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TELLING NUMBERS

Mostly electoral trusts: where major parties got donations from

DONATIONS DECLARED IN 2016-17 & 2017-18

Party	Total donations	From corporate sector	Corporate donations share
BJP	969.31	915.59	94%
Cong	68.56	55.36	81%
NCP	8.43	7.74	92%
CPM	8.01	4.42	55%
AITC	2.35	2.03	86%
CPI	2.59	0.04	2%
Total	1059.25	985.18	93%

Donation figures in Rs crore. Source for all data: ADR

OF THE donations that national political parties received from the corporate sector in the last two years, just under half came from electoral trusts, an analysis by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) shows.

The ADR analysis is based on the income declarations of six national parties for 2016-17 and 2017-18. While parties are required to submit details of donors have made contributions above Rs 20,000, the BSP declared that it received no voluntary contributions above Rs 20,000 from any donor during this period, the ADR said in a statement.

The six parties covered in the analysis — BJP, Congress, NCP, CPI, CPI(M) and Trinamool Congress — declared donations of Rs 985.18 crore from the corporate sector, out of which Rs 488.42 crore (49.58 per cent) came from electoral trusts. The BJP received Rs 458.02 crore of this, the Congress another Rs 29.40 crore, and the NCP and Trinamool Congress Rs 50 lakh each. Another 12 per cent came from the manufacturing sector, and 9 per cent from the real estate sector.

Prudent/Satya Electoral Trust was the top donor with Rs 429.42 crore, all of which went to two parties. It donated 46 times in two years, contributing Rs 405.52 crore to the BJP in 33 donations and Rs 23.90 crore to the Congress in 13 donations.

The total contribution from the corporate sector constitutes 93 per

TOP FIVE CONTRIBUTORS AMONG CORPORATE DONORS

Electoral trusts	49.6%
(Rs 488.42 crore)	
Manufacturing	12.2%
(Rs 120 crore)	
Real estate	9.2%
(Rs 90.57 cr)	
Mining, construction export/import	4.8%
(Rs 47.63 crore)	
Healthcare	4.3%
(Rs 42.33 crore)	

WHERE THE ELECTORAL TRUSTS DONATED

BJP	458.02
Congress	29.40
NCP	0.50
Trinamool	0.50

Figures in Rs crore

cent of all donations received by the six political parties from known sources (Rs 1,059.25 crore), the ADR said. Such contributions accounted for 94 per cent of donations to the BJP and 81 per cent of those to the Congress.

Of the six parties, BJP received Rs 915.596 crore from 1,731 corporate donors, followed by the Congress which received Rs 55.36 crore from 151 corporate donors.

THIS WORD MEANS WORLD HERITAGE SITE

Jaipur is now one. How is the status earned?

LAST WEEK, Jaipur earned the status of a UNESCO World Heritage Site, becoming the 38th Indian entry in a list of 1,121 such sites across the world - 869 of which are cultural, 213 natural, and 39 mixed. Under the World Heritage Convention's operational guidelines, a World Heritage Site is one that is found to have an "Outstanding Universal Value", which signifies "cultural and/or natural significance which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity".

The selection is done by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, which meets at least once every year, generally in June-July, to deliberate the addition, removal, or modification of sites on the list. The Committee comprises 21 members se-

lected from among the 192 signatories to the 1972 World Heritage Convention. These states prepare a tentative list, followed by a nomination document, based on which the application is considered by the Committee for possible inclusion. India is represented by the Indian National Commission for Cooperation with UNESCO (INCCU) and the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).

Inclusion in the list affords the location a coveted status, driving up demand for tourism. At the same time, an onus is placed on the government of the country for conservation. The Committee conducts regular audits at declared sites, and can consider deleting it from the list.

OM MARATHE

Detailed report:

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SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

Why a corporate bond market

FM has announced fresh measures for developing such a market, after previous budgets and a number of panels had failed to work out a plan. Why does India need such a market, and what are the new measures?

SHAJI VIKRAMAN
CHENNAI, JULY 9

INDIA'S ECONOMIC reforms since 1991 have led to seismic changes in many areas and sectors. But one segment where growth has been stunted in spite of the efforts by policymakers over the last three decades has been the development of the corporate bond market. Successive budgets and at least half a dozen committees mandated by the government, the RBI and the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) to work out measures to develop this market have largely failed. In this year's Budget, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has announced fresh measures to boost the development of India's corporate bond market.

What are these measures?

In her Budget speech, the FM had said that an action plan to deepen the market for long term bonds including for deepening markets for corporate bond repos, credit default swaps etc, with a specific focus on the infrastructure sector, will be put in place. She said Foreign Portfolio Investors (or FPIs) will also be allowed to invest in debt securities issued by Infrastructure Debt Funds. The FM also stated that a Credit Guarantee Enhancement Corporation, for which regulations have been notified by the RBI, will be set up in 2019-20.

How will some of these measures help?

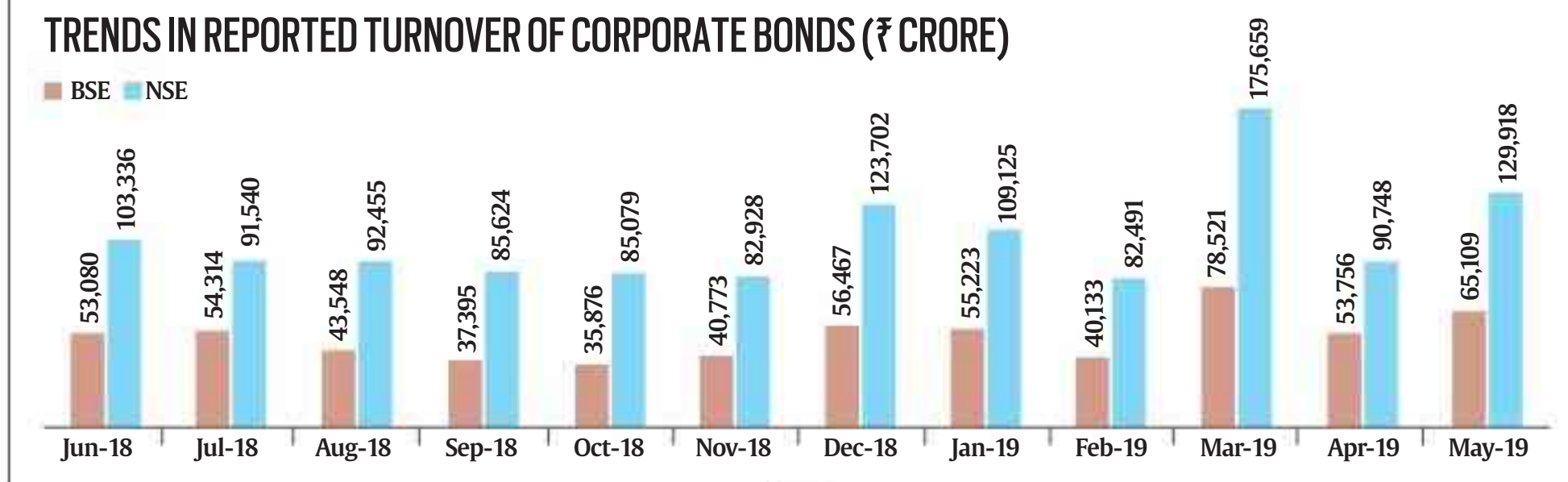
Unlike the Indian equities market where the daily volumes of traded stocks are high, signifying liquidity or enough opportunity for both buyers and sellers, the debt market is dominated more by trading in government bonds or securities. Most of the demand for these securities is from investors such as banks that have to mandatorily hold these bonds as part of regulatory norms. Over time, more Indian companies — both listed and unlisted ones — have started issuing bonds that offer semi-annual interest payments to investors. But these bonds aren't traded much, thanks to a limited investor base and low liquidity. This, in turn, leads to lower volumes of their trades compared to the other segment of the capital market. The aim of the government and regulators is to boost the liquidity and volumes and make the debt market more vibrant.

UDIT MISRA
NEW DELHI, JULY 9

LAST WEEK, the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) gave an unexpected order in the case pertaining to the resolution plan of Essar Steel. A two-member Bench of NCLAT approved the resolution plan suggested by ArcelorMittal but also introduced a key change that is likely to have significant ramifications for the resolution process under Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC).

What is the change ordered by NCLAT?

The resolution plan proposed by ArcelorMittal was questioned by both operational creditors, who alleged that they were not treated on par with financial creditors, as well as some financial creditors such as Standard Chartered Bank that alleged that its claims were not honoured adequately. As it happened, the NCLAT ruled that the Committee of Creditors (CoC) had discriminated between creditors. The NCLAT order



Source: Sebi

What is the importance of a corporate debt market?

In most international markets including the US, trading volumes in the debt market are much higher than those in stocks. Liquidity, too, is quite high with enough buyers and sellers willing to buy bonds with low credit ratings in the hope of receiving a big payoff. This enables companies to raise funds across different maturities including for infrastructure projects with long gestation periods.

In India, given the absence of a well functioning corporate bond market, the burden of financing infrastructure projects such as roads, ports, and airports is more on banks and the general government. This, in turn, puts lenders such as the banks under pressure as reflected in the ballooning of bad loans. For instance, in banks, such investments create an asset-liability mismatch. In other words, they are buying into long-term assets, such as a highway, with short term liabilities, that is deposits of three- to five-year maturities. Eventually, this not only results in inefficient resource allocation but also weakens the bank balance sheets.

How will a Credit Guarantee Enhancement Corporation help?

The proposed new corporation will help companies to boost their credit rating, which, in turn, will enable them to raise funds at cheaper rates. By allowing repurchase agreements or repos (that allow a company to raise funds by offering its securities and agreeing to repurchase it later) in AA rated bonds or securities, volumes could go up in the corporate bond market. More importantly, it can help improve liquidity especially if the RBI, like many other central banks of the world,

uses it for its repo operations. The other measure — of allowing investments made by FPIs in debt securities issued by Infrastructure Debt Funds to be sold to a domestic investor within a specified lock-in period — should help offer an exit option for such investors and improve liquidity. Similarly, policymakers want to develop the segment for credit default swaps. This will mean protection against the possibility of a company or issuer defaulting on a repayment option and thus offering comfort to an investor willing to take a risky bet and, in the process, adding volumes.

Beyond the Budget, what else has been done to boost the bond market in the recent past?

Since 2016, the RBI has made the point that the bigger companies would have to raise part of their long-term borrowings from the corporate bonds market rather than from banks. New norms since then make it mandatory for companies with large exposures to raise 25 per cent of their incremental or fresh borrowings from the bond market. This policy has been put in place to force corporates to go to the bond market and to ease the pressure on banks. Regulatory rules also make it necessary for any company that plans to raise debt funds of over Rs 200 crore to execute it on an electronic platform. This is expected to improve transparency as well.

Why has the Indian corporate bond market failed to take off?

For years, the investor base in the corporate bond market has been narrow — marked by banks, insurance companies, pension retirement funds and now mutual funds. The

FPIs are now prominent buyers of top-rated bonds given the attractive returns especially in the backdrop of a strong rupee. Most of these investors do not trade but hold these investments until maturity. With few buyers in the market or market makers who offer buy or sell quotes constantly, there is little liquidity. There is little or no incentive for market making. A majority of the bonds issued by companies are privately placed with a select set of investors in India rather than through a public issue; this is done to both save time as well as avoid greater disclosures. Foreign investors can now invest up to Rs 3,03,100 crore in these bonds and so far only a little over 67 per cent of this limit has been utilised. In 2019-20, investments by foreign funds in stocks have aggregated Rs 28,268 crore and Rs 10,949 crore in debt. Another peeve has been the varied stamp duty in states on debt transactions. But this will soon be sorted out with a uniform rate.

Have the recent corporate defaults been a dampener?

Indeed, an II&FS subsidiary that had the highest rating defaulted on its obligations exposing credit rating agencies and, in turn, hurting institutional investors who bought into these and other similar bonds. The investors included the EPFO — India's largest retirement fund — and many mutual funds too. This is likely to dissuade investors, who may prefer to invest in safer avenues only. The new insolvency law was supposed to provide an extra layer of comfort too with a speedier resolution of stressed assets and a return of funds to bondholders. But that has not been the case with the deadline of 270 days being breached in many cases.

Why NCLAT ruling on Essar Steel matters

stated: "... we hold that the 'Committee of Creditors' has no role to play in the matter of distribution of amount amongst the Creditors including the 'Financial Creditors' or the 'Operational Creditors'..." As such, the NCLAT amended the resolution plan in a way that both financial and operational creditors would receive roughly 61 per cent of their claims. The NCLAT logic was: financial creditors, being claimants at par with each other and claimants like the operational creditors, face a conflict of interest when deciding whose claims should be honoured and to what extent. This is more so the case when the maximum amount of money is allocated in favour of one financial creditor and minimum (or nil) for other financial creditors and operational creditors.

Should financial and operational creditors be treated on par?

On the face of it, the NCLAT's argument that there is no difference between two financial creditors stands to reason. But the NCLAT also observed that there is no difference between financial creditors and oper-

ational creditors when it relates to the "resolution" plan under IBC. Referring to Section 53 of the IBC that deals with the distribution of assets, the NCLAT argued that "the distribution of debts to the 'Financial Creditors' and the 'Operational Creditors' during the 'Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process' cannot be equated with [the] distribution of debts to all stakeholders after the liquidation."

In other words, NCLAT sought to distinguish between distribution of assets under a "resolution" process as against under a "liquidation" process. It argued that Section 53 of the IBC lays out the order of priority for the proceeds from the sale of the "liquidation" assets. This order of priority favours financial creditors over operational creditors. However, the NCLAT pointed out, this is not a liquidation and as such the differentiation between financial creditors and operation creditors is not merited.

Why is this ruling problematic?

The NCLAT ruling goes against the January 25 ruling by a two-judge Bench of

the Supreme Court that had clarified why, under the IBC process, paying off financial debts, which are secured, needs to be prioritised over operational debts, which are unsecured. "We have already seen that repayment of financial debts infuses capital into the economy inasmuch as banks and financial institutions are able, with the money that has been paid back, to further lend such money to other entrepreneurs for their businesses." The SC had favoured prioritising financial creditors because they generally lend finance on a term loan or for working capital that enables the corporate debtor to either set up and/or operate its business. On the other hand, contracts with operational creditors are relatable to supply of goods and services in the operation of a business. The SC had concluded that "while ensuring maximum recovery for all creditors being the objective of the Code, financial creditors are clearly different from operational creditors and therefore, there is obviously an intelligible differentia between the two which has a direct relation to the objects sought to be achieved by the Code."

Automated facial recognition: what NCRB proposes, what are the concerns

KARISHMA MEHROTRA
NEW DELHI, JULY 9

ON JUNE 28, the National Crimes Record Bureau (NCRB) released a Request for Proposal for an Automated Facial Recognition System (AFRS) to be used by police officers across the country.

What is automated facial recognition?

AFRS works by maintaining a large database with photos and videos of peoples' faces. Then, a new image of an unidentified person — often taken from CCTV footage — is compared to the existing database to find a match and identify the person. The artificial intelligence technology used for pattern-finding and matching is called "neural networks".

A senior former Home Ministry official said current facial recognition in India is done manually. While fingerprints and iris scans provide far more accurate matching results, automatic facial recognition is an easier solution especially for identification

amongst crowds, he said.

Are there any automated facial recognition systems in use in India?

It is a new idea the country has started to experiment with. On July 1, the Ministry of Civil Aviation's "DigiYatra" using facial recognition for airport entry was trialled in the Hyderabad airport. State governments have also taken their own steps towards facial recognition. Telangana police launched their own system in August 2018.

What does the NCRB request call for?

The NCRB, which manages crime data for police, would like to use automated facial recognition to identify criminals, missing people, and unidentified dead bodies, as well as for "crime prevention". Its Request for Proposal calls for gathering CCTV footage, as well as photos from newspapers, raids, and sketches. The project is aimed at being compatible with other biometrics such as iris and fingerprints. It will be a mobile and web application hosted in NCRB's



Getty Images

Data Centre in Delhi, but used by all police stations in the country. "Automated Facial Recognition System can play a very vital role in improving outcomes in the area of Criminal identification and verification by facilitating easy recording, analysis, retrieval and sharing of Information between different organisations."

How will the new database fit in what already exists?

NCRB has proposed integrating this facial recognition system with multiple existing databases. The most prominent is the NCRB-managed Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CCTNS). Facial recognition has been proposed in the CCTNS program since its origin.

"The idea is that integration of fingerprint database, face recognition software and iris scans will massively boost the police department's crime investigation capabilities. It will also help civilian verification when needed. No one will be able to get away with a fake ID," a Home Ministry official had told *The Indian Express* a year ago.

In 2009, following the Mumbai terror attacks, CCTNS was envisaged as a country-wide integrated database on crime incidents and suspects, connecting FIR registrations, investigations, and chargesheets of all 15,500 police stations and 6,000 higher offices. It also plans to offer citizen services, such as passport verification, crime reporting, online

tracking of case progress, grievance reporting against police officers, and more.

The new facial recognition system will also be integrated with Integrated Criminal Justice System (ICJS), as well as state-specific systems, the Immigration, Visa and Foreigners Registration & Tracking (IVFRT), and the Koya Paya portal on missing children.

How far has CCTNS progressed?

The Rs 2,000-crore project is accessible to the CBI, Intelligence Bureau, National Investigation Agency, Enforcement Directorate and the Narcotics Control Bureau. The project did not meet its initial 2015 deadline and was extended to March 2017.

In August 2018, the first phase of connecting the police stations was nearly complete. In the second phase, the Home Ministry proposed integrating the database with the fingerprint database of the Central Finger Print Bureau (CFPB). NCRB is currently rolling out the National Automated Fingerprint Identification System (NAFIS) and its integration with CCTNS.



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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

CAUTION ON SPECTRUM

Government should assess implications of Trai’s recommendations on pricing on the health of the telecom sector

ON MONDAY, THE Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) reiterated its stance on the issue of spectrum pricing, including that of 5G, for the upcoming auctions. This was in response to the Digital Communications Commission, the apex decision-making body of the Department of Telecommunications, which had sought a review of the Trai’s August 2018 recommendations on the auction of spectrum. The commission’s call for reviewing the Trai’s recommendations came amid concerns over the financial health of telcos, and worries that demand for spectrum is likely to be muted as consolidation in the sector has effectively left only three private telecom service providers. But, in its response, Trai has stayed with its earlier position, stating that all relevant factors, such as the methodology, assumptions, as well as developments between the spectrum auction held in October 2016 and its recommendations, released in August 2018, have been considered.

Over the years, the telecom sector has been a major source of revenue for the government. And at a time when the Centre is struggling to meet its revenue targets, higher proceeds from spectrum auctions could provide the much-needed boost to government coffers. But the temptation of revenue maximisation should be resisted when there are legitimate concerns over the financial health of the sector. Aggressive bidding by telcos in the 3G auctions in 2010 marked a turning point in the industry’s fortunes. As a result of the pile-up in debt, highly indebted telcos exercised restraint in the 2016 spectrum sale, with the government realising only Rs 65,789 crore as revenue against Rs 5.63 trillion (base price) worth of spectrum that had been put up for sale. The price war, which began in September 2016, only exacerbated the already precarious financial position of incumbents. Their deteriorating finances have also taken a toll on the government’s revenue. In 2018-19, the Centre was able to collect only Rs 39,245 crore through licence fees and spectrum usage charges, as against the initial target of Rs 48,661 crore. In comparison, it had collected Rs 70,241 crore in 2016-17. While average revenues per user (ARPU) have risen of late, a turnaround is still some time away. With precarious finances, a repeat of the 2016 auction is a possibility.

At such high prices, cash-strapped operators will find it difficult to bid, without sinking even more into debt. This could impact their capital expenditure, leaving them with fewer resources to invest in towers and fibre optics. Acknowledging the issues plaguing the sector, the telecom minister, Ravi Shankar Prasad, has recently set up a panel to rationalise levies, and to look into other issues. While it might be difficult to set aside Trai’s recommendations, the government would do well to think carefully through the implications of the recommendations, before rushing to auction high-priced spectrum.

SPOOKED BY VAASTU

Telangana Chief Minister should stop using public funds to finance expensive personal whims

THE TELANGANA HIGH Court has stalled Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao’s plans to demolish the present secretariat complex and the Errum Manzil Palace, a heritage structure, and build a new “vaastu compliant” office complex and assembly building in Hyderabad. The HC stayed the proposal, while hearing a clutch of petitions against the government’s move, which many, including the Opposition, have rightly called a waste of public funds. Rao’s whim would cost the exchequer Rs 500 crore — Rs 400 crore for the new secretariat and Rs 100 crore for the assembly building — a substantial amount that could help the Telangana government to address, for instance, rural distress following a deficient monsoon.

The “vaastu” of the secretariat has apparently spooked KCR so much that he has spent very little time in the building since he assumed the office of chief minister in 2014. Two years later, he moved into a new residence-cum-office complex built over nine acres, at the reported cost of Rs 50 crore. Incidentally, KCR’s predecessors, especially N T Rama Rao, had also fussed over the “vaastu” of the secretariat, but none of them felt the necessity to pull down the buildings, the seat of the Andhra Pradesh government since the state was formed in 1956. What evidently sets KCR apart is that he, as the undisputed supremo of the ruling Telangana Rashtra Samiti, and thereby the state, believes it kosher to use public funds to indulge and address his personal anxieties. The chief minister seems to think that his personal well-being and the public good are the same. A couple of years ago, his family in tow, he had offered gold ornaments worth Rs 5.5 crore to the Tirupati shrine. These ornaments had been procured with funds drawn from the Common Good Fund, a public fund meant for renovation of dilapidated temples. At that time, KCR justified making donations and offerings to temples in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh using public funds as meeting vows made by him on behalf of the people of Telangana to the gods.

It’s time KCR drew a clear line between his personal beliefs and constitutional role. As a private citizen, he has the choice of believing in “vaastu”. But as a public figure he

AEGEAN LESSONS

Election results in Greece shine a light on the limits of radical politics without a programme and roadmap of governance

BEFORE BREXIT, BEFORE the election of Donald Trump, the crisis of globalisation, global liberalism and capitalism had found expression in Greece. In January 2015, Alexis Tsipras, leader of the radical-left Syriza, rode a popular wave against the austerity measures imposed on Athens by the European Union, oligarchs and income inequality, to become president. In 2019, as Greece has emerged from the crisis — but with unemployment (18 per cent) and inequality still at record highs — the shoe is on the other foot. Kyriakos Mitsotakis and his centre-right New Democracy have won about 40 per cent of the vote, far ahead of Syriza.

Five years ago, Syriza promised that “hope is coming”. But like other radical movements without an ideology of state and roadmap for government, it was unable to govern according to the principles it campaigned on. Once president, Tsipras gave sops to oligarchs, withdrew even more welfare programmes and came across as anti-immigrant and anti-poor with measures like the eviction of families unable to repay loans and his refusal to intervene after reports of inhuman conditions at refugee camps surfaced. In essence, as the movement against the establishment became the establishment, it mimicked, even outdid, its predecessor.

The fact remains that political movements that take to the streets often articulate the entrenched shortcomings of systems of state and governance. But the task of actually governing cannot be achieved just by the charisma of a leader and the promise of “hope” and “revolution”. In France, Emmanuel Macron has had to face this reality with the Yellow Jacket protests, which severely dented his image as the young, charismatic face of a liberal West. Closer home, the Aam Aadmi Party, which began as a protest against corruption and traditional ways of doing politics, has struggled with the art of political compromise, of working not on the street but quietly behind the scenes. Meanwhile, in Greece, the burden of “hope” is now back on the centre.



SUHAS PALSHIKAR

EVER SINCE THE Supreme Court gave its ruling in the *Indra Sawhney* case, the complications surrounding the issue of OBC reservations have defied solutions. As I have argued, identifying backwardness, periodic scrutiny of claims to being backward and ensuring fair treatment of those included in the list of backward communities, constituted three challenges emanating from the Mandal discourse (*EPW*, April 26, 2008). Subsequently, this list of key issues became more complicated by claims from many regionally important peasant communities that they are backward, resulting in crossing the 50 per cent threshold.

Some states have chosen the Ninth Schedule to circumvent the Mandal ruling while others like Haryana, Gujarat or Maharashtra have grappled with ways to overcome the limitations prescribed by it. The latest ruling of the Bombay High Court is bound to lead to a new route for states to accommodate demands of various communities.

At least four questions arise from the Bombay High Court’s ruling. The Court has approved the report of the M G Gaikwad Commission which undertook studies to examine the status of Marathas and made recommendations about the quantum of reservation. The fact that there were earlier commissions, which had a different conclusion, does not seem to have weighed on the Court.

Curiously, the Gaikwad Commission report was not discussed in the public realm and thus the Court did not have the benefit of arguments and counterarguments about approach, method and interpretation. The first question regarding such a policy instrument is this: Can such a far-reaching policy be undertaken without the public having access to the findings of the Commission and without the courts having the benefit of public discussions? Can secrecy and urgency be the basis for policies? For instance, the projected calculations of the population of backward communities, as is quoted in the HC ruling, appear to be tricky, if not altogether problematic. The veil of secrecy has resulted in a non-transparent way of deciding backwardness and arriving at the conclusion about whether a community is adequately represented in administration.

Secondly, the argument of exceptionality is brought into sharp focus by this ruling. It is not clear what constitutes an exceptional sit-

We are moving away from the constitutional logic behind enabling clauses such as Articles 15 and 16

The issue of the Maratha quota has brought forward an even more serious issue that the Court has not addressed. Suppose a community is found to be backward and it is not included in the present list of OBCs, what is the justification for creating a separate quota for it? Even if the state were to accept the exceptional situation, necessitating crossing the 50 per cent limit, why is it that one community gets a separate quota? Ostensibly, this would be done in order not to disturb the existing social balance. However, such a strategy effectively means that one community is assured of a guaranteed quota while all others have to compete within the quota.



DOMINIC ASQUITH

IT’S FAIR TO say that India has been on every Briton’s mind this summer – even if the predominant emotion, until recently, was envy. The World Cup in England and Wales is shaping up to be the biggest cricket tournament to date with more than 80,000 fans from India expected to visit throughout the summer. Cricket stadiums across the country have been dominated by a sea of blue, as we are reminded that this joint passion is one of the many ties that bind us.

Alongside the cricket, we’ve welcomed investors and government representatives at a series of events celebrating the UK-India relationship, including at the London Tech Week and UK-India Week. Next week, at the annual Joint Economic and Trade Committee meeting, our international trade minister Liam Fox and his Indian counterpart, Piyush Goyal, will discuss how to further reduce trade barriers and agree to work towards a more ambitious trading relationship. On July 16, we’ll mark India Day at Mansion House — the official residence of the Lord Mayor. This will be a landmark event celebrating our financial services links, in particular the central role the City of London could perform in raising funds for Indian infrastructure development.

All this activity speaks to the health of the UK-India relationship. Brexit has given the UK a compelling reason to re-evaluate its relationships beyond its nearest 27 neighbours — and

BOWLED OVER BY A SEA OF BLUE

India and the UK are bound by ties beyond cricket. We must strive to build on them

India is in the spotlight. It is a priority because we recognise its fundamental role in shaping the world that we live in. It’s a rare partner whose economic priorities and assessment of global challenges mirror our own. It’s one of our most thriving trading and investment relationships, central to UK’s growth strategy.

Critics might point to a recent report, introduced in British Parliament, which suggested that the UK could do more to develop its relationship with India. Far from being a criticism, I see that report as a demonstration of the cross-party support that exists for deeper ties — and a vindication of my own firm belief that the UK’s relationship with India is one of the most important that we hold. After all, PM May’s first official visit upon taking office was to India and 27 ministers have visited since. The UK has a bigger diplomatic presence in India than anywhere else in the world.

Of course there is always room to do more. Given its size, global challenges uniquely affect India and so it’s right that our partnership is focused on tackling universal issues like climate change, renewable energy, cyber threats and antimicrobial resistance. With the UK’s bid to host the next UN Climate Conference COP26, our legal commitment to net-zero emissions by 2050, and our membership of the International Solar Alliance, the UK and India are particularly well placed to join forces on promoting sustainable energy,

and building resilient, smart cities.

PM Modi has an ambitious vision for India on the world stage and the UK is the partner to support that ambition. Since 2010, the UK has been the largest G20 investor in India. More than 400 British companies operate here, creating over 450,000 jobs. For nine consecutive quarters, our bilateral trade has grown, usually at double digit rates. We are now India’s second biggest research partner with joint research expected to be worth £400 million by 2021. The number of Indians studying in the UK has almost doubled in the last three years, and Indian nationals continue to receive more skilled work visas from us than the rest of the world combined. Our bilateral relationship is already uniquely strong owing to the incomparable living bridge connecting our people — but the scale of that is set to grow.

As a diplomat, I sometimes have to be mindful of what I say. So I stay well away from cricket predictions — other than to be sure it will come to pass as the great Neville Cardus put it: “Dear, lovely game of cricket that can stir us so profoundly, that can lift up our hearts and break them.” However, regardless of who takes home the Cup, this isn’t just an Indian summer. We’re here for the long term – and there’s a great deal more to do.

The writer is the British High Commissioner to India

JULY 10, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

GOVT ON BACKFOOT

OPPOSITION IN PARLIAMENT demanded the resignation of the prime minister and the home minister for the government’s inept handling of the agitation by the police and paramilitary forces. In the Rajya Sabha, two Janata members, S C Jha and Rameshwar Singh, supported the Opposition demand. In the Lok Sabha, an adjournment motion on the issue moved by CPM MP, Samar Makherjee, was rejected.

JANATA DEFECTIONS

AS MANY AS 10 Lok Sabha members walked out of the ruling Janata P arty to sit on the Opposition benches with Raj Narain. In the

process they reduced the ruling party’s strength to 288 in a house of 543. Narain’s camp predicted more resignations from the Janata Party, but a party spokesman said there was no danger to the stability of the government considering that it continued to have a majority in the lower House.

RIGHT TO DISSENT

SOCIALIST STRATEGY WITHIN the Janata Party, chalked out by their two-day conclave, declares that they will oppose such government measures, introduced in the legislatures, which “violate the spirit” of the election manifesto and other policy resolutions of the Janata Party. The meeting in New Delhi specifically

mentioned in the context, “any suggestion to bring forward a preventive detention bill or any other measure which curtails civil liberties as also the Industrial Relations Bill”.

AMNESTY IN IRAN

AYATOLLAH RUHOLLAH KHOMEINI announced a general amnesty covering “all those people who committed offences under the past regime,” excluding those involved in murder or torture. Khomeini’s announcement said the measure also applied to armed forces members. The announcement came on the eve of the birthday of Imam Mehdi, an ancient Shiite Muslim patriarch whose birthday is celebrated across Iran.



Once upon a stage called Delhi

In the 1970s, theatre in the city helped define a wider political imagination. Now, the young must accomplish that task without the aid of the likes of Girish Karnad and Habib Tanvir



KRISHNA KUMAR

TILL THE MID-1970s, New Delhi felt quite different from how it feels now. This feeling is not necessarily a reflection of the pleasure that old, familiar images are known to give. Many things have changed, but some have changed more radically than others. No one can imagine how active and endearing theatre in Delhi was in the early 1970s. The roundabout near Bengali Market and the buildings around it are still there, but the life inside them is altogether different now. The National School of Drama, Triveni, and Kamani routinely offered the very best in contemporary drama.

Several plays I saw in these theatres became a part of my mental world, and some of the actors who performed in them continue to remain associated in my mind with the roles they had played. Om Shivpuri in *Aadhe Adhoore* (written by Mohan Rakesh), Sudha Shivpuri in *Khamoshi! Adaalat Jaari Hai* (by Vijay Tendulkar) and Manohar Singh in *Tughlaq* (by Girish Karnad) are three such faces. When I learned that Karnad had died, I recalled Manohar Singh acting as Tughlaq, bringing him out of medieval history into contemporary Delhi. Ebrahim Alkazi, who directed the play, had the gift of making every script feel contemporary and relevant, no matter what its content was or whether it was Indian, Greek or German. Living in Delhi meant living in a large, very wide world in the 1970s. It was an exuberant feeling, and drama was its source.

I had forgotten some episodes of Karnad’s *Tughlaq*, so I turned to the internet to revive my memory. There was a lot to look at. Within a few minutes of browsing, I realised that the inevitable had happened. Tughlaq had entered the college syllabus, so it had gathered a vast amount of exam-worthy commentary. Its allegorical meanings, Karnad’s ability to use history to throw light on the present, his sense of the stage as a space, and several such points were elaborated upon on several sites. There were videos, too, telling the student how to answer exam questions about the play. There were some good commentaries but as I don’t have to prepare for an exam, I decided to switch off, sit back and just recall the time when dramatists like Karnad, Mohan Rakesh and Habib Tanvir were routinely injecting a new kind of awareness into Delhi’s ethos. After the end of the 1971 Bangladesh war as it was called, there was little left of the Nehru era. Image-wise, Indira Gandhi had acquired greatness without shedding her closeness to common citizens.

The open-air theatre at Triveni had steps with cushions placed on them. Mohan Rakesh’s *Aadhe Adhoore* was running as a daily show for several evenings. Sitting in one of front rows in a packed show, I briefly heard some commotion which subsided in a few seconds. In the intermission, when I looked back, I was startled to notice Indira Gandhi sitting in one of the middle rows. That the prime minister could find time to see a play and was interested in *Aadhe Adhoore* meant a lot, in a city that, for older, native residents, had already grown beyond recognition.

Theatre, cinema, literature and magazines were involved in a larger, political struggle, to define the nation, bridging its endemic divisions. In his short story, ‘Dilli mein ek maut’ (A death in Delhi), Kamleshwar had created a symbol of the



VIEW FROM THE RIGHT

CONGRESS AND VIOLENCE

THE RECENT CASE of violence in Old Delhi, which started with a parking fight and later acquired communal overtones, is the focus of this week’s *Organiser*. The editorial of the magazine connects the vandalism of a “Durga Temple” in the area to Rahul Gandhi’s recent resignation from the post of Congress president. Though it “may look like” the two events have “no correlation”, the magazine says, “if we go into the nuances of the mindset behind the incidents and the reasons for the downfall of the Congress, there is direct correlation which Rahul Gandhi failed to understand”.

It says that vandalism of any place of worship is “unacceptable” but this has happened “because it has been happening in the history and the mindset of iconoclasm was systematically neglected and nurtured” says the editorial, first by the British and then “the Congress led by Nehru-Gandhi family” which overlooked it in the “name of Secularism”. Since turning into a “dynas-



Suvajit Dey

outsider’s experience of the urban jungle. Karnad and Tanvir had used rural aesthetic resources that made Bengali Market feel like the hinterland of a village. Tragic or otherwise, these plays conveyed the feeling that as Indians we could still make sense of ourselves, without surrendering to comparisons or false pride. Tughlaq, in particular, made disillusionment acceptable, as a moment of truth. Well before the end, you knew there was no hope for the king, but you also felt that the struggle will not end with him. One had the same feeling at the end of *Aadhe Adhoore*. Struck by pathos, you still felt the urge to trace the cracks in a family to larger, complex sources.

That urge is what seems to have slipped away. Few want to relate to the complexity of an obvious truth; denying it is considered a more obvious choice. The subject does not matter. It can be air pollution, politics, health or education. Accepting that the news is bad, even ominous, gets you nowhere. Truth seems distant and fundamentally inaccessible, like one’s political representatives in the assembly and Parliament. A rich supply of alternate resources of news and viewpoints is constantly in circulation, but none look capable of healing the injury that the urge to face the truth has endured.

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By the 1970s, Delhi’s bubble of a truth-seeking theatre was ready to break. Ambitious though it was, the universe of ideas and images proved too small and fragile. Post-Emergency Delhi was a different city. It was more vast, difficult to know and grasp, not just to manage. There was no centre of aesthetic gravity left in it. The question why it proved so vulnerable is not easy to answer. People say our institutions were weak; some say the individuals chosen to run them were not right. Both arguments can claim substance and the matter must wait longer for the verdict.

Recently, one of my former students asked whether the Emergency was the worst crisis that Indian democracy had suffered. I found the question difficult and a bit out of the syllabus. I failed to convince her that the Emergency was mainly a crisis of the state. Except for short periods and in different specific regions, we have not experienced a social crisis and we don’t know exactly how the state might handle it. The young Delhi-ites of today must assess, without the aid of great artists like Karnad, Tanvir and Rakesh, whether a nostalgic view of the past is justified.

Kumar is a former director of NCERT and writer

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“China needs to be highly confident in the cause of human rights... Human rights should be a joint cause for mankind rather than a topic for geopolitical competition.” — GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA

Vigilantism 2.0

And the centrality, in it, of the slogan ‘Jai Shri Ram’



PAMELA PHILIPOSE

THE LYNCHING OF Mohammad Akhlaq of Bisara village, Uttar Pradesh, for the meat in his refrigerator, proved to be the decisive marker in the sharply rising graph of Muslim-targeted hate crimes that followed the BJP’s victory of 2014. The thrashing to death of Tabrez Ansari, in Saraikeela village, Jharkhand, barely 24 days after the BJP government was sworn in for a second term, signposts changing patterns in the ecology of hate crimes in the country.

How do we assess Vigilantism 2.0 against the backdrop of Modi Sarkar 2.0? The first aspect in the Ansari killing was that, in contrast to that of Akhlaq, it did not involve beef. The act was pared down to its fundamentals — the Muslim identity of the subject, with the charge of theft being applied as a masking agent. In fact, it reflected a certain impatience with the elaborate charade of cow protection being used to justify attacks on Muslims. How often can a potential vigilante produce hard evidence of meat possession in order to launch such assaults? Isn’t it so much easier to target someone for resisting the evocation of Lord Ram; someone on whose tongue the words “Jai Shri Ram” arrive unwillingly?

This brings us to another characteristic of the Ansari killing. It was part of a triumphant upsurge that followed the May 23 verdict that manifested itself within hours of the BJP victory, and continues to the present day. The celebrants, impervious to the anguished cries of their victims, sought to make the Modi victory their own, playing out their own fantasies of power by forcing random people to pronounce one of the central slogans of political Hindutva. How random these victims were can be judged by the geographical spread of the most recent attacks. They included a group of Muslim men in Barpeta, Assam, a skull-cap wearing teenager in Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, a cab driver in Thane, Maharashtra, a cleric aboard a train from Gaya, Bihar, young men in Delhi’s Rohini area and Haryana’s Gurgaon. Only two commonalities were evident: The religion of the assaulter and assaulted, and the central slogan of “Jai Shri Ram”.

“Jai Shri Ram” has more of a marked presence in contemporary India thanks to social media, than it had in its heyday during the Ram Jannabhoomi movement. But melodious renderings of it, soothing to the ear and heart, are not the ones that garner the most “likes”. It is the visceral, gut-spilling, high decibel variations that are “favourited” over and over again. Take

the ‘Bajrang Dal song’ from Swapnil Murlidhar Barphe: It’s a mass of floating super monsters and super heroes hurling themselves at each other, with special effects borrowed from the Bahubali and Chhatrapati Shivaji playbooks. What is conspicuous in this version, which claims over 150 million views, is the way English words are used in a posh accent — “Everybody put your hands up” is spliced into the violence, lending it a certain coolness, an urbane acceptability. The subliminal message is clear: Listeners are enjoined to foist their will on a hated minority, use the mace of angry Hanuman as a hammer of death, with the cry “Jai Shri Ram” denatured from being a general salutation to a communal war cry.

Much blood has flowed down the subterranean culverts linking the Akhlaq and Ansari killings. Public realisation has grown of how the criminal-justice and political costs of such vigilantism are minimal, if at all, and can, in fact, deliver major dividends. There is now a more pronounced public articulation of the previously unthinkable; more demonstrations of the previously undoable. The veneration accorded to a Godse by Pragma Thakur, which helped cement her handsome Lok Sabha victory this time, is striking. While in 2014, Jayant Sinha won his Hazaribagh seat in Jharkhand by a margin of 1,59,128 votes, in 2019 — after his much discussed garlanding of a vigilante killer — he won by a margin of 4,79,548 votes. If the first instance indicated a glorification of the politics of assassination, the second provided tacit stimulus to the politics of vigilantism. If the Akhlaq felling had evoked widespread horror and shock, the eight-hour torture of Ansari four years later brings on public outrage in a few quarters, and sadness in others. But, all of it is now tinged with a certain acceptance that stuff happens, and targeting an entire state for such developments is not fair.

The Reliance Dhirubhai Ambani Professor in South Asian Studies and Professor and Chair of the Department of Anthropology at Stanford University, Thomas Blom Hansen, writes that the “mightiest socio-political force in India” today is not the state or the law but “deeply embedded vernacular ideas of popular sovereignty”. He goes on to add that one of the crucial enabling conditions for public violence is the lack of the “application of the force of law in the face of such exertions of ‘the law of force’”.

The profoundly disturbing question that he raises should give us pause as we recall young Ansari’s terrorised face while being forced to repeat the words, “Jai Shri Ram” yet another time: Is India’s democratic revolution devouring democracy?

Philipose has recently authored Media’s Shifting Terrain: Five Years that Transformed the Way India Communicates

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

CAMERA IN CLASS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Classroom and eye’ (IE, July 9). The Delhi government’s decision to make classrooms accessible to parents in real-time through a smartphone app is a flawed idea which would dangerously regulate the teaching learning process. It could lead to conditioned behaviour and stem creativity. It would not only put teachers under undue stress, but even the children would be worse off with their classroom privacy eroded.

Vijai Pant, Hempur

SPACE BORDERS

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘When countries moonwalk’ (IE, July 9). The exploration of outer space has progressed as a collective effort of mankind to challenge our territorial limitations and expand our horizons beyond the known universe. Associating successful space missions with national pride could result in a 21st-century space race, which will be detrimental to the overall idea of longing to comprehend the dynamics of various celestial bodies, energy, and the dark matter.

Sudip Kumar Dey, Kolkata

WATER WOES

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘On the water front’ (IE, July 9). India is an over-populated country and most of its citizens depend on agriculture, which requires huge amounts of water. Though India enjoys a four-month-long monsoon, it suffers from scarcity of water due to mismanagement and over exploitation. The water crisis is a challenge not only at farmers but for all citizens. The new Union government has emphasised the importance of water and merged various ministries to form the new Jalashakti ministry. This is a welcome move.

Tapomoy Ghosh, Katwa

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

To encourage quality reader intervention, The Indian Express offers the Letter of the Week award. The letter adjudged the best for the week is published every Saturday. Letters may be e-mailed to editpage@expressindia.com or sent to The Indian Express, B-1/B, Sector 10, Noida-UP 201301. Letter writers should mention their postal address and phone number.

THE WINNER RECEIVES SELECT EXPRESS PUBLICATIONS

INDIA LEADS

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘Budget and the world’ (IE, July 9). There is currently subdued growth and muted global sentiments over global GDP growth, which has been lowered by the World Bank due to the protracted trade war between major powers. The announcement by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to raise fiscal resources by drawing sovereign bonds from abroad is a signal that in this era of protectionism, which has characterised the global economy for the past two years, India is chartering a new discourse. India’s total external debt is \$543 billion as of March 2019, which is lower than other developing and developed economies. New Delhi can, therefore, lead the way for other economies by embracing globalisation.

Pranay Kumar Shome, Kolkata