



Hard landing

Airlines must take stock of their collective plight and sell seats at the real cost

To the long line of private airline carcasses dotting the bleak landscape of Indian aviation, one more may soon be added. Jet Airways announced a temporary halt of its operations from Wednesday night as funds to keep the airline going dried up. Despite intense lobbying by the bankrupt airline, banks stood firm on their decision to not release emergency funds to sustain operations until a white knight is found. With operations halted and the half a dozen or so planes that were flying till Wednesday grounded, the airline is starting down the barrel, especially because most of its prized departure slots at major airports across the country have either already been or will soon be allocated to other airlines. Jet will be able to regain these slots only if it bounces back before the end of the summer schedule in October. Whether that will happen is now in the hands of prospective buyers, who are said to have evinced interest in buying the airline during the Expression of Interest (EOI) process called by banks last week. The fact that the banks refused to extend emergency support is probably an indicator of the quantity and quality of the EOIs received by them. It is hard to believe that they would not have temporarily supported Jet if the EOIs had been serious. In sum, it does appear at this point that a miracle will be needed for Jet to take wing again.

The collapse of Jet has caused turbulence in the market and also raised some serious questions over why the domestic airline industry is proving to be so perilous for enterprises. There have been more than half-a-dozen private airline companies that have fallen by the wayside in the last decade and more, and it is well-known how Air India is propped up with government support. While it is true that fuel costs, which account for about half of the expenses of running an airline, have been difficult to manage, the fact is that reckless competition is responsible for the sorry plight of the industry. Margins in the airline industry are wafer-thin in the best of times and the combined effect of rising fuel prices and the inability to pass them on to consumers due to competition has proved to be a deadly cocktail. In the race to the bottom, it was Kingfisher seven years ago, Air Deccan and Air Sahara before that, it is Jet now, and who knows which airline could be next. It is notable that airlines took stock of their collective plight and stopped undercutting each other on fares. The Centre can help too by reviewing fuel taxes and surcharges apart from airport levies, which the airlines complain are too high. After all, a healthy airline industry can only be good for government revenues over the long term.

Beijing surprise

The Chinese economy has grown faster than expected, but concerns over stimulus remain

China's economy is showing signs of a rebound. According to figures released by its National Bureau of Statistics on Wednesday, the Chinese economy grew at 6.4% in the first quarter of the current year compared to the same period last year. While this rate of growth is equal to the pace registered in the December quarter and faster than economists' expectations of a 6.3% expansion, it is still slower than the growth rate of 6.8% recorded in the same period last year. Retail sales and factory output also showed strong growth momentum. The latest growth figure is seen as a sign that the Chinese government's efforts over the last few quarters to stimulate what is the world's second largest economy are beginning to have a positive effect. Total social financing grew by almost 40% to 8.2 trillion yuan in the first quarter of the year, pointing to a credit expansion that will boost growth in the coming quarters. With trade tensions with the United States subsiding significantly for now, export growth may accelerate, further boosting the Chinese economy. Chinese exports reached a five-month high in March, rising 14.2% when compared to the same month last year. The Chinese stock market has also been buoyed by the early signs of an economic turnaround and increased liquidity, with the CSI 300 index rising by over a third in value since the beginning of the year.

Gross domestic product growth that is generated largely by increased lending, however, poses the risk of losing momentum once the stimulus is withdrawn. Beijing, of late, has once again been prodding its banks to boost lending to public and private businesses, apart from implementing various fiscal measures to boost consumer spending. This could lead to a tricky situation where businesses that resort to heavy borrowing when credit is easily available become burdened with disproportionately high amounts of debt over the economic boom cycle reverses. Chinese authorities may eventually be forced to crack down on exuberant lending by banks when the economy is found to be overheating. It was such a crackdown that contributed to the fall in property prices in the last few years. For now, though, property prices have begun to rebound after restrictions on the real estate sector were eased lately, in an attempt to stimulate growth in the economy. The Chinese government is now walking a tightrope as it attempts to keep the momentum from slowing in the short term, even as market forces try to correct imbalances within the economy. Such macroeconomic policy, focussed too narrowly on the short term while ignoring the long-term consequences, however, does not bode well for either the Chinese economy or the wider global economy.

A shameful marker of five years

India's dubious contribution to a global epidemic of hate is a spate of performative mob lynchings



HARSH MANDER

The most malignant legacy of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's five years in office is that he has made India a more frightening and dangerous place for its religious minorities, particularly Muslims and Christians. His leadership has been scarred by a massive surge in hate speech and violence against these groups. In particular, this period has seen the rise of a form of hate violence that targets its religious and caste minorities, better known as "lynching". In these five years, this word entered popular discourse in India, for the first time, by describing frenzied attacks by mobs against people mainly because of their religious or caste identity, Muslim and in some cases Dalit.

Contours of hate

Right-wing regimes that are hostile to minorities have risen to power in many countries. But in no other country than India has this current anti-minority, far-right politics resulted in a concerted pattern of lynch attacks against minorities — and emerged as a scourge in the country today.

Lynching itself is of course not unknown in many countries. I have found three broad kinds in the modern world. The first is as occasional and random criminal acts, without any pattern or regularity to signal a significant social phenomenon. This can and does occur anywhere.

The second is as 'rough justice', of people frustrated by failures of

legal justice, attacking people alleged frequently to be petty thieves or rapists. This has been common, for instance, in Indonesia and Latin America.

The third kind is as hate crime, one which targets persons not because of what a person has done, but because of who they are. This is what India is currently witnessing. These hate crimes are often dressed up as rough justice: people rationalise cow lynching as popular anger because state systems have not implemented cow protection laws. But the targets of lynch mobs are particular communities, and the allegations of crimes against them are usually patently false — and, in any case, just an excuse.

The closest global parallel to lynchings in India is the one of racial terror against African-Americans in the American South in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The motive of both was/is to target people because of their identity, to instil fear, and to convey a message of violent dominance.

The environment

I would characterise lynching in India not just as communal terror but specifically as command hate crimes. India Spend found that as many as 97% of cow-related attacks since 2010 occurred after Mr. Modi was elected to office; and that 90% of all religious hate crimes since 2009 have occurred under his watch. These point compellingly to the conclusion that an environment has been created since the Prime Minister assumed office, in which people feel safe, enabled and even encouraged to act out their hate and attack religious minorities.

This permissive environment is stirred firstly by frequent toxic hate speeches by senior leaders of



the ruling party. A leading television channel found a 490-fold rise in hate speech by leaders in the four years of the current government compared to five years earlier. Mr. Modi has been remiss in condemning both hate speech and lynch attacks by communal vigilante formations, except in the most general terms. The police has tended mostly to criminalise the victims of these attacks and protect the attackers. They, therefore, feel emboldened and encouraged to attack people of minority identities, assured of their impunity, and convinced of their nationalist fervour and heroism.

Hate violence targeting religious, caste and gender minorities is, of course, not new in India. Violent clashes and attacks based on religious identity, most often targeting religious minorities especially Muslim, but also on occasion Sikh and Christian minorities, have continued after Independence. According to some estimates, the numbers of people who died due to communal violence in India could be significantly more than 10,000.

There are no accurate official data of casualties by lynch attacks

and hate crimes in the past five years. But the numbers of persons killed in all such hate crimes are likely to be far less than those killed in even a single major episode of mass communal violence.

What then makes this present form of targeted hate violence, through lynch mobs and occasional solitary attacks, so worrying? Every episode of mass communal violence of the past, however grave, would occur in a particular area, and would unfold over some hours, some days, or in the rare instance of the Gujarat communal carnage of 2002, for some weeks. The difference with the new phase of lynch mobs and solitary hate crimes under the Prime Minister's watch is that it is no longer bound by geography and time, and so it mounts pervasive fear.

Signal of impunity

Historian Amy Louise Wood writes vividly of the performative character of American lynching. In these "hundreds, sometimes thousands, of white spectators gathered and watched as their fellow citizens tortured, mutilated, and hanged or burned their victims in full view" This, she said, lent to lynching a "tremendous symbolic power precisely because it was... public and visually sensational".

In India this same performative symbolic power has been attained with the video camera. In 28 journeys of the Karwan e Mohabbat to lynch victims in 14 States, we have found that almost every lynching was videotaped by the perpetrators and triumphantly and widely circulated online. Through this the perpetrators signal that they feel assured of their impunity, that despite their posting their images of committing murder online, they will be valorised as 'nationalist' heroes of the Hindu nation.

But they also seek through these videos to convey to the targeted community what they have been reduced to, begging vainly for their lives from their powerful attackers. Prof. Wood recalls: "Even one lynching reverberated, traveling with sinister force, down city streets and through rural farms, across roads and rivers... To be black in this time was to be 'the victim to a thousand lynchings'." In the same way, each lynching in India is reverberating to every inner-city and rural Muslim area: to be Muslim in India today is to be victim to ten thousand lynchings.

The message that such performative lynching communicates is stark and unambiguous. That if you are of the targeted community, you are no longer safe. In no place, and at no time. You can be attacked in your home: a mob can enter it and check what meat is cooking, and bludgeon you to death claiming it is cow meat. For being visibly Muslim, you can be lynched on a train, while walking down the road, at your workplace or a park. This fear, assiduously encouraged by the ruling establishment, is the most shameful marker of these five years.

India sometimes creates its own specific cruelties. These include untouchability, caste atrocities and the cruel burning of brides for dowry. While politically encouraged bigotry and hatred against minorities are growing into a malignant global epidemic, India's dubious contribution to this is its spate of performative mob lynchings, bludgeoning its religious minorities and disadvantaged castes into the pervasive fear of everyday living that this has brought in its wake.

Harsh Mander is a human rights worker, writer and teacher

Predictable chaos in Libya

The Iraqi-Libyan species of intervention, with UN 'approval' but under the West's watch, is a post Cold-War phenomenon



KRISHNAN SRINIVASAN

General Khalifa Haftar, head of the Libyan National Army, is advancing on the capital Tripoli, having taken control of the east of the country including most of the oilfields. Gen. Haftar had helped Muammar Qaddafi seize power in 1969 before going into exile in the U.S. in the 1980s, but returned to Libya in 2011 to join in Qaddafi's overthrow. He now casts himself as a conservative Salafist opposing Islamists and the Muslim Brothers, and has the backing — for their individual reasons — of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and some West Asian states, apart from Russia (openly) and France (covertly).

Libya's descent

The United Nations recognised Tripoli's administration is called the Government of National Accord, but is anything but that, being dependent on a motley of warlords, militant or moderate Islamists, secessionists and monarchists, all split on regional and ethnic lines. Even before Gen. Haftar launched his offensive, West Libya was replete with inter-militia battles and kidnappings. The Tripoli government commands no security forces, public administration scarcely exists, water, petrol and power shortages abound, and few banks operate. Thousands are

fleeing towards Tunisia, and 180 people have been killed so far in the recent fighting.

The rule of the gun prevails in Libya ever since western forces overthrew Qaddafi. The oil-rich country, now a departure point for thousands of migrants travelling to Europe, once had one of Africa's highest standards of living, free health care and education, with high female literacy and percentage of women in the workplace. Its inland waterway to green the eastern desert was called the world's largest irrigation project. But after the western armed intervention supported by some Arab sheikhdoms, a perceptive commentator noted, "Nothing was certain, least of all what kind of country Libya would now become."

The revolt against Qaddafi began in Benghazi, and western intervention was legitimised by the fig leaf of a UN Security Council resolution calling for a ceasefire, a no-fly zone and protection of civilians, on which there were five abstentions which included India, Russia and China. Qaddafi accepted the resolution. Shortly thereafter, France, the U.K. and the U.S. attacked Qaddafi's forces and NATO assumed responsibility for regime change at the same moment that an African Union mediation mission was en route to Libya.

The Libyan tragedy, like those in Iraq, Syria and Yemen, and most probably to ensue in Afghanistan, illustrates wider issues at play. Iraqi warring militias after the Second Gulf War empowered jihadists, made Iraq ungovernable, U.S. withdrawal inevitable, and led to the Balkanisation of the nation.



No lessons were learned, causing former U.S. President Barack Obama to confess that his worst mistake was a failure to prepare for the aftermath of western intervention following Qaddafi's overthrow. Western wishful thinking persists in the belief that Libya could arrive at a path to democracy that revives the country's collapsed institutions, rather than falling under military rule.

Post Cold-War phenomenon

In 1965 and 1981, the UN adopted declarations on the inadmissibility of intervention in the domestic affairs of states, and until the 1990s the UN was the custodian of state sovereignty. The Iraqi-Libyan species of intervention, professedly with UN approval but actually under western control, is a post Cold-War phenomenon, the motivation being to implant liberal democratic institutions and human rights, along with security concerns, usually thinly justified by 9/11 and lately the Islamic State. Exogenous state-building and a peripheral role for local leaders characterise this innovation in international relations. The spectre of failed states became a major concern, leading to the imposition of a neo-liberal agenda in the guise of human

rights protection.

The ambiguous legal justification for interventions not specifically authorised by the UN, such as the creation of safe havens in Iraq, established a pattern despite negative precedents that showed that attempting nation-building in societies divided by ethnic, factional, ideological and religious lines is beyond the capacity of any minority group of UN members, let alone of one super-power. None of the interventions could have taken place without the projection of U.S. power or its indirect underwriting.

Two factors paved the way for these neo-protectorates; activists with rights-based agendas joined the political mainstream, and western outrage to televised suffering. Activists united with foreign policy establishments, and third world disorder presented opportunities for sly expansion of mandates into new operating areas. Added to these was post-1990 revisionism towards state sovereignty and permissiveness to humanitarian interventions. Relativism towards sovereignty was anathema to post-colonial independent states, especially when western interventions were selective and political in nature, and the victims of intervention lacked the power to oppose.

Western nations came to contemplate, albeit fitfully and inconsistently, neutralising a number of sovereign states in the third world that were illiberal, war-torn or internally weak, as potential threats to international peace. But this essentially political project was pre-

sented as a high-minded enterprise with altruistic motivations, similar to the post-war occupations of Germany and Japan.

There were many reasons for the failure of state-building in the new protectorates. The new elites were never very different or more liberal than those deposed. Organised criminality was invigorated by opportunities created by the absence of proper law enforcement due to outsiders not understanding the consequences of their policies. This was because the interveners were more concerned with checking the power of institutions rather than building them, and to appease domestic opinion back home, concentrated on exit strategies and political markers such as holding elections. If the outcome was doubtful even in Kosovo in Europe, the challenge of transforming political and social cultures in the world beyond Europe, where there is no economic pull factor and traditions have little in common with western liberalism, was obviously far more formidable.

As for humanitarian arguments and the Responsibility to Protect doctrine, such reasoning is malleable enough to be appropriated by Russia in Georgia and Ukraine. Whether in Libya or elsewhere, expeditionary interventions to implant human rights and democracy have a certain heuristic value in understanding the illusions of western hegemony which rose to prominence in our times and sought to mould the third world in its image.

Krishnan Srinivasan is a former Foreign Secretary

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

The real issue

It is strange that the Congress party has taken so long to realise that unemployment is the real national issue (Page 1, "Unemployment is the real national security issue: Rahul", April 18). The issue of unemployment is a certainty that is often overlooked by successive governments but conveniently raked up only during election season. The Congress is largely to be blamed for having failed to generate adequate employment in its long years of governance. The party's unprecedented struggle to try and change the narrative of Election 2019, from national security to that of unemployment, is

nothing but hypocrisy and easily comprehensible. It is a do-or-die battle in the face of the formidable challenge posed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the ruling party. The seriousness and concern of the Congress over critical issues are dubious, lack honesty and with the general election in mind.

N. SADHASIVA REDDY,
Bengaluru

■ One of the main factors in this election will be employment. India, as many reports suggest, is a power house with prolific talent and skills. The current government has hardly paid attention to job creation. This election is also sensitive in its own right as it will

determine how the 'New India' will evolve.

AMBARISH APPAT,
Nallepilly, Palakkad, Kerala

Rahul interview

Congress president Rahul Gandhi termed the 2019 general election as a fight for the very idea of India is only a vain attempt to take a high moral ground ('Interview - Rahul Gandhi', "This is a fight for the very idea of India", April 18). The fact is that the dynastic Congress party and its equally dynastic regional allies are fighting for their own credibility and survival. There is an imperative need to get rid of them once and for all for the very idea of India and the sake of its democracy. Mr. Gandhi comes across as if he

has all the solutions to the problems of the country and that only he and his party represent the idea of India.

His die-hard habit of belittling the Prime Minister at every opportunity betrays his lack of maturity.

C.G. KURIKOSE,
Kothamangalam, Kerala

■ It is refreshing to see purpose and clarity in Mr. Gandhi on what he proposes to do if given a chance. He is quite right that the nation's potential lies in its huge economic potential and in the millions of aspirational youth. On the contrary, the cacophony by the NDA over the national security issue is making people tired. The ruling party should realise that people have travelled

some distance from the rhetoric-based approach.

J. ANANTHA PADMANABHAN,
Tiruchi

Poll notes

The elections in Tamil Nadu may have been held in a peaceful manner but in quite a few polling stations, some voters were put to difficulty as officials refused to let us vote even though we had our

voter ID card. In the Villivakkam constituency many of us were not given our booth/voter ID slips. The excuse was that we may not have been at home when officials visited our place. As a senior citizen, I have been denied my right to vote.

BHANUMATHI RAJAGOPALAN,
Chennai

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CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

There was an erroneous reference to Sri Lanka beating India in the quarterfinal in Kolkata of the 1996 World Cup (Between Wickets column, Sport, April 17, 2019). Actually, Sri Lanka defeated India in the semifinal.

A report, "India to launch coffee consumption drive" (Business page, April 14, 2019) inadvertently said that the country has a domestic consumption of more than 5 mn bags (60 kg each) of coffee. Actually, the country produced 5.84 mn and consumed 1.47 mn bags (60 kg each) of coffee during 2017-2018 as per International Coffee Organisation.

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Is the Election Commission toothless or is it refusing to bite?

PARLEY

On its powers and limitations in conducting free and fair elections

The Election Commission (EC) has come under intense scrutiny over the last few weeks for its inability to take swift action against those violating the Model Code of Conduct (MCC). It took a rap on its knuckles by the Supreme Court for the EC to crack the whip. In a discussion moderated by Anuradha Raman, S.Y. Quraishi and Trilochan Sastry talk of the EC's powers in imposing the MCC, and the controversy over NaMo TV. Edited excerpts:

Mr. Quraishi, with the EC recently taking action against some politicians for violation of the MCC, do you think it has finally demonstrated that it can bite?

S.Y. Quraishi: It is a pity that we needed the Supreme Court to remind the EC of powers that it always had. Even advisories for senior leaders is good enough because it leads to a lot of naming and shaming, which is effective. To say that the EC is toothless in ensuring that the MCC is followed is wrong. It probably needs a little more will power to act strongly, particularly against the ruling party, because the ruling party always has an advantage which has to be neutralised. I think the EC has enough teeth. Just polite advice to the Prime Minister is enough to cause ripples. To underestimate the power of advisories is wrong.

But it took a long time for the EC to actually act. Is there reason to believe that the EC is compromised?

S.Y. Quraishi: I wouldn't use such a harsh word. The EC has always been under observation. Not only does it have to be fair, it has to appear to be fair. Now that it has got a rap on its knuckles, I think it will be bolder than it has been so far.

Does it worry you that the EC is taking its own time to act against the Prime Minister?

S.Y. Quraishi: It is very unfortunate that instead of debating the conduct of politicians, we are debating the EC. The EC is partly responsible because of delays. Had it acted promptly, it would not be in the

dock.

What are your thoughts on the Supreme Court interim order directing political parties to provide full information on each and every political donor in a sealed cover to the court? I recall a conversation where you had serious misgivings about electoral bonds.

S.Y. Quraishi: I am partly disappointed and partly happy. I am happy that it has taken note and commented that there is no transparency [in the electoral bonds scheme]. But asking that the information be delivered in a sealed envelope is beyond my comprehension. It is a grave error and very unfair. Is it a state secret? Parties know who the donor is, the government knows, and the donor knows who he or she gave the bond to. It is only you and I who don't know. Another sad thing is that while the elections are in process, the Constitution has barred any intervention by the court. The fact that the court has to intervene again and again is a sad situation.

Trilochan Sastry: There is a procedural issue and a substantive issue. On the procedural issue of whether the court should have intervened during the election, I have no comments to offer, but on the substantive issue as to whether such actions should be taken against hate speeches and on the countering of elections in a constituency in Tamil Nadu where cash was seized, the EC's decision is welcome. How institutions become aware of their power is a work in process and a long one at that. The EC is still discovering its powers, and if it is being nudged and that helps, it is okay.

On the issue of giving information on electoral bonds in a sealed cover to the court, we are very patient. We would have preferred something faster. The court perhaps felt it did not want to interfere when the election process was underway. So, it found a compromise and directed parties to declare who gave how much funds in the form of electoral bonds in a sealed cover. We will see on May 30th what it does. But the best practice all over the world is complete transparency.



Does the EC suffer from some inherent structural problems in the manner of the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners?

S.Y. Quraishi: The appointment system to the EC must improve. Right now, the Election Commissioners are appointed by the government of the day and they might feel beholden to the government or the government might feel that they should be beholden. In any case, public perception is that if they have been appointed by a particular government, they will be soft. A collegium system of appointment should be considered.

It is not as if the Supreme Court's manner of appointment of judges is free of problems. You appear to be suggesting that the collegium system is working fine.

S.Y. Quraishi: Yes, there may be problems, but this is the best system possible. If you see the electoral system in the world, the shortest cut-off for appointment is in India. Everywhere in the world, such constitutional appointments are made by either a collegium or even by the parliamentary committees and there is a parliamentary endorsement. In some cases there is a live interview of the candidate so that the whole nation is privy to the appointment. It is only in India that the most powerful Commission in the world has the most defective system of appointment. Mind you, it also puts pressure on the incumbent. The Com-

TS: The EC probably needs a little more will power to act strongly, particularly against the ruling party, because the ruling party always has an advantage which has to be neutralised.

missioners, even if they're acting bona fide, if the public perception is, 'oh they must be soft on the government', as is happening just now, to insulate them from these kind of allegations and accusations, a neutral system of appointment is perhaps the answer.

Should the MCC be enacted into a law?

TS: I think good practice sometimes is better than a law. When we pass a law, we are unable to anticipate every contingency. I think we need to trust the EC to exercise its powers. The moment you make a law, some comma or some phrase somewhere will be interpreted this way or that way and it will end up in the courts. And there will be a legal tangle. The Supreme Court has kind of endorsed the idea of a MCC without giving it a legal status. I think we should just let it be like that.

S.Y. Quraishi: I am absolutely against making it a law. It is a clever trap. The MCC will be taken away from the EC's discretion and it will have to be given to the judiciary in which case it will take 20 years for you to know whether some act was committed. Now this MCC acts like a fire brigade

— if there is fire, it has to be extinguished right then and not after five or 10 years. Second, its moral authority should not be underestimated even if the ultimate punishment under the model code is advice, warning, censure or reprimand. Its contribution towards forming public opinion is firm. The moment a leader gets a notice, it becomes a newspaper headline. The moral authority of the model code is very strong and the leaders are actually scared of getting a notice under the model code. Third, anything which is in the model code is also part of different laws, and action is simultaneously taken under the laws also. The only difference is that the action will be known to you after 10 years, whereas, here, a notice is served even to the Prime Minister: you violated the model code, please reply why action should not be taken. And the reply comes in 23 hours. This kind of speedy compliance never happens even to a law of the land.

The week before the announcement of election dates is when we usually see a flurry of advertisements from the government. This year was no exception. How is it that the week before the EC actually announces the dates, the government is prepared with its advertisements?

S.Y. Quraishi: All I can say is that the dates are decided by the EC and governments are very curious to know what the dates are and we never let them out, so that the surprise element is not taken away. The incumbent government cannot plan its political moves accordingly.

TS: It's very tricky to distinguish between a genuine policy decision which is announced and an announcement which is for the sake of getting votes. I think everything cannot be legislated. Something has to be left to the good sense of the voters.

What actually is the problem with the TV channel that was launched in the name of the Prime Minister a few weeks after the MCC kicked in?

S.Y. Quraishi: I don't have the full facts, but *prima facie* there is no problem in a political party or a political leader owning a channel. We know that in the south every politician seems to

have a channel. So when we were formulating the guidelines for the expenditure monitoring division in 2010 and 2011, we came across many channels which are owned by political parties. What they were doing was that their appearance on their own channels was shown as nil expenditure. We said, nothing doing. After all, there is a notional value attached to the telecast on the channel, which will have to be counted and shown as expenditure incurred. NaMo TV, if it is owned by the party or Mr. Modi himself, there is no problem except that the expenditure on the publicity on the channel has to be accounted for.

TS: I want to add one point here. You know the framework in which we are discussing all this. It seems to me that we are convinced that wrongdoing will happen and we are trying to fix it by this rule or that rule. Then we are falling back on the MCC. I think the only long-term solution is voter awareness. If the three of us seem to feel that a certain practice may not violate a constitutional right but it violates a moral code, I think when the people of India largely realise that, these things will disappear and among a large section of politically aware voters this is already happening.

Do both of you agree that the EC suffers from no limitations whatsoever?

TS: It can exercise far more powers when it chooses to, but the one power it does not have is to de-register political parties and you know there are parties which never contest elections, which do not submit their accounts, which do not follow their own internal Constitution of holding elections on time. And the EC becomes powerless. I think with due caution they should be allowed to de-register. In any case, there is judicial oversight.

S.Y. Quraishi: This has been pending for 20 years. We have been demanding that. The power to register does not include the power to de-register, according to a Supreme Court judgment. We went to the government and asked them to empower us. We have nearly 2,000 parties. Most of them are bogus; they are there only for money-laundering. We cannot do anything. To that extent, the EC is toothless, yes.



S.Y. Quraishi is a former Chief Election Commissioner and the author of 'An Undocumented Wonder: The Great Indian Election'



Trilochan Sastry is the chairperson of the Association of Democratic Reforms and former Dean at the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore



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SINGLE FILE

A struggle to breathe

In this election season, it is imperative for political parties to talk about pollution

ARMIN ROSENCRANZ & NITISH RAJ



The National Capital Region's pollution levels make it to the headlines every year. Every October to December, stubble burning in Punjab and Haryana, smog arising from industries, and motor vehicle emissions increase the air quality index (AQI) of Delhi to the hazardous level of 450. In the remaining months, the AQI goes back to the level of 101-200 (unhealthy for sensitive groups). The economic loss for India in the last five years due to the exposure to crop burning is about 1.7% of the country's GDP. Annually, this exposure to pollution costs Delhi, Haryana and Punjab around ₹2 lakh crore.

Despite this alarming level of pollution, neither the Union government nor the Delhi government has taken significant steps to plan out a long-term solution. Even the interim Budget took no significant step to tackle this issue. The odd-even scheme, which was launched some years ago to curb pollution, failed to achieve its objective. A study by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water found that the average number of vehicles plying on the roads daily increased by 10% during the odd-even period in January 2016 compared to the last week of December 2015. This increase was mainly due to a 17% increase in two-wheelers, 12% increase in three-wheelers, 22% increase in taxis and 138% rise in the number of private buses. Another study published in *Current Science* found that the odd-even scheme led to an increase in emissions as the median concentration of 13 out of the 16 gases measured were higher in the morning hours and afternoon hours on days when the scheme was enforced.

Clearly, the government needs to take more radical steps to curb pollution. It should: find alternatives to stubble burning and impose strict sanctions in case of contravention of any ban on the practice; impose a blanket ban on firecrackers; impose a blanket ban on all vehicles exceeding prescribed tailgate emission standards; legislate stricter norms for fuels; open toll roads where trucks should be excluded and high-occupancy vehicles exempted from the toll; provide separate bus lanes to reduce congestion; create a separate fund in the Budget to specifically deal with this crisis; provide agricultural subsidies to farmers to disincentivise crop burning; improve the drainage system; and incentivise the use of renewable energy.

Apart from the courts, none of the other organs of the state has shown any readiness to deal with the pollution crisis. Meanwhile, until the government responds, NGOs and social workers should step in to tackle this issue through their own programmes and campaigns. In this election season, it is imperative for political parties to make this issue a priority, for pollution doesn't only affect us but our children, the generations to come, and our planet.

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NOTEBOOK

The many roads to development in Chhattisgarh

In the heart of Bastar, which is peaceful only on the surface

JACOB KOSHY

They may be remote and disconnected from electricity, dispensaries and schools, but several villages in Chhattisgarh's Bastar region abutting large tracts of forest boast of well-maintained roads. An activist who works to boost awareness among the Adivasis about their traditional rights to forest land attributes the quality of these roads in the conflict region to the influence of Naxalites.

Several villages and administrative blocks in Kanker district (about 150 km from Raipur), such as Narayanpur, Antagarh and Abujhmad, are considered part of the 'Red corridor', a zone where Naxalite influence is considered pervasive. Keshav Shori, co-founder of DISHA, says: "In their efforts to reach deeper into the State and counter the Naxalites, the go-

vernment and security forces have invested in building pucca, all weather roads. Where you see great roads, you also see military men and their camps. That brings about its own set of problems."

Indeed, no settlement of the forest villages in Kanker or Narayanpur district is too far away from a camp site. A soldier from the Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) says he has already spent four years in the Antagarh forest. A photographer colleague and I were in the district for a story about the forest rights of the Adivasis. When my colleague took some innocuous photographs of the majestic sal and mahua trees, a barrage of Army men approached us and demanded that the photographs be deleted.

The SSB is tasked with guarding the various infrastructure projects coming up in the region, particularly the 235-km railway line

that will connect Jagdalpur district with the Rowghat mines. Though the project was commissioned more than two decades ago, the Maoist insurgency and the general intractability of the region had considerably delayed the railway line's progress. "Even if everything looks peaceful on the surface, there's always uncertainty. Anything can happen any time over here. Half a kilometre from here, some months ago, an improvised explosive device went off," the soldier says. "If any adverse report from this area reaches our superiors, we're hauled up and get into trouble."

The solid roads bring the Army men closer to the villages, but without dispelling the mutual suspicion that seems ever-present among the tribals and the security personnel. It's hard to tell if a particular villager is a Naxalite, an informant or a courier,

another soldier says.

The passive friction plays out even among the stray dogs in the villages. Several camps have their police dogs who accompany the soldiers when they are out patrolling. The dogs are well fed and well nourished, and several times, says Mr. Shori, the local strays tag along with the Army dogs and attack the domestic fowl in the villages. "When the villagers demand compensation from the Army men, they refuse to pay saying that it wasn't their dogs that devoured the fowl," he says.

With India's cities incessantly hungry for the coal and minerals that abound in Chhattisgarh's forests, governments — whether Congress or the BJP — are unlikely to ever stop building roads that will reach deeper into the heart of the forests. But how effectively they win hearts is still a story in the making.

FROM The Hindu ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO APRIL 19, 1969

Czech party drops liberals

Mr. Gustav Husak, the tough Slovak leader, who urged compromise with the Kremlin, replaced reformist champion Mr. Alexander Dubcek as Czechoslovakia's Communist leader last night [April 17] and declared "there will be no changes in policy." Mr. Husak, 56, was named First Secretary of the party at a crucial Central Committee session in Prague Castle following the worst crisis in Prague-Moscow relations since the Soviet-led invasion last August. Prague Radio, in reporting the change in the party leadership, which drops leading progressives Joseph Smrkovsky and Josef Spacek from the presidium, also announced that the progressive Editor of the party newspaper, Rude Pravo, Mr. Jiri Sekera, had resigned. Mr. Dubcek, President Ludvik Svoboda and the Federal Prime Minister, Mr. Oldrich Cernik, had been retained in a smaller 11-man Presidium.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO APRIL 19, 1919.

Indian Cotton Committee Report.

The Report of the Indian Cotton Committee [as available in Simla] says: We have divided our Report into two parts, the first of which deals with the agricultural and irrigational aspect of cotton cultivation and the second with the commercial aspect. But in conclusion we wish to emphasize as strongly as possible that the recommendations in both parts must be treated as an organic whole. It is of little avail if the agricultural department involves pure or improved strains of cotton, increases the outturn by the introduction of improvements in agricultural practices and ensures cleaner methods of picking or in the irrigation department provides facilities for the extension of the cultivation of cotton unless the cotton produced is marketed in a condition which enables it to secure its proper price and unless the cotton trade pays that price for it.

POLL CALL

Electoral roll

An electoral roll is a list of persons who are eligible to vote. Every Indian citizen who has attained the age of 18 years on the qualifying date (the first day of January of the year of revision of the electoral roll), unless otherwise disqualified, is eligible to be registered as a voter in the roll of the polling area of the constituency where she is ordinarily a resident. The roll helps streamline voting on election day. Voter registration helps combat electoral fraud by enabling authorities to verify an applicant's identity and ensure that no voter casts her ballot more than once. Publishing and updating the electoral roll is the responsibility of the Election Commission of India. The electoral roll is updated every year in September-October and published in the first week of January.

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