

Opinion

SUNDAY, MARCH 31, 2019

FINALLY, A POLITICAL party has found the courage to bite the bullet. For too long we have ducked the issue, declined to face the moral argument, and trotted out excuses for our unwillingness to take radical measures to eliminate poverty.

The vast majority of the people of India were always poor. (I could be accused of being anti-national.) We were very poor at the time of Independence. The per capita income (at prices then prevailing) was ₹ 247. Few had jobs outside agriculture. Literacy was at 17%. Life expectancy at birth was 32 years. All these indicators pointed to massive and widespread poverty.

In 72 years, all indicators have improved. Millions have moved out of agriculture and hold jobs in the organised sector. The literacy rate is 73%, life expectancy at birth is 68 years and per capita income at current prices (2018) is ₹ 1,12,835.

A staggering number

We should be happy; at the same time we should be ashamed that nearly 250 million people are still very poor. A similar number will be thrown up if we count the people without a proper home (not a hut); or without a patch of land; or without sufficient food on many days of a month; or without a regular source of income.

We can be legitimately proud that millions of people have escaped the vicious grip of poverty. Every survey has reported that between 2004-05 and 2013-14 (the UPA years), at least 140 million people were lifted out of poverty. Some more may have breached the poverty line under the NDA government, even while some who were hit hard by demonetisation and the flawed GST may have slipped below the poverty line. My guess is that one number cancelled the other under the NDA government. We have to await data for the period.

The inevitable conclusion is that there is a significant proportion of the population that lives in poverty. That proportion is variously estimated at between 20 and 25%. In absolute numbers, it is a staggering 250 to 300 million. The economic question is, can we rely on growth alone to lift them out of poverty? The moral question is, should we rely on growth alone to lift them out of poverty?

Economic mind, moral heart

The answer to the economic question is, yes we can. Rapid growth will eventually wipe out poverty. It will also allow us to build a social security system that will offer support in the event of anyone falling below the poverty line due to a personal tragedy or business failure. The catch is, this may take years, and the very poor will suffer great hardships and humiliation during that period. Hence, the answer to the economic question is not entirely acceptable.

The answer to the moral question is, no we cannot. We must look beyond growth and employ other radical measures to wipe out abject poverty. The one measure that has the broadest support among economists and social scientists is direct cash transfer to the target population. In fact, Dr Arvind Subramanian, Chief Economic Adviser between 2014 and 2017, had devoted a whole chapter to the idea in the Economic Survey 2016-17.

The idea of a Universal Basic Income

ACROSS THE AISLE

P Chidambaram



Nyay for the very poor



Congress is promising to ensure a minimum monthly income of ₹12,000 per family if voted to power

(UBI) has been debated for many years. Direct Cash Transfer to targeted groups of people is a variation of UBI. Pilot schemes on cash transfer to targeted groups have been tried in many countries. There is a lot of literature on the subject. Many doubts about direct cash transfer have been effectively answered.

Nyuntam Aay Yojana (NYAY, meaning Justice) announced by the Congress party promises to make a direct cash transfer to 50 million very poor families every month/year. The sums involved are considerable but whether India, after 72 years of Independence, should embark upon such a scheme to eliminate poverty must be answered with an economic mind and a moral heart. In my view, there can be only one answer: yes we must do it, overcoming all challenges. The quality of a good government lies in successfully

implementing a difficult scheme, not shooting down a scheme that is morally imperative and economically feasible.

First charge on resources

India's GDP, at current prices, has grown in the last 15 years (see table) and will grow, in nominal terms, at between 11 and 12% every year:

2004-05	₹ 32,42,209 crore
2009-10	₹ 64,77,827 crore
2014-15	₹ 124,67,959 crore
2019-20	₹ 210,07,439 crore

By 2023-24, it is expected to reach ₹400,00,000 crore. The total expenditure of the Central and state governments in 2018-19 is estimated at

₹60,00,000 crore, and this number too will grow as revenues increase every year.

The moral-economic question is, should not the country set apart up to 2% of its GDP to lift the poorest 20% out of poverty. Remember, the bullet train between Ahmedabad and Mumbai will cost upwards of ₹1,00,000 crore! The write-offs in the handful of corporate insolvency cases that have been resolved so far amount to more than ₹84,000 crore! If a few people 'deserve' such largesse, why should 50 million families (250 million people) not deserve a small fraction of the GDP or of the total expenditure?

The poor have the first charge on the country's resources. The Congress has recognised this principle and thrown the gauntlet.



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INSIDE TRACK

COOMI KAPOOR

Gujarati link

Those driving from the Varanasi airport to the temple town have noticed that boards on construction sites of ongoing highways and bridges projects usually have a Gujarat address these days. Apart from Narendra Modi, there are several connections between Gujarat and the Prime Minister's constituency. For instance, the architect of the recently inaugurated Kashi Vishwanath Corridor is Bimal Patel, the man behind the Sabarmati riverfront project. C R Patil, the MP from Navsari, Gujarat, is in-charge of the two model villages adopted by Modi in the constituency. Modi has also appointed Sunil Oza, the former MLA from Bhavnagar, Gujarat, to oversee the development projects for Varanasi. Patil and Oza in turn have called in many BJP supporters from Gujarat to help out.

Nyay vs Anyay

The Congress hired half-a-dozen advertising agencies to make presentations to the party for the 2019 campaign theme. Although a large sum was spent for the professional advice, it appears that the Congress, like the BJP, is eventually fashioning its own campaign and has turned down the suggestions. Rahul Gandhi played a major role in conceiving the concept which is to be announced at the beginning of April. The Congress will promote the slogan that the party will ensure 'Nyay (Justice)' to undo Modi's 'Anyay (Injustice)'.

In the minority

Shahnawaz Hussain is the best known Muslim face of the BJP. Once a minister in Atal Bihari Vajpayee's Cabinet, he continues to be a senior spokesperson for the party and is on the BJP's powerful central election committee. So when the Bhagalpur seat came up for discussion before the committee, it was humiliating for Hussain to discover that the BJP had already conceded it to its partner, the JD(U). Hussain's claim on the seat was indisputable. He has won from the seat twice and in 2014 lost by a mere 1% margin. Last year Hussain had travelled back and forth from Bhagalpur spending some 15 to 20 days a month in the constituency. So who is responsible for cutting out his name? JD(U) chief Nitish Kumar may nurse a grudge since as BJP spokesperson, Hussain had hit

out in 2010 after the chief minister had cancelled a dinner for Modi in Patna, but the real reason seems to be that Hussain is not in Amit Shah's good books.

Great expectations

Actor Shatrughan Sinha fell out with the BJP for not according him due respect. Now, the Congress too may have fallen short of his expectations. Sinha expected his entry into the Congress to be announced with due fanfare. He was furious when he learnt that party spokesperson Randeep Surjewala was to make the announcement. In light of Sinha's reaction, the Congress shelved his formal entry into the party till after the Bihar seat-sharing concluded. In the meantime, Sinha was given a chance to meet Rahul Gandhi for a photo op.

Plan gone awry

The Congress planned to field Hardik Patel against Amit Shah from Gandhinagar. Patel is a great orator and with over 2.5 lakh Patel voters in the Lok Sabha seat, he was expected to keep Shah on his toes. But the plan fizzled out after the Gujarat High Court rejected Patel's plea seeking suspension of his conviction in a rioting case in Mehsana in 2015.

Dual loyalties

The Congress is having a hard time dealing with its slippery partners. Take the case of JD(S) general secretary Danish Ali, who worked out an agreement for seat-sharing with the Congress for the Lok Sabha polls in Karnataka. One day Ali handed roses to Congress leaders after successfully concluding the seat formula. Five days later he presented chrysanthemums to Mayawati's right-hand man Satish Misra, joined the BSP and got the party ticket for Amroha Lok Sabha seat in UP. Karnataka CM H D Kumaraswamy tweeted that the deal had his blessings, ignoring the fact that the only BSP minister left his Cabinet several months back and the BSP is contesting all the parliamentary seats in Karnataka. Ali has been H D Deve Gowda's pointsman in the Capital for two decades and was unhappy he never got a Rajya Sabha seat for services rendered. One conjecture is that the Gowdas found the BSP offer an easy way to placate Ali. But can a politician be loyal to two competing parties? Or is Kumaraswamy planning to dump the Congress in case the BJP does well in the polls?

Decoding Mankading

Making a U-turn on Buttler's run-out, the Marylebone Cricket Club has now said they didn't think that it was 'within the spirit of the game'

RINGSIDE VIEW

Shamik Chakrabarty



POLLY UMRIGAR ONCE recounted a tale of Vinoo Mankad's professionalism. Someone in the Bombay Ranji team dressing-room in the early 1950s had inadvertently stepped upon Mankad's cricket coffin. The great allrounder was furious and cornered the 'offender' before letting him off with a stern warning. "Never do that again, ever," Mankad had said. The late Polly *kaka* had immediately developed an admiration for his illustrious senior team-mate. Mankad was India's first cricket professional in the true sense of the word.

He was also the first Indian allrounder to achieve the double – 1,000 Test runs and 100 wickets. Mankad was, in fact, fastest to the landmark in world cricket at that time – 23 Tests. Kapil Dev reached there in 25 Tests. Ian Botham eventually became the quickest of them all, getting there in 21 Tests. Mankad didn't see the England all-rounders surpassing him. He died relatively

young at 61 years of age in 1978.

Apologies for a lengthy prelude... But things need to be put in perspective. Mankad is not a Twitter trend with a hashtag, offering negative recollections. Unfortunately the mode of dismissal that Ravi Ashwin effected to Jos Buttler during an IPL fixture between Kings XI Punjab and Rajasthan Royals in Jaipur is called Mankading. The denigration is down to the Australian press of the 1940s that had coined the phrase. Mankad had run Bill Brown out twice during India's 1947-48 tour of Australia, when Brown, the non-striker, had left the crease before the ball was bowled. Mankad had warned Brown first even though the law didn't require that. And although the Australian press had vilified Mankad, Sir Donald Bradman stood by the Indian allrounder.

"For the life of me I cannot understand why. The laws of cricket make it quite clear that the non-striker must keep within his ground until the ball has been delivered. If not, why is the provision there which enables the bowler to run him out? By backing up too far or too early the non-striker is very obviously gaining an unfair advantage... there was absolutely no feeling in the matter as far



Rajasthan Royals batsman Jos Butler reacts after being 'Mankaded' by Kings XI Punjab captain R Ashwin during the IPL cricket match in Jaipur

as we were concerned, for we considered it quite a legitimate part of the game," the Don wrote in his autobiography, *Farewell to Cricket*. Mankad had the support of the other Australian cricketers as well, although, when the dust settled, he had regretted his action. In hindsight, he realised his 'mistake'.

Running out a batsman for leaving his crease at the non-striker's end before the ball is delivered has always been well within the law. The Marylebone Cricket

Club (MCC) are the custodians of the Laws of Cricket and their Law 41.16 states: "If the non-striker is out of his/her ground from the moment the ball comes into play to the instant when the bowler would normally have been expected to release the ball, the bowler is permitted to attempt to run him/her out. Whether the attempt is successful or not, the ball shall not count as one in the over. If the bowler fails in an attempt to run out the non-striker, the umpire shall call and sig-

nal Dead ball as soon as possible."

After Ashwin had whipped the bails off and appealed, the matter had been referred to third umpire Bruce Oxenford who adjudged that the bowler didn't deliberately stop and in his action and waited for the non-striker to leave his ground. Buttler was declared out. Ashwin, too, claimed that there was no deliberate delay. The whole thing was down to Oxenford's interpretation, who ruled in the bowler's favour. Ashwin has been a vocal supporter of running out the non-striker in that fashion. In 2012, he had run Sri Lanka's Lahiru Thirimanne out, as the latter stole a few inches at the non-striker's end. But stand-in India captain Virender Sehwag, in consultation with Sachin Tendulkar, withdrew the appeal. "If that was soft, so be it," Sehwag had said then. Both Sehwag and Tendulkar decided to follow the convention.

In every sport the written laws of the game live cheek by jowl with its unwritten rules. When Trevor Chappell bowled underarm to Brian McKechnie in the World Series Cup final at the MCG on February 1, 1981, there was outrage. Trevor did it under instruction from his captain and elder brother Greg, as New Zealand required six runs to tie the match off the final ball. It was perfectly legal at that time and Australia won the game. But they lost the fans. On Channel 9, former Australia captain Richie Benaud had described it as "disgraceful". Even the prime ministers had waded into the controversy. Both Greg and Trevor were flayed for breaching con-

vention. The ICC subsequently banned underarm bowling in limited-overs cricket, calling it "not within the spirit of the game".

Making a U-turn on Buttler's run-out, the MCC has now said they didn't think that it was "within the spirit of the game". "Having extensively reviewed the incident again, and after further reflection, we don't think it was within the spirit of the game," the MCC laws manager Fraser Stewart was quoted as saying by British newspaper *The Telegraph*. Mind, getting out in that fashion didn't serve a novelty to Buttler. In 2014 at Birmingham, Sachithra Senanayake did it to the England 'keeper-batsman during an ODI against Sri Lanka. The Edgbaston crowd booed the Sri Lankan off, while then England captain Alastair Cook suggested that a "line had been crossed". Buttler himself, however, had put things in perspective. "It is obviously batsman's error," he had said, adding: "If you walk out of your ground and someone wants to do it, it is in the laws of the game. It is all part of the game."

Actually, there's an ambiguity in the law that could be cleared up by empowering the bowling-end umpire to warn the non-striker once if he/she is trying to steal some inches. Even more importantly, the International Cricket Council must ban the game's governing body has allowed its use for so long. Vinoo Mankad can't be a Twitter hashtag with a negative connotation. Sport doesn't teach us to disrespect.

Idea Exchange

SUNDAY, MARCH 31, 2019

In Chhattisgarh Assembly polls, we have beaten both Modi and Amit Shah, not just Raman Singh. We have dispelled the notion that Shah is an election-winning machine. That is not a fear now"



WHY BHUPESH BAGHEL

A GRASSROOTS LEADER, Bhupesh Baghel, 57, has worked his way up in the party since first joining the Youth Congress in 1985 to finally bagging the CM's post after the Assembly elections. Among the states that the Congress won last year, Chhattisgarh was its most decisive victory, with the party winning 68 out of the 90 seats in the state. Born

into a farmer's family, the Kurmi leader first came into the limelight in 2013, when he was handed the reins of the party after a Naxal attack in Jhiram wiped out the entire Congress leadership in the state. He is now outlining the Congress's Chhattisgarh strategy for the Lok Sabha polls, which are spread across three phases in the state



"Rahul Gandhi never called PM a thief. Those who consider themselves *chowkidars* but loot the nation are thieves. If you are a *chowkidar*, do *chowkidari*. No one called you a *chowkidar*, you did that on your own

A country where one is branded a criminal for asking questions cannot succeed

Chhattisgarh CM Bhupesh Baghel says Balakot aerial strikes will not impact election results, asserts that change of candidates by BJP shows that it's afraid in the state and explains why no one anticipated the scale of the Congress victory in the Assembly elections



Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel with National Bureau Chief Ravish Tiwari in *The Indian Express* newsroom

ABHINAV SAHA

RAVISH TIWARI: What is your assessment of the Chhattisgarh Assembly elections?

If you look at the time before the creation of Chhattisgarh (2000), the Congress had formed governments in Madhya Pradesh. In 2003, it was not that the BJP won, the Congress lost (the Chhattisgarh elections). Not even the Congress, Jogi (then CM Ajit Jogi) lost the elections. People did not like his style of working. Raman Singh became the chief minister. Even in 2008 and in 2013, one can't say that the BJP won; we lost. In 2003, we won 37 of the 90 Assembly seats. In 2008, we won 38 and in 2013, we won 39. The difference (between the BJP and the Congress) has never been a lot. We have always been just five-six seats behind the halfway mark of 45 seats.

In the Antagarh bypolls, which happened right after the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the word going around was that if Jogi was removed from the Congress, our government would be formed. When he left the party, it paved the way for our victory. I was made the president of the state party unit just before the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. We could not deliver then but we continued to fight for our people. We raised issues such as ration cards for the poor, sale of crops... We did *padyatras*, *dharmas*, *gheroos*. That is how we were successful in winning the people's trust.

RAVISH TIWARI: In the Assembly elections, your fight was against Raman Singh. Now, in the Lok Sabha polls, your fight is against Prime Minister Narendra Modi. How are the two contests different?

In the run-up to the Assembly elections in Chhattisgarh, the BJP said Narendra Modi would be their face for the election. All banners, posters and hoardings had large images of Narendra Modi. Raman Singh's picture would be very small. In our campaign, we spoke a lot about demonetisation and the Goods and Services Tax. I think, in the entire country, the most opposition to demonetisation and the GST came from Chhattisgarh. We did not just target Raman Singh but also Narendra Modi and Amit Shah.

As the Assembly elections got closer, our party president Rahul Gandhi raised the *chowkidar* slogan for the first time while inaugurating a party office in Chhattisgarh. We kept raising that slogan and also the issue of the Rafale deal. As the elections got nearer, photos of PM Narendra Modi and Amit Shah started shrinking on posters. So we beat both Modi and Shah in the 2018 Assembly elections. We have dispelled the notion that Shah is an election winning machine. That is not a fear now. Last time (in the state polls) we won three-fourths of the seats, this time we will win 100%.

RAVISH TIWARI: The BJP has decided to drop all its 10 incumbent MPs from Chhattisgarh and replace them with new faces in the Lok Sabha polls. How do you plan to take them on?

What people want to know is why are these leaders being replaced? Is it because work is not being done, or is it getting some novelty in the polls, or is it simply out of fear? The BJP is scared after the defeat in the 2018 Assembly elections. This fear is the reason behind the change in leadership. A scared force can never win a battle.

RAVISH TIWARI: As a leader who has risen from the grassroots, what is your assessment of the Lok Sabha elections — not just in Chhattisgarh but also at the national level?

It is very simple. All that Modi said in 2014 is *jumla* — bringing back black money, giving employment to two crore people, implementing the recommendations of the Swaminathan Committee report to help resolve farmer woes. People understand this now. It is apparent from the election results in Rajasthan, Punjab, Karnataka. People are making the comparison (between the BJP and the Congress). We formed the government in these states. When the Centre implemented demonetisation without any notice, people thought they could battle the hardships with the black money that would come back into the system. But that myth got busted. Today, there is no account of how much black money came back. People have lost their trust (in the government).

While campaigning during the state elections, Rahul Gandhi raised the issue of loan waivers for farmers, returning land to the tribal population... and 2,200 acres were actually returned to the community. The people now see that Rahul Gandhi implements his promises while what Modi says is only *jumla*. People on the ground have got this message. In states such as UP, Bihar, Telangana, where I travelled, the trust among people for Rahul Gandhi has been growing. They see a clear difference between the two leaders.

LIZ MATHEW: The Pulwama terror attack and the aerial strikes in Balakot, Pakistan, have changed the political narrative. The focus is now on national security. Will it affect the results of the Lok Sabha elections?

At the national level, anyone asking questions (about the strikes) is labelled an anti-national or anti-religion... But why is asking whether there was an intelligence failure in Pulwama a crime? Our party president Rahul Gandhi interacts with students, farmers, journalists. He responds to their questions. A country that doesn't raise questions, where one is branded a criminal for asking questions, such a country cannot succeed. The people of the country have to make a choice.

There will be no impact of the Pulwama attack and the aerial strikes (on polls). In the past too, the country has been attacked several times but no one ever doubted (former prime ministers) Indira Gandhi, (Lal Bahadur) Shastriji or

Jawaharlal Nehru's decisions. There must be a reason for people raising questions now. After the aerial strikes, some media organisation published that 300 people were killed. Where did this number come from? How did the media get this number? Is it criminal to ask this question? The armed forces were not put together in the last five years. No one doubts the armed forces, all Indians are proud of them. But the way the party (BJP) is politicising it, people are pointing fingers.

KRISHN KAUSHIK: The Chhattisgarh government was criticised after the controversial 1992-batch police officer SRP Kalluri — who was accused, even by the Congress, of harassment and human rights excesses in Bastar — was given the important portfolio of Inspector General of Police (Anti-Corruption Bureau) and Economic Offences Wing (EOW). Last month, he was transferred to the post of transport commissioner. Fifteen MPs have written to you to set up an 'overarching inquiry' to look into the actions of Kalluri. What is the government doing about it?

Of all people, I have been the most opposed to him. The question here is not about the official but the government's vision and intention. Secondly, when he is in the EOW, he is not in the field. When he was IG, he was.

Also, he was believed to be very close to Raman Singh. When our government came to power, we gave him a responsible role so that the BJP doesn't accuse us of playing politics of revenge. Now, trans-

port is not a department where one can earn money (illegally). In a way, it's a punishment posting. He has been posted there. We have also set up a committee to investigate all allegations against him. Action will be taken as per their report.

HARISH DAMODARAN: Your government announced a sharp hike in minimum support price (MSP) of paddy to ₹2,500/quintal from ₹1,750/quintal. How sustainable is this? Also, why is your party not highlighting this and instead talking about *chowkidar*, Rafale etc?

Our party president has been talking about both the issues. I have travelled with Rahul Gandhi to Odisha twice, and on both occasions he spoke about the MSP being raised in Chhattisgarh. If it has not been spoken of in the national media, I cannot comment on it. Rahulji has been constantly speaking on the issue... We have made the payments. Every farmer has got ₹2,500. It has been implemented 100%. You can check with the farmers.

RAHUL TRIPATHI: Naxalism has been a challenge for both the UPA and NDA governments. Both sides have focused on security while dealing with the issue, but the challenge remains. Do you think it's time to change the strategy and explore methods such as dialogue?

The issue has not remained the same, it has grown over the years. When Chhattisgarh was formed, it (Naxalism) was only limited to three districts. Now it has spread to 14 districts. The more forces have been deputed, the more Naxalism has grown. This shows that the more guns you send, the more this problem will spread. Gun is not the answer.

I am not saying that we should speak directly to Naxals. The victims (of Naxalism) include Adivasis, traders, local journalists, those working in local social groups. We have to speak to all of them. We will speak to everyone affected and that is how we will get effective solutions. After talking to these people, and taking into consideration the points that emerge from the talks, I will take things forward. A bullet for a bullet, and a gun for

a gun, that solution does not work.

RAVISH TIWARI: The BJP claims the Congress is soft on Naxalism. Even within UPA-II, there was difference in opinion on Operation Green Hunt (against Naxalites). What directive have you got from the party high command now?

Through this interview, I want to ask the BJP a few questions. We have lost leaders such as Mahendra Karma in the struggle against Naxalism. Nand Kumar Patel, Vidya Charan Shukla, they had all fought against Naxals. We have lost a lot and there is no need to clarify on our position vis-a-vis Maoists, given our loss.

The BJP government did not ensure a fair investigation in the Jhiram Ghati Maoist attack which wiped out the state Congress leadership in 2013. We want to investigate it. There was a conspiracy. It was unlike any Naxal attack before. It was systematic killing. We enquired with the Home Ministry, I also enquired personally, but the BJP has not responded. I think it is the BJP that is connected to the Maoists. Why can't they conduct an inquiry? They have the power to do so for such killings.

RAVISH TIWARI: Before the Assembly elections, there was a push for coalition with Mayawati's BSP, even in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. You didn't concede to the demand for a coalition. Now, with a few weeks to go for the Lok Sabha elections, is there a need for coalitions or should the Congress fight alone?

In Chhattisgarh, we were discussing the need for coalitions before the (Assembly) elections. The BJP was in the state for 15 years, so we needed a strategic plan. But the BSP demanded a lot and kept shifting its stance. I understand that Ajit Jogi (Janata Congress Chhattisgarh) and the BSP's coalition was due to the Enforcement Directorate and CBI. Perhaps the same story played out in UP too.

KARISHMA MEHROTRA: The Comptroller and Auditor General is probing what was pegged as the world's largest mobile distribution scheme under the Raman Singh government. What aspects of the scheme are under investigation?

Firstly, it was a ploy to win elections. They wanted to distribute 55 lakh mobile phones in an area without network, and without any plan to disburse the phones. In Naxal-affected areas, there is not even electricity. The phones can be used to play songs but then the people will have to go to the neighbouring villages to charge their phones. We also opposed the use of local resources to install towers worth ₹600 crore. How can local panchayat funds be used for this? We raised the question in the Vidhan Sabha.

Also, why weren't BSNL towers installed, why did they put up Jio towers? We have recalled 10 lakh mobile phones. We are asking the company to take it back. The CAG is now looking into the matter. Why should government money be given to private firms, especially when we have BSNL? When we ask them for an inquiry, they say it's vendetta politics. The phones have the NaMo and Raman apps pre-installed on them. It's wrong. Had there been a PM, PMO or CMO app, it was understandable.

VANDITA MISHRA: You said that the Modi-Shah machine has been stopped in Chhattisgarh. But in MP and Rajasthan, the Congress did not perform as well as it expected to.

Rajasthan was the most surprising and the Central leadership is assessing the results. I think Delhi underestimated Chhattisgarh, both the media and political experts. We didn't have big leaders like in MP and Rajasthan. Delhi didn't know anyone other than Jogi. We mobilised our workers, fought on issues that affected people... It was a people versus the government fight.

RAVISH TIWARI: What do you make of the language being used by leaders in political campaigns. The Congress president has called the PM a 'thief'.

Rahul Gandhi has never called the PM a thief. He has said '*chowkidar chor hai*.' Those who consider themselves *chowkidars* but loot the nation are thieves. Vijay Malviya, Nirav Modi, Lalit Modi, how did they all escape? If you are a *chowkidar*, do *chowkidari*. No one called you a *chowkidar*, you did that on your own. On social media, have you seen the language used by the BJP workers against Jawaharlal Nehru, Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi? They are maligning them.



When Chhattisgarh was formed, Naxalism was limited to three districts. Now it has spread to 14. The more forces deputed, the more it has grown. This shows that more the guns, more this problem. Gun is not the answer