



A thought for today

To have a coalition, to run a coalition government, you require a lot of adjustments, a lot of flexibility

PRANAB MUKHERJEE

Family In Trouble

Which allies will continue to support Lalu as he is enmeshed in CBI raids and FIRs?

With CBI conducting raids in various cities and registering FIRs against RJD chief Lalu Prasad, his wife Rabri Devi, and his son and Bihar deputy chief minister Tejashwi Prasad, fresh trouble has cropped up for the ruling coalition in Patna. The CBI case relates to the improper award of maintenance contracts for railway hotels during Lalu's tenure as railway minister from 2004 to 2009. In lieu of the contracts Lalu and his kin allegedly received prime land below circle rates. The CBI investigation comes on the heels of an ongoing Enforcement Directorate probe against Lalu and his family members under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, where Delhi farmhouses owned by his daughter, Rajya Sabha MP Misa Bharti, were raided on Saturday.

It will be recalled that in May the ED had arrested a Delhi-based chartered accountant who is believed to have been behind cash transactions linked to shell companies that owned benami properties in the national capital, with Misa supposed to be a beneficiary. Taken together, these raids and investigations have deepened the corruption taint against Lalu at a time when his coalition partner and Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar has shown that he isn't averse to doing business with BJP.

After JD(U) chose to support the NDA presidential nominee, its silence now on Lalu's woes could see fissures emerge within Bihar's ruling coalition. JD(U) and RJD may part ways in the middle of their tenure. After all Nitish's good governance image sits uneasily next to Lalu's graft cases. However, there's no denying that Lalu still commands the loyalty of the Yadav constituency in Bihar. He hopes to play a crucial role in stitching together a grand opposition coalition against BJP for the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. He's trying to bring SP's Akhilesh Yadav and BSP's Mayawati together.

Lalu is trying to spin the corruption investigations against him and his family as vendetta politics by BJP - he's received support from Congress on this. At the same time there's talk that if Tejashwi is arrested his brother and state health minister Tej Pratap, who has not been indicted, could be elevated as deputy chief minister. Already graft investigations have cost the RJD chieftain a place in active electoral politics. The latest of these threaten his family members with the same fate.



It's Stressful

As admissions to IITs and NITs are stayed, students face new hardships

The admission process of IITs, NITs, IIITs and government-funded engineering colleges has been stalled midway - even as IITs say more than 33,000 candidates have already taken admission. A pattern has emerged of goalposts for exams and admissions being shifted repeatedly and especially at the last minute. This is very unjust in how it inflicts unwarranted pressure and hardship on students - while the authorities concerned just cannot seem to get their act right.

Two petitioners have won a stay from the Supreme Court over the awarding of 18 bonus marks to all candidates who appeared in the JEE Advanced, after two wrong questions were discovered in one out of 10 question sets in Hindi. They argued the bonus marks were unfair to those who attempted the questions correctly in other question sets. The petitioners alleged that the bonus marks altered the merit list and brought their ranks several notches down. This is certainly possible. A higher rank can ensure admission to top-grade institutes and preferred engineering streams. But Attorney General KK Venugopal argued that it was difficult to find the candidates who took the test in Hindi, which led to awarding bonus marks to all candidates. Ultimately there should be a uniform, predictable policy for dealing with wrong questions, so that the matter doesn't keep returning to the courts.

It should be remembered that medical candidates had little clarity about the NEET entrance test for four years and CBSE is facing heat over poor evaluation practices in Class 12 examinations. Often the bunglings emerge closer to exam or admission time. This unconsciously worsens stress for students, who spend years preparing for exams amid stiff competition and limited seats.



Body politic

From Trump's glad-handling to Modi's 'hug gale lag ja'

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More attention is being paid to body language in international politics than at any other time, thanks to ceaseless TV coverage of meetings between world leaders. Whether it is President Trump's glad-handling and back-slapping, or his wife's wrist-wrenching and daughter's air-kissing, the media is in the grip of a feeding frenzy, adducing for its audience meaning behind every extended grasp and missed handshake.

The US president's reputation as a germophobe had little to do with his forsaking a handshake with German Chancellor Angela Merkel when they first met at the White House - a contretemps he has since redressed. Nor did his machismo faze French Premier Emmanuel Macron from extending a bone-crushing grip that had Trump's metacarpals carping. Macron and Canada's Justin Trudeau were themselves photographed jogging in shorts in what was clearly a masculine display of Francophone camaraderie. Clearly, a lot of messages are being essayed on world stage through body language.

Our own Prime Minister Narendra Modi has embarked on a hugging spree, embracing a vigorous global outreach with awkward clinches that some observers say present a "hugly spectacle". It is very different from the time Fidel Castro bragged his sister-in-arms - a shy Indira Gandhi - at the Non-Aligned Movement Summit in New Delhi in 1983. Today's hugs are all about alignment of interests even if the body and soul are not exactly in consonance.

A full court press witnessed Modi's clumsy clinch with Trump in the White House Rose Garden, an appropriate venue given that ties between the two countries remain in bloom - notwithstanding pinpricks on the trade and travel front, and the thorny relationship both have with the media in their respective countries. More hugs followed when Modi met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, a clinch so forceful that one wiseacre thought he saw net and yahoo come apart. With hugs to - and from - Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Russia's Putin, Afghanistan's Ashraf Ghani among others under his arm, Modi now has legitimate claims to be our first "hug gale lag ja" prime minister who could earn a new moniker for our country - Huggistan.

But as we have seen with one of the early huggers - Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif - no amount of clasping and clinching can advance a relationship where there is no meeting of minds. Notably, no hugs were in evidence when Modi met China's President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Hamburg. When countries prefer muscle over nuzzle, no hugs will be forthcoming till the parties concerned can get weighty matters off their chest.

At The Root Of All Lynchings

Vigilantes don't expect to be punished, victims don't expect to get justice

Amish



Pehlu Khan, a Muslim, was lynched by Hindu criminals, professing to be cow vigilantes. The incident fills one with grief and anger. Around the same time, Farook, a Muslim atheist in Coimbatore, was lynched by Muslim criminals, claiming to be true believers.

Search deeper and you will find the case of a Hindu doctor lynched by a mainly Muslim mob, over a cricket dispute. Hindu rail passengers lynched a Muslim youth, in what began as a dispute over seats. A Dalit man was beaten brutally and nearly killed by a Muslim mob because his son fell in love with a Muslim girl. There was a case of tribal vigilantes, lynching both Hindus and Muslims because they suspected them of being child traffickers. And this is only in the recent past.

the modern INDIAN

All these cases are horrifying. And all of them reveal patterns. But sadly, many in the public debate space only find patterns which validate their biases. Therefore, many leftists cherry-pick cases where the criminals are Hindu upper castes, and the victims Muslims or Dalits; and then build a narrative of recent Hindu majoritarianism ripping India apart. Events involving cows get particular attention; with a byline that Hindu violence crows more than humans.

The right-wing likes to pick cases where the criminals are Muslim, and the victims can be anyone else (Hindu upper castes, Hindu Dalits, Muslim atheists, etc), and then build a narrative of Muslims being inherently violent. Some have even given a communal colour to the horrific Delhi gang rape case, since the victim was Hindu, all the rapists caught and punished with the death penalty were Hindu, but the juvenile who got away was a Muslim.

Interestingly, when both Hindus and Muslims are victims, the events are usually ignored. When other animals, besides cows, are involved (lynchings happen over goats as well; crimes



by TV studios in Mumbai and Delhi, continue to suffer systemic apathy.

This situation has led to the corruption of our society. Why do the disempowered vote for criminals and strongmen? Because they know that they will not get justice in a gummed up judicial system. So, the practical thing to do is to elect a strongman from your community and expect him/her to use political power to protect you.

Why are encounters tolerated by our society? For the State to take away life without due process is a moral corruption that is not worthy of a civilised society. But encounters have been occurring in India since the 1960s, when efforts were made to control the Chambal valley dacoits. Thousands of criminals, and perhaps many innocents, have lost their lives.

Yet, many encounter cops are celebrated in blockbuster films. Why? Because the common Indian sees this as a pragmatic way to maintain order, especially when crime or terrorism reaches unbearable limits. Encounters are only opposed, selectively, when it suits someone's political agenda.

The only long-term solution is a clean-up of the criminal justice system. Police reforms (as ordered by the Supreme Court in 2006) must be implemented to give the force autonomy from political interference, better-trained and more manpower, and modern weapons.

We must invest in more competent prosecutor systems, which ensure that police investigation is converted into proper charge sheets and professional arguments in court which lead to convictions. We desperately need more judges. Court records must be digitised (we can use reCaptcha techniques here) and court procedures computerised, so that the time wastage of witnesses, lawyers and judges is reduced. Date delays must be stopped. Judges should stop wasting time on frivolous PILs.

I know that arguing, even fighting, for these reforms, does not make for an exciting TV debate or a grandstanding op-ed. But if you actually want mob violence and lynchings to stop, this is perhaps the only way to ensure it.

The writer is a bestselling author

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proportion of total prisoners. It was naively believed that a few high-profile convictions would lead to a tipping point. For example, the Jessica Lal case was supposed to suddenly put the fear of the law into the powerful. While justice was done in the Jessica Lal case, did things change at a systemic level? More than a decade later, we must admit the obvious: Nothing has changed. Many unfortunate people, who can't possibly be tracked

'Minority bias a BJP myth ... Telangana spends double and Karnataka three times more than Bengal on minorities'

Mahua Moitra is general secretary of West Bengal Trinamool Congress and a member of the state assembly from Karimpur. With violence flaring up in Darjeeling again and communal tension in North 24 Parganas district, she spoke to Rohit E David on charges of mismanagement and bias against the state government, Centre-state tensions and the political challenge from BJP.



■ Darjeeling is again on the boil and there has been communal violence in other parts of the state. Why is the whole of Bengal in turmoil?

As far as the two districts of Darjeeling and Kalimpong are concerned, the Bengal government is fully committed to negotiation with all non-violent stakeholders while maintaining the basic premise of the indivisibility of the state under any circumstances.

The situation in Basirhat is almost back to normal. Hence, it is highly irresponsible and incorrect to say that entire Bengal is in turmoil.

■ But Gorkha Janmukti Morcha and Gorkha National Liberation Front have rejected chief minister Mamata Banerjee's offer of talks, saying they will only negotiate with the Centre.

Trinamool has been open to negotiations from day one. However, we cannot do this when there is widespread violence, offence and looting. We are against the division of the state and the creation of Gorkhaland.

If Gorkhaland agitators believe that

has enforced prohibitory orders similar to what we saw in Mandasaur in Madhya Pradesh recently. Any prudent government will take this precaution in the immediate aftermath of sectarian violence. We also seek to normalise the situation with minimal external interference.

■ Your party has been accusing the state's governor of crossing constitutional boundaries. Why?

The honourable governor's history as an ex-state BJP president of Uttar Pradesh does not inspire faith in his declared neutrality. His words and actions unfortunately reinforce his past. His letters to the chief minister on his official letterhead enclose memoranda from the state BJP in Bengal.

This is the sorry truth which has been vindicated by the Bengal BJP chief declaring that the governor is a soldier of Modi's vahini.

■ Does Trinamool have an element of bias towards a certain community?

Not at all. This charge of minority bias is a myth perpetuated by BJP. For example the allegation of free houses to 50,000 imams in Kolkata is absolutely untrue and the charge of changes to textbooks is absolutely untrue.

As for charges of bias in targeted expenditure, the figures speak for themselves. In Karnataka with Muslim population of 78 lakh (13.2% of the state), the minority affairs (MA) department's budget for 2017-18 is Rs 2,750 crore, a per head allocation of Rs 35,256. In Telangana

with a Muslim population of 44.6 lakh (14.2%), the budgetary allocation for MA is Rs 1,279 crore or Rs 28,677 per head. However, in Bengal which has a Muslim population of 2.5 crore (27.5%) the MA budget 2017-18 is Rs 2,815 crore or Rs 11,433 per head.

Q&A So Telangana spends more than double and Karnataka three times of what Bengal does on minorities.

■ Mamata has accused BJP of spreading rumours through social media. Can you substantiate this?

These are not just accusations but backed by hard proof. Haryana BJP leader Vijeta Malik used an image from a Bhojpuri film 'Aurat Khilona Nahi' to post fake Facebook images about the plight of Hindu women in Basirhat. This image was widely circulated by BJP social media cells and members.

An ex-BJP state president of Bengal squarely defeated in two consecutive Lok Sabha elections and now installed as governor of Tripura, continues to make inflammatory Twitter posts and retweet incendiary messages by bhakts.

■ Isn't there a danger of this communal violence spreading to other parts of the country?

Violence in Basirhat was contained within the area and did not even spread to nearby villages. Given the BJP's toxic policy of using communal tensions to consolidate their vote bank, India may sadly see more hatred and bloodshed in the days to come.

dilbert



Sanyasi & Sansari: Renunciation & Worldly Life

Sri Sri Mangesha

Many may prefer to go with the notion that one needs to renounce the world, if one wants to walk on the path of spirituality. In the real sense, the path of spirituality leads to liberation. To seek this, one needs to understand the path and that is where, the numerous channels of spirituality unfold in front of a worldly human being.

But, does this mean that one should disconnect from the real world? Should one give up worldly desires? The answer lies on the path itself. Renunciation and worldly life are in fact two sides of the same coin, the coin being spirituality. Both these paths may seem to move in opposite directions, but the destination is the same. One is the 'Sanyasi life', and the other is the 'Sansari life'. While a sanyasi may turn away and give up all worldly desires of the materialistic

world, the sansari continues to live a materialistic life and also practices spirituality. The sansari lifestyle reveals many answers and secrets. He faces daily challenges and channelises his awareness through a spiritual perspective. This in turn opens up a plethora of opportunities for him, to reach his spiritual goal. Most divine beings and saints have set good examples in practising spirituality while living a worldly life. Krishna, Rama, and in recent times, Sant Tukaram and others, continued to accept these daily, worldly challenges. They not only walked the spiritual path, but also practised spirituality through the life of a worldly human being.

Then, what is liberation in the true sense? Krishna, in the Bhagwad Gita, says: 'Both these lifestyles are equally

meant for spiritual growth.' A common thread is running between these two paths, and that is, 'deposit'. To gain something, one needs to deposit something first. While the sanyasi needs to give up his worldly desires, the sansari needs to deposit his attitude and ego.

Which ever spiritual technique one may wish to adopt from the above, unless the disciple understands this, no guru can guarantee the path of Self-Realisation of the disciple. The guru goes to great lengths to motivate and encourage the seeker, teaches him various techniques and methods to practise spirituality, but until the follower reaches Self-realisation with the help of practice, he will continue to depend upon his guru. Both paths lead to the same destination.

This is where Bhakti Yoga comes in. Although this is the easiest way to

embrace spirituality, it is also the most difficult path. How often does one find oneself trapped, anxious and nervous? This is the real test of time, where one can adopt the practice of unconditional love and unconditional forgiveness. Spiritual leaders lead their disciples on a positive path through their guidance. Every single human being has a huge reservoir of this divine power within him. He only needs to channelise it in the proper direction and utilise it, to the benefit of society.

Detachment from worldly desires and connecting with the divine resource within, allows love and compassion to surface. The worldly human being thus starts his devotional relationship with his personal god. He starts practising oneness and forgives easily. The bigger picture is now clear with his realisation of the fullity of life and the importance of connecting to the Divine. (The writer is a Himalayan Kriya Yoga master.)



Sacredspace

Arrive Refreshed
May you travel safely,
arrive refreshed,
And live your time away
to its fullest;
Return home more enriched,
and free
To balance the gift of
days which call you.

John O'Donohue