



inside
TRACK
COOMI KAPOOR

DISCIPLINE PANEL?

SPEAKING OUT of turn in the Congress has become the norm and party discipline appears ready to implode. Among those candidly airing their views or acting against the party's interests are seasoned hands such as Salman Khurshid, Shashi Tharoor, Jairam Ramesh, Ashok Tanwar, Sanjay Nirupam, Bhupinder Hooda, Milind Deora, Navjot Singh Sidhu, Digvijaya Singh, Jyotiraditya Scindia and Umang Singhar. In most cases, those defying party discipline get away unscathed. The question is what exactly is the role of the Congress Disciplinary Committee. The average age of the committee, chaired by A K Antony is 82. The three-member panel consists of Antony, 78, Motilal Vora, 90, and Sushil Kumar Shinde, 78. According to party insiders, the commit-

tee sometimes meets, but normally Antony defers any controversial issue for discussion to another session. The last time the Disciplinary Committee took any meaningful action was the revocation of the suspension against Mani Shankar Aiyar over a year ago.

RENEWING OLD LINKS

The picturesque ancient port and temple town of Mahabalipuram turned out to be an ideal setting for the informal summit between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, even though it was not the original venue proposed for the meeting. Discussions on the place where the two heads of government could hold the summit have been on for over six months. The initial suggestion was Varanasi, Modi's constituency. Varanasi fitted the bill since like Wuhan in China, the venue of last year's summit between the two leaders, it offered both history and a secluded environment. The Chinese vetoed Varanasi on the ground that the plane carrying Xi and his entourage would be too large for the small Varanasi airport. The fact that Japanese PM Shinzo Abe had already visited

Varanasi might have been an additional negative factor. Goa was ruled out because Xi had seen the coastal resort at the BRICS Summit in 2016. Finally the consensus was on Mahabalipuram with its rich archeological heritage and ancient trade links with China and association with Chinese Buddhist monk Hiuen Tsang, even though Tamil Nadu is not a BJP-ruled state.

SWAMY VS DHAVAN

The Chief Justices' court is so overcrowded during the Ram Janmabhoomi hearings that some 30 lawyers have per force to stand. Senior counsel Rajeev Dhavan, who represents the Sunni Waqf Board, usually has the last word during arguments. (When opposition lawyers pointed out that there was no reference to the Babri Masjid in travellers' account before Aurangzeb's time, he retorted that Marco Polo had forgotten to mention the Great Wall while writing about China.) But Dhavan has met his match in Subramanian Swamy. Annoyed at discovering Swamy sitting composedly in the front row of the court, Dhavan demanded the judges make the MP get up since he did not represent

any of the original appellants and was not even a lawyer. Dhavan protested indignantly that when he went to Parliament, he was sent to the visitors' gallery. (Swamy succeeded in getting his writ petition admitted and clubbed with the original cases, unlike other latecomers, since he put a petition before a separate Bench claiming that his argument was based on the different plea of fundamental rights.) Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi's advice to Dhavan was that he should stand for Parliament if he wanted to sit in the Rajya Sabha.

OUT, BUT IN

The news that Shakti Sinha was stepping down as Director of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library came from the former IAS officer himself, who tweeted that his term was over. The NMML is presently being handled by a joint secretary in the Culture Ministry. Many speculated on why Sinha had fallen out of favour. In fact, Sinha is likely to return as director since the selection authority, the NMML Executive Council headed by Lokesh Chandra, has forwarded his name. The delay is simply because the Cabinet Committee on Appointments

has yet to ratify the choice. A normal bureaucratic delay.

POLITICAL WISDOM

A political observer points out that family-controlled political parties which have not followed the law of primogeniture as laid down in Hindu epics have come to grief. He cites two examples. Recently, there was mayhem in Lalu Prasad's family. Daughter-in-law Aishwarya Rai stormed out of her in-law's house in tears, claiming she was ill-treated, not allowed to cook in the kitchen and that her smartphone had been snatched from her. Aishwarya blamed her sister-in-law Misa Bharti and mother-in-law Rabri Devi and exonerated her estranged husband Tej Pratap and her brother-in-law Tejashwi. Misa, who is the eldest of Lalu's children, grew up advising her father on political issues. She was furious when Lalu appointed Tejashwi as his political heir. She reportedly encouraged Tej Pratap the elder brother to revolt.

In the INLD, Om Prakash Chautala picked his younger son Abhay as his political heir, rather than his elder offspring Ajay. The result: Ajay's two sons Dushyant and Digvijay split the INLD.



Fifth
COLUMN
TAVLEEN SINGH

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What lynching means

ONCE UPON a time, not so very long ago, when the RSS chief addressed his troops on the auspicious occasion of Vijayadashmi, people like me paid no attention. This is no longer possible. The RSS is now seen as a vital player in the decisions made by the Government of India. So I have learned to pay attention to what the RSS chief says. When Mohan Bhagwat held a huge press conference in Vigyan Bhawan last year, I made it a point to be there and listened carefully as he articulated his worldview. It cheered me up enormously when he announced that the thoughts of Guru Golwalkar were no longer considered sacrosanct and that the RSS did not believe any more in a Hitlerian final solution to our 'Muslim problem'.

So it came as a disappointment to hear his views on lynchings last week. He said the word did not exist in any Indian language and that it was being used to malign India's fair image by people with a vested interest in making India look bad. The word probably does not exist, which is why when Hindi newspapers write about the newest victim of mob violence, they use the word in English. But, can we at least begin by admitting that ever since a former member of the RSS became prime minister, a certain kind of mob violence in the name of saving cows has become a routine feature of Indian life?

The RSS chief is not alone in believing that these 'so-called lynchings' are actually just routine breakdowns in law and order. After listening to his speech, I tweeted, 'Call it lynching, call it murder, these incidents shame India. There is no 'conspiracy' by the West to defame India Mr Bhagwat. It is savagery by violent mobs against helpless victims that defames India'. As usual, I was inundated with angry responses. The efficient, wrathful and vigilant army of BJP trolls went nuclear. They attacked me for not being a good enough Indian and for only noticing incidents when the victims were Muslims. They said they had noticed that I was unconcerned about Hindus being killed in similar fashion. And, some posted pictures of the bloodied bodies of an RSS family that had just been murdered by a Muslim mob. In my view that is just murder.

The truth is, I have not so far come across a video of a Hindu being forced to yell 'Allah o Akbar' while being beaten to death. I have seen many, many horrific videos of Muslims killing Hindus, and they are very upsetting. But, a lynching has a specific context. It does not mean a riot, it does not mean any old act of public violence, it means a public hanging or stoning to death by a mob. It means punishing someone in such a manner that others will see it as a warning and a lesson. When two Dalit children were beaten to death for defecating in the open last month, it was plain and simple murder, not a lynching. And, yet many reporters used the word 'lynching' to describe what happened. This is probably why the RSS chief is confused.

All acts of public violence indicate a breakdown in law and order, but not all acts of public violence mean a breakdown in the rule of law. That happens only when punishment is delivered for some imagined crime by a mob made up of people who believe they have the right to judge and punish someone because they are so certain of his guilt. In Behror, when I went to the place where Pehlu Khan was beaten to death, I asked people what they thought about what they had done. They said he deserved what he got and it was only when this kind of public killing came as punishment would Muslims stop smuggling cattle. When I asked about due process, they said that they did not believe in it. They were telling the truth. Pehlu Khan's family has been attacked and shot at when they have tried coming to the Behror courthouse for a hearing. It is such things Mr Bhagwat that have truly defamed our dear Bharat Mata.

If after Mohammad Akhlaq was dragged out of his house and beaten to death in the village of Bishada in Dadr district, there had been firm words of disapproval expressed by the leader of the RSS, there might have been no more. Since these words of disapproval never came, the vigilantes who have made it their cause to kill Muslims who they think might be smuggling cows or eating beef have not hesitated to admit proudly why they are doing the things they do. In some excellent investigative journalism by India Today reporters, vigilantes were filmed admitting on (hidden?) camera that the reason why they beat their victims so badly was not to kill them but to disable them for life. Victims who survive a lynching suffer from all sorts of injuries even when they live to tell the tale.

So Mr Bhagwat, your belief that this talk of lynchings is just an attempt to defame India is wrong. It is true that India's image in the world has suffered in recent years, but it is not because of some sinister plot but because too many people have seen too many times on uploaded videos the terrified eyes of men who know they are about to be beaten to death. Speak up against this kind of violence Mr Bhagwat, and not just the image of India but the image of the RSS will improve. And, next time you want to understand what a lynching is, remember that it is always something that happens in public to create terror and to revive the most primitive kind of imagined justice.

The new functionally non-literates

my life
& WORK
ALAKA BASU

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I DO NOT know if the widely publicised photograph of Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan reading a book by William Dalrymple on the plane back from the United Nations General Assembly is real or staged. But it got me thinking of our changing occupations in the air.

For various reasons, I have been taking many domestic flights lately. On each flight, I find myself conducting a secret poll. I walk up and down the aisle a couple of times, ostensibly to stretch my limbs, but actually to see what my co-passengers are up to. Somewhat disappointingly, no one is up to any hanky panky; indeed no one is up to anything at all, suspicious or innocent.

Largely male, largely in their thirties and forties, apparently comfortably off enough to be flying India's coolest airline, almost none of my co-passengers seems to want to use their literacy and education to read something during these two or three wonderfully free hours. The rare book I spot is in the hands of a woman of a certain age. In the business class section, which I also dare to walk in while doing my research, a few men frown at numbers in the business papers. I suppose reading to increase one's stock returns is making very good use of one's literacy and education. A few of my compatriots in Economy flip through the pages of the airline magazine in the manner of toddlers flipping through picture books.

As for the rest, a few are asleep, a few are staring into space, and the rest have their smartphones on. The only visible text on these phones seems to consist of 140-character sentences. Otherwise, it is invariably some movie that is straining these passengers' eyes.

One could call these non-readers functionally illiterate even if it is true that they do not fit that part of UNESCO's definition of functional illiteracy which refers to the inability to conduct the business of everyday life — balancing bank accounts, paying bills, deciphering medical instructions. It is clear that these passengers are not in the least bit handicapped on such transactional matters. However, functional literacy also includes the ability to use reading and writing capability to acquire political, social, ethical and cultural skills and understanding, to learn the value of scepticism, of self-criticism, and to know and appreciate other ways of living and doing things, instead of fearing or despising the 'other', whether across one's country or caste or gender.

If not from reading, where are any non-profitable attributes of functional literacy coming from in this new successful middle class? Judging from the overheard conversations, the fashion statements (blue jeans paired with red thread around the wrists), the American syntax, the un-

alloyed pride in one's national past and present, one is tempted to conclude that reading as a source of knowledge, opinions and values has been taken over by movies and television shows, religious and political leadership (often one can hardly tell the two apart), and WhatsApp forwards.

If this is true, then one must beg the mass media to take more seriously their mission to engage the modern, well-off, non-reader; to try harder to provoke self-reflection, grapple with what differentiates common decency from cruelty, and develop an anthropological empathy for other people and other places, even those we believe to be our sworn enemies. The media do not have to become heavy-handed and dull, and thus bankrupt, to do this — all one asks for is regular spoonfuls of something other than self-regarding and boundary-creating news and entertainment. If they can also slide in a few fun-filled minutes of book discussions, or discussions on thorny philosophical problems, or art appreciation, maybe there will even be a rise in the sales of books and in the use of lending libraries, so that our frequent flier travels with something more than an iPhone in hand.

Book publishers and sellers are trying to do their bit to entice readers. The best-seller shelves at airports are chockablock with sexy covers and titles in the fiction section, cheerful covers and titles in the self-help section, and pious covers and titles in the culture and religion section. And yet the traveller-in-a-hurry largely ignores these attractions, zeroing in instead on the kettle-cooked chips and the throat savers.

It could be of course that my airline passengers are a biased sample, that train travellers still pass some of their time with heads dug in a book. And, maybe, in air travel that does not begin or end in the nation's capital, there still exists a gentler and yet more critical view of life that is influenced by the written word. But these travellers on our premium airline are today's movers and shakers; if they don't let books move them, what will they shake our world into?

But then, each time, as soon as my plane touches ground, cellphones are whipped out, drivers summoned, meetings arranged, stock prices checked, hair patted, nationalist vigour displayed and smiles exchanged. And each time, I am again plagued by self-doubt, worried if in fact the non-readers have a much better grip than me on what constitutes the life worth living. This is what books do to you — destroy your sense of well-being. My belief that all is well, that our broken world can be mended, is in any case currently very fraught, thanks to the last two books that I read on a flight — *A Meal in Winter* by Hubert Mingarelli and Davide Enia's *Notes on a Shipwreck*. Both come upon by chance, both full of sentences to be reread, both slim easy reads, and both with a foreboding of sadness that is difficult to shake off.

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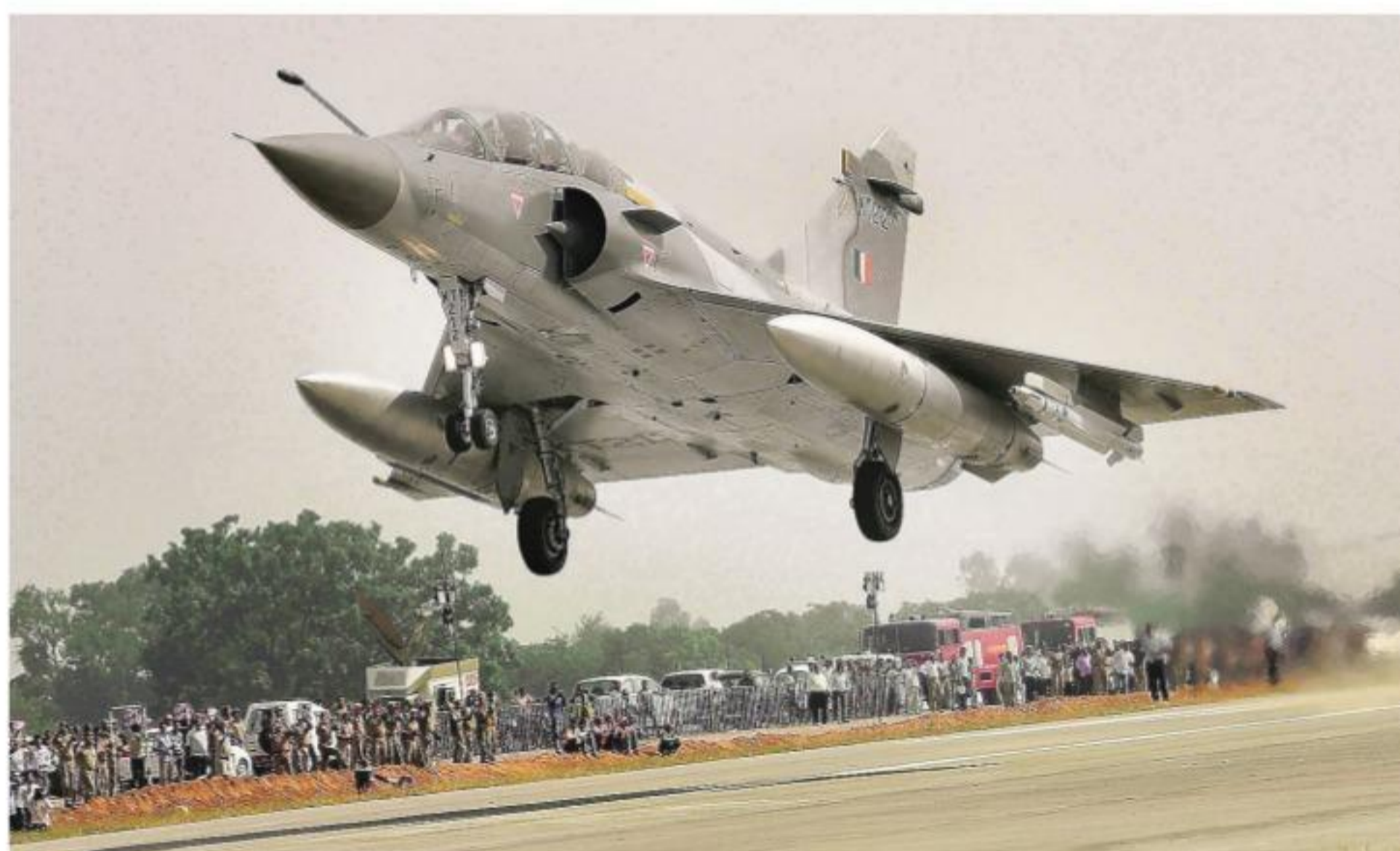
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Mirage-2000 to Rafale, the story in between



The first Mirage-2000 squadron was flown to Gwalior from France in June 1985. Express

IN NOVEMBER 1980, a few of us were assembled under the leadership of then Air Commodore Prithi Singh, an experienced test pilot, and given some papers to study. These were about the Mirage-2000. We were to evaluate the aircraft in France as a possible counter to Pakistan's F-16. At the time, we did not have any aircraft that

The MIG-29 is superb in its air superiority role but it does not have the same quality and versatility as that of the Mirage-2000. At the end of the day, the IAF bears the responsibility and the bureaucracy exercises the power to say yes or no...

We were pulled out from various places. I was then commanding a squadron and was chosen to be the team's second test pilot. There were five engineers led by Group Captain I G Krishna. It was the first fly-by-wire combat aircraft, still in prototype stage, that the Indian Air Force would be exposed to. On December 8, 1980, Air Commodore Singh took the first flight and I flew the fifth Mirage-2000 prototype the next day. We flew a few more sorties, thereafter, covering supersonic speeds to very low-level flight over the sea. It was a remarkable aircraft as was the experience. The aircraft employed technology and concepts outclassing any other that we had experienced and brought a totally new dimension to prosecuting air war.

Last week, as Defence Minister Rajnath Singh took a sortie in a Rafale fighter aircraft after an official handover ceremony of the first jet acquired by the Indian Air Force, my mind went back to

another aircraft from the Dassault stable, the Mirage-2000.

The first Mirage-2000 squadron was flown to Gwalior from France in June 1985 — of the 40 Mirage-2000s acquired by the IAF, 26 with the M53-5 engine were flown down. These engines were subsequently replaced by the more powerful P2. The RDM Radar that the aircraft had needed to undergo many improvements and software changes. The two squadrons flew a lot and became operational in record time. The aircraft proved highly reliable and the support from the French manufacturer was excellent.

Since induction, the capability of the fleet was continually improved. We managed to integrate excellent sensors, weapons and upgrade the avionics.

Two years later, in 1987, I was at the Air Headquarters as the head of Air Staff Requirement where one of my missions was to follow up on the Mirage-2000 fleet, and to focus on the development of LCA (Light Combat Aircraft) which was evolving with support from the designers of the Mirage-2000. Very soon, all hell broke loose. Many criticisms started appearing in news media. *The Sunday Mail* came out with an article on October 18, 1987, with the headline, 'How the French Duped India'. It was nasty and incorrect.

The two Mirage squadrons were working continually towards improving their mission capability. They got operational on mid-air refuelling during day

and night. They proved their worth in dramatic ways during the Kargil conflict and recently at the Balakot strike. With a very limited fleet of some 50 aircraft, they kept their lead, evolving tactics and strategy to combat enemy in the air as well to strike strategic targets.

Mirage-2000 systems and avionics became the examples to evolve those of LCA and for upgrading other fleets. TACDE (Tactics and Air Combat Development Establishment), the premier institution for evolving aerial warfare tactics, started working closely with the Mirage-2000 squadrons. The contribution of the Mirage-2000 to the IAF is enormous and it proved those who branded the aircraft as mere air show pieces as liars and venomous.

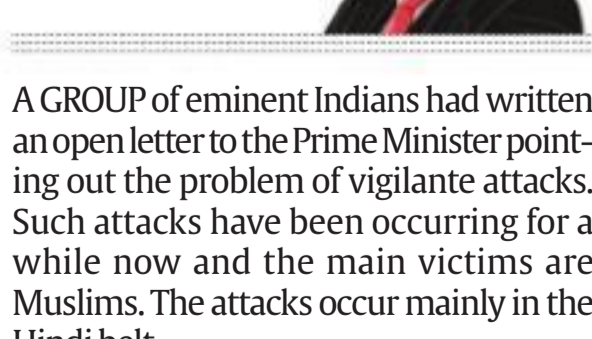
When we acquired the Mirage-2000 in 1982, there was an option to build 150 of these under license. The option was never exercised. It is a pity that in 2019, we target the LCA Mk-2 to have at least the same capability as that of the Mirage-2000. We could well have produced these at HAL under license.

In the '90s, we acquired second hand MIG-21 Trainers to overcome shortage and we now plan to buy second hand MIG-29s. The MIG-29 is superb in its air superiority role but it does not have the same quality and versatility as that of the Mirage-2000. At the end of the day, the Air Force bears the responsibility and the bureaucracy exercises the power to say yes or no, while the government takes a distant stand.

It is time we get over our hang-ups and get more professional in what we do. The noise of politicising over every military acquisition is now deafening.

The writer is former Chief of Air Staff

Out of
MY MIND
MEGHNAD DESAI



A GROUP of eminent Indians had written an open letter to the Prime Minister pointing out the problem of vigilante attacks. Such attacks have been occurring for a while now and the main victims are Muslims. The attacks occur mainly in the Hindi belt.

The authors were not revealing a dark secret or a vital aspect of India's defences. Even so, a citizen filed an FIR with the police, and a local magistrate in Bihar then filed a case for sedition under the Indian Penal Code. The case has now been closed. The astonishing thing is that the per-

Hail Macaulay for our outdated laws

son filing the FIR was not a military or a civil servant. The evidence advanced for the sedition charged was that the letter is likely to bring India into disrepute. What evidence could there possibly be for this belief? Why should a section or two of the IPC frustrate the Freedom of Expression guaranteed as a Fundamental Right in the Constitution?

To understand this, you have to go back into the past when the British ruled India. They introduced the law, lawyers and law courts which Indians love so much that 33 crore cases are outstanding, waiting to be decided. As British rule spread across India, the British needed some laws. Warren Hastings had hoped

to rule using existing Hindu and Muslim legal texts but soon that friendly approach was abandoned. English laws were to be used to keep Indians in order. The British rulers never understood their subjects — the mob as they called it. They needed someone to fashion tools for keeping Indians in order.

The one person who met the challenge was Thomas Babinpton Macaulay. In the five years he had on the Governor General's Council, he changed the face of India forever. Forget his Minute on Education. That only trained generations of Indians in English and the treasures of Western science and history. But he gave us a jewel which every government in

India values as the best gift of two centuries of English rule. This is the IPC (Indian Penal Code). He boasted that he was going to prepare the best short summary of the English penal system. He succeeded beyond his wildest dreams.

The Independence movement knew the IPC well. They suffered day in and day out from it. It was repressive. But when they came to power, they did nothing to remove the IPC or even amend its worst features. When they had the chance, they retained not just the IPC but the entire collection of laws of repression installed by the British. The rulers may have changed colour but their suspicion of the mob had not gone.

The British have reformed their laws and their penal system. But India loves Macaulay (and British Rule) so much that it cannot abandon or reform a rusty 19th-century law. The mob has to be ruled with an iron rod. Now even a group of writers and creative artists have been denounced as a mob would be. The irony is that filing of the FIR has already done the damage to India's reputation.

After a long agitation Section 377 was removed. More needs removing. It is fashionable lately to denounce Macaulay's putras. If sincere, remove the most pernicious legacy of Macaulay. Have the courage to remove or at least reform the IPC.