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**SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE**

By all means, doubt me. Be suspicious and test my every claim. That's rational. Then, do the same for those in power. That's American.

**EDWARD SNOWDEN,** former CIA employee who leaked evidence of massive illegal surveillance by the US National Security Agency in 2013, and is currently hiding out somewhere in Russia. 2.98 million followers.

DECISION 2017

# How EVMs work, why many parties have suspected they can be rigged

Leaders who lost the recent elections — Mayawati and Harish Rawat among them — have alleged voting machines were tampered with. RITIKA CHOPRA recaps a seemingly endless controversy

**How does an Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) work?**

An EVM consists of a 'control unit' and a 'balloting unit', connected by a 5-metre cable. The control unit is with the Election Commission-appointed polling officer; the balloting unit is in the voting compartment into which the voter enters to cast her vote in secret by pressing the button against the name and symbol of the candidate of her choice. The control unit is the EVM's 'brain' — the balloting unit is turned on only after the polling officer presses the 'Ballot' button on it. The EVM runs on a 6 volt single alkaline battery fitted in the control unit, and can even be used in areas that have no electricity.

**When did the EC decide to switch to EVMs? Why were they deemed superior to traditional paper ballots?**

Paper ballots have inherent problems — their printing, storage and transportation involve huge expenditure; lakhs of ballot boxes are needed for each election, and there are logistics issues with their safe storage between elections. There were instances when the number of invalid votes (marked incorrectly by illiterate voters) exceeded the winning margin. Also, the counting of ballot papers could take a full day or more.

To overcome these problems, the EC approached the Electronics Corporation of India Limited (ECIL) in 1977 to develop the prototype of an EVM. On August 6, 1980, the EC demonstrated the ECIL prototype to representatives of political parties to a generally positive reaction. The EC subsequently also drafted Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) to manufacture EVMs.

**When were EVMs first used in elections?**

The EC decided on a trial run at a few polling stations during the 1982 Kerala Assembly elections. Since the Representation of the People (RP) Act, 1951, only allowed ballot papers and ballot boxes, it urged the government to amend the law. It did not, however, wait for the amendment, and invoked its emergency powers under Article 324 to use voting machines in 50 out of the 84 polling stations of Paravur constituency, where Congress candidate A C Jose was pitted against the CPI's Sivan Pillai.

**And when and from whom did they face their first challenge?**

CPI's Pillai filed a writ petition in Kerala High Court days before polling, questioning the use and functioning of EVMs. After the EC demonstrated the machines to the HC, the court refused to interfere. But after Pillai won by a margin of just 123 votes, the Congress's Jose went to the HC saying the RP Act, 1951, and Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961, did not allow use of EVMs. The HC again ruled in the EC's favour, but the Supreme Court reversed the verdict and ordered a re-poll at all 50 polling stations using conventional ballots. This time, Jose won.

The EC then suspended the use of EVMs until Parliament, in 1988, inserted Section 61A in the RP Act and Rules, legitimising them. In November 1998, they were used on an experimental basis in 16 Assembly seats — 5 each in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, and 6 in Delhi. In the Lok Sabha elections of 2004, the entire country voted using EVMs.

The EVMs *(top)* have a balloting unit *(above)* and a control unit. *Archive*

**Broadly, what position have the courts taken on the alleged tamperability of EVMs?**

The 1984 SC verdict striking down the pilot run of EVMs in Kerala had little to do with the machines' efficiency. It was passed on the ground that there was no provision for them in the existing law. But political parties and experts have repeatedly questioned the functioning of EVMs in court. In 2004, advocate Pran Nath Lekhi sought to establish before the Delhi High Court that EVMs had been doctored to favour the UPA in the Lok Sabha elections. Lekhi pleaded that the result of the election was the opposite of the projections (of an NDA win) made by opinion and exit polls. The HC found no merit in the petition, and Lekhi was forced to withdraw.

In 2005, the Karnataka High Court upheld the use of EVMs, and described them as a "great achievement" and a source of "national pride". The HC order was passed on an election petition filed in 1999 by an unsuccessful candidate who challenged the integrity of EVMs used in the Yelahanka parliamentary constituency. The court examined BEL scientists and studied the safety features of the machines before ruling that the EVMs were tamper-proof, and an attempt to doctor them could not be kept hidden.

**How has the EC responded to criticisms of EVMs?**

From August 3 to 8, 2009, the Commission undertook the extraordinary step of inviting sceptics to demonstrate the alleged fallibility of EVMs, using 100 randomly sourced machines from 10 states. "The outcome of this exercise is that none of the persons, who were given the opportunity, could actually demonstrate any tamperability of the ECI-EVM, in any of the 100 machines put on display. They either failed or chose not to demonstrate," the EC said in a press note on August 8. The machines, the EC said, could neither be reprogrammed nor controlled by an external device. "The source code (for the EVM) is so designed that it allows a voter to cast the vote only once. The next vote can be recorded only after the Presiding Officer enables the ballot on the Control Unit. In between the machine becomes dead to any signal from outside (except from the Control Unit)," the 2009 statement said.

**SIMPLY PUT**

The Commission has said that comparisons between EVMs in India and abroad, where they have failed, "are both misplaced and misguided". This is because "most of the systems used in other countries are PC based and running on operating systems. Hence, these could be vulnerable to hacking.

"The EVM in India on the other hand is a fully standalone machine without being part of any network and with no provision for any input... The software in the EVM chip is one time programmable and is burnt into the chip at the time of manufacture. Nothing can be written on the chip after manufacture. Thus the ECI-EVMs are fundamentally different... (and) any surmise based on foreign studies or operating system based EVMs... would be completely erroneous."

**Which are the countries that have junked EVMs?**

Germany and the Netherlands banned EVMs for lack of transparency. Italy felt e-voting results could be fudged. Ireland junked EVMs after spending 51 million pounds researching them for 3 years. In the US, California and many other states have banned EVMs without a paper trail. However, the size of the electorate at all these places is a fraction of the size in India — and the time, energy and expenses of going the same way here are not comparable.

**If the EC is so confident of the integrity of EVMs, why has it agreed to Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT)?**

With parties, activists and candidates constantly alleging rigging of EVMs despite repeated assurances, the EC called a meeting of all state and national political parties on October 4, 2010 to discuss the issue. At this meeting, some parties suggested that in order to increase transparency, the EC should explore the possibility of introducing VVPAT, in which a voter immediately gets a printout of her vote, which is then deposited in the ballot box. So, every voter can see whether her vote has been registered correctly.

Around the same time, BJP leader Subramanian Swamy, who was then the president of the Janata Party, filed a writ petition in Delhi High Court alleging that EVMs were vulnerable to rigging, and demanding a paper back-up of the EVM vote. The EC informed the court that it was already exploring the idea of VVPAT. In 2012, the HC observed that EVMs in their present form were not "tamper-proof", and the VVPAT system may be developed early in consultation with political parties. Subsequently, the Supreme Court ordered the EC to use VVPATs across all seats in the 2019 Lok Sabha election.

**What was the EVM hacking controversy of 2010?**

In probably the biggest controversy around EVMs, in 2010, three scientists claimed they had developed a way to hack into the machines. A video posted on the Internet by the researchers purportedly showed them connecting a home-made electronic device to an actual ECI-EVM. Professor J Alex Halderman from the University of Michigan, who led the project, said the device allowed them to change the results on the machine by sending it messages from a mobile phone. The EC once again denied the allegations, and nothing much came of the video except that the Indian scientist out of the three, Hari Prasad, was arrested for allegedly stealing an EVM from the Collector's office in Mumbai.

**Where is this controversy now headed?**

All political parties have criticised EVMs only when they have lost elections. Five days ahead of the Delhi Assembly election results in February 2015, Arvind Kejriwal had tweeted about possible tampering of EVMs. He did not pursue his allegation after the same EVMs registered a record mandate for his party, which won 67 out of 70 seats. Similarly, while the BJP seems happy with EVMs today, before the 2014 general election, it had alleged tampering on many occasions — in fact, BJP spokesperson GVL Narasimha Rao had even written a book titled *Democracy At Risk! Can We Trust Our Electronic Voting Machines?*, with a foreword by L K Advani. Mayawati is only the latest politician to attack EVMs; before her the RJD, TDP, SP, JD(U) and Left have all targeted the machines.

# How, in spite of several reports, Gov's discretion lies in grey zone

IN FACT

BY MANEESH CHHIBBER

EXPRESS EDITORS INTERPRET

Manohar Parrikar has been sworn in as Goa CM by Governor Mridula Sinha. *PTI*

THE DECISION of Goa Governor Mridula Sinha to invite — and swear in — a government led by the BJP despite the party having won four fewer seats than the Congress in the Assembly elections, has reopened the debate on the need for a more structured and transparent system to deal with scenarios arising out of fractured verdicts.

Dealing with the issue of discretionary powers of the Governor, the Justice R S Sarkaria Commission, in its voluminous report in January 1988, said the Governor was expected to use his/her discretion in choosing the Chief Minister; in testing majority of the government in office; in the matter of dismissal of a Chief Minister; in dissolving the Legislative Assembly; in recommending President's Rule and, finally, in reserving Bills for the President's consideration.

In choosing the Chief Minister, the Sarkaria Commission said, the Governor should be guided by certain principles. The first criteria, the Commission recommended, was that the "party or combination of parties which commands the widest support in the Legislative Assembly should be called upon to form the government".

The Governor, it said, was expected to remember that his/her "task is to see that a government is formed and not to try to form a government which pursues policies which he approves".

The Commission recommended that the first shot at government formation should be allowed to the leader of the single party having an absolute majority in the Assembly. In case no party had majority, it suggested an order of preference that could guide the Governor in making a fair decision.

This order of precedence, it recommended, should be: leader of any pre-poll alliance of parties "formed prior to the elections", followed by the leader of the "largest single party staking a claim to form the government with the support of others, including 'independents'".

Thereafter, the Governor could invite the leader of a "post-electoral coalition of parties, with all the partners in the coalition joining the government" and, finally, the leader of a post-electoral alliance of parties, with some of the parties in the alliance forming a government and the remaining parties, including Independents, supporting the government from outside.

The Governor's endeavour in all this, the Commission said, should be to "select a leader who in his (Governor's) judgment is most likely to command a majority in the Assembly".

The Justice Madan Mohan Punchhi Commission on Centre-State relations, which submitted its report in April 2007, made similar recommendations.

While the debate continues over whether Governor Mridula Sinha did the constitutionally right thing by ignoring the claim of the leader of the Congress Legislature Party to be invited first to form the government and prove his majority, the blame for the lack of clarity on the use of "discretionary powers" by Governors lies mainly with the Congress.

Congress governments, including the one headed by Manmohan Singh, failed to take the recommendations of the two important Commissions on Centre-State relations seriously and give them legislative shape, perhaps through amendments to the Constitution.

Earlier, Indira Gandhi's government had decided against implementing the recommendation of the First Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) to formulate guidelines governing the use of discretionary powers by Governors.

The First ARC, which was set up in 1960 to review Centre-State relations, had pointed out that the Governor's main aim should be to uphold his "oath of his office to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution and the law of the land". It had also said the Governor should be impartial, should have a sense of fairplay, and should command the respect of all parties in the state.

The Supreme Court's Bommai judgment, while laying down the dictum that the floor test was the best test for whether a Chief Minister enjoys majority support, did not make it clear as to who should be given the first shot at government formation.

Incidentally, the issue of the Governor's discretionary powers — where he/she can act without the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers is an old one, and had figured in the lengthy debates of the Constituent Assembly as well.

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INDIA PREPARES TO DISCUSS BREAKTHROUGH TECHNOLOGY

# Designer humans: science, ethics of germline editing

TABASSUM BARNAGARWALA
MUMBAI, MARCH 14

LAST MONTH, a scientific advisory group formed in the United States by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) and the National Academy of Medicine (NAM), two independent, influential groups of scholars and professionals, backed a hugely controversial — and potentially pathbreaking — proposal to genetically modify human embryos to treat hereditary defects and disabilities.

The endorsement, which came with the rider that genome editing could be permitted "only for serious conditions under stringent oversight", puts the world's scientific community at an ethical crossroads, even though some countries are reported to be already pursuing such research.

India, which has not squarely addressed the issue yet at the level of policy, is slated to begin a round of meetings to discuss the social and ethical dimensions of human genome editing next month.

**What exactly is human genome editing?**

A genome is the genetic makeup of an organism — the full set of its DNA, which is the chemical compound that contains all the information that the organism needs to function. Each molecule of DNA is made up of two strands twisted around each other. Each strand is constituted of four 'nucleotide bases', called A, T, G, C — and bases on the two strands pair in an A-T, G-C formation. The human genome has 3 billion of these base pairs, which reside in 23 pairs of (or a total 46) chromosomes in the nucleus of each cell. Between the years 1990 and 2003, all 23 pairs were sequenced by an international research project called the Human Genome Project.

'Genome editing' is the addition, removal or replacement of DNA base pairs to change an organism's genome structure. This is commonly used in agriculture, but editing the human germline — which essentially means creating genetically modified humans through the the manipulation of their genes — is an altogether different ball game, and is specifically prohibited in over 30 countries. While germline editing is focussed on editing the genes — or traits — that pass on from parents to children, it runs the risk of affecting even non-targetted genes.

**What techniques are available for genome editing?**

In recent years, a technique known as CRISPR-Cas9 has provided a new dimension to genome editing. It is faster, cheaper and more accurate than earlier techniques, and can precisely target a sequence of DNA, extract, edit or replace it even in the embryo stage. The technique can prevent hereditary diseases such as sickle cell, thalassaemia, HIV, cancer, and Huntington's disease from passing on to children.

Another popular method is Somatic Cell Gene Therapy (SCGT) which affects only an individual and not his or her future generations. The technique targets a group of cells, and can be used clinically to treat diseases such as thalassaemia and haemophilia that are single gene disorders. Research and clinical trials are currently ongoing.

**What does the American panel say on human genome editing?**

A 22-member international committee of researchers, lawyers and ethicists have come out with a 261 page report on *Human Gene Editing: Scientific, Medical and Ethical Consideration* that encourages research in human germline editing but only to correct disabilities and hereditary defects, and not for "human enhancement" — that is, to build up traits and capacities such as physical strength, or to improve intelligence. "While it could be used to treat muscular dystrophy, genes could also be manipulated to get muscles enhanced for sports. There is a very thin line there," said Richard Hynes, cancer researcher at Massachussets Institute of Technology, and a member of the committee.

The report has also called for public discussion and accessibility for both rich and poor before gates are thrown open for genome editing. It has recommended genome editing only in cases where no other "reasonable alternative" is available. Gary Merchant, professor of Law at Arizona State University and another member, said a standard set of guidelines to command ethics in genome editing must be put together by various countries.

**Where does India stand on this matter?**

India has not permitted trials of CRISPR-Cas9 technology to edit the human germline. The Department of Biotechnology and Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) will meet with Inserm, the French National Institute of Health and Medical Research, in April to discuss the social and ethical implications of genome editing in India, after which the government plans to issue broad guidelines for researchers.

"Our main concern is that this technology should not be used for human enhancement," ICMR Director General Dr Soumya Swaminathan said. Meanwhile, several countries, including the US, UK, China and a few European countries will meet in China later this year to take forward discussions on genome editing. There is no clarity yet on India's participation.

Nobel Prize winning biochemist Dr Venkatraman 'Venki' Ramakrishnan, president of London's Royal Society, said India has a long way to go before it can consider germline editing. "The technology they (India) need to develop will be first used to correct defects in somatic cells. Germline correction is distant future for India," he has said.

According to Professor Merchant, ethical concerns are "a little more (important) in India (than in many other countries), but strict laws can help regulate it". Prenatal sex determination was banned by The Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act, 1994, and The Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2016, which has been introduced in Parliament, seeks to prohibit commercial surrogacy — in India's ethical-legal environment, germline editing is unlikely to have easy passage. The technology can be used by the rich to 'customise' a baby with desired traits, and allowing human genome editing could make India a hub for a certain kind of medical tourism, rather like surrogacy has done, experts point out.

"The concept of gene editing can slip into prenatal testing, foetal management and IVF. Developing and underdeveloped countries that face social barriers such as preference for male children need to tread carefully," said Josephine Johnston, research director at The Hastings Center, the world's first bioethics research institute.

**What is the situation in other countries?**

In 2015 in London, 16-month-old Layla Richards became the first-ever recipient of gene therapy to cure her of 'incurable' leukaemia. A 11-month-old baby was also treated subsequently for the same cancer using gene editing technology. The UK has moved fast on research and clinical use of CRISPR-Cas9, and the NAS-NAM paper has encouraged cautious research in the US. In Germany, where strict laws exists for assisted reproduction, research in the human embryo is restricted. Austria, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands have banned human germline editing, while ambiguous guidelines are in place in Mexico, Canada and Argentina.

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**WORDLY WISE**

THERE ARE WORDS BANDIED ABOUT THAT ARE BEING MISUSED — 'SOCIALISM', 'COMMUNISM,' 'FASCISM.'

— JIM LEACH

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

# NO, GOVERNOR

## In Goa and Manipur, after fractured verdicts, Raj Bhawans invite charges of partisanship

IN GOA, GOVERNOR Mridula Sinha ignored the established principle of inviting the single largest party in the wake of a fractured mandate, and appointed BJP leader Manohar Parrikar as chief minister on Sunday. The BJP has 13 MLAs in a House of 40, four less than the Congress. A similar situation has developed in Manipur, where Governor Najma Heptulla invited the BJP, which won fewer seats than the Congress, to form the government. The Congress should have been invited first. The BJP's claim should have been considered only if the Congress pleaded inability or failed the floor test. Both gubernatorial decisions, in Goa and in Manipur, reek of partisanship.

Sinha's invitation to the BJP ostensibly rests on that party hastily submitting letters of support from smaller parties — the MGP and the Goa Forward Party with three MLAs each — and three independents to claim a majority in the House. The premise of her decision is questionable: These parties did not fight the election as part of a coalition. In fact, Goa Forward Party ran an anti-BJP campaign. The BJP, of course, was quick to win over the smaller parties and approach the governor's office. But surely this is not about running the race to the Raj Bhawan faster — speed cannot be the overriding or pressing consideration for the governor while assessing a party's claim to form government. There have been occasions in the past where a party with the support of the largest number of legislators has been preferred over the single largest party in the assembly in government formation. But it is also true that those decisions — the Congress and its allies have been beneficiaries — were disputed on grounds of procedure and propriety. The Justice M.M. Punchhi Commission on Centre-State Relations in 2010 laid down some guidelines to be followed in the appointment of a chief minister by a governor. It said the governor should invite the leader of "a pre-poll alliance commanding the largest number" or the "largest single party" to form the government in case no party or pre-poll coalition has a clear majority. The Sarkaria Commission, which studied Centre-state relations in the 1980s, held a similar view. The CM thus appointed must prove majority as per the guidelines laid down in the Bommai judgment — on the floor of the assembly.

Ruling on a petition filed by the Congress, the Supreme Court asked the BJP government in Goa to prove its majority within 48 hours, instead of the 15 days' leeway given by Governor Sinha. But it was a half-measure. The court's reluctance to uphold the principle of inviting the single largest party first and therefore, to stay Parrikar's swearing-in on Tuesday, is controversial.

# ROOM FOR REFORM

## Mandate from UP adds to political capital of government at the Centre. It should use it wisely

THE UTTAR PRADESH verdict has affirmed the large mandate that Prime Minister Narendra Modi won in 2014 at the Centre. But this affirmation comes with enormous expectations, particularly of the youth — for a revival and quickening of growth, increase of investment and job creation. At nearly the end of the third year of his government, Modi's report card on the economy does not inspire confidence. The private sector continues to be saddled with excess capacity, and is unlikely to consider fresh investments. The government cannot over-spend, given its responsibility towards the fisc. Huge debt on the books of India Inc and large non-performing assets in the balance sheets of state-owned banks have jammed the wheels of the economy — finding a way forward means making bold political calls.

Certain issues that required the government's urgent attention continue to be neglected. Much remains mired in bureaucracy even after the prime minister's promises. For instance, the strategic sale of public sector undertakings, which Modi reintroduced in the reform lexicon by getting the Union cabinet to approve its broad modalities in October last, is yet to move ahead substantively. The bad loan problem has its origins in the UPA's term when the private sector added huge capacities, built large infrastructure projects and borrowed a lot, hoping the economy would continue to grow rapidly. But then a global downturn and policy inertia back home during the last couple of years of the UPA government led to a collapse of private sector confidence. Modi acknowledged the gravity of the bad loan problem early on during the 2014 Lok Sabha campaign, but his economic managers are yet to address it nearly three years later.

The triumph in state elections once again provides the prime minister an opportunity to push bold plans to further his development agenda. It will take not just innovative ideas of good governance, but also their implementation, to lift Uttar Pradesh, which has a budget size of almost a fifth of the Union budget, and which is home to 16 per cent of the country's population, out of its morass. Over the next couple of months, the Goods and Services Tax regime will finally be in place; and labour laws will need to be simplified. The opposition to some tough political economy measures may not be so intense, given the scale of the BJP's win in UP. Hopefully, the government sees the vote as a sign of urgency in people's expectations of meaningful change.

# LOOK WHO'S TALKING

## President Erdogan describing Holland as 'Nazi' draws attention to new, and old, political spectres

AMID NEW DEVELOPMENTS in Europe — Brexit, migration, terrorism, a far-right on an upswing — an old spectre has raised its head. Turkey's President Recep Erdogan has accused the Dutch of "acting like Nazis" for not allowing Erdogan's ministers to campaign in the Netherlands, amongst the 4,00,000-strong Turkish migrant community, towards an April referendum that seeks to extend Erdogan's powers. If successful, it is feared Erdogan will take Turkey from parliamentary democracy to a presidential system. Turkey has already experienced alleged purges in its civil service, judiciary, army, etc., following 2016's attempted coup; over 150 journalists have been arrested, alongside opposition leaders and activists. April's referendum is divisive enough for a 10 per cent swing voter group to be considered vital; hence, Erdogan's attempts to reach migrants spread across Europe. But unease over the Turkish referendum has spurred European states to refuse permission for rallies. This led the Turkish strongman to also accuse Germany of fascism: "I thought Nazism was over," Erdogan reportedly stated. "But I was wrong. Nazism is alive in the West."

In calmer times, this could have been dismissed as a hissy-fit. However, the episode has gone beyond flinging charges; Turkey has expelled the Dutch ambassador, threatened sanctions against the Netherlands, even hinted at undoing the EU deal that funds Turkey to stem migrants into Europe. Critics claim this deal has given Erdogan astonishing liberty, with European nations turning a strategic blind eye to tumult in Turkey. The current dispute only underlines the need for Europe to observe Ankara far more critically.

Alongside, the flippant use of terms like Nazism and fascism by Erdogan highlights several ironies, including, of course, who's talking here. But Europe itself, frequently confounded by its challenges, must resist the temptation of slipping into a lexicon of the past. There are elements of brute hegemony in today's geopolitics; but given the enormous differences between then and now — the internet being one aspect — using "fascism" as a descriptor doesn't take understanding to a new level. It freezes thought in futile furies.

# Misreading the new

## The rise of BJP, the decline of Congress, demand fresh ways of seeing

SANJAYA BARU

SO MUCH OF the instant analysis of the Uttar Pradesh assembly election results echoes the bewildered commentary that followed Narendra Modi's historic victory in the Lok Sabha elections of May 2014. Familiar arguments, such as the communal polarisation of the electorate, getting caste combinations right, the resort to "populism", even the "stupidity" of the Congress party's inept leadership, are being trotted out as explanations for the persistence of a trend.

None of these was an unknown factor in the run-up to the elections. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has always unabashedly appealed to the "Hindu" vote, at least partly in the hope of neutralising the "caste" factor, regional parties have always been about caste and ethnic loyalties, every successful politician has been a "populist" at the hustings, even if a "reformer" in office, and the Congress has had a crisis of leadership for at least five years. Serious analysts must come forward with a better explanation for what is clearly a new trend in Indian politics — the secular decline of the Indian National Congress as a national party of government, and the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party as a mainstream political party, with a vote base across the country.

But for any such serious analysis, political science requires new data and new tools. As in economics, so in political science, we see the persistence of old theories seeking to explain new realities. The discipline of economics at least got used to the idea of a paradigm shift from time to time: When facts changed, as John Maynard Keynes famously put it, theory caught up. The Keynesian revolution was one such paradigm shift. Then, after the implosion of the Soviet Union and the Chinese Communist Party's embrace of market economics, even if with Chinese characteristics, the statist paradigm in economics went out of fashion. More recently, following China's rise, the trans-Atlantic financial crisis and the slowing down of Europe, the so-called Washington Consensus and the "neo-liberal" economics it was built on have met their comeuppance.

> The Congress faces three very different challenges. First, it has no national leadership of any standing left: Sonia Gandhi's appeal has faded. Rahul Gandhi has been demonetised. Second, its regional leaders are a dispirited lot. Third, the Congress has not been able to craft a new political platform even as Narendra Modi cherry-picks every good Congress idea and replays it as his own. It is not the "timidity and stupidity" of the Congress leadership, as some analysts seem to believe, responsible for the party's decline — this will continue till it re-invents itself under a new leadership. That is what Modi did for his party in 2013.

Yet, the ideologically conditioned economists of the left and right persist with their old ideas, while the more pragmatic ones, with their ear to the ground, have been able to walk a new path. Economics, as a discipline, has been in disrepute over the past decade — this has challenged practical economists to come up with new ideas. However, we do not as yet see signs of a similar soul-searching among political scientists studying India. Most of them remain prisoners either of an ideology or of statistical surveys.

While ideological blinkers blind one to change that one does not wish to see, statistics and opinion surveys too have their limitations in a complex polity like India. If ideology ends up convincing someone that a tree is a pillar, statistics can end up making one miss the woods for the trees. Not surprisingly, therefore, contemporary political analysis continues to use theoretical tools from inter-war Europe or statistical tools from post-war American political science to explain the rise of the BJP and the popularity of Narendra Modi. Given this crisis in political science, journalists have become political pundits — and political pundits have become journalists.

The time has come to seriously understand the roots of the decline of the Congress and the rise of the BJP. Neither is a cyclical or transient phenomenon. A senior Congress spokesperson said on TV that what goes up must come down and in politics, what goes down can come up; so, why worry. The next time round, the Congress will win and the BJP will lose.

It is a comforting thought for those in the Congress who sit in the Rajya Sabha and live in Lutyens Delhi: It is, however, not what the average Congress worker in Siddipet or Silchar, Sholapur or Sonepat thinks.

The Congress faces three very different, but inter-related challenges. First, it has no national leadership of any standing left: Sonia Gandhi's appeal has faded and Rahul Gandhi has been demonetised. Second, the party's regional leaders and cadre in many states, including traditional bastions like Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Telengana, are a dispirited lot. Third, the Congress has not been able to craft a new political platform even as Modi cherry-picks every good idea of the Congress and replays it as his own. In short, it is not the "timidity and stupidity" of the Congress leadership, as some analysts seem to believe, that is responsible for the party's decline — the decline has been a long time in the coming and will continue till the party is able to re-invent itself under a completely new leadership. That is what Modi did for his party in 2013.

Finally, the BJP's rise too is not just because Modi is Indira Gandhi Mark II, implementing the UPA's manifesto and successfully communalising a large majority of Hindus. The BJP has come this far based on the strength of its cadre, its regional leaders and its appeal to a "new India". On top of this, Modi has been able to project himself as both a strong nationalist and a pro-poor political leader. It is also clear that the BJP has a long-term policy perspective on all fronts, including economic, foreign and social policy that it hopes will give it the same political longevity the Congress enjoyed after Independence.

Taken together, these very different trajectories of the two national parties constitute a paradigm shift in India's political economy and a power shift in politics. Given India's diversity, there will always be space for other political parties in one part of the Subcontinent or another. Even the Congress had to yield space to other parties after the first general elections. The Communist Party of India defeated Nehru's Congress in Kerala in 1957. By 1962, other parties unseated the Congress and a large number of powerful regional political leaders emerged. Yet, the Congress remained the dominant player.

Much the same could happen over the next decade, with several parties retaining regional relevance, even as the BJP emerges as the dominant national player.

*Baru is author of 'The Accidental Prime Minister: The Making and Unmaking of Manmohan Singh'*

# POLL DANCE IN PARIS

## *In France, the possibility of a far right president makes the drama more riveting*

RADHA KAPOOR-SHARMA

WITH THE FIRST round of the French presidential polls scheduled for April 23, it is election season in France. So far, this election is like no other before it, with a systematically strong showing by Marine Le Pen of the National Front in all polls. A far-right president is now a distinct possibility.

This particular election, with its cast of unlikely characters, its doses of scandal, police raids and judicial investigations, and a narrative that includes calumny, betrayal and suspense, resembles a political drama rather than the straightforward exercise of universal suffrage. It certainly has the French riveted. In a first for a leader of the Fifth Republic, outgoing President François Hollande decided to abstain from seeking re-election. A lucid decision, as he faced the very real prospect of losing his party's nomination, given his dismal approval ratings and the public's disenchantment.

By all accounts, the election was supposed to be a cakewalk for the main opposition — the centrist right party, Les Républicains. François Fillon, former prime minister and party nominee, dubbed "Mr Clean", was a sure-shot winner, leading in all polls and in a strong position to stop the National Front in its tracks. Fillon won his party's primary hands-down on a platform of tough measures destined to revive the economy, such as slashing France's bloated bureaucracy and ending the much criticised 35-hour week, His surprise victory stemmed, in part, from his projection of himself as a man of "probity".

Except, his presidential dream seems to have crashed with the disclosure by a French newspaper that he paid his wife hefty sums from public funds to act as his parliamentary assistant — a job that she allegedly did not do. A judicial probe was ordered astonishingly quickly and is currently underway. His approval ratings plummeted after this "fake" job scandal, named "Penelope Gate" after his wife.

> This election, with its unlikely characters, doses of scandal, police raids and judicial investigations, and a narrative that includes calumny, betrayal and suspense, resembles a political drama rather than straightforward universal suffrage. Outgoing President François Hollande decided to abstain from seeking re-election; he faced the very real prospect of losing his party's nomination, given his dismal approval ratings. With a systematically strong showing by Marine Le Pen, a far-right president is now a distinct possibility.

However, Fillon has fought back tooth and nail against what he terms an "institutional coup d'état" and a "political assassination". His refusal to step down has forced his party members to rally round him. His chances of making it to the second round appear slim with the threat of prosecution still looming, but digging for dirt continues unabated, with new scandals involving interest-free loans and expensive custom-made suits surfacing. This suggests his candidature is still not to be taken lightly.

The main beneficiary of Fillon's fall from favour is not the Socialist nominee — the disastrous results of Hollande's first term cast a long shadow over the chances of his party's candidate, Benoit Hamon, surprise winner of the socialist primary with some highly populist campaign promises like universal income for all and a 32-hour week. Normally, a shorter working week would have rallied the leisure-loving French, but the Socialist candidate is trailing in the polls.

The actual beneficiary is, in fact, the 39 year-old former investment banker, Emmanuel Macron, who left the Socialist government to create a party, "En Marche" (On the Move), and is running on a pro-business, socially liberal platform. He claims to represent neither left, nor right, but France. He has the backing of the financial oligarchy and has caught the imagination of French voters, disillusioned with both the main political parties. Though he has never held elected office, he has recently emerged as the front-runner in this election. Many socialist heavyweights, unable to identify with Hamon's extreme positions, or acting in pure self-interest, are likely to throw their weight behind Macron. This would lead to the dismemberment of the Socialist Party.

In the meantime, Marine Le Pen of the far-right National Front, running on an anti-immigration, anti-Islam, anti-Europe ticket, continues to make electoral inroads with all polls showing her making it to the second round, though eventually losing to Macron. Le Pen is also embroiled in a financial scandal involving the alleged misuse of EU funds, supposed to be supported on social media by Russia-generated bots, but somehow, she is much less under media scrutiny than Fillon. The general feeling seems to be that though Le Pen is dangerous, she can be stopped by the left and right uniting against her.

However, the threat of Le Pen winning needs to be taken seriously — pollsters can be off the mark as they were with Trump and Brexit, especially as National Front voters tend to conceal their voting intentions. Moreover, new scandals involving the other candidates could swing the election in Le Pen's favour, as could suburban social unrest — or a terrorist attack.

*Kapoor-Sharma is a Paris-based writer*

# MARCH 15, 1977, FORTY YEARS AGO

### THE GEORGE CAMPAIGN

HUNDREDS OF FOLLOWERS of Socialist leader George Fernandes from various states, including trade unionists from Bombay, students and Lohiaite teachers from Delhi University and youthful supporters from elsewhere, have landed in Muzaffarpur, Bihar, to carry out a spirited campaign for George in his absence. Students of the Bihar University daily wheel around a tableau depicting a Tihar jail cell with a cardboard figure of George Fernandes in handcuffs behind iron bars. The handcuffs and prison bars also form the dominant theme of the Janata Party posters in this constituency. Alice Fernandes, mother of George Fernandes, is also here to campaign for her son. Her other son, Lawrence Fernandes, now out of jail, also arrived to lend a helping hand in electioneering for his brother, George, who, in absentia, is facing Congress and CPI nominees.

### BAIL DENIED

ADDITIONAL SESSIONS JUDGE O. N. Vohra dismissed the bail application filed by George Fernandes, facing charges of conspiracy in the Baroda dynamite case.

### JP'S GANDHIAN INDIA

JAYAPRAKASH NARAYAN CONGRATULATED the people for having dispelled in just two months the fear that had gripped the country and exhorted them to vote for the Janata and "make India free". "My vision is of a free, progressive and Gandhian India" and "the Janata Party is pledged to this vision," he said. He assured the people that "once the elections are over, I will myself launch a crusade to set up a people's committee at every level for ensuring that the pledges are honoured."

### INDIRA ON EMERGENCY

INDIRA GANDHI SAID people who seemed to think the "Emergency will be restored" after the election were not aware the "Emergency is not something that can be enforced frequently". She said, during the Emergency, some excesses had been committed.

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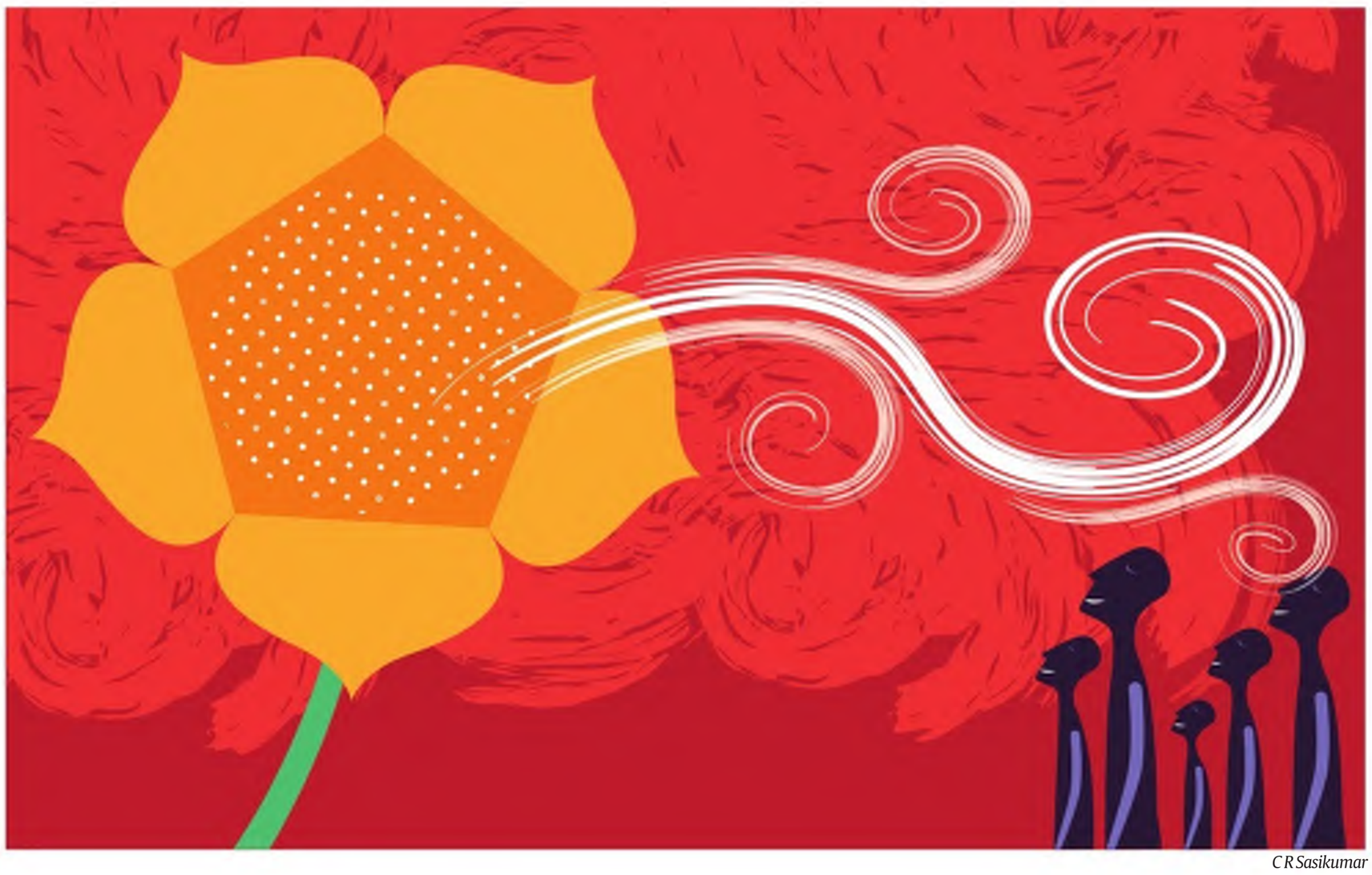
# THE IDEAS PAGE

## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Preet Bharara deserves credit for leaving New York a little cleaner than he found it."

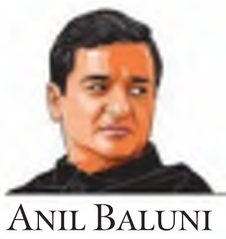
—THE NEW YORK TIMES



C R Sasikumar

# BJP's UP sweep is made of this

### PM Modi's charisma, Amit Shah's organisational flair, local party structure, overarching vision, aspirational voters



ANIL BALUNI

WHAT AN ELECTION it has been. More than 310 seats for the BJP in Uttar Pradesh. Did anyone even dream of this scenario? These once-in-a-generation results in the just concluded assembly elections for five states, and more specifically, UP, have established what can be described as a new normal in Indian politics. That new normal is this: The BJP under the historic leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the organisational master class of Amit Shah has established itself as the pre-eminent political party of India — the party that caters to the aspirations of every section of Indians.

While each state election is of equal importance, the results in UP have a special importance, if for no other reason than the sheer legislative numbers the state brings to the national polity — 80 seats in the Lok Sabha, 31 seats in the Rajya Sabha and an important say in determining the presidential elections. But what is it that the BJP did in UP that has coloured the state so completely saffron? After all, remember that even at the peak of the Ram Mandir movement, the state did not vote this decisively and with this consistency for the BJP. Is there something about the BJP's UP model that can act as a template?

Essentially, the BJP's UP model can be described as the Panchva Tatva Model — a perfect pentagon where each arm worked in harmony with the others and delivered a model worthy of emulation.

The first *tatva* of this model is the most obvious — the charisma of Narendra Modi. How else can one describe the phenomenon where just months before an election result, a leader says that unlike others, I will not take a populist decision but I will demonetise 86 per cent of India's currency which will inconvenience you, and yet the people vote for him like they have never voted before for anyone? UP has also established, in some senses emphatically, what people most like about Modi — his decisiveness when it comes to national interest. Be it driving his team extra-hard, round-the-clock, to delivering almost 2 crore LPG connections in less than a year, to delivering a body blow to the cancer of black money in India or in establishing a new benchmark, through the surgical strikes, in how India will respond to terror attacks — Modi has shown he is decisive when it comes to Indian interests.

The response that Modi drew in Varanasi, where he campaigned for three days, only reinforced this aspect — that for Modi, there is never a backseat and he is not a general who will leave his troops to battle while himself hiding in the safety of the barracks. Modi, instead, is a general who leads from the front.

The second *tatva* is the organisational genius of Amit Shah and his ability to identify talent. He established this in 2014 when he was in charge of the state. In 2017, as national president of the BJP, he has shown that not only has he cemented his past success model but also, that he learns from every experience. Within the span of less than three years since 2014, more than 12 lakh new members were added to the BJP, thereby increasing its social base across the state. But Shah's lasting contribution to the BJP's election machinery must be establishing the importance of booth management. Before Shah was sent to UP in 2013, booth committees as the driving force of micro-management was a concept still to take hold in the UP BJP.

By the 2014 elections, under him, the BJP had booth committees in 37 per cent of the critical booths. This number increased to 87 per cent by 2017. In addition, the entire state was divided into 82 district units, 1,463 mandals and 9,933 sectors. Having already established the concept of Panna Pramukhs at booth level, this time, Shah introduced another innovation — booth *rakshaks*. Their job — to act as protectors of the booth in every aspect. From ensuring that planned campaigning happens at their booths to reporting feedback to senior leadership, booth *rakshaks* owned the booths with heart and mind.

The third *tatva* of the BJP's machinery is the local organisational structure. This meant, on the one hand, that out of the 403 constituencies, there was not even a single constituency which was not touched by at least two major star campaigners and, on the other, ensuring that the entire state party leadership worked as one. The first was achieved by the brilliantly crafted Parivartan Yatras. The yatra touched every nook and corner of the state, helped mobilise the cadre, and establish mass contact right at the grassroots level. And how did the BJP achieve the second — ironically, by not declaring a CM candidate.

> Essentially, the BJP's UP model can be described as the Panchva Tatva Model — a perfect pentagon where each arm worked in harmony with the others and delivered a model worthy of emulation. The first tatva of this arm is the most obvious — the charisma of Narendra Modi. How else can one describe the phenomenon where just months before an election result, a leader says that unlike others, I will not take a populist decision but I will demonetise 86 per cent of India's currency which will inconvenience you, and yet the people vote for him like they have never voted before for anyone? UP has also established, in some senses emphatically, what people most like about Modi — his decisiveness when it comes to national interest.

In this respect, UP has actually demolished the construct that one cannot win a big state without a pre-declared face. Indeed, the BJP has established that in a state where there are many claimants for the top position, all of whom have come up the ranks by a democratic process and not through dynastic succession, not declaring a face helps. It worked in Maharashtra, and Haryana earlier, and now has worked so demonstrably in UP as well.

The fourth *tatva* is complementing this groundwork by an overarching vision. The manifesto the BJP released was not only comprehensive and forward-looking, but as with all things BJP under this new leadership, it was designed and presented in an attractive manner as well. It was no longer a dreary, boring document that had to be released just to complete the paperwork. Instead, top brains of the party, in Lucknow and in Delhi, went into first drafting it, and then designing and presenting it. And as has been the new norm in the BJP, inputs were also invited from the people of UP and more than 30 lakh inputs were received.

The fifth and last *tatva* of the BJP model has perhaps been its most potent and with the most long-term appeal — it has established a "class" of BJP voters when all others were vying for caste voters or voters on the basis of religion. The BJP's appeal was simple — if you are looking for a better future for yourself and your children, then as a class, vote for us, irrespective of the caste, sub-region or religion you belong to. The local leadership line of the party established this class model as well — from Rajnath Singh to Kalraj Mishra to Keshav Prasad Maurya to Yogi Adityanath. Between them, they represented the widest swathe of the state's population.

If 2014 started the era of Modi, then after this round of election results, it can be stated without a doubt that the era has not only just begun but that it has a long and glorious future, not just for the BJP but for the country as well.

*The writer is spokesperson, BJP*

# A finger on the pulses

### Government must give a level playing field by removing restrictions on markets and exports

FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH

BY ASHOK GULATI

LAST YEAR, ROUGHLY at this time, the price of tur dal (split pigeon pea) in the retail market was hovering around Rs 180/kg. The prices of other pulses were not far behind. They were all spiralling due to back-to-back droughts during 2014-15 and 2015-16. Production of all pulses had plunged to 16.5 million metric tonnes (MMT), and imports shot up to 5.8 MMT. The rising demand for imports from India also put international prices under pressure, especially for chickpeas from Australia.

This caused hardships to poor consumers at home as dal was slipping away from their "dal-bhaat" or "dal-roti", a survival food-kit of the poor. There were heightened concerns at the policy level to find ways and means to augment pulses supplies in general and tur in particular. A long-term agreement was signed with Mozambique for the import of pulses.

In fire-fighting mode to douse the flames of high inflation, the Government of India set up a committee under the chief economic advisor to solve this problem of pulses. It was important to have a fresh look at the pulses sector as over the last 25 years, policy had failed miserably to achieve self-sufficiency in pulses. So, it was clear that business as usual will not deliver.

One of the key findings of the committee was if farmers have to be incentivised to grow more pulses, and on a larger irrigated area, they must receive a sufficient profit from growing pulses. Given the levels of technology, it was realised that if farmers get about Rs 7,000/quintal for their produce, then pulses can compete with other crops. The ongoing minimum support prices (MSP) of kharif pulses hovered between Rs 4,625/quintal for tur and urad (black gram) to Rs 4,850/quintal for moong (green gram). Giving a massive jump from these levels to Rs 7,000/quintal in one go was considered politically difficult. So, it was thought it would be done over two years. But when the MSP for 2016-17 crops was announced, it was just Rs 5,050/quintal (including bonus) for tur and urad, and Rs 5,225/quintal for moong — far below their market prices.

Farmers responded to high market prices by planting more area under pulses, and a good rainfall helped them to reap a bumper harvest in 2016-17. Tur production, for example, shot up by a whopping 65 per cent, from 2.5 MMT to 4.2 MMT, while overall, pulses production went up by 33 per cent, from 16.5 MMT to 22 MMT. The result was a massive drop in the market price of tur, from about Rs 10,000/quintal in September-October 2016 to Rs 4,000-4,500/quintal in February-March 2017, even below the MSP. Private trade was not allowed to hold onto much stock, exports were banned and government procurement was not enough to hold the floor at the MSP. Obviously, such low prices do not give much profit to pulses producers in relation to competing crops. So, hoping that farmers will remain upbeat on pulses and bring more irrigated area under pulses will remain a distant dream. The usual roller-coaster of high and low prices in pulses is likely to continue.

But all is not lost yet. There is still a chance that the government can rescue the situation, if it springs into action right away. Chickpea (chana) has started arriving in the market. It is India's largest pulses crop, accounting for more than 40 per cent of total pulses production. Last year, chickpea production, as per government estimates, had fallen to 7 MMT, although the market assessment was below 6 MMT. But this year, chickpea production is expected to be around 9.1 MMT, a jump of 29 per cent. As a result, chickpea prices have been tumbling down. Although the prices are still a little above MSP, it won't be a surprise if they also go below MSP very soon, as did tur prices.

Urgent action is needed if we are serious about solving the pulses problem. The least that the GoI can do is to give farmers a level playing field by removing restrictions on the functioning of free markets. This would imply action on five fronts.

One, remove stocking limits on private trade, so that these enterprises can buy from the market and store. This policy should be announced for at least the next three years, if not more, so that private players are encouraged to buy and build ample storage capacity. Two, abolish bans or restrictions on exports of all pulses. If farmers can get a better price by exporting, why are they not permitted do so, especially when the system cannot even guarantee them MSP and imports are open? Let it be very clear that any bans or restrictions on exports are simply an implicit tax on the peasantry and an anti-farmer policy.

Three, introduce all pulses in futures trading. This way, farmers will get price signals well in advance. They should take planting decisions based on likely future prices, not last year's market prices. They should be forward-looking, not backward-looking. This will be in sync with markets and can reduce the risk of planting decisions. Four, step up government procurement at MSP by engaging even private agencies, to build a buffer stock of 2 MMT. This is a golden opportunity and can also save farmers from a price crash. Five, impose an import duty of 5-10 per cent for the next three to six months to give a cover to farmers in post-harvest months.

Unless these actions are taken immediately, the pulses problem is not going to be resolved. And next year, consumers may once again face higher prices. Can the GoI bite the bullet?

*The writer is Infosys Chair professor for agriculture at ICRIER*

## VIEW FROM THE RIGHT

### TERROR AND DHARMA

THE EDITORIAL IN *Organiser*, 'Spread the Colors of Integration', comments on divisive activities by various groups in the country. "The first ever strike in Bharat with Islamic State (IS) link in a passenger train in Madhya Pradesh," is "really shocking". "It simply means the ideologies of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and Maulana Masood Azhar are working together against Bharat," it notes. It also points at "the conviction of G.N. Saibaba and others for abetting Maoist violence against Bharat", which is "an indication of another variety of threat looming over us". "The 'red terror' is no longer limited to the forests of Bastar," it says, emphasising that it has "successfully infiltrated urban centres of Bharat through the academic route". It then slams the "intolerant and status quoist people, whose only agenda is to deny the integrationist roots of Bharat". Such groups include sections of the "defeatist Congress, destructive Communists and fundamentalist Islamists".

Noting that the "real Bharat is represented by sons like Prahlad, who stood against his own father, Hiranyakashyap, for the cause of Dharma," it praises the father of slain terrorist Saifullah, who "refused to accept the body of his own son for being a traitor". In conclusion, it hopes that "our inherent roots of integration are strengthened with the colours of Holi".

### THE COLOURS WE SEE

THE COVER STORY in *Organiser*, 'Decoding Colors', is written by Adwaita Gadanayak, director general, National Gallery of Modern Art. Underlining that "each colour is meant to be seen and enjoyed separately," it says that if mixed together, they "will appear all black". "All colours emanate from white, and when they are mixed together again, they become black," it says, drawing an analogy with the mental condition of a human. "When your mind is white and aware of consciousness — pure, peaceful, happy and meditative — different colours and roles emerge," it says. "Colours are the language of the light," and "although they are the result of a physical phenomenon and electromagnetic waves of different lengths, the true nature of colours is above all spiritual".

Each one of them is a manifestation of spirit and has the ability to influence our daily lives," it emphasises. "For each thought, each feeling and each desire there is a colour, a vibration and a corresponding influence," it notes, adding that "this is why certain words will hurt you; their colours do not mix well with your own base colour". "Beautiful thoughts, noble feelings, generous actions produce auras of very pure colours, while dark thoughts, negative feelings and unhealthy desires convey dull, dirty and off colours," the writer notes.

### DALAI AND ARUNACHAL

AN ARTICLE IN *Panchjanya* is about the Indian stand over the upcoming Arunachal Pradesh visit of the Dalai Lama. By "strongly condemning" Chinese objection over the 10-day visit that begins on April 10, India has given a clear message. The Chinese foreign ministry has reiterated their claim on Arunachal Pradesh and blamed the Indian government for spoiling its relations by allowing the Dalai Lama to visit Arunachal. India has stated: "The Dalai Lama is an honorable guest. Therefore, he has the freedom to travel across any part of India."

Noting that "this is not the first instance that the Dalai Lama is visiting Arunachal", the article says the Chinese government is often on the look-out for opportunities to stake its claim over the area. Earlier also, China had refused to give visas to Arunachal-based Indian players and politicians, contending that it considers them "Chinese citizens". China has not been able to produce a single piece of evidence to substantiate its claim over Arunachal Pradesh, it says. It underlines how Communist China had annexed the free country of Tibet and East Turkestan after the Chinese revolution of 1949.

*(Compiled by Ashutosh Bhardwaj)*

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### REALISTIC PROMISES

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Victor and the vanquished' (IE, March 13). There is no doubt about the rising popularity and credibility of the BJP and PM Modi. However, every politician must be careful to ensure that promises made to the people should be practical and achievable because incomplete promises and shattered dreams can easily be interpreted as cheating and deception.

**Ajaya Laxmi,** *Faridabad*

### NO ROMEO SQUADS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'PM's rule in UP' (IE, March 13). The victory in the UP elections certainly belongs to the prime minister and Amit Shah. However, that does not necessarily mean there is reason to celebrate. The rhetoric through the campaign was laced with communal undertones, and the PM, since he was the chief campaigner, must now ensure that "Romeo squads" and "kabristans" do not dominate the discourse and governance of India's most populous state.

**Neha Sharma,** *Noida*

### NEW LOW

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'EVM dunnit' (IE, March 13). Mayawati's allegations on EVM machines being a cause of her party's rout in the UP elections will only further the demise of her party. The electoral failure is a chance for the BSP to rethink their strategy. Such allegations on election processes will not benefit the party. People in India have huge faith in the Election Commission and such allegations from a former chief minister is a new low.

**Amit Verma,** *Bareilly*

### PUNJAB MODEL

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Back to the state' (IE, March 13). The author is correct when he suggests that the Congress high command must rely upon the local leadership at the state level in both the assembly and the parliamentary elections if it is to to regain political ground. The landslide victory of the Congress in Punjab under the leadership of Amarinder Singh is proof that this strategy works.

**R.K. Kapoor,** *Chandigarh*

### LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

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

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