



A thought for today

Pardon him, he is a barbarian, and thinks that the customs of his tribe and island are the laws of nature

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW, Caesar and Cleopatra

Douse Language Fires

Mamata has blundered in trying to impose Bengali on Darjeeling Hills

With protests and bandhs called by the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha the Darjeeling Hills are tense, and the Bengal government has a serious crisis on its hands. Violence has already broken out against government establishments – such as the torching of the Bijanbari block development office – forcing thousands of tourists to flee the picturesque holiday destination. The GJM stir started over the state government's declaration last month to make Bengali compulsory in all schools, which has certainly backfired for chief minister Mamata Banerjee. It has breathed life into her political opponents and allowed them to accuse Kolkata of linguistic and cultural chauvinism.

That said, violence cannot be justified under any circumstances and those protesting in the Darjeeling Hills must do so peacefully. In fact, resorting to violence will only undermine the protesters' valid cause: making Bengali compulsory in all schools in the state goes against the spirit of plurality on which Indian democracy rests. Unfortunately this isn't the first time that a Bengal government has tried to force-feed the Bengali language. In 1984, the erstwhile Left Front regime had abolished English in the primary sections of state-run schools to give primacy to Bengali. That decision ended up negatively affecting the job prospects of a whole generation of Bengalis.

It's welcome that Mamata has now reversed her position and clarified that Darjeeling schools will be exempt from the compulsory Bengali policy. Just as the NDA-led government at the Centre has been criticised for trying to impose Hindi on non-Hindi speaking states, the latter can't justify imposing regional languages within their own jurisdictions. If the Centre is erring with moves that may see Hindi being made a compulsory subject in CBSE schools across the country, so is the Kerala government with its recent ordinance that makes Malayalam mandatory in all schools in that state.

In an increasingly globalised world languages have become closely linked with economic opportunities where parochial policies do more harm than good. India's rich and diverse linguistic traditions must not be sacrificed at the altar of political expediency. Governments promoting a particular language at the cost of other languages is a recipe for disaster. The country has already seen its fair share of violence on this account. A better approach would be to allow schools and parents to decide what languages should be taught and promoted.



Modinomics Rings Hollow

Look beneath government hype, and signs of deep economic distress are evident

Kapil Sibal



Three years of drought, that is the state of the nation. The monsoon of hope is a long way away. Yet the dream has not soured; a reflection perhaps on the nature of our Republic.

This government is in denial. It believes that black economy has been given a fatal blow. At 7.1% India continues to be the fastest growing economy in the world. Spurt in public investment has created jobs. FDI flows are evidence of investors' preference in the growth story of India. Reforms have led to ease of doing business.

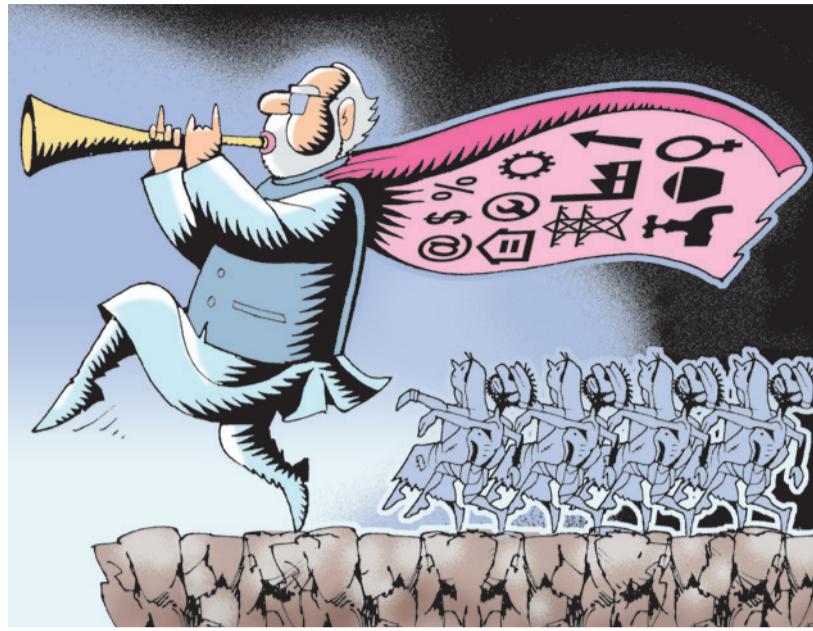
Consensus on GST that eluded the previous government has been reached. This historic legislation will now be implemented from July 1. The Sensex has reached record levels. All this because Modi, as predicted by Nostradamus, will transform India.

Let us critically examine each of these claims.

On November 8, when the prime minister announced demonetisation of all 500 and 1,000 rupee notes freezing 86% of India's economy, it was indeed a surgical strike at unaccounted cash in the economy. If this ill-thought decision was an attempt at eradicating unaccounted wealth then it failed miserably. Most cash is either invested in real estate, gold or is stashed abroad. Undisclosed cash in circulation represented only around 5% of unaccounted wealth.

Now that real estate is outside the GST net, cash will continue to be a factor in real estate transactions. What is alarming is that unaccounted cash entered the banking system and is slowly being withdrawn and reconverted into undisclosed cash.

Demonetisation was a godsend for dalals who earned a fat commission for depositing such cash in banks and then ensuring their withdrawal. Black money is back albeit at a slow pace. Its full flow will take time. The problem of black money remains. It's the poor however who suffered. Claims that demonetisation will eliminate both fake



notes and deal a fatal blow to terrorism have turned out to be hollow.

The claim of 7.1% growth is also suspect. The latest Q4 GDP results show a growth of 6.1%. This also reflects the adverse impact of demonetisation on the economy. Private investment, the engine of growth, has dried up. Rate of savings is below 30% of GDP, whereas during UPA regime it was over 35%.

Exports were in constant decline for 19 consecutive months till June 2016 and have now plateaued. The IT sector has to reinvent itself to remain competitive. Recent layoffs by four major IT companies are evidence of its health.

Bank NPAs at 11% of gross advances are a roadblock to lending. Low credit off-take, in the absence of demand, is worrisome. There are hardly any jobs for the 12 million who enter the workforce annually. Underemployment is rampant. Jobs created in 2015 and 2016 stood at a dismal 1.35 lakh and 2.31 lakh, respectively.

Yes, public sector investment has created some jobs but unless private

Private investment, the engine of growth, has dried up. Rate of savings is below 30% of GDP, whereas during UPA regime it was over 35%

sector investment is robust, the economy's capacity to absorb the workforce will be suboptimal. FDI flows mainly in IT, electronics and defence – niche sectors of the economy – don't cater to jobs in either agriculture, small and medium scale sector, or for that matter in manufacturing. The National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) set up in December 2015 to catalyse core sector growth has so far not made a single investment in any project. So much for the confidence of foreign investors in our economy.

Modi believes in seducing foreign investors in digitising the economy, little realising that most of India earns less than Rs 10,000 a month and seldom accesses digital platforms for

bank transactions. Record levels of Sensex, we all know, do not reflect the true state of the economy. With real estate giving no returns and interest rates down, the only option for investors is in equities. This is risky because once the bubble bursts investors will be badly hurt.

As for ease of doing business, we are ranked 130 out of 190 countries evaluated by the World Bank. Is that the transformation Prime Minister Narendra Modi had promised in 2014? Unless the economy is rid of bureaucratic juggernauts and antiquated rules and regulations, the promised transformation will elude us.

In a regime which terrorises business and entrepreneurs, where the taxman is allowed to become an extortionist, where investigation agencies are hand in glove with government, business cannot hope to flourish. Business is already moving out of India. Big business now prefers to make investments abroad. This is the reality. Ease of doing business is a chimera. Reforms have been slow and incremental. Radical reforms were promised only to be forgotten.

GST is a ghost of what was originally conceived. Any consensus which compromises the core of the reform is not a cause for celebration. To exclude electricity and real estate from GST was a mistake. We were sold the dream 'One Nation One Tax' which is now 'One Nation Eight Taxes'. Multiple rates will make for bureaucratic squabbles. Multiple registrations will break the back of the small and medium sector.

The trader is already complaining at the haste with which the finance minister is moving. They want GST implementation postponed. Some states also hold the same view. GST could have been a historic legislation. Its shortsighted compromises have taken away its sheen.

The economy is in distress. Maybe, the cheerleaders of Modi do not quite know what Nostradamus meant.

The writer is a senior Congress leader and former Union minister

South Asia Cup?

ICC Champions Trophy sees the dominance of subcontinental teams and audiences

The ICC Champions Trophy semifinal stage is going to be a subcontinental affair with India, Bangladesh and Pakistan vying for top honours along with hosts England. It was there that the game originated, but these days all and sundry like to do an Ashis Nandy facelift of the facts, that cricket is a South Asian game accidentally discovered by the English. Even from Cardiff to Edgbaston it's been people of South Asian origins who have been filling the stands. The tournament of course has delivered lots of drama and surprises, with the two teams that played the 2015 ODI World Cup final (Australia and New Zealand) being the first to exit and the top-ranked ODI team (South Africa) being beaten by the lowest-ranked (Pakistan). Now the prospect of an Indo-Pak final has fans salivating.

But really the task of predicting a winner or even the finalists remains tougher than ever due to volatile performances. Pakistani bowling looked ineffective against India but decimated South Africa. The Indian side that crushed Pakistan convincingly looked ordinary while being made to eat humble pie by Sri Lanka. Bangladesh's spirited batting performance against New Zealand gave them a semifinal berth and they look all fired up to avenge their 2015 World Cup quarterfinal loss against the fancied Indians at Edgbaston tomorrow. It is England however which has impressed everyone by winning all their three pool matches comfortably.

A diverse and multicultural England has also provided a great setting for the tournament. The good-natured joke goes that if the Brits hadn't invaded us, the semifinal play with Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis wouldn't have happened. Champions Trophy is now truly headed for a reunion of the batch of 1947.



'More inclusive and softer Brexit would be smoother ... need a cross-party negotiating team to represent UK'

Preet Kaur Gill was elected as Britain's first-ever female Sikh MP in the recent UK general elections, winning the Birmingham Edgbaston constituency in the House of Commons on a Labour Party ticket. Gill spoke to Rohit E David on UK Prime Minister Theresa May's failed gamble of calling a snap election, Labour's substantial gains and the impact of British political uncertainty on Brexit and negotiations with the European Union.

Q&A

■ What explains the surprise election results in UK and the reverses for Prime Minister Theresa May wherein her party lost 13 seats and its majority in parliament?

The snap election was called by May for her personal and Conservative Party interests and not in the public interest. The objective was to solidify her position and mandate, taking advantage of her positive polling and public opinion in April. However, what the election and the campaign showed was a stark difference between the two main parties – Labour and Tories – in values and connections with the general public.

The positive campaign run by Labour focussing on the many and not the few resonated with the electorate. This was highlighted by the massive gains made by Labour in both winning new seats as well as reducing the Tory majority.

■ What does the hung parliament verdict in UK indicate just days before Brexit negotiations are to begin?

The Conservatives failed spectacularly in this election. Their stated objective was to build a clear strong majority to empower May to dictate policy and Brexit on her personal terms ahead of the public need. The actual result has left the Tories short of a majority. It is unfortunate that despite all the support and momentum Labour fell short of an overall majority.

This has allowed the Conservatives to now try and form a minority government through an alliance, with the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) adding their 10 seats to the 318 won by the Conservatives.

■ What does the UK election result mean for Brexit?

This whole election was called to strengthen May's position for a hard Brexit with Europe. She openly said no deal was better than a bad deal, indicating she was prepared to leave the EU without a deal in place. This would have

been catastrophic for UK.

The people have spoken and shown that they do not have confidence in the Tories. Brexit should now be taken up by a cross-party negotiating team to represent and reflect the will of the people of UK for the best deal for all.

■ Doesn't this jeopardise prospects for hard Brexit and bring in much more uncertainty?

This depends on the approach of the Conservatives going forward. They will clearly not be in a position to do what they wish as they will face a tough challenge in the House of Commons on each decision and bill that is not in the wider public interest. People in my constituency have strong views on this and people and the economy should be at the centre of negotiations.

If the government changed their approach to a more inclusive and softer Brexit, utilising views and ideas and policies put forward by Labour and the other parties then this would ensure a smoother Brexit.

■ Where did the

Conservatives lose support?

The Tories basically lost their way with their unprecedented U-turn on their election manifesto just five days after publishing it. This highlighted the weakness and ill thought out policies of the Tories, openly challenging their slogan of strength and stability. This was further questioned when May failed to attend open televised debates with other party leaders.

Overall, the Tories underestimated Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and his ability to connect and resonate directly with the electorate, especially the young voters in a way we have not seen before in British politics.

■ Do you feel that the result may impact India-UK ties?

I don't see this result specifically affecting India-UK ties. However, it will make it more difficult for the Tories to make key decisions for the future of UK without proper parliamentary discussion.

■ What are some of the challenges you foresee in front of you while representing the Indian community?

The most pressing issue for the Indian community is of race hate crime. Given global terror incidents, the response by countries like US to demonise entire communities has caused real concern. We have seen increased threats and loss of life in the Sikh community due to mistaken identity and ignorance.

dilbert



Bahu ho to aisi

Rabri Devi wants daughters-in-law straight out of Ekta Kapoor serials

Shinie Antony



Rabri Devi has spoken what's on most mom-in-law minds. She wants a bahu straight out of Ekta Kapoor's serials. You know, the one who chops onions in a kanjeevaram sari with sindoor trickling down her head.

The former chief minister of Bihar is looking for two rishtas, a bride each for her sonny boys, as Tej Pratap Yadav and Tejashwi Prasad Yadav, both in their late twenties, have come of age. Ministers in the Bihar government, they look forward to taking dabbas with garam garam rotis in them.

One apple of her eye, she says, is very religious; the other apple of her other eye not so religious. The tricky thing will be to match their future brides accordingly. The pooja-path boy should get the pooja-path girl. Plus, as he is given to dressing up as lord Krishna, she must have a Radha costume on the go.

Girls who go to cinema halls and shopping malls need not apply. They can continue to shop and munch popcorn, undisturbed. It is the other type of girls – those who shop online and watch pirated films at home – that we need here.

You know, the girl next door. Who can look after the house, preferably the Yadav household and not some random neighbour's; who will respect elders, mainly Mr and Mrs Yadav, and not the cook or driver, however elderly; who can manage outside work, without being sidetracked by shop windows and movie posters. In short, just like mommy-in-law.

Her sons, whose mall plans were stalled for their eco-unfriendly tendencies, better hope these malls never get made, so no wife of theirs is tempted to accompany them to work and be mistaken for shoppers. That would upset mummy ji, who only asks they be well-cultured.

Meanwhile, her husband Lalu Prasad tweeted that the two dream bahus can, in addition to being caring and loving, be working women or housewives. Perhaps describing someone he knows well, he particularly stressed he doesn't want a veiled, home-bound, dependent woman on the premises. Sanskari, yes, he said in Alok Nath's voice, but his own accent.

He also mentioned his continuing youth. 'Abhi toh main jawaan hoon,' he said on the occasion of his seventieth birthday, a comment she ignored like all good wives should. But candidates who apply for this post must be able to place cake in hubby's mouth without looking at hubby at all, as demonstrated by Rabri Devi herself in photos from that day.

No Hope For Religion In A Sleepless World

Talk: Osho

Triumph over death' does not mean there is something like death to conquer. It simply means you will come to know that there is no death. To know that death is not, is to conquer it. As soon as one knows there is no death, our ongoing and losing battle with death ceases.

In sleep we reach the same place as we do in meditation. But in sleep, we are unconscious, while in meditation, we are fully conscious. If someone were to become fully aware, even in his sleep, he would have the same experience as in meditation.

For example, if you were under anaesthesia, and in your unconscious state, you are taken on a stretcher to a garden where flowers are in full bloom, where fragrance is in the air, the sun is shining and birds are singing, you would be completely unaware of all this.

Once you are out of the anaesthesia, if we asked you how you liked the garden, you would not be able to tell us anything. Then, if you were to go to the same garden when fully conscious, you would experience everything present there when you had been brought in before.

In both cases, although you were brought to the same place, you were unaware of the beautiful surroundings in the first instance, while in the second instance you would be fully aware of the flowers, fragrance, song of the birds, the rising sun. So although you will undoubtedly reach as far in an unconscious state as you will reach in a conscious state, to reach some place in an unconscious state is as good as not reaching there at all.

In sleep, we reach the same paradise

we reach in meditation, but we are unaware of it. Each night we travel to this paradise, and then we come back – unaware. Although the fresh breeze and lovely fragrance touch us, and the birdsong rings in our ears, we are never aware of it.

And yet, in spite of returning from this paradise totally unaware of it, one might say, 'I feel very good this morning. I feel very peaceful. I slept well last night.'

What do you feel so good about? Having slept well, what good happened? It cannot be only because you slept – surely you must have been somewhere; something must have happened to you. But in the morning you have no knowledge of it, except for a vague idea of feeling good. The worst punishment ever devised

on earth is not letting a person sleep. In the past, meditation was as easy for those who were close to nature as sleep is for those who live close to nature. First, meditation disappeared; now sleep is on its way out. Those things are first lost which are conscious; after that, those things are lost which are unconscious.

With the disappearance of meditation the world has almost become irreligious, and when sleep disappears the world will become totally irreligious. There is no hope for religion in a sleepless world.

You will not believe how closely, how deeply, we are connected to sleep. How a person will live his life depends totally on how he sleeps.

(Abridged from 'And Now And Here', Osho Times International, courtesy Osho International Foundation, www.osho.com)

Post your comments at speakingtree.in



the speaking tree

Sacredspace

Serious Theft

I always saw pollution as theft, and I always thought, 'Why should somebody be able to pollute the air, which belongs to all of us, or destroy a river or a waterway, which is supposed to belong to the whole community?'

Robert Kennedy, Jr.