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AIADMK's woes are far from over

The crisis won't end even if the OPS faction's demands are met

On Thursday, Tamil Nadu chief minister Edappadi Palaniswami ordered an inquiry commission into the death of late chief minister J Jayalalithaa. The probe will be headed by a retired judge of the Madras High Court. With the probe order and converting Jayalalithaa's Poes Garden residence into a memorial, Mr Palaniswami has met two of the demands put forward by former chief minister O Panneerselvam's faction, the AIADMK (Puratchi Thalaivi Amma), for a merger. Signs of a possible merger raise hopes that the ruling AIADMK will get to focus on governance; but, unfortunately, the problems within the party are far from over. Both the EPS and OPS factions were expected to merge on Friday and the stage was set for the grand announcement at Jayalalithaa's memorial, but alleged differences in the OPS camp has stopped it for now. AIADMK's deputy general secretary TTV Dinakaran's opposition to both EPS and OPS has split the party three ways. Mr Dinakaran claims to have the support of 30 MLAs, whose exit might not bring down the government but it will seriously affect its legitimacy. To add to these complications, Jayalalithaa's nephew and niece have come forward claiming rights over their aunt's Poes Garden residence.

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What's unfolding is the manoeuvring and outmanoeuvring by AIADMK leaders for the political sceptre to remain in power — this has little to do with the welfare of the people of the state. A memorial might make for good political spectacle, but it does little to alleviate the sufferings of the drought-hit farmers. In this intra-party factional din the government seems to have forgotten that the bypolls to the RK Nagar assembly seat left vacant with Jayalalithaa's demise need to be held.

The political uncertainty that has rocked the state since December 5 when Jayalalithaa died is not showing any signs of going away. This must not be left to simmer any longer. Tamil Nadu governor C Vidyasagar Rao could intervene to bring more clarity to the situation. Meanwhile, Mr Palaniswami must keep the party's housekeeping matters away from public glare and ensure that Tamil Nadu is politically stable.

Urban sanitation needs more than toilet credits

Invest in providing adequate sanitation facilities in urban agglomerations

News of a Bengaluru citizen rushing into a coffee shop to use the loo, and having to justify it to the staff later by insisting that he had bought enough from them to deserve "pee credits" shows how dire the sanitation situation is, even in our most cosmopolitan cities. If, in order to use the toilets, one has to spend money in buying whatever the establishment is selling, it automatically excludes access to those without the means to invest in buying from the said establishment. This approach is good only for a small percentage of rich city dwellers, and it does nothing to solve the sanitation problems of our cities.

The problem of open defecation and sanitation is not one that can be solved through apps on a smartphone. It requires a concerted effort by the government not just in terms of creating awareness but also in terms of building and maintaining the requisite infrastructure. The problem of urban sanitation — more precisely, the lack of it — disproportionately affects the urban poor. Living in the streets, slums and shanty towns, their services are indispensable to the everyday running of the city, but the facilities they have are woefully inadequate. In light of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and the push from the government to end the practice of open defecation has done nothing to improve the sanitary conditions and open urination that is such a ubiquitous phenomenon in cities across India. The problem of open defecation is pretty dire even in cities. According to a report by the Indian Institute for Human Settlements, Class 1 and 2 cities account for 45% of the total share of open defecation households in urban India.

The government must invest in providing adequate sanitation facilities in densely populated urban agglomerations, because it is a healthcare disaster waiting to happen. In terms of diseases that can be caused by poor sanitary facilities cost the country in money and in human capital as well.

straightforward

SHASHI SHEKHAR



We can't become a republic of noise

Instead of rushing to a trouble spot, netas and babus must invest time in making better policies

For the last one week, you must have seen images of people sobbing and complaining in newspapers and on television. Loved ones of those infants who perished in the Gorakhpur tragedy, middle-class victims of builders such as Jaypee and Amrapali in Noida, farmers driven to kill themselves despite loan waivers, family members of victims of political killings in Kerala... Is this the sum total of our earnings over the last 70 years?

This is a time where the merchants of sorrow and outrage are out to make a killing. But one must not lose hope in an evolving democracy. Keeping this logic in mind, let me share a personal experience with you.

This tragic incident took place 25 years ago. I was sitting at my newspaper's office in Agra. I heard that the health of the residents of Khatik Pada was deteriorating because they had imbibed contaminated water. By the time I could comprehend what was happening, 21 people had lost their lives. The sick were taken to the local medical college but within a week another 11 people died. An investigation revealed that the tank near Sanjay Place from where people drank water and fell ill contained carcasses of dogs and other animals. Since the tank was not cleaned regularly, the

water had turned poisonous. This departmental lapse had claimed the lives of more than two dozen people. Most of these were Dalits.

On reaching the spot I saw one district official and a few police personnel consoling the people. The collector at that time was an extremely capable officer. On the evening of the tragedy, I asked him with some amount of outrage where he was when the children were dying? "Should I have got my picture clicked by reaching the spot or stayed in my office to activate the government machinery to make necessary arrangements?" was his reply. He was correct. God forbid, if such an incident were to happen today, some people will term it as a conspiracy against the Dalits, others will call the entire government inefficient and those who were rooting for a war with China and Pakistan till yesterday will be quick to brand our entire system dysfunctional.

That is why the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh has to drop all other business and spend two days in Gorakhpur and Union health minister JP Nadda alters prior engagements to reach the spot. Groups of ministers and senior bureaucrats are converging at Gorakhpur. Why don't they understand that to prevent such incidents from happening in the future, people will have to sit in their offices, evolve a strategy and implement it on the ground?



Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath with Union health minister JP Nadda, Gorakhpur, August 13

DEEPAK GUPTA/HT

Panic and anxiety has fostered a culture to show-off than work on the ground. This is dangerous for the common man.

Those beating their chest over not getting a flat in Noida have also fallen victim to this tendency. Those builders who were helping politicians dispose of their black money and benami property have now begun to rob common people. Those politicians who brought out advertisements boasting of good administration were their partners in crime. The case

is similar with farmers. Governments may waive off loans to remain popular but that leaves the coffers empty and they are left with nothing for development projects.

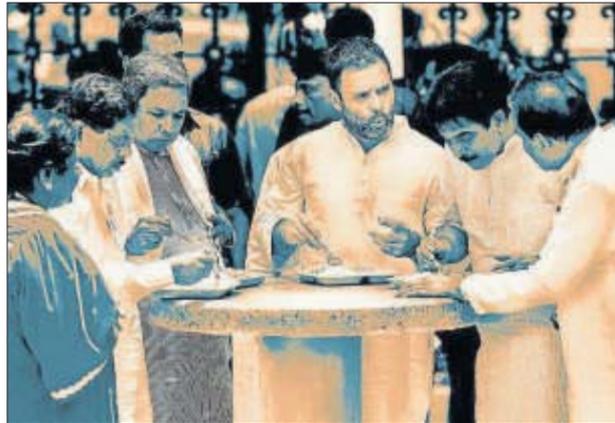
There are numerous other examples which prove that for the sake of ephemeral name and fame, actual work has been put on the back-burner. Our democracy had turned into a mobocracy long ago. Why are we bent upon turning into a republic of noise?

I know that a number of questions will be raised in response to my question but where does this leave the average citizen? Consider these two examples. When a nuclear power station was waterlogged during the Tsunami in Japan in 2011, power supply to a large section of the country was cut off. Trains were cancelled and life came to a standstill in megacities such as Tokyo. In a place where you have 60-70 storey buildings and people commute to work for 50-60 kilometres, you can imagine the plight of those without elevators and public transport. The citizens were feeling shackled without fetters. Even during such an awkward phase nobody cursed the government. Let them work for now, we'll ask them questions later, was the prevalent sentiment. That is how the people of Britain reacted after the London bomb explosions.

Asking questions and giving a verdict on politicians during the elections is our right, but creating a clamour to disrupt their work can be suicidal. We need to understand this basic difference.

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SERVED HOT



Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi and Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah during the launch of Indira canteens across Bengaluru

PTI

PDS has flaws, but cheap canteens are not a solution

Leaving aside the safety net, the jury is out on the political dividends from expanding the nodes of food subsidy



MAMATA PRADHAN
DEVESH ROY

Food subsidy in India has moved along the value chain. While the Public Distribution System (PDS) has remained a pillar for providing subsidised food, the latest pier is about prepared food. From farm to fork has now become from anywhere to a café. Amma canteen, the avant-garde route of food subsidy started by J Jayalalithaa is now seen as the beacon for providing cheap food and state after state have joined the race.

Odisha has a scheme called Aahaar, Madhya Pradesh has Deendayal Rasoia and forthcoming in Uttar Pradesh is Annapurna Bhojnalaya. Recently, Congress vice president Rahul Gandhi announced the launch of Indira canteens across Bengaluru for poor labourers and migrants.

Where does this subsidy contest go from here? Leaving aside the safety net element, the jury is out on the political dividends from expanding the nodes of food subsidy. In the subsidy race, benchmarking can be a bane for the low performers. How many remember the improvements in PDS over and above poster boys such as Chhattisgarh and Tamil Nadu? Moreover, the economics of these schemes are still not clear. The PDS has remained the holy grail despite widespread and endemic prob-

lems. Also, the costs of these schemes can spiral out of control. Are these substitutes or complements to the PDS? What happens if the system moves towards a direct benefit transfer? A first order policy question is: With the mushrooming of these food canteens as a parallel system, will it stifle the evolving changes across states to strengthen the PDS or experiment with new delivery mechanisms? In our research, surveys in Odisha have showed the suppressive role of schemes such as Aahaar towards the PDS. Beneficiaries in Odisha seemed apathetic towards the suboptimal rice being given in the PDS.

Also, as the subsidy moves along the value chain, it is pertinent to assess what it means for the elaborate procurement system of grains feeding the PDS? The canteen programmes will scale up because of the money and time it saves, and it is convenient. How this system is provided for and the implications it has for back-end are critical issues to address. Will the system distort the production choices more towards cereals? Will food safety and nutrition be preserved particularly in cases where institutions are weak? The records on the mid-day meal scheme in terms of these attributes have been far from encouraging. The big-ticket question is: Do we need yet another scheme while we are struggling to fix the long-serving ones like the PDS? Do we need another food subsidy pulley or grease the existing one well?

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pulp-it

R SUKUMAR



Nobody has emerged a winner in the Infosys saga

It has irretrievably damaged Narayana Murthy's reputation, and showed that the board is dysfunctional

On August 18, Infosys Ltd CEO Vishal Sikka abruptly resigned. The board of Infosys released a letter blaming founder and former chairman NR Narayana Murthy for Sikka's exit. Sikka himself, in his letter to the board, spoke of personal attacks and allegations that were "amplified by the very people from whom we all expected the most steadfast support in this great transformation." Soon after, Murthy released a message saying he was anguished by the board's comments.

On the morning of Sikka's resignation — a few hours before it was announced — Mint carried an article on an e-mail from Murthy to a few of his advisers, claiming that three members of Infosys's board, including co-chairman Ravi Venkatesan, had told him that Sikka was more chief technology officer (CTO) material than chief executive officer (CEO) material. That mail, dated August 9, repeated issues Murthy had raised about the board's functioning and corporate governance. The letter may have been the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back.

As I write this article, the Infosys stock has crashed 10%; public sympathy is with Sikka; and Murthy is facing the opprobrium generated by his actions. But who's to blame?

By 2014, when Infosys hired Sikka, the company was in desperate need of a CEO who could help it transform. For long, IT services companies such as Infosys had made their money with coders to build and maintain applications for large Western firms, but that model had exceeded its best-by date. Some of their customers were being disrupted by digital upstarts. Some were keen to retake control of their IT function because it was becoming the key to their success. And some were looking for cool digital solutions. Meanwhile, artificial intelligence and automation were eating into the traditional business of IT services companies.

Since 2007, Infosys hadn't had a CEO who

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had either the big-picture technology vision of Nandan Nilekani (CEO between 2002 and 2007) or the vision and attention to detail of Murthy (1981-2002). Circa 2014, it needed someone who had both. Vishal Sikka was the person the board identified.

From the beginning it was clear that Sikka (he had been a wunderkind at SAP AG) had the technology vision and the appetite for bold decisions regarding acquisitions (although he may have not had enough of a focus on operations). He insisted on working out of Palo Alto, which was a mistake because it didn't allow him to get to know the operations of the company as well as he should have. Perhaps the board could have insisted he move to India. I'm sure he would have.

One of the acquisitions Infosys made in this period was of a company called Panaya in 2015. It emerged later that Infosys's chief financial officer (CFO) Rajiv Bansal wasn't in favour of the deal and had walked out of a meeting of the company's board on the acquisition. In October that year, he quit and the company agreed to pay him a generous severance which wasn't part of his original contract. The Panaya acquisition and the payout to Bansal (part of which was scrapped after Murthy made a fuss about it) prompted at least two whistle-blower e-mails. These alleged that some of Infosys's key managers involved in the deal had made some money off, and that Bansal had been paid hush money to keep his peace. The company had the allegations investigated — by reputed firms that found no wrongdoing — but it stopped short of releasing the complete reports as demanded by Murthy.

Apart from never properly explaining its about-turn on Bansal, the board also never got around to explicitly defining its terms of engagement with Murthy. This may seem like a minor omission but it was, in my opinion, the biggest mistake the board made — a man like Murthy will never get off unless he is told where he gets off. Worse, some of the directors may have pandered to Murthy by actually complaining about Sikka to him.

As for Murthy, he simply refused to let go. Infosys was the best thing he'd done in his life. He only wanted the best for it but he seemed to be unable to move beyond it.

Friday's events have left Infosys without a CEO, irretrievably damaged Murthy's reputation, and highlighted the dysfunctionality of the board.

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IGNORE NEGATIVE EMOTIONS AND SHIFT YOUR FOCUS TO THE POSITIVES

SC Khungar

We create maps of people and want them to fit into our maps. When they don't behave as per our liking, we get disturbed. We want to control them, and failing to do so makes us angry, in turn creating a series of negative thoughts that deplete our inner power.

We have to understand that all people are different, have different perspectives and different choices. We can't expect others to approve of our choices. Therefore, emphasis should be to change ourselves and con-

trol our thinking.

While I was at school, I used to go to a nearby park to study as the atmosphere at home was not suitable for studies. Moreover, in those days coolers and air conditions were not as common as they are now. While at the park, there was a particular crow that would always disturb me with its caws. The more I tried to hush it away, the more determined it appeared. I learnt to ignore it, and slowly its cawing was no longer a disturbance. However, one fine day the crow stopped coming, and then I real-

ised that I was missing him.

The cawing of the crow was annoying but it was not the bird's fault.

So what I did was to unknowingly focus on the positive aspect of having the good company of the crow. Likewise, we should all focus on the positive aspects of people around us, rather than fret over the negatives.

(Innervoice comprises contributions from our readers. The views expressed are personal.) innervoice@hindustantimes.com