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# Dalits don't need dinner diplomacy

The community needs better education, jobs and healthcare

Political parties are in the middle of a pitched battle over whether Karnataka state BJP chief BS Yeddyurappa ate food ordered from a restaurant in a Dalit home recently. This, apparently, is in keeping with the party's plan of making inroads into the Dalit community by having leaders eat in their homes. BJP leaders are doing the same thing in other states. Whether there is any truth to the allegation from opponents that food was procured from outside as the Mr Yeddyurappa did not want to eat food cooked by a Dalit or not, the whole practice is abhorrent.

It suggests that Dalits need some sort of legitimacy by dint of higher caste leaders eating in their homes. The BJP is not alone in this, all political parties have adopted the practice to demonstrate their progressive credentials. This is to shortchange, and indeed, insult the Dalit community. Its members don't need the meaningless show of leaders deigning to eat with them. They need substantial inputs in education, healthcare and jobs to give them a level playing field. This dinner diplomacy is solely aimed at getting votes. Dalits today are not content to be considered a buyable votebank to whom leaders can pay lip service. As the BSP debacle in Uttar Pradesh shows, their vote can no longer be taken for granted. The discrimination against them continues as recent cases of a Dalit groom being beaten up for daring to come to the wedding venue on a horse shows. Mindless reservations in low-paying jobs and relaxation of marks restrictions too are not the answer. Dalits need concrete measures for empowerment.

As has been seen before, these visits by politicians result in raised expectations in the family in question. As we have also seen, they are forgotten quickly after the publicity purpose has been served. This tokenism must be stopped and cannot be a substitute for action on the ground. Dalit students should have equal access to education in a non-discriminatory environment. We have seen talented students like Rohit Vemula face the inherent prejudices in educational institutions. Politicians should put their money and resolve where their mouths are to push the cause of Dalits, not be part-time lunch or dinner companions.

# Promote viable crop alternatives to tobacco

This will save lives, protect farmers' livelihoods and reduce health costs

Hoardings of a teary farmer thanking the government for protecting their livelihood cropped up in Delhi last week. It's not loan waivers or subsidies that farmers are grateful for. The farmer in the advertisement is thanking the government for taking action against NGOs receiving foreign funds, referring to the recent order cancelling FCRA registrations of at least three NGOs working for tobacco-control.

Though cigarettes account for just 11% of tobacco use in India – bidis, chewing and smokeless tobacco constitute the rest – the Tobacco Institute of India (TII) says India's tobacco-control efforts have lowered domestic demand for home-grown Flue-Cured Virginia (FCV) and pushed up illegal cigarette trade, leading to farmers' earnings dropping around ₹1,500 crore between 2014 and 2016. Tobacco is highly addictive and kills half of its users. One million of the seven million annual deaths worldwide from tobacco-related diseases occur in India. Against this public health challenge, arguing that preventing disease and deaths will lead to farmers' suicides is a fallacy. India is the world's second largest producer of tobacco, with 60% of its annual production of 800 million kg being exported. Domestic demand accounts for just 40% of FCV cultivated in India, so the gains from improved health and lives saved from shrinking domestic demand clearly outweighs losses to farmers.

Increasing export of this highly addictive crop is not an ethical option. The challenge then is to ensure that farmers have viable substitutes for a tobacco crop. India took a lead in the inclusion of Article 17 in the World Health Organisation's Framework Convention of Tobacco Control, the world's first public health treaty that mandates countries support economically-viable alternative for workers, growers and sellers. Instead of fighting tobacco-control measures, India must save farmers' livelihoods by promoting viable crop alternatives to tobacco.

# Why BJP will dent Mamata's citadel

Trinamool's secular politics may not be enough. To think Bengalis are tolerant by birth is a myth



RANABIR SAMADDAR

With the rise of a power determined to expand its control throughout India, other powers based on local apparatuses of rule now face the Shakespearean dilemma: To resist or not to resist. With this will be linked the destiny of the all-important issue, namely, how to survive and live on, that is to be or not to be.

This dilemma is not new. Consider the trajectory of imperial power from the middle ages. The empire ruled from Delhi or Agra, and demanded submission from the rulers of the fur-flung regions. Either these kingdoms would be eaten up by the empire, or they would become fiefs. At times these kingdoms would form alliances and set up new emperors, who they thought would be obedient to them. But the pattern would return. This pattern supposedly ended with the introduction of constitutional rule in India.

However during Indira Gandhi's rule this pattern re-emerged, and now has revived with a vengeance. Once again, West Bengal, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Karnataka, and Kerala, are worried: How to face this aggressive power? How to form once more an alliance and confront the new empire? Is the way out one of playing with this new power, avoiding, evading, humouring, coaxing or cajoling? The choice is not clear. Most prefer to bypass or lie low, only at times resisting when they think that the core interests are being hurt.

One reason for this vacillation is that the social basis on which local power rests is now weak. Aggression has unsettled the hitherto settled caste, class, and other alliances on which the local power rested. Globalisation has produced new middle classes. There is an urban turn in political mobilisations. And these two factors now find reflections in new Hindu mobilisations. New capital, religious bigotry, conservatism, a State bent upon coming down on any protest forgetting that compassion is an essential part of governing, now happily co-exist. Market liberalism in economy and orthodoxy in politics and administration can now operate together. This had happened in other countries. There is no reason to think that it can't happen here.

Soft communalism is on the rise here, particularly in parts where we still do not witness the depredations of the vigilante squads. New money is its basis. Rent and extraction of resources are the roots of this new wealth. States do not want to tackle the so-called soft menace firmly lest it should antagonise Delhi. In West Bengal, the old syncretic culture is under attack and all that made a region based on the interface of particular languages, religions, castes, and other com-

munities are now asked to be standardised into a Hindi-Hindu polity. To create a riot and polarise the populace along a single divide it will require only a deliberately engineered breakdown of administrative power supported by a determined push by the bigots.

The Muzaffarnagar riot of 2013 is a model for the aggressive general power today. In this case soft communalism and passivity of the state took only days to develop into a riot. Such riot-like situations have occurred in West Bengal in the last few years. While the TMC has reacted with alacrity in several of these cases, these incidents show that the powder is being readied dry for later.

Kolkata had seen one of the worst commu-



The Bengal administration must be ready to stop attacks on secularism

nal massacres in the country in the 20th century. The middle classes had witnessed silently the Great Calcutta Riots of 1946, the riot of 1964 and killings of youth in early 1970s. Hence to think that Bengalis are syncretic and tolerant by birth is a myth that the liberal educated Bengalis love to hold as true. The upper caste educated Bengalis are mostly anti-Dalit and think reservation is the root cause of decline of education in Bengal, and that the disorderly conduct of the lower classes is the cause of the nemesis of the state.

Many TMC followers joined the recent Ram Navami processions and Hanuman Jayanti with gusto, thinking they were taking the wind out of the sail of the religious Right. On the other hand those brandishing weapons in festivals have got scot free, and are now emboldened.

The Congress also used to justify such conduct as a means to stem communalism. But they could not protect secularism. The Congress rule over India in 1992 in this way facilitated the demolition of the Babri Masjid. There is no reason to think that such fate will not overtake the regional parties.

The writing is on the wall is clear: Whatever tactics the local powers may adopt, they have their tasks clearly cut out. The administration must be geared up to prevent any attack on secularism and the syncretic or tolerant culture of the state/s they rule, and mobilise the masses for this political task.

For both these tasks the popular governments in the states have to pull their acts together. Otherwise they will be swamped by a conservative Right. Their pro-people policies will be of no avail.

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## DARK CLOUDS



If the Saharanpur clashes end up extending to clashes with other Dalits, it will mean that BJP's multi-class, multi-caste project is in trouble

SHANKAR SHUKLA/HT

# Saharanpur violence is bad news for a 'new India'

The confrontations between Dalits and Thakurs in UP have eroded the party's claims of improving law and order



PRASHANT JHA

A simple question is beginning to haunt the Yogi government of UP. Why is an all-powerful government, soon after elections, unable to handle a district level law and order/political issue? The answer lies in the nature of BJP's spectacular win itself. The Saharanpur clashes between Thakurs and Dalits was perhaps inevitable. There are two ways to view the caste clashes — through the prism of politics and governance. To win UP, the BJP relied on upper castes, non-Yadav OBCs and non-Jatav Dalits. Together, they constitute close to 60% of the population.

What this also meant was that three extremely powerful social groups voted against the party — Muslims, Yadavs, and Jatavs among Dalits. These groups, at different points, have ruled UP for over 15 years. It is not surprising that the change in the balance of power, and the exclusion of these groups from the power structure, began to have an impact on the ground. Other groups which have voted for BJP feel emboldened, while these three groups feel victimised. If it was a small fringe, it was different. But together, they constitute over 40% of the population. This is not to suggest that all three

groups are acting in concert — far from it. Indeed, there remain contradictions and conflicts within these groups too.

But the BJP's political success with its 60% formula — of getting the support of everyone else but these groups — is now turning into a 40% governance problem — of having to cope with challenges that emerge from these three groups. In Saharanpur, it is the Jatavs; in other places, it could be Muslims; elsewhere, it could even be Yadavs. These are not groups to take it lying down if BJP's supporters turn aggressive. And they have enough numbers and political strength to cause problems for the administration.

If it spreads, the BJP will also have to deal with another dimension of the problem. The party is in the middle of an ambitious political experiment — of creating a multi-caste alliance. The PM has made a conscious effort to expand into Dalits, backwards and poor: The party too has recognised that its ideological project of Hindu unity and electoral project of winning elections will always encounter obstacles without Dalits. At the same time, it has been able to retain the loyalty of its older base of upper castes. If the Saharanpur clashes end up extending to clashes with other Dalits, it will mean that BJP's multi-class, multi-caste project is in trouble. Yogi Adityanath and BJP are realising that social contradictions in a state like UP are such that even huge mandates do not go uncontested. Indeed, sometimes political wins of this nature themselves sharpen contradictions.

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## big picture

IAN BREMMER



# Trump cannot 'solve' the North Korea problem

Given that Kim Jong-un may have nuclear warheads and ICBMs, the US must be careful in dealing with him

The great problem in knowing whether Korea is about to explode is in judging which words to take seriously and which to ignore. For years, leaders of the world's only communist family dynasty have threatened to drown South Korea, the United States and Japan in a lake of fire. Past US presidents have shrugged off these threats and worked behind the scenes with China and South Korea to find safe ways to tighten pressure on the regime.

But things have changed. There are two important changes. First, US President Donald Trump is less willing than his predecessors to handle things quietly. Instead, Trump has approached North Korea with warships and threatened to "solve" North Korea, with or without Chinese help. He has also said he'd be willing to meet with Kim Jong-un. Depending on what happened in that hypothetical meeting, either a negotiated settlement or war might become more likely.

The second difference is much more important. In fairness to Trump, a more assertive response is warranted, because satellite imagery tells us that North Korea has made substantial progress toward constructing an intercontinental ballistic missile capable of reaching the US mainland — and on miniaturisation of a nuclear warhead that the missile can carry. This is why former president Obama warned Trump that North Korea was likely to be his biggest foreign policy challenge. It's one thing to negotiate with an erratic dictator; it's quite another when that dictator can send a nuclear-armed missile toward your largest cities. Would mutually assured destruction deter Kim Jong-un? We can't know for sure until the moment of no return.

Trump's options are no better than Obama's. Sanctions won't change minds in Pyongyang, because the leadership pays no political price for hardship imposed on the

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people, and it helps Kim persuade them that outsiders want to destroy them. China, which fears that a Korean crisis will send refugees streaming across the border, is unlikely to offer much help.

That said, there are plenty of cool heads around President Trump who will make clear that he can't afford to launch an ultra-high-risk surprise strike unless it's clear that every potential alternative has been exhausted. The president's dramatic warnings are still directed mainly at China in hopes that the president, Xi Jinping will help increase pressure on Pyongyang. He also wants to reassure allies in South Korea and Japan that he understands the severity of the growing threat.

Yet, short of open conflict, there is another important risk to consider. Imagine a best-case scenario. A coup inside North Korea leads to peaceful regime change. China steps in to ensure control of nuclear weapons and material, and Beijing agrees to a plan to reunify Korea's north and south. North Korea collapse would leave more than 25 million people without a country. Then there's the question of who will pay to bring the Koreans back together. Evidence suggests Korea's reunification will be far more expensive than Germany's. When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, East Germany's population was a quarter of West Germany's, and its per capita income was about one third the West German total. Though separated by the Iron Curtain, trade ties between them were well-developed. By contrast, North Korea's population is more than half that of South Korea, but its per capita income is less than 5%. The two countries have almost no commercial relationship.

To create anything close to parity of prosperity, reunified Korea will need billions of dollars per year over several decades. And how difficult will it be for millions of profoundly disoriented North Koreans, plucked from the lifeboats of their isolated country, to find work in one of the world's most technologically advanced economies and societies? What happens to those people if they can't find work? The world will need answers to these questions before Kim Jong-un can launch a nuclear attack. That day is now closer than anyone outside North Korea would wish.

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IF IT IS SOMETHING YOU HAVE TO DO, IT'S BETTER TO DO IT WITH A SMILE

Himika Chaudhuri

I had an unusually packed schedule at work last week. Even as I was struggling to meet work deadlines, I got a call from my husband at 4pm saying that we would have six people coming home to stay with us that night for two days. The news felt like a bomb drop. A nuclear one at that.

Arranging meals, setting the house, taking them around - the thought of it had me feeling tired, frustrated, angry - all at the same time. Where was the time, the energy

or the mindspace to entertain houseguests mid-week, and that too suddenly, I thought.

I reached home in panic and began to work on ordering in dinner, making evening snacks, straightening up the guest rooms. But that feeling of "anger" just refused to leave me. The stress that I felt made it almost impossible for me to concentrate on the work at hand. Fed up, I just let things be and sat down with a glass of chilled water and switched on some music. As I sat quietly for a bit, I realised that now

that I was calmer, the work at hand didn't seem so daunting, and neither did the thought that I had suddenly been thrust with a responsibility that I wasn't in a position to take up right then.

That's perhaps the thing with situations — we must deal with them — but how we let that affect our life, almost always depends on us. If we must, then let's do it with a smile.

Inner Voice comprises contributions from our readers. The views expressed are personal