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Time to lift the  
smokescreenAir pollution kills, but the environment  
minister continues to be in denial

**U**nion environment minister Anil Dave is a brave man. At a time when people are becoming increasingly cautious about air pollution and the harmful effect it has on health, and several studies are warning of the same, Mr Dave told the Lok Sabha this week that there is not enough "evidence" in India to establish a direct correlation between diseases and air pollution. "Air pollution could be one of the triggering factors for respiratory ailments and associated diseases," he said in a statement. In the past, the minister had stirred controversy by expressing reservations about the findings of foreign studies that are cited in the media to highlight the problem in India. Recent studies have claimed that India's poor air quality causes nearly 1.1 million premature deaths every year, almost on a par with China.

Expanding on the argument that deaths cannot be directly linked to air pollution, the environment minister described health impacts as "generally synergistic manifestation of the individual's food habits, occupational habits, socio-economic status, medical history, immunity, heredity, etc." In response to his assertions, Sunita Narain, director general of the Centre for Science and Environment, said, "There is more than enough evidence across the world that air pollution kills...if the Indian minister is in denial it is extremely unfortunate."

If one rereads Mr Dave's statement in Parliament, the minister used his words cleverly. He said that air pollution "could be" one of the triggering factors but there is not enough evidence in India. In other words, there is no government-generated study to establish the link. This is true: The environment ministry is working with the ministry of health and family welfare to "assess the trends and impact [of air pollution]". So far now the plan to tackle air pollution, according to Mr Dave, is this: People must suffer till as long as a study by the government does not establish the link between air pollution and diseases. This is a strange stand to take since on many other issues, the government agrees with studies/rankings from by foreign agencies. Mr Dave should at least apprise us of the shortcomings of the existing studies, many of which have come from credible institutions.

## Rewarding law-breakers

The Rajasthan government has no business asking  
Hindutva groups to adjudicate on Bhansali's film

**T**he message that goes out is clear and frightening. That breaking the law, violence and vandalism earns you the right to impose your intolerant views on subjects over which you have no jurisdiction. On a day when the sets of the film Padmavati was attacked in Kolhapur, Rajasthan social justice and empowerment minister Arun Chaturvedi has said the film would be screened before a committee of the Shri Rashtriya Rajput Karni Sena (SRKS) and "other knowledgeable members of society" and their objections invited before the film was released in the state. In January, the SRKS had attacked filmmaker Sanjay Leela Bhansali and destroyed his film set while shooting at Jaigarh Fort. Now that the sets have been attacked again in Kolhapur, the police have come up with an odd explanation — Bhansali had asked for police protection during the day but at night the sets were unguarded and so vulnerable. On March 5, the SRKS destroyed two mirrors at Chittorgarh Fort, a Unesco world heritage site, on account that according to legend, Alauddin Khilji was shown Rani Padmini's face in these.

Mr Chaturvedi is colluding with vandals in order to uphold some mythical customs. The SRKS and other Hindutva groups have no locus standi on what contents a film can have or to impose conditions on its screening. That is the job of the censor board. What he is doing is legitimising and condoning violence, indeed rewarding it by allowing these extraneous forces to decide on what films should be made and what people can watch. This official sanction will embolden other groups to exert more demands. Across the country, we see intolerance towards anyone who goes against what the custodians of tradition decree. We see fatwas against a young Muslim girl singing against terrorism, another Muslim girl singing Hindu devotional songs, and Hindutva groups going on the rampage for perceived insults to religion and culture. This should not be tolerated in a democracy where everyone has the right to express themselves in any way they please as long as they do not violate the law.

If today groups like the SRKS can sit in judgement on a film, tomorrow they will extend their remit to other areas. The Rajasthan government must come out condemning its minister and make it clear that no one other than legitimately appointed bodies will decide on what films can be shown in the state.

beyond the bite

RAJDEEP SARDESAI

How to combat  
Brand ModiThe Opposition must redraw the vocabulary  
of politics to attract a younger demographic  
that wants jobs and equal opportunity

**I**n the aftermath of the 2014 general election debacle, I asked a senior Congressman how his party would now battle the Narendra Modi juggernaut. "Not to worry, we have time on our side," he claimed rather confidently. The message was that with Rahul Gandhi still in his early forties, five years out of power wasn't an issue. Now, almost three years later, the 2017 electoral verdict in Uttar Pradesh and beyond has only confirmed that time is rapidly running out for the Congress and the Opposition. The prime minister has already made his intentions clear: He wants to see a "new India" emerge in 2022, underlining his determination to be in office for 10 years and beyond.

How then does a dispirited and fragmented Opposition combat a consummate 24X7 politician like Modi who seeks to monopolise the entire political narrative with his larger than life persona and astute communication skills? Today, Modi claims the "nationalist" space (surgical strikes against Pakistan), the anti-corruption plank (the "war on black money" rhetoric), the aspirational mood (the Start Up India idea), the pro-poor agenda (with schemes like the LPG-kerosene ujwala programme) and the kisan vote (soil health card scheme). What then is left for the Opposition to claim as its own idea when even UPA schemes like Aadhaar are now linked to Brand Modi?

First, the Opposition needs to hold Modi accountable for his mistakes but end its blind hostility to any and every move of the central government. For example, the demonetisation step deserved a serious, bipartisan debate but ended up in screechy name-calling. If only the Opposition had chosen to intelligently expose the government with hard facts and figures instead of disrupting Parliament, they might have at least won over the middle classes.

Second, Modi's opponents need to look beyond the 2002

Gujarat riots "maut ka saudagar" script, which only consolidates the BJP's growing Hindu constituency. The riots are a grave and permanent blot on the prime minister's reputation but simply recalling the bloodstained imagery of communal violence won't work any longer. Entire generations of millennial Indians who are now of voting age have no memory, visual or otherwise, of the riots. The challenge posed to a multi-religious society by the gradual spread of political Hindutva which excludes minority voices is genuine, but it cannot be done in a manner that a political party is seen to only prey on the fears of one community. Third, while the idea of a "mahagathbandhan" that brings together all anti-Modi forces may appear electorally attractive, it fails to realise that chemistry matters just as much as arithmetic in a highly-competitive political arena. The Nitish-Lalu-Congress combine worked in Bihar not just because of its numerical advantage, but also because Nitish Kumar had a certain credibility as an effective chief minister. On the other hand, the 'UP ke ladke', Akhilesh Yadav and Rahul Gandhi, just didn't carry the same credibility quotient to match up to Modi's pan-Indian appeal. Opportunistic alliances are no substitute for a convincing common programme of governance or for a trustworthy leadership.

Fourth, parties like the Congress need to shed their high command culture, which prevents autonomous decision-making and the emergence of strong regional leaders. The Congress, for example, achieved success in Punjab because they empowered Captain Amarinder Singh to lead the party's campaign in the state. Unfortunately, a "national" party like the Congress has very few such regional satraps left in its ranks: The fact that mass leaders like a Mamata Banerjee achieved success when out of the Congress cocoon is a sign that the party needs to look beyond its Delhi darbar

to match the BJP's organisationally robust model.

Finally, the Opposition needs to redraw the vocabulary of Indian politics to appeal to a younger demographic that wants education, jobs, equal opportunity. In the age of media 360, this age group has no time for the hypocrisies of the old order. A Mayawati cannot mouth social justice platitudes even as her family blatantly self-aggrandises itself. The Yadavs cannot claim to stand for "secular" values when Muslims are killed in Muzaffarnagar but the celebrations in Saifai carry on uninterrupted. Similarly, if the Yadavs are given preference in government recruitment, then it is an example of brazen casteism, which will invite a backlash. And if Rahul Gandhi's scriptwriters resort to B grade dialogues like "khood ki dalali" when our soldiers sacrifice their lives, then the "nationalist" India First rhetoric will get even more ammunition.

Yes, time does matter in politics. Eventually, Modi too may fail to deliver on his tall promises and get felled by anti-incumbency. The crude attempt to capture power in states like Goa and Manipur may also trap the BJP in its own smugness. But till then, the Opposition is better advised to get its own act together rather than be in a constant reactive, wait and watch mode. Or else, as National Conference leader Omar Abdullah has warned, be ready to live with the spectre of Modi in power till 2024 at least.

Post-script: So when was the UP election lost to the Opposition? My sense is that the day when Akhilesh and Rahul tied up, the endgame was clear: You can't say "27 saal UP behaal" one day and "kaam bolta hai" the next. The Indian voter does get swayed, but can't be taken for granted.

Rajdeep Sardesai is a senior journalist and an author  
The views expressed are personal



BJP supporters carrying Prime Minister Narendra Modi's masks during Holi celebrations, Jammu, March 12

## newsmaker

ANNA HAZARE Anti-corruption activist

THE WORLD IS PROGRESSING .... AND HERE WE ARE DISCUSSING OF GOING BACK IN TIME TO BALLOT PAPERS. ENTIRE WORLD IS USING EVMs ... THE VOTERS EITHER SIGN OR GIVE FINGER PRINTS ON THE BALLOT PAPER WHICH IS A TIME CONSUMING PROCESS... SECONDLY, THEN AT LAST COMES THE COUNTING PROCESS WHICH IS AGAIN TIME CONSUMING



Illustration: SIDDHANT JUMDE

## THINK IT OVER »

THE VERY CONCEPT OF OBJECTIVE TRUTH IS FADING OUT OF THE WORLD. LIES WILL PASS INTO HISTORY.

GEORGE ORWELL

## Focus on trade when dealing with Trump

Investment, the 3.5 million diaspora and 200,000 students in US varsities give this relationship a new dimension

Arun K Singh

Donald Trump's first post-Inauguration speech to a joint session of US Congress last month did serve to calm somewhat the frayed nerves in Washington. But it did not last long, as tweeted allegations of Obama having ordered wiretap on his phone during the campaign, prompted sharp denials and hitherto unmet calls for substantiation.

Recent public opinion polls, showing the highest disapproval ratings for a new President, were believed to have prompted the change in tactics. Despite sustained criticism for unpredictability and volatility in his responses, the Republican base has remained loyally supportive. He had sought to consolidate this support by continuing with the pre-election rhetoric, and signing a flurry of executive orders projected as fulfilling campaign promises. The independent voters, however, who had helped carry him past the post, now seem anxious.

The Democratic party, and its members in Congress, remain determinedly adversarial. In a manner similar to the Republican stalling tactics during the Obama administration, they have decided to come out in complete opposition to Trump and his agenda, despite their normal support for plans for job creation and infrastructure construction.

The Trump-prompted Republican effort to modify the Obama healthcare provisions has given them another coalescing peg. The 'springshoots' of the Trump order are now visible. The Administration will define itself as pursuing a core 'nationalist' agenda, both economic and political.

This economic agenda will entail working on bilateral, rather than multilateral, trade and economic arrangements. In the assessment that US strengths give it better leverage in this framework. Taxes and tariffs would be oriented towards attracting investment and manufacturing in US, and publicly tout new investment decisions. The net impact, however, will be affected by job displacement due to technological change, and reduced demand from adversely affected trading partners.

Political nationalism would involve the US stepping back further from what is seen as unnecessary international entanglements. 9/11 had generated political compulsions for Bush to get deeply involved in Afghanistan. The flawed involvement in Iraq had prompted Obama to look negatively at any similar involvement in Libya and



US President Donald Trump during a rally in Nashville, March 15

Syria. Unusual for recent US Presidents, Trump said in his joint session address that the US respects the "sovereign rights of nations" and the "right of all nations to chart their own path". This is a far cry from US belief in its exceptionalism, and being a model for rest of the world.

A key section of the new White House, led by adviser Steve Bannon, is believed to be a strong advocate of a nationalism not constrained by multilateral institutions and principles. It supports further augmentation of military capacity, and dealing with others on the basis of strength and transactional advantage. There is a preponderance of military personnel in new appointments to the National Security Council. Civilian posts of secretaries of homeland security and defence are also being occupied by former military officials. Trump has repeatedly said that the military budget would be raised, despite US already spending more than the next nine countries. There is also talk of cutting the budget of USAID and diverting it to the Pentagon.

In foreign policy there has been some course modulation. Trump has now spoken of strongly supporting NATO, which he had earlier described as obsolete. In his conversation with the Chinese President on February 9, he reiterated the 'One-China' policy, while questioning it before. He has now referred to sharing "vital security interests" with allies, while so far decrying alliance

commitments.

Other countries are still watching the evolution of the Trump presidency with anxiety and a continuing sense of uncertainty. Those with key stakes in the relationship have attempted to reach out and initiate the process of dialogue and bargaining with the new parameters. The prime ministers of UK, Japan, Israel and Canada have visited, as have the foreign and defence ministers of Germany. Chinese State Councillor Yang Jiechi briefly met Trump during his call on the US NSA on February 27.

There was no reference in the joint session address to Afghanistan. The focus has clearly shifted to ISIS. North Korean missile programmes are being described as potential threats to US mainland. Pakistan, which has over the decades managed a relevance to US policy by aligning itself during the Cold War, then in the reaction to the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979, and now after 9/11, will need a new reason.

India would also inevitably fine tune its approach keeping in mind the new politics and priorities in US. The Indian foreign secretary had meetings with senior US officials earlier. The India-US political convergence and defence partnership had increased substantially over the past three presidencies of Clinton, Bush and Obama. A special effort would now be needed to look at the dimensions of the economic partnership. This has been an area of recurrent problems and disagreements. India being under the Special 301 watch list, and problems related to H1B visas are among the manifestations. It is no doubt in our interest to build our relations with all the major poles in the desired multipolar international system, so as to maintain the autonomy of our decisions. However, the trade and investment dimension, the nearly 3.5 million strong Indian origin diaspora, around 200,000 Indian students in US universities, give a particular overall dimension to this relationship. As we promote Make in India, including in defence, and seek partnerships for Start-up India in the US Silicon valley, an overall politico-economic narrative for the relationship will help soften the all-too-frequent bumps. And, even as we seek to consolidate it under a Trump administration, we should not lose sight of need to sustain the bipartisan support for the relationship.

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The views expressed are personal

innervoice



In an evolving world,  
we need to bring  
about change within

SCKhungar

Change is the law of nature. That's the case even for the four seasons and four stages of human life which change in cyclic order. When we reach the last stage of life, many of us don't get the same love and support from our children. If we don't get attention from them, we shouldn't feel neglected. We should understand that time has changed. Children today are going through their own share of stress of managing their work and family. We, as parents, should continue to give them the same love. Children also need to remember that their parents want their welfare and it is their duty to look after them. Secondly, in old age, we should start developing the attitude of detachment. Because when there is attachment, we feel scared that the other person is moving away or is getting attached to someone else. Therefore, we should continue to give them love without expecting emotional support. For where there is love, there is no fear.

Parents who live alone in old age, particularly need radical changes in their attitude and behaviour. Their first priority is to remain healthy. Secondly, they should develop a good social circle with sincere friends and relatives for any help in an emergency. Finally, they should lead a spiritual life. When there is a change outside, we need to bring about a change inside. Jimmy Dean has rightly said, "I can't change the direction of the wind, but I can adjust my sails to always reach my destination."

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