

Opinion

SUNDAY, MARCH 24, 2019

BEING A CHOWKIDAR is honourable work that goes back many centuries. Watchmen came from all communities and backgrounds. They were individuals and the work was routine. Liberalisation spawned a new organised business of providing security guards to homes and businesses. These guards carry no weapons; only a few who guard banks are allowed to carry a side-arm. By and large, the days and nights are uneventful.

It would have remained so but for Mr Narendra Modi imperiously directing his party folk to adopt the prefix 'chowkidar' to their names. Within hours, we got another example of the BJP's boasts: 25 lakh people had become *chowkidars*. It was announced that Mr Modi will have a conversation with them. Next stop: the *Guinness Book of Records*, I suppose.

The circus goes on

Governance, under the BJP, has become a circus. There is a ringmaster, but there are no lions or tigers. The whip is cracked on lambs and rabbits. There are, of course, enough clowns who will say that there will be no elections after 2019.

While there are some who enjoy the show, the vast majority of the people are asking pertinent questions. Survey after survey has revealed that the main concerns of the people are (1) unemployment and (2) farmers' distress, especially indebtedness.

The evidence on unemployment is mounting with every passing day. The shocking story of the National Sample Survey Office is well known despite the media blacking it out. The NSSO conducts a Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS). The previous survey was conducted in 2011-12 and another survey was conducted in 2017-18. The last report was approved by the National Statistics Commission in December 2018, but the BJP government has withheld the release. Protesting against the suppression of the report, Mr P C Mohanan and Ms J V Meenakshi, the two remaining non-government members of the Commission, resigned in January 2019. There has not been a word of explanation from the government.

The contents of the report are tumbling out:

- The unemployment rate for males in urban India is 7.1% and in rural India is 5.8%.
- The size of the workforce (male and female, rural and urban) has shrunk by 4.7 crore from 42 crore to 37.3 crore.
- Job losses in the rural segment were 4.3 crore and in the urban segment were 0.4 crore.
- Women suffered more job losses in the rural segment and men suffered more in the urban segment.

The data affirm that there has been rise in unemployment and increase in rural distress. The government denies both, and hence has suppressed the inconvenient truth in the PLFS.

Unprecedented unemployment

Other data confirm the conclusions of the PLFS. The CMIE reported that the total workforce (number of people employed) declined from 40.75 crore in February 2018 to 40 crore at the end of February 2019. The CMIE also reported that 1.1 crore jobs were lost in 2018. The Minister of Industry, Tamil Nadu, told the state legislature that 5 lakh jobs were lost in the

ACROSS THE AISLE

P Chidambaram



Want managers, not just watchmen



The size of Indian workforce has shrunk by 4.7 crore from 42 crore to 37.3 crore, according to the Periodic Labour Force Survey conducted by NSSO

state because of demonetisation and the GST.

Go to any city — Akhbar Nagar circle in Ahmedabad, Thadi market square in Jaipur or Khajrana square in Indore — you will find casual labourers earning less than half of what they were earning before, and reduced to penury. Underway now is recruitment to 62,907 posts of khalasi (or helpers). Over 82 lakh persons have applied. According to data, 4,19,137 are B.Tech graduates and 40,751 hold Master's in Engineering!

The ruling *chowkidars* perhaps think that their job is to guard the houses; it is not their concern if people living in those houses are unemployed or losing their jobs.

Sins against farmers

There is a similar story on growing distress in the agriculture sector. The last Economic Survey (2017-18) authored by Dr Arvind Subramaniam severely indicted

the BJP government: "In the last four years, the level of real agricultural GDP and real agricultural revenues has remained constant."

They were guilty of —

- Denying a fair increase in MSP and thus keeping producer prices depressed;
- Paying no attention to the procurement machinery: according to the Shanta Kumar Committee report, only 6% of farmers benefited from the procurement system;
- Tinkering with the import-export policy: banning or restricting agricultural exports from India (e.g. onions and potatoes) and allowing imports into India that affected farmers' prices (e.g. pulses).
- Not taking steps to offset the effect of a relentless increase in prices of inputs such as seeds, fertilisers, diesel, electricity, water, hired machinery, etc;
- Empty boast that farmers' income will be doubled but not taking any mea-

asures to help farmers earn an income through non-crop agriculture;

- Demonetisation that destroyed the micro and small farmer who got pushed deeper into debt; and
- Not waiving farmers loans.

Having committed these sins against the farmers, the farmers were sought to be appeased by an election-eve sop of ₹2,000 per family or ₹17 per day! Given the scale of indebtedness (average ₹1,04,000 per farmer, according to NABARD), a loan waiver was an economic and moral imperative. The BJP government flatly refused to consider a loan waiver and paid for the folly in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

The experience of the BJP government tells us that the need of the hour is competent economic managers, not just self-appointed watchmen.



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INSIDE TRACK

COOMI KAPOOR

In-house talent

The BJP hired at great expense the top advertising names in the country for its 2019 publicity campaign. Yet, some of the best ideas have emanated from Narendra Modi himself, who has a natural talent for self-publicity. The original slogan coined by the professional ad-men for the 2019 campaign was *Namumkin Ab Mumkin Hai*, which was happily used as the catchline in government advertisements since there was no mention of the party or the Prime Minister. But when Modi addressed a rally in February, he turned the concept around to announce the more upfront slogan "*Modi Hai to Mumkin Hai*". However, surveys with sample audiences suggested that even this slogan did not resonate with listeners and many did not understand the Urdu word "*mumkin* (possible)". The PM pulled a rabbit out of the hat by turning around Rahul Gandhi's accusation "*Chowkidar Chor Hai*" to his advantage with the campaign "*Main bhi Chowkidar Hoon*", cleverly incorporating his supporters in his campaign. All Central ministers quickly fell in line and attached the prefix '*Chowkidar*' to their Twitter IDs, as did other followers. The *chowkidar* campaign is reminiscent of 2014, when Mani Shankar Aiyer had dismissed Modi as a mere *chaiwallah* and Modi had cleverly turned around the elitist insult into a badge of honour.

Grudge match

Mayawati generally punches above her weight while dealing with male politicians, who are terrified of *Behenji's* damage potential. But the feisty Priyanka Gandhi Vadra has no such inhibitions. Mayawati retaliated to Priyanka's much-publicised appointment as general secretary for Eastern UP by announcing that the BSP would contest all seats from Madhya Pradesh, from where the Congress won recently. *Behenji* also sought to steal the thunder of the CWC meeting in Ahmedabad by categorically ruling out any tie-up in UP with the Congress, despite pressure from other non-BJP parties. Priyanka's response was to call on Dalit leader Chandrashekhar Azad of the Bhim Army in hospital. Soon after that meeting, the Bhim Army declared that Azad would contest the Lok Sabha polls and take on Narendra Modi from Varanasi. Furious, Mayawati wanted to field BSP-SP candidates even in Rae Bareilly and Amethi, and it was with difficulty that Akhilesh Yadav persuaded her not to. Shortly afterwards, Danish Ali, general secretary of the JD(S), the Congress's ally in Karnataka, joined

the BSP. Priyanka followed up with a trip from Prayagraj to Varanasi, where the boatmen who greeted Priyanka along the route are lower-caste Nishads and Mallahs. The BSP read this as an attempt to divide the party's vote bank. Mayawati snubbed the Congress yet again by making clear that the Congress was untouchable and she was not interested in its offer of support in seven UP seats. The fact that the photogenic Priyanka has a smart retort for every query and gets more TV coverage than most other politicians also rankles.

Snuffing out rivals

Madhya Pradesh chief minister Kamal Nath has come up with a plan to keep his rivals busy and out of his way. He suggested that the Congress cash in on the popularity of its two most important state leaders, Jyotiraditya Scindia and Digvijaya Singh, to boost the party's position in urban areas, where the BJP is stronger. He recommended that Scindia stand from Gwalior rather than his traditional Guna and Digvijaya from Bhopal instead of the family seat of Rajgarh. Digvijaya may have helped install Kamal Nath as CM, but the latter does not want the wily politician constantly interfering in state affairs.

No sniff of a scoop

For years, journalists on the Congress beat regularly visited the office of the friendly and accessible party spokesperson Tom Vadakkan, hoping to be tipped off on news breaks. The journalists are now furious that Vadakkan successfully hid the big scoop about himself. Vadakkan, who was a fixture in the Congress, having been recruited by Rajiv Gandhi in 1989, has joined the BJP. Vadakkan's problem was that his loyalty was taken for granted. He remained in the same position while later arrivals leapfrogged over him. In 2009, when the bishop from his home town Thrissur suggested that Vadakkan was the ideal candidate for the Lok Sabha constituency which has a large Christian population, the high command said he could not be spared. When Randeep Surjewala was made media in-charge in 2015, Vadakkan's office at 24, Akbar Road, was allotted to him. This year, a backbencher MP from Kerala, K C Venugopal, was appointed the party's organising secretary since he happens to be Rahul Gandhi's benchmate in Parliament. Vadakkan says he joined the BJP with no expectations, but the BJP will find him an asset in a state where nearly 20% of the voters are Christian and the party has never won a parliamentary seat.

Major drama

Rory Mc Ilroy triumphs in a battle of nerves at the Player's Championship

OVER THE TOP

Meraj Shah



'SOME DAYS YOU don't have it, and some days you do'. So goes the popular refrain in golf: one that most of us are guilty of quoting to justify a lousy round. You know who you are, and you know exactly how it goes: starting off with a bad shot, or a stroke of bad luck, the round snowballs into an agonising drag around the course that seems interminable.

At times like these, after amply demonstrating your lack of interest and commitment to the game to your partners, you sulk through the remainder of the ill-fated round. The dark mood persists until you've downed a few at the 19th hole. Happens all the time to me; missing an easy putt, for example, almost always affects my temperament on the next hole, and adversely affects my play until I can put it out of my mind. Usually, I can't.

One definition of a professional is someone who can perform what's required of him, to the best of his abilities, when he doesn't feel like it, and golf is no exception. The top pros work on their mental game more than they work on their golf swing, and the most successful players in the history of the game—from Jack Nicklaus to Tiger Woods—have displayed mastery over both. From hitting the shot required when the moment demands it—as Jack demonstrated in his famous last-nine charge at the 1986 Masters Tournament, or in Tiger's case, 'willing the ball into the hole,' great players conquer nerves, and negativity, 'better than most'.

Last week's Player's Championship, yet again, provided the most exciting finish of any tournament on the PGA Tour schedule. Just what is it about the Player's? Billed as an 'unofficial Major', the event, played at the TPC Sawgrass, has an enviable highlights-roll of down-to-the-wire finales. Certainly, the iconic island green on the par-3, 17th hole, plays a big role in the high drama that the dying stages of the tournament always seem to produce. It doesn't matter if you're leading, or not,



Rory McIlroy celebrates winning The Player's Championship golf tournament at TPC Sawgrass - Stadium Course, US

JASEN VINLOVE

whether you're feeling confident, or struggling; an island green strikes fear into the heart—especially when the

tournament is on the line. At the Player's, the 17th hole serves as a barometer of both: a player's states of

mind, and play.

Rory Mc Ilroy showed just how much he's matured as a player with his steely play over the final nine holes of the event last week. Rory, who famously had a meltdown at Augusta a few years back, showed ominous signs nerves when he hit an easy putt completely off-line on the 14th hole on the final day. The Ulsterman who will turn 30 in just over a month has definitively entered what he calls the 'second phase' of his career. He sealed the deal with gutsy birdies on the 15th and 16th holes, staying dry on the 17th hole, and closing out with a never-in-doubt par on the last.

That this year's Player's Championship will be remembered not for Rory's stellar finish but, rather, Jim Furyk's remarkable run on Sunday, is a fitting postscript for the veteran's steady play on Sunday. Starting the final day way down the field, Furyk stitched together a birdie-par birdie finish for a stunning 67 to take the clubhouse lead; he ended up one shot shy of Rory's 16-under total. Especially fascinating were the different strategies and shots employed by 48-year-old Furyk, versus players like Rory, or Jon Rahm who's half Furyk's age. Like Furyk's bold precision play showed, you've got to play your game.

Tellingly, both players did not drop a shot on the 17th hole. Disaster of the

week belonged to none other than Tiger Woods, who hit consecutive balls into the water for a four-over-par quadruple 7 on the hole that effectively ended his charge on the second day.

In a rare admission from a pro, Vijay Singh put it well when asked by *Golf Digest* magazine what he thought of that hole. "I think it's a great hole. I mean, it's not a difficult hole if you go out there on Monday or Tuesday or Wednesday and just play it. You know, come tournament day, for some reason that green just shrinks. It only seems six foot square near the hole, and the rest of it feels like it's all water... I think it's just atmosphere and I think we just get nervous on the 17th hole, simple as that," said the 'Big Fijian'.

Tiger's score was the worst for any player in the field this year but still two shy of Angel Cabrera's 9 in 2005, and the all-time record of a nine-over 12 by Bob Tway in 2005 is probably going to stand for all time.

For Rory, this win couldn't have come at a better time. With the Masters Tournament right around the corner, he's won against golf's hardest field, on a course that puts very similar demands on a player as Augusta National. If he wins there, Rory would achieve a career grand slam as a 30-year-old. That's just astonishing.

A golfer, Meraj Shah also writes about the game

Idea Exchange

SUNDAY, MARCH 24, 2019

“We have begun discussions with AGP on introducing safeguards in the Citizenship Bill. We will prepare a more acceptable draft of the Bill... Hopefully, we will see the Bill next June or July”



WHY HIMANTA BISWA SARMA

AFTER 23 years in the Congress, Sarma walked out of the party in 2016 to join the BJP. Later that year, he was credited for the party's win in the Assam Assembly elections. As chairman of the BJP's Northeast Democratic Alliance, the Assam minister has been instrumental in increasing BJP's influence in the region. With the

Citizenship (Amendment) Bill and National Register of Citizens sparking protests in the Northeast, Sarma has been working to placate NDA partners there ahead of the Lok Sabha polls. He is confident that despite apprehensions, people in the Northeast will vote for the BJP, for the government's development work



“Now people speak frankly. During Cong's term, 'secularism' brought you down. Now, you can interpret its meaning differently than its interpretation by Left secular people. We have that liberty now”

Muslims from Assam, UP, Bihar different... Fight is against Bangladeshi Muslims, not Indian Muslims

Assam finance minister Himanta Biswa Sarma believes the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill will not affect BJP's prospects in the state, says national security is just one of the issues on which people will vote for BJP in LS polls, defends use of word 'termites' for Bangladeshi migrants as reflection of sentiments on the ground, and says the freedom to eat beef in the Northeast cannot be restricted

LIZ MATHEW: Despite the protests over the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016, the BJP has made key alliances in almost all states in the Northeast. How did you manage that?

When we tried to get the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill passed, a certain section of people supported it and another section had its reservations. Even then I had said that irrespective of the outcome, the Bill will not affect the BJP. No election is fought on a single issue. The opinion on the Bill may be divided, but when it comes to the Northeast and the development that has taken place under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi... there has been no 'for' and 'against'. People feel they have been given a fair deal.

We have been travelling across the Northeast and talking about the Bill. The tribal culture is very strong in the region. We can incorporate certain things which will assure the people in such villages that this Bill will not affect their culture and rights. We have started the process again. People have realised that the BJP has good intentions, that is to protect the Northeast.

LIZ MATHEW: But the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill is an emotional issue. Won't the people of the region take that into account while casting their votes?

People of the Northeast will vote in the same way as the rest of India. In the Northeast it is all about development. In the last five years, every state in the Northeast has been connected by the Rajdhani Express, metre gauge has been converted to broad gauge, single-track railway lines are being converted to dual tracks, bridges have come up over the Brahmaputra, all the states are connected by airways, Bangladesh is opening its ports for trade with people of the region... There has been a dramatic turnaround in the fortunes of the region. We believe the people of the Northeast will vote wholesale in favour of the BJP and the NDA.

LIZ MATHEW: After the aerial strikes in Balakot, Pakistan, national security seems to have overshadowed all other election issues. Will it work to the BJP's advantage?

I don't believe that people will vote only on the basis of national security. Look at the number of initiatives taken by the Centre in the last six months alone. Beneficiaries under the Ayushman Bharat scheme have been increasing. There is the 10% quota for the Economically Weaker Sections. All these steps have created a situation in favour of the Prime Minister and the BJP. People now know that the PM is serious about national security. But, at the same time, he is also serious about health, economically weaker sections of people... My belief is that the Prime Minister will get votes for the whole package.

ABANTIKA GHOSH: But if the BJP has so much going for it, why resort to polarising rhetoric? You were quoted as saying that without the Citizenship Bill, 17 Assembly seats in the state will go to Bangladeshi Muslims.

That statement was made after the Assam elections; there were no polls around then. I still believe in it. People of Assam are in serious danger of losing their identity. I am going to tell this to the people of India, irrespective of elections. It's a hard fact which has also been accepted by the Supreme Court. On the NRC (National Register of Citizens), their (the Supreme Court's) words have been more harsh than what I'm saying. They called it 'external aggression'. The number of Muslim migrants who have entered Assam post 1971... it has created a situation almost like an external



Assam Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma with Associate Editor Liz Mathew in *The Indian Express* newsroom

aggression. This is the language of the Supreme Court.

ABANTIKA GHOSH: But wouldn't the Assamese identity be diluted just as much if migrants other than Muslims come into the country — which is what the Citizenship Bill is attempting?

You have to realise that Assamese identity is part of the Indian identity. We have our independent culture, but overall we are part of India's culture and ethos. But the Muslim migrants do not share our common identity. We are fine with indigenous Muslims. We are proactively working for the welfare of the economically disadvantaged indigenous minorities in Assam. But, Muslim migrants from outside India are posing a serious cultural threat to Assam and India. When it comes to Hindus, Sikhs, Jains... they are like you, like us, they cannot create additional political or cultural challenges to us.

KRISHN KAUSHIK: But the Assam agitation did not have a religious aspect at all. The agitation was against Bangladeshi migrants, not Muslim migrants.

That's debatable. When we participated in the Assam agitation, we only cited data about Muslim migration, because of whom we were losing our identity. But across India people did not want to speak about it frankly. They felt that if you say something you will be seen as not secular. In the last 10 years, and after the BJP came to power, people have started speaking a bit more frankly. During the Congress's term, you were brought down by the word 'secularism'. Now, you can actually interpret the meaning of secularism differently compared to how it was interpreted by the Left secular people. We have that liberty now, and people have started speaking frankly — that our identity crisis is from the Bangladeshi Muslims.

KABIR FIRAUQUE: But the Silapathar massacre of 1983 was of Bengali Hindu refugees. The sentiment, or ethos as you put it, in Assam, has always been against Bangladeshis, irrespective of religion. These are issues for a researcher, not

a politician. As a politician who has participated in the Assam agitation, this is how I have understood it. The agitation was supported by the BJP, and Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Both Vajpayee and L K Advani reiterated that the people of Assam should have a different view with regard to refugees and economic migration. The underlying tone, according to us, was that people were always against Bangladeshi Muslims.

KRISHN KAUSHIK: The Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) had reservations about the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill. Now they are back in the NDA fold. Is the BJP still committed to the Bill?

In the last few months, we have tried to discuss the Bill logically (with the AGP). We have discussed introducing safeguards in the Bill to ensure that it does not affect people's sentiments. We have started discussions with the AGP on the safeguards. We are doing the same with our other partners in the Northeast. We will come to a conclusion that is acceptable to all parties. We will prepare a more acceptable draft of the Bill and then present it to the government and, hopefully, they'll look into it. Hopefully, we will see the Bill next June or July.

PVAIDYANATHANIER: When seasoned politicians such as yourself talk about Bangladeshi Muslims, on the ground the sentiment is generalised to mean all Muslims. Do you see that happening?

That's wrong. We should not have any grievances against Muslims who are part of India, who have equal rights as me or

any other Indian citizen. I have a secular mindset. Though I understand secularism in my own way, I have full respect for Muslims in general. Our fight with Bangladeshi Muslims is on ethnic lines not on religious lines. Assamese Muslims understand this.

Let me give you an example. After the Balakot air strikes, we registered 92 cases against Bangladeshi (migrants) who posted 'Pakistan *zindabad*' on social media. After arresting them, we found that all of them were recent migrants from Bangladesh. They are posing a civilisational challenge to us. But Assamese Muslims, Muslims from UP or Bihar are different. Those interpreting our fight against Bangladeshi Muslims as a fight against Muslims are wrong. We are not against Indian Muslims.

SHUBHAJIT ROY: Last year, when the NRC list was made public, home minister Rajnath Singh travelled to Dhaka and told his Bangladeshi counterpart that there was no question of sending back any person from India. The Bangladesh Deputy High Commission in the Northeast also shared their concerns with you. Can you tell us about it?

Rajnath Singh said that nobody will be sent back to Bangladesh as long as the government accepts them as citizens. I am not for large-scale deportation to Bangladesh either because that will take 15-20 years. We want to create a list of people who have migrated from Bangladesh. Then we want to discuss what rights should and shouldn't be given to them. They should get the right

to health and education, but when it comes to land, voting, they cannot get that. This is to ensure that they do not pose a challenge to our political or cultural identity. Having said that, India has a long tradition of respecting human rights and you cannot deal with anybody, Hindu or Muslim, inhumanely. But, at the same time, you cannot allow them to encroach upon your society. So, till Bangladesh accepts them as their citizens, one should not push them inhumanely across the border. You cannot put them in a train and send them away.

LIZ MATHEW: But BJP president Amit Shah referred to Bangladeshi migrants as 'termites'. Is that humane?

They are 'termites' or '*ghuspathi*' in the context of politics and encroaching upon government land. It is a political speech which questions their (Bangladeshi migrants') encroachment on the political rights of Assamese indigenous people. When it comes to human rights, the incumbent (Central) government's record is better than many others. Mine and Amit Shah's stance on the matter is not different. When it comes to dealing with them (migrants) on the basis of political, cultural and land rights, I want to deal with them ruthlessly; but when it comes to rights like health and education, they must be dealt with humanely. This is also the view of our party. It will take time to deport them to Bangladesh, you have to give their children basic human rights. You must understand this line of distinction.

SHUBHAJIT ROY: In 20th-Century Europe, the Jews were targeted and called 'cockroaches'. Don't you think using the term 'termites' for Bangladeshi migrants dehumanises the community?

In Assam, in districts such as Morigaon, Nagaon, you will hear more harsh words. The reality is that monasteries are being encroached upon, temples are being demolished every day, temple land is being encroached for madrasas. The use of such words is dictated by the emotions of people. For the minority Hindu population of Morigaon, Nagaon, Goal-

para... The kind of torture they face every day, the inhuman treatment, I think these are mild words. The BJP feels for these Hindus.

VANDITA MISHRA: But as a party you have a choice, you can either encourage or embolden those harsh words or you can moderate them. So why are you constantly making this choice to encourage this harshness?

See, as it is, our identity is finished. We are nowhere in the districts I mentioned, and you are telling us to moderate. Will they (the migrants) believe and understand me? Reality in Assam is very dangerous. If this continues, Assamese people will lose everything in the next 15-20 years.

AMRITH LAL: You mentioned that the deportation of the migrants will take 15-20 years. Reports say that they are being kept at detention camps. Will these camps continue till then?

The idea of detention is not ours. It is based on an order of the Gauhati High Court. As a political leader, I don't support it. What about the rights of their children on education and health? I don't believe 15 lakh people should be kept in detention camps. The Court recently said the camps should have hospitals and schools. The government has sanctioned funds for it. The Court is trying to humanise the detention camps. As a politician, I feel their identity should be digitally recorded and they should not be allowed to claim Indian citizenship in other states. Once that is done, they should be given basic human rights.

KABIR FIRAUQUE: You spoke about cutting off land and political rights for those who came to Assam post 1971. This is already under discussion, under Clause 6 of the Assam Accord, which is for people who came before 1951...

You must understand Clause 6 in a different context. When the Assam Accord was signed, the cut-off should have been 1951. But Rajiv Gandhi imposed upon leaders of the Assam agitation to make the cut-off 1971. The cut-off for Delhi, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu is 1951. We took on the burden of illegal immigrants between 1951-71. They are foreigners as per the Citizenship Bill, and the Constitution. We want to make them Indian in the context of Assam. Around 30 lakh people imposed serious political and cultural threat to the people of Assam. So Rajiv Gandhi incorporated Clause 6 in the Assam Accord, saying that you reserve certain seats for the Assamese in the Assam Assembly, certain land rights... Now we are trying to implement that, which is a protection against people who have been regularised between 1951-71. It's an acceptable clause.

ABANTIKA GHOSH: We have had a spate of lynchings across the country over the consumption of beef. As the convener of the BJP's Northeast Democratic Alliance (NEDA), when you visit states in the region, what kind of concerns do people have about this?

See, Northeastern people in tribal states, basically those who believe in Christianity, eat beef. So in the Northeast we feel that there should not be any restrictions on eating any kind of food. But yes, our party has a view point, we believe in what (Mahatma) Gandhi said. We say that if people voluntarily give up eating beef or if the government can create a situation where eating beef declines, it is fine. In the Northeast, the people should be given freedom because it is a part of their identity and culture. Our party or any authority should not restrict that freedom.

SHUBHAJIT ROY: But why give this freedom only to the Northeast?

If you create a set of principles and try to implement it in the South, North, Northeast... It won't happen. It is not opportunism, neither is it guided by any politics. It is the way we celebrate the diversity of the country. In the Northeast, I know if you say voluntarily give up (eating beef), it will not happen. So why say something in a place where it is not possible? At an individual level, one can choose vegetarianism, but at the society level, India becoming vegetarian, that I will not accept.

MUZAMIL JALEEL: But is lynching a person for eating beef justified? The PM has condemned it. Let us end the issue there. We all align with that.



The idea of detention (camps) is not ours. It is an order of the Gauhati HC. I don't support it. What about the rights of their children on health, education? 15 lakh people should not be kept in detention camps