

# Quotas will not douse the flames

The Maratha stir is also about the loss of political voice

**S**outh Mumbai, the part of the city that has most of its heritage buildings, the seat of government, and some of the most expensive real estate in the world, was colonised for a few hours on Wednesday by saffron-turbaned Marathas demanding reservation of government jobs and college seats. Their rally was silent but the message was loud and clear. Chief minister Devendra Fadnavis announced several sops to pacify the Marathas, but their main demand for reservation is before the Bombay High Court, which is yet to decide on a petition challenging the 16% quota announced by the previous government.

This brings us to the crux of the issue: Why do the land-owning Marathas want reservation, meant to help socially and economically disadvantaged sections? After all, this is the community that long dominated all walks of life in Maharashtra. Advocates of reservation for Marathas say their land-owning heritage is the cause of their troubles, which have worsened with the agrarian crisis in the state. Fragmentation of land holdings and uncertain crop yields have left many farmers unable to pay for their children's education. This has meant that Maratha youth have struggled to find jobs, a double whammy when coupled with falling farm incomes. It's significant that the trigger for the protests was the rape of a minor girl from the community by Dalit men. Politically, Marathas, who accounted for 12 of Maharashtra's 18 chief ministers, are not as dominant as they used to be.

Wednesday's rally in Mumbai is actually of a piece with protests by other dominant castes across the country—the Patel-Patidars in Gujarat, the Jats in Haryana, the Gujjars in Rajasthan, and the Kapus in Andhra Pradesh. Politicians tend to find easy solutions—providing reservation by tweaking existing quotas or adding to quotas. But these will not work over the long term. Why are influential communities in states resorting to agitations for reservation? Is it because income from agriculture is declining and there aren't enough other employment opportunities? Is it because other groups are increasingly claiming their share of political power? Something is wrong and it needs to be fixed.

**ourtake**

# Tamil Nadu is paying the price for AIADMK wars

A merger of the party's factions could put the focus back on governance

**U**npredictability is the new normal in Tamil Nadu politics—especially in the ruling AIADMK. Last May when former chief minister J Jayalalithaa defied anti-incumbency and won 134 of the 234 seats in the assembly, the AIADMK appeared unassailable. But today, and after Jaya's demise in December, the party has split into three groups and the cadre is demoralised. This uncertainty and confusion is affecting governance. Given this, news about the talks of a merger between two factions within the AIADMK is a positive one. Reports suggest that the Tamil Nadu chief minister Eddapadi Palaniswami's faction and the one led by former CM O Panneerselvam are in talks and a merger is likely. Once this takes place, the TTV Dinakaran-led faction could be further sidelined.

The priority for the party should be to regain the all-important 'two leaves' symbol. By gaining this the EPS-OPS (as both leaders are called) combine will also have an edge over the TTV faction, which has the support of some legislators and cadre. Once this is achieved, the state government could approach the Election Commission to hold the much-delayed bypoll to the RK Nagar assembly constituency, which has been left vacant by Jaya's demise. The EPS-OPS merger is expected to bring much-needed clarity to the cadre and, more importantly, the government. Political stability is a prerequisite for investor confidence and economic progress. Tamil Nadu is the second richest state (GDP wise) in India and area wise is bigger than South Korea—yet it does not have a full time governor. The Centre can help on this front.

The likely merger of the two factions in the AIADMK is a good sign and should help put the focus back on administration. The people need a government that focuses on their needs—and not one caught in dousing intra-party wars.

# How to end the tyranny of distance

To integrate the N-E with India, sensitise police and political leaders, and change curriculums



SANJOY HAZARIKA

**B**eing Indian is no easy task. We cannot be guided by one view of India, or how an Indian should look, what he or she should or should not eat or dress or behave. We need to move towards a more inclusive society and sense of community.

This is a matter that many are being forced to look at anew and rethink as thousands of people from the Northeast Region (no one seems to have an exact figure and this is an area which calls for good research), an unconfirmed figure that I have seen is 30,000 to 35,000, many of them from the most populous state of Assam, move every year outside the Northeast Region (NER) in search of jobs, better lives, opportunities and education,

The most visible—and it's easy to create another stereotype of this group—are those who work in the hospitality industry such as restaurants and hotels, salons or at malls as shop assistants and supervisors.

Young people from the Northeast lead the way in sporting disciplines such as boxing, high-skill group activities like football or lead the way in music. Take any major foot-

ball team in India—players from the region would compose certainly a handful. We could regard this as a resource drain: Individuals from the region migrate for better opportunities, divesting the region from their economic contribution. But I see it as part of a larger picture of internal migration and social change. Across India, they hold a range of jobs, from the basic to high-level positions, seeking education, conducting research, teaching, working in government, as entrepreneurs, lawyers and in other professions. It takes great courage to do what they are doing. Whereas some from an earlier generation staunchly opposed the idea of India and held onto an impossible dream of freedom and separation, many younger people these days are engaging with the Idea of India and reshaping it to their comfort and conviction. We need to recognise this phenomenon. They may not have embraced 'Indianness' as much as people in other parts of the country. But they are engaging with it every day of their lives in metros and other locations, even at low, medium or even high risk to their dignity and safety. The most vulnerable are women, who face molestation, harassment and verbal abuse.

Many continue to face the bitter sting of discrimination. It has everything to do with appearance. I haven't faced it so far. But others have. What is important to recognise now is that instead of quietly accepting the humiliation and nastiness heaped on them, younger people are fighting back, resisting, forcing governments, employers, institu-



People from the Northeast face a great deal of discrimination

More than 30,000 individuals were said to have left the city. But what the media did not report and we did not get to know till much later was that many more stayed behind. And of those who left, many returned. Because they were largely white collar workers who needed the jobs to sustain families and livelihoods. That's why they did not want to stay home—they needed to go back and earn.

People vote with their feet; our children teach us: we have to listen and hear. We are saying to Delhi's face: We are here, we're here to stay, whether you like it or not. The nazar is either way and it doesn't have to be a buri nazar! Strangers have become migrants; they have become neighbours. They've even become colleagues. But have they understood each other, have they moved towards friendship?

This won't happen with economic or political sops. One of the ways is to fiercely implement laws to deal with harm and injustice. But we have to go beyond laws, by influencing that most difficult and sensitive of tools: The human mind. This can happen by using multiple strategies: Curricula changes, sensitising mohalla and RWA groups, training police and administrators, MPs and political leaders. Another is to develop incubation centres where, to start with, students of the region who plan to study and live in metros, get an orientation of and introduction to the cultures and society they will be inhabiting. Too often, we still hear of those who are caught unawares and come to harm. The process of building goodwill and understanding remains a work in progress.

Sanjoy Hazarika is director, CHRI  
(This is based on a talk at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, in July)  
The views expressed are personal

# Sharif's 'homecoming' rally could backfire

By showing a large following, the former PM wants to re-establish his hold, but the odds are tilted against him

SHAHEEN SEHBAI



A sewer worker cleans a manhole in Mumbai, June 17, 2016

ARJIT SEN/HT

# Norm-less engineering is killing sewer workers

Instead of blaming contractors, probe the role of officials who are responsible for keeping drains free of blockage

ARKAJA SINGH

**T**hree sewage workers died in Delhi on August 6. After the deaths, much of the outrage has been directed at a contractor, who sent them to unclog the drains without safety gear, contravening the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013. The Delhi Jal Board (DJB) distanced itself from the matter, saying: "The matter will be clearer after an inquiry. But prima facie it appears that the four who were working there had no links to either the DJB or the contractor in the area. It is strange, such a case has never happened before." However, the matter would seem stranger if you consider that the deaths occurred in Jai Vihar, an area named after the DJB's office located there, and in sewage pipes that are built and managed by the DJB. Going by the DJB's statement, perhaps residents engaged the contractor directly, or it is possible DJB contractor sub-contracted his work? It is also possible that the lines could not be unclogged by suction machines because they were blocked with plastic waste, construction debris and other solid waste, which should never be in sewage lines.

According to the norms, storm water drainage networks and sewage lines should never

be inter-connected as they are designed for different kinds of load. In a well planned and managed system, mixing random loads of rain water and solid waste would throw the system out of balance. However, in the DJB's world, natural water channels, storm water drains and sewage systems are inter-linked and supplement each other's inadequacies—creating a deadly cocktail of solid and liquid waste, creating public health and environmental risks.

This sort of norm-less public engineering kills sewage workers. Perhaps with safety equipment could have lessened the risks, but if your job is to hold your breath and swim in sewage, what sort of training could prepare you for it? Blocked sewers create situations that are dangerous and we need to hold accountable the people who create such situations. So if the DJB and the Delhi government is serious about an inquiry into the deaths, they should look into where the sewer line was flowing from, to where, and what were the reasons why the sewer line was blocked?

Such a panel must also look into whether the DJB has mechanisms to monitor when sewer lines become blocked, and their protocols to address such situations. It should also look into whether the DJB had received any complaints from the public about it and its response. This does not mean we neglect to pursue contraventions of the manual scavenging law, but if we are to end the practice of unsafe cleaning of sewer lines, we must shine a torch on the systemic malpractices that create conditions for unsafe cleaning.

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The views expressed are personal

**P**akistan's political history is full of power shows, street rallies and long marches, some successful, some destructive. On Wednesday, ousted and disqualified prime minister Nawaz Sharif started what he cynically called a "drive back home". Many saw this march as his last-ditch attempt to undo a devastating Supreme Court decision against him and to pre-empt corruption cases that could land him and his family in jail.

Amid jets and helicopters flying over Islamabad and despite warnings by security agencies including the Military Intelligence, Inter-Services Intelligence and Intelligence Bureau that there were terrorist threats on the 170-mile long Grand Trunk Road to Lahore, Sharif took to the streets in desperation.

The ousted leader has used such street demonstrations of power several times in the past, as have others including late Benazir Bhutto and Imran Khan. Sharif's last such outing was in 2009 when he started a march to seek restoration of Supreme Court chief justice Iftikhar Choudhry who was sacked by General Pervez Musharraf in 2007. Despite promises, the new President Asif Ali Zardari refused to reinstate him and thus Sharif rallied lawyers and civil society march in 2009 for his restoration.

Immediately the then army chief, General Ashfaq Kayani, intervened and the chief justice was restored before Sharif could leave his stop over at Gujranwala in central Punjab. It was a big success for Sharif the then Opposition leader and a blow to Zardari. But it was the army, which put its stamp on national politics, regaining ground lost during General Musharraf's nine years. Ironically when Sharif took to the streets then he was fighting for the judiciary.

**THE IMPORTANT FACTOR IS THAT WHILE STREET POWER HAS PLAYED A BIG ROLE IN CHANGING POLITICAL FORTUNES, IT WAS ALWAYS THE ARMY AND JUDICIARY THAT TOOK LIFE-AND-DEATH DECISIONS**

For many people, this crisis leads to a spiritual awakening. That's when they realise some things. Real happiness does not lie in bank account figures. It is in finding joy and contentment in life. If we make a list of all the worldly things from which people derive pleasure, we will find that there's a looming danger of loss.

The problem with worldly happiness is that it only provides temporary joy. Through the ages, saints, philosophers, and enlightened beings have pointed to the place where we can find our own happiness. We each

have a wellspring of joy within us. How can we find it?

Meditation is a simple practice that everyone can do. It means sitting quietly for some time, eliminating distracting thoughts, and gazing within. By meditating on the inner light and sound within, we can connect with our place of happiness. True and lasting bliss can be attained by uniting our soul with the Lord, who is the source of all love.

Inner Voice comprises contributions from our readers. The views expressed are personal  
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WE MUST ASPIRE TO FIND THE WELLSPRING OF JOY WITHIN US

Sant Rajinder Singh

Whatever happiness we find in this world is temporary. It may be momentary, it may last weeks, months, or years. However, it cannot last forever. We live in the illusion that everything is rosy.

When things are going well, we become comfortable and complacent. However, a point may come when a disaster or crisis faces us and we start to question God, saying, "Why did you let this happen?" We sometimes even lose faith in God.