



The Indian EXPRESS

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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Level-playing field matters

Why state financing is the only way to ensure fair and transparent poll funding



ASHOK KHEMKA

BUILDING PEACE

A narrative that helps normalisation of Indo-Pak ties is needed. But it can't be built only on Imran Khan's version of Pakistan

THE OUTGOING PAKISTAN high commissioner, Sohail Mahmood, who is returning to Islamabad to take charge as foreign secretary, has iterated Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan's call for the resumption of dialogue, after the elections. The need for India and Pakistan to resolve their differences by peaceful methods is a no-brainer. Finding a modus vivendi as cordial neighbours, if not as the best of the friends is an imperative, because the alternatives are too dire to contemplate. Implicit in Mahmood's call is the expectation that what happens at the election stays in the election, and that all the grandstanding settles down once victory and defeat have been decided. It usually does. There is much talk of Pakistan and war this election season in India, but the political leadership of this country knows that actual war is a messy business. This is why there is recognition that the two countries must normalise relations. This is why even while the leading lights of the BJP were demanding in Parliament a "befitting" reply for a particularly bad round of ceasefire violations in 2017, the national security advisors of both countries were in secret talks.

So if Pakistan wants peace today, it should not be interpreted by India as a sign of weakness, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in Kathua, nor should India be considered weak for talking to Pakistan rather than sending the Indian Air Force to bomb terrorist targets. But the new "objective narrative" between the two countries that Mahmood talks about cannot be a one-side acquiescence of Khan's version of what Pakistan or the Pakistani state is today. After all, there would have been no Pulwama had Pakistan acted against Masood Azhar after Pathankot, and perhaps no Pathankot had the perpetrators of Mumbai 26/11 been punished. And there would never have been a Balakot had Jaish-e-Mohammed not been headquartered in Pakistan. And there would be no Jaish had it not been nurtured by the Pakistani security establishment. Whatever Khan says, there is no sign that this establishment has changed its colours.

The best phase in India-Pakistan relations lasted the two years from the time the military ruler Pervez Musharraf pledged not to allow Pakistani territory or PoK to be used by terrorists for attacks on India in January 2004. It lasted until the 2006 Mumbai bomb attacks, and officially died in 2008. In this short period, the two countries caught a glimpse of what normal might mean in their relations — two bus services to connect divided J&K, cross LoC trade, both signs of what a Kashmir resolution could look like, relative peace in the Valley, sporting and cultural ties between South Asia's big rivals. That was an attempt at crafting an "objective narrative". A new narrative will certainly require an acknowledgement of what went wrong the last time, if nothing else.

ABUSING WOMEN

Clearly, Akhilesh who wants to project a more liberal and modern alternative can't rein in his toxic uncle

THE OLD ORDER had reluctantly yielded to the new in the Samajwadi Party. With Akhilesh Yadav at the helm, the party showed nimbleness and humility in sewing up alliances for the Lok Sabha election. The visible presence of Yadav's wife and Kannauj MP, Dimple Yadav, in party fora, too, has been a welcome change from its testosterone-heavy optics. But the musty odour of feudalism still clings on to the party. True to that vein of patriarchal nastiness, party MLA and candidate for Rampur constituency Azam Khan has aimed a volley of sexist abuse at his rival Jaya Prada, a former actor. At a rally in Rampur last week, Khan, in an apparent reference to Jaya Prada's association with the RSS, said: "It took you 17 years to understand her true face. But I realised in 17 days... that she wears khaki underwear."

This is not the first time that Khan — or any other Samajwadi leader — has denigrated Jaya Prada (Khan once called Jaya Prada *naachne gaane wali*; the actor has also alleged that Khan circulated morphed images of her during an election campaign.) As the over-the-top infantilisation of Hema Malini's campaign, or the furore over Trinamool Congress's choice of candidates in Bengal reveal, women actors and performers are subject to the worst of prejudices and barbs when they enter politics. While barriers to women's entry into politics remain extremely high, the ones who find their way in are relentlessly policed and put in place, revealing a larger discomfort with those who seek equal political power. Political leaders across the spectrum, from Mamata Banerjee to Smriti Irani and Mayawati, have been ridiculed in this manner.

But it is not only the SP that must choose between a dark, regressive past and a more equitable impulse. It's a choice thrown up for Indian politics by the larger changes in Indian society — and the countervailing political assertion of women that is pushing back against patriarchal rigidity. While leaders such as the BJP's Naveen Patnaik and Banerjee appear to have recognised and acknowledged that tectonic change, too many parties appear to find comfort in clinging on to a grubby, toxic masculinity. If the SP fails to censure Khan for the rancid political discourse he is guilty of, it will have taken a few steps backward on its rocky path to becoming a modern, more equal political party.

TIGER'S TRAIL

Tiger Woods' comeback is also a tale of the politics of perception and consumerism

On the face of it, Tiger Woods winning the Masters at Augusta, Georgia, makes for an unlikely underdog tale. After all, as early as 1997, as a 21-year-old with only a year's experience on the professional circuit, young Tiger became the No 1 golfer in the world. In 1997, when he won his first Masters, his father stood beside him. At 43, when he won his fifth after 11 years without a major title, he had his children at his side. But the hurdles that arguably the greatest golfer of the 21st century has had to overcome are not merely physical or even psychological. Woods' there-and-back-again narrative of triumph is also the story of the complexities of celebrity, of the cocktail consumerism and puritanism that have become such a major part of sporting celebrity.

In 2009, Woods took a voluntary sabbatical from professional golf due to injuries. The announcement also came on the heels of revelations about a series of extra-marital affairs and, following that, a tumultuous period in his marriage. For a sporting figure as iconic as Woods, his personal life had a professional — and financial — fallout. The shareholder cost of Woods' personal life has been pegged at over \$5 billion. Woods' injuries may have had a lot to do with the slump in his career. But his extra-marital transgressions are what hurt his image.

The culture of celebrity in contemporary America, and much of the world, including India, seems to revel in hyperbole. Half-black, half-Asian Buddhist Woods was a hero as much for his background as his dazzling play on the course. His fall, too, was not seen as a human failing but an almost professional betrayal, at least going by the sponsors. And now, he is Tiger once again — celebrated by Donald Trump and Barack Obama, Serena Williams and Kobe Bryant. In sports, it seems, as in much of public life, it is the politics of perception that builds people up and brings them down.

IN JUST 28 days since the announcement of the general election, the Election Commission (EC) has seized cash, drugs, alcohol, precious metals and other items worth Rs 1,800 crore. Compare this to the legal upper limit of expenditure per candidate — Rs 70 lakh. Simple arithmetic would show that the seized amount can fully finance up to five candidates from each of the 543 constituencies. The amount seized is just the tip of the iceberg. The expenditure in any election is estimated to be several times the legal upper limit.

Fiscal constraints on electioneering give rise to the problem of unaccounted money. There have been a few solutions. However, all of them are premised on an adverse relationship between accountability and transparency. Alternately, state funding of the recognised political parties and outlawing of corporate funding could be instrumental in making the electoral process fairer and more participatory.

In 1962, the late Atal Bihari Vajpayee moved a Private Member's Bill to prevent electoral donations by corporates. It was argued that since all shareholders need not subscribe to the political endorsement by a corporate, it was immoral to allow donations against their consent. Vajpayee had propositioned that such funding would only serve corporate interests. While all political parties welcomed the bill, the then ruling party did not vote in its favour. Never again was such a bill introduced.

Under Section 29B of the Representation of the People Act 1951, political parties are free to accept donations from any person, except from a foreign source. Two inferences can be drawn from this — first, money wields the ability to disrupt political agenda; second, foreign money dilutes electoral integrity. Both reasons would equally be valid for any person who is alien to the election process — a non-voter. The concerns that arise from foreign-funding are equally applicable to funding from corporates, with the distinction that while the former is a jurisdictional alien; the latter, on account of being a non-participant, is an alien. However, party interests deter further expansion in the law.

The anonymity provision under the electoral bonds scheme is antagonistic to transparency — the bonds merely enable an "on-the-books" secretive transfer. The State Bank as the facilitator would be privy to the details of the depositor and the political party funded, therefore allowing the ruling party to monitor its rivals. What would be unknown to others, will be known by the ruling party.

The finance ministry's electoral bond scheme afforded a way to fund political parties without disclosing the donor's identity. Of the Rs 2,722 crore donated through the scheme in the last 15 months, almost 95 per cent has gone to the ruling party, which enjoys a 31.34 per cent vote share. The remaining contestants with a 68.66 per cent vote share could only garner 5 per cent funding. The anonymity provision under the scheme is antagonistic to transparency — the bonds merely enable an "on-the-books" secretive transfer. The State Bank as the facilitator would be privy to the details of the depositor and the political party funded, therefore allowing the ruling party to monitor its rivals. What would be unknown to others will be known by the ruling party.

Corporates have long defended their political donations on the grounds of freedom of speech. Within American jurisprudence, corporates claim free speech under the First Amendment. Like citizens, they seek to endorse their economic and political views through contributions to campaign finance. However, casting such a wide net of freedom of speech seems misplaced.

Corporates are associations that further economic interests of their members who enjoy a freedom of trade. Therefore, their freedom of speech is based on their exercise of the freedom of trade, which is essentially for a commercial purpose. Citizens, on the other hand, enjoy an unfettered freedom of speech which extends onto the political domain. Since corporates are not participants as voters, they have no claim to freedom of "political" speech and expression. Therefore, while citizen-voters can donate to a political party pursuant to free speech, corporates must refrain from donating to a political party.

In 2015, the Brazilian Supreme Court declared corporate financing of elections to be unconstitutional. The court understood that right to equality was essential to ensuring fairness through the extrinsic (fair options between candidates) and intrinsic (fair options between ideologies) conceptions. Because 95 per cent of all campaign finance came from corporates, the courts felt that disclosure norms could only address the extrinsic aspect.

Corporates would still be able to collectively suppress certain socio-economic ideologies (welfare measures, controlled economy, wage-labour regulations) to their advantage, by inducing political parties and candidates. So, the electoral contest would not allow certain policies to flourish, irrespective of who won. Outlawing corporate funding was important to ensure the right to equality.

In realpolitik terms, there is no incentive for any ruling political party to reform the law as it stands. Even the main Opposition party lives in the hope that it would derive similar advantage when it comes to power. Thus, necessity would dictate that the task of electoral funding be given to the EC under Article 324. A fair and transparent manner to finance the political parties would require a censure of unaccounted money and direct donations by corporates and non-voters to political parties. State funding of recognised political parties is a viable alternative. A state funding scheme would be viable through the levy of an election cess on the direct taxes. A National Election Fund could be maintained by the EC, into which the proceeds from this cess may be deposited. At the current GDP-Direct Tax ratio and voter numbers, a 1 per cent election cess can fund Rs 500 for each vote cast in elections to the Lok Sabha and the state assemblies. The cess being progressive would spare the poorer candidates from the costs of funding elections. Direct donations to political parties may be permitted only from persons who are entitled to vote. Those not entitled to vote may contribute to the neutral National Election Fund.

Donations from corporates into this fund will not distort the election process, but would instead improve the integrity of the peoples' electoral choice. Parties would be inclined to adopt a more inclusive agenda when in government since more votes will translate into more state funding. Parties will also vie for votes in absolute numbers than merely be the first past the post. Democracy will then truly be of the people, for the people and by the people.

The writer is a senior IAS officer. Views are personal



RAJMOHAN GANDHI

WHAT GANDHI REALLY SAID

He was unconvinced by RSS chief after 1947 meeting, stood against majoritarianism

IN HIS ARTICLE ('The Mahatma and the Sangh', IE, April 12), Manmohan Vaidya, the RSS joint general secretary, recalls an interesting meeting that took place in Delhi in 1947 between Mahatma Gandhi and M S Golwalkar, the RSS chief at that time. Citing Golwalkar's *Complete Works*, Vaidya quotes remarks about the meeting that Golwalkar evidently made 22 years later, in 1969. Vaidya writes:

"On the occasion of the birth centenary of Mahatma Gandhi, a statue of Gandhiji was unveiled by Golwalkar. In his address, he said: 'My last meeting with Mahatma ji was in 1947. At that time riots broke in Delhi. Even those who were non-violent by tradition had become cruel, rogue and heartless. Mahatma Ji said to me: 'See, what is happening?' I said: 'This is our misfortune. British used to say when we leave; you people will slit each other's throats. Today, the same thing is happening. It is bringing disrepute to us in the whole world.' In the prayer meeting of that day, Gandhiji took my name with pride and expressed my thoughts."

While researching my Patel biography (first published in 1990) and my Gandhi biography (which came out in 2006), I too had come across the Gandhi-Golwalkar meeting of September 12, 1947. Apart from Gandhi's journal, *Harijan*, which published his prayer-meeting remarks, and the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, I found references to the meeting in two other places: In Brij Krishna Chandiwala's *Gandhiji ki Dilli Diary* and in a letter that

Nehru wrote to Patel in October 1948, found in *Sardar Patel's Correspondence* (ed. Durga Das), vol. 7, p. 672.

Harijan of September 21, 1947, gives Gandhi's account, delivered on September 12 at the end of his prayer-meeting, of his talk with Golwalkar earlier that day: "He had been told (Gandhi said to Golwalkar) that the hands of [RSS] were steeped in blood. The Gurujee assured him that this was untrue. That organisation did not stand for the killing of Muslims. All it wanted to do was to protect Hindustan to the best of its ability. It stood for peace and he had asked Gandhiji to make his views public."

In Delhi in 1947, Krishna Chandiwala was Gandhi's constant companion. He had become Gandhi's aide and associate from 1920, when he left St Stephen's College to join the Non-cooperation Movement. According to Brij Krishna, when Golwalkar assured him that the RSS did not stand for the killing of Muslims, Gandhi asked him to say so publicly. Golwalkar said Gandhi could quote him. This Gandhi did in his prayer talk that evening, but he told Golwalkar that the statement ought to come from him. Afterwards, according to a letter that Nehru wrote to Patel on October 27, 1948, Gandhi told Nehru that he did not find Golwalkar convincing.

Connected to the Gandhi-Golwalkar encounter was Gandhi's conversation four days later (September 16) with RSS workers in New Delhi's Balmiki Colony, which figures in *Harijan*, in *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase*, written by his aide and secretary from 1919,

Pyarelal Nayyar, and in Brij Krishna's diary. Gandhi told the RSS workers that while he had been impressed years earlier by the discipline, simplicity and absence of untouchability he had noticed in an RSS camp, "sacrifice without purity of motive and true knowledge has been known to prove ruinous to society". Their "strength could be used in the interest of India or against it".

When an RSS worker asked Gandhi if Hinduism did not permit killing an evildoer, he answered: "How could a sinner claim the right to judge or execute another sinner?" Only a properly constituted government was entitled to punish an evildoer. Speaking of Patel and Nehru, Gandhi said: "[The two] have been colleagues for years and have the same aim," and added: "Both the Sardar and Pandit Nehru will be rendered powerless if you become judge and executioner in one. Do not sabotage their efforts by taking the law into your own hands."

Then Gandhi said something which may be relevant today in India and, with necessary substitutions, elsewhere: "If the vast bulk of the Hindus wanted to go in a particular direction, even though it might be wrong, no one could prevent them from doing so. But even a single individual had the right to raise his voice against it, and give them the warning. That is what I have been doing."

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APRIL 16, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

HISTORIC RAIL LINK

THE CENTURY-OLD dream of rail linking India in thousands in the recent past. And they have got so mixed with the local population that authorities are finding it difficult to identify them. The cabinet's political affairs committee, which discussed the matter the other day, noted "the gravity of the situation" and decided upon various steps to stop the people from crossing into India.

THE INCOME TAX intelligence authorities have unearthed a racket allegedly being operated by some promoters and brokers in the commercial and residential real estate busi-

ness in the capital. A number of high officials of the Union Works and Housing ministry, the Delhi Development Authority and the local bodies are also suspected to be involved. The fraud came to light when the tax officials came across some suspicious entries in the accounts submitted by some multi-storied companies. The promoters had shown huge amounts as "conversion charges" paid to an office under the UWH ministry. Conversion charges are paid to the government while converting a residential plot into a commercial one. Reliable revenue intelligence sources said that some promoters managed to get their plans cleared without paying those "charges".

ILLEGAL INFILTRATION

THE GOVERNMENT IS greatly concerned over infiltration into Assam and some other



13 THE IDEAS PAGE

2019: Blowin' in the wind

The 'hawa' this election season is very different from the 2014 general election. The BJP alone is no longer setting the agenda



HARBANS MUKHIA

IN THE PLETHORA of impressionistic narratives around the elections, here is one more: Has the *hawa* acquired a different tone this time round?

To begin with, the euphoria centred on a messiah, pervasive in 2014, is now conspicuously absent. The untiring preoccupation with one individual's pronouncements, from the most casual to the most elaborate, whether uttered at a gathering of a village school kids or a massive public meeting in the national capital, commanded the same amount of coverage on the TV channels for a couple of days throwing everything else on to tickers below the line. That preoccupation is much more subdued now. Thus, one of the pillars of the earlier campaign — unprecedented publicity — has lost much of its vigour.

Much more significant, however, is the winning — or losing — strategy of setting the agenda for the elections. 2014 saw Narendra Modi setting the agenda and the ruling party, the Congress, responding to it defensively. Responding to, in lieu of setting the agenda, in any case, is defensive by nature. Modi set the agenda of *sab ka vikas*, giving it the irresistibly seductive wrapping of *sab ka saath*. An add on was the highly inflated image of corruption, while the subterranean communally divisive agenda was getting organised support of the RSS at the ground level.

The conspicuous absence of euphoria is now matched by the equally conspicuous absence of any reference to either *sab ka saath* or *sab ka vikas* in the current campaign. This absence gets all the more highlighted in the face of the Opposition's centring of the economic issues of farmers' distress and joblessness in the campaign. The centring isn't a last-minute improvisation by one party. The several farmers' marches organised by the Left parties and numerous farmers' associations of a variety of hues over the past nearly two years brought the issue inescapable attention on a national scale. Joblessness grew into an established fact with such data as was becoming public and the truth of it was reinforced by the government's clumsy attempts to conceal the data.

The Opposition, especially the Congress under Rahul Gandhi, combined the two issues of economic distress as the centrepiece of its campaign in the state elections in Gujarat and later in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, yielding impressive dividends. There, too, the agenda was being set by the Opposition and Modi was responding to it by seeking to divert attention from it.

Now, with the entire electoral process in full motion, the Opposition in general and the Congress, in particular, has seized the initiative by framing an imaginative and attractive plan of action through its manifesto at least on the farmers' issue. The fact that the BJP leaders only respond to it is to keep announcing that the plan is unimplementable is defensive at best and getting caught with its pants down at worst. Interestingly, the BJP manifesto was released three days before the first votes were cast indicates its low opinion of electoral promises.

Caught unprepared, the BJP hopes to get home by playing the divisive as well the nation-in-peril card vis-à-vis Pakistan, thus ad-



CR Sasikumar

mitting the Opposition's charge of complete failure on the economic front. At any rate, contrary to the common assumption of the communal divide and the national security as the unfailing harbingers of electoral victory, history tells a completely different story. The 1965 war with Pakistan brought the Congress in 1967, to loss of governments in all states from Punjab to West Bengal, except at the Centre, where too it suffered setbacks. In 1971, Indira Gandhi had already won the massive mandate before the decisive war with Pakistan. The victory did not give her comfort for long and by 1974, India was engulfed in unprecedented unrest led by Jayaprakash Narayan, leading ultimately to the Emergency and Congress defeat in the 1977 elections. The victory at Kargil in 1998 did not give any relief to Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh's "inaction" after the horrendous Mumbai attack in 2008 did not bring any electoral punishment — he comfortably won a second term in 2009 for his impressive show of economic growth.

The same is true on the question of divisive politics. The BJP's rise from two Lok Sabha seats to 86 occurred between 1984 and 1989 before the now "liberal" LK Advani led his rath yatra from Dwarka to Ayodhya. The demolition of the Babri Masjid in the presence of all the stalwarts of the BJP on December 6, 1992, failed to become the vehicle for its jump to power. Indeed, in the elections held in 1993, the BJP lost three of four Hindi speaking states: Uttar Pradesh (the locale of Ayodhya), MP, Himachal Pradesh and barely survived in

The Opposition, especially the Congress under Rahul Gandhi, combined the two issues of economic distress as the centrepiece of its campaign in last year's state elections in Gujarat and later in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, yielding impressive dividends. There, too, the agenda was being set by the Opposition and Modi was responding to it by seeking to divert attention from it.

Rajasthan where the Chief Minister, B S Shekhawat had kept himself aloof from the Advani adventure. If the BJP won the election in 1998, six long years after the demolition, clearly the two events were unconnected.

More recently, within months after the grand victory in 2014 with 31 per cent of the vote, it badly lost Delhi and Bihar where it pitched its campaign on the divisive agenda. The Indian electorate votes through its lived experience of governance and between the options of economic welfare and jingoism, internal or external, it prefers the former.

The defensiveness of the BJP's current campaign has many facets. The euphoria the media had created is subdued now because even the achievements on the security front have been clouded with questions and its equation of a question with *desh droh* is hardly resonating. Partly also because over the past five years, the media itself has become immensely diversified with innumerable small-scale, local-level channels, videos on the social media and local level regional newspapers have proliferated and these are not slavish to the regime as much of the "national" media is. And the BJP's strategy, perfected by its top leadership, to pursue either divisive measures or especially measures to undermine almost every working institution and blaming it on the Opposition cannot yield more than the minimal dividends. Lies have a limited life span.

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WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

Amritsar (Jallianwala Bagh) remains to this day the most potent embodiment of the violence on which British rule partly rested for nearly two centuries.

— THE GUARDIAN

Embracing the Islamic world

The key to Modi's success in the Muslim neighbourhood has been the decision to focus on India's national self-interest rather than religion



RAJA MANDALA

BY C RAJA MOHAN

SPECULATION CONTINUES ABOUT Prime Minister Narendra Modi's travel plans to Abu Dhabi this weekend at the very peak of the election campaign. If he chooses to be present at the *shilanyas* ceremony for a temple in Abu Dhabi, Modi might also receive the Zayed Medal that the United Arab Emirates has awarded him recently.

Whether he travels to Abu Dhabi or joins the temple ceremony by a video link, the event caps the transformation of India's engagement with the Middle East. Under Modi, India has shed its traditional defensiveness towards the region. The Middle East, in turn, has responded with great enthusiasm to India's new pragmatism.

That brings us to a paradox. The significant expansion of India's engagement with the Muslim neighbourhood comes at a time when religious nationalism has sharpened domestic political divisions. While the ruling party has been accused of fomenting Hindu majoritarianism, some of the more important diplomatic successes of the Modi government have been with Muslim countries. Within the Subcontinent, Afghanistan and Bangladesh see India as a valuable partner and their engagement with India has gained a strong foundation. Both Kabul and Dhaka have better relations with Delhi than with Islamabad. The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation invited India's Minister for External Affairs, Sushma Swaraj to address a meeting of its foreign ministers in the face of Pakistan's strong objections.

India's relations with Sunni Arab states like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have never been better than today. At the same time, the last four years have seen progress in implementing strategic projects like the Chabahar port in Shia Iran. Modi has also brought out India's longstanding partnership with Israel from behind the veil. There have been few objections from the Arab or Muslim world.

One would think Pakistan would be the last government that wants welcome Modi's return to power. But as Prime Minister Imran Khan put it, a strong government under Modi may be more credible interlocutor than a weak coalition government.

While Manmohan Singh could not convince the Congress party of the wisdom of him travelling to Pakistan during his decade-long tenure as PM, Modi was prepared to show up in Lahore on a few hours notice at the end of 2015. That the relationship has gone nowhere is another story. But the pertinent point is the impression that Modi is confident enough to wage either war or peace.

The key to Modi's success in the Muslim neighbourhood has been the decision to focus on India's national self-interest rather than religion. When he came to Delhi in 2014, Modi found the relations with Bangladesh at a difficult juncture. The

Manmohan Singh government had negotiated the important agreement on resolving the land boundary dispute with Bangladesh in 2011. But the Congress could not get it ratified in the Parliament.

To his credit, Modi persuaded the BJP units in Assam and Bengal to stop opposing the agreement and got it ratified by the Parliament. He was also quick to accept an award of the international tribunal on the maritime boundary dispute with Dhaka. It was certainly possible to quibble over the technical details of an award that went largely in favour of Bangladesh.

Contrast this with Modi's difficulties with Nepal, the world's only Hindu nation that Modi likes to call "devabhumi" — the land of the gods. Yet, Modi's tenure saw the tensions between the two countries spike.

There is no doubt that most countries love to demonstrate solidarity with other states and peoples on the basis of shared political values, common religious faith or ethnic kinship. Yet, this empathy is more often than not discarded when a government has to choose between national interest and external solidarity. There is no better example than Pakistan's muted voice on China's current controversial treatment of the Muslim population in the Xinjiang province. For Islamabad, the logic of strategic partnership with Beijing is far more compelling than the declared commitment to take up Muslim causes around the world.

In the Middle East, the fear of Iran's expansionism and potential hegemony has driven Saudi Arabia and the UAE into political collaboration with the Jewish state of Israel. Much in the manner that communist ideology was not strong enough to bind Soviet Union and China in the 1960s and 1970s, religion has never been a sticky enough glue for Muslim majority nations.

While the proposition that national interest trumps all else appears self-evident, it was not easy for independent India to operate on that premise. The partition of the Subcontinent and Pakistan's claim to speak in the name of Islam and its relentless efforts to mobilise the Islamic world in its favour on disputes with India complicated Indian diplomacy. It has been a rather long learning curve for Delhi to separate presumed transcendental religious solidarity and the logic of national self-interest in engaging the Middle East.

Complicating the Pakistan factor outside has been Delhi's concern about the reaction of its large Muslim population at home on foreign policy issues, especially those relating to the Middle East. The idea that India's relationship with Israel or the United States matters more to the Indian Muslims than securing their rights as citizens has always been a political myth of Lutyens' Delhi.

In the end, what matters in foreign policy is not the colour of national ideology or the flag of its faith. Internal coherence and the capacity for practical give and take are the factors that count. Diversity, along multiple axes, has been India's greatest structural vulnerability. Anything that deepens those faultlines will inevitably undermine, over the longer term, Delhi's ability to effectively engage the world.

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AKHILESH MISHRA

Dole versus entitlement

Congress manifesto offers patronage to poor, BJP aims to enable self-sufficiency

BOTH THE BJP and the Congress manifestos are now in the public domain and we have had time to read and digest the core message from each of these. Beyond the instant headlines, can we glean some insights about the approach of each party from their flagship announcements?

Undoubtedly the flagship scheme of the Congress is the Nyuntam Aay Yojana (NYAY) and how it intends to tackle poverty. The Congress' promise is that it will raise the family income of the poorest Indians from the present monthly average of Rs 6,000 to Rs 12,000. On the face of it, this looks like a winner and a sure shot method to eliminate poverty. But, how does the Congress intend to fund this scheme? After a lot of furore, their advisors have, at least for now, backed off from their proposal of raising taxes for the middle class. But they have still not backed off from their other proposal — of funding NYAY through an inflation tax.

What does inflation tax mean? Simply that, instead of the average two to three per cent inflation now under the Modi government, we will return to the double-digit inflation regime that we witnessed during the entire tenure of UPA-II. To understand what this means for the poor, consider the effect of inflation on purchasing power and prices. With average 10 per cent inflation for five

years (as was witnessed during UPA-II), the purchasing power of Rs 12,000 — that the poor will get through NYAY in 2019 — will be reduced to just Rs 4,627 by 2024. The prices of essential commodities, on the other hand, would have multiplied exponentially. A product priced at Rs 100 today would be around Rs 161 after five years of average 10 per cent inflation. Effectively then, with the way it has been designed, the poor will be poorer after five years of NYAY. This is not just an incidental fallacy of this scheme, it is also reflective of the entire approach of the Congress in tackling poverty. A majority of their interventions, since the "Garibi Hatao" slogan in the 1970s, have been dole-based. By their very design, they do not empower the poor to create their own durable income earning opportunities. Instead, they are designed to keep the poor perpetually in subsistence mode, so that each election cycle they remain a catchment for new vote-seeking devices. That is why despite 40 years of Congress style "Garibi Hatao", poverty has not been eliminated.

Now consider the BJP's flagship interventions as promised in their manifesto. Rs 100 lakh crore worth of investment in infrastructure, 25 lakh crore investment in the agri-rural sector, up to 50 lakh collateral-free loans to ignite entrepreneurship and

housing for all by 2022. None of these are doles. Instead, they are designed to kickstart an economic cycle of sustainable empowerment. An enterprising youth from a poor family who has an idea to build a sustainable business, but is held back due to lack of capital, can now avail the opportunity of collateral-free, low interest, bank loans. The economic empowerment that such a model brings, as has been proved world over, not only lifts people out of poverty but also progressively puts them in the middle-class category.

The Ayushman Bharat scheme, which intends to cover 50 crore people, is another such example. That poor families will no longer have to fear penury in case of any serious health emergency, is the obvious benefit. But the virtuous economic cycle that Ayushman Bharat will kickstart will, perhaps, be the biggest benefit of this scheme. There was always a demand for top quality health services in the villages and towns, but the paying capacity to meet this demand did not exist. With significant paying capacity now created in one go, the entrepreneurial genius of Indians will create the supply chains needed to meet this demand. High quality hospitals, wellness centers, trained doctors and other medical professionals will all be in demand, not just in the metros but in tier II and III cities and towns.

This will create permanent employment which in turn will drive its own economic cycle of consumption and growth.

Building more than 60,000 kms of roads in the next five years, doubling of functional airports, ensuring tap water supply in every home, 24 hours power for every house, pension schemes for small shopkeepers in addition to unorganised workers, and, the promise to further rationalise taxes for the middle-class are some of the other ideas in the BJP manifesto. Curiously, the Congress manifesto is absolutely silent on the middle-class: Is it because of the intrinsic guilt that they will be at the receiving end of the vote gathering device of Congress?

In totality, the manifestos present two competing visions. The Congress manifesto, reflective of its dynastic culture, offers a vision of subsistence living for the masses with a benign dynast to look after their future. The BJP manifesto, reflective of PM Modi's vision, seeks to provide an enabling environment to empower the genius of each individual and to take India to middle-income status by 2030. The choice is now upon us. The decision we make today will determine the future of our children tomorrow.

The writer is CEO, Bluekraft Digital Foundation and was earlier director (content) MyGov

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POLLS AND PEOPLE

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Poll machine and the people', (IE, April 15). The process of management of elections in India has no parallel in human history. The hierarchy within the machinery and the chain of command and control is critical to the smooth conduct of the electoral process. The idea of sensitising people about the conduct of the elections in India and making a case for a popular acknowledgment is better left to the mass media.

Sudip Kumar Dey, Kolkata

FLYING LOW

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Turbulence ahead' (IE, April 15). The pathetic state of affairs in the aviation sector needs to be rectified. The government should encourage more investment in this sector. Public carriers like Air India should be given more financial support.

Sanjay Chawla, Amritsar

US INTOLERANCE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Light and dark' (IE, April 13). The arrest of Julian Assange in the UK is a blow to whistleblowers around the world. The US politicians, especially the Democrats, have felt that he had a chilling effect on US democracy and led to the defeat of

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

To encourage quality reader intervention, The Indian Express offers the Letter of the Week award. The letter adjudged the best for the week is published every Saturday. Letters may be e-mailed to editpage@expressindia.com or sent to The Indian Express, B-1/B, Sector 10, Noida-UP 201301. Letter writers should mention their postal address and phone number.

THE WINNER RECEIVES SELECT EXPRESS PUBLICATIONS

Hillary Clinton in 2016 by colluding with Trump and the Russians. His revealing of US surveillance, its war crimes and its disinformation campaign globally has not gone down well with US politicians. They have become intolerant of free speech and made it clear that they want no refuge to be available to crusaders like Assange.

Sauro Dasgupta, Kolkata

THIS WORD MEANS

LONG PERIOD AVERAGE

The IMD yardstick for determining whether rainfall will be normal, deficient or in excess

ON MONDAY, while releasing its monsoon forecast, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) expressed the projected rainfall in terms of Long Period Average (LPA), saying that it was expected to be 96% of LPA. The LPA of the monsoon season over the country is 89 cm, calculated for the period 1951-2000. This is the average rainfall recorded during the months from June to September, calculated during the 50-year period, and is kept as a benchmark while forecasting the quantitative rainfall for the monsoon season every year.

Like the countrywide figure, IMD maintains an independent LPA for every homogeneous region of the country, which ranges from 71.6 cm to 143.83 cm. The region-wise LPA figures are: 143.83 cm for East and Northeast India, 97.55 cm for Central India, 71.61 cm for South Peninsular India, and 61.50 for Northwest India, which put together bring the all-India figure to 88.75 cm.

The monthly LPA figures for the season are 16.36 cm for June, 28.92 cm for

July, 26.13 cm for August and 17.34 cm for September.

So, when IMD forecasts the category of rainfall, be it for country, region or month, the forecast is based on these standardised figures calculated for a period of 50 years. As per the outputs obtained from the weather models, the rainfall is categorised as normal, below normal, or above normal.

IMD maintains five rainfall distribution categories on an all-India scale. These are:

NORMAL OR NEAR NORMAL: When per cent departure of actual rainfall is +/- 10% of LPA, that is, between 96-104% of LPA

BELOW NORMAL: When departure of actual rainfall is less than 10% of LPA, that is 90-96% of LPA

ABOVE NORMAL: When actual rainfall is 104-110% of LPA

DEFICIENT: When departure of actual rainfall is less than 90% of LPA

EXCESS: When departure of actual rainfall is more than 110% of LPA

SIMPLY PUT

What black hole image tells us

When scientists 'photographed' an invisible black hole: the image captures the area around it, generated from data collected by a set of telescopes, and provides a platform for understanding black holes better

AMITABH SINHA
PUNE, APRIL 15

BLACK HOLES are supposed to be the darkest regions in the entire universe. And yet, when scientists announced last week that they had, for the first time ever, been able to capture a photograph of a black hole, the image they unveiled was anything but dark. It appeared bright orange and doughnut-shaped in what became one of the most widely circulated images in the last one week. When light cannot escape a black hole, how was the photograph achieved, and what makes the achievement important?

What the image shows

The main subject of the photograph, a black hole located 55 million light-years from Earth, at the centre of a galaxy named Messier 87, was confined to the small and dark central core of the doughnut shape in the image, identifiable only because of the bright surroundings it was enclosed within. This was the only way that a black hole could have been photographed — by capturing the entire area surrounding it. The black hole itself does not emit or radiate light, or any other electromagnetic waves that can be detected by instruments built by human beings. But the area just outside the boundary of the black hole — referred to as event horizon — which has vast amounts of gas, clouds and plasma swirling violently, emit all kinds of radiations, including even visible light.

The outside of the black hole was not easy to be photographed either. The black hole in question had a diameter of 1.5 light-days, or about 40 billion kilometres. The ring outside a black hole usually has 4 to 5 times greater expanse. But the very vast distance from Earth meant that recording anything better than a point-size picture was physically not possible with available instruments. Scientists had calculated that a greater resolution picture, like the one they finally were able to capture, required a telescope whose antenna was as large as Earth itself.

Why it matters

Scientists have been using computer-simulated images of black holes for several years to study these regions. For the first time, they have an actual image. While they appear quite similar, scientists will now start looking closely at the actual image to see whether it differs from the computer-simulated images in the details, and whether these differences could be explained by instrumentation, observation or other errors. This can provide a test for existing theories of the universe, and lead to a better understanding of black holes and the nature of the universe itself.

Choosing the black hole

There was an alternative to photographing the black hole in the M87 galaxy — trying to photograph a black hole that was much nearer. There are thousands, possibly millions, of black holes much nearer to Earth, but not every black hole could be a candidate for being photographed. Scientists were looking for a particular size of black hole, large enough to be captured by instruments available on Earth. The black hole in the M87 galaxy is about 6 billion times the size of the Sun, and one of the biggest ones known. There is no black hole of comparable size nearer to Earth.

There was a candidate nonetheless, in our own Milky Way galaxy. The Sagittarius A* black hole, at the centre of the Milky Way, is

WHY 'BLACK'?

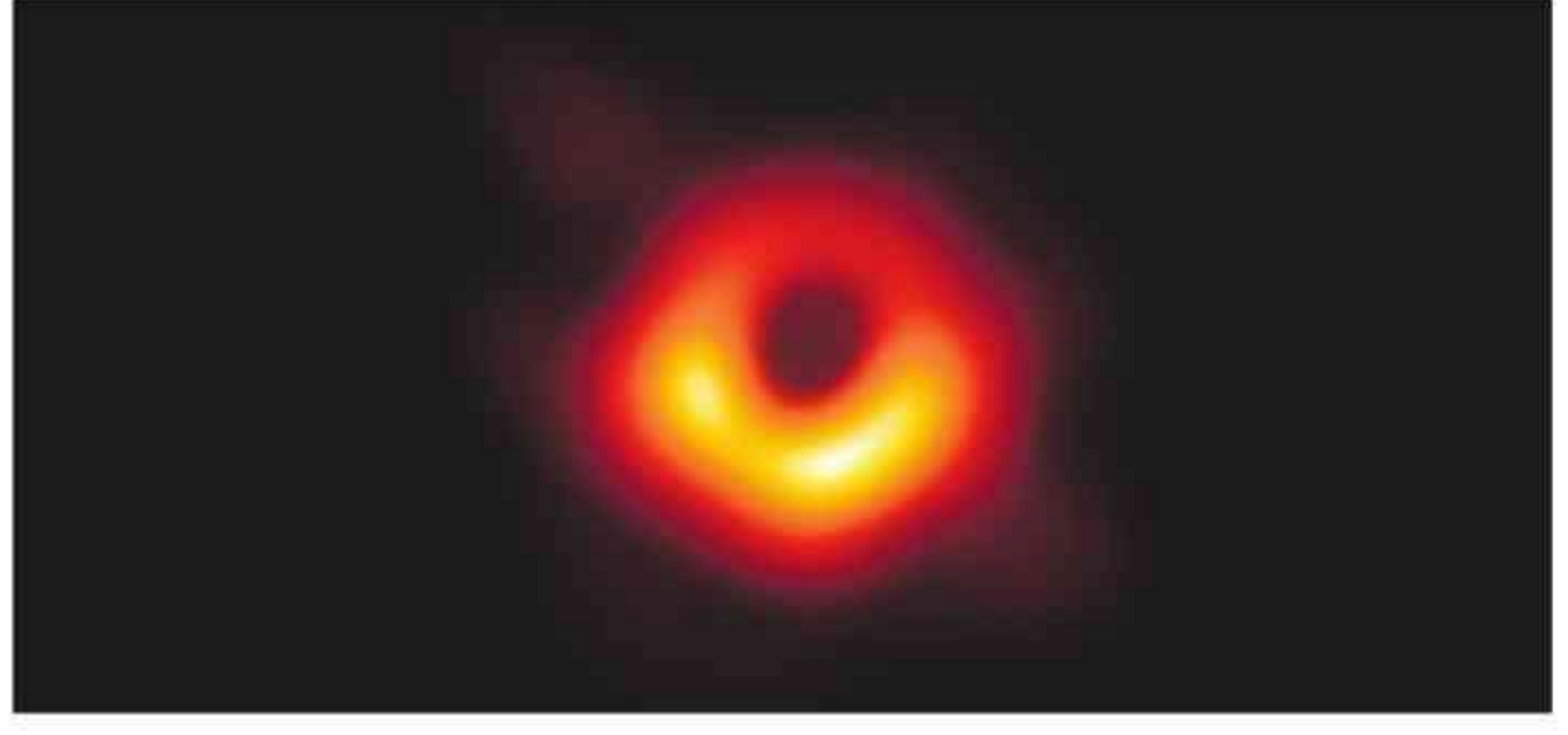


Image of black hole released by Event Horizon Telescope (EHT) and National Science Foundation. Reuters

From where no light can escape

AMITABH SINHA
PUNE, APRIL 15

ALBERT EINSTEIN'S General Theory of Relativity showed that massive objects in the universe, like Earth or the Sun and other stars, created curvatures in space-time, very similar to what a heavy object would do when placed on a taut rubber sheet. And, that the force of gravity is nothing but the drag that another object feels when inside this curvature. It is because of this curvature that an object either falls on the Earth or keeps orbiting it. To escape this curvature, an object needs to move at fast-enough speeds, called the escape velocity. The escape velocity to move out of Earth's gravity is 11.2 km per second.

The more massive a body, the bigger and deeper the size of the curvature it creates in space-time. Consequently, the higher is the escape velocity required to pull away from its gravity.

It was soon evident that this reasoning would lead to the concept of black holes,



Dr Katie Bouman, computer scientist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who created the algorithm that made the image possible. MIT CSAIL via Twitter

areas from where nothing could ever hope to escape. That is because there is an upper speed limit in the universe. Nothing can move faster than light, or electromagnetic waves in general. But there is no upper limit, as yet known, on the massiveness of a heavenly body.

Stars that are billions of times more

massive than our Sun are known to exist. The Sun itself is about 1.4 million km in diameter, and has a mass of about 2x10³⁰ kg. Massive stars, when they are dying, are known to collapse under their own gravity, forming extremely dense spheres of astronomical masses. They pack the mass of thousands or millions of Suns into a radius of a few kilometres.

Such mindboggling bodies create incredibly narrow and deep curvatures in space-time, from where even light, travelling at nearly 300,000 km per second, is unable to escape. Once an object falls inside this curvature, there is absolutely no hope of coming out, ever. That is why black holes do not send out any signals or radiation, because nothing can escape from it.

Initially, many scientists, including Einstein himself, were skeptical about black holes. Over the years, however, scientists have gathered several evidences of the existence of black holes. For example, the observed orbits of several heavenly bodies could be explained only by the presence of a black hole nearby.

working on the black hole image was more complicated than the techniques used for compression of files. They had a huge amount of amount of data to deal with, and yet extremely limited information directly obtained from the radiation. Not surprisingly, therefore, they had to write entirely new algorithms, using groundbreaking approaches, to regenerate the image.

As a result, a large number of pixels on that photo presented to the world could have been generated by the computer. But they were generated using the information in the pixels that were the result of direct observation of the telescopes, rather than being produced from mathematical models, as happens in a computer-simulated images.

It took two years for some of the world's fastest supercomputers to process the huge amount of data and recreate the image of the black hole in the M87 galaxy. A photograph of the Sagittarius A* black hole is yet to be released, apparently because the image is not yet ready.

TELLING NUMBERS

What political parties earned through electoral bonds in 2017-18

DURING 2017-18, the BJP earned Rs 200 crore from electoral bonds and the Congress Rs 15 crore, the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) had said last January based on an analysis of the parties' tax returns and contribution statements submitted with the Election Commission. No other national party declared any contributions through electoral bonds, according to details released by ADR.

Citing lack of transparency, the ADR later challenged the electoral bond scheme in the Supreme Court, which last week asked parties to submit to the EC details of contributions through electoral bonds. Incidentally, the CPM, also a petitioner, had not

submitted its returns at the time the ADR released its report.

The Rs 200 crore that the BJP received through electoral bonds was out of Rs 1,027 crore declared by the party. This included Rs 553 crore received from undeclared sources; the amount through electoral bonds was part of that. The Rs 15 crore collected by the Congress through electoral bonds, meanwhile, was out of Rs 120 crore received from unknown sources, and Rs 199 crore declared overall. All national parties (barring CPM) considered, the Rs 215 crore received via electoral bonds accounted for nearly one-third of all contributions (Rs 689 crore) received from unknown sources.

AS DECLARED BY NATIONAL PARTIES, 2017-18

Party	Known sources	Unknown sources		Total
		Electoral bonds	Other	
BJP	484	200	353	1027
Congress	79	15	105	199
BSP	41	0	10	51
NCP	3	0	5	8
Trinamool	5	0	<1	5
CPI	1	<1	<1	1+
Total	613	215	474	1293

Figures in Rs crore (rounded off); all national parties barring CPM. Source: Association for Democratic Reforms, January 2019

Campaign bar: Powers of the EC, and how it has used them in the past

LIZ MATHEW
NEW DELHI, APRIL 15

ON MONDAY, the Election Commission of India barred Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and BSP chief Mayawati for three days and two days respectively for making "highly provocative" speeches that could "aggravate existing differences and create mutual hatred between different religious communities".

Later in the evening, the Commission issued orders also barring Azam Khan of the Samajwadi Party and Maneka Gandhi of the BJP from campaigning for three days and two days respectively starting 10 am on Tuesday.

Such action by the Election Commission is rare — and it came on a day it told the Supreme Court that its power to act against violations of the Model Code of Conduct was limited to "issuing of notice" and "advisories", and "in case of repeated violation of the advisories... to file a First Information Report with the Police for initiation of criminal proceedings".

The court responded that it would "like to examine the matter", and asked the Commission to send a "representative... who is well conversant with the issues raised" to the court on Tuesday.

The offences

The ban on campaigning by Adityanath and Mayawati begins at 6 am on Tuesday. It means the leaders will miss the last day of the campaign ahead of the second phase of elections on April 18. Eight UP constituencies — Nagina, Amroha, Bulandshahr, Aligarh, Hathras, Mathura, Agra, and Fatehpur Sikri — will vote in the second phase.

Mayawati was scheduled to address a rally in Agra on Tuesday, which she will not be able to do now. Yogi was to address rallies in Nagina and Fatehpur Sikri, and was expected to campaign outside UP on April 17 and 18.

The EC has censured Mayawati for her speech in Deoband on April 7, in which a "special mention was made to the minority community of Muslims to vote in a consolidated manner in favour of the candidate of coalition parties"; and Adityanath for his 'Ali and Bajrang Bali' comment in Meerut on April 9, and for referring to the "hara virus", indicating Muslims. The EC said that as senior leaders they "should have desisted... (from) making statements that have the undertone and propensity to polarize the elections".

Khan has been punished for making derogatory remarks against the BJP candidate from Rampur, Jaya Prada; Maneka for telling Muslims that if they do not vote for her, they should not expect help after she wins.



Mayawati addresses a press conference in Lucknow after the EC order Monday. PTI

Earlier instances

The only other occasions on which the EC has acted in a similar manner against violations of the Model Code have been in 2014. It had banned Azam Khan and BJP president Amit Shah from holding public meetings, processions, or road shows in UP, and had directed the state chief secretary to initiate criminal proceedings against them in case there was a violation. The ban on Shah

was lifted after he wrote to the Commission promising that he would not disturb public tranquility or law and order. According to the poll panel, Shah vowed not to use "abusive or derogatory language".

Also during that Lok Sabha election campaign, the EC had banned BJP leader Giriraj Singh from campaigning in Jharkhand and Bihar for saying that those who did not vote for Narendra Modi, then

the prime ministerial candidate of the BJP, would have to go to Pakistan.

Code and Court

When the elections were announced, the EC had issued a detailed 286-page Code of Conduct for parties. On April 5, it issued a general advisory, seeking "strict compliance" of instructions such as "No appeal shall be made on the basis of caste/communal feelings of the voters; no activities which may aggravate existing differences or create mutual hatred or cause tension between different castes/communities/religious/linguistic groups shall be attempted; and no temples/mosques/churches/gurdwaras or any place of worship is to be used for election propaganda, including speeches, posters, music etc or electioneering".

Separately, the Commission has asked parties and candidates to desist from displaying photographs of defence personnel or photographs of functions involving defence personnel, in campaign advertisements. However, it did not issue any order after Opposition parties complained that BJP leaders were "politicising" the armed forces.

An EC official said action depended on the "gravity of the offence" and on whether the accused was a "serial offender". However, hate speech would attract several provisions under the Indian Penal Code, the

Code of Criminal Procedure, and The Representation of the People Act.

"The EC could separately file a complaint with the police under IPC provisions. If no one approaches the court, election officials can do so themselves," the EC official said. "The court can refer charges of corrupt practices to the President, who can seek the views of the Election Commission. The Election Commission can advise barring the individual from casting his/her vote for six years."

In 1999, Shiv Sena supreme Bal Thackeray was banned by the EC from casting his vote and contesting elections for six years with effect from 1995. Thackeray had delivered an inflammatory speech at a rally in Mumbai in 1987 while campaigning for an Assembly bypoll. The Commission's order, which came after 12 years, was based on a 1995 judgment of the Supreme Court, which confirmed the Bombay High Court order that found Thackeray guilty.

The Model Code of Conduct, which evolved from a draft code voluntarily approved by representatives of leading political parties in Kerala in February 1960, has been in place since 1962, when the Election Commission circulated it to all recognised parties. "But a lot of time has passed, and the nature of elections and electioneering have undergone many changes. It is time to revise it thoroughly," the EC official said.