



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

CALLING ATTENTION

The killing of CRPF jawans by militants is a reminder of the challenge that awaits the Modi government in the Valley

THE KILLING OF five CRPF jawans in Kashmir by militants is a reminder of the challenge in the Valley that awaits the re-elected Modi government. The five men were on picket duty in Anantnag when two men on a motorcycle fired at them. One of the attackers was also killed, and police have said he is a “foreigner”. The attack has been claimed by a long-defunct organisation called al Umar, active in the 1990s and headed by Mushtaq Ahmed Zargar, one of the three men exchanged with the Taliban at Kandahar in 1999 for the IC 814 hostages. The attack came four months after 40 CRPF jawans were killed in an attack claimed by Jaish e Mohammed, leading to an unprecedented Indian air attack inside Pakistan. In this period, India succeeded in having Masood Azhar listed as an international terrorist, and the India-Pakistan relationship itself is seen to have changed. In Kashmir, police took out several militants in encounters, including the alleged mastermind of the Pulwama attack, and the number of youth joining militant groups is said to have come down. The latest incident shows that militancy continues to take a heavy toll.

The timing, three weeks before the Amarnath Yatra is set to commence, is not insignificant — the attack took place on the road that connects Anantnag to Pahalgam, one of the two places from which the pilgrimage is accessed. Last year saw the government deploying over 40,000 CRPF personnel for security to the yatris after the 2017 incident in which seven pilgrims were killed when militants fired at their bus. This year, the security considerations have only gone up.

Governor Satya Pal Malik has appealed to militants to engage with him in dialogue. While such an appeal has its merits, it is without meaning unless the government acknowledges that there is a problem in Kashmir, and that this problem is a deep-rooted alienation. It cannot be resolved just by killing militants, slapping NIA cases against separatists and discrediting mainstream politicians, a vital link between the Centre and state, or even by cleaning up a corrupt system. The periodic assertions of the BJP-RSS ideological plank for demographic change in the Valley are only adding fuel to the fires. The latest fear in Kashmir is over a purported plan for delimitation of Assembly constituencies. The NDA government would be well served by steering clear of divisive and polarising ideas that can only set the stage for more violence and alienation. The Centre has extended President’s Rule for another six months, but the priority should be to hold Assembly elections at the earliest. With his huge mandate, nothing stops Prime Minister Modi from taking bold steps to win the hearts and minds of Kashmir.

GET BACK TO WORK

The doctors have a reason to be angry. They need a hearing — not hectoring by TMC or communal cheerleading by BJP

WEST BENGAL’S POLITICAL turmoil is beginning to complicate other serious problems in the state. On Monday, angry relatives of a patient, who died in Kolkata’s Nilratan Sircar (NRS) Medical College, clashed with the institute’s junior doctors. The incident precipitated a doctors’ strike at NRS, which has now spilled over to all state-run medical college hospitals and at least six district hospitals in West Bengal and is spreading. On Wednesday, some of them pulled down the shutters on their emergency services. The matter pertains to the rights of patients and doctors, which are usually seen, in over-crowded under-equipped government hospitals, as antagonistic parties.

But the aftermath of the NRS incident points to a more problematic discourse. The doctor-patient clash has become a rallying point for West Bengal’s political opposition led by the BJP. There is, of course, nothing wrong in a political party taking up cudgels on behalf of aggrieved doctors; in fact, they should. Politics can lend its powerful weight to social sector issues like health or education and maybe an ascendant BJP can prod the state government into cleaning up the mess in hospitals. But what is worrying — and reprehensible — is that the BJP is using this to play the Hindu-Muslim card. The party’s West Bengal chief, Dilip Ghosh, has alleged that “anti-social people of one community” (read Muslim) were behind the attacks on the doctors. The patient was 74-year-old Md Sayeed and his relatives and their neighbours were part of the crowd that had barged in. The full force of the law should apply to all who have broken it — in fact, five of the patient’s relatives have been arrested. Using the religion of the protesters to score political points against the TMC may be a time-tested BJP strategy — yes, it worked during the elections — but it will deepen faultlines and make any solution harder to find.

As for the TMC government and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who is also health minister, their handling of the crisis hardly evokes confidence. She asked her deputy to visit the hospital but instead of reaching out to the doctors and listening to them, she has taken an adversarial position threatening them with consequences. After its electoral debacle, if the TMC government needs to signal that it can govern the state, it should get back to governance and not let the BJP hijack the debate. As for the BJP, its electoral success has clearly affirmed its position as an alternative to the TMC — how it behaves in Opposition matters to voters more than ever. As for the doctors, they need to get back to work, too. Medical care is an emergency service, holding it to ransom isn’t the way to strengthen your negotiating position.

COURTING GREATNESS

For two decades, Lee Chong Wei entertained badminton fans with his near-perfect game

ONE WAY OF looking at it is Lee Chong Wei went for four Olympics, reached three finals and won a silver medal each of those times. In the last of those instances in 2016, the much-revered badminton legend, who announced his retirement, even beat arch rival Lin Dan, denying his Chinese nemesis a third straight final. Despite these highs, the Malaysian legend, who is recovering from nasopharynx cancer, apologised to his countryman for “not delivering an Olympic gold”. He shouldn’t have. The Chong Wei faithful, present beyond Malaysian borders, adored him. They didn’t mind the fact he couldn’t cross the threshold to win gold in three Olympics, three World Championships and one Asian Games.

Two decades of excellence is too long to scrunch into a regret — though Chong Wei was known to dwell on it compulsively, as he sought answers for what more he could do against his Chinese peers. Along the way, Chong Wei found the rest of the world rooting for him. While Lin Dan had the might of the Chinese system behind him, the Malaysian chose the unglamorous path of playing week in, week out, rewarded with a stay at World No 1 for 349 weeks. Curiously, he couldn’t hold on to reach the well-rounded 350 weeks mark.

But perfect figures will do no justice to the emotion that would run through a crowd when Chong Wei stepped on the court. If his rubber-band body that would dive around ceaselessly didn’t get you to the edge of the seat, then his eight-feet leaps in the air did. His cancer diagnosis had sent badminton fans into desperate prayers. The ultimate compliment, though, came from the only man who could’ve spared Chong Wei fans all this heartbreak: Lin Dan acknowledged “no one will accompany me on court anymore”.



NEERJA CHOWDHURY

“MARTE KO AUR bhi maarna” — that neither feels good nor right. And yet, given the state of the Indian National Congress, hard questions need to be asked.

They need to be asked because every Indian — whether she acknowledges it or not — has a stake in the revival of the Congress party, if we are to continue as a parliamentary democracy. Despite the slump in its fortunes, the Congress is the only centre-piece, even today, around which opposition at the national level can coalesce. Regional parties will play a role but only up to a point.

For a start, the Congress should honour Rahul Gandhi’s resignation to step down as party chief, taking responsibility for the party’s rout. It would be a real charade, that the Congress has been so good at mounting in the past, if it persuades him to take it back. This time it will not only deepen the cynicism about a party already facing an existential crisis, it might finish Rahul Gandhi’s political career. On the other hand, if he holds firm — he also said that his sister Priyanka Vadra Gandhi should not be made Congress President in his place — he may win the respect of some, and live to fight another day.

Even if his decision turns out to be a mistake, it is always better to have erred, following an inner steer, than the cacophony of voices outside. If nothing else, Rahul Gandhi would be ensuring accountability. Equally important, he would be respecting the sentiment against “dynasty”, which was implicit in the 2019 mandate, particularly among the young and first-time voters, as Narendra Modi’s “naamdar vs kaamdar” slogan found a resonance amongst many. And India is a young and an aspirational country; its average age is going to be 29 in 2020.

This then could be Rahul Gandhi’s “Sonja moment”. In 2004, his mother Sonia Gandhi, gave up her claim to be prime minister, though she had been elected as the leader of the parliamentary party of the UPA. From that day, the country accepted her. Despite her foreign origins, the Congress still looks at her as its most respected leader.

Many apprehend that Rahul’s exit may cause more problems than solve. For, in the way the Congress is structured, it is the Nehru-Gandhi family which has kept the party united, and won it votes, though the latter is now diluted. The party, however, need not split, if the new president is chosen by consensus, and has the backing of the Nehru-Gandhi family. With a wipeout in 18 states,

Let him go

Accepting Rahul Gandhi’s resignation as Congress president could help renew the party’s fortunes

Congress leaders have to pull themselves up and hang together — or be forced to walk into the sunset.

There are enough people in the Congress who can head the party, and this time it can be somebody from the South, since the southern states have stood by the Congress more than the North and the West.

The delay in deciding, either way, has only deepened the insecurities in the party. As it is, the exit of leaders has started, what with 12 out of 18 of its legislators gravitating to the TRS in Telengana, the party’s Leader of Opposition in Maharashtra moving across to the BJP, and more are likely to follow. Defeat has unsheathed knives inside the organisation, be it in Rajasthan, or in Haryana, and this is a given when a party weakens.

Talk to ordinary folks, in town and village, and they are clear about the two reasons for the Congress’s woes: Congressmen and women have forgotten how to work hard. And the Congress has lost touch with the reality called India.

The Congress was always a party of patronage but it has over the years become no more than a conglomerate of comfortable men and women pursuing their individual agendas, interested in amassing wealth, given half a chance, and promoting their progeny. (There are exceptions of course). After all, it is the guilty men and women of UPA who brought Modi to power in 2014. Even today, the party’s leading lights are not willing to go beyond “money”, “media”, and “marketing” as the only reasons for the Modi magic. They discount the fire in the Modi-Shah belly not just for another stint in power, but to wield absolute power and leave a historical legacy, recasting India in accordance with their ideological worldview. There is no counter to it from the Congress side. The implication of Outcome 2019 has been more far reaching for the Congress than for the BJP.

As a beginning, the party has to democratise its decision-making processes. Why should not Rahul Gandhi work as an ordinary general secretary, as a “kaamdaar”? Priyanka Vadra Gandhi, as G. Sec in charge of East UP, has already been tasked with winning UP for the Congress in 2022. Maybe Rahul Gandhi can undertake a padayatra going around the country, with folded hands, only to understand what young and old India has to say about the Congress’s mistakes and what it should do. After all, Jagan Reddy undertook a 3,000 km padayatra to great effect in Andhra

Pradesh, as did his late father Y S Rajasekhara Reddy. Perhaps the new narrative that the Congress seeks will emerge from such a process — of looking to the ground for solutions, and encouraging the emergence of leaders from there.

For entitlement is also about elitism, just as it is about a name opening doors. And about a culture which leaves everything to the High Command. Should there be a place for “High Command” in a modern, democratic organisation? Should decisions be left only to the Congress President? Or to Sonia Gandhi, who soon after she was elected chairperson of the Congress Parliamentary Party, was “authorised” to decide who should be the leader in both Houses of Parliament? Should not this decision be taken by a “Presidium” of leaders, which is under consideration.

Given its success, the BJP can afford to go in for a centralised model of decision making with Modi-Shah team calling the shots. A moribund Congress on the other hand has to ensure power-sharing — and a federal structure — to have any chance at rebuilding. In other words, to allow its regional leaders who have some kind of a mass following, an autonomy of functioning to decide and deliver. They too will have to move away from the High Command culture at the state level to a collegium style decision making. In 1998, when Sonia Gandhi took over as Congress President, she used to hold daily meetings with 20-30 leaders to decide the party’s line when Parliament was in session.

The sooner the Congress takes a decision on who should head the party, and knuckles down to preparations for the elections that lie three months down the line, in Maharashtra, Haryana, Jharkhand, the better for it. The party has fared better in recent state elections (Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and in local elections in Karnataka) than in national polls, and that may be the way to go. It is, after all, winning elections which provides the adrenaline to any party, and can arrest the outflow of leaders.

And who knows, Rahul Gandhi’s resignation may unleash processes which starts to dismantle — at least dilute — dynastic structures in other political outfits which have become family fiefs. For along with a Hindu consolidation, it is the rise of the subaltern that Modi represents in 2019, which the Congress and others will have to take note of.

The writer is a senior journalist



S GOPALAKRISHNAN

CARTOONING DOES NOT fall under the category of absurd-art. However, as Kerala celebrates the centenary of the first cartoon in Malayalam this year, the discipline of cartooning is facing an absurd situation. On Wednesday, the Kerala Lalit Kala Akademi, an autonomous body, was asked by the state government to review its decision to award a cartoonist because of objections from a section of the Christian clergy. The cartoon chosen for the award is on a controversial bishop, Franco Mulakkal, who has been accused of rape.

It was the first prime minister of the country who asked Kesava Sankara Pillai alias Sankar, the pioneer of the Indian political cartoon, not to spare him in his work. And Sankar didn’t. Sankar’s Kerala, where some of the country’s major cartoonists were born, has changed. Kerala society has undergone such transformation that a section of the society think they are infallible and above criticism. For instance, the cartoon under attack has only lampooned the accused bishop; the cartoonist has only the person, not the church and its values, in the crosshairs. Besides, the government has no business to ask the autonomous akademi to revisit the three-member jury’s decision to award the cartoonist.

JOKE IS ON KERALA

The controversy over a cartoon criticising a bishop reflects a social crisis

All mainstream political parties and the media are scared of annoying any religious or caste formations even on issues of serious concern. Last year, a major campaign by a caste outfit forced a well-established weekly to suspend the publication of an innovative novel that was being serialised. My apprehension is that Kerala as a society is increasingly losing its vocabulary to critique.

The present controversy is a reflection of a deeper crisis in Kerala. Any refusal to introspect may only deepen the crisis. How is it that a society which prided itself on nurturing art forms such as Chakyar Koothu and Ottan Thullal, in which satire is the dominant idiom, which celebrated writers including Sanjayana, VKN and Vaikkom Muhammad Basheer, and prided in cartoonists like Abu, Kutty and O V Vijayan, became intolerant of criticism?

All mainstream political parties and the media are scared of annoying any religious or caste formations even on issues of serious concern. Last year, a major campaign by a caste outfit forced a well-established weekly to suspend the publication of an innovative novel that was being serialised. I am apprehensive that Kerala, as a society, is losing its vocabulary to critique. Sociologists, economists and intellectuals, communists and Congressmen, have been idlyling on a cushion, namely the “Kerala Model” of development, to claim that the state is on par with European societies. This image of an enlightened Kerala is turning out to be a farce. Creative freedom in the state is increasingly under threat and if the trend continues, the Malayalam language and Kerala will cease to be spaces for creative endeavours.

The decision of Left Democratic Front government to succumb to the pressures of the Catholic church is deemed to be an outcome of its ringing defeat in the Lok Sabha election. If so, it has failed to read the writing on the wall. The Left government’s incapability to understand the nuances of the Sabarimala issue and go in for an unilateral implementation of the Supreme Court order in favour of allowing all women entry into the shrine is said to have caused a major erosion in its votes. The organised Hindu right has already accused the government of having separate yardsticks for different communities.

In short, the cartoon episode has not just flagged the larger issue of Kerala’s liberal public space becoming constricted but also about the Left political mainstream allowing itself to be reduced to a clueless spectator in such debates. In the 1970s and in the wake of the Naxalbari rebellion, K G Sankara Pillai, an important voice in modern Malayalam poetry, wrote a seminal poem in which he visualised Kerala tuning in to Bengal for inspiration. It appears the present Kerala Left is seeking an uninspiring parallel in present-day Bengal.

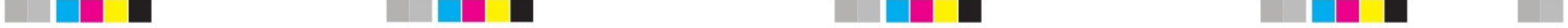
Gopalakrishnan is a Malayalam writer

JUNE 14, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

SOVIET HEAVY WATER THE SOVIET UNION has informally agreed to supply substantial quantities of heavy water to India for its atomic establishments. This has emerged from the Indo-Soviet talks that concluded in Moscow yesterday. The Soviet Union will also step up supplies of crude oil to India, it is learnt. Available information suggests that India had asked for as much as 205 tonnes of heavy water for its nuclear programme. The Soviet Union is reported to have said that details of heavy water supplies to India can be worked out in the near future. At the talks India also explored the possibility of Soviet crude supplies of about 2.5 million tonnes to 3 million tonnes.

BONUS ISSUES THE DEPUTY PRIME minister and finance minister, Charan Singh, is strongly opposed to the demand of railwaymen for bonus and has conveyed his views to Prime Minister Morarji Desai. In a long letter addressed to Prime Minister Desai on May 30, the deputy prime minister pointed out that the payment of bonus to railwaymen would lead to similar demands by other departmental employees and involve an additional burden of Rs 600 crore annually. With a deficit budget of Rs 1,375 crore for 1979-80, it would hardly be possible to think of this order of expenditure, which would in no way be productive.

SILENT VALLEY PROJECT ECOLOGISTS AND OTHERS who have launched a mini-campaign against the Silent Valley hydro-electric project in Kerala are in for frustration. Prime Minister Morarji Desai has taken a firm stand that the project cannot be stalled. Some time ago, he had given a go-ahead to the Kerala government. Desai has made the Centre’s stand abundantly clear in a letter to the Janata Party President, Chandra Shekhar, who had drawn the PM’s attention to the opposition from ecologists and a section of the press to the clearance of the project. Fears had been expressed that the project will denude the rain forest and endanger the rare flora and fauna of the area.



Too good to be true

Draft National Education Policy addresses key issues in higher education, provides starting point for reform. But like election manifestos, it is merely a statement of intent



SATISH DESHPANDE

WHAT DOES THE new National Education Policy (NEP) have to say about the future of Indian higher education? Before trying to answer this question, it is necessary to spend a moment or two on the roughly 500-page draft of the NEP (henceforth DNEP) that the new government unveiled on the day it took office.

Ever since Kapil Sibal took over as the human resources development (HRD) minister a decade ago, relations between the academic world and successive Union governments have inhabited a triangle defined by morbidity, chaos, and toxicity. For most of this period, there seemed to be no overall policy, only an incoherent plethora of schemes that could be contradictory, overlapping or isolated from each other. Grand Tughlaqian projects predominated, and they tended to assume a clean slate, ignoring the entrenched mess of modalities and institutions already in existence. Abortive attempts to produce a coherent national vision document had only made matters worse.

Against this dismal background, DNEP 2019 appears to offer some hope. It is the first policy document of the past decade that at least looks the part. From the perspective of higher education, its main strength is that it has got its basics right — it appears to have a reasonable understanding of existing problems, and offers a plausible picture of possible solutions that may take us towards a better future. Indeed, the DNEP comes as a refreshing shock to academics long accustomed to policy documents that are rooted in a stubborn denial of basic ground realities.

Beginning with the meaningful decision to drop the delusional techno-speak of “Human Resource Development” and return to “Education” as the name for its parent ministry, the DNEP makes many policy pronouncements that will be widely welcomed in the academic world. The most overarching is the acknowledgement that all education is, and ought to be envisioned as, “liberal” and holistic. There is a strong re-affirmation of the state’s commitment to public education, much needed at a time when privatisation has seemed to be the overriding objective of governments. Also welcome is the explicit assurance that institutional autonomy is not just a polite term for financial abandonment. Finally, the recognition that rampant resort to ad hoc and contractual appointments has crippled higher education and must be stopped immediately will surely bring relief to teachers’ organisations agitating tirelessly on this very issue.

Taken together, the 10 chapters on Higher Education in the DNEP seem to offer a reasonable road map on higher education, preparing the ground for vital discussion and debate on concrete mechanisms and their specifics. The core vision based on a tripartite division of higher education into teaching universities, research universities, and optimally-sized multi-disciplinary undergraduate colleges is sound. The diagnoses and prescriptions for the key areas of governance and regulation are workable as initial starting points, as is the plan to create a National Research Foundation separate from regulatory bodies.



JAYA JAITLEY

KHAN MARKET CHANGED after the aura of “refugee spaces” wore off. Nearby markets such as Meherchand Market, Lodhi Colony Market and Khanna Market in New Delhi catered to different groups of refugees but were all housed within a radius of 2-3 kilometers from the other by Meherchand Khanna, the Union minister looking after refugee rehabilitation after Partition. What has become the upwardly mobile Meherchand Market used to be largely for tailors whose claim to fame was the ability to turn frayed suits inside out to make them look new.

Khan market was affordable for the likes of us teenage girls who, in the 1960s would bicycle there for a low-cost ice cream. It became inaccessible after globalisation brought in foreign brands and elite businesses. It became a VIP area, with Levis taking over Bengal Sweets — and depriving us of gol gappas — and expensive spa products replacing the familiar chemist who knew what your shampoo preferences and monthly quota of medicines were. And with this change, the political and bureaucratic elite took over, joined in good numbers by the intellectual elite seminarists of the India International Centre and the India Habitat Centre. All these layers of VIPs knew each other and strutted around as if they owned the place. These privileged ones, including dynasts of various fam-



CR Sasikumar

A surprisingly sensible document in comparison to its immediate predecessors, the DNEP nevertheless provokes two kinds of concerns. The first kind are triggered by what it does not say, or say clearly or strongly enough. It is striking that the crucial topics of equity and inclusion do not rate a separate chapter in Higher Education (though they have one in School Education). The persistence of practices of discrimination and exclusion in the face of legislated access for hitherto excluded groups has been at the forefront of public debate on higher education in recent times. It is deeply disappointing that the DNEP has evaded this issue, with the question of Under-Represented Groups (URGs) making no appearance outside school education.

Caste discrimination has long been an important issue in higher education, and has received intense public attention in recent times, from Rohith Vemula to Payal Tadavi. Moreover, national statistics unambiguously establish that Persons with Disability and Muslims are by far the leading URGs in higher education. It is beyond debate that a national policy is needed to deal with this vital issue, and, sadly, the DNEP’s effective silence must count as cowardice.

The DNEP is also silent (or excessively soft-spoken) on another issue that its own blueprint foregrounds, namely the challenge of protecting public higher educational institutions from undue governmental interference. Even a casual reader will recognise that the proposed institutional framework for higher education — with the National Education Commission chaired by the prime minister at its apex — clearly implies even more governmental control with significantly higher levels of centralisation

than what is already the case. The DNEP should have included — but does not — a forthright proposal for dealing with this unavoidable problem.

This brings us to the second kind of concerns caused by what the DNEP cannot say. Because it belongs to a peculiar category of potentially powerful yet easily ignorable vision documents, the DNEP cannot tell whether — and to what extent — it will matter. Like the pre-election manifesto promises of political parties, statements of intent in policy can be shrugged off with impunity. Indeed, the DNEP acquires an aura of incongruity precisely because it stands in stark contrast to what governments have done and failed to do in higher education. This is especially true of Modi Raj 1.0, which seemed to have declared war on higher educational institutions across the country.

This incongruity and its uncertainties are magnified by the mixed messages sent to us by the government. The Kasturirangan Committee responsible for producing the DNEP submitted it to the then Minister for Human Resource Development Prakash Javadekar, on 1 December 15, 2018. It was then kept under wraps for six months until it was revealed on May 30, 2019, the very day that the new government took office. Continuity did not seem to matter because it was not Javadekar but Ramesh Pokhriyal ‘Nishank’ who was entrusted with implementing the DNEP. Now the nation awaits the new born DNEP’s janmakundali to reveal its future. But we already know one of its possible epitaphs: It was just too good to be true.

The writer teaches sociology at Delhi University

Khan Market gang’s blinkers

They couldn’t spot the India which sees dynasts as obstruction to its dreams

just a bit of “campaign tourism for kids” and not indoctrination.

Those who had controlled the narrative for so long reluctantly gave the BJP less than a majority, hoping for success of those foolish flurries of optic solidarity raised by the handholding of the Opposition on campaign platforms that did not extend to alliances — Chandrababu Naidu, Mamata Banerjee, Mayawati, Rahul Gandhi and even Arvind Kejriwal all periodically claiming to mobilise components of the Opposition. They planned a meeting in Delhi a day before the results to discuss their coalition. Yet, across Karnataka, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Bihar and UP, Madhya Pradesh and other states voters could see that there was no consolidated opposition leader offered as an alternative who had the maturity, experience, decisiveness, oratory, charisma and most importantly, the ability to handle contending interests among themselves and across the country.

The Khan Market gang even started writing articles on the greater value of coalitions, and refused to see that the voter of aspirational India knew how short lived, fragile and contentious coalitions had been — the NDA 1 coalition being different because the top leadership of the BJP had a perfect understanding of how it had to work. Thinking citizens who were largely apolitical but nevertheless life-time Congress voters wanted stability this

time, said so quietly, and voted for Modi.

Narendra Modi is the catalyst who set off the remarkable transformation that was happening in the questioning minds of aspirational India. They too wanted entitlement of their own kind — to legislatures, to better facilities, health and living conditions and tools to access to a larger world. If a dynast in the campaign constantly messages that after my great grandfather, my grandmother, then my father and now I alone can be the prime minister, the manual labourer’s son will contrarily say, “I will not dig dirt; I want to become something better, like a *chai-wala* was able to.” Artisans and domestic workers are actually sending their children to study subjects like engineering, architecture, fashion design and law or making them entrepreneurs of small businesses. They do not want to face entitled obstructionists who use influence to get ahead.

Whether the accurate prediction before the results of 303 seats by Modi, Amit Shah and Piyush Goyal at different times stemmed from a realisation that the Khan Market arguments had lost their hold — among the many other factors in their favour — we may not know but entitlement was certainly turned on its head across the long campaign.

The writer is former president of the Samata Party

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“He is but a pale shadow of the kingmaker who once ruled over vast areas of Karachi and Hyderabad.” — **DAWN**

The view from Palanpur

The experience of Palanpur offers useful tips to India — importance of education, human capital, vocational training, need for greater connectivity



ECONOMIC GRAFFITI

BY KAUSHIK BASU

PALANPUR, WITH A population of barely 1,255 individuals, clustered in 233 households (2008 data), is a nondescript village in the Bilari Block of Moradabad district, Uttar Pradesh, some 220 kilometers east from Delhi. The residents belong to various caste groups — Thakurs, Muraos, Jatavs — and are pre-dominantly Hindus, though about 10 per cent of the population is Muslim, themselves broken up between two castes — the Telis and Dhobis.

None of this makes Palanpur special. What makes it special is that, despite being such a run-of-the-mill Indian village, Palanpur is such an iconic name. This happened because in 1973, two young British economists, Christopher Bliss and Nicholas Stern, put up a proposal to do a detailed study of the village. From September 1974 they began their research, spending long stretches of time living in the village, somewhat akin to what anthropologists do. This resulted in the publication *Palanpur: The economy of an Indian village* in 1982. I was then living in Delhi and teaching at the Delhi School of Economics and was beginning to get interested in development economics. I read this book with great interest.

Those were the days of exciting work on rural economics. Ashok Rudra and Pranab Bardhan were collecting and analysing data. Amit Bhaduri, Amartya Sen, Joseph Stiglitz, David Newbury and other leading economists were active participants in this research agenda, combining new data with cutting-edge theory to understand the economics of tenancy contracts, rural credit, and agrarian change. There is little surprise that Bliss and Stern’s Palanpur became a celebrated book.

The history of this research turned out to be rather different from what anybody had planned. What was meant to be a one-time study, became a saga. Nick Stern returned to Palanpur several times, and the publication last year of *How Lives Change: Palanpur, India, and Development Economics*, by Himanshu, Peter Lanjouw and Nick Stern, has given us a rare panel view of a small economy. The first study of Palanpur was actually done in 1957-58 by the Agricultural Economics Research Center of Delhi University, and recorded in a paper by Nasim Ansari. Going by this, what we have now is a rich record, spread over several decades, of this village economy.

This new book brought back the nostalgia for early development economics, and for the Delhi School of Economics, which stood out as a hub of intellectual activity, with open, critical discourse, that was rare outside of the US and Europe.

How Lives Change is a remarkable book which brings together two qualities seldom seen concurrently — empathy for the subject, in this case the inhabitants of Palanpur, usually found in anthropological writings, and the rigor of statistics and theory, associated with economics.

This new book provides a keen, bird’s eye view of research in rural India, with scholarship and a lightness of touch, rare in economics. Thus we learn about the befuddlement of villagers when Bliss and Stern first arrived in Palanpur in 1974. The question that the inhabitants asked repeatedly was “matlab kya hai?” It was the economist Clive Bell, with earlier field experience in Bihar, who advised Bliss and Stern: “You must convince them that you are mad but harmless.”

What makes this latest book especially valuable is the authors’ use of Palanpur as a testing ground for what has happened all over India, all the way to 2008, with some data even up to 2015. Much has been written about India’s growth trajectory, which picked up sharply after the 1980s. It turns out, this is well reflected in Palanpur. Between 1957 and now, the villagers of Palanpur became 2.4 times richer in terms of real per capita income. From 1957 to 1982 their incomes grew at 1.44 per cent per annum. After the mid 80s, growth picked up and over the next 25 years it grew at 2 per cent per annum.

Caste continues to have a hold but it is fortunately getting weaker, and further, there is mobility. The dominant caste, the Thakurs, have prospered between 1957 and now, but the Teli Muslims have done even better and now have the highest per capita income in Palanpur. The chief source of prosperity is mobility, being connected to the rest of India — both via migration and by the ability to commute.

The experience of Palanpur is used by the authors to offer useful tips to India — the importance of education, human capital and better vocational training, the need for even greater connectivity to towns and cities, since this is often the conduit to growth and prosperity; and finally, the authors draw attention to climate change. With the use of more sophisticated harvesting technology, there is a risk that the region in and around Palanpur will take to large-scale stubble burning, which is happening currently in Punjab and Haryana and casting a shroud over Delhi. India needs planning and public policy to avoid this looming crisis. Despite all this, the book ends on an optimistic note, celebrating India’s remarkable growth story.

To close on an end note, while India’s economy has been transformed, it is important to record that villagers too have changed from the time when Bliss and Stern first met them in Palanpur. It is rumored that villagers have now seen so many researchers that when they see a new one with a questionnaire, some have been known to ask if it’s for a Master’s thesis or a PhD. They will accordingly make the answer short or long.

The writer is C Marks Professor at Cornell University and former chief economist and senior vice president, World Bank

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

APATHY PREVALENT

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, “What lies beneath” (IE, June 13). It comes as no surprise that government institutions toe the line for corporates. Those in power show complete apathy to tribals. The tangled equation between mineral wealth governance and tribal rights calls for an urgent solution.

Prakhar Agarwal, Hyderabad

CAREFUL, PM KHAN

THIS REFERS TO the article, “Terms of engagement” (IE, June 13). For his own sake, Imran Khan, should not be too eager to talk with India. In the past, whoever from the Pakistani side — Benazir Bhutto, Nawaz Sharif and even Pervez Musharraf — has tried to mend fences with India, has been deposed by the “permanent establishment” in Pakistan. Or talks were forced to be abandoned due to a major terrorist attack on India.

R C Goyal, Ambala.

ELITE CABAL

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, “Bureaucracy reboot” (IE, June 13). According to reports, JNU will award Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and former Foreign Secretary S Shankar Menon its first award for distinguished alumni. Such instances amply fore-shadow coming events. How will we know that the proposed lateral entry of 400 private sector specialists for posts from deputy secretary upwards will not be “jobs for the boys”? These two developments may be unrelated but they

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

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do indicate the government’s mindset.

Tarsem Singh, Mahilpur

BETTER STATE

THIS REFERS TO the article, “Welfare policy and Modi 2.0” (IE, June 11). For better outcomes, we have to overcome many lapses. It is important for the government to make people financially literate, bring in better technological architecture and recognise the importance of cooperative federalism.

Arshpreet S Eknoor, Fazilka

