

Opinion

SUNDAY, APRIL 7, 2019

A 54-PAGE DOCUMENT has set the cat among the pigeons. That the BJP is a flock of pigeons — ignore the boast about a 56-inch chest — was proved by the apoplectic fit that seized the BJP after the release of the Congress party's Election Manifesto (CEM) for the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

Manifestos have, usually, a short shelf life. The CEM hit the headlines within minutes of its release on April 2, but acquired a new dimension with every passing hour. By the end of the day, and certainly by the end of April 5, the key manifesto promises had reached every city and town and also the villages that were close to urban areas. I am certain that television and the campaigners will carry the key promises to others within a few days. The message is so powerful that the messengers are obliged to carry it.

What is different about CEM 2019 that has made it the talk of the town (and the village) within a few hours? The answer is that the CEM is the voice of the people. I can say with utmost confidence that every idea or promise in the CEM was suggested by a citizen of India either in writing or at one of the 174 consultations across the country. The draftspersons simply wrote the sentences capturing the ideas in precise language.

BJP is riled

Normally, it is the ruling party's manifesto that is criticised by the opposition parties. I cannot remember an occasion in recent times when an opposition party's manifesto was attacked so vehemently by the ruling party. It raises the question, why? What has got the goat of the BJP?

I can think of a few things that must have riled the BJP. First, the promise of jobs. Unemployment is at a 45-year high of 6.1%. There were obvious and immediate solutions but, ignoring the obvious, Mr Modi promised to create 2 crore jobs a year. That promise has returned to haunt the BJP.

Instead of creating jobs, the BJP government destroyed jobs through demonetisation and a flawed GST. The official report of the NSSO puts the number of jobs lost at 4 crore, 70 lakh. The CEM has identified many obvious ways to employ the large number of unemployed youth. A simple step like filling all the vacancies in government etc will employ nearly 24 lakh young people.

Next, the CEM's bold approach to the agriculture sector. Even as the BJP was deriding the idea of a farm loan waiver, the CEM announced that outstanding agricultural loans will be waived. Pointing out that the BJP had waived the loans of insolvent companies (the 'haircut' so far is ₹84,585 crore), the Congress justified a farm loan waiver. Two other promises in the CEM have caught the interest of farmers: a separate Kisan budget and no more criminal cases against farmers to enforce an essentially civil liability of recovering an overdue loan.

The CEM also promised to bring back the famous Agricultural Extension Services, repeal the Agricultural Produce Markets Act, replace the Essential Commodities Act, and set up a College of Agriculture and a College of Veterinary Sciences in every district of the country.

ACROSS THE AISLE

P Chidambaram



Congress manifesto takes battle to BJP



Congress President Rahul Gandhi, senior party leaders Sonia Gandhi and Manmohan Singh releasing party's manifesto for Lok Sabha polls 2019, in New Delhi

Not shying away

The CEM did not shy away from addressing issues that are sensitive. For women, it promised the passage of the women's reservation Bill and reservation of one-third of all posts in the government. For SCs, STs and OBCs, it promised an Equal Opportunities Commission, more affirmative action and reservation in private higher education institutions. The CEM also contained promises to senior citizens, linguistic and religious minorities, persons with disabilities and the LGBTQIA+ community. After reading the CEM, every section felt included.

The CEM dealt with issues of national security, internal security and foreign policy and challenged the BJP on its failed policies and actions. When Mr Arun Jaitley raised questions, the Con-

gress hit back with facts and counter questions. Why have the number of infiltration attempts, the number of infiltrators and the number of casualties increased in Jammu & Kashmir? Why was AFSPA withdrawn totally from Tripura in 2015, from Meghalaya in 2018 and from three districts of Arunachal Pradesh on April 1, 2019? Is the BJP supporting enforced disappearance, sexual violence and torture? Why is Section 124A (sedition), a colonial-era provision, necessary when Parliament has made the Defence of India Act and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act? It is apparent that the Congress has rediscovered its combative skills and was willing to take the fight to the BJP. I welcome the debate but I am disappointed that the Prime Minister's speeches are becoming shriller and shriller by the day.

Wanted: Battle of ideas

The BJP has not released its manifesto yet. The first phase of polling is on April 11, barely four days from Sunday. I suspect that the BJP is revising its draft manifesto hurriedly to counter the CEM. That is good. Let the BJP engage in a battle of ideas. So far, the BJP has relied on hyper-nationalism and abuse. I would welcome it if the BJP shifts its campaign to ideas and arguments.

I do not like the idea of multi-phase polling but, given the charged atmosphere, it is perhaps unavoidable. Between phases, the media must play a neutral role of reporting the news and the Election Commission must enforce the rules without discrimination. Over to the people of India.



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INSIDE TRACK

COOMI KAPOOR

Heavy duty armour

There is a new trend in politics in Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and Haryana. *Netas* contesting elections are hiring strapping bodybuilders as security guards. Most are dressed in black so that they resemble the SPG personnel who protect the Prime Minister. The bouncers and hunks, who earn a reported ₹5,000 daily, do not just add to the candidates' status, they are also known to intimidate and even threaten voters. After the Election Commission of India expressed concern, the Delhi Police Commissioner issued a circular to all gyms and bodybuilder associations in the capital that no member should resort to strong-armed tactics during public rallies or during door-to-door campaigns. The commissioner also held a meeting with some 580 gym owners cautioning them that their staff should not disturb public peace in the campaign season.

Missing Pradhan

There has been a silent power shift in Odisha's BJP, which few in Delhi seem to have noticed. Petroleum minister Dharmendra Pradhan is not standing for the Lok Sabha elections. Till recently BJP posters in Odisha displayed only two photographs, Narendra Modi and Pradhan, projected as a prospective chief minister. Now the BJP posters in Bhubaneswar have Modi on one side and Aparajita Sarangi on the other, while Pradhan's mug shot has been relegated to the bottom. So who is Sarangi? She is a former middle-level IAS officer who was a popular municipal commissioner of Bhubaneswar. Sarangi who was last posted in Delhi as a joint secretary took voluntary retirement four months back and joined the BJP. She is contesting the Lok Sabha elections from Bhubaneswar. One explanation for underplaying Pradhan is that the BJP's internal surveys suggest that he is not the right choice to be projected against Naveen Patnaik, since his harsh criticism of the CM has not gone down well with potential voters. The other reason could be that the BJP is looking towards Patnaik as a prospective ally, if the NDA does not secure a majority. In which case underplaying Pradhan makes sense since projecting him as the party face would not endear the BJP to Patnaik.

Out of backroom

When Amit Shah filed his nomination from Gandhinagar, it was described by some as his official coming out from the shadows of being a backroom operator. In fact, ever since Shah

took over as party president in July 2014, he has exerted his authority and made clear that he is number two in the BJP's pecking order. Soon after taking over, Shah started making speeches. In fact, during the Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh polls last year, he attracted impressive turn-outs. Rather than address a single rally in a large city, Shah travelled in the interiors in an open van. His pre-recorded speeches were played as his motorcade drove along. Shah's team takes great pains to study the region he visits so that he can introduce localised references to temples, customs and legends. He has his personal electronic digital team, apart from the team for the entire party, which relays all his road shows on social media, including on Facebook Live and Twitter. Some wonder whether Rajnath Singh committed a faux pas when he referred to Shah as Advani's successor in Gandhinagar. After all, Advani was always the bridesmaid, never the bride. But Shah's men seemed pleased enough by the comparison.

Unofficial ally

One of Amit Shah's bigger assets in Uttar Pradesh is not an official ally. Shivpal Yadav, Mulayam Singh's brother who formed a separate party, the Pragatisheel Samajwadi Party [Lohiya; PSP(L)] after splitting with the Samajwadi Party, is helping the BJP in more ways than one. Shivpal may not win seats but the damage potential in vote-cutting could be crucial in the Yadav citadels in central UP. Shivpal is fielding candidates against all family members who are contesting, except in Mainpuri from where his elder brother Mulayam Singh Yadav is standing. Shivpal visited Mulayam at home on the day he filed his nomination to propagate the impression that Mulayam is neutral in the fight between his son and brother. Last month, Sanjay Nishad of the NISHAD Party quit the SP-BSP alliance ostensibly on the grounds that he was denied a ticket from Maharajanj constituency, since the BSP-SP demurred at granting two seats to Nishad candidates. (Sanjay's son Praveen was the winning candidate in the upset Gorakhpur bypoll last year and was expected to be fielded from the area again). SP insiders suspect Shivpal's hand in persuading Sanjay Nishad to shift to the BJP. A day later, Praveen crossed over to the BJP and is the party's Gorakhpur candidate. Meanwhile, the Peace Party, consisting largely of backward Muslims from the Pasmanda community in eastern UP, has also joined forces with the PSP(L).

Braveheart!

Stephen Gallacher's incredible resurrection at the Hero Indian Open is the stuff of lore

OVER THE TOP

Meraj Shah

IN A WAR of attrition, the last man standing, walks away with the prize. Standing on the eighth tee on the final day, Stephen Gallacher told himself that this could still be his day. "Just hang in there, I told myself," said the Scot after his round. Gallacher had just made a complete mess of the seventh hole, hitting consecutive drives into the thick stuff and finally holing out for a quadruple bogey.

It helped that Gallacher had his son caddying for him. "Jack was as cool as a cucumber after that quadruple bogey and it was brilliant having him on the bag. He kept saying, 'Just keep doing what you are doing, make sure you have the right club, get the process right, pick the your shot and hit it—that's all you can do'."

Five strokes behind the leader at the turn, Gallacher went on to make five birdies on the back nine (including

three on the final four holes) while other contenders self-destructed all around him.

The 44-year-old, known for his ball striking with the long irons hit one of the shots of the week on that stretch: a 4-iron from 240 yards out for his second on the par-5 18th that flew over the water and gave him an easy two-putt for birdie. It was the European Tour veteran's fourth European Tour win.

The 2019 edition of the country's national open championship—like any event played at the Gary Player Championship Course at the DLF Golf & Country Club in the NCR—was never going to be won by brilliance, (or audacious shot-making, for that matter). The ridiculously tucked-away pins, glassy greens—some of which are elevated with punishing roll-off areas—and some of the longest holes on the European and Asian Tours, ensure that disaster strikes consistently during events at the DLF Golf & Country Club. On this cruel, Black-Knight design, one loose shot is all it takes to dismantle fine rounds, and undo days of prudent course strategy. Just ask Julian Suri.

Suri, the American golfer with Indian origins, led from the start and held, or shared, the top position on the



Stephen Gallacher holding the trophy after winning the Hero Indian Open 2019, at the DLF Golf & Country Club in Gurugram, Haryana

leader board until he arrived at the dreaded 14th hole on the final day. This savage par-4, that was deemed the hardest par-4 hole on the European Tour in 2017, measures 550 yards from

the tips and averaged 4.6 strokes during the week.

Leading by two shots, Suri was well placed after conservative play off the tee put him 256 yards from the green

and proceeded to hit an astounding 5-iron that landed close to the pin before rolling off the putting surface. What followed was a litany of chipping errors, compounded by poor putting and suddenly Suri's chances had been vanquished by a quadruple bogey. The frazzled youngster never recovered from that blow and ended up with a five-over 77 to finish tied-fourth.

Unlike Gallacher who managed to rally back after that mess-up on the eighth, the hole proved to be the nemesis for Shubhankar Sharma—the Indian hope for the week—for whom the DLF G&CC is home turf. Sharma dropped four strokes on the Par-5 through the week and that probably cost him even more strokes as the hole was relatively conducive to birdies. Amongst the home contingent, the talented Rashid Khan announced a return to form by notching up a Top-10 finish. Khan and Bengaluru boy, Chikkarangappa, finished top-of-the-heap amongst the home contingent.

The headlines though, as always, were hogged by the Gary Player Championship course that re-affirmed its reputation as one of the most unforgiving venues on any Tour. Set up at 7,438 yards for the event, the course extracted its pound of flesh from any player who decided to take it on. Callum Shinkwin, the English player, who made it to the final group on the back of a pair of four-under 68s on the second and

third days was the only one who seemed to be capable of dominating the layout. The course got its own back with a vengeance on the final day: Shinkwin tumbled out of reckoning with a disastrous six-over 78 on the final day.

The 14th hole, in fact, played so hard this week, that the players tees were moved up from Gold to Black making it a slightly shorter, 535-yard-hole. Let you forget—this is a Par-4 we're talking about. This hole was hardly the exception when it came to the difficulty levels though; all 18 holes played over par for the week, but perhaps the most telling stat came from the 256-yard 16th hole: no player in the field managed to birdie this hole on the final day. The final stretch from holes 14–18 averaged two-over-par for the week. That stat really puts Gallacher's stellar final stretch in perspective: it was by far the best finish by anyone in the entire week.

Twenty six players finished below par, but none managed to break par on all four days. The key to playing this monster was patience: bidding your time, and accepting that occasional big numbers are inevitable. Young players, notably the hapless Suri, learnt that lesson the hard way: in golf, you've got to take it on the chin, and move on. Just ask Stephen Gallacher.

A golfer, Meraj Shah also writes about the game

Idea Exchange

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Why is the yardstick of secularism only used for us? What is Mamataji doing? Religious processions are being physically stopped... In Kerala, RSS workers are being killed cruelly. There has to be a holistic view"



WHY RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD

CONTESTING HIS FIRST Lok Sabha election, from Patna Saheb constituency, Union minister Ravi Shankar Prasad argues that while the BJP has also been talking about its development work, the Opposition's suggestion that the attacks may have been engineered has made security an issue in these polls. Currently a Rajya Sabha

member, Prasad holds the important portfolios of Law and IT in the NDA government and is its face when it comes to tackling contentious issues. The 64-year-old who began his career as a student leader and was also jailed during the Emergency, is confident that the BJP will win the Lok Sabha polls "convincingly"



"We are not saying you can't raise questions. You can. But the narrative (that the Opposition is trying to create) is that the (Balakot) strikes were engineered by the government for political gains. It is regrettable"

There is no alternative leader... Indians know how to distinguish between state, LS polls. BJP will win

Union Minister for Law and Information Technology Ravi Shankar Prasad questions methodology of NSSO survey, clarifies the govt stand on judicial appointments, says Women's Reservation Bill needs debate and calls for Ram temple hearing to be expedited



Union Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad with Associate Editor Liz Mathew in *The Indian Express* newsroom

RENUKA PURI

RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD: The India of 2019 is not the India of the '90s. It's an aspirational India now. As the minister for information technology, I see a new kind of aspiration in the youth. The way India has picked up on innovation... India has become the second biggest centre for mobile manufacturing. India is the second biggest start-up country in the world.

Also, the security of the country will figure prominently in the (election) discourse. The alarming regularity with which Congress leaders and their gurus have been challenging the whole narrative (of the Balakot aerial strikes) will also be a part of the public discourse.

We are quite hopeful of winning the elections conclusively and convincingly. People of India want Narendra Modi to be the Prime Minister once again. You can't remove someone when there is no alternative — no alternative programmes or no alternative leader. The people of India are very mature. They know how to distinguish between a Vidhan Sabha election and a Lok Sabha election. The people of India will ensure that the BJP-led NDA will come back to power in a very conclusive manner.

LIZ MATHEW: How different is the 2019 general election from 2014?

Before the 2014 election there was policy paralysis, stinking corruption and a sense of hopelessness. The 2019 election is backed by performance, expectation, India emerging as a global power, which was clear in the way countries supported India at the UN Security Council in our bid to get Masood Azhar listed (as a global terrorist). We have ensured the complete isolation of Pakistan. People see this as a continuation of 2014, with the addition of better performance and hope which the government and the Prime Minister have created.

LIZ MATHEW: What will be the main agenda in this election?

The issues in these elections will be development, economic growth, India being recognised by global industries. It will be about inclusive development which we have brought about. Nine crore people have benefited from the Ujjwala Yojana. We need to remember another statistic. From 1947 till we came to power, about 6.25 crore toilets were constructed in rural parts of India. In the last five years alone 10 crore (toilets) have been built.

Also, after the Pulwama terror attack, the manner in which opposition parties have raised questions, on the sacrifice of our jawans and the armed forces, which was designed to weaken their morale, has become an issue.

LIZ MATHEW: So will the issue of national security dominate the discourse in the run-up to polls?

I won't say that national security will be the only issue. It is an important issue. Nationalism will be an important issue. If an argument is made that the entire Pulwama tragedy was engineered for political consideration, it becomes an issue. But we have also been talking about development. We have talked about the job opportunities we have created in the country and what we have done for the farmers.

KRISHN KAUSHIK: Speaking of jobs, data from the National Sample Survey Office's Periodic Labour Force Survey 2017-18 has revealed that for the first time since 1993-94, the actual size of India's male workforce has shrunk.

I seriously question the methodology of this report. It is a draft report. What questions were asked? If you ask, do you have a job, and if you ask do you have a livelihood, the answers are bound to be different. I also read in your newspaper that job opportunities for urban women have grown.

Nearly 14 crore Indians have received ₹7.8 lakh crore (as loans) under the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana, of which four crore-plus are first-time entrepreneurs. Is it not employment and livelihood creation? So many roads have been constructed in rural parts, more than 100 kilometres of national highways... Around 73.50 lakh new subscribers were added to social security schemes of the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation last year.

Nearly 127 mobile phone manufacturing units have become operational in 2018 as compared to only two in 2014. In Noida and Greater Noida (where these units have come up), nearly five-six lakh people have got employment. So many airports and Metros have been added. All villages have been electrified. The economy is the fastest-growing economy in the world. Does it mean that no employment opportunity has been created? I regret to say that the NSSO data does not capture this.

KRISHN KAUSHIK: You said the Opposition is questioning the armed forces.

What is wrong with that?

They are not questioning the armed forces but the very authenticity of the Balakot strikes; it's different. The foreign secretary has made the Government of India's official statement. The air chief has held a press conference confirming the strikes. Not a single country in the world has questioned the strike. When you say that give me evidence of the strikes then you are seeking to question the entire narrative. That has clear implications on morale. We need to trust our forces. That's all we are saying. We are not saying you cannot raise questions. You can question. It's an accountable government. The narrative (that the Opposition is trying to create) is that the attack was engineered by the government or the ruling party for political purposes and that Balakot was an extension of that. It is regrettable. Also, just to remind you, when Osama bin Laden was killed, did anyone ask the US where they buried him? They just released elementary sketches.

RISHI RAJ: There have been a series of dialogues with social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter on checking the spread of fake news and leak of users' data. However, there is no clarity on what the government has achieved so far.

We respect freedom of the press. I appreciate social media because it is a new empowerment tool for ordinary Indians. But the constitutional norms under Article 19 should also be kept in mind. So when a social media platform is used to promote radicalisation, terrorism, massacre, mayhem, we will be tough on them. They have realised it. We have also told them that if you abuse the data of Indians for collateral purposes, that will not be acceptable. The Election Com-

mission is now on the job.

I had issued a warning to Mark Zuckerberg, a good friend of mine. The very next day he apologised. Cambridge Analytica was issued a notice. They replied to one and eloped thereafter. The matter is now with the CBI.

I had an interaction with WhatsApp. In the wake of lynchings, I asked them how was it that on the same day, on the same issue, at the same time, and in the same area, lakhs of the same message are being circulated. It's not rocket science to identify them. They have now limited forwarded messages to five. I also told them to set up a grievance cell and office in India. They have agreed.

PRANAV MUKUL: There was a lot being done on the draft Personal Data Protection Bill, 2018. But it yet to see the light of the day.

The Bill required more consultation. I said that since the whole world was awaiting our data protection law, so we must concentrate. Don't forget that the Justice B N Srikrishna Committee submitted that report (draft Bill), we had two-three rounds of consultations... We needed some more consultation. I said if they want some more time, go ahead. I think we are coming back to power and then we will take care of it.

KAUNAIN SHERIFF M: The revised Memorandum of Procedure (MoP) on appointment of judges has not been finalised yet. We know that in at least seven appointments, especially names recommended for elevation by the collegiums of the high courts of Kerala and Allahabad, you have raised objections citing the proximity of some candidates to sitting judges and judicial officers, and asked for a wider pool of names. Will we see some of these crite-

ria in the finalised MoP?

I think a judge should not be disqualified merely because of a relationship. That should not be the only criteria. If you are independently competent, then why not? That's our approach and I am very happy that the judiciary also has the same.

My approach to the MoP is very clear. There has to be a screening process based on suitability and merit. There must be a corpus of competent people to choose from. There must be an institutional mechanism of screening — at the collegium, high court and Supreme Court. That job is still going on. We will discuss it again. I have never said that the appointments are bad, I wish to make that very clear.

RAVISH TIWARI: The Modi government seems to have a very tense relationship with the judiciary. Why are you so angry with them?

It's not about anger. We had mentioned in our manifesto that the present system of appointments should change. This has been said in three Law Commission reports as well. Also, the highest number of judicial appointments have happened in the last five years. The average appointment of high court judges since 1989 has been between 83-84. In 2016, there were 126 judges appointed to high courts — the highest in 30 years. There have been 110-115 (appointments) every year.

About the collegium architecture, the Supreme Court itself has said that the government has the right to seek reconsideration. And, whenever we have sought a reconsideration, it has been objective, fair and reasonable.

RAVISH TIWARI: But the government doesn't seem to respond to the judiciary's concerns. Last January, when four senior judges held a press conference and spoke out against the then chief justice, the government was silent. There was no attempt to address their concerns.

The government should not interfere in the workings of the judiciary. The government must not at all interfere in the constitutional workings of the Supreme Court. I don't want to get into the circumstances under which (the press conference) was held. The concerns of the judiciary family should be settled in the family itself. I did intervene in a definitive case. It was about the appointment of a judge to the Karnataka High Court against whom

there were serious allegations of misbehaviour with a lady. There was a complaint against him. I said you will not be appointed till a fair enquiry is conducted.

KIRAN RATHEE: You mentioned the increase in mobile phone factories in India. But these are mostly assembling units. Real manufacturing isn't taking place here. Mostly Chinese companies are coming here to set up a base and many Indian companies are being pushed out of the market.

I differ with you on the point that these are only assembling units. Assembly is the initial process for manufacturing. Also, I don't agree that Indian companies are being pushed out. Overcoming hiccups is a part of the process and we will overcome them. If you have Chinese companies coming here then there are a lot of Indian companies in China too.

LIZ MATHEW: What do you make of all the hatred and negativity directed at minority communities and Muslims on social media?

We don't support it all. When the lynchings were happening, the Prime Minister said, 'Unko mat maro, himmat hai toh mujhe maaro (Don't kill them. If you have the courage, kill me)'. It was a tough message and tough action has been taken.

But yes, why is the yardstick of secularism only used against us. What is Mamataji (chief minister Mamata Banerjee) doing in Bengal? The number of religious processions that have been physically stopped there... In Kerala RSS workers are being killed cruelly. Even Congress people are being killed. There has to be a holistic view. If you look at our record objectively... I have raised the issue of triple talaq. I thought women leaders such as Soniaji (Gandhi) and Priyanka Gandhi will do more, but nothing. These are important issues.

LIZ MATHEW: But triple talaq affects less than 2% of the Muslim population. It's an important issue, but what about issues such as lack of social development and education that affect the community? Shouldn't the government focus on that?

You can't say why did you do this and not that. It's a gender equality and gender justice issue. Yes, we have to take care of other things as well. So many women have been covered under the Ujjwala Yojana, it also includes Muslim women. If two crore people in India have got the benefits of Ayushman Bharat, it also includes Muslims. Of the 14 crore Mudra Yojana beneficiaries, almost one-third are women, minorities and SC/STs. It is not from the perspective of getting votes. It is the duty of the government to take care of everyone.

ABANTIKA GHOSH: Speaking of gender quality, why has the women's reservation Bill not been passed yet?

It has been discussed. At the panchayat level, many of our states have given 50% reservation to women. In municipalities too. In a first, the Prime Minister has given women pilots a chance to fly fighter planes. We have had BSF women on bullet motorcycles showing their riding prowess on Rajpath. There are other things as well, such as the Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao Yojana.

Yes, there is a genuine divide (on the Bill). We need to build a consensus. Some believe that only OBC women should be given reservation. They believe that if there is blanket reservation, then only elite, educated women will occupy the positions. Somewhat reservation for OBC, SC/ST and other extremely backward castes also. We need to find answers to these questions. These issues need to be debated.

RAVISH TIWARI: For a long time now we have been hearing about Ram Lalla, 'mandir wahin banayenge (We will make the temple there)'...

It's our firm commitment that a Ram Lalla temple should be erected. The matter is in the Supreme Court. Both the President and the Prime Minister have said that you have to achieve it through constitutional means. And yes, we would like the hearing to be expedited. In the case of Sabarimala, Section 377, urban Maoists, the hearing was expedited. This suit is 70 years old, and as a lawyer for Ram Lalla, I know that there is overpowering evidence available on which the argument to expedite the hearing can be made. I hope the court does that.



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member, Prasad holds the important portfolios of Law and IT in the NDA government and is its face when it comes to tackling contentious issues. The 64-year-old who began his career as a student leader and was also jailed during the Emergency, is confident that the BJP will win the Lok Sabha polls "convincingly"



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RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD: The India of 2019 is not the India of the '90s. It's an aspirational India now. As the Minister for Information Technology, I see a new kind of aspiration in the youth. The way India has picked up on innovation... India has become the second biggest centre for mobile manufacturing. India is the second biggest start-up country in the world.

Also, the security of the country will figure prominently in the (election) discourse. The alarming regularity with which Congress leaders and their gurus have been challenging the whole narrative (of the Balakot aerial strikes) will also be a part of the public discourse.

We are quite hopeful of winning the elections conclusively and convincingly. People of India want Narendra Modi to be the Prime Minister once again. You can't remove someone when there is no alternative — no alternative programmes or no alternative leader. The people of India are very mature. They know how to distinguish between a Vidhan Sabha election and a Lok Sabha election. The people of India will ensure that the BJP-led NDA will come back to power in a very conclusive manner.

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Before the 2014 election there was policy paralysis, stinking corruption and a sense of hopelessness. The 2019 election is backed by performance, expectation, India emerging as a global power, which was clear in the way countries supported India at the UN Security Council in our bid to get Masood Azhar listed (as a global terrorist). We have ensured the complete isolation of Pakistan. People see this as a continuation of 2014, with the addition of better performance and hope which the government and the Prime Minister have created.

LIZ MATHEW: What will be the main agenda in this election?

The issues in these elections will be development, economic growth, India being recognised by global industries. It will be about inclusive development which we have brought about. Nine crore people have benefited from the Ujjwala Yojana. We need to remember another statistic. From 1947 till we came to power, about 6.25 crore toilets were constructed in rural parts of India. In the last five years alone 10 crore (toilets) have been built.

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I won't say that national security will be the only issue. It is an important issue. Nationalism will be an important issue. If an argument is made that the entire Pulwama tragedy was engineered for political consideration, it becomes an issue. But we have also been talking about development. We have talked about the job opportunities we have created in the country and what we have done for the farmers.

KRISHN KAUSHIK: Speaking of jobs, data from the National Sample Survey Office's Periodic Labour Force Survey 2017-18 has revealed that for the first time since 1993-94, the actual size of India's male workforce has shrunk.

I seriously question the methodology of this report. It is a draft report. What questions were asked? If you ask, do you have a job, and if you ask do you have a livelihood, the answers are bound to be different. I also read in your newspaper that job opportunities for urban women have grown.

Nearly 14 crore Indians have received Rs 7.8 lakh crore (as loans) under the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana, of which four crore-plus are first-time entrepreneurs. Is it not employment and livelihood creation? So many roads have been constructed in rural parts, more than 100 kilometres of national highways... Around 73.50 lakh new subscribers were added to social security schemes of the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation last year.

Nearly 127 mobile phone manufacturing units have become operational in 2018 as compared to only two in 2014. In Noida and Greater Noida (where these units have come up), nearly five-six lakh people have got employment. So many airports and Metros have been added. All villages have been electrified. The economy is the fastest-growing economy in the world. Does it mean that no employment opportunity has been created? I regret to say that the NSSO data does not capture this.

KRISHN KAUSHIK: You said the Opposition is questioning the armed

'There is no alternative leader... Indians know how to distinguish between state, LS polls. BJP will win'

Union Minister for Law and Information Technology Ravi Shankar Prasad questions methodology of NSSO survey, clarifies the govt stand on judicial appointments, says Women's Reservation Bill needs debate and calls for Ram temple hearing to be expedited



Union Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad with Associate Editor Liz Mathew in The Indian Express newsroom. Renuka Puri

forces. What is wrong with that?

They are not questioning the armed forces but the very authenticity of the Balakot strikes; it's different. The Foreign Secretary has made the Government of India's official statement. The Air Chief has held a press conference confirming the strikes. Not a single country in the world has questioned the strike. When you say that give me evidence of the strikes then you are seeking to question the entire narrative. That has clear implications on morale. We need to trust our forces. That's all we are saying. We are not saying you cannot raise questions. You can question. It's an accountable government. The narrative (that the Opposition is trying to create) is that the attack was engineered by the government or the ruling party for political purposes and that Balakot was an extension of that. It is regrettable. Also, just to remind you, when Osama bin Laden was killed, did anyone ask the US where they buried him? They just released elementary sketches.

RISHI RAJ: There have been a series of dialogues with social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter on checking the spread of fake news and leak of users' data. However, there is no clarity on what the government has achieved so far.

We respect freedom of the press. I appreciate social media because it is a new empowerment tool for ordinary Indians. But the constitutional norms under Article 19 should also be kept in mind. So when a social media platform is used to promote radicalisation, terrorism, massacre, mayhem, we will be tough on them. They have realised it. We have also told them that if you abuse the data of Indians for collateral purposes, that will not be acceptable. The Election Commission is now on the job.

I had issued a warning to Mark Zuckerberg, a good friend of mine. The very next day he apologised. Cambridge Analytica was issued a notice. They replied to one and eloped thereafter. The matter is now with the CBI.

I had an interaction with WhatsApp. In the wake of lynchings, I asked them how was it that on the same day, on the same issue, at the same time, and in the same area, lakhs of the same message are being circulated. It's not rocket science to identify them. They have now limited forwarded messages to five. I also told them

to set up a grievance cell and office in India. They have agreed.

PRANAV MUKUL: There was a lot being done on the draft Personal Data Protection Bill, 2018. But it yet to see the light of the day.

The Bill required more concentration. I said that since the whole world was awaiting our data protection law, so we must concentrate. Don't forget that the Justice B N Srikrishna Committee submitted that report (draft Bill), we had two-three rounds of consultations... We needed some more consultation. I said if they want some more time, go ahead. I think we are coming back to power and then we will take care of it.

KAUNAIN SHERIFFM: The revised Memorandum of Procedure (MoP) on appointment of judges has not been finalised yet. We know that in at least seven appointments, especially names recommended for elevation by the collegiums of the high courts of Kerala and Allahabad, you have raised objections citing the proximity of some candidates to sitting judges and judicial officers, and asked for a wider pool of names. Will we see some of these criteria in the finalised MoP?

I think a judge should not be disqualified merely because of a relationship. That should not be the only criteria. If you are independently competent, then why not? That's our approach and I am very happy that the judiciary also has the same.

My approach to the MoP is very clear. There has to be a screening process based on suitability and merit. There must be a

corpus of competent people to choose from. There must be an institutional mechanism of screening — at the collegium, high court and Supreme Court. That job is still going on. We will discuss it again. I have never said that the appointments are bad, I wish to make that very clear.

RAVISH TIWARI: The Modi government seems to have a very tense relationship with the judiciary. Why are you so angry with them?

It's not about anger. We had mentioned in our manifesto that the present system of appointments should change. This has been said in three Law Commission reports as well. Also, the highest number of judicial appointments have happened in the last five years. The average appointment of high court judges since 1989 has been between 83-84. In 2016, there were 126 judges appointed to high courts — the highest in 30 years. There have been 110-115 (appointments) every year.

About the collegium architecture, the Supreme Court itself has said that the government has the right to seek reconsideration. And, whenever we have sought a reconsideration, it has been objective, fair and reasonable.

RAVISH TIWARI: But the government doesn't seem to respond to the judiciary's concerns. Last January, when four senior judges held a press conference and spoke out against the then chief justice, the government was silent. There was no attempt to address their concerns.

The government should not interfere

in the workings of the judiciary. The government must not at all interfere in the constitutional workings of the Supreme Court. I don't want to get into the circumstances under which (the press conference) was held. The concerns of the judiciary family should be settled in the family itself.

I did intervene in a definitive case. It was about the appointment of a judge to the Karnataka High Court against whom there were serious allegations of misbehaviour with a lady. There was a complaint against him. I said you will not be appointed till a fair enquiry is conducted.

KIRAN RATHEE: You mentioned the increase in mobile phone factories in India. But these are mostly assembling units. Real manufacturing isn't taking place here. Mostly Chinese companies are coming here to set up a base and many Indian companies are being pushed out of the market.

I differ with you on the point that these are only assembling units. Assembly is the initial process for manufacturing. Also, I don't agree that Indian companies are being pushed out. Overcoming hiccups is a part of the process and we will overcome them. If you have Chinese companies coming here then there are a lot of Indian companies in China too.

LIZ MATHEW: What do you make of all the hatred and negativity directed at minority communities and Muslims on social media?

We don't support it at all. When the lynchings were happening, the Prime Minister said, 'Unko mat maro, himmat hai toh mujhe maaro (Don't kill them. If you have the courage, kill me)'. It was a tough message and tough action has been taken.

But yes, why is the yardstick of secularism only used against us. What is Mamataji (Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee) doing in Bengal? The number of religious processions that have been physically stopped there... In Kerala RSS workers are being killed cruelly. Even Congress people are being killed. There has to be a holistic view. If you look at our record objectively... I have raised the issue of triple talaq. I thought women leaders such as Soniji (Gandhi) and Priyanka Gandhi will do more, but nothing. These are important issues.

LIZ MATHEW: But triple talaq affects less than 2 per cent of the Muslim

population. It's an important issue, but what about issues such as lack of social development and education that affect the community? Shouldn't the government focus on that?

You can't say why did you do this and not that. It's a gender equality and gender justice issue. Yes, we have to take care of other things as well. So many women have been covered under the Ujjwala Yojana, it also includes Muslim women. If two crore people in India have got the benefits of Ayushman Bharat, it also includes Muslims. Of the 14 crore Mudra Yojana beneficiaries, almost one-third are women, minorities and SC/STs. It is not from the perspective of getting votes. It is the duty of the government to take care of everyone.

ABANTIKA GHOSH: Speaking of gender equality, why has the women's reservation Bill not been passed yet?

It has been discussed. At the panchayat level, many of our states have given 50 per cent reservation to women. In municipalities too. In a first, the Prime Minister has given women pilots a chance to fly fighter planes. We have had BSF women on bullet motorcycles showing their riding prowess on Rajpath. There are other things as well, such as the Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao Yojana.

Yes, there is a genuine divide (on the Bill). We need to build a consensus. Some believe that only OBC women should be given reservation. They believe that if there is blanket reservation, then only elite, educated women will occupy the positions. Some want reservation for OBC, SC/ST and other extremely backward castes also. We need to find answers to these questions. These issues need to be debated.

RAVISH TIWARI: For a long time now we have been hearing about Ram Lalla, 'mandir wahin banayenge (We will make the temple there)....'

It's our firm commitment that a Ram Lalla temple should be erected. The matter is in the Supreme Court. Both the President and the Prime Minister have said that you have to achieve it through constitutional means. And yes, we would like the hearing to be expedited. In the case of Sabarimala, Section 377, urban Maoists, the hearing was expedited. This suit is 70 years old, and as a lawyer for Ram Lalla, I know that there is overpowering evidence available on which the argument to expedite the hearing can be made. I hope the court does that.



The makeover of Sensex

Only seven companies survive from the original list

It is a truism that equities offer higher long-term returns than other financial assets. This is certainly the case with the Sensex, or the BSE Sensitive Index. Over the 40 years that the Sensex has, sort of, been in existence, it has delivered compounded capital gains of about 16 per cent per annum, along with 1.5 per cent in annual dividends. That beats inflation comfortably. The Sensex was actually launched in 1986. The BSE compiled it as a ready reckoner to track the combined share prices of the 30 largest listed companies in India. The methodology was adopted from the venerable Dow Jones Industrial Average (DJIA) of the New York Stock Exchange, and a base

year of 1979-80 was chosen. Hence, though only 33 years old, the Sensex's history reaches back 40 years.

The tectonic shifts in the economy across those four decades are illustrated by changes in the index composition. As companies gain (or lose) market value and sectors gain in importance, they move in (and out) of the index. Only seven companies survive from that original list of 30 — namely (in alphabetical order), Hindustan Unilever, ITC, Larsen & Toubro, Mahindra & Mahindra, Reliance Industries and the Tata twins — Tata Steel (then known as "Tata Ordinary") and Tata Motors (aka "Telco"). The current index includes several entirely new sectors

which did not exist in 1986. There were no listed banks in 1986, for example, since the entire sector was nationalised. Banking is now the single-largest sector by weight. The Sensex set includes five private banks with just one public sector bank. Add in non-banking financial companies, and the sector is, by far, the most important index component. India's information technology industry was barely conceptualised in 1986 and there were no listed IT companies. IT is now the second-largest sector by weight. There are two listed mining conglomerates including a public sector unit, and another Sensex PSU is a producer of crude oil and natural gas. There are six listed automobile companies — there were only three in 1986.

The 2019 Sensex also includes a private telecom service provider with 350 million subscribers, and another company, which is nominally classified as a refiner/marketer of fuels, also owns a large telecom service with

280 million subscribers. This was unthinkable in 1986, when getting a landline meant being on the waiting-list for years. Old-style commodity businesses such as cement producers, textile manufacturers and paper mills have gradually been shouldered out by these new startups that were only allowed to start operations after the New Economic Policy of 1991. The index composition also shows the increasing importance of private consumption since banking, finance, telecom, automobiles *et al* are largely driven by retail consumption.

Liberalisation came relatively late to the investment industry itself. Private mutual funds, exchange-traded funds, and ULIPs were not allowed to provide services until the 21st century. This means that, in many ways, the returns indicated by the Sensex were just a theoretical construct for the first 15 years or so of its existence. There were no index funds or ETFs available to capture

index performance; there was only UTI, which offered strange instruments with no correlation to stock-market movements. Individual investors punted as they pleased, trading paper certificates in an opaque system of open outcry where huge brokerages were charged and transactions rolled over for years on end. Indeed, the creation of a financial regulator, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi), triggered a strike in April 1992 by the brokers who controlled the BSE. That strike led directly to the discovery of the Harshad Mehta scam. The legendary "Big Bull" couldn't liquidate his stock positions to return cash "borrowed" from the banking system.

The BSE is now a listed corporate entity and the Sensex has, in many ways, been superseded by the broader Nifty. But it remains a unique artefact with India's financial history embedded within in its meandering journey northwards.

Getting clean air back

Air pollution can be brought down to near permissible levels within five years with the use of the right regulatory and policy instruments

AJAY SHANKAR

The good news is that finally there is a National Clean Air Program to mitigate the real health crisis that air pollution is causing. The task is daunting. All new programs need substantial funds for the subsidies and grants that are the normal instruments of implementation. The fiscal deficit will, however, be higher in the coming financial year and the new government would need to again move towards fiscal rectitude. The provision of large budgetary resources for clean air may, therefore, be difficult. So the challenge would be to make a major dent without much money. Fortunately, there are some zero and modest cost options, which can have a major impact and require only policy and regulatory interventions.

The zero cost option for getting air pollution from burning of crop residues down to zero would be for the thermal power stations of the region to offer an attractive enough price for the supply of briquettes made from crop residues. The price signal would get competitive private investment into briquette making plants. The farmers would get a price for their crop residue and some increase in their incomes. The additional cost, if any, that the power plants would incur by the use of briquettes instead of coal would be a pass through in their regulated tariff. The impact on the final consumer would be negligible. All that would be needed is a policy mandate to thermal power plants and regulators.

Electricity and gas cylinders are reaching all rural households through *Saubhagya* and *Ujjwala* programmes. Cow dung is presently used for cooking and is a significant source of air pollution. The Power Distribution Companies could announce a sufficiently remunerative tariff for the purchase of electricity generated from cow dung. This could be a separate earmarked component of the Renewable Energy Purchase obligations of the Distribution Companies. A policy mandate to the Regulators would be needed. There are mini plants, which convert cow dung into gas and compost and use the gas, to generate electricity. Private investors would then put up plants in villages and pay a price for cow dung. Cattle owning households would get some additional income. With this they would find it easier to pay for clean energy, electricity, and gas, for cooking. In a few years all the cow dung in the country could be converted into clean energy and would cease to cause air pollution. The additional cost to the consumer of electricity as a result would be marginal.

Electric vehicles do not pollute the air. To begin with, the Transport Authorities in the more polluted areas, such as the National Capital Region, could announce that from, say, 1st January 2020, all new as well as replacement permits for taxis, three wheelers, and mini buses for local public transport would be given only for electric vehicles. This would give enough time for the electric vehicle manufacturers in India to ramp up production. They have the electric vehicles. The local authorities should get a sufficient number of charging stations in place by then. The cost of these electric vehicles have come down considerably. The Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL) is providing electric vehicles to the government at the existing market rates. These do not need subsidies for public transport. Purchase of electric vehicles for personal use would rise only after



people get used to electric taxis. However, the electric two wheelers have become so economical that they only need the network of charging stations to dramatically increase market share. But buses need subsidies as their costs are still quite high. Subsidising electric buses by fully foregoing the goods and services tax (GST) would be amply justified. It may be noted that London is mandating that all taxis be electric to address growing concerns there about air pollution.

Micro, small and medium industries cause considerable air pollution as they use coal and other polluting energy sources. A rapid extension of the gas grid to cover all urban areas and industrial clusters would enable these industrial units to use clean gas as their energy source. All households would also switch over to piped gas for cooking. Imported liquefied natural gas (LNG) based fuel would be able to cater to the full demand. This can be done without any subsidy. The distortion of dual pricing in gas; one for domestic gas and one for imported LNG has outlived its rationale and needs to go. There should be only one price for all consumers as is the case with petrol and diesel.

Then there are old coal fired stations in and around urban centres. These can easily be closed to reduce air pollution. This should pose no difficulty as the country has surplus power capacity. The recent closure of the Badarpur thermal plant is a good example. Such closure

of old polluting plants would also reduce net carbon emissions as the newer plants are more energy efficient. In addition, the increased demand for electricity from newer plants would, to some extent, mitigate the risk of these plants becoming NPAs due to lack of demand.

Old commercial vehicles cause considerable pollution and need to be fully replaced with BS VI compliant new vehicles at the earliest; within 3 to 5 years. A regulatory fiat of scrapping all these vehicles across the country would be the way forward. The phasing out would not run into resistance and become far smoother if an attractive enough price was given for trading in of the old vehicles. An efficient system for scrapping these with full traceability would also need to be put in place. Government would need to fully finance this. But the outgo of money would be sufficiently offset by the additional GST revenues from the higher sales of commercial vehicles.

Air pollution levels could conceivably be brought down to near permissible levels within five years with the use of the right regulatory and policy instruments. Subsidies should be introduced only where there is no other option. But then it should be amply provided so as to achieve the objective fully.

The writer is former Secretary, Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion, Government of India

Simple ideas to transform India

ANIL AGARWAL

India is currently the largest democracy and one of the fastest-growing economies in the world. The entire world is keeping a close watch on our country as almost one billion people will cast their votes to elect a government that will be entrusted with the duties of taking the country forward, and making India an even more powerful nation in the next five years.

The average age of India's population today is 25 years and the country is known for its hard working and intellectual workforce. However, with escalating unemployment, many people, especially talented youngsters, are heading overseas for job opportunities.

Such brain drain needs to be curtailed and citizens need to be encouraged to choose careers most suitable to them. They should be provided with platforms to succeed in careers that divert them from mainstream jobs. We can take a cue from the US with its Liberal Arts universities helping about 35 per cent of the population to explore other career opportunities. This broadens the student's perspective and will lead them to a totally new career focus like painting, art, theatre, sports, and so on. Alternative career options should be encouraged through prestigious social recognition by parents and society at large.

The growth of a start-up culture is in the right direction. The government has done a fabulous job of creating an environment conducive for start-ups. Financial institutions all over the world are looking at optimum ways to deploy funds, and the most popular one is micro finance. Providing loans of up to ₹2 lakh will provide the much-needed impetus to the common man with an Aadhaar card. They will be encouraged to come up with thousands of new ideas to deploy that money. They will become entrepreneurs and have an independent livelihood, and going forward, will create jobs instead of seeking jobs. Data clearly shows that the least bad debts arise from micro finance.

Public sector enterprises, including state-owned banks, are the backbone of India. Empowering these PSUs and PSBs and giving them a free hand to operate and take decisions will help generate employment and speed up development. These need to be provided with global funds, independent boards and minimum interference in decision making. This will raise their performance manifold and create a huge number of jobs.

India has around 650 districts which have very effective district collectors, who can be honed as business development managers in their areas, whether it is agri-

culture, sport, mining, education or tourism. They can develop their strategy and have the final authority once the policy decisions have been taken by the government. The responsibility will lie on them as the buck will stop with them. This structure will surely transform the country.

Traditionally, India has always been an agrarian nation with agriculture being the backbone of the economy. Massive strides have been taken on the agricultural front to make India self-sufficient in our food requirements. India is a large country which has been blessed with rich resources both over the ground as well as underground. To finance and monetarily support India's growing welfare and developmental spending, the nation needs to look "underground" towards its huge but yet untapped mineral and oil and gas resources. These yet-to-be-tapped natural resources could be tapped by PSUs or private participants and the funds thereby generated be used for various purposes.

The government needs to act strongly on the auction of raw materials for the aluminium and steel industry. India is facing a surge in import bills through imports of aluminium and iron ore, hurting the economy significantly. It has surplus capacity yet it imports over 50 per cent scrap and primary aluminium, losing \$3.5 billion per annum and lakhs of jobs to other countries. A uniform import duty of 10 per cent on both scrap and primary aluminium will encourage the domestic industry and avoid dumping.

Encouragement to explore and produce natural resources in India will lead to greater self-reliance. Natural resources require processing, which will help create thousands of SMEs who will create quality products and millions of jobs. Self-reliance will also help save billions of dollars in imports, which can be ploughed back into social development.

Finally, India needs to build upon its 5000-year-old history, rich culture, monuments, museums, royal palaces, coastline, hills, deserts and places of tourist interest. These could be handled by professionals who will provide world-class maintenance, making them attractive for the global and Indian tourist. This will encourage tourism immensely and create massive job opportunities in the tourism sector.

I am sure political parties will include and address these through their manifestos for the forthcoming elections, as these are quite relevant for the nation's development. Once implemented, these ideas will lead to job creation and poverty alleviation, and will take India a step closer to the super power that it aspires to become.

The writer is Executive Chairman, Vedanta Resources

▶ OTHER VIEWS

Big step by Lightfoot

Chicago elects the first black, gay woman as its mayor

In his January 2017 farewell speech in Chicago, outgoing President Barack Obama, talking about the threats facing American democracy, touched upon the toxic persistence of racism, and spoke of how "Hearts must change". In the same speech, he also said, "I've lived long enough to know that race relations are better than they were 10, or 20, or 30 years ago — you can see it not just in statistics, but in the attitudes of young Americans across the political spectrum." Now, in what seems to be an effort to pick up on the cues of the former president, Chicago has become the largest American city to elect a black woman as its mayor earlier this week. A former prosecutor, Lori Lightfoot, 56, is also the first openly gay mayor to hold office in the city. And, she defeated another African-American woman, former alderman, Toni Preckwinkle.

Obama had risen through the ranks in this territory, serving three terms in the Illinois Senate from 1997 to 2004. Lightfoot's win, in the context of contemporary American politics, goes some way towards dulling the sharp divisiveness that has marked the Trump presidency. Trump has supported an assortment of anti-gay measures. His views on women have been regressive. Lightfoot's victory is a significant electoral fightback. She is armed with an encouraging liberal legacy as well: Chicago elected its first black mayor in 1983 — Harold Washington. In 1909, the civil rights organisation, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), was first estab-



lished in Chicago. At her election night party, Lightfoot told the crowd, "You did more than make history. You created a movement for change". Her victory is a heartwarming moment.

The Indian Express, April 5

Don't shame rape victims

A Court of Appeal will help Supreme Court focus on weightier matters

The Congress manifesto promising a Court of Appeal between the high courts and Supreme Court is a sensible proposal that must be top priority for the next government irrespective of the party that comes to power. Currently, Supreme Court is weighed down hearing sundry appeals, special leave petitions, and other original litigation leaving little time for constitutional matters or select cases of public importance. Constitution was the court's focus area in the initial decades since Independence. But with India's economy taking off and litigation also rising proportionately with the stakes, SC has become the final word on even routine cases like business disputes, dishonouring of contracts, and even bail matters. Congress's proposal of a Court of Appeal "to sit in mul-

tiple benches of three judges each in six locations" can remedy the situation and also make justice accessible. The resources to travel to Delhi and engage lawyers with so-called "face value" before judges are available only to well-heeled litigants. Ultimately, even this flawed system is susceptible to breakdown if vacancies are not filled as soon as they emerge. One solution to retaining judges in the system would be to raise retirement age of HC judges to 65 and SC judges to 70. Another approach would be bottom up, by creating an All India Judicial Service. Multiple Law Commission reports have mooted a smaller Supreme Court supported by regional courts of appeal. Politicians and judges must work together to make this a reality.

The Times of India, April 5

Outer clarity

India must make a forceful case against weaponisation of outer space

The Indian Space Research Organisation's successful April 1 launch of the PSLV-C45 rocket that placed 29 satellites in three different orbits is remarkable both for the complexity set of multi-tasking the mission accomplished and for the timing. Coming three days after ISRO and the Defence Research and Development Organisation knocked out a satellite in a Low Earth Orbit with a direct hit, it would appear that the Indian space programme stands galvanised and poised for a giant leap. The dexterity with which so many satellites, most of them American, were placed in three different orbits certainly showcases both the reliability and the expertise that ISRO offers. This is not a new development. In February 2017, the PSLV-C37 placed 104 satellites, 96 of them from the U.S., in

one go. Equally important, just as the February 2017 launch also placed the fifth of the Cartosat 2 series in orbit, an earth observation satellite with cameras that have a resolution of less than a metre, the PSLV-C45 placed EMISAT, which can, among other things, aid in electronic intelligence.

That is precisely why the government should articulate much more clearly the doctrinal aspects of the space programme, as well as the deterrence sought to be achieved by it. India must communicate its peaceful intentions just as it showcases its capabilities, so as to contribute to a better understanding among countries it hopes to deter and thereby reduce the chances of wrong inferences being drawn in crisis situations.

The Hindu, April 5

