

The
Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

Make the most of the monsoon

MPs must use local area funds to drought-proof constituencies

For India, the monsoons are not just rains; it's a life-affirming annual occurrence. But in the age of climate change, there is always the threat of the rain-laden clouds not making an appearance. However, if scientists at Massachusetts Institute of Technology are to be

believed, the last 15 years have been good for the country. According to the researchers, the monsoon season has in the last 15 years recovered from a 50-year dry spell, during which the northern and central parts received relatively less rain. Their findings show that since 2002, the drying trend has given way to a much wetter pattern, with a stronger monsoon supplying much-needed rain — along with powerful, damaging floods — to the populous north central region.

But the unfortunate part is that India has failed to make use of the bounty by not upping its water conservation game. Taking advantage of the good rains, the planners should have gone for fixing the broken water harvesting structures and building new ones, educating people on the importance of water management and improving water efficiency in agriculture. Some efforts at drought-proofing was seen when the MGNREGA was rolled out. If this had been done seriously, then we would not have seen such large scale agrarian distress, which can have serious political repercussions.

On the political side, leaders have failed to lead from the front. During their interaction with MPs, water experts such as Indira Khurana have spoken on the need to invest in long-term water conservation measures with their MPLAD and MGNREGA funds by developing a constituency plan for rain-water harvesting. This plan should be based on the rainfall of the constituency and the total water resources available. For this, the MPs can draw up on their constituency's database of ponds, tanks, lakes, nallahs, streams and rivers. Another step could be ensuring drinking water security of the constituency, do water audits and encourage water efficiency in agriculture. As things stand now, no one seems to be bothered too much.

Youth wings must reflect a young India

The BJP's decision to drop 40-plus leaders from its student bodies is worth emulating

The BJP has realised the importance young leadership and is reorganising its youth wing to reflect this. According to a report in Hindustan Times, the BJP has decided to drop 40-plus leaders from its youth wing, Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha, and as a part of this exercise its units in Maharashtra have been dissolved, with plans for a similar action in Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. The BJP is right — politicians in their forties cannot be considered 'young'. If a party wants to reflect the aspirations of the young it must have a fresh lot of leaders in its youth wing. Politics must reflect the social milieu — regrettably that's not the case now. How can a young nation, with a median age in the mid-twenties, have so few leaders in this age group?

Traditionally leadership positions in the youth wings of political parties have been treated as berths reserved for leaders waiting for a call to the main party. Age limits have seldom been factored into such scenarios. Take the example of the DMK in Tamil Nadu. Until January, the DMK youth wing was headed by a 63-year-old MK Stalin, who gave way when he was chosen as the party's working president, for more than three decades. Mr Stalin's successor is former state highway minister MP Saminathan who in May turned 53. Surely the DMK's youth wing leadership does not reflect the demographic profile of Tamil Nadu, which has a median age of around 27. Internationally we see more young politicians coming to the forefront. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and French President Emmanuel Macron are the best examples of this trend. We have had similar examples in India as well. Rajiv Gandhi became PM when he was 40. Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath is 45 years old. His predecessor, Akhilesh Yadav took office when he was 39.

It is hoped that all parties realise the importance of giving youth a voice in its rank and file. This will bring in fresh thinking and ideas, something our politics sorely needs.

A creeping 'coup' is on in Pakistan

Nawaz Sharif might not finish his term due to the nation's predisposition to pick dreams over reality

TCA
RAGHAVAN



Pakistan is oscillating between two diametrically opposed narratives. The Joint Investigation Team (JIT) appointed by the Supreme Court has presented in its report a damning indictment of overseas asset ownership of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his immediate family. Accountability of even the highest and that the fight against corruption must therefore begin from the top, forms one trajectory of discourse and argument. Not so, is the second trajectory.

What is underway inside this camouflage of accountability and probity is a 'creeping coup' to engineer a regime change. Whether it succeeds or not is a different matter but, symptomatically this is, according to the perceptive former diplomat Afrasiyab Khattak for example, part of the "cycle of seven or eight years of Bonapartist intervention".

Each of these two narratives is convincingly articulated and is internally consistent. For these arrayed against Sharif, holders of highest office must be even more accountable, the allegations of a witch hunt are preposterous and the judges and JIT

officials are performing their role independently and objectively. But there are equally powerful arguments against.

A JIT into financial impropriety and undeclared assets having representation from military intelligence and the ISI is one. How a considerable volume of financial information, from within Pakistan and from third countries, spanning over three decades could be collected and converted into evidence in eight weeks is another. The view that some — perhaps much — of this material are recycled versions of what emerged in similar exercises from the early 1990s has therefore a widespread currency. The present situation may have emerged from the independent revelations in 2016 of the Panama Papers but the substance of the allegations against many of Pakistan's principal political families, including the Sharifs, are hardly new.

The fact that the issues or transactions under consideration date back to the nineties, and often earlier make the entire proceedings even more unrealistic. It would appear that Pakistan's tangled history since the 1990s is itself being leapfrogged over. In the oscillatory patterns of Pakistan's politics between generals Zia-ul-Haq and Pervez Musharraf, the corruption of civilian politicians dominated public discourse. Accountability was the instrument through which Musharraf split the Pakistan Muslim League after the 1998 coup and created a king's party. Undeclared and colossal wealth



■ If he continues, next year Sharif will be the first elected PM to finish his full term AP

is not a new development in Pakistan.

The JIT was created following a split 3-2 judgment of the supreme court. Two of the judges had called for the immediate disqualification of the prime minister basing their judgment on Articles 62 and 63 of the constitution. These articles are the residues of the violence General Zia had inflicted on the 1973 constitution. Article 62 provides for a prime minister who is 'Sadiq' (truthful) and 63 that he be 'Ameen' (righteous). In the minority judgment, Sharif passed neither test. The JIT report is now back with the supreme court, which has reserved its judgment but it can reasonably be expected

in the coming weeks, if not days.

Between these two diametrically opposed narratives is a middle argument. Sharif is paying the price of his own hubris and arrogance in taking on the army — the Musharraf trail, siding with the Jang/Geo group in its tangle with a DG, ISI, the Dawn Leaks case in General Raheel Sharif's last months in office, etc. That in each of these and other similar instances the prime minister persisted despite knowing the results of earlier encounters was no less than a form of lunacy and he will now have to count the costs. What he possibly did not take into account was how much the army had risen in public esteem after Operation Zarb-e-Azb and the decline thereafter in terrorist attacks within Pakistan.

Those who smell a creeping coup in the air point to the role accountability and anti-corruption has played since the 1970s in tilting the civil military equation in a particular direction. This thesis gets a further fillip because many of those leading the legal and political charge against Sharif have, with merit, been identified in the past as the Pakistan military's advance scouting parties.

Pakistan has within its grasp an important milestone which falls next year — the first ever completion of a full term by an elected prime minister. Whether it will sacrifice this on the altar of a mythical probity in public life remains to be seen. It is possible that this may happen because what is also clear is there are many in Pakistan with a predisposition to choose dreams over reality.

TCA Raghavan served as Indian high commissioner to Pakistan and Singapore. The views expressed are personal

CROSS PURPOSES



■ Apart from income tax notices that were sent to the Hurriyat leaders in 2002, this is the first time that a nodal agency is digging into insurgency-related charges HT PHOTO

Hurriyat arrests signal a shift in the Kashmir policy

This complicates the tenuous alliance between Mehbooba and the BJP and shrinks her room for manoeuvre

HARINDER
BAWEJA



Images of Kashmiri separatists walking the corridors of the Prime Minister's office during Atal Behari Vajpayee's tenure have been replaced with visuals of Hurriyat Conference leaders being arrested and taken into custody by a central agency.

The arrest of seven separatists — including hardliner Syed Ali Shah's son-in-law and Mirwaiz Umar Farooq's aide — signals a significant policy shift. For long, CM Mehbooba Mufti has been imploring Prime Minister Narendra Modi to be like 'Vajpayee'. In other words, she wants Modi to hold true to the promise of 'insaniyat' (humanity). Instead, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) has slapped charges of hawala transactions and accused the separatists of using money from Pakistan to fund the unrest that broke out after the killing of Hizbul Mujahideen militant commander Burhan Wani in July last year.

Apart from income tax notices that were sent to the Hurriyat leaders in 2002, this is the first time that a nodal agency is digging into insurgency-related charges. The law will, of course, take its course — as it must — and the National Investigations Agency will have to prove the case in court, but in the sullen and alienated Kashmir Valley, where perception

counts as much as reality, the arrests are being interpreted in various ways.

It is well-known that the Hurriyat has been getting funds from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. What is equally well-known is the fact that India's intelligence agencies have been generous with their slush funds and former RAW chief, AS Dulat, who authored a book, has even given details of how the separatists were paid. For decades, governments of all political hues have flirted with the separatists in the hope of using them as objective interlocutors but the Hurriyat leaders have been weighed in by their masters in Pakistan.

The script has clearly changed. The Modi government, which in its first year in power, called off foreign-secretary-level talks with Pakistan because its high commissioner had a meeting with the Hurriyat has now decided to pursue them under the law. The arrests have come at a time when the Hurriyat has not been in control of the Kashmiri street that exploded after Wani's killing. The separatists, who kept issuing protest calendars in the hope of staying relevant, will use the arrests to play the victim in a bid to enhance their appeal.

The NIA probe is also a signal that New Delhi intends to pursue its law and order approach. The crackdown on the Hurriyat is a sure sign that there is no political outreach in the works. This complicates the tenuous alliance between Mehbooba and the BJP and shrinks her room for manoeuvre particularly because she had kept a channel open with Geelani. But it is clear — New Delhi is running Kashmir more than its state government is.

Himika Chaudhuri

It's one of those things that we have heard a million times — communication is the key to a healthy relationship. Yes, it is. Sometimes, silence is too.

A junior from school is seeing someone. She keeps complaining about altercations with her boyfriend on trivial issues. "It's exhausting," she told me. During one such fight, she lost her cool and told him a few things that she believes could have been avoided. "Half of those allegations aren't

The transgender rights bill is not strong enough

Vague guidelines could end up putting a bureaucratic noose around trans and gender non-conforming people



DHRUBO
JYOTI

Imagine yourself 14 years old, experiencing dysphoria in your body and gender expression that is triggering violence and repression at home. You meet a sympathetic community outside but the law of the land ties you to your natal family. You try and get a certificate to convince the courts but the medical officer doesn't think you look transgender. The hearings drag out over months, even years, draining you of resources, energy and even life.

This could well be the fate of a new generation if a new bill passes.

The legislation, originally aimed to empower India's transgender community, is increasingly looking like a bureaucratic noose around trans and gender non-conforming people if the officialese that sets up vague and confusing guidelines isn't urgently clarified.

A new report by a parliamentary standing committee, which was looking into the draft transgender rights bill introduced last year, attempts to set right some of these problems. The heart of the committee, led by senior BJP parliamentarian Ramesh Bais, appears to be in the right place. For a country that criminalises homosexuality, it is striking that the report opens with an affirmation of alternative genders and sexual orientations and goes on to admonish homophobia — a stricture that could well shame many members of the ruling party.

The report ends by calling for not just legal, but civil rights for the transgender community such as marriage — a welcome realisation that people cannot live with dignity while being criminalised by both the society and the State.

The report also pushes back on the definition of transgender in the original draft — not wholly female nor wholly male; a combination of female or male; neither female nor male — that many activists deemed offensive and dangerous; but doesn't do enough to broaden the ambit to include as many kinds

FOR A COUNTRY THAT CRIMINALISES HOMOSEXUALITY, IT IS STRIKING THAT THE REPORT OPENS WITH AN AFFIRMATION OF ALTERNATIVE GENDERS AND SEXUAL ORIENTATIONS

of identities and expressions as possible. Troublingly, the panel takes the same line as the government on the need to certify. The committee appears obsessed with the potential for misuse of trans certificates, as if social stigma and socio-economic barriers aren't deterrents enough.

Worse, the report endorses the need for a medical officer on the panel — a recommendation at odds with the Supreme Court's to let trans people self identify and a global move away from biological determinism of gender through inspection of genitalia. The recommendations can lead to the creation of a massive bureaucracy that will boost gate-keeping, corruption and favouritism and force the most underprivileged to compete for meagre resources.

The panel also doesn't strike down a clause in the bill that criminalises beggary; instead, it aims to punish organised syndicates. But there is no clarity on how police will enforce this crackdown without arresting and harassing common trans folk begging on the streets. Neither is the clause forcing trans children to stay with natal families addressed adequately. The committee introduces courts into the mix, and calls for recognising alternative structures of care, but doesn't go far enough to recognise families as the primary site of violence for trans folk.

The report came through a process of widespread consultations and long deliberations, the positives of which are seen in the call to define discrimination and affirmative action for trans people. But the spectre of bureaucracy looms large.

In 2014, the Supreme Court in a landmark judgement laid down the rights of trans people that are necessary to lead a life of dignity and respect. Three years on, little has changed on the ground. Trans employees are scarce, their housing difficult and their educational barriers formidable.

This can change with the new legislation. The committee's nod to homosexuality and trans identities is significant, an acknowledgment of how the country, and indeed the world, has moved past a climate of hostility for different genders and sexualities. It is time to walk the talk on these pledges and ensure trans citizens don't spend their lives entangled in babdom and mothballed files.

No country can progress by leaving a section of its population behind on the basis of conservatism and hate. There has been plenty of signalling on Section 377 that criminalises many of us — from even the RSS chief — but little action. The government should ensure the full gamut of rights are available for all of its citizens: Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer or others. For the mature democracy that India claims to be, it shouldn't be this difficult.

dhruba.parkat@htlive.com

innervoice

WHEN ANGER BUILDS UP, TAKE A STEP BACK AND EMBRACE SILENCE



even true. I don't know why I said it," she told me.

That got me thinking — does adopting the policy of silence when you are really worked up, a good way to avoid building up a bigger disaster in any relationship — romantic or otherwise?

Maybe it is. Just taking a step back and shutting up may actually help us to not speak out things that we don't mean. Moving out of the situation, both mentally and physically, is also likely to aid in clearing up the mind and seeing things in a clearer

perspective. Taking a break from the situation could be done for a few hours to a few days, depending on the intensity of emotion — let the anger die down before you decide to have that conversation. When you go back to that same chat when the mind is calmer, much of what appears to be a fight would be turned into a healthy discussion, and in turn, a happy ending!

Inner Voice comprises contributions from our readers. The views expressed are personal
innervoice@hindustantimes.com