 'Pulkistan' and 'Sumantra Bhusmani'.

6. You undertake to indemnify, in perpetuity, the author of this column and his progeny, both current and future ones, if any, from any damage (real or imagined) that may accrue to your reputation (real or imagined) from anything that this author may have ever written or may ever write in

7. All disputes arising from this Agreement will be settled by a fivejudge bench of a Kangaroo Court where the Chief Kangaroo will be myself, and the other four kangaroos will be picked by a one-member collegium headed by myself.

8. You biometrically signed this Agreement and accepted all its provisions the moment your eyes fell on the headline or any other line(s) of this column, including the defamatory lines in the visual misrepresentation of the author's winsome visage at the top of this column.

# Stupa-hopping in Sarnath

In the land where Buddha gave his first sermon and the Ashoka Pillar was found



RANA SAFVI is a historian, author and blogger documenting India's syncretic culture

In the 6th century BCE, a young man left the comforts of his royal home in search of truth. For six years, he followed extreme ascetic practices and became totally emaciated. It was then that he realised that this was not the way to nirvana. He eventually found enlightenment under a tree in Bodh Gaya. Prince Siddhartha became Buddha, or the Enlightened One.

#### **Teachings of Buddha**

From Bodh Gava, Buddha went to the Deer Park (Mrigadava) in Sarnath, where the five monks who had been with him during his ascetic phase were staying. It was there that he gave his first sermon, an event known as the Dharma Chakra Pravarttana, or turning of the wheel of law. In ancient times, this place was known by many names - Rishipatana, Mrigadava and Mrigadaya. The word Sarnath comes from a corruption of the name Saranganatha (lord of deer).

In his first sermon to these five companions, Buddha spoke of the Four Noble Truths and the eightfold path that frees people from suffering. He said that there are two ways of life: one is to indulge in all the pleasures of the world and the other is to deny oneself these pleasures. The middle path is the way to achieve nirvana, he said.

It is in Sarnath that Buddha laid the foundation of his sangha, or organisation of monks. He had 60 disciples, who he sent to different parts of the country to spread his teachings. He also established an order of female monks, which was joined by his wife.

Two hundred years after Buddha, the Mauryan emperor, Ashoka, fought the Battle of Kalinga and, disgusted by



the bloodshed, became a Buddhist. It is to him that we owe many of the beautiful stupas and monasteries in Sarnath. We also owe a huge debt to Sir Alexander Cunningham, who excavated the Dhamekh, Dharmarajika, and Chaukhandi stupas along with a monastery and temple between 1834 and 1836. Many excavations followed these, the most famous among them being the 1904-05 excavation by Friedrich Oscar Oertel of the Ashoka Pillar, including the Lion Capital.

### **Invasions and restorations**

I have visited Sarnath many times, and each visit is as magical than the previous one. Entering the gate the first thing one sees are the remains of excavated monasteries. As I walked beyond that, I saw a huge group of devotees sitting around in prayer at the Dharmarajika stupa. It was an enchanting sight, for they were oblivious to the sun beating down on them and chanted their sacred texts.

This stupa is the one said to have been built by Ashoka to commemorate Buddha's first sermon. Today it is just a low and flat platform as it "was pulled down in 1794 by one Jagat Singh of Banaras," says B.R. Mani in Sarnath: Archaeology, Art and Architecture. He says, "Jagat Singh, the Diwan of Raja Chet Singh of Banaras, dug the stupa mound in 1793-94 for the purpose of obtaining building material, both stones and bricks, for the erection of a market place in the city after his

On top of the Ashoka pillar in Sar-

nath was the the Lion Capital and the Dharmachakra, but the Lion Capital is now housed in Sarnath museum, while the pillar remains where it was originally. The Lion Capital was adopted as the national emblem of India in

With remains of excavated monasteries on both sides, I walked up to the Dharmekh stupa, which is synonymous with Sarnath. After Ashoka, the other rulers who added to Sarnath's glory were the Kushans, the Guptas and Harshavardhana. Under the Guptas, the Dharmekh stupa was encased with stone-carved floral designs. Sarnath suffered from the Huna invasions, but Harshavardhana later restored some of the earlier buildings. The Chinese pilgrim Hiuen-Tsang (602-664) left detailed accounts of the Dharmarajika stupa and Ashoka's lion pillar. He found 1,500 monks living there.

Sarnath also suffered when it was attacked by Mahmud of Ghazni. Mahipala, the Pala king, restored the monuments. Architect James Fergusson, in History of Indian and Eastern Architecture, remarks on the similarity between the sculptured band on the central part of the Dharmekh stupa, which has "geometric patterns of great intricacy", and the carvings done on the two earliest mosques in Delhi and Ajmer. The calligraphy on the screen of Quwwat-ul-Islam mosque, built by Qutbuddin Aibak in the Qutub complex in Delhi, does bear resemblance to the stupa. I have often wondered at the presence of the eternal knot associated with Buddhism in this complex.

The last great monument of Sarnath, a monastery named Dharmachakra Iina Vihara, was built in the 11th century by Kumaradevi, wife of Govindachanda of the Gahadavala dynasty.

Sarnath's importance as a Buddhist centre diminished with time. But there are many other interconnections between historical characters which never cease to amaze me. According to an inscription at Chaukhandi stupa, Humayun sought refuge in Sarnath when he was escaping from the Battle of

# What qualities should we expect from our leaders?

Our political leaders must owe supreme loyalty to nothing but the country's constitutional values.



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We expect individuals to be their own leaders, to take charge of their lives, to assume responsibility for their decisions. But when individuals group together, a problem arises. Groups can't take charge of themselves, nor can every member simultaneously take charge of the entire group. Someone from the group is invariably asked to show the way, to become the primary agent, to lead. This is simply a fact: groups can't do without leaders. Every sporting team has a captain, a school or college has a principal, a company has its CEO, institutions have their directors, and governments their presidents, chief or prime

ministers Yet, not everyone who occupies high office is a leader. A person who merely coordinates the actions of others or has

management skills is not a leader. Moreover, not everyone who assumes the role of a leader is able to play it well. What qualities then make for a leader? Which virtues are required to provide ethical leadership? I suppose there is little new one can say on this matter. But let me still give it a shot in the hope that it serves as a good reminder. And in the election year, why not focus on qualities necessary for political leadership? Here I can identify four.

### **Being inclusive**

First, if a person is chosen to lead the group, it is her responsibility to take care of the interest of each person of the entire group. This often entails putting collective interest before her own interest or that of her preferred group. For this to happen, she must first be able to identify the common good, to have a grasp of what is acceptable to all, to have an inclusive vision. This requires an infinite capacity to listen to others, to learn from them, to have the intellectual ability to critically examine and evaluate what everyone wants and needs, and then put them all together. Second, since this intellectual formu-

lation can only be the first step, an esti-

mate of the real quality of a decision is not known until it is implemented; its deficiencies begin to show up only when put into practice. This requires him to keep his ear to the ground, listen patiently to criticism to judge if his policies are working. He must not be defensive when criticised, or evade uncomfortable questions, but face criticism head on and be able to sift the wheat from the chaff. It also necessitates that a leader show flexibility and an ability for course correction by admitting mis-

Third, a leader must be a good com-

takes. He should know that one's stature

is not diminished by accepting fallibili-

municator, and that is greatly helped if he has a way with words. But all the rhetorical flourish is of no avail if the speech lacks sincerity and conviction. A conviction with no relation to truth or actual outcomes is dishonest. Eloquence, though a good quality, is hollow without truth. Isn't it better to

Finally, a good leader knows that nothing can be achieved without the collective expertise and wisdom of a support team. And when it comes to the entire country, such a team consists of a battalion of groups and institutions.

quietly do the job at hand rather than

make grandiose claims or promises that

can't be kept?

How should members of such teams be picked? It is tempting to induct people who belong to a common caste, region or religion. But such people are prejudiced in their thinking, serve their own particular group or merely themselves. They can't be good for the country as a whole. A good leader must rise above narrow, irrelevant considerations to select his team.

### **Unafraid of rivals**

It is equally tempting to pick those one has taken a fancy to, who are personally loyal. But such people often lack spine. Fearful people with poor ability can never offer good advice to their leader and could allow bad decisions to prevail that push the country down a ruinous path. Besides, they are often among the first to backstab the leader once out of power. Thus, personal likes and dislikes too must be set aside. I doubt if younger readers know that Nehru inducted into his cabinet Dr. Ambedkar, his longstanding, pre-eminent critic, as also the founder of the Jan Sangh, Syama Prasad Mookerjee. Abraham Lincoln, the 19th century American President, was also exemplary in this matter. The man he appointed as his Secretary of War was earlier his superior in legal practice and had on occasion even humiliated him. But over time Lincoln was convinced that the interest of the nation during war would be best served by bringing this rather arrogant man into the cabinet. This led him to set aside personal resentment, forgive him and appoint him to a very crucial job in his cabinet. Great leaders don't hold grudges, are not vindictive and do not care if they have been wronged in the past by anyone so long as they are convinced that he will do no wrong in the future. Magnanimity isn't just a personal moral quality but a necessary political virtue.

Clearly then, a leader must have a knack of appointing persons best suited to his team who have proven ability, understand the purpose of the job, can speak their mind, and are able, without fear, to disagree with the leader if need be. Above all, they must understand the inclusive public philosophy that guides the nation. But such persons can be identified only by one who possesses these qualities and is himself devoted to this public philosophy. In India, this means that our leaders must owe supreme loyalty to nothing but our constitutional values.