



The Indian EXPRESS

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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

INDIA, A TEMPLE, AND A MOSQUE

All parties must respect, abide by SC verdict on Ayodhya. BJP, in power, has an added responsibility: Make it about future, not past

AS THE RAMJANMABHOOMI-BABRI Masjid title suit in Ayodhya dragged on for over seven decades, it became clear that, in the end, it would have to be settled in court, resolution would have to come within the ambit of law and the Constitution. Politics had, far from facilitating any meaningful give and take, only deepened the polarisation. And mediation efforts outside the court had invited charges of bad faith. Closure would have to come, it became evident, not by the brute calculations of majority and minority, nor by taking the legislative route, but by invoking a higher principle. A solution would have to be situated in justice and due process, and all parties would have to respect and abide by it.

The Supreme Court verdict on Saturday, November 9, which recognises the Hindu claim over the disputed land, while directing the building of a mosque on a suitable plot elsewhere in Ayodhya, meets that promise, by and large. The unanimity of the five-judge Constitutional bench led by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi is not an incidental artefact of the ruling — it is part of its essence. In the aftermath, it instantly lowers temperatures. And going ahead, it creates crucial room for all political players to speak to their constituencies.

But of course, even a unanimous verdict sparks questions. In a democracy, on a dispute as tangled and resonant with claims, complexities and ambiguities as Ayodhya, a tidy closure will always elude.

Admittedly, the nature of the task before the court was almost impossibly fraught and, to its great credit, it has tried to find a balance between pronouncing on a matter that involves faith, belief, contested history and bringing into play settled principles of evidence sustainable in law. It has recognised the Hindu claim over the disputed site because of the existence not merely of faith and belief but of "actual worship down the centuries". Crucially, however, the court has also acknowledged that the damage to the mosque in communal conflict in 1934, its desecration in when idols were installed on the pulpit below the central dome, and its destruction in 1992, "constituted a serious violation of the rule of law". Under exercise of its powers under Article 142 of the Constitution to do "complete justice", the court has, therefore, directed that 5 acres be handed to the Sunni Waqf Board by the Central government out of the acquired land, or by the UP government within the city of Ayodhya, simultaneously to the handing over of the disputed site to a trust.

The court prefaces its verdict by saying it has been "tasked with the resolution of a dispute whose origins are as old as the idea of India itself." It unambiguously underlines that "title cannot be established on the basis of faith and belief." But after invoking the Constitution and constitutional values of justice, fraternity, human dignity and equality of religious belief, the final settlement it makes is of a bare title suit. This raises a question: Could the act of judgment have been more an act of imagination of a more equal justice? Could it be that the Allahabad HC order of a three-way ownership of the disputed land offered a cue?

These questions have no immediate answers. But one thing is clear. The Supreme Court verdict must now be taken forward and built upon by all stakeholders. In his address to the nation, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has spoken of a new resolve, a new dawn, of the need for India to leave behind past bitterness. The Opposition parties have signalled their acceptance of the verdict. There are signs of ferment among Muslim groups, with the IUML backing the ruling, but the Muslim Law Board expressing dissatisfaction. It is the right of the Muslim side of the dispute to ask for a review, but that decision must be taken calmly, wisely.

For the politics of secularism, the verdict brings the promise of freedom — from the burdens and dead-ends of a congealed dispute. It is now faced with the task of renewal — to find a new vocabulary, and to fill it with new issues and meanings. For the BJP, too, which used the Ramjanmabhoomi dispute and the demolition of the Babri masjid to propel itself to relevance and power, this is a moment of challenge: At a time when the judicial clearing of the path to the temple helps it to claim political vindication, as the ruling party at the Centre and a majority of states, in a country where almost half of the population was born after 1992, it needs to make the Ayodhya verdict more about the future, less about the past.

Ram's political triumph

The reconfiguration of Hinduism, where political rather than spiritual forces represent it, is now complete



PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

THE BIRTH OF the Ramayana, as we know it, is in an act of grief. A *nishada* hunter strikes down the male of a pair of *krauncha* birds. The unslain female bird utters a mournful cry. Unable to bear the separation, she too dies. This primal scene of crime, and the anguish it generates, prompts Valmiki to compose the Ramayana. But the deep sorrow of that crime haunts the story. Ram has his triumphal moments — vanquishing Ravana, establishing Ram Rajya. Ram always sides with duty, some exalted high ideal that makes his own desires irrelevant. That is his greatness. But there is also no escaping the fact that Ram himself never finds inner repose. His deepest moments of anguish arise precisely when he acts as a sovereign, overcoming his natural *karuna*, sidelining it for some kingly duty. It is almost as if his most political of acts, the banishment of Sita, is contrary to his own nature. It is when Ram acts as a political agent, that his torment is most pronounced. His political acts, sometimes, make him guilty of wrongdoing. He is saved, if at all, only by the forgiveness of Sita as Bhavabhuti perceptively noted. It is Ram in the end who is most in need of *karuna*. The fact that Ram politically triumphs is not always the moment that he is morally redeemed, or made whole.

So Ram has triumphed politically. The Supreme Court has declared that he, in his incarnate form, has sovereign rights to 2.77 acres of disputed land. Any other claimants to the land, especially the waqf board, cannot claim adverse possession to the land. The sovereignty of Ram's empire over the hearts and minds of Hindus has been resoundingly affirmed. He is an object of worship, a locus of faith whose importance cannot be denied. He has politically triumphed over all the deniers: Those who denied he existed, and those who denied that there was an attempt to erase his tem-

ples. He has triumphed because a way has been cleared for the central government to manage Ram's land, to create a grand structure to mark his divinity. His sovereignty, and our faith in him, can now be affirmed in legalese, and etched in stone.

The Supreme Court had a difficult job on its hands. It is a reflection on the state of India's politics that the idea that the pre-1991 status quo ante would be restored was ruled out right from the start. It is hard to imagine what Indian politics would be like if the Court had asked for the restoration of the Babri Masjid. So, the only two other options were a victory for the Hindu side, or some imaginative solution that did equal justice to all kinds of claims involved in this dispute. The Allahabad High Court judgment, flawed as it was, was very explicitly a balancing act: Divide the property, respect all faiths, and put the past behind us. In some ways, this judgment has gone for a corner solution. It does say, none of the claimants can prove adverse possession; it does recognise that the demolition of the Babri Masjid was an act of political vandalism. It provides compensatory relief for the waqf board. But in its operative part, this judgment is the opposite of the Allahabad High Court — no division of property; one faith nominally given priority over another, and an affirmation that long gone historical wrongs can continue to be the basis of new legal claims.

But will this moment of political triumph solve Ram's inner torment? Or will it only exacerbate it? We hope that the judgment, right or wrong, will depoliticise the issue. It has been settled. Let us move on. This would be the best option, a chance for Indian secularism to get a fresh start. But there are reasons to be nervous on three fronts: Psychological, institutional and politi-



CR Sasikumar

A government trust will now determine how worship at the site will be materialised. Is it just possible that instead of a triumphal monument to Ram's political glory — for this is all that the temple will be under present circumstances — can we build something genuinely congruent with Ram's greatness?

For Hindu nationalists, this is a moment in a long historical struggle. They identify Hindus as subjugated. The demolition of the Babri Masjid was a cathartic moment, and the building of a temple will be the denouement for a long repressed civilisation.

Has that cathartic need now been satiated? Or will this simply embolden those who see politics as an apocalyptic conflict between Hindus and others, to assert their pride even more insistently? Second, in public form we all respect the unanimous view of the Supreme Court. But let us not pretend that, if not in this case, in a wider context, the Court's credibility is in serious doubt. Will marginalised groups read this as a loss of faith in the fairness of Indian institutions or not? Politically, does this judgment deepen the fusing of religion and politics? In some ways, the institutional fusion has been deepening for a while — the political, legal and religious movements have all intermingled. But with a central government trust, now in charge of effectively building a temple,

the state is the medium through which Hindu sovereignty is now being exercised. The political reconfiguration of Hinduism, where political rather than spiritual forces now represent it, is now complete.

We all ardently wish that India moves on. The settlement should take the issue, and all allied psychological complexes of Hindu subjugation off the table. But here is an outlandish thought. A government trust will now determine how worship at the site will be materialised. Is it just possible that instead of a triumphal monument to Ram's political glory — for this is all that the temple will be under present circumstances — can we build something genuinely congruent with Ram's greatness? Something that marks a new kind of holiness not predicated on the revenge of history or the narcissism of group identities? Can we create a new liturgy that is genuinely inclusive of all religions, and looks to dawns of the future rather than glories of the past? What this might be can be left to more imaginative minds to devise. But such a gesture would be, in the face of this legal triumph, an even more poignant way to move on. It will save both secularism from identification with majoritarianism and Hinduism from identification with a prideful communal identity. The Court decision does not foreclose this option, and it would be entirely in keeping with Ram's *karuna*. No one disputed Ram. But making the fate of 2.77 acres of land a litmus test of respect for Ram, and for the fate of a civilisation, was an act of vandalism on Hinduism as well. Ram's political triumph should not leave him, like in Valmiki's Ramayana, with an inner torment, at war with his better more compassionate self.

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PEACE AND A TEMPLE

The Ram temple struggle is over, let's hope for harmony for all now



RAM MADHAV

THE RAM TEMPLE at Ayodhya will soon be a reality, now that the legal hurdles have been removed by the Supreme Court.

Symbols of vandalism and iconoclasm at the most sacred places of Hindus, like Ayodhya, have been very big sources of embarrassment as the sentiments associated with such places are quite deep-rooted. It is not just about a temple or a mosque. There are any number of thriving mosques in the country. There are more than a hundred mosques in the vicinity of Ayodhya, many of them unkept. It is about the renewed sense of assertion of a nation.

Historian Arnold Toynbee talks about it in the context of a church in Warsaw pulled down by the Poles. "In the course of the first Russian occupation of Warsaw (1914-1915) the Russians had built an Eastern Orthodox Christian cathedral on this central spot in the city that had been the capital of the once independent Roman Catholic

Christian country Poland. The Russians had done this to give the Poles a continuous ocular demonstration that the Russians were their masters. After re-establishment of Poland's independence in 1918, the Poles pulled this cathedral down... I do not greatly blame the Polish government for having pulled down that Russian church. The purpose for which the Russians had built it had been not religious but political, and the purpose had also been intentionally offensive". Toynbee said.

"Perhaps the Poles were really kinder in destroying the Russians' self-discrediting monument in Warsaw," he added. The Muslims should look at Ayodhya probably from the same perspective. They are saved by the Supreme Court from the embarrassment of defending the indefensible in the name of religion. It might be instructive for them to remember that Islam came to India from West Asia not just riding over the shoulders of invaders like Mahmud of Ghazni

and Babur, but also through Sufi saints of the 13th century like Hazrat Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, who came to spread the message of love and harmony. Ajmer Sharif is a standing testimony to the fact that India is an inclusive and pluralist civilisation where all religions thrive.

Hindus too would be making a mistake if they look at Ayodhya from a religious prism or from the prism of "avenging historical wrongs". Leaders of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement as well as the other Hindu organisations have also stressed upon it in their statements after the verdict. A similar historic event happened about 70 years ago: The Somnath temple, destroyed by Ghazni several centuries before the arrival of Mughal invaders, was rebuilt in 1950. The then president of India, Rajendra Prasad, had said, "By rising from its ashes again, this temple... will proclaim to the world that no man and no power in the world can destroy that for which people have boundless faith...

Our only aim is to proclaim anew our attachment to the faith, convictions and values on which our religion has rested since immemorial ages."

Ram Janmabhoomi is about those values. Together, with a magnificent Ram temple at Ayodhya, shall rise a nation imbued with those values that Mahatma Gandhi, whose 150th birth anniversary we are celebrating, used to describe Ram Rajya. Ram epitomised values like respect, love and dignity. These values are not reserved for Ram's own people alone, but everyone including the enemies. When he encountered Ravana on the battlefield, he was said to have bowed to him in respect before aiming at him. For him, material wealth alone was not the ultimate goal in life. "Even if Lanka were to be a kingdom of gold, I shall consider my mother and motherland to be superior to it," he declared.

There were very few intellectuals appreciating the deeper message of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement in

the 1990s, when it was at its peak, except for Girilal Jain, Arun Shourie, and a handful of others. The larger liberal intellectual establishment of the country was ferociously anti-temple, forcing Nobel laureate VS Naipaul to comment in an interview that, "It is not enough to abuse them or to use that fashionable word from Europe: Fascism. There is a big historical development going on in India. Wise men should understand it. Rather, they should use it for intellectual transformation of India."

It was a long struggle that has finally seen its culmination today. Swami Chinmayananda, eminent spiritual guru, used to say: "This whole fight for Ayodhya is for 'Ayuddha' - non-war". Let us hope that with the rise of the Ram temple, this country shall see lasting peace and harmony.

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FAITH WINS OVER LAW

The Ayodhya judgment is a setback to evidence law with differential burden of proof being demanded from different parties



FAIZAN MUSTAFA AND AYMEN MOHAMMED

THE SUPREME COURT has tried to please everyone in its much awaited judgment on the property dispute in Ayodhya. The worshippers of Lord Ram have been given land for the construction of a temple at the very site where the Babri Masjid stood between 1528 and December 6, 1992.

The Nirmohi Akhara has welcomed the judgment as it will be given some representation in the trust that would construct the temple. The Sunni Waqf Board too must have the satisfaction that the highest court has accepted their central argument that the Babri Masjid was a Sunni, and not Shia, waqf property, and the same was not constructed after demolishing the Ram temple. Thus, the court has rejected the Hindu right's narrative on the Babri mosque. This false narrative not only was responsible for galvanising the ordinary Hindus, but also gave

some sort of legitimacy to divisive electoral politics. Similarly, Muslim grievances about the trespass in 1949 and the tragic demolition of the mosque in 1992 have been accepted by the court. In fact, the court has accepted that there was an injury caused to them — i.e. violation of their legal right. Accordingly, the court, invoking its extraordinary jurisdiction of doing complete justice, has given them almost double the land in Ayodhya.

The Ayodhya dispute did not begin in 1528 with Babur, the founder of Mughal empire, but in 1886 with litigation in the British courts over a *chabutra* (courtyard) that was constructed outside the Babri Masjid by one Mahant Raghubar Das in the late 1850s. When the British prevented the construction of a canopy over the *chabutra*, Das unsuccessfully litigated his cause in three judicial forums. Each

time, the courts emphasised status quo — that is, the Muslims would pray inside the Babri Masjid while the Hindus had limited rights to pray at the *chabutra*. Surprisingly, the apex court has rejected title of Muslims for want of proof of title document. This may have repercussions for several temples and mosques. The court rejected the revenue record and gazetteers as sufficient proof. Even the British grant papers were said to be sufficient only for proving the upkeep of the mosque.

In law, the phrase "status quo" means the situation at the time of the judgment must not be changed. The Babri litigation is a story of changing "status quo". On the night of December 22-23, 1949, trespassers placed Lord Ram's idol under the central dome of the Babri Masjid. In a few days after the incident, a new status quo would be sanctified by the local

Certainly in matters of freedom of religion, the court should not have any say, but deciding title suit on the basis of faith is a thorny proposition.

courts: Muslims were not allowed to pray inside the mosque, the idol would not be removed, and that Hindus would have a "limited" right to pray and pujaris would ensure daily *bhag*. By one act of criminal trespass, a mosque was converted into a temple.

On February 1, 1986, District Judge K M Pandey would order the unlocking of gates that acted as a "barrier" between the idols inside the masjid and the devotees who had come for the darshan. This decision had the blessing of then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, who in order to mollify the self-anointed regressive Muslim leadership would subsequently introduce the bill to reverse the Shah Bano judgment on February 25, 1986.

The demolition of the mosque on December 6, 1992 was also the destruction of the rule of law. The SC has rightly criticised it and accepted that

it was in violation of the "status quo" order passed by it. Within a few hours of the mosque's demolition, a makeshift temple had come up at the structure's location. Within a month of the demolition, the Allahabad High Court allowed for darshan at the makeshift temple. In 1994, the Supreme Court, while dealing with the Acquisition of Certain Areas of Ayodhya Act, ordered the protection of the latest "status quo": No mosque but a makeshift temple and legally protected darshan at the site.

In 2010, the Lucknow bench of Allahabad High Court ruled that the title suit must be decided as a question of joint-ownership of property. Muslims, the deity Ram Lalla and Nirmohi Akhara were to get one-third share of the disputed property. The Supreme Court has overruled this judgment and rightly held that it was

not a partition suit.

The judgment will be remembered for the victory of faith over the rule of law as the Supreme Court considered religious beliefs even in deciding a property dispute, and despite conceding that faith cannot confer title, it still went ahead to give property to worshippers on the basis of faith. The court should not have any say in matters of freedom of religion, but deciding title suit on the basis of faith is a thorny proposition. In brief, it is the red letter day for the constitutional right to religion but a setback to property law and a setback to evidence law with differential burden of proof being demanded from different parties.

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inside TRACK
COOMIKAPOOR

JNU ESCAPE ARTISTES

THE FACT that Nobel prize winner Abhijit Banerjee was imprisoned in 1983 in Tihar for 12 days for participating in a *dharna* against the then JNU vice-chancellor has evoked interest. Sunil Gupta, the former legal adviser for Tihar Jail, in his new book, *Black Warrant*, provides an interesting postscript to the tale. Some 250 JNU students were arrested for arson and rioting, but amazingly, 170 students, including 55 women, managed to escape right under the noses of the jailors. A large number of visitors met the students on their first day in jail. In those days Tihar visitors were identified simply by a stamp on their wrists. The students took advantage of the hot and sweaty weather in May to transfer the stamp image from one wrist to another. The bumbling jail authorities did not notice that three times the number of visitors left the jail as had entered. They also discovered belatedly that the arrested students had all given fake names and police never bothered to verify their identities. So the escapees could not be traced. Incidentally, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman was then a member of the Free Thinkers group, one of the two student bodies which organised the protest.

CRUMBLING HOUSE

The government's decision to convert the historic Parliament House, built in 1927, into a museum is not without reason. Signs of ageing of the iconic circular structure have been apparent for some time. In the 1990s, when Najma Heptulla was the deputy chairperson of the Rajya Sabha, a terrible stench sometimes pervaded the House. Eventually the drainpipes under the floor had to be dug up and diverted. During P V Narasimha Rao's tenure as prime minister, there was pandemonium in the Lok Sabha one day when a piece of cement fell off the roof. To keep away pigeons that regularly perched and cooed in the Lok Sabha's high ceiling, a large net was installed under the dome. Later, the windows of the dome were permanently shut to keep the birds out. Since a major gas fire in the kitchen, cooking in the heritage building has been forbidden. Food is now brought from outside and warmed on electric heaters. Thankfully the parliamentary staff seems to have successfully tackled the monkey menace. There was a time when simians roamed the circular verandahs.

DAUNTING TASK

The Jal Jeevan Mission under the Ministry of Jal Shakti is envisaged to achieve for Narendra Modi's second tenure what the Swachh Abhiyan campaign did for his first. The mission's budget is a whopping \$51 billion and the goal is set very high. At present only 18 per cent of rural households have tap water connection and the



Ageing of the iconic Parliament building has been apparent for some time. File

aim is to provide the entire country safe drinking water. PM Modi hopes to replicate the success of WASMO (the Water and Sanitation Management Organisation), which he established in Gujarat in 2007 as chief minister. Today, 78 per cent of rural households in Gujarat get water supply through taps. Modi has ensured that those recruited for the water ministry have domain knowledge. Secretary Parameswaran Iyer has focused on projects concerning water and sanitation through most of his career, including in the Swachh Bharat Mission. Additional

Secretary Bharat Lal is usually associated with his tenure as resident commissioner, Gujarat, and as joint secretary in Rashtrapati Bhavan, but he has worked earlier both with water projects in the Rural Development Ministry and with WASMO in Gujarat.

NOT SO MEEK

N C Saxena, who was a member of the National Advisory Council (NAC) during UPA time, in his recent book, *What Ails the IAS*, suggests that Manmohan Singh

as prime minister did not follow Congress president Sonia Gandhi's writ unquestioningly, as has been alleged. He notes that Singh and his adviser, Montek Ahluwalia, often differed with Gandhi, who chaired the NAC. The PM was not in favour of safety net programmes such as NREGA, for example, writes Saxena. Significantly, the NAC was not reconstituted immediately after the Congress returned to power in 2009 and, according to the book, Singh reluctantly revived it in March 2010. The Food Security Bill was delayed for two years by the then PM and the Act finally passed with modifications because of pressure from Gandhi, it adds. Saxena also points out that Singh did not renew the membership of three NAC members, including the outspoken Harsh Mander, in 2012 even though Gandhi herself acknowledged their valuable contributions.

FACES TO REMEMBER

Well-known artist and Trinamool Congress Rajya Sabha MP Jogen Chowdhury, whose term expires next March, has put his years in Parliament to good use. He has sketched the faces of many colleagues in the House over the years, including Manmohan Singh, Smriti Irani, Sitaram Yechury, Amit Shah, Ghulam Nabi Azad and the late Arun Jaitley and Sushma Swaraj. The artist plans to compile his parliamentary sketches for a book. Chowdhury describes his experience as an MP as, "invaluable for an artist. It was like watching different characters on a stage".



Fifth COLUMN
TAVLEEN SINGH
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An adda with the Finance Minister

WHILE WAITING for Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to appear at the Express Adda last week in the glittering ballroom of the St Regis Hotel, I got chatting with some important businessmen. I asked them what the mood was now in Mumbai's mighty corridors of commercial power. They said without hesitation, "The mood is gloomy. Nothing is happening at all on the investment front and the government is not paying its bills so there is no improvement on infrastructure... The NHAI cannot expect roads to be built if it doesn't pay its contractors." As soon as they finished talking, these worthy gentlemen looked nervously around and said that they would be grateful if I did not quote them. So they shall remain nameless. Suffice it to say that what they said is something I hear almost daily in this city, whether I am talking to big businessmen or small shopkeepers.

In the words of one big businessman who also requested anonymity, "We had hoped that Modi's first Budget after winning a second term would indicate signs of major reforms, but this did not happen. They say that the Budget was prepared by bureaucrats and handed to the Finance Minister to read out which is why there was nothing new in it. That is unfortunate. The situation in the private sector is so grim that solutions will only be found if Modi appoints an economic czar, like he has a political czar in Amit Shah." When I asked if Nirmala Sitharaman could become that czarina, he said she had done a good thing by lowering corporate taxes but not much else had happened.

I arrived early at the Adda to get a seat close enough to the stage. I wanted a chance to ask the Finance Minister a question I have been longing to ask her about, something she said while imposing her super-rich tax in the Budget. She had said it would affect less than 5,000 super-rich Indians so she had no problem imposing it. I wanted to ask Nirmala Sitharaman if she was ashamed that in a country of more than a billion people there were only 5,000 super-rich Indians. So as soon as the floor was open for questions, I asked my question. She said she would like 'millions of Indians' to come into the super-rich bracket. What was she doing to make this happen, I persisted, and she said, "I have lowered corporate taxes, haven't I?" She smiled as she said this so I was not sure if she was being ironic or serious. But, the truth is that she will have to do much, much more as Finance Minister if we are to see that miserable figure of 5,000 rise to even 50,000 by the end of Narendra Modi's second term as Prime Minister. At the moment super-rich Indians are fleeing in their thousands to countries in which it is easier to do business.

The Prime Minister routinely announces proudly that India has gone up many notches on the international charts that measure the ease of doing business. If only he could wander unnoticed in the city that we grandly call India's commercial capital, he would discover that he has little to be cheerful about. There is a peculiar menace in the air that has intensified in his second term because petty officials in positions of huge regulatory power appear to believe that it is open season on businessmen. It is as if they are conspiring to ensure that India remains stuck in a sort of undeclared licence raj, that now comes in the form of regulations instead of licences. It is no surprise at all that investment has not picked up.

Unless it does, there is little hope that those 12 million new jobs that need to be created every year will begin to happen. Wherever I go these days, I meet fashionably dressed young men who have about them a restless, angry quality. When I stop to talk to them, they tell me that they are all educated and so do not think that they should become farmers. In any case, they say, there are too many people in every family already employed on the farm. They want real jobs, they say, jobs that will enable them to better their lives and better the lives of their children. The dream of prosperity that Modi sold them remains a dream. It is these restless, angry young men who are meant to be India's greatest asset and they are losing hope. If there is one single factor that could cause a sudden, sharp drop in Modi's immense personal popularity, some day soon, it is his seeming inability to chase away the dark clouds that continue to hover darkly over the economy. Modi's ministers who blame this enduring downturn on the global situation fool only themselves. Nobody believes what they say.

When snooping brought down a CM and a PM



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AS ALLEGATIONS of illegal phone-tapping rock the Karnataka Assembly, with the CBI investigation revealing that police were snooping in on several public figures in the state, it's déjà vu all over again for politics in India. The recent WhatsApp row and the storm it has kicked up in political corridors — while the Opposition alleged that the government had a role in the snooping, the latter brought up the "bugging" of then finance minister Pranab Mukherjee's office during the UPA regime in 2011 — is only another version of this cloak-and-dagger drama that's old hat for Indian politicians.

Flash back to the heady days of the late 1980s, when Rajiv Gandhi, once hailed as 'Mr Clean' by the media, was on the decline. And Ramakrishna Hegde, the charismatic Janata Party chief minister of Karnataka, was in the ascendant, widely seen as a potential prime ministerial candidate from the non-Congress camp. His two consecutive victories in the 1983 and 1985 Assembly elections in Karnataka had

side was well prepared to take the matter to a conclusive end. The issue came up in Parliament, with Union Minister of Communications Bir Bahadur Singh announcing that some 50 telephone numbers had been tapped in Karnataka. He cited evidence, including orders signed by the DIG (Intelligence), for tapping telephones of people, to back his assertion.

On August 10, 1988, Hegde tendered his resignation and was succeeded by his party colleague SR Bommai. The political objective realised, everybody gave up on the issue. Though it did not mark the end of Hegde's political career, he ceased being a front-runner for the top job.

Three years later, in March 1991, allegations of snooping resulted in another casualty, triggering the collapse of the Congress-backed Chandra Shekhar government at the Centre, barely four months after it had assumed office.

The allegation that former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi was being spied upon by a couple of Haryana policemen was as bizarre as the arrangement of a 64-member breakaway faction of the Janata Dal enjoying power with the outside support of the 197-member Congress.

On March 2, 1991, the minders of Rajiv Gandhi caught two men, Prem Singh and Raj Singh, from a roadside spot close to 10, Janpath. They were sipping tea hawked by a small-time vendor, when some people suddenly descended on the scene and forcibly took them away. Dressed in plainclothes, the men confessed to being Haryana CID personnel. According to Haryana's political folklore, Rajiv Gandhi was tipped off by Ranjit Singh, younger brother and rival of then Haryana chief minister Om Prakash Chautala, who was among leading lights of Chandra Shekhar's Samajwadi Janata Party (Rashtriya).

That was reason enough for Rajiv Gandhi to pull the rug from under Chandra Shekhar's feet.

The latter tried reaching out to the former to dispel all his misgivings, but in vain. Gandhi was insistent upon Chandra Shekhar's resignation. Left with no choice, Chandra Shekhar put in his papers four days later, on March 6, 1991. As in the Hegde case, no one showed any interest in getting to the bottom of the snooping charge against the Haryana policemen. It was never disclosed, if at all, who had ordered them to spy on Rajiv Gandhi. And also, what information the two men had gathered or could possibly gather by standing in a bylane of 10, Janpath.



my life & WORK
VIJAYANTAARYA

'Do I have to go back, my children ask me'



Delhi Police personnel on protest in the Capital last week following a clash with lawyers. Express photo

THERE CONTINUES to be a lot of curiosity around women in police. Every time a girl opts for khaki, those around her raise their brows in concern. How will it be like, who will marry her, how will she raise a family, oh there are unlimited work hours, what about her safety?

I remember that as an under-training officer whenever I would be out at night for patrolling or surprise checks, my parents and particularly my father would call and ask, 'Tere naal kinne gumman ne (How many armed personnel do you have with you)?', and I would emphatically say 'Oh, there are many of us'. It's not easy for our caretakers to reconcile to the fact that their

cer's professionalism and competence get judged every time she encounters a situation. There is a natural comparison with a 'male' colleague, and if he could have done it better.

Facing violent mobs is part of our routine duties, and at times, segments that are part of the crowd use the opportunity to rough up women officers, deriving sadistic pleasure from taking on women in positions of power, with khaki a vivid symbol of it. Also they look upon us as 'soft' targets. They think they can deter us from leading, from doing our duty, and compel us into retreating by violating our personal space.

However, they fail, as they do not understand that injury to any woman or man in khaki is not an assault on the individual but a collective blow against every one of us tied by the thread of khaki. We take pride in it, as we stand up for crimes against women and strive towards making social spaces safer for them.

As part of the job, like every policeman, we sacrifice our own families. Most days our children have gone to sleep by the time we reach home. There are no regulated meal times, not just for us but our families too. Asked about my children's ages and classes, I often take a minute before I can reply. The first question my children, aged seven and five, ask me when I get home is do I have to go back. They know that even if I am sleeping next to

them at night, I may have to leave anytime because duty calls.

More than half the time police personnel have to seek extension for their children's school homework because we forget to look into their notebooks. My children are growing up without me, literally.

Since my husband is also in the police service (Devender Arya is DCP Southwest) our days are quite similar — endless, routineless. Quality family time is difficult to come by, simply because it is unusual for both of us to be home at the same time. There is no concept of a weekend because the week never ends. And on all occasions warranting celebration like festivals, we have to be extra vigilant and alert. There is also a great deal of role reversal, with both of us playing mother or father depending on our availability. But, since police personnel have committed themselves to the service of the nation, I feel families have to be ready for these sacrifices.

While all professions come with their share of hazards, this call for a little extra puts a police job apart. Every time we fall, we resolve to rise up, stronger than ever, surprising everyone, including ourselves. I write this today, with all my love, for khaki and women in khaki. Dear colleagues, let no one bottle the genie, continue to make magic in everything that you do, wherever you go.

"Har ladai ki tarah, iss kashmkash mein bhi saath hain/Ek dusre se hum hain, hamare ik se jabbaat hain (Like every fight, we are together in this one too/It's not you and me who make us, but we are one and the same)."

Arya is a 2009 batch IPS officer currently serving as DCP, North West Delhi

A woman police officer's competence and professionalism get judged every time she encounters a situation. There is a natural comparison with a 'male' colleague, and if he could have done it better than her



Out of MY MIND
MEGHNAD DESAI

I WISH the contract to renovate the surroundings of the Raisina Hills, with Parliament, the North and South Blocks, had not been awarded before the recent Emergency on the air pollution front. Although Delhi air later changed from 'deathly' to 'poor', the viability of Delhi as a habitat needs to be questioned. Delhi is overcrowded, overbuilt, with far too many cars. There is no municipal governance one can discern which has any interest and/or effectiveness in environment control. The AAP government has stopped behaving like a bunch of teenagers and be-

Dilli Chhodo: Time for a new Capital

gun to do serious work. But the Opposition behaves in a manner (with BJP leader Vijay Goel flaunting an SUV to defy odd-even regulations) which does not assure citizens (or even a frequent visitor like myself) that they understand the seriousness of the crisis facing Delhi.

The answer to the problem is at hand but requires boldness and an ambitious vision, which means Prime Minister Narendra Modi has to step in. There is a need to decongest Delhi. But this is also the right time, in the 70th year as a sovereign democratic republic, to ask whether India should have a brand new Capital free of the burden of memories of Old Emperors. Delhi is a capital city by accident. It is

at the gate of India, from where invaders used to come through the Khyber Pass. North India is landlocked and Delhi is crucial, for the North. Earlier empires had their capital in Pataliputra/Patna. From Alexander till Babar the conquerors came from the Northwest. The last conquerors came by sea and landed not in the North but on the coastal extremities. They only moved their imperial capital to Delhi less than a century ago. That proved a fatal choice and they did not last in their Lootyens Delhi for long.

The Republic of India has the most extensive territory, larger than any previous Empire it has seen — Hindu, Afghan, Mughal or British. It needs its own

Capital. The Capital should be centrally located, equidistant between North and South, East and West. It should be commissioned by the BJP/NDA government, and designed and built by whoever wins a global competition.

But where should it be? I have one suggestion, but there could be others. There is in the Dandakaranya the ideal ample space to build a new Capital. It is ideal because it straddles North and South, East and West. It touches states from Maharashtra to Odisha, Chhattisgarh to Telangana. It is at the heart of India. Its 90,000 sq km will have ample space and a healthy natural environment to build a fantastic new Capital for new India.

Many nations build their Capital as exclusively for government business and keep their commercial centres separate. The US has Washington DC as a special city for national politics. Malaysia has a similar arrangement. Brazil commissioned Brasilia specially as a new capital away from São Paulo or Rio. Canada has Ottawa, Australia Canberra.

Delhi will always be there as it has been. But the British constructions of 1911-1930 can be abandoned and sold off along with Lootyens Delhi to finance the new Capital. With the political Capital gone, Delhi will breathe again. It can be a proper Union Territory, not mixed up with National Capital.