

## Valley without hope



TICKER

MIHIR S SHARMA

Troubles in the Kashmir Valley have taken a new and distressing turn — witness the shocking murder by a mob of a member of the Jammu and Kashmir police on duty in downtown Srinagar. Deputy Superintendent of Police Mohammed Ayub Pandith was beaten to death by a mob of 200 to 300 right outside Srinagar's

Jamia Masjid; no more explicit indication of anarchy and alienation exists than the open murder of a policeman.

It is important to stress that this murder differs from other killings of officials of the state in Kashmir. First, this was not an attack by militants against a planned target.

Second, this was a senior officer in the state police force.

Third, it happened in full public view.

The Jammu and Kashmir police occupy a specific niche in the Valley. Naturally, they are supposed to be guardians of the Indian Constitution, just like any other police force. But they have also been, historically, a crucial halfway house between ordinary Kashmiris and the paramilitaries and army that are seen as instruments of "Delhi". Being raised from among Kashmiris, and living among them, as well as carrying out the ordinary day-to-day policing activity essential to society, they were not usually the primary targets of anti-Delhi anger or violence. In the past years, this has changed. Police families have been ostracised and individuals attacked — culminating in this horrific murder.

This indicates the changing character of the violence in the Valley. Since the killing of Burhan Wani and the ill-advised coalition between the Peoples Democratic Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party, resistance in Kashmir has increasingly become to appear like a popular revolt and less like a stage-managed guerrilla war. It is unwise for us to imagine that Kashmir in 2017 has the same character as it did in 1991, 2008 or even 2014. The crowds of civilians that emerge to stand between paramilitary squads and holed-up militants would have been an unusual event in earlier times.

What has happened to bring us to this pass?

The answer to this question is complicated. Yet one thing is certain: the current upsurge is a product of a far more widespread anger at Delhi and disillusionment with local leadership than was earlier the case. Older Kashmiris have complained that they are no longer able to "control" the young and the angry. I have been told that senior security officials have even said, in despair, that it is difficult to fight "an entire people". If so, this is a shocking admission of failure. The Indian state has been unable to demonstrate to a generation of young Kashmiris that there is hope in something other than active resistance. Seeing themselves as having been denied their rights as Indians, they are now seeking them as Kashmiris. We will need a different approach to the Kashmir problem if we are to emerge from this impasse.

What is aggravating the problem? Well, first, the fact is that the state government has lost all credibility. It lost much of it through the very composition of the coalition: the PDP ran a campaign to keep out the BJP, the BJP ran to keep out the PDP, and when the two joined hands afterwards it seemed to legitimise the primary accusation against "pro-India" politicians in the Valley — namely, that they have no principles whatsoever. But the state government's behaviour since then has made matters worse; the chief minister seems to have gone almost completely silent.

The central government has been as silent. The BJP is a constituent of the government in Srinagar, but its government in Delhi seems to have forgotten that. No calming words have emerged from the central leadership, not a single phrase that Kashmiris could view as conciliatory. Even elements within the army have abandoned that institution's long-cherished principles, particularly in its response to the widely-shared video of military-men using a human shield.

Compare this to Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who famously said that a common humanity was the base upon which the Kashmir dispute would be settled. Today's BJP views Kashmir only as a way to win votes in Uttar Pradesh and a stop on the way to Amarnath. And, if you listen to increasingly loud whispers from its foot-soldiers, eventually as a location for settlements of "real" Indians.

Given the central government's cynical silence, the voices of "India" that Kashmir hears are on TV. One paramilitary officer I met told me that Times Now and Republic TV were more dangerous for the national interest in the Valley than Pakistan TV or Geo. The blood-thirsty, dehumanising rhetoric of chicken-hawk TV anchors, and the soldiers and ex-soldiers they con into appearing on their shows, are among the worst contributors to Kashmiri alienation. If this implacable hatred is the authentic voice of India, Kashmiris argue, who can hope for peace?

## Giving Air India another shot at survival

Ratan Tata's reported keenness on acquiring Air India shows his experience of AirAsia India and Vistara has erased unhappy memories of the 1994 SIA-Tata JV



### WHERE MONEY TALKS

SUNANDA K DATTA-RAY

Perhaps J R D Tata would have been pleased, for what rankled most of all his disappointments with successive Indian governments was Morarji Desai sacking him as a director of the airline he started in 1932. But as a practical man, JRD would also have remembered his friend, Singapore's veteran Lee Kuan Yew, warning about the rot that had eaten into the old Tata Airlines after it became Air India in 1946 and was nationalised in 1953.

Lee would not have thought there was much chance of the beleaguered carrier recovering

from its wounds by limping back to the nest where it was born. Yet, he was prepared to give it a chance. Singapore Airlines was probably the first to respond seriously in 2001, when Atal Bihari Vajpayee's government (Arun Shourie was disinvestment minister) thought that selling some equity might enable the airline to recoup its \$70-million debt and upgrade its fleet of 27 aircraft. This was at least partly because of Lee's early admiration of what he regarded as one of the world's finest carriers. He called it race discrimination when the British, who still ruled the Malayan peninsula, didn't offer Air India shares in the new Singapore-registered Malayan Airline in which British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC) and Qantas held 51 per cent equity. But as his honeymoon with India faded, he saw Air India's decline as symptomatic of the Indian state.

I asked Lee why SIA eventually withdrew from the bidding — the last to do so — in 2001 and he said there was "too much vested interest" in Air India for a slightly diluted ownership to make any difference to operations. SIA could not "change the culture, it is too ingrained". There would be "too much opposition all down the line, within the company and in the government, in the civil avia-

tion department and ministries, because this is the airline that services them". Many heads would be broken and life would be miserable. Sellapan Ramanathan, then President of Singapore, agreed that investing in Air India would be throwing good money after bad. He mentioned deteriorating service, unionisation, and jobs for the boys. "I ask you, how do you run an airline when every chairman when he retires — he's got a new job — still travels free? Every Tom, Dick and Harry has his share. Are you a commercial airline or are you not?"

Lee's prescription was predictably drastic. He would "let Air India die naturally" instead of trying in vain to revitalise it. It would be "better to start a new airline" and cater separately to VIPs. "You can have Indian Air Force One, Air Force Two, Air Force Three for the President, prime minister, and ministers and officials. A dynamic airline helps the economy. You have to take into account the number of tourists it will bring, the businessmen, the connections it will create." Lacking his father's sentimental attachment to India, Singapore's present Prime Minister, Lee Hsien Loong, complains that air services remained static to protect Air India even if

it meant discomfort and "ungodly" hours for passengers.

Qatar Airways has shifted its interest from Air India to seeking 10 per cent of American Airlines. But Ratan Tata's reported keenness on acquiring Air India indicates that his experience of AirAsia India and Vistara has erased unhappy memories of the fiasco of the \$846-million SIA-Tata joint venture company set up in Mauritius in 1994 for a domestic airline in India. That ambitious project was meant to illuminate the way to an era of close India-Singapore cooperation at many levels. After protracted negotiations, it founded on the rocks of India's bureaucratic conservatism, military nervousness, political greed, professional jealousy and the ineffectiveness of three prime ministers who dared not confront vested interests.

Air India's fixed assets are valued at ₹37,375 crore. Its 12,880 employees cost ₹2,345.5 crore and are protected by a clutch of unions, which dedicatedly serve their, rather than the airline's or public's, interests. Debts are in the region of ₹46,570 crore with accumulated losses of ₹47,440 crore. The airline's market share is under 13 per cent. There is a strong case for allowing Air India to follow such once-hallowed global brands as TWA, Swissair and PanAm into oblivion. Nearer home, today's Indians hardly remember Jamair and Kalinga. But for the drama of Vijay Mallya in the London courts, Kingfisher, too, would be a forgotten name. In joining them, Air India might clear the skies for a more dynamic new Tata airline.

LUNCH WITH BS ▶ SANJEEV SHARMA, MANAGING DIRECTOR, ABB INDIA

## Human face of technology

**Sharma discusses ways in which India can beat its job paradox and how technology can create a better world with Raghu Krishnan**

The ISKCON temple in north Bengaluru is an unusual place to meet our guest for Lunch with BS. In the temple, a tourist attraction in the technology hub, houses the kitchen of Akshaya Patra, the non-profit that makes nutritious meals every day to keep thousands of children in school. The Akshaya Patra foundation runs industrial-style kitchens across India, working with several state governments in their mid-day meal programme. It follows best practices in sourcing, in ensuring the meals are healthy and throws open its audited books so that people know how the money it collects is spent.

The north Bengaluru kitchen, the first from the foundation, produces over 200,000 meals a day, all packed in safe containers and dispatched in vans before 8:30 am to be delivered to government schools across the city.

The locally-listed arm of Swedish power and industrial automation maker ABB contributes around 16,000 meals a day, a small slice but one that helps the company meet its mandatory corporate social responsibility (CSR) spending. Its association with the non-profit has made ABB conscious that "giving back" is not just about CSR. Since engaging with Akshaya Patra, ABB has offered the services of doctors and ambulances deployed at its installation sites in remote locations to local communities.

We are meeting Sanjeev Sharma, managing director at ABB India, who returned to the country to take charge of operations after 17 years at ABB's various global offices. He chooses to tour the Akshaya Patra kitchen before we sit down for lunch at a private room in Higher Taste, the vegetarian restaurant at ISKCON. The main restaurant is out of bounds — a party is on in full swing.

A vegetarian by choice, Sharma wants to have a simple working lunch and the lady in charge suggests a platter of *rotis*, vegetable curry and biryani along with butter milk. We go with her suggestion. As we wait for the food to arrive, I ask Sharma about India's job paradox: How can India create the number of jobs it needs? Take Akshaya Patra, which is using technology to scale up, but is using less number of people than used in the mid-day meal model followed by Tamil Nadu.

If the aim is to serve nutritious and hygienic food to children, he says, the focus

should be on building scale using technology and reach out to more children, who in turn would be better citizens in future. "Given the scale of the problem, we are addressing one per cent (of the needy children). If you use technology and increase it to 40 per cent (of the total population), you have 40 times as many jobs," says Sharma. The need for people to cook, plan and deliver as many meals to children, for most of whom it would be the first or the only meal, would also mean up-skilling from manual labour that would only open up more employment opportunities. "The more engaging and meaningful programmes we do in scale, jobs is not a problem in a country like us," he believes.

Sharma runs a 10,000-strong business that employs blue collar workers in factories across India making equipment, and highly qualified engineers in the R&D unit, who help design complex projects globally. If, for instance, ABB is laying a cable under sea between Norway and Germany, all the work is done in India, except for the execution.

While there are technology shifts that impact jobs — case in point, India's IT services firms shedding engineers as they look to reinvent — Sharma says, India can still generate millions of new jobs if it is able to skill its people. "One side of the story is about fear mongering about mass losses of jobs. That will happen if you don't do anything about it. I think we should fear that. If we chose to do the right things, it is possible to avoid job losses at a mass scale," says Sharma, speaking slowly but clearly — a trait one probably honours working with Europeans. The food, though without onion and garlic, seems spicy to him. We get a cup of curd to nullify the effect of the spices.

Sharma says the financial sector in India continues to be a net job generator due to scale it achieved through technology. But when computerisation of banks started nearly two decades ago, there were protests on the streets that it would displace people.

During his stint in Malaysia, Sharma oversaw factories in 29 countries and got an overview of the global business of ABB. He restructured businesses, shut unviable factories and looked at new areas of investments. On his return to India last year,



ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA

Sharma only saw opportunity for ABB to build, grow and expand its business.

In January, ABB closed a massive contract to lay 1,800 km of high voltage power lines from Raipur, capital of Chhattisgarh, to Pugalur in Karur district of Tamil Nadu. The

two-way link will integrate thermal and wind energy for transmission of power to high consumption centres. It will help transmit thermal energy to the south during summer, when wind is low, and transmit clean energy to the north, when there is excess wind power.

Once in India, Sharma also got to travel across the country visiting factories and offices, while his wife, Mukta, stayed back in Malaysia not wanting to unsettle their second daughter who has just completed Class XII. He catches up with reading — he prefers writings in business and technology — while travelling, as he waits at an airport and is on board a plane. All that travelling across India has also given him ideas about what the country could do to generate more jobs.

India is ripe to get into manufacturing, he says, but it ought to choose the right products that can see value addition here than produce assembly line products that even a robot can do. China is automating a lot of jobs as labour costs rise, but there are still products that need skilled human intervention. "If you are making switches, one way would be to automate all the lines like in Germany. In India also it is possible to do those switches and in the sub-assemblies in semi-urban areas, you can create jobs. After the sub-assembly stage those can be integrated into a product line run by automated machines," says Sharma, as he finishes the biryani with soya nuggets. The server suggests *rasmalai* for dessert; we oblige.

One way to tap the opportunity India presents, he continues, is to skill people, set up assembly line finishing schools, a model

Indian IT services firms perfected by getting engineering graduates to learn in six weeks and generate thousands of jobs every year. Or scale like Akshaya Patra. Sharma, as part of the Karnataka unit of the Confederation of Indian Industry, is ready to pilot those finishing schools that would train ITI diploma holders to be job ready in the shortest possible time. "If you do that, these people can, as a first step, get into the low value-add and the slightly medium value-add jobs that would be shed by economies like china. This is where you can generate mass employment," he says.

Sharma also feels that the growing restrictions on travel to countries like the USA would help India's software industry more than it would actually hurt. "Instead of exporting people, we should export innovative ideas. As a country, you should focus on more value added skills, sell products that the world demands. Ensure that you have scale, have digitally trained manpower, reskill through machine learning and artificial intelligence but get more people to take up education first," says Sharma. "When you turn inwards, instead of trading people across the border you would focus on innovation. The world will change for the better."

## The curse of the Khooni Jheel



PEOPLE LIKE THEM

GEETANJALI KRISHNA

I still remember the first time I saw the secret lakes of Faridabad. We were hiking through the thorny Aravali scrub when we came across the first one, its eerily blue waters stretched for kilometers. When we finally reached its banks and peered into the water, we couldn't see the bottom. The silence was unearthly and there were no signs of life anywhere around the lake. It was a queer sort of place. Over the years, on subsequent trips to the forests of Asola and beyond, I have come across many such water bodies, all created by the indiscriminate mining that took place here in the 80s and 90s. So much land was dynamited that ground water pooled in to form these lakes. The dynamite residue pollutes the lakes till date, rendering them uninhabitable.

cousins and uncle struggled in the water. By the time help arrived, all that remained to be done was to fish their bodies out of the water. Two of the victims were still holding hands. "Till date, the entire *gali* lane, is shrouded in grief, as we had all grown up with the three men who lost their lives in the killer lakes of Faridabad," said Sharma.

Since the incident, Sharma and his neighbours have come to believe that evil resides in these lakes, locally called Khooni Jheel (bloody water). "Think about it," said he, "nothing is able to survive there, not even fish or birds." Also, they believed that some occult powers around the lake influenced the victims to make ill-advised decisions the day they drowned. "They were family men, one has left behind a wife and infant," said he. "None of them had ever done anything as risky as jumping into an unknown stretch of water before." This belief has been strengthened by the fact that the lake had claimed several lives every year.

It could also be, said I, that the lakes themselves weren't evil, just dangerous simply because they were uncharted and poorly administered. "It could," agreed Sharma. "But it could also be that greed and avarice that prompted the uncontrolled mining of the Aravalis have tainted them forever and nothing good will ever spring forth as his

## Nowhere safe



PEOPLE LIKE US

KISHORE SINGH

Cities have an aura of safety about them, despite everything to the contrary the newspapers report daily. Still, you don't expect to be attacked in the relative security of your own car, protected by the rush of evening peak hour traffic when it is still light. The attack, all the more audacious for it, came, therefore, as a surprise — and not a pleasant one.

We'd had an incident at precisely the same point of the now dismantled BRT just ahead of the Moolchand crossing a few years previously when some goons had smashed our car window while the vehicle idled at a red light, and made off with my wife's purse. It had remained an unpleasant memory that was dredged up every time we took the road, but on this

occasion, returning from the hospital following a laser surgery procedure that had been painful, I hardly knew where we were when the car started wobbling, forcing the driver to pull up by the kerb. The occupants of a van behind us too stopped, cautioning the driver to remain in the car because they had seen someone slash our car's tyre at a traffic light. Their attempt to help was challenged by a couple of thugs waiting on the pavement where we'd been forced to stop, who flung bricks and threatened them with physical harm for intervening. They then hopped pillion style on to four or five unnumbered motorbikes, waiting ahead, and disappeared into the traffic.

The good, if shaken, samaritans — occupants of an RBI van that had concluded a cash delivery — persuaded me to call the police. Twenty minutes later, the police arrived, a sizeable platoon of them, and though they were solicitous, provided little comfort beyond asking us to change the damaged tyre in their presence, convinced that if we were left alone, the gang would return with knives and rods to threaten and steal — or worse.

The rest was the usual baloney. There were cameras at the traffic light where the attack had taken place, but the other side of the crossing was the jurisdiction of the Greater Kailash police station to whom they were transferring the case.

The police *thana* in question never called. Ironically, we were outside the Defence Colony police station, which should have been a deterrence for the hoods? "See, Sir," said a friendly cop, "policing quality has deteriorated," blaming it on citizen reporters who video and protest against the patrolling habits of the men in uniform and their attempt to instill fear in criminal elements by roughing them up, "they have taken away all our powers."

While there might be some truth in it, the paradox that one of the city's busiest, best-lit crossings, in snooty south Delhi, within a stone's throw of Lutyens' habitat, should be hostage to the mercy of hoodlums, armed or otherwise, who think nothing of attacking and thieving in plain sight of thousands of commuters without dread of reprisal, is scary. Though the helplessness of men from the RBI van who had stopped and come to our assistance were resolute, they were also scared. As custodians of cash, they were travelling sans uniforms, without armaments, and at the mercy of gangsters who, they now feared, might by waiting at the next traffic signal to extract revenge. "They don't want to harm you," a policeman tried to assuage their fears, "all they're after is any valuables you might be carrying." Not quite the comforting thought one expects from the men who guard our cities.

# WEEKEND Business Standard

Volume IV Number 47

MUMBAI | 24 JUNE 2017

## WEEKEND RUMINATIONS

T N NINAN

### Celebrating, fingers crossed!

**A**s Benjamin Franklin wrote, nothing is certain in this world other than death and taxes. India's experience with taxes has often been worse than death (which at least has finality to it!). That is all the more reason to pause and celebrate the advent next week of the single-most important reform of the country's tax system since Independence. The country's arrival at the stage of introducing a value-added tax that integrates treatment of goods and services, and covers both the Centre and states, is a massive achievement — even if marked by the compromises and delays involved in getting anything done in India.

The result, perhaps inevitably, is not as clean or uncomplicated a tax as might have been wished for. Further, we should be prepared for the possibility of operational problems as a transitional issue, while taxpayers will evidently need to be prepared for more paperwork and form-filling than they have been used to (the third certainty in this world, after death and taxes, is form-filling). But these should not take away from the magnitude of the achievement, and the seminal importance of the change that is being introduced.

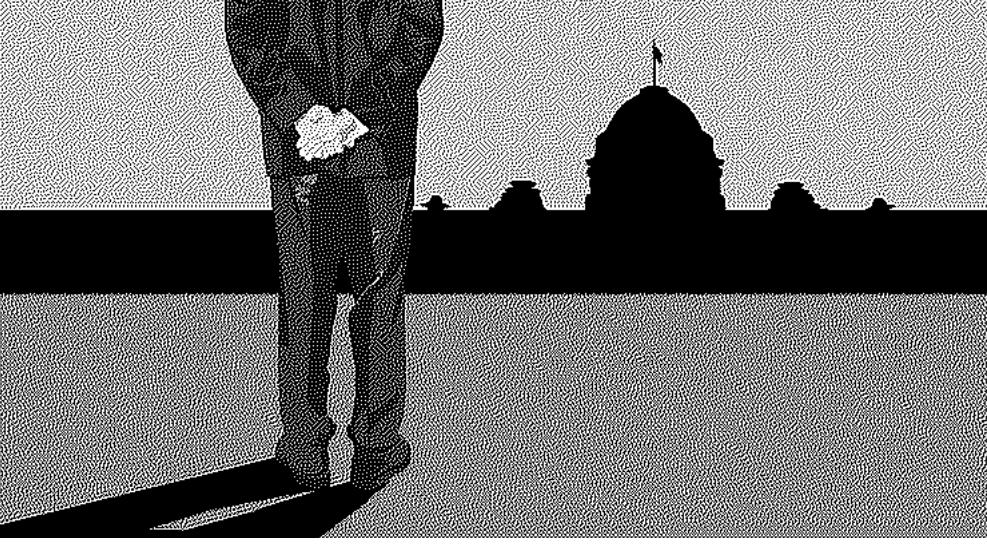
The tax has many fathers, but no mothers! Still, it is a happy marriage of expert opinion with fiscal practice. Expanding on Shankar Acharya's listing of the GST's distinguished parentage in this paper in 2005 (*India's tax reformers* <http://mybs.in/2FS8KHa>), one must include at the intellectual level everyone from L K Jha, Raja Chelliah, and Amaresh Bagchi to M Govinda Rao and Vijay Kelkar. The finance ministers who deserve a roll call of honour are V P Singh (who first introduced the Modvat), Manmohan Singh (who expanded the scope of Modvat), Yashwant Sinha (who introduced the more ambitious Cenvat with a flat rate of 16 per cent), P Chidambaram (who moved the first Constitutional Amendment Bill on the GST) and now Arun Jaitley, who has overseen the project come to fruition.

State chief ministers also deserve much credit, as do successive chairmen of the empowered committee of state finance ministers — Asim Dasgupta, Sushil Modi, and Amit Mitra. Various central finance ministers encouraged and facilitated the states' move to a state VAT system — an essential preparatory step. Finally, Pranab Mukherjee got Nandan Nilekani to head the group whose work led to the creation of the new tax's information technology backbone, the GST Network, which will face its trial by fire next week.

The GST's promise is multi-faceted: It is expected to improve the coverage of the tax net, improve compliance by those in the net, increase therefore the ratio of taxes to gross domestic product (GDP), and thereby generate more resources for the government. In the process, it is also expected to give a boost to GDP and, through forcible digitised recording of transactions for millions of new players, transform the country's business environment while also speeding up road transport (no more stoppages at state borders). How exactly things will pan out, and whether or to what extent these potential benefits will be realised, will be known in the coming months and years.

Malaysia, often cited as among the more recent of the 140 countries that have introduced a GST, did not have an easy time of it. And India's businessmen have a way of defeating the objectives of every solution that those in authority devise! Six months after demonetisation, the level of digitised transactions has slipped back to the old levels, traders who had pulled out unused credit card machines have reverted to asking for cash payment, and cash is back in real estate transactions. Vast ranges of products (like routine hardware items and sundry electronic and other gadgets) are habitually sold at the retail stage without anyone asking for bills, the former at significant discounts to the listed price. While the GST is structured to be an all-encompassing tax and to create a vastly expanded digital network of recorded transactions, no one knows how traders long used to avoiding taxes will apply their ingenuity. So, while hoping for a smooth changeover to a "new, improved" way of doing things, fingers crossed!

ILLUSTRATION BY BINAY SINHA



### CV and stature

What makes one tick as Rashtrapati, and what doesn't, is determined by the incumbent. It's for Kovind to prove sceptics wrong

**W**ether Ram Nath Kovind has the credentials to be India's 14th Rashtrapati or not is now a question. His committed backers will read his many achievements in public life "in spite of" his humble origins, and even those on the margins may echo the answer embarrassed Congress leaders had given when skeletons were tumbling out of the closet of Pratibha Patil's past as she was nominated in 2007.

My paper was then trawling Ms Patil's past and running a series of exposés on murky dealings in the business of sugar, cooperative banking, and private educational institutions. Seeking a cessation of hostilities, a senior Congress leader came to see me very late one evening, with a basket of *langda* mangoes. "All your reporters' stories are correct," he said. So why should we stop running them, I asked. "Because brother, for better or worse, come July 25, she will represent the glory of the republic. So how does it help to dig all this dirt out and give your President-to-be a bad name?"

Some of the justifications the Congress then produced were comparable to what's on offer with Mr Kovind now. A long career as a parliamentarian, governor, first woman president (second Dalit now) and, finally, no better or worse than some of the others to have occupied the same position. The numbers in the electoral college matter, so the Congress and the UPA brazened it out with Ms Patil. Critics, this columnist included (*National Interest: Pratibha Patil, The Precedent*, <http://bit.ly/2xI4wF>), had warned that this marked a new trivialisation of what was, after all, a titular, yet highly symbolic office. We had also warned that there will be consequences, and that a poor and tempting precedent was being set. We are seeing it play out now.



NATIONAL INTEREST

SHEKHAR GUPTA

Husain and a forgettable Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed.

We have also seen two professional civil servants K R Narayanan from the foreign service and Dr A P J Abdul Kalam, a science-bureaucrat.

That pretty much accounts for all the presidents we have had so far. You can say with pride that none of them failed to maintain the non-controversial dignity needed of this highest office. Two prominent exceptions: The Emergency, when Ahmed signed Indira Gandhi's ordinances without reading; and later a short phase when Singh allowed his office to become a den of intrigue against Rajiv Gandhi. Relatively ordinary men can successfully grow into an office with such organised protocol, pomp, and really not very much of substance to do.

Let's now try a different test. Which ones were our

most memorable presidencies, and which the most forgettable. We don't need to go so far as the fifties or sixties. But those born in the past 50 years, and certainly the millennials would likely not remember that India had a full-term President called Giri in spite of the fact that he became a vital pawn in Indira Gandhi's game of splitting the Congress and destroying its old guard. And we will all remember Ahmed for the wrong reasons. For my generation, his presidency is defined by that brilliant Abu Abraham cartoon with Ahmed in a bath-tub, chest-hair showing, handing out a signed document and pen to his staff and saying, if there are any more ordinances, just ask them to wait. Ahmed was very well qualified, from an Anglicised old social elite, and checked that all-important "identity" box as well, as a Muslim.

Top of the memorable ones, on the other hand, will be Kalam, not merely for his vital intervention on Bihar and substantive nudging over some dodgy judicial appointments — in spite of the collegium — but also his calming influence over a post-Gujarat riots India in a period also fraught with war-like tensions of Operation Parakram. Venkataraman and Sharma gave India confidence in the resilience of the "system" through periods of much political instability and short-tenure governments, some running on daily wages. Narayanan enhanced the moral and intellectual dignity of the office in a manner comparable to Radhakrishnan, much earlier. Remember also his dignified confidence in the tricky period when Mr Vajpayee's government was defeated with one vote and had to lead the war in Kargil as a caretaker.

What was the difference between those we remember with affection and gratitude, those we have forgotten, and a few that we'd rather forget. The history of our presidency throws no connection with qualification, political record, caste, religion, or social background. In short, it was never the quality of the CV that defined an incumbent's performance or legacy. It was that other, unquantifiable quality: Stature. Kalam, Venkataraman, and Narayanan had it. Giri, Ahmed, and Ms Patil didn't.

This is the question about Mr Kovind. You can be raised to any office if you have the numbers with you. The challenge is to raise your stature to that office. Under our Constitution, the presidency is even more titular and unimportant than the governor of a state. A governor can at least play political games and also exercise real powers in periods of President's Rule. The founding fathers had intended the presidency to be the chief patron and symbol of the Constitution, the glory of the Republic. We shouldn't pre-judge Mr Kovind. As president he will deserve the entire nation's respect due for his office, irrespective of the politics. Hopefully he will also surprise all sceptics.

Postscript: After saying tough things about Giani Zail Singh, it's fair to recall this example of his brilliant wit and political savvy. Zia-ul Haq, in India on the pretext of watching cricket in February 1987, but actually to calm things with Rajiv Gandhi over Operation Brasstacks, called on Zail Singh and joked (in Punjabi) that now he too had a prime minister (Jnejo) and was a mere ceremonial president like Zail Singh. "There's one difference, Zia Sahib," Zail Singh replied. "I know the precise day my job ("naukri") will come to an end. You can choose to go on for as long as you wish." Giani demitted office, on due date in July that year. Zia lasted a year longer, till fate took him down with that C-130 in Bahawalpur.

Twitter: @ShekharGupta

### Why I often support teams playing against India



#### VIEWPOINT

DEVANGSHU DATTA

**O**n principle, I want India to win every cricket World Cup (WC) — both 50-overs and T-20. This is because I consider a WC as the biggest trophy. Whenever a WC comes around, I want the India team to be well-prepared, in peak form and raring to go.

As a logical extension, I support any team that plays against India in any non-WC game. This may seem counter-intuitive but it is an attempt to counteract the counter-intuitive nature of Indian team selection processes. The BCCI often makes unusual picks; sometimes India plays the wrong number of bowlers, or it plays the wrong type of bowlers, or both.

Hence, on principle, I would also like the Indian team to lose a large proportion, if not all, of their matches going into a WC. A string of prior losses, preferably humiliating ones, in other events improves the chances of a WC win.

Therefore, I consider it my patriotic duty, as a patriotic citizen of India, to back any and every opponent of India, except at those quadrennial events.

The outcome of the recently concluded Champions Trophy was reasonably satisfactory. It would perhaps have turned

out even better if India had lost to South Africa and Pakistan in the league but one can't have everything. As it stands, at least one conflict — between captain and coach — has come to a head and is now being resolved. We can also hope that players who did not pull their respective and collective weights will be sacked.

If everybody was capable of following through with this chain of logic, Indian cricket would be better-run. The fans would be happier as well. Remember what the psychiatrists say about delayed gratification? The emotional reward is always greater if the reward is delayed.

Consider this scenario: Indian fans suffer agonies and absorb defeat after defeat. Then, just as they are on the verge of overloading suicide helplines with their frantic calls, India wins the World Cup. Bazinga! Transports of joy!

The quantum of happiness centred on that win exceeds by far, the quantum of sorrow accumulated over four years. Historians will recall this is exactly what happened in 1983.

Sadly not everybody is capable of being far-sighted. I have been abused by many Indian fans who consider my attitude wrong-headed. My patriotism has even been called into question, along

with my parentage, only because I wholeheartedly want India to win the World Cups. This is despite the fact that I live in India, I pay taxes here and I want India to repeatedly win the biggest trophy in the game.

What's really odd is that many of the most vocal and abusive of Indian fans are actually citizens of other countries. Some are British, others are American and still others are Canadians and Australians.

There are even a few New Zealanders; some residents of Singapore as well. These chaps worked really hard to leave their homeland and went through years of struggle in order to become citizens of elsewhere.

These members of the Indian diaspora still fervently support India while equally proudly displaying the new passports that they have acquired.

They are deeply offended if they are accused of treachery to their adopted nations because they cheer for their nation of origin. At the same time, they accuse Indian citizens — those who choose to live in India and remain citizens — of treachery if they don't cheer for India.

Double standards anybody?

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### Indian Muslim or Muslim Indian?



#### LINE AND LENGTH

T C A SRIVATSAS-RAGHAVAN

**T**he Madhya Pradesh government last Sunday had arrested 15 people for supposedly celebrating Pakistan's win in the Champions Trophy final. By this token, Britain should be arresting almost all Indians with Brit citizenship for supporting India's team.

Little wonder, then, that at one of those 'Three years of NDA' meetings someone said "Indian Muslims have never been under such severe pressure as they are today". This usage reminded me of something that happened three decades ago when I was working for a large

multi-edition newspaper.

A highly respected former member of the ICS and scion of a very distinguished family had written an article for the paper. At the bottom of that article he had been described as an Indian Muslim.

There was no need to do that. His name was enough to tell the reader his religion.

A few days later he wrote to the editor, saying that he should have been described as a Muslim Indian instead of as an Indian Muslim. Clearly, it was a matter of some importance to him. It came as a big surprise to us.

But he had posed, in the most succinct way possible, the identity problem of Muslims in India. The problem hasn't gone away. In fact, it's been made worse over the years by the Sangh Parivar.

Was it the cynicism of the Congress, which has always regarded India's Muslims as a mere political group and whose votes were essential? Or was it the persistence of the RSS and the BJP, which painted them as

mortal enemies of the Hindus for all time to come?

Were they worried that the Congress was ditching them? Had Indira Gandhi's gradual drift away been the trigger? Or was it the Rajiv Gandhi government's decision to open the locks of the Babri Masjid?

Were they concerned that the victimhood syndrome was being appropriated by the BJP, which was making the Hindus feel as if they were the victims?

Majoritarian victimhood, by the way, was a new strategy at the time. Countries in West Asia have successfully adopted it since then.

#### Slippery slope

It's become crystal clear in the 30 years since 1986 that the fears of those two highly educated Muslims were well-founded. They have become as relevant as pawns are in a game of chess: They make up the numbers but have no firepower.

This has led to a completely unexpected outcome. Just as the more urbane supporters of the RSS-BJP among upper-class Hindus never thought leadership would slip away to, shall we say, less urbane people, those

two Muslim gentlemen also could not have anticipated that the leadership of their community would slip into the hands of people who thought very differently from them about political and social issues.

But this is what eventually happens when you bring in religion and nationalism into politics, whether overtly like the BJP or covertly like the rest of the non-southern Indian political parties. It makes the minorities politically influential as a group but at the same time increases the vulnerability of individual members of the group.

The overall consequence of this change can be seen most in the nature of leadership, strategy, and tactics. Thus, now, for the BJP the Muslims are only socially important inasmuch as anti-Muslim talk helps unite the Hindu vote for it.

For the rest of the non-southern Indian political parties, they are important only politically, inasmuch as they do nothing much for them socially lest this upset their Hindu supporters. UPA I and II tried it and paid the price for it in 2014.

They will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

### A historical retreat

#### EYE CULTURE

KANIKA DATTA

**D**onald Trump's decision to spend Fathers' Day weekend at the official presidential retreat, Camp David, attracted unwanted attention because this was his first holiday outside his lush Florida properties. The decision to go rough — by Mr Trump's standards — may be grudging acknowledgement of mounting public criticism. At \$20 million for his first 80 days in office, American taxpayers have footed about a fifth of the \$97 million bill that his predecessor Barack Obama racked up during his eight-year tenure.

Predictably, the liberal media smirked because Camp David's high-end rusticity (and limited golfing opportunities) were unlikely to appeal to 45's taste for gaudy uber-luxury and 18-hole courses. "Camp David is very rustic. It's nice, you'd like it. You know how you'd like it? For about 30 minutes," he once joked to a European journalist.

History is not his strong suit but Mr Trump may like it even less if he were aware of its associations with former presidents whose views were as divergent as possible from his crude nationalism. The 1978 Camp David Accords, patiently brokered by Jimmy Carter, between Egypt's Anwar Sadat and Israel's Menachem Begin, marked the first global name recognition of Camp David.

But the retreat started life in the 1930s as a part of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal programme, the sort of economic stimulus that is anathema to Mr Trump's free-market fundamentalism. It was expanded into a presidential retreat in 1942, after the US had entered the war against the Axis powers, a reversal of the aggressive isolationism embedded in the original America First slogan (which Steve Bannon purloined for Mr Trump's inaugural speech).

Roosevelt found Washington's humid summers unbearable for his sinus problem. With the war on, escapes to his Hyde Park mansion in New York were out of the question.

As an alternative, a rudimentary recreation camp built 1,800 feet above sea level in the Catoctin Mountains was hurriedly expanded and refurbished. About two hours' drive from Washington, Roosevelt was delighted with it. He flourished in this cool, dry air, opting to hide there from the press in the November cold of 1942, on the eve of the first biggest amphibious assault in American history — the Operation Torch landings in Morocco and Algeria — that changed the course of World War II.

It was the general who commanded

the Allied forces in Operation Torch that gave the retreat the name by which it is known today. He named it for his five-year-old grandson, hoping to erase the memory of a popular predecessor. Before that, however, Dwight Eisenhower had considered closing it because — in ironic contrast to Mr Trump's predilections — he thought it symbolised unwarranted luxury in those difficult post-war years. His wife convinced him to retain it.

The first post-war Republican president couldn't have been more different from the 21st century's second GOP incumbent. He derisively coined the term "military-industrial complex", which appears to have become the centrepiece of Mr Trump's jobs-revival agenda; launched an infrastructure-boosting programme that was more genuine than 45's tax-break-led scheme; and enforced a Supreme Court ruling on equal education rights for African-Americans, scarcely a concern for today's incumbent.