

# Opinion

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**INSIDE TRACK**  
**COOMI KAPOOR**

## Social faux pas

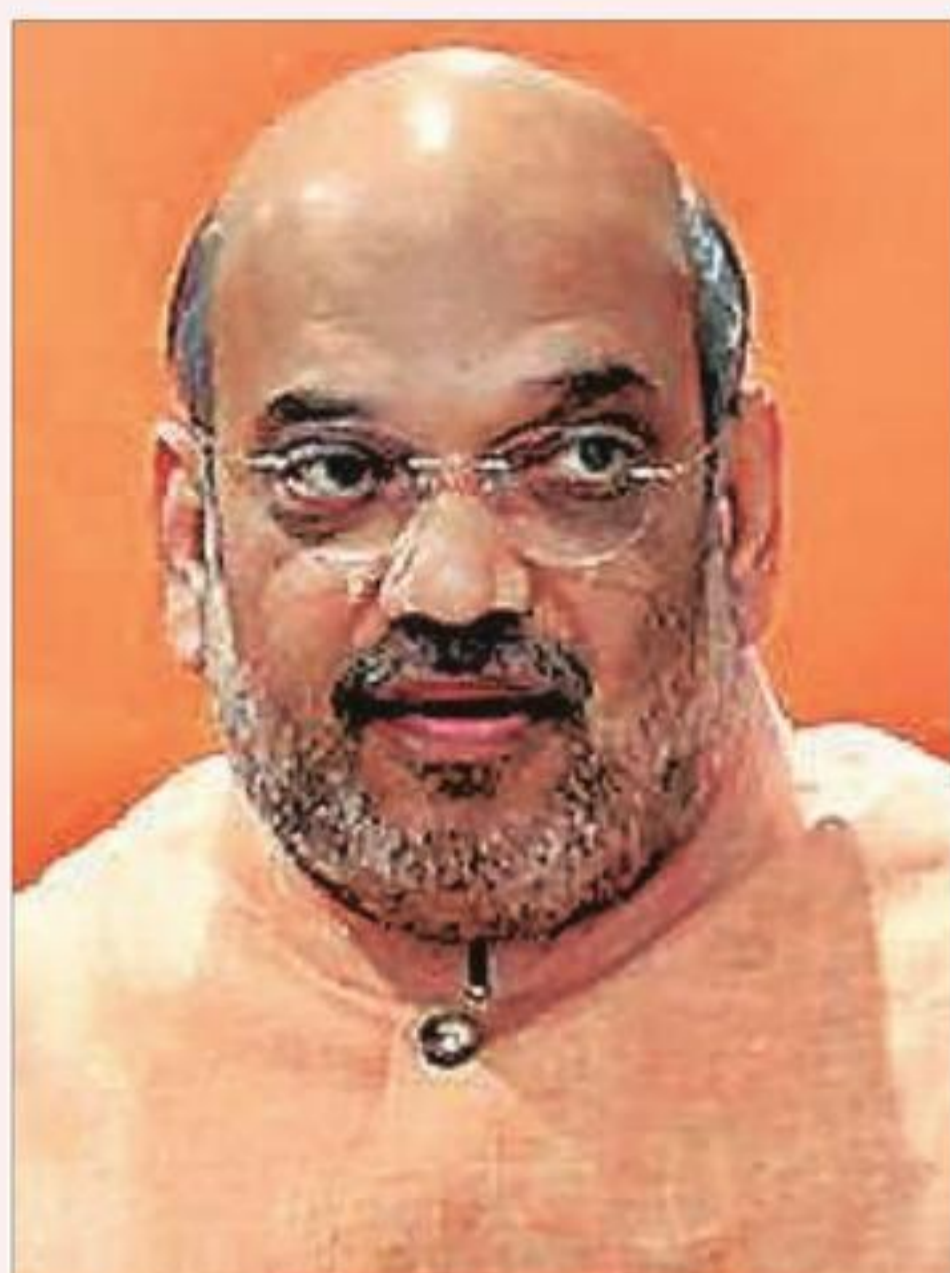
It was a major social faux pas at the President's At Home at Rashtrapati Bhavan on Independence Day. Ambassadors and other important guests felt slighted at the cavalier treatment meted out to them and many left without even a cup of tea. This was after, setting a new precedent, the host, President Ram Nath Kovind, left his own party before the guests could even partake a morsel. That the President was leaving was amply clear since the military band played the national anthem, which is done only after the event winds up. To add insult to injury, guests were asked to reach the venue at 4.30 pm when the function started only at 6 pm and continued till around 7.15 pm. Not even water was offered in the reception hall. In contrast, during the first two years of Kovind's tenure many had appreciated the effort to make the function more informal and friendly by permitting guests to mix with the VVIPs, after the walkway greetings with the president, prime minister and vice-president were over. But, because of heavy-handed security arrangements, intermingling of invitees is generally near impossible in recent times with guests segregated into separate enclosures with cordons.

## Vendetta politics

P Chidambaram made himself scarce for the first 27 hours after his anticipatory bail from the Delhi High Court was cancelled, because it is the normal legal strategy to avoid jail till one applies to the appeals court. Otherwise you get stuck endlessly in prison. But his party felt that it was a PR disaster to take this course of action, as many on social media mocked a former home minister for going underground. But Chidambaram is not an emotive figure like Indira Gandhi who won much public sympathy during the Janata rule for her arrest. Charan Singh, then home minister, had vowed that he would one day put Mrs Gandhi in the same cell he stayed in at Tihar. When a case was filed against her in 1978, she refused to seek bail, summoned the media to witness her arrest and sat on a *dharna* at a railway crossing singing an old World War-II song 'Wish me luck as you wave me goodbye'. Chidambaram refused to indulge in theatrics or even mention Home Minister Amit Shah's name. Many see parallels with both Emergency and post-Emergency arrests. They believe Shah nurses a grudge that Chidambaram as Union home minister ensured Shah as Gujarat home minister was implicated in the Ishrat Jahan encounter case, though the Gujarat government had got the tip-off on it from the Intelligence Bureau in Delhi. History has shown that vendetta politics seldom works.

## Self-appointed reps

Several opposition parties have stopped sending their representatives



for TV political debates since they feel that the anchors favour the government and they do not get a fair hearing. To overcome this handicap and to appear objective, the channels invite participants whom they term sympathisers of party X, Y and Z. This too has been objected to. Misa Bharti confirmed that the RJD had written to channels that they could not unilaterally decide who could represent their party. Even the RSS has reservations to all and sundry being dubbed as 'RSS ideologues'. At a recent TV talk show, a frequent guest described as 'RSS ideologue' asked sheepishly that the strap line be removed and 'political analyst' be inserted instead. The anchor protested that if he had to invite a political analyst he had a wider range to choose from.

## Questionable query

The Congress straw poll among CWC and special invitees to select an interim president was fashioned so that all participants were intimidated into giving the same answer: the Gandhi family. The loaded question put to those whose preferences were sought was, "Everyone else wants Rahul Gandhi to continue. What do you think?" A disgruntled Congress leader admitted privately that "an honest conversation is not possible in the party". While some blame the old guard, it had nothing to do with old or new guard. The truth is that the Gandhis believe they are indispensable and did not want to risk appointing a non-family member, even temporarily, to the job. They had in mind the exam-



ple of Sitaram Kesri, who refused to budge once anointed.

## UP's shadow CM

The announcement of the new Uttar Pradesh Cabinet was delayed because the Delhi BJP high command had to check Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's list and make changes to ensure caste considerations, regional representation, and that some bad eggs were removed. Though to the outside world the Yogi is all-powerful in his state, in fact it is the little-known Sunil Bansal, state general secretary, organisation, who wields almost as much influence, since he has the ear of Amit Shah. Incidentally, Rajnath Singh's son Pankaj was again omitted from the ministerial list.


**OUT OF MY MIND**  
**MEGHNAD DESAI**

## Bhagwat's quota poser needs a debate

**RSS CHIEF MOHAN** Bhagwat has a question troubling him which he wants debated. He asked the question at the time of the Bihar elections four years ago. It embarrassed the BJP then and he had to keep quiet. But he has raised it again. It is a question which is at the heart of the RSS and its vision for the future of India. Only someone not in electoral politics can raise such a question. It deserves a serious debate.

Bhagwat asks how long should the SC/ST reservations last? Of course, these reservations were put in the Constitution for a 15-year period initially. The view was that the historic disadvantages visited upon the SC/ST people over millennia deserved to be corrected. A period of 15 years must have seemed sufficient in those hopeful days when, on the threshold of freedom, people believed that independent India will achieve economic miracles once foreign rule had ended. Alas, decades of slow growth made reservations unremovable.

The expression 'Scheduled' is because at the end of the Round Table Conferences held in early 1930s, the British government published a white paper in which they listed in an Appendix (Schedule) the castes and tribes of India which were to get special treatment as and when Dominion Status was granted. This was a victory for B R Ambedkar who had worked relentlessly to win concessions for Dalits.

But there is a fundamental problem in any Constitution which treats all citizens as equal but has to push affirmative action for some subgroup of the population — Black Americans in the US and SC/STs in India. Bhagwat's dream for the ideal Hindu Rashtra wishes to treat all those who reside in the land of

the Indus — call them Hindus (defined as including Muslims, unlike V D Savarkar's definition) — as equal. Leaving Muslims aside, the basic contradiction is between the ideal of equality among Hindus and the facts of the hierarchical social structure of Hindu society. To make matters worse, since the Mandal Report commissioned by the Janata government of 1977-80 (which included the Jana Sangh), these hierarchical inequalities have been valorised by OBC reservations. It is not just the SC/STs but the 7,000 *jaatis* who claim inequality and want to preserve reservations.

Bhagwat wishes all reservations would wither away and Hindus could be a single people. He knows it cannot happen yet but he

wants to pose the question of equality versus entrenched reservations. This is what he wants to discuss. At what stage of prosperity can India give up reservations? After all, other democratic societies have income and class inequalities but do not require affirmative action. Why not India?

But if being Hindu requires everyone to have a caste identity, then hierarchy is ineradicable in a Hindu nation. Hindu Rashtra has to be fundamentally socially unequal or it is not Hindu. Separate cells each for the 7,000 *jaatis* define a Hindu society. Bhagwat knows this difficulty. The RSS has always wanted to unite Hindus into a single mass, overcoming caste divisions which are social not religious. No matter how prosperous India becomes, social hierarchy is likely to remain. Can Hindu society have *jaatis* without hierarchy? Can caste divisions be horizontal not vertical?

Bhagwat deserves a debate and an answer.



# Damp squib

## Why can't the season-ending playoffs on the PGA Tour get it right?

**OVER THE TOP**
**Meraj Shah**


**THE 2018 TOUR** Championship was the most memorable event on any tour in professional golf last year. The grand finale to the season, and the PGA Tour's FedEx Cup, had a dream finish when Tiger Woods, yet again, returned to the winner's circle, notching up his 80th victory. Who can forget Tiger and playing partner Rory McIlroy walking down the fairway on the 72nd hole, trailed by a sea of fans held back by a tenuous rope. And, when he dropped the bogey putt to win, in Tiger's words, "All hell broke loose."

It was an amazing spectacle for those who had the privilege of watching it. And a clear reaffirmation of Tiger's superstar status; the rarefied air that, say, the likes of Michael Jordan, or David Beckham, inhabit. That win didn't do as much to elevate Tiger's standing, as it did for the Tour Championship; it's the one edition of the event that no golf fan

is ever likely to forget.

And that's why I can't get over the sheer idiocy of not opening a door for Tiger to defend his title this year. In case you're wondering why, Tiger missed the first event of the playoffs—that have been reduced from four to three events this year—and couldn't finish 11th or better at last week's BMW Championships which would have ensured a tee time this week.

Considering that the PGA Tour has been struggling with the format for the FedEx Cup pretty much since the inception of the playoffs, and has yet again changed the format and rules this year, not including Tiger, or for that matter British Open winner Shane Lowry, is beyond egregious. Golf's richest tourney—the winner takes home \$15 million—and one that's always struggled to attract fans, decides to leave out two of the hottest players of the season because of some ill-conceived format. The main issue in question is the number of points awarded for winning Major Championships—a paltry 600 points—that are significantly fewer than the 2000 points awarded to the winner of the first two events in the playoffs. The result of all this complicated



No one deserves to win the FedEx Cup than major man—Brooks Koepka

inanity is that Tiger and Lowry aren't in the field, while 11 players, who didn't win a tour event this season have teed it up. Not granting their presence, but rather the omission of two players who

just had to be in the field.

What the mandarins at the PGA Tour have tried to rectify, is the convoluted scoring system. I'm not going to explain it, because I never understood it. Until

last year, a complex system of points determined the eventual winner (who may or may not have won the last event). This year, it's been simplified: players start on a score that commensurates with their FedEx rankings going into the Tour Championship.

So, top seed Justin Thomas, started the event at 10 under par, with the second seed at eight under, and so on, down to even par for the 26th-to-30th ranked players in the 30-man field. This will ensure that, for the first time, the tour championship winner will also win the FedEx Cup.

I'm dyslexic when it comes to complicated betting systems. If you're one of those who finds it easy to keep track of scores in your weekend nassau; what with press and repress, then you're probably scoffing, and you've got every right. All I can keep track of is simple matchplay—either I win the hole or I lose it. Golf is hard enough, and I really couldn't care less for additional number crunching. So, at least from point of view, the new system works.

On the other hand, plenty of players aren't particularly happy. Rory McIlroy pointedly expressed his disagreement at the event. "You can shoot the best score of the week and not win the golf tournament," McIlroy said. If that happens to someone it's going to be hard for them to wrap their head around."

The Ulsterman also questioned the playoffs' relentless emphasis on the

winner's purse. "I don't think the money needs to be front and centre, because I don't think that's what the fans care about," McIlroy said. "Players might care about it, and we want to be rewarded and paid for what we do, but at the same time, competitively, it's not about that. It's about trying to win golf tournaments." Thank you Rory. That is, pardon the pun, bang on the money. And that's why the Playoffs have failed to generate an iota of the excitement that an event like The Masters Tournament does. Tiger won that in 2018; and there's not a golf fan who doesn't remember that. But hardly anyone knows that the payout to Tiger at the Masters was about two million dollars. It's not important.

The whole idea of creating a season-ending playoff was to create an end-of-year pot of gold that would keep players and sponsors interested and involved on the PGA Tour. Arguably, the FedEx Cup has managed to do that, but it has failed spectacularly to create an emotional investment for the game's fans. McIlroy put it well earlier this week: "If the FedEx Cup wants to create a legacy that lasts longer it doesn't need to be about the money, it should be about the prestige of winning an event that you'll be remembered for." I've got no idea who'll take the Cup home this week; and unlike last year, I don't really care.

A golfer, Meraj Shah also writes about the game