

ACROSS THE AISLE



P CHIDAMBARAM

There is a huge gap between intention and implementation. 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

gOVERNMENT WITHIN GOVERNMENT

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 128 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 carriage way — chipped or broken, uneven height, disjointed slabs, terribly plastered and 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 implementation. 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.

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INSIDE TRACK



COOM 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




MEGHNAD DESAI

NARENDRA MODI HAS secured for himself five or perhaps even ten years. He may be the first to equal Nehru's record by winning three elections in succession. But, he is a man in a hurry. This is why One Nation One Poll (ONOP) has been taken up at an early stage in the Modi 2.0 era.

The first constitution of India was the 1935 Government of India Act. It had strong states and a weak Centre. After the

HISTORY HEADLINE

When the Cup first came home



SYED KIRMANI

BEFORE THE 1983 Cricket World Cup, every member had different hopes and dreams. I thought, if we just qualified for the knockouts, that would be a big achievement. We were in the group of the reigning world champions, West Indies. They had won it on the previous two occasions, 1975 and 1979. We had beaten them in an ODI in Berbice before the World Cup. I was the vice-captain on that tour. Kapil Dev, who was the captain, went to the dressing-room and stayed there for some time due to an injury or something and I was leading the side. And we won very comprehensively and then defeated them for the second time in the first match of the 1983 World Cup. From thereon, belief came in the dressing room that we could win the World Cup. We started to believe in our strengths. It was a big boost.

We were the minnows of the tournament and some of our opponents were a little complacent as well. Then came the very important match against Zimbabwe. We had beaten them earlier in the first leg of the league phase. But we also lost a couple of group league matches. So the Zimbabwe game became a must-win affair. The game wasn't televised. I was very relaxed. Wicket-keepers were not considered as all-rounders until MS Dhoni came and changed the perception.

We batted first and I was getting ready for a shower followed by breakfast. Suddenly someone shouted from outside the dressing-room: 'Kiri pad up'. I realised it was a serious call. In a preparing myself for a big shower and a big breakfast. I went to the dressing-room window and saw the scoreboard. It was 17 for five. My towel dropped (tongue-in-cheek); my mouth agape. I don't know how I finished my shower and breakfast, because very soon I found myself walking out to bat. It was somewhere around 140 for eight, by the time I walked in.

I walked up to Kapil, who was standing there, his head down. It was a 60-over game and we still had 35 overs left in our innings. I told Kapil, "Listen Kaps, we are in a do-or-die situation. We just cannot sit and die!" "*Maar ke mame ka hai* (we will go down hitting)", he said. I inspired him saying that "You are the best hitter in the



India defeated the West Indies by 43 runs to lift the 1983 World Cup

Indian team. I will take singles and will give you strike. You will try to hit every delivery." He said, "*Kiri bhai humko aur 35 overs khelna hai* (we still have to play 35 overs). I will try my best." He went on to score 175, which till this day remains the best ODI innings ever played. I have never seen any other batsman play like that in such a situation. Certainly, that was the greatest innings played in the history of the World Cup. I did my bit, gave him support. It was excellent partnership batting in fact.

When our partnership was flourishing, everybody sat tight outside the dressing-room. We played full 60 overs. We had an unbroken 126-run partnership. He was 175 not out and I was 24 not out. We reached the semifinal and it was history after that.

I took a brilliant catch to dismiss David Gower, who was England's X-factor. We won the match comprehensively. Throughout the tournament, till we reached the final, we were overlooked by the fans. We were the minnows. Reality dawned on the local fans and media after we reached the final. They started to belt out, "the weakest team in the competition is looking to surprise the whole world."

On the eve of our very first match we had a team meeting, where Kapil said, "Listen gentlemen, you are all seven seniors, you don't need my guidance. You will have to guide me." It was a big statement which gelled the team. We improved as a team as the tournament progressed, although we didn't have any support staff. Of course, we had a bit of luck. But luck only helps you when you do your job with sincerity.

Even after we were all out for 183 in the

final, we weren't looking back. We had nothing to lose. Kapil said, "Let's go and give our best." We had already overachieved. We decided to put our best foot forward.

Gordon Greenidge departed early. Vivian Richards came at No 3 and the way he started, it felt like the match was going to end inside 20 overs. Then Madan Lal asked for an extra over from Kapil. He was punished by Richards in his previous overs. It proved to be a masterstroke. Richards mistimed a pull and Kapil ran from wide mid-on to deep mid-wicket and took a stunner. Once Richards left, West Indies started to panic. In fact, sometimes they panicked when their top-order failed — Gordon Greenidge, Desmond Haynes, Richards and Clive Lloyd. We sensed an opening. But I told my team mates not to relax. It wasn't over until Michael Holding was out.

We didn't know how to celebrate also. Our triumph was that unexpected. A cash-strapped cricket board didn't have enough money to give us proper cash rewards. Lata Mangeshkar did a concert to raise the fund. The BCCI collected in lakhs from the concert. We, the players, were given Rs 1 lakh each.

For me, there was a personal achievement as well. I was adjudged the best wicket-keeper of the tournament. The great Godfrey Evans came with then ICC president and handed me over the silver gloves and the silver ball, written below, "World's best wicket-keeper".

The writer, a former Test player, was part of the 1983 World Cup winning team

FIFTH COLUMN



TAVLEEN SINGH

Terminal healthcare

HOW MANY more children must die before we notice that our public health services are not just broken, they simply do not exist in whole swathes of India? I speak of the hospital of horrors in Muzaffarpur. I am haunted by the glazed eyes of children lying three and four to a bed with needles stuck in their tiny arms. So, although, many things happened last week that are more appropriate for a political column, I feel compelled to dedicate this column to Bihar's dead children.

The lives of Indian children are cheap. Experts estimate that 21 children die of preventable diseases every minute. They estimate that 61 of a thousand children born every year do not make it to their fifth birthday. So what was it about the deaths of more than 100 children this time that was somehow so much more horrible than usual? What was it that made it somehow worse than the Gorakhpur horror two summers ago that caused 63 children to die of this same Acute Encephalitis Syndrome because the hospital ran out of oxygen? I believe it is because India has changed. Things that were tolerated just three years ago no longer are. One of the things that is now completely intolerable is that India should have some of the best private hospitals in the world and, at the same time, some of the worst public hospitals.

What is no longer acceptable is that our politicians and high officials should be permitted criminal neglect of government health services, simply because they never have to use them. So the first reform that the Prime Minister should order is to make it compulsory for all officials, elected and unelected, to use only government hospitals. When they see their own sick children lying crammed four to a bed on grimy sheets in filthy, crowded hospitals, conditions will immediately improve. When their wives and daughters are forced to sit on the unwashed floors of government hospitals, hoping and praying that their children somehow manage to survive, conditions will immediately improve.

They will probably improve last in Bihar because it has traditionally been governed by political leaders who lack basic humanity. And, because the vast majority of the people of Bihar are so mired in extreme poverty that they are forced to forget horrific tragedies like the one six years ago in the village of Dharmashati Gandaman when 23 healthy children died because of a poisonous midday meal. That horror also happened on the watch of the man they call 'Sushasan Babu' (Mr. Governance) and the people forgave him so quickly that he became chief minister again in 2015.

This time let's hope that even if Nitish Kumar quickly forgets the criminal negligence of his government, the Prime Minister does not. If Narendra Modi in his second term gives healthcare the kind of intense concentration he gave the Swachh Bharat campaign in his first term it is possible that Indian children will finally stop dying of preventable diseases. The excuse that healthcare is a state subject no longer works. Modi has chief ministers today governing almost every major Indian state, so, if he orders them to make the radical changes that are needed in primary healthcare, they will be forced to make them.

They can also be ordered to widen the meaning of Swachh Bharat by taking it beyond sanitation. The disease that killed the children in Bihar is caused by mosquitoes who breed, as everyone knows, in stagnant water. If Swachh Bharat volunteers can extend their activities to teaching people about the dangers of dirty water, as they have done with poor sanitation, more and more rural Indian children could soon start living beyond their fifth birthday.

There are other reforms that are urgently needed. For a start something needs to be done to end the license raj in medical education that prevents desperately needed new medical colleges from being built. If governments cannot find the money to build them, then they must allow private investment. Why should there be such a desperate shortage of medical colleges that young Indians wanting to enter the medical profession are forced to go to other countries to study medicine?

In my personal opinion, though, the step that can bring about the most change is to make it compulsory for political leaders and high officials to use only government hospitals, clinics and primary health centres. Why should they be allowed excellent private health services when it is they who are directly responsible for creating the abysmal facilities that India's poorest, most vulnerable citizens are forced to rely upon? It is time as well to totally ban Indian officials from flying off to Europe and the United States for medical procedures that are now available in India. If these bad old habits continue in the 'new India', there will be no new India.

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