

# Coercion is not the answer

## Raje has done a disservice to the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan

To say that Rajasthan chief minister Vasundhara Raje acted in an insensitive manner by tweeting that the lynching of social activist Zafar Hussein in Pratapgarh district on Friday was not a murder is an understatement. A group of government officials allegedly beat to death 55-year-old Zafar Hussein, a social activist and CPI-ML member, for trying to stop them from photographing women defecating in the open. By taking photographs of the women, the officials were trying shame them into stopping open defecation and ensure that people build toilets under the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (SBA). Other than being insensitive, Ms Raje's defence of government officials will only embolden others to take such illegal steps.

With the target for making India open defecation free (ODF) by 2019 under the SBA, states are tripping over themselves to meet the deadline, even at the cost of violating citizens' right to food or privacy. In Indore, local authorities used temple loudspeakers to narrate a "commentary when someone went out to defecate in the open". According to a local Hindi daily, the Sawai Madhopur collector has directed ration shops to stop giving people grains if they didn't build toilets. Social activists rightly claim that such directives flout the National Food Security Act, 2013. In South Sikkim, people are denied government documents including OBC/ death/birth certificates, if they don't build toilets. Recently, a 70-year old man in Tuticorin, filed a case in the Madras High Court, stating that his village has been denied work under the rural employment guarantee scheme because he failed to build a toilet. This, he claimed, violates Article 21 (right to life) of the Constitution.

While threatening citizens may enable officials to participate in the end open defecation race, it won't sustain the programme in the long run. To ensure success of this programme, which will only happen when people demand toilets, it is important to make people understand the critical link that exists between health and sanitation. In fact, chief ministers such as Raje are doing harm than good to SBM by supporting wrongdoers.

# It's a clear case of misplaced priorities

## Setting up gaushalas within jail premises will in no way help rehabilitate prisoners

When we think of Indian jails, what comes to mind is overcrowding, lack of proper sanitation and human rights violations. So, the move by the Uttar Pradesh government to set up gaushalas on jail premises comes as a bit of a surprise. Last year, Haryana announced that it would set up gaushalas in jails. The rationale is that this will provide another form of productive activity for prisoners and will also utilise surplus land. But this is a case of misplaced priorities. The states which are planning to set up these facilities should first take a long hard look at the conditions in jails that need to be set right first. At the all India level, the occupancy rate at the beginning of last year was 114.4%. Two-thirds of all prisoners are undertrials, packed like sardines into small spaces. Of these, an average of four dies every day. Seventy per cent of convicts are semi-literate or illiterate and the plight of women prisoners is particularly worrying. A problem most inmates face is lack of sleep thanks to overcrowding and excess heat or cold. These are some of the issues that should exercise the governments.

If there is surplus land, it could be gainfully used to set up literacy or computer centres with an aim to dispense rehabilitative justice as opposed to retributive justice. The idea should be to enable the prisoner to be gainfully employed once he has served his term and reintegrate into society. The setting up of gaushalas is part of a political agenda in most BJP-ruled states. But to use surplus land in jails in no way helps the prisoners.

Dairy farming is a skill but this would also suppose that the prisoner once freed would have access to livestock in order to earn an income. The government could think also of using the land to set up counselling centres. In fact, surplus land can also be used to expand the prison facilities so that overcrowding can be lessened. The government cannot be totally focused on cow protection and promotion at the cost of other pressing issues.

# The farm crisis is really a jobs crisis

## The economics of agriculture is not going to change dramatically with or without loan waivers



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It is difficult to miss the political or economic underpinnings of the current farmer unrest in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, which could quite quickly spread to other states.

The politics fuelling the agitation is obvious: With the Narendra Modi-led BJP pummeling the Opposition in election after election, the anger in farmland has come as a godsend to political foes and even allies. Nothing exemplifies this better than the antics of the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, which has been shouting from the rooftops demanding a farm loan waiver. It is fighting for its political survival as the BJP is eating its lunch in the state.

Unfortunately, it is the economics of farming that matters, and this is not going to change dramatically with or without loan waivers. In 2008, the UPA wrote off ₹72,000 crore of farm loans, but this has not stopped demands for more loan waivers. Between 2014 and now, state governments — from Telangana to Andhra Pradesh to Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh — have written off, or agreed to write off, nearly ₹90,000 crore of farm loans. If Maharashtra agrees to write off another

₹30,000 crore, it will add up to ₹1,20,000 crore. And there could be more, with the Chhattisgarh government promising to waive interest on farm loans to the tune of ₹3,200 crore. There could be a deluge of waivers as we head into the Gujarat, Himachal, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh elections later.

Nobody is asking the question: If nearly ₹2,00,000 crore of waivers between 2008 and now have not (and will not) put the distress in farming behind us, what will?

If cheap credit, free power (in many states), free water (in many irrigated areas), discounted diesel (for pumpsets), subsidised fertilisers and seeds, and higher procurement prices for foodgrain cannot make farming viable, what will?

If make-work schemes like MGNREGS and heavy investments in land acquisition for highway building and rural roads at four times market prices, as the UPA's Land Acquisition Act mandates, will not improve rural fortunes, what will?

The answer is that we are seeing the problem the wrong way. The farm crisis is really a job crisis in disguise. If the jobs growth problem is handled, the farm crisis will abate steadily.

Consider one simple number: Some 50% of Indians depend on agriculture, but agriculture accounts for only 15% of our GDP. This means agriculture is supporting more than three times as many people as it should. There are more mouths to feed for every acre of land cultivated than what the land can profitably



Protesters throw milk on the road outside the collector's office, Thane, Mumbai

produce. Is it then any surprise that farmers are angry over what they get as procurement prices and subsidies?

Evidence from some of India's other mini mutinies also merge into this narrative. Consider who all have been agitating for jobs and reservations. Over the last two years, we have seen the landed Patidars of Gujarat, the Gujars and Jats of Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, the Kapus of Andhra Pradesh, and the Marathas of Maharashtra resorting to agitations to demand job reservations. These are all castes that have in the past depended on agriculture for livelihoods. But instead of talking farm prices and subsidies, they are talking jobs reservations. Clearly, they know that their families have outgrown the farms

they own, and now need to look for jobs. This proves that half the problem in farms has to do with excess hands who need to find incomes outside the farm.

But this is what has stalled in a world where manufacturing and agro-industry jobs are increasingly being mechanised, and labour laws militate against hiring more people. This is what needs fixing.

The road to farm rejuvenation involves increasing farm sizes (currently 85% of India's farmers are categorised as small or marginal) by allowing surplus labour to find other jobs, so that those who remain farmers can borrow and invest in raising productivity by adopting modern technology and mechanisation. The money now going down the loan waiver drain needs to be re-routed to investments in farm infrastructure — irrigation, canals, cold chains, etc. And yes, India needs to become one market for farm produce, by encouraging states to bring down the barriers to interstate movements.

Last, the Land Acquisition Act needs to be scrapped, and the focus shifted to creating a genuine market for land in rural areas. Most farmland near cities or highways now costs at least ₹50 lakh an acre. Which marginal farmer will not sell his land at true market prices if he can earn an annuity income of ₹30,000 a month without having to do any work?

The best way to serve farmers is to allow millions of them to exit farming, by allowing them to reap market prices for the one real asset they own: Their land. The UPA's land Act militates against easy encashment of this asset by making land prohibitively expensive for infrastructure-building or expanding urban growth.

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The views expressed are personal

## COURSE CORRECTION



Slowly but steadily the flood plains of the Yamuna have been destroyed, both by the people and State agencies

# Stop encroachments on the Yamuna floodplain

## Building on the river bed will impede the flow, increasing the chances of devastating floods in surrounding areas



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Rivers need space to spread naturally and harmlessly when in flood. Europe has learnt it at high cost following the recent spate of devastating 500 year flood events. In India we have had devastating floods in Mumbai (2005), Uttarakhand (2013), Srinagar (2014) and Chennai (2015) to bring home to us the ill effects of invaded river flood plains.

Have any lessons been learnt? Not really, if what is happening in Delhi with Yamuna flood plains is any indication.

The River Yamuna travels some 52 km through the NCT of Delhi. It enters near village Palla and exits at village Jaitpur. Ranging from 800 m to 3 km in width, the Yamuna flood plain in Delhi — constituting the DDA's Zone O — is spread, on paper, over 9,700 ha. But a closer look tells a different story.

Slowly but steadily the flood plains have been gnawed at both by the people and State agencies. The result is unauthorised settlements mushrooming all over the flood plain; and state-created or sponsored structures like power utilities, metro complexes, bus depots, crematoria, games village and stadiums, samadhis and cultural cum temple complexes standing well within Zone O. One of the very

harmful structures have been the pseudo bridges (bridge that span just the lean season flow with approach roads standing as cross embankment in the floodplains) that have straight jacketed the river and fragmented the flood plain. Fortunately due to a sensible direction in 2014 by the Yamuna Standing Committee, the river and the city might not suffer anymore of these pseudo bridges!

It is a strange irony that despite a well adjudicated and non adversarial judicial intervention made on 13 January 2015 by the NGT in form of "Maily se Nirmal Yamuna Restoration Project 2017" the city is still to witness any notable movement on the restoration of its flood plain. What use is an unimplemented plan, however sound?

There is little time to lose and the litmus test of the state's ability to reverse the brazen and insidious encroachment taking place well into the active flood plain shall be in the Jaitpur area where encroachers are making merry while State agencies remain undecided on who should beat the cat.

A recent NGT-directed hydrodynamic simulation of the Yamuna flood plain carried out by IIT Delhi presents a horrifying scenario. Looking at the past 25 year flood scenario and where the water will spread, it warns city managers against any lethargy in halting and reversing flood plain encroachments. Imagine what the city would witness if floods of the intensity of 100 or 500 year (not unlikely in times of rapid climate change) were to visit it?

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The views expressed are personal

# Modi-Trump meet may not live up to expectations

## Status quo in bilateral ties needs to be maintained until there is some sort of stability in Washington



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To say that the United States is still getting used to Donald Trump as president, six months into his inauguration, is an understatement. It is against a backdrop of unpredictability unleashed by the president's policy and turbulence, both domestically and globally, that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's much-awaited meeting with Trump will take place in Washington on June 26.

Trump's challenges abound on his own turf — from the courts, from Congress, and media on everything from travel restrictions on people from six Muslim countries, to charges of rigging the polls by colluding with Russia, to his attacks on the free press. Since he took over, Trump hasn't indicated any sense of respect for traditional levers of diplomacy, leaving much to personal interactions with individual leaders.

If the leaks are any indication, Washington's foreign policy establishment is frustrated. Key senior positions — including that of ambassador to India — are still empty, leaving the department of state and the department of defence largely rudderless. Campaign rhetoric on trade practices forgotten, Trump called China's Xi Jinping a "great guy". China, Saudi Arabia, (where he visited and reaffirmed America's friendship and declared Qatar an enemy throwing West Asia into crisis); even Russia has understood this paradigm shift, and opened direct communication with Trump and his family insiders. A personal rapport is also what Delhi's foreign policy machinery hopes to achieve when the two leaders meet.

The Indian side is confronted with some key concerns that Modi could raise in Washington. Indian nationals living in the US have been at the receiving end of an all-consuming anti-immigration rhetoric. Srinivas Kuchibhotla became the first to be killed in a hate crime after the immigration bans

MANY COMPARE PM NARENDRA MODI WITH US PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP — FOR THEIR POPULIST POLITICS AND DISREGARD OF THE MEDIA AND CIVIL SOCIETY. BUT THE COMPARISON ENDS THERE

were announced. Campaign promises of nationalist and protectionist policies have impacted the immigration of highly skilled workers to the US. The much-sought after H1-B visa is subject to much greater scrutiny. Several new initiatives aimed at reforming skilled immigrant hiring policies have been introduced in Congress, raising alarm among Indian IT companies.

Under Barack Obama, India-US ties saw significant expansion in defence, counter-terrorism and trade cooperation. Indian national security managers are keen on expanding this particularly in ways that strengthen and solidify US support in combating Pakistan-sponsored extremism against India. New Delhi hasn't forgotten that phone call between Trump and Nawaz Sharif — calling him a fantastic leader of a fantastic country, but is quick to replace that memory with the more recent snub to Sharif in Saudi Arabia a few weeks ago where Trump referred to India (and not to Pakistan) as a victim of radical terror.

For now, Washington's South Asia policy seems restricted to Afghanistan's security, critical for the region of course, but also the US India's challenge lies in bringing some of that attention to its own specific security concerns to the rest of the region, vis-a-vis Pakistan, and the all-weather China-Pakistan nexus.

Just how India will raise these concerns and what response it can expect is unclear. Notions of shared democratic values are changing, and the Trump era poses a major challenge for India-US ties.

Many compare Modi with Trump — for their populist politics and disregard of the media and civil society. But the comparison ends there. Modi, for all the criticism at home for a flagging economy, an agrarian crisis and silence as the number of incidents of communal violence rise, has consistently expressed the need to consolidate India's role as a global player, with the US as lead partner.

However, given Trump's fickle politics, his lack of attention to the need for a balance of power in Asia, and US foreign policy that swings from autopilot in some areas to dramatic shifts in others, New Delhi must lower its expectations and accept the possibility that this visit could be more about the optics than real outcomes. Perhaps the best India can hope for when the two leaders meet, is holding on to the status quo until there is some stability in Washington. In these times, even that is good. As the old saying goes: Don't make best the enemy of the good.

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CONFESSON OF A CRIME HAS A HEALING EFFECT ON OUR BRUISED PSYCHE

## PP Wangchuk

We tend to forget our crimes as most of us are not given to confessing our crimes. One of the greatest qualities in a person that can bring back peace of mind and happiness is to confess and regret our crimes, small or big.

I do not think there can be any person on this planet who has not committed any crime. The crime may not be murder or rape; it could be a case of abusing someone or even misbehaving in a public transport

system.

What we should do is that we look back, at least over a period of one year, and see where we erred and committed a crime or crimes. Even if we don't do anything to 'undo' the crime, or don't punish ourselves in a suitable manner, that would be okay provided we confess and regret and vow to never ever do such things.

This process has a great healing effect and our bruised psyche gets a 'lift'. You feel ashamed of your deed, and feel sorry and vow never to repeat such things.

American philosopher Criss Jami, in Killosophy, says: "A man does not have to feel less than human to realise his sin; oppositely, he has to realise that he gets no special vindication for his sin."

That is to say, ultimately, a confession is in itself a punishment as well as a reward, depending on the way you take it.

(Inner Voice comprises contributions from our readers  
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