

CHATTERBOX

Numbers gone wrong

During the elections, Congress leader and party strategist Ahmed Patel got fed up of visitors coming to him asking, “What is your prediction for the polls?”. His solution was to keep several slips of paper with a pile of notes on the table. These slips had a ready reckoner of his assessment of seats, and other useful electoral data. The party couldn’t even reach his prediction midway.

University of ‘greats’



So the subversives are now part of the government. So much was said to revile, run down and generally disrespect Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) as an institution: The place where people supposedly spend more time politicking than studying (and engage in less reputable pursuits, as well). But out of the four member cabinet committee on security, the government’s highest policy-making body, two are students of JNU. S Jaishankar did an MA, MPhil and PhD from the university before he was selected for the foreign services. Nirmala Sitharaman (pictured) was also a student there and did a masters in economics. Horror of horrors, not only was she a good student but also took an active part in politics. She was a free thinker, in opposition to the Students Federation of India that is the student wing of the CPI(M). So a university that has given the country its top ministers must be doing something right.

DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?



“I want to work on the basis of mutual understanding with the state government, and expect no hindrance from the Bengal government when it comes to implementing central projects in line with the rest of the country”

Union Minister of State for Women and Child Development
Debasree Chaudhuri, May 31, New Delhi

CHECKLIST
THE STATE MINISTERS – UNSUNG HEROES

■ **Rameswar Teli, food processing industries:** From Assam, Teli has won the Dibrugarh Lok Sabha constituency twice in a row. He shot into prominence for defeating Congress leader Paban Singh Ghatowar. Teli is a bachelor. While his parents still live in the thatched house in Tipling, his uncle is a handcart puller. When in his constituency, Teli operates from his office, which is made of bamboo, like most houses in the rural Assam.

■ **Som Parkash, commerce and industry:** Elected to the Lok Sabha from Hoshiarpur in Punjab, Som Parkash is a retired IAS officer and served as the deputy commissioner of Jalandhar. He is a prominent Dalit face in Punjab’s Doaba region, and won the 2019 Lok Sabha elections with 42 per cent of the vote in the reserved constituency. He took premature retirement from the IAS to join the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). He had also contested the 2009 general elections from

Hoshiarpur but lost by a few hundred votes.

■ **Renuka Singh Saruta, Tribal Affairs:** a representative of the Gond community from Chhattisgarh and two-time MLA, Renuka Singh was women and child development minister in the Raman Singh government from 2003 to 2005. She defeated senior Congress leader Khelsai Singh by over 1.5 lakh votes. She had lost to the Congress veteran in the 2013 Assembly election. The party did not field her in the 2018 election. It is believed Singh was targeted by several factions within the state BJP.

■ **V Muraleedharan, External Affairs and Parliamentary Affairs:** A Rajya Sabha MP and chief of the BJP in Kerala, he has been in the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad who got a job as a clerk in the government but gave it up for full time service of the BJP. His dedication has been rewarded.



OPINION

VENKAIAH NAIDU

The geopolitics of future lies in your hands

I welcome each and every one of you to Upa Rashtrapathi Bhawan. Let me take this opportunity to congratulate all of you for choosing the Indian Foreign Service as a profession. The Foreign Service offers you the privilege of being India’s ambassador’s to the world.

The Service offers a challenging and exciting career and a truly unique opportunity to take our country’s great civilizational and cultural ethos with its developmental aspirations to the rest of the world.

My dear young friends,
You will soon be given the crucial responsibility of being all the spokespersons, interpreters and narrators of India’s story to the world.

You will construct new bridges of understanding, appreciation and collective advancement between India and the rest of the world and build new, forward looking and stable partnerships between nations.

You can play an important role in shaping the geopolitics of the future and in determining the new world order.

We are now living in a world that is more connected than ever before. The world is truly a ‘Global Village’. It is also swiftly changing in many unprecedented ways.

The changing global geo-political and geo-economic landscape requires a new agile, carefully strategized diplomatic response.

I see a number of challenges that budding diplomats such as yourself would have to deal with and overcome.

Despite the acknowledged need for an Integrated World Order, new ‘walls’ are being erected to the free flow of goods and services and people as well.

This return of the unwelcome tendency of protectionism has the potential to adversely impact the global effort for collective advancement.

Let me impress upon you the grave nature of the threat that the world community as a whole faces due to terrorism. No country in the world is immune to the consequences of terrorism now and therefore curbing this menace would require a united response from world nations.

India has consistently taken an unrelenting and uncompromising stand against terrorism, we must continue to be champions of peace.

We are now confronted by the unethical acts of financial fugitives.

The ease with which they find safe havens in other countries escaping the long arm of law is a serious global concern. Extradition Treaties and all bilateral and multilateral agreements need to be constantly updated and overhauled to defend and safeguard the integrated global economic order for collective good.

To transform this world into the world we want, in consonance with the United Nations’ transformative, ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the world needs India. The world needs India not only because we are home to nearly 1.3 billion people comprising one-sixth of humanity. The world needs India because the problems and challenges facing the planet today need a humane, holistic vision.

The world needs India because it needs a voice that speaks of peace, non-violence and peaceful coexistence. The world needs India because it needs to harness the potential of dialogue and discussion, collaboration and cooperation.

This vision and voice, this attitude and belief are what India has stood for over the last twenty millennia. This vision and voice of India is more relevant to the world than ever before.

Our core civilisational principle of viewing the world as ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’ and our prayer of ‘Sarve Jana Sukhino Bhavanthu’ gives us the moral strength and courage to influence global discourse in these testing times of great turbulence.

I am glad to note that India has taken the lead in building sustainable development solutions.

International Solar Energy Alliance, launched under India’s initiative at the COP 21 in Paris is one such example.

You must continually look for opportunities to provide similar leadership and lead the global agenda setting and implementation in as many fields as possible.

Our foreign policy formulation and implementation must be firmly tied to the domestic development agenda.

There is a constant need for a sustained dialogue and exchange of information between India’s representatives abroad and those who are implementing the development initiatives back home.

With India moving on the development path swiftly, the world is looking at India with keen interest. We must not hesitate to take advantage of this momentum by capitalizing opportunities in areas of trade, services, investments and infrastructure. Diplomats must be proactive in enabling Indian industries and business to tap into world markets and must do their best in encouraging foreign investment to flow into India.

Just recently, we have conducted the ‘largest festival of democracy’. We have conducted the elections in a peaceful and orderly manner. The people have made their choice with a resounding clarity and voted for stability.

“I hope that all people will continue to deepen the roots of our rich democratic tradition and focus our collective energies on development, reforms and enhancement of the quality of our people’s lives”.

India is strong and is gaining in strength because we are open to good ideas from all over the globe.

Edited excerpts from a speech by Vice President Venkaiah Naidu to the Officer Trainees of 2018 Batch of Indian Foreign Service (IFS) and Bhutanese Diplomats, in New Delhi, May 28, 2019



ILLUSTRATION BY BINAY SINHA

As clouds of uncertainty loom on the future of the Congress government in Madhya Pradesh. Many old guards of the BJP including eight time MLA and leader of Opposition in the Assembly **Gopal Bhargava** have said that the present government is counting its last few days. Excerpts of an interview with **Sandeep Kumar**:

‘Govt in MP will fall on its own’

There are speculations that the Income Tax department may summon top officials of the Madhya Pradesh government, politicians and aides of Chief Minister Kamal Nath in future to probe into an alleged hawala racket unearthed during the Lok Sabha (LS) election. Reports allege there were money transfers to many Congress candidates during the LS election in Madhya Pradesh.

It is quite serious and disturbing. I too came to know about the racket through the media. We cannot take this casually. The current

establishment in Madhya Pradesh is deeply entrenched in corrupt practices. There have been transfers of officers. Chief Minister Kamal Nath’s close aides and officers are said to have been involved in this. The matter should be investigated by the Central Bureau of Investigation. A grave cause of concern is they used this illicit money for election purpose. This is an insult to democracy and demands strictest action. Regardless of the position held, culprits should be punished.

Why do you say there was corruption being practiced while making decision

Rebuilding Odisha brick by brick

Several NGOs, along with the government and private agencies, have joined hands to help the state return to normalcy post cyclone Fani. But it could take a very long time, writes **Thirumoy Banerjee**

Towards the end of April, a red alert was sounded in Odisha about an approaching cyclone: Fani. The state is not alien to cyclones, and the administration started taking precautionary steps right away. As the day of the landfall approached, the alert became more serious — the cyclone was termed “extremely severe”, raising concerns of largescale damage.

Since the Super Cyclone in 1999, which left over 10,000 dead in the state, and a devastation that took years to get over, Odisha has seen multiple storms. Phailin struck in 2013, followed by Hudhud a year later. Last year in October, eight people were killed when Titli made its landfall in Odisha and coastal Andhra.

The Odisha government took a series of measures to minimise the damage, and evacuated hundreds of thousands of people. At 8.40 am on May 3, Fani made its landfall in Puri, with wind speeds up to 185 km/hour. It destroyed whatever came in its path. Even the state capital, Bhubaneswar, was battered. The level of destruction was far more than what government agencies thought. The Jagannath temple too was not spared. The government, which was appreciated for its work before the cyclone made its landfall, was now criticised for not being able to do enough to rehabilitate people.

“No one could gauge the enormity of Fani and the level of destruction it would leave behind,” said Jagadananda of Centre for Youth and Social Development (CYSD), one of the many NGOs in the state working tirelessly to help the affected people. “We have reached out to 14,000 families. The farmers are in serious need of help. Their produce can get spoilt, which may lead to distress sale. We are trying our best to stop that.”

A recent Indian Meteorological Department report stated that Fani was the

most intense pre-cyclonic storm to hit Odisha coast in the satellite era.

Given the vastness of the damage, a number of NGOs, including Oxfam, Action Age, Aide-et-Action, Christian Age, Concern, Help Age India, WaterAid, Plan India, Save the Children, CYSD, Swabhiman, Childfund, Vasundhara, Help Odisha, Red Cross Odisha, among many others, have been working in different parts of the affected districts.

“The focus in the first few days was to address the severe drinking water crisis. Most areas had no electricity. So, some NGOs and other organisations together set up RO plants in Bhubaneswar, Puri, Bir Harekrushnapur village, and Brahmagiri. The second biggest challenge was to remove the uprooted trees. The damage to the state’s green cover has been immense,” Jagadananda said.

Difficulties, though, were many. “Accessing the places that had been cut off was the first challenge. The trees had fallen, the roads had been damaged, electric poles were uprooted. The second challenge was that there was no mode of communication for close to two

weeks, and those in dire need of help couldn’t reach out to us. Third, any house that did not have a concrete ceiling was left roofless. There was not enough polythene available. Then, in the initial days, there were a few incidents of looting of relief materials by people who were in distress... The biggest challenge was to assess the extent of damage,” said Sruti Mohapatra, founder of Swabhiman, which works for differently abled children, and has been working to rehabilitate such people affected by the cyclone.

Several organisations working in the affected areas said there was political bias in providing relief. “So, there were a couple of people, who was helping only those who had voted for them in the elections,” said the head of an NGO.

As the crisis unfolded, several social vices

regarding transfers?

Official transfers have become the norm of the day since the Congress party assumed power in the state. As soon as the Model Code of Conduct was revoked on May 26 (2019?), a day after, the state government transferred more than 20 IAS officers. The Kamal Nath government has been only interested in transferring officers since day one. It is quite obvious what could be the reason behind these transfers.

If we talk about Madhya Pradesh Assembly, the Congress party is in minority and is running a coalition government. Many Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders, including you, are saying this government will not last long. What could be the political scenario in the state in such situation?

Let me make it very clear. We are not going to disturb the government but if it falls on its own, a number of situations may arise. We will discuss things with party high command.

So... will you seek re-election or form the government?

This is an important decision. We will form the government or go for elections will depend on circumstances of the day. In any case, this is not a decision that would be taken at the state level. The final decision will be by the party high command.

Bahujan Samaj Party MLA Ramabai claims to have been offered a ministerial berth and a sum of Rs50 crore by the BJP in exchange for withdrawing support from the Congress-led state government.

These are all baseless allegations. In my MLA career spanning 40 years, I have never heard of an MLA being offered Rs 50 crore. Further, if someone approached her, she should prove that through any tape or recording or witness. If she has proof, she should lodge a formal complaint. The matter should be enquired, and the culprit be brought to justice. Making media headlines will not serve purpose. This is not first time. She has made accusations before. If she keeps doing this, people will assume she is giving hints at joining the BJP.

Do you think this is an effort to dent the image of the BJP?

Indeed, it is. Either she is trying to defame the BJP, or indicate that for this sum of money, she is willing to switch her loyalty.

The BJP has earned massive mandate in recently concluded general election. How do you see this? Just six months before the

LS polls, the Congress party had managed to defeat the BJP in three important states, including Madhya Pradesh.

It is the “Modi magic”. Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s leadership and his personality is the main factor behind this massive victory. Not only in Madhya Pradesh, but across the nation, the candidates have become secondary. Wherever the BJP has contested, Modi was the candidate for whom people voted for. Even in his rallies and public meetings, the PM asked people to vote for him and not for any individual. That’s the only reason. None of the new MPs should boast about their huge victory. People incapable of becoming Sarpanch and councillor are MPs now, all because of “Modi magic”.

You wrote a letter to Governor Anandiben Patel asking her to convene a special session of the Assembly to discuss “immediate” issues of the state. Did she revert?

No, I did not get a reply from the Governor’s office, but I got a letter from Chief Minister Kamal Nath. He boasted about the achievements of his government and tried to deviate from the issue I raised in my letter. I told him not to see my letter in the political context. It was related to the problems of common people.

It is being said that the party high command was not comfortable with your move. Didn’t you taken them into confidence before writing the letter regarding a floor test?

I never challenged them for floor test. I wrote the letter to ask for a special session as many “burning issues” were pending for discussion. Like farmers’ distress, drinking water crisis etc. In the middle of all this, someone asked me about the Congress government’s future and I replied, “it will fall on its own”. Both incidents were separate. The Congress is running a thin majority government and the party has no faith in its own MLAs. That is why it made an issue out of it. I haven’t used the word “floor test in my letter. There are reports that suggest the state government is struggling to execute loan waiver scheme.

Are you happy with the Madhya Pradesh representation in the new Modi cabinet?

I am proud that four MPs of the state are in the cabinet. I want to congratulate them all for representing Madhya Pradesh in the cabinet. All of them are seasoned politicians and I am confident that their experience will help in the nation’s growth.



CYSD volunteers clear trees uprooted by cyclone Fani in Puri

came to the fore. “During relief, we found out the level of discomfort between the general communities and the Dalits, which was very unfortunate. We are working on this too,” Jagadananda said.

The education sector too has been hit hard, with 12,000 schools affected by the catastrophe. “Schools are supposed to reopen in mid-June, but it could get delayed. Children are psychologically disturbed. We have provided them with notebooks, pens, etc. Many of these children are very young and they are being counselled through theatres and music,” Umi Daniel of Aide-et-Action, Odisha, said. “We are keeping a watch to prevent any case of human trafficking, child marriage, or child labour, which can become common in a situation like this,” he added.

Help has poured in from various sources. Apart from the government assistance, many corporate houses in India and abroad have

contributed, or have promised relief assistance. Disney has already contributed ₹2 crore. Sources told *Business Standard* that the European Commission is considering a relief package to the state, so is the Tata Group. Other organisations, such as Human Aid International, have already provided relief. Several philanthropy groups, such as Odia Society in America, are expected to pitch in too. Business conglomerate Shapoorji Pallonji Group has also provided relief materials.

A lot has happened since Fani, which has claimed 64 lives. Narendra Modi has been re-elected as the prime minister, Naveen Patnaik has just taken oath as Odisha chief minister for a fifth straight term, but efforts to bring the state back to normalcy are far from over, with many people clueless about when they can return home. “The overall damage done will take years to be undone,” Mohapatra added.