



**A thought for today**

Once you attempt legislation upon religious grounds, you open the way for every kind of intolerance and religious persecution

WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

# Dangerous Trend

From Ballabgarh to Srinagar, communal politics undermines personal and national security

The most remarkable thing about the murder of a young 19-year-old and assault on family members out for some pre-Eid shopping is not that it took place on a railway train in Haryana's Ballabgarh, only a few miles out of the national capital. It is that the perpetrators came up again with the 'beef' excuse, hoping this will swing the administration and public opinion their way.

What's even more shocking is that the SHO of Government Railway Police at Ballabgarh has admitted they couldn't rescue the youths, nonchalantly stating that "such things happen". It's clear from the sequence of events that the brothers were victims of a hate crime to which the police were bystanders. And there's no denying that such crimes are taking place in an atmosphere of increasing communalisation and suggestions from BJP and Sangh Parivar leaders, starting from the Mohammad Akhlaq case, that beef



lynchings are understandable and their perpetrators may have had some cause. The signal that goes out to lawless mobs and even policemen is that it is open season on minorities, and the mere imputation of carrying beef or being 'anti-national' is enough for mobs to run amok.

This trend is extremely dangerous for a diverse country like India. To check this, authorities must signal unambiguously they are on the victims'

side. Senior government functionaries should forthwith meet murder victim Junaid's family and assure them that justice will be done. And they must be as good as their word by ensuring tough punishment for the perpetrators. Moreover, it's also time to roll back dog-whistle communalism through such things as unjust food laws, or rules restricting cattle trade that end up hurting the whole economy.

Pursuing a religious agenda in politics not only undermines the security of the country, it also assists those pursuing a religious agenda in Kashmir. Mirroring the Ballabgarh incident insofar as communalisation leading to a breakdown of law and order is concerned is the ghastly lynching of a police officer, seen as a government agent, by a mob raising pro-Pakistan slogans outside Srinagar's Jamia Masjid. The grim situation in Kashmir today is also the result of Valley politicians being sympathetic to the religious agenda of separatists. Both Ballabgarh and Srinagar show that communalism as a political tool comes with hefty collateral damage. Things will get much worse unless politicians wake up to this reality.

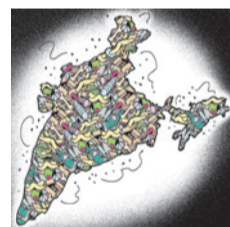
# Clean The Cities

From Delhi to Kochi, the garbage problem has risen to dangerous levels

The urban development ministry has announced the inclusion of another 30 cities in the smart city mission set up two years back, taking the total number of such cities to 90. With the total investments approved for all smart cities having now risen to Rs 1,91,155 crore, the urban development minister has also claimed that almost 50% of all projects under this mission are already under implementation and would be completed by 2019-20. But facts visible to the naked eye belie tall claims.

Most of the investments have to be raised by local and state governments from their own funds and borrowings. This will be difficult given the perilous condition of state finances and the poor resource mobilisation and governance capacity of urban local bodies. Yet, even as the process of smartening our cities moves at snail's pace the urgency for it is evident all around, not least in the garbage heaps that are rising at breakneck pace.

Looking at the accumulation of solid waste in various parts of the capital for example, the Delhi high court has observed that there seems to be more garbage than land for people in the capital. Importantly, the court has also noted that the problem is not so much the lack of funds as the absence of will among the corporations to do their work. In Kerala many urban centres are facing a sanitation crisis, with putrefying waste in public places being linked to diseases as in Delhi. Over in Bengaluru the waste management crisis regularly manifests itself these days in the foaming, burning Bellandur lake. The underperformance of city corporations is inexcusable. Whenever the smart cities rise there must not be any more delay in delivering clean cities.



# Modified America

How now, brown cow? And OCD – obsessive chocolate disorder

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A recent survey conducted by the Innovation Center for US Dairy apparently revealed that 7% of American adults – roughly 16 million people – think that chocolate milk comes from brown cows. Food and Wine magazine milked the same survey to report that 48% of American adults don't know that it is made from cocoa, although much of the country suffers from OCD – obsessive chocolate disorder. Those who have beef with such ignorance and think it is restricted to the boonies may recall the writer PJ O'Rourke, who noted two decades ago that America is so urbanised, "we think low-fat milk comes from cows on Nutri/System weight-loss plans."

America is a strange beast in the strange time, a place the comic guru George Carlin warned some years back where the IQ and the life expectancy of the average citizen are passing each other in opposite directions. But a recent study showed US life expectancy declined (marginally) for the first time since 1993, presumably bumping up IQ if the Carlin Principle is applied. What does one make of this, given that life expectancy in America has been increasing for a long time?

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrived in the US this weekend at a time America is still getting its head around a brain fade it suffered last November, much like Britain's Brexit bombshell. Nothing is what it seems to be, and no words, deals, pacts, agreements are sacrosanct in a country so stumbling at the moment that Arnold Toynbee's description of it as "a large, friendly dog in a very small room which knocks over a chair every time it wags its tail" seems ridiculously charitable.

It's more like a thick-skinned American bison for whom the idea of the milk of human kindness had curdled dramatically over the past few months. Have chocolate? It belongs to me! Witness the confusion over Qatar, which was sold \$12 billion of arms just few days after Washington accused Doha of being a major funder of terrorism. How Modi navigates this treacherous terrain will determine the future of ties between what are arguably the world's oldest democracy and the world's largest democracy, although both can lay justifiable claims of being plutocracies.

But to return to matters of milk and chocolate, it was the US that spurred New Delhi's White Revolution, resulting in India becoming the largest producer of milk in the world. It is only fair that India back America's Brown Revolution – and no, we are not talking of chocolate milk.

# History Must Be Earned

Modi is the best bet for India to earn its rightful place in the world

Gaurav Dalmia



In Prime Minister Narendra Modi's meeting with President Donald Trump today, he will reiterate that India's rise is in US interest – from global balance of power, to counter-terrorism, to trade. On the global stage India seems to be a darling for investors, but a relative lightweight geopolitically.

Overtures towards China were diplomatically rebuffed with big Chinese investment announcements in both Pakistan and Bangladesh, aimed at stealing India's thunder. Domestically, Modi's economic agenda has been largely successful. Growth is good, the stock market is hitting record highs, and India's credit rating is set to improve. Yet the investment cycle is lagging and employment generation is stubbornly slow.

Politically the momentum continues: a stupendous victory in the bellwether state of Uttar Pradesh, and more recently, in Shimla municipality, where Congress dominated for the last three decades. Yet, on governance, challenges abound. Jammu & Kashmir seems to be spinning out of control, polarisation has increased as social fault lines are surfacing, and there are fears of a police state. Indian leadership will matter more than ever before. Over to Prime Minister Modi!

Many in the intelligentsia believe Modi has overstepped his mandate, while simultaneously, the mass verdict is that he is an excellent leader. Political foes dislike Modi. That is understandable. Psychologists say that hate and envy are adjacent emotions. Hate is often more justifiable than envy – both to one's own self and to the audience. Hence this dynamic.

Many amongst the civil society intelligentsia seem to be tiring of Modi. The problem they see was articulated by American political commentator Gaylord Swim: "Political process requires strong advocates, certainly, but it also takes a counterbalancing sense of humility and dialogue. The political course often leads to strident voices and



character assassinations."

The passion for advocacy and the counterbalancing propensity for dialogue do not easily fit in one package. Modi represents more of advocacy, less of dialogue. This makes the intellectual elite furious. However, for common folk, who have witnessed the other end of this "unbalance" in the previous regime, backing Modi makes perfect sense.

While Modi exudes energy, honesty and pride, his competitors have exhibited apathy, opportunism and brazen corruption. This contrast effect makes Modi a hero!

Some are perplexed by Modi's political actions. Traditionally, if one thinks of the political spectrum as a stage, parties often take positions on one or other side of the stage at election time to differentiate themselves from the competition. Post-election, they typically move towards the centre, prompted by the realities of administration and the need to broaden their electoral appeal.

**I would rather have a leader who acts, calibrates and adjusts, rather than one who is timid, opportunistic, or incompetent**

This has happened with BJP along the economic dimension; it has moved slightly left from its traditional right-of-centre world view. However, on social issues, it has remained die-hard conservative. Some might argue, it is becoming more extreme than its campaign positions. As a byproduct, the ugly head of intolerance is hijacking the otherwise positive narrative.

Whether one views this through the philosophical lens of social justice or the practical lens of administrative priority or the political lens of electoral payoffs, initiatives like the beef ban and the way they have been handled have caused

alarm. Moreover, India needs sensitive management of its social fault lines.

Every government comes with its extreme supporters at the fringe. Modulating these voices is tricky. Because the current government has come with an absolute majority for the first time, many ideologically extreme groups believe that now is the time to further their cause. To pre-empt social upheaval, Modi's next leadership trial will be to contain these forces.

Modi's popularity and possible dysfunctional consequences of absolute power bother some people. Firstly, one should not hold Modi responsible for the fact that the opposition parties are facing anti-incumbency, internal power transition challenges and weakening morale. The problems plaguing Modi's competitors are a byproduct of their own actions, and his own party, though meritocratic, is not immune from such degenerative tendencies.

Maintaining his party's internal dynamism will be his greatest challenge, as he seeks to build a long-term legacy. Secondly, Modi's team is aware that their NDA coalition got only 38.5% of the popular vote, even though they got 336 out of the 543 seats in the Lok Sabha. His party itself got only 31% of the popular vote.

By contrast, the UPA coalition that emerged in 2004 had 47% of the votes and 320 seats. This points to the continuing fractured nature of the polity and the vulnerability of the current administration to small vote swings. This realisation, coupled with the fact that the Modi government has a strong party machinery with its ear to the ground, will channelise its priorities.

In a world where leaders, conditioned to be passive followers of the public mood, rarely lead, Modi is a refreshing change. I would rather have a leader who acts, calibrates and adjusts, rather than one who is timid, opportunistic, or incompetent. To borrow from the TV political drama House of Cards: "History is earned." I believe Modi is the best bet for India to earn its rightful place in the world.

The writer is Chairman of Dalmia Group Holdings

# 'GJM rattled by special audit of Gorkhaland Territorial Administration ... dialogue only when hooliganism stops'

With Darjeeling and its surrounding areas in turmoil over the Gorkhaland agitation, Derek O'Brien, Trinamool Congress national secretary and leader of its parliamentary party in Rajya Sabha, spoke to Rohit E David on the handling of the crisis by West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee. Centre-state tensions over it and the political fallout:

**■ Has the West Bengal government messed up the handling of the Darjeeling issue?**

Far from it. Mamata Banerjee has visited the hills of Darjeeling dozens of times. No chief minister of Bengal had ever set foot into these areas for decades. A historic cabinet meeting was also held in Darjeeling. The West Bengal government is offering peace and real development. Those opposing this only want disruption. Sabotaging the development process pains the common people of the area who rely on this peak tourist season. Also, a dialogue can only happen when hooliganism stops. Never at gunpoint.

The truth lies somewhere else. Trinamool recently won municipal elections in the hills of Mirik. This stunned GJM (Gorkha Janmukti Morcha), which has been running the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA). Elections to GTA are expected in the near future. Honestly, this is not about parties winning or losing, but about democracy flourishing in the north Bengal hills.

**■ But isn't BJP right in saying that the crisis was triggered after your govern-**

**ment made Bengali mandatory in schools even in the Gorkha region. Did you not think through the consequences?**

As BJP fishes in troubled waters, GJM is looking for lame excuses and trying to rake up an issue where there is none. Bengal follows a three language formula. The fourth language is optional for the hills. Nothing compulsory. Nothing mandatory.

**■ GJM says that West Bengal government cheated it after the previous accord in 2011. It says two or three things were transferred to GTA jurisdiction though many more were agreed upon. Why does GJM not have faith in your government?**

There is another reason why GJM is flustered. Since 2012, GTA has received Rs 900 crore from the state government and Rs 600 crore from the central government. There has been a special audit called for on how GTA funds were spent. This too has rattled GJM.

**■ Do you feel that police action against the locals made matters worse?**

GJM has re-

neged on a key clause of the Memorandum of Agreement they signed in 2011. Central government, state government and GJM had signed this tripartite agreement. The clause reads: "GJM agrees to ensure that peace and normalcy will be maintained in the region." Today, GJM must follow this in letter and spirit.

**■ BJP says Mamata is desperate to make inroads into Darjeeling – and divide the Gorkhas, Adivasis and Rajbongshis. Your response?**

We stand for inclusivity, peace and development. We stand for unity in diversity. Bengal and her districts are as diverse as a nation altogether. Every district is culturally, linguistically distinct. What does Jalpaiguri have in common with Kolkata, Cooch Behar or Purulia? But we are together and will be forever. No one can break this spirit. Fifteen separate development boards have been established for the Lepcha, Sherpa, Bhutia, Tamang and other communities.

**■ Has Trinamool used underhand tactics to gain political benefit from this issue and settle scores with its opponents?**

Absolutely not. Mamata

has personally overseen developmental projects in the region. Uttarkanya, the secretary for north Bengal, has been opened. Local people no longer need to travel to Kolkata to interact with the state administration. Kalimpong subdivision has been made into a district and Mirik upgraded to a subdivision. Over 8,50,000 people have benefited from discounted medicines available at a wide network of fair price shops. 100% electrification, a long-standing demand in the hills of Bengal, has been achieved. A medical college is being set up in Kurseong. Lots more is happening.

**■ SS Ahluwalia, BJP MP from Darjeeling, has said that Mamata has forgotten she is dealing with Gorkhas and that Trinamool government is treating them as terrorists and insurgents. Your response?**

BJP is speaking in different voices and their MP from Darjeeling has virtually gone missing. Bengal will never be divided. It is a game of vested interests. BJP needs to answer hard questions on farmer distress, shrinking jobs, economic uncertainty communal disharmony.

**■ How do you respond to BJP's question about why Mamata went on a foreign visit even as the Darjeeling Hills are in turmoil?**

She was in The Netherlands to receive a prestigious UN Public Service Award and lead an official delegation. It was a huge win. Bengal proved to be world class for its Kanyashree scheme. There were 552 nominations from 62 countries for this award.

## dilbert



# 'Birth' Family And Your 'Found' Family

Marguerite Theophil

For some of us, the family provides what everyone needs – family members are usually loving, supportive and accepting, people. For others, though, there is no healthy connection with the family they were born into; it is not that unusual to find that one's values, goals, or choices differ from those of one's birth family.

As we grow older, we find that creating a network of friends and confidants can very often give us the closeness and security that was lacking, or for a host of reasons, is no longer available through family relationships. While it may very possibly be true that often you are the one to blame for a bad family relationship, life is too short to associate with people simply because of blood ties or because you feel an obligation, particularly, if those people are hurtful or judgmental. Some people have reported that

considering friends, associates and others as 'family' might seem disloyal to the birth family. But others, in frankness, report that their own families have been dysfunctional and unsupportive, or things have become irreparable, and they find the need to seek closeness and support in those they are not related to – their 'found' family.

Finding or forming your family does not mean you always need to distance yourself from your biological family. It simply means you can interact with them freely when you and they feel like it – not out of some compulsion or obligation.

We would be fortunate to have friends that make us wonder how we ever lived without them; the kind you can count on in rough or stormy times – and equally important – be right beside you to celebrate occasions and accomplishments. We all need

the kind of people around us who will be direct and risk displeasing you, who will not play silly psychological games, who will boost your energy when you are low. And for whom you will do the same.

Loving friendships, and found family ties, though not necessarily a 50-50 balance deal, involve thoughtful reciprocity.

This does not mean that in found families everything moves smoothly. There are misunderstandings, betrayals, complicated relationships all thrown in. It's somehow knowing that the element of 'have to' is missing that propels us to realise that we really have a choice in making things work; or in a worst-case scenario, ending a relationship with less of the burden of guilt and taking sides that accompanies birth family rifts. The key word is really 'choice'. In

biological families, we don't have a choice. Sometimes things work out beautifully, and other times, it's quite the opposite.

Deep friendships can become 'family' connections in terms of the ways in which we support each other; sharing major life events, making a commitment to each other. A lucky few have both kinds of families that are wonderful to be a part of. But others who have suffered because of the dark side of family relationships need to know that they can find a set of people who will accept and support them lovingly.

I find it interesting that we even need to call our circle of friends a 'family'. It reveals to us the need we all feel for a place and for people from whom we can draw confidence, find acceptance, peace of mind, a realistic sense of ourselves, and are able, with their involvement, to actualise our fullest potential.

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## Sacredspace

Not So Simple

The simplest questions are the most profound. Where were you born? Where is your home? Where are you going? What are you doing? Think about these once in a while and watch your answers change.

Richard Bach



the speaking tree