

EVERY GOVERNMENT IS taken by surprise when a grave crisis explodes in its face. Someone is at fault, but nobody will take responsibility. Ultimately, the buck stops at the table of the head of the government — chief minister or Prime Minister. A deeper probe will, however, reveal that s/he is not the first person who should be held responsible, but the parliamentary system of government holds otherwise.

### Cruel deaths

The encephalitis epidemic that has consumed 117 lives so far in Muzaffarpur district, Bihar, is a case in point. According to the Union Health Ministry's Management Information System, all of the 103 primary health centres and the only community health centre in the district were rated 0 out of 5 because they did not meet the mandatory requirements for evaluation (medical officer, nurse/midwife). The paediatric unit of the Sri Krishna Medical College and Hospital in Muzaffarpur, where the affected children were treated, did not meet the criteria to qualify as a paediatric ICU. On these facts, who should take the blame? No one will, so we will blame a small, white-coloured (and delicious) fruit called litchi! Doctors said that eating lychees affected only children who did not eat a meal at night. And pray, why did they not eat a meal at night? Because they are poor and don't get a meal. Can there be anything more devastating and painful? (Between 2008 and 2014, there were 6,000 deaths from encephalitis.)

A few days ago, seven sanitation workers died while emptying a septic tank in a hotel near Vadodara, Gujarat. It was not the first time such a tragedy happened and, sadly, it will not be the last. Cleaning a septic tank is not rocket science: there are machines and an Indian version (Bandicoot) has been developed by a start-up in Kerala. When men have to be unavoidably deployed for cleaning sewers and septic tanks, there are special clothing, masks and oxygen cylinders. None of the equipment is scarce or beyond the financial capacity of a municipal corporation like Vadodara, yet seven poor men were allowed to die. (Between 2011 and 2018, death of 114 sanitation workers was reported from all states of India.)


### Shocking negligence

There is another unbelievably shocking statistic: on an average, four persons are killed in Delhi in road accidents every day. You can expect that four persons will be killed tomorrow, four the day after, and so on, on average four, every day in Delhi alone. Only a fraction of that number is killed in air accidents all over the world in a whole year! Why do we have strict rules for air travel and lax rules for road travel? (Between 2011 and 2017, 12,724 persons were killed in road accidents in Delhi.)

Have you traveled on the Barapulla flyover in Delhi which is the 'pride' of the PWD of the Delhi government and which took years to be built? The flyover is average, the design is average, the ride is average, but the quality of the construction is awful. Just look at the parapets on either side of the carriageway — chipped or broken, uneven height, disjointed slabs, terribly plastered and

ACROSS THE AISLE

P Chidambaram



# gOVERNMENT WITHIN GOVERNMENT



A demonstration in New Delhi against deaths of children in Bihar who suffered from encephalitis, commonly known as brain fever

Painted and, on the whole, ugly. Yet, it passed all quality tests, the contractor was paid (and presumably feted) and the flyover inaugurated in 2010. It won't be long before it is closed for repairs.

### Intention & implementation

In none of these cases — and you can think of others — was there a policy failure. Any government's policy is to build, equip and staff health facilities and hospitals; to abolish manual scavenging; to enforce traffic rules and ensure safety; to build quality infrastructure and beautify cities and towns; and so on. The Legislature or the Executive (i.e. the ministers) makes the policy and, naturally, wants the policy implemented well. But there is a huge gap between intention and implementa-

tion. Why? We are hesitant to say it, but it must be said: within the Government (with a capital G) there is another government (with a small g). It is the small-g government that has failed the big-G government as well as the people, at least as far as India is concerned.

Let me make the point with two contrasting examples. Demonetisation was a policy blunder; the ministers who dreamed up that policy and constituted big-G Government must own responsibility. On the other hand, GST was a good policy. If it has caused as much distress as demonetisation, the blame must be taken by small-g government.

Swachh Bharat is good policy, but the false statistics fed on ODF status of states and villages is the deceit of small-g government. Ujjwala is good policy, but the replacement cylinder rate of three per year is the failure of small-

g government.

When we vote, we the people vote for big-G Government. There is a small-g government over which we the people have no control at all. We have no say in their selection, recruitment, training, evaluation, posting, appraisal or promotion. We cannot go on in this fashion. We must re-invent small-g government. Just as we the people reward or punish big-G Government and its occupants every five years, we must find a way to reward or punish small-g government and its occupants every five years or sooner.

The main challenge that we face today is not in making policy. It is in the efficient, economical and excellent implementation of the policy.

Website: pchidambaram.in @Pchidambaram\_IN

INSIDE TRACK

COOMI KAPOOR



### Modi's choices

With the appointment of Om Birla as Speaker of the Lok Sabha, the top three posts in the country, President, Prime Minister and Speaker, are held by men who use Hindi as the lingua franca. They come from diverse castes, Dalit, OBC and Bania, and humble backgrounds. As with Ram Nath Kovind, Modi did not opt for a conventional choice, surprising everyone, including the person selected. Modi does not go by the traditional logic of job suitability. More than language skills and parliamentary experience, Birla was rewarded for outstanding social work and public service in his constituency. Incidentally, Birla along with two other Rajasthan ministers in Modi's Cabinet, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat and Arjun Ram Meghwal, are part of the anti-Vasundhara Raje camp, indicating that the former CM is out of favour.

### Odd choice

The selection of Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury as leader of the Congress in the Lok Sabha has taken many party MPs by surprise. Chowdhury, a five-time MP from West Bengal, is a doughty street fighter with several criminal cases against him. He does not have either the oratory or familiarity of the parliamentary rule book possessed by more obvious contenders for the post such as Manish Tewari, Shashi Tharoor or K Suresh. An added disadvantage is that floor coordination with the Trinamool will be awkward. In the last Parliament session, Chowdhury had infuriated Mamata Banerjee by alluding to her name in the Saradha scam. One surmise for the surprising choice is that Sonia Gandhi's advisers who recommended his name did not want to prop up anyone who would pose a threat to them. Another speculation is that the Congress assumes that, as in the last Parliament session, there will be little room for meaningful debate and discussion. The only way to grab attention will be through disruptive behaviour and adjournments, something that Chowdhury is familiar with.

### Real-life heroine

The Capital's media has focused on the victories of first-time actress MPs Sumalatha Amarnath from Karnataka and Mimi Chakraborty and Nusrat Jehan from West Bengal. But one spectacular win has been largely ignored. Outspoken Dalit actress Navneet Kaur, standing as an Independent from Amravati in Maharashtra, defeated five-time Shiv Sena MP

Anandrao Adsul, despite the Modi wave in the state. Navneet, a Punjabi, has starred in Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Punjabi, Tamil and Hindi films, but never in a Marathi movie.

### Next stop, Raebareli

Smriti Irani received a huge applause when she took her oath as MP. The feisty minister is not content to rest on her laurels. The giant killer wants to ensure that the BJP wins Raebareli in 2024. She hopes that her party will permit her to offer advice as how to go about storming Sonia Gandhi's citadel, which neighbours Amethi. Irani was perceived by the voters of Amethi as a helpful big sister, with none of the noblesse oblige airs of the Gandhis. Leaving nothing to chance, Irani even sent across a few Trojan horses to lull the Congress camp into a false sense of complacency.

### Sporting loser

Akhilesh Yadav has taken his party's defeat with equanimity, unlike most defeated party leaders who kept away from Parliament's Central Hall for the first few days. A good natured Yadav answered all the queries posed to him by journalists. Asked about his wife Dimple's defeat from Kannauj, he joked that, in a way, it was a blessing since someone needed to stay home and take care of his mischievous son. Besides, Dimple can now resume work on a delayed project — opening her Hibiscus Hotel in Uttar Pradesh.

### Ace up its sleeve

The Gujarat Congress has gone to court over the Election Commission's decision that elections to the two Rajya Sabha seats, where vacancies have arisen due to the resignations of Amit Shah and Smriti Irani, should be held separately and not as one election. In a simultaneous poll for the two Gujarat vacancies, the Congress stands to win one RS seat since the electoral system provides each MLA with a single first-preference vote. However, if elections are held separately, then the BJP, which has a majority over the Congress, can walk away with both seats. The BJP is certain that past legal precedents in filling such vacancies is on its side. But it is extra confident since it has an additional ace up its sleeve. The two vacancies from Gujarat did not occur on the same day. Shah resigned his Rajya Sabha seat on May 23 after winning from Gandhinagar, Irani on May 24 because her victory from the Amethi was confirmed only the next day.

# The Pogba problem

Solskjær needs a dressing room free of Pogba as it will reduce the player-power factor and bad vibes

RINGSIDE VIEW

Shamik Chakrabarty



PAUL POGBA IS a World Cup winner. Manchester United fans, however, give a hoot about what Pogba has achieved for France. His performance has been patchy, to put it mildly, for United, a club that had coughed up the then world record fee of £89 in 2016 to land him from Juventus. United also pay him £290,000 every week. Pogba has failed to turn up, especially in big games.

From United's perspective, it absolutely doesn't matter whether Pogba has won the World Cup or the Milk Cup. Jose Mourinho had brought him to make an impact. The 26-year-old is said to have made a negative impact in the dressing-room. There was a reason why Mourinho's third season at Old Trafford fell apart. The day the Portuguese was sacked as United manager, Pogba had posted a cryptic, classless tweet — "Caption this!" — alongside a picture of himself adopting a knowing look. He raised his game after Ole

Gunnar Solskjær arrived. The new manager didn't have Mourinho's personality and tried to keep the club's most expensive buy in good humour. But as Zinedine Zidane became the Real Madrid manager and made the Pogba overture, the United midfielder went back to square one, performance-wise, and started to glorify the Madrid club and its boss.

"Like I have always said, Real Madrid is a dream for anyone. It's one of the biggest clubs in the world. There's also Zidane as a coach and it's a dream for anybody who likes football," Pogba had said during the March international break. It could have been the end of Pogba at United if Sir Alex Ferguson were in charge. But the Red Devils are now fallen giants, with a lightweight manager manning the dug-out.

Recently, Pogba once again hinted a move away from his present club. "Like you said, there's a lot of talking and a lot of thinking as well. For me I have been for three years in Manchester and have been doing great; some good moments and some bad moments, like everybody. Like everywhere else. After this season and everything that happened this season, with my season being my best season as well. I think for me it could be a good time to have a new challenge somewhere else.



Back in December last year, Mourinho reportedly had branded Paul Pogba 'a virus' in the dressing-room

I'm thinking of this; to have a new challenge somewhere else," he told reporters in Tokyo.

United finished sixth in the Premier League last season and will play Thursday night football, the Europa League, this term. Pogba, on the other hand, wants Champions League football. But unlike David De Gea, he has preferred not to keep his counsel. That a player is publicly deriding United shows how far this great club

has fallen off their perch. Ed Woodward, the club's executive vice-chairman, is reportedly willing to pay £500,000-per-week to keep the misfiring, overrated midfielder at Old Trafford. Woodward, a specialist in signing up new noodles partners, seldom looks beyond shirt sales and Pogba remains a lucrative option. Solskjær doesn't have the aura of a big manager. Maybe, reluctantly he toes the line.

Back in December last year, Mourinho

reportedly had branded Pogba "a virus" in the dressing-room. "You don't play. You don't respect players and supporters. And you kill the mentality of the good honest people around you. You are like a person with a flu, with a virus in a closed room; you pass that virus to the others," Mourinho was alleged to have told Pogba. The then United manager had also benched the enfant terrible. In 2003, when David Beckham's eye was cut by a flying Sir Alex

boot, the former's time at his boyhood club was up, notwithstanding his superstar status. United under their present dispensation sided with the player in a player-manager feud. Pogba's commercial viability was always greater than Mourinho, who is 56 years old and past his prime as a manager. It probably clinched the deal for the former.

United are progressing at a snail's pace towards the proposed squad overhaul. Solskjær wanted new players to arrive by July 1, when the squad will return for pre-season. So far only Daniel James has arrived in a £15million move from Swansea. United, out of the Europe's elite competition, will have to make do with the also-rans. A lot will depend on Solskjær's ability to improve the young players. It's going to be a lengthy process. United can forget about winning the Premier League title in the next four-five years. At the moment, even a top-four finish next season looks difficult, although Chelsea are hit with a transfer ban and they have lost their most prized possession; Eden Hazard.

It's arguable if Solskjær is the right man to preside over the United overhaul. But he certainly needs a dressing-room free of Pogba, as it will significantly reduce the player-power factor and negative vibes. In 95 appearances over three seasons, Pogba has scored 24 goals and made 23 assists. He is dispensable and something between £120million and £130million should be good business.