



A thought for today

The only people truly bound by campaign promises are the voters who believe them

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

UP's Last Lap

BJP brings its big guns to boom for assembly poll, and they may bear fruit

The race for crowning political glory in Uttar Pradesh has entered its last lap with polling left in only 40 of the 403 assembly seats that are up for grabs. The high decibel campaign has come to an end in a do-or-die battle for BJP, BSP and the SP-Congress combine in the state. The temple town of Varanasi, also Prime Minister Narendra Modi's parliamentary constituency, had become the focal point for all political parties. Modi spent three consecutive days in Varanasi campaigning for BJP candidates. Apart from Modi BJP has brought out all its big guns, appearing to line up all its Hindi-speaking ministers for the UP election campaign.

Chief minister Akhilesh Yadav addressed seven rallies on the last day of his campaign for Samajwadi Party. BSP chief Mayawati ended her 32-day-campaign after addressing over 50 public meetings across the state and is now busy gathering feedback and reviewing party preparations for the last phase of polling on Wednesday. But the ruling SP's problems were highlighted when Governor Ram Naik wrote a letter to Akhilesh on the presence of tainted minister Gayatri Prajapati.

The minister has been absconding ever since the police filed an FIR in connection with separate cases of gang rape and attempt to rape another woman, on directives from the Supreme Court last month. This is supremely embarrassing for the state government and has given another handle to opposition parties to target it over lawlessness and crime. An absconding Prajapati has harmed Akhilesh's assiduous attempts to cultivate an image of a clean politician. It prompted Modi to take a dig at Akhilesh's much-hyped Dial 100 service and claims of UP police arriving within 15 minutes to arrest the guilty.

If one looks at the precedent of civic polls in Maharashtra, demonisation has not had adverse consequences for BJP. That, together with the fact that BJP won 42% of the vote in UP's last election in 2014, should stand BJP in good stead in this election – not to mention the booming firepower that BJP has brought to bear on the campaign and the prevailing state of lawlessness under SP. But UP is a sprawling and diverse state with many interests, and it's also possible that a coherent picture may not quite emerge out of this assembly poll.



Promised Land

When Delhi is told it will look like London it worries that means Dickensian squalor

When Arvind Kejriwal says he will make Delhi look like London it's déjà vu. For we have already heard Mamata Banerjee express a desire to turn Kolkata into the London of the East. Things should get really exciting if the two chief ministers now get into a competition on this front. But first citizens must get clarity about which century's London is being emulated. The way in which the garbage menace has grown in Delhi under the Kejriwal government, one is reminded how London's sewers were once open ditches sloping through its streets and market-places into the Thames.

As for Mamata's tallest London-like achievement it is London-lite, a Big Ben tower that is actually a Chota Ben, about one-third the original's size. Still, nobody can miss her colourful stamp on the city. Houses and government offices, roundabouts and flyovers, public toilets and footpaths, even taxis have gotten a blue makeover – where red used to rule. Sadly other leftovers of communist rule like political violence and populism remain less than a scratch away.

Actually what this game of colours really shows is how unfulfilled promises leave citizens bruised black and blue. It's painful to remember how more than a decade ago then chief minister Vilasrao Deshmukh had made Mumbai dream of becoming Shanghai. The gap between the two metropolises has only grown more unsurpassable since then. Some would say one looks like a sci-fi film set and the other like a crumbling history book. Over in Varanasi the prime minister has them fantasising about becoming Kyoto. Instead of eternally deferred rain cheques on elsewhere, our leaders should just get real about being here. Just get the sewers scrubbed, the rivers desilted, the garbage recycled. Instead of pipe dreams, we want clean pipes.



Wax or waterboard

How a beauty parlour makes Gitmo look like a holiday resort

Bikram Vohra

I have never been to a torture chamber but the other day I accompanied my wife to a beauty parlour and was invited in since there were no other customers. Half an hour into observing the self-inflicted cosmetic cruelty that women voluntarily engage in and you get the impression it makes Gitmo look like a holiday resort.

We guys get tetchy if the razor blade is a bit blunt and these ladies, they actually take appointments so that someone can pluck their hair out from their eyebrows one by one. By the third hair I would be confessing to everything. The way they undergo this agony and then pay for it must rank as the most incredible act of masochism ever.

Then the whole waxing routine, getting rid of unwanted hair, with nary a thought for the hair's feelings... unwanted. They don't even flinch. Me, I was weeping just watching. After which they apply bleach willingly and let it burn and sting and you want to say shall I get you some pepper spray so we can go the whole nine yards, fling in some chilli powder, too.

I am trying to reconcile all this torment with my wife pleading on the phone for the appointment. I must come today, even at 2pm, I have a function at night, you have to fit me in. She was begging for this. Do you know if they don't fit you in it is about the level of a defcon code 10 emergency level like the US president forgetting his nuclear password. Like if they cannot get a hair appointment they might as well shoot themselves.

And women have their own favourite torturers. If Elly is not there and Indu has taken leave or Pooja is busy, it is a disaster. They have to settle for Anjana and that's the start of a bad hair day.

I am sitting there in pure bewilderment thinking why waterboard anyone, just send the beefy, never say die hardcore terror boss for a facial and a waxing. He will be a trembling little heap of nerves in half an hour. "No more plucking and stop with the waxing, I demand protection under the Geneva Convention, you cannot exfoliate."

And while my wife is obviously loving all this tender, loving care I am reading the price list and did you know there are 16 different waxing packages? You know what the sobering thought in all this is? Women go through all this madness to look nice. For us menfolk. That is so touching.



Shots Heard Round The World

The West is growing increasingly hostile to the flexible identity of Indian migrants

Robin.David@timesgroup.com



Those who grew up in India in the pre-internet days of the 1970s and 80s would remember how difficult it was to stay in touch with friends and family living abroad. If you needed to urgently contact your uncle in the US or UK, you had to book an ISD call, depend on often unpredictable telephone lines and sometimes moody telephone operators to put you through after a couple of hours of waiting in front of a black, bulky phone, tethered to a corner in the house. And the operator would sternly interject every three minutes to let you know that the meter was running, forcing you to hurriedly end the conversation.

Strange as it may sound, this was one of the factors that shaped the identity of Indian migrants in those days. There were no budget airlines to hop continents and no internet to stay in constant touch with family and news back home. So, many migrants tried harder to fit into their adopted countries even if half-heartedly.

They tried to learn foreign languages and alien cultural mores while trying to give their children the best of both worlds, inadvertently giving birth to the American Born Confused Desi (ABCD) or Coconut Generation that was brown on the outside but felt white (Caucasian) on the inside.

We have come a long way from those naïve ABCD days if NRIs in the US are forced to issue an advisory to the community to speak only English in public places after Srinivas Kuchibhotla's murder in Kansas. On the one hand these attacks mirror the atmosphere of fear and suspicion in American society, and on the other, it reflects the increasingly flexible identity of migrants which is bound to clash with growing nativism globally.

In fact, in the past 10 days at least three attacks are suspected to be racially motivated with the latest one on Friday when a Sikh man was shot at and injured near Seattle while washing



of them won parliamentary elections. But that doesn't mean the diaspora has lost interest in the politics of Punjab back home. If anything, it is even more involved. All the three main parties in the recent assembly election – Congress, AAP and Akali Dal – tried to get NRIs to campaign for them.

In fact, in a rare instance in 2016, the Canadian government had to write a polite letter to the Union government against Punjab Congress chief Captain Amarinder Singh meeting the diaspora in Toronto and Vancouver as their laws did not allow foreigners to hold political meetings in Canada.

Advocacy group Sikhs for Justice had lodged a complaint after which Amarinder cancelled his trip and wrote a sharp letter to Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau claiming his visit was not political.

In July 2015 Shiromani Akali Dal leaders were heckled by community members during public meetings in the US and Canada because they were upset with the party for what they perceived as governance missteps.

As far back as 2004 the Washington-based Migration Policy Institute said in its online journal: "The assumption that people will live their lives in one place, according to one set of national and cultural norms, in countries with impermeable national borders, no longer holds. Rather, in the 21st century, more and more people will belong to two or more societies at the same time." These migrants would work, pray and express their political interests in several contexts rather than in a single nation-state.

However, there is no doubt that the Indian migrant will face many tough challenges from now on. The Indian government will have to find ways to help these migrants navigate choppy times. Giving away awards at Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas functions may not be enough. The authorities will have to find ways of standing up for NRIs without damaging delicate diplomatic ties. And they will succeed if they understand the transnational identity.

his car. Sikhs, in fact, have been at the receiving end of the maximum number of attacks since 9/11.

The NRI of today is no longer that uncle with a funny accent who returns in white sneakers once a year with a box of foreign chocolates. The NRI of today is a "transnational migrant" who lives in the US or UK but doesn't conform to the norms and values of only that society. He is very comfortable straddling two nations and two cultures. He is as much Indian as he is American or European or Australian, largely because he never loses touch with India.

Sometimes the Indian identity takes over and at other times the identity of his adopted country is in the forefront. In England he will back Virat Kohli's team but root for Wayne Rooney's boys in the football World Cup and see no contradiction in his behaviour. Besides, there are many who divide their time between their adopted and home countries.

The real challenge for this new-age

We have come a long way from those naïve ABCD days if NRIs in the US are forced to issue an advisory to speak only English in public after Srinivas Kuchibhotla's murder in Kansas

NRI will be to find a footing for himself in an increasingly anti-migrant landscape. He may be very comfortable in his multiple loyalties which allow him to straddle two cultures, but many locals in his adopted country may see him as an outsider with divided loyalties.

The politically active Punjabi NRI is a good example of how loyalties play out today. It is generally accepted that Punjabis are an integral part of Canadian society. The community even made history in October 2015 when a record 19

When Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina visits New Delhi soon, she will be looking for deliverables

Subir Bhaumik



As Prime Minister Narendra Modi prepares to welcome Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in April, her image managers in Dhaka are more worried than elated. What will she come back with is the question they all ask.

Hasina has been steadfast in her support for Modi's 'isolate Pakistan' drive, her government has cracked down hard on Northeastern rebels and Islamist militants, on fake currency rackets and Pakistani agents to address India's security concerns. She has cleared transit for Indian goods to Northeast through Bangladesh territory and addressed most of India's connectivity concerns seen as crucial to the success of India's Look East policy. As Hasina prepares for her Delhi visit, Indian and Bangladesh officials are trying to finalise a deal to allow Indian use of Chittagong and Mongla ports for accessing Northeast.

But even her close advisers have been asking Hasina what will she have to show to her own people from this visit. Some even suggested it be deferred, now that they don't expect India to

announce any 'real progress' on the Teesta water sharing deal.

Modi had promised Hasina during his 2015 Dhaka visit that he will get Mamata Banerjee to agree to the Teesta deal after Bengal's concerns were addressed. Foreign minister Sushma Swaraj, tasked to manage Mamata, is ailing and the Bengal leader now complains Modi has not got a promised meeting between the Indian government and those in Sikkim and Bengal to work out a compromise deal that can be offered to Bangladesh.

Hope for a solution on Teesta seems to have evaporated post-demonetisation, now Modi-Mamata relationship is at an all-time low

Whatever hope there was for a solution on Teesta seems to have evaporated post-demonetisation, after which the Modi-Mamata relationship is at an all-time low. Not only is Mamata intensifying her deprivation rhetoric on everything from cash to Teesta waters, she is even accusing the Modi government of planning coups and assassination



targeting her.

Bangladesh high commissioner Syed Muazzem Ali has said his government continues to repose faith in Mamata for a Teesta solution, but even optimists doubt whether Mamata will oblige now. But India's endless domestic complications provide little comfort for Hasina. At a recent global water conference in Budapest, Hasina pitched strongly for lower riparian rights on trans-regional rivers.

Delhi should not miss the signal – patience on the water issue is running out in Dhaka. Bangladesh is still primarily an agrarian country where water is a huge issue. Hasina wanted Indian participation in the ambitious \$3 billion Ganges water barrage project, but Bangladesh's junior water

resources minister Nazrul Islam recently told me they have not been able to figure out Delhi's response so far. Chinese corporations, Nazrul told me, have already promised full financing for the project that, when completed, will help Bangladesh store enough water in a huge reservoir and use that during the lean season to flush its western rivers.

Bangladesh usually touches base with India before it turns to China for funding such key projects, but it does not help anyone for Dhaka to keep hanging. Hasina's government has huge development aspirations as she sees inclusive economic growth and human development as the only way to beat challenges like Islamic militancy and religious radicalisation and keep Bangladesh

on the right track.

So for all the eyebrows raised in Delhi over \$28 billion Chinese funding and investments promised for key projects during President Xi Jinping's recent Dhaka visit, Bangladesh insists it needs both India and China, the latter primarily as a source of development finance. China is also Bangladesh's main supplier of military hardware – its sale of two submarines to the Bangladesh navy now has got alarm bells ringing in Delhi.

India's insistence on revisions to the bilateral investment treaty, keeping in mind its funding of the 1320MW controversial Rampal thermal power project, has also worried Dhaka. Domestic resistance to the project is growing on environmental grounds. Even Mamata seems to be fuelling the resistance because she believes it will adversely impact not only Bangladesh's but also her state's part of the Sundarbans.

If Afghanistan and Bangladesh are key to Modi's 'isolate Pakistan' policy in South Asia, it is time for India's diplomatically active PM to look beyond catchy expressions and pay back to a trusted ally, when she needs it the most.

The writer is an author and former BBC correspondent

dilbert



Sacredspace

The Mountains

Mountains are impersonal. You can climb a peak but you can't possess it. It is simply there, serene and impervious to your love or hate, and it will be there long after you and I are gone.

Ruskin Bond

Lent, A Time For Silent Contemplation

Janina Gomes

The Lenten season is begun with Ash Wednesday. Lent is a time for silence. That does not mean that we give up all activities and stop short of accomplishing all that we have necessarily to do during the day. We do all that we do with an attitude of silence.

A silent attitude is to have a good look at our inner conflicts, many of which arise from relationships. Silent contemplation is to give up the compulsive need to always be doing something. Being busy becomes harmful when we do not know when and how to stop.

Talking can be a compulsive activity, too. When we are cautious about what we say and its effect on others, we listen before we speak. We talk in constructive ways and not become increasingly critical of others.

With an attitude of silence, contemplation becomes paramount.

We keep aside time for regular prayer and look deeply at ourselves and centre ourselves in such a way that communication with God becomes easy and life takes on added meaning.

Lent is a time of praying, fasting and almsgiving. Fasting is not only about abstaining from food but from negative habits that destroy our peace of mind. We allow good thoughts to flow through us. We are moved by compassion so that when we give, we do not take away the dignity of those who receive. That is why the Bible enjoins us that when we give, we should not let our left hand know what the right hand is giving. The Bible says, "God who sees what we do in secret will reward us."

Centred prayer is a way of soothing our inner conflicts and making sense of them. That gives us direction in our

lives, to move closer to God. That allows us to 'piano' our loud inner voices, to make room and space for the soft, inner voice.

Lent also reminds us that we are all stewards of our time. Time is not to be frittered away in concerns that are petty and of no good consequence to anyone. As good stewards, we move in the direction of calm and equanimity. We will continue to experience the stress and strain of daily living. But, like observers, we will discipline ourselves to focus on what brings us life and sideline what takes us away from living.

With silence, we learn to see our negative behaviours for what they are. We renounce and are sorry for the times when we got bogged down with trifles. True penance is not about using a horsewhip on our selves.

It is instead an exercise that allows grace to flow through us. We gently nudge aside negative behaviours and adopt patterns of living that bring joy to us and others.

The flow of grace greens our souls and allows us to transplant spiritual seedlings in our inner selves, very much like the rice that is transplanted in the fields. There are seasons for transplantation. The rain and sunshine are both needed for plants to sprout and grow. Every year we need to transplant the fields of our inner beings with new seedlings of love, hope and joy that the three pillars of Lent recommend – prayer, fasting and almsgiving. These bring us to the end of the season – a preparation for the glorious feast of Easter.

Post your comments at speakingtree.in. The Speaking Tree is also available as an 8 page newspaper every Sunday for Rs 3. Book your copy of The Speaking Tree with your newspaper vendor or SMS TREE to 58888.



the speaking tree