



Unseemly contest

The Gujarat Rajya Sabha elections were a lesson on how they should not be fought

Having converted a routine biennial Rajya Sabha election in Gujarat into a prestige issue, the Bharatiya Janata Party has created the perception that it lost a high-stakes battle. It won the two seats it was expected to and lost only the one it was meant to, given the respective strengths of the BJP and the Congress in the State Assembly. The BJP had enough legislators to get its president, Amit Shah, and Union Minister Smriti Irani elected. However, the party decided to make an open secret of coveting the third seat by luring away Opposition MLAs and banking on cross-voting. Ultimately, the Congress candidate, Ahmed Patel, won the seat in the first round itself, getting the required 44 votes. With two votes declared invalid by the Election Commission, the required votes came down from 45 to 44. The EC demonstrated independence and institutional strength amidst tremendous pressure mounted on it by both parties. It passed a clear order on sound legal grounds to invalidate the votes of two Congress MLAs, who had voted for the BJP, for showing their ballots to persons not authorised to see them. There is a precedent recorded last year in Haryana for violation of the secrecy clause, but the vote was then rejected by the Returning Officer on the spot, whereas in this case the paper was placed in the ballot box. The EC invoked statutory rules on voting procedure as well as its plenary powers under the Constitution to direct the Returning Officer to segregate the two votes and count the rest.

This bitter contest is a lesson on how Rajya Sabha elections should not be fought. The House derives its legitimacy from the fact that elected representatives of the people in State Assemblies constitute the electors. It is an abuse of this scheme for political parties to encourage cross-voting. When their strength in the Assembly is known, it is unseemly to field an extra candidate and force a contest. The run-up to the vote saw attempts to win over rival legislators and counter-poaching tactics. The Congress packed off its 44 MLAs to a resort in Bengaluru, where it is in power. This was followed by an income tax raid on a Karnataka minister. All this lent the impression that the BJP would stop at nothing to deny the Congress a seat. This was compounded by the fact that the Congress had nominated Mr. Patel, a close confidant of Congress president Sonia Gandhi and a power centre in the party. This gave the election the colour of a proxy tussle between the BJP and Congress leaderships. The ultimate outcome is a morale booster for the Congress at a time when it seems to lack vibrancy and vitality. As for the BJP, it should serve as a reminder that the pursuit of unquestioned political supremacy at the cost of democratic norms most often boomerangs.

Castles in the air?

India needs to carry more weight in seeing through connectivity plans with Afghanistan

Two months after the India-Afghanistan air corridor was inaugurated with great expectations, news that it has been hit by a shortage of cargo planes is a cause for concern. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Ashraf Ghani had agreed on the project during the Heart of Asia summit in Amritsar in December 2016, as a gamechanger to get around Pakistan's obstructionist behaviour in delaying truck shipments from Afghanistan to the Wagah border. The fact that Mr. Ghani himself developed the plan, which allowed traders to pay what they would have to transport their goods by road with the Afghan government underwriting the rest, showed Kabul's commitment to securing its trade links with India. Delhi too affirmed the importance it placed on the trade route: for instance, when the first cargo flight under the arrangement landed in Delhi on June 19, External Affairs Ministers Sushma Swaraj and M.J. Akbar were on the tarmac to welcome it. It is therefore surprising that the initiative has been hit by logistical problems within weeks, leaving traders in Afghanistan with tonnes of perishable produce only because a chartered aircraft line wasn't secured in advance. Officials argue that these are just teething troubles that will be resolved at the earliest. However, a larger question remains. Shouldn't India be optimising its efforts to secure connectivity and trade with other countries that lie to its west?

Despite its commitment of \$2 billion in development aid to Afghanistan, there are few new infrastructure projects that the government has taken up in the past few years. The big ones, mostly planned a decade ago, have been complete, including the Zaranj-Delaram highway (which connects to Iran), the Herat dam, the Doshi-Charikar power project, and the construction of Afghanistan's parliament complex. In addition, India's plans for the Chabahar port in Iran and the trilateral agreement to develop transit trade also need close attention. The trilateral agreement has yet to be ratified in Iran, and tenders by India Ports Global Limited to develop berths as well as the railway line connecting Chabahar to the Afghan border at Zahedan (first planned in 2011) continue to be delayed. Similarly, there has not been sufficient follow-through on the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline after its inauguration in 2015. Eventually, India's dealings with both Afghanistan and Iran are not just about circumventing Pakistan. They should open up important new connectivity and commerce avenues, as well as develop markets in Central Asia, and through them to Russia and Europe. While it is heartening that Road Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari recommitted to the trilateral arrangement and development of Chabahar during his recent visit to Iran, regional connectivity needs more administrative will than just ribbon-cutting ceremonies and grandly announced plans that run aground when the government's focus shifts elsewhere.

When the paradigm shifts

The Modi government has managed to change business as usual in politics, in the absence of a counter-narrative



HAPPYMON JACOB

The recent visit of Narendra Modi to Israel, the first ever visit by an Indian Prime Minister, and the blunt display of conviction and boldness in doing so, is a clear indication of how Mr. Modi, and the BJP-led regime in New Delhi, plan to radically alter the 'ideology' of the Indian state. 'Change' has undoubtedly been the underlying mantra of the Modi government. But have the changes brought about by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government over the past three years been cosmetic or has there been a fundamental 'paradigm shift' even if one were to argue that the Modi government's economic and governance successes are limited?

In his landmark book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas Kuhn makes a distinction between cosmetic changes in status quo and paradigm shifts: the latter are revolutionary and fundamental. Has Mr. Modi managed to shift the paradigm of our polity, and how we view and engage with it?

New brand of politics

One thing is becoming clearer by the day: the BJP's contemporary political articulations and policy formulation cannot be understood if we don't view them as a paradigm shift driven by powerful ideological forces. It's not business as usual or a mere extension of old politics, it's an altogether new brand of politics. As Kuhn would put it, we are witnessing a "proliferation of competing articulations, the willingness to try anything, (...) and the recourse to debate over fundamentals". We may end up missing the bigger picture and fail to understand its implications if we continue to view the policies of the current regime using the usual analytical tools of



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politics.

Some of us are refusing to see this paradigm shift and some others are unwilling to acknowledge what they see. But most of us seem to be interrogating Mr. Modi and his new brand of politics while still deeply embedded in the secular-liberal seductions of the Nehruvian world view. Even the earlier BJP government under Atal Bihari Vajpayee operated broadly from a Nehruvian paradigm: whenever questioned, the defence put up by the then NDA leadership was that it was merely building on the Nehruvian paradigm – and it was for the most part. If during the Vajpayee years it was 'business as usual', or what Kuhn calls the 'normal science' period, wherein the BJP was still busy aligning its policies within the Nehruvian paradigm, the tendency to 'fit in' is now a thing of the past. There is today an unapologetic shift from the Nehruvian paradigm to a Hindutva 2.0 paradigm.

Moreover, it would also be inaccurate to view Mr. Modi's Hindutva politics as merely subversive of the Nehruvian world view. Subversion is reactionary: Hindutva 2.0 is a fundamentally divergent Weltanschauung. Its policies may be flawed and ineffective, but it nevertheless reflects a new paradigm. For Hindutva 2.0, domestic conflict resolution is a favourite staging ground to showcase aggressive nation-building practices, devoid of sensitive political rapprochement and accommodation, and with a high dose of aggressive rhetoric and military tactics. This is not only contrary to the broadly accommodative and politically-sensitive Nehruvian style of conflict resolution but also to the Vajpayee-era policies.

Contours of the new paradigm

The new Hindutva paradigm has major implications for India's domestic politics, conflict resolution practices, foreign policy, and social dynamics. The liberal, and left-leaning, Nehruvian intelligentsia

traditionally enjoyed the pride of place in the pecking order of India's socio-political hierarchy. Endowed with state patronage, it formed the *creme de la creme* of modern India's class structure, controlling political debates, determining the boundaries of public morality and whose commentary on the state of the nation was revered. Not so in the Hindutva paradigm of today. The liberal intelligentsia is on the defensive, and the Hindutva intelligentsia is on the rise, with some from the former group having conveniently jumped ship.

The role of minorities in our national imagination is also undergoing critical changes. When the Hindutva ideologues claim that there will be no more 'minority appeasement', what they really seem to be implying is that 'minorities have to either fall in line or be treated as second-class citizens'. And frankly, there is no difference between the two.

Take another example: successive Congress governments or even the Vajpayee government almost never tried to put pressure on the higher education system and intellectual edifice of the country, both of which have been dominated by left-liberals. Instead, they were co-opted into the system. The new regime in New Delhi not only does not co-opt them, but is proactively sidelining and silencing them, leading to stiff resistance and resultant turmoil.

Yet another example is the Modi government's Kashmir policy. In the past, governments were not only desirous of political reconciliation in Kashmir but were also tolerant of the Kashmiri dissidents. Today's BJP government is doing exactly the opposite even to the extent of sending NIA sleuths after some of those very outfits which New Delhi's agencies had been courting, appeasing and promoting in the past. The violent re-

outreach, *vis-à-vis* China and Pakistan, two of India's most crucial neighbours. The eventual outcome of this aggression is already becoming evident. Display of strength and power is deeply ingrained in Hindutva's political culture and the new dispensation has only made it starker than ever.

While intellectual traditions might be able to absorb such structural changes with more receptivity and even learn from them, the impact of paradigm shifts on socio-political structures can be far more severe depending on the nature and direction of such shifts. Given that the organising principle of Hindutva 2.0 is majoritarian communalism, the likely result of the ongoing paradigm shift in Indian politics will be lot more chaos. We are already witnessing attempts at using persuasion of all kinds, including the use of force, to advance the Hindutva agenda.

Given the polarising nature of such a paradigm shift, there are bound to be ideological struggles, street battles, regional divisions, and attempts at revisiting the fundamentals of the Indian Union, among others. Worse still, if the regime and its ideological mentors effect this paradigm shift without caring for pluralistic accommodation, religious sensitivity, regional differences and civil rights, it could lead to civil war-like situations, mounting dissent and violence.

Those resisting this ideological transformation of the Indian state must remember that paradigm shifts are driven by powerful ideological constructs and the only way to resist or moderate such shifts is to generate powerful counter-narratives. In contemporary India, it is precisely such powerful ideological alternatives that are sorely missing: some have lost their way out of the erstwhile paradigm, some have given up resisting, and several others seemed to have jumped ship. Nitish Kumar won't be the last one to do so.

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Working on the app-based model

We need regulation of technology and work for workers without security nets



ADITI SURIE

The line between work and jobs is often manipulated. The Delhi High Court is hearing the issue on August 10 in response to a Delhi-based union's petition which refutes the claims of Uber and Ola – as not being employers of drivers but only providers of work.

In an Indian orbit

This is the first Indian public articulation of a question on the so-called gig economy that has been raised in courts worldwide. The union says drivers are put under control and supervision amounting to employment, but neither do they enjoy flexible work nor receive benefits. As informal sector workers who know how to maintain continuity in income, falling incentives have upset their calculations of spending, saving, and repaying debt. The same algorithms that give drivers a written history of work and earnings also allow com-

panies to be faceless but still in control.

Uber and Ola drivers are some of the first informal sector workers to be immersed in new-age tech. Their work is organised around data, timestamps and geo-references, making it traceable and trackable. Algorithms that run platforms also systematise parts of work unlike in previous non-tech work. Work has readable history, incomes verified in bank statements, with regularity – paid mostly without delays, without asking. Processes and protocols were never a part of their previous work as lorry drivers, chauffeurs or drivers based at traditional stands. In contrast, most of us in "jobs" are accustomed to having legibility in our work lives.

The High Court can create precedence for the regulation of tech-based work for a large young population which needs work but is underemployed for the formal job market. The sheer number of drivers who join these platforms indicates the sizeable digital workforce being created. Identical platform ideas are being funded in different cities as separate entities, because investors find the digitisation of local services even at city level worthwhile.



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Unlike those of us in "jobs" with protected salaries, these drivers manage earnings to spend, save and resolve debt. Legal contracts that safeguard future income (preventing untimely dismissal) and future savings (provident funds) have not been available to them. Unlike in America where the platform model originates and is called the 'death of the job', this new form of work has more continuities with older forms of the informal sector than discontinuities.

Platform drivers have experienced what organised work feels like – not formal jobs, but work that is accounted for, seamless, and organised. Rides come continuously. Payments come in regular intervals, partly in hand through cash, partly in banks, expanding savings from the near to

the mid-term. Primary research by this writer finds drivers made more stable financial decisions because of this organisation of platforms.

Left vulnerable

Yet, platforms have thrown this off balance by severely changing the rules of the game for drivers. Agility, which is key to this business model, allows companies to experiment but makes drivers vulnerable. Shrinking, negligible incentives have reduced their incomes. Some cannot repay car loans. Companies restrict drivers' access to their work data. They also say that their earnings don't always add up. Companies are unabashedly constraining the very offerings that got drivers to join their platforms in the first place.

As informal sector workers, drivers have learnt how to maintain continuous work and income despite flexible work. The rules of the informal labour market come from trusted networks that are tacit to those outside it. Drivers may not be uncomfortable with weekly, daily fluctuations in income on platforms because they were within a known range. But the game has no rules now.

How do we weigh the benefits of legal formality when they come

without a living wage? Who gets to decide this trade-off: the state or the worker? A countrywide skilling and job crisis leaves these informal, semi-skilled workers with limited work options – driving, with low barriers of entry, is vital here. Regulation should be responsive to drivers' interests. Drivers can decide the quantity and duration of their work on platforms and this is valuable for them. Their terms of earning need regulations for transparency.

It will be crucial to see whether the Delhi court judgment can create precedence for the regulation of technology and work for workers without security nets. It will take a city court, immersed in the realities of its economy, its labour patterns, its experiences of vulnerability and security, to determine these questions. For a city such as Delhi where so much work and employment is in the non-manufacturing sector, how should we think of security for workers? Do we not need to think through regulations that contain the algorithms that are set to determine the smartening of our cities and digitising India?

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Ahmed Patel's win

Congress veteran Ahmed Patel's election to the Rajya Sabha can be described aptly as a victory of the presence of mind of the Congress's think tank over the arrogance of the BJP leadership whose vaulting ambition to win seems to be crossing all lines. In finding merit in the complaint of the Congress party and then deciding to invalidate the two 'open' votes, the Election Commission of India has also asserted its independence. On his part, BJP president Amit Shah needs to be a lot more cautious. Perhaps he needs to position himself at a distant spot when there is voting ("Ahmed Patel makes it to Rajya Sabha", August 9).

P. VIJAYACHANDRAN, Thiruvananthapuram

Ahmed Patel's return to his Rajya Sabha seat from Gujarat, defying the odds, and by a whisker, should be

seen more as a rebuff to both Amit Shah and Shankersinh Vaghela. Their scripts did not work this time, thanks to the two Congress MLAs. The Election Commission acted promptly. For Mr. Shah – known for mastering his own brand of political craftsmanship, that has led to his party capturing power in several States even without the People's mandate – the defeat of his candidate, an ex-Congressman in his own home State, is a setback. The case also shows that the Congress has so far failed to energise itself and present itself as a formidable challenger to the BJP. Can Rahul Gandhi deliver the goods?

S.K. CHOUDHURY, Bengaluru

As most of India retired for the night on Tuesday, a nail-biting finish to an ugly political race played out. It was a race that involved defection, the use of money

and even muscle power to overpower people's representatives. Thank god the crude game plan of the BJP was overcome by an Election Commission that showed it has some spine.

JENNIFER DURASINGAM, London

One-sided analysis

It is a matter of concern and disappointment for long-time readers of *The Hindu* to read political commentaries that are unmistakably and unapologetically one-sided. The article, "The mood of the moment" (August 9), is aligned with this disturbing trend and appears more as a fiery political speech targeting the Modi government than an objective analysis of current political trends.

Nitish Kumar may be painted as a renegade to the 'secular cause', but the fact is that he was always uncomfortable in the company of the corrupt Lalu Prasad clan. Couldn't Lalu Prasad have

averted the collapse of the grand alliance by asking his son and former Deputy Chief Minister to resign, as demanded by Mr. Kumar? To dismiss Mr. Modi's undented popularity with the people as merely a paradox and as a consequence of a cleverly orchestrated nationalistic propaganda, the article exhibits a strange timidity to look for deeper causes such as the Prime Minister's corruption-free governance at the Centre. Instead of sharing a common vision for India, what brings the Opposition together is a shared hatred for one individual.

V.N. MUKUNDARAJAN, Thiruvananthapuram

Worth pursuing

It is a welcome development that the Uttar Pradesh Shia Central Waqf Board has proposed an amicable solution to Ramjannabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute ("Shia board for mosque at reasonable

distance", August 9). After decades of dispute, it is gratifying that the board has taken the initiative to show goodwill and promote brotherhood. The idea must be taken forward so that we can prove once again that India can never be shaken and is a shining example of being a mosaic of cultures. Striving for national unity in a spirit of brotherhood with all will also keep fanatics and terrorist groups at bay.

J.P. REDDY, Nalgonda, Telangana

Two 'types' of notes?

After the shock of demonetisation, still a mysterious exercise, comes another jolt – a "scam" in the printing of new ₹500 currency notes. Though, technically, notice needs to

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

A reader pointed out that the report, "National competition on letters to the Mahatma" (August 9, 2017), did not give the address to which the competition entries should be sent. The entries should be sent to the Chief Postmaster General of the respective postal circle.

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The march from yesterday

Scientists should participate in a public debate on the nature of science and its practice in India



SUNDAR SARUKKAI

These days when everybody is marching for something or the other, scientists don't want to be left behind. A global movement called March for Science was held in different places in the world in April this year and the Indian version was held in some cities on Wednesday. But do the concerns that drove the global marches for science also matter in the Indian case?

The call for this march in Indian cities had many problematic assertions. The march was justified by pointing out that science in India is "facing the danger of being eclipsed by a rising wave of unscientific beliefs and religious bigotry" along with reduction of funding to premier scientific institutions. They added that non-scientific ideas are being promoted and suggested that "promoting [a] scientific bent of mind can certainly help improve the social health of our country where incidents of witch hunting, honour killing and mob lynching are reported regularly."

The march organisers made four suggestions: allocate a certain percentage of the GDP for science and education, "stop propagation of unscientific, obscurantist ideas and religious intolerance", insist that education should only impart "ideas that are supported by scientific evidence", and finally, "enact policies based on evidence-based science".

Problems with the narrative
This statement as well as the rationale for the March for Science shows how naïve ideas of science continue to be propagated as truth. It also illustrates the power of the scientific community in India that they can continue to utter such sweeping statements about science without worrying about their consequences. Moreover, such recycling of ideas of science and its relation to society is unfair to hundreds of thoughtful scientists.

What is worrying about such calls is that they echo the national narrative on science right from Independence. Science in India has constantly legitimised itself by creating a false opposition with beliefs, superstition and religion. The fact that this same



The march in Bengaluru. ■ V. SREENIVASA MURTHY

narrative continues even today just shows how these ideas are being used as a decoy so that the real questions that the public may ask about Indian science do not get asked. This invocation of superstition, witches, mob action or even caste atrocities seems to suspiciously arise whenever the scientific community wants to demand more funds from the government. There is a striking parallel between the language and narrative of the religious right and those who hold fundamentalist ideas about science. The claim that there is a "rising wave of unscientific beliefs" is more rhetorical than evidence-based and deploys the strategy of fear-mongering to make a point. To claim that a "scientific bent of mind" can get rid of honour and mob lynching is to betray a very poor sense of the nature of social reality and social action.

The suggestions that this group made are actually unscientific. To claim that 10% of the GDP should be allocated for education is an unscientific claim and one made without factoring either the fiscal policies on education or the chal-

lenges that confront education in India today. They also want to stop the propagation of unscientific ideas, but what are 'unscientific ideas'? The logical fallacy of using extreme examples to push for their agenda is yet another strategy of the fundamentalists.

A blinkered viewpoint

Like the right wing, these scientists too do not give the norms which will define what is scientific; all that we have now is that whatever scientists say or do is scientific – analogous to the claim by the right wing that whatever they say or do about their religion is that religion. Their ignorance, or perhaps their disinterest, about the rich debates on what constitutes scientific evidence betrays only an unscientific use of the term 'scientific evidence'. Their third suggestion that education should only be about ideas that are supported by scientific evidence is patently absurd. True education should be as much about the capacity to critically reflect on science as on everything else we are taught. Imagine the

world of education if we followed this condition: we could not teach art, music, literature, languages and quite a significant portion of social science, to list a few. We cannot teach history because it is not 'scientific' and so we will never learn how to understand the history of science. We cannot teach sociology since many theories of sociology will not pass the test of scientific theories, so we cannot really understand how scientific knowledge is created socially. Their final suggestion that policies should be based on "evidence-based science" aggravates all these mistakes.

What these scientists do not seem to realise is that the point of contention is precisely what they take for granted: science, scientific method and scientific temper. What is common between such claims about science and the right wing fundamentalists is that both these camps do not draw upon available material which offers a challenge to their naïve beliefs. Both these camps speak as if what they say is the literal truth. Both of them try to force everybody else into their own beliefs and states of ignorance, many times by using radical oppositions and images (such as lynching).

In the case of this 'national' view of science, everything they claim can easily be disproved by referring to the extensive work in the fields of history, philosophy and sociology of science. The difficulty of giving one coherent definition of science or of scientific method, or to have a theory of causality that can help explain how scientific temper can get rid of superstition, caste, religion or even mob lynching should hopefully make them more critical of their own beliefs about science. Yet nothing changes the discourse about science in India. This is truly an example of Science Sena at work.

A march based on such an 'unscientific' understanding of science cannot be a march for science. It sounds more like a sermon for science. The scientists should instead participate in a public debate on the nature of science and its practice in India. This will take the mystery of scientific knowledge out of gated institutes and private meeting rooms into the public domain, which after all has been funding science for so long without necessarily seeing the returns for the cost it has incurred.

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The goods exchange

Cross-LoC trade continues to be a key confidence building measure between India and Pakistan



AFAQ HUSSAIN

With the resumption of cross-Line of Control (LoC) trade on the Uri-Muzaffarabad route this week, it seems that the Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, Mehbooba Mufti, has upheld her promise of supporting this trade, which is also a part of the 'Agenda of Alliance' between the Peoples Democratic Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party. Trade was stopped in Uri on July 21 after banned drugs were seized from a truck while trade on the Poonch-Rawalakot route has stopped for over a month now after border tensions.

It's about barter trade

Of late, cross-LoC trade has been in focus after the National Investigation Agency (NIA) began probing the funding patterns of traders. Such administrative checks, although essential, do not address the root cause of trade irregularities. While the results of the investigations have not been made public, it is important to realise that this is barter trade wherein goods are exchanged against goods without involving any monetary exchange. Therefore, regular accounting and other practices of international trade may not be applicable here.

Now that it has been decided to resume this form of trade, it is imperative that steps be taken to strengthen trade practices and ensure that it does not fall victim to speculation and allegations once again. In this connection, the recent joint meeting between officials of both sides was a rare sight, given the rising tensions between the two countries. In order to streamline trade, it was decided that permanent and formalised communication facilities will be set up between the respective trade officers. Also, based on the ongoing research that the Bureau of Research on Industry and Economic Fundamentals (BRIEF) is conducting on strengthening cross-LoC trade, a number of steps have been proposed that could lead to a change in the trading mechanism.

Steps to better trade

First, a joint investigation team from India and Pakistan should be set up to investigate cases of narcotic and arms smuggling across the border. At present, truck drivers end up being the victims although they may or may not be involved directly. Such a team should address the root cause of such instances in a

speedy and transparent manner.

Second, to keep a check on the traders and trade practices, a monitoring cell of officials from State and Central agencies must be constituted. It should monitor daily trade practices such as registration of traders, invoicing and exchange of goods, trade balancing, etc. to address allegations of hawala money, under-invoicing, and even misrepresentation of goods. Trade data and information for each registered trader should be mandatorily recorded in an electronic format by the trade facilitation officer and shared with the cell at regular intervals for analysis and other checks.

Third, there is a need to institutionalise and formalise trading communities. As an initiative, traders and chambers on both sides have come up with the idea of a joint chamber called the Jammu and Kashmir Joint Chambers of Commerce and Industry, which will have traders of both sides as well as the local chambers of Jammu and Kashmir and the Mirpur Chamber. Support from both governments will add weight to it. This will also help create more transparency in transactions and information flow among traders and chambers in both inter- and intra-LoC.

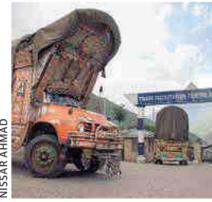
Train the trader

Finally, it is important to impart training to LoC traders. With support from excise and security agencies, training sessions should be conducted on the standard operating procedures of this trade as well as established accounting practices such as maintaining balance sheets. This would help traders and government agencies monitor trade and ensure trader accountability.

Over the last year, cross-LoC trade has been affected by a number of allegations. With a resumption of trade, the government must uphold its promise of taking cross-LoC confidence building measures (CBM) to the 'next level' – as mentioned in the 'Agenda of Alliance'. Thus, it is necessary that the Central and State governments take the necessary steps towards reforming trade and ensuring capacity building of traders.

In October, cross-LoC trade will complete nine years. Irrespective of the negative perception around it, this form of trade continues to be one of the most successful CBMs between India and Pakistan. Cross-LoC trade has also managed to connect the two divided sides of Jammu and Kashmir, thereby creating a constituency of peace in an otherwise tense region. The governments must ensure that trade continues to flourish.

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NESAR AHMAD

SINGLE FILE

Rage of the morality police

For writers who 'offend' the faceless mob, it is always a lonely battle

SUDIPTA DATTA



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Let's face it, we have always been a little intolerant of the "other". Anyone who doesn't conform to what we think is the "right" way to eat/look/think is guaranteed a difficult time. So it is that a painter is forced to live and die in exile; a writer has to declare himself "dead" in literary terms before a court grants him a fresh lease of life; cricket pitches are dug up to keep a team out; a face smeared with tar for daring to speak up and so forth.

The explicit reality

When Jharkhand writer Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar finds himself being pilloried by people who may not have actually read what he has written, he is not alone, but it will be a lonely battle. To those saying he has slighted Adivasi culture in a story included in a collection of erotic stories, they must turn to his fiction tuned to reality. One of the most powerful stories in his *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2015) is the eponymously titled one, the last in the collection. A group of Santal dancers with their "tamak and tumdak" are gathered to perform for the visiting President of India. When the troupe master Mangal Murmu refuses, he is harassed, gagged and feels "helpless and so foolish". All he wanted to do was protest against his people being used as "toys". As Murmu rages: "Someone presses our 'ON' button... and we Santals start beating rhythms on our tamak... while someone snatches away our dancing grounds. Tell me, am I wrong?"

Today, Shekhar, who won the Sahitya Akademi Yuva Puraskar in 2015 for *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey*, must be feeling a little "helpless and foolish" for the manner in which self-appointed Adivasi groups have lashed out against him for "objectifying Santal women", his writing branded as pure "porn". Yes, he writes about sex, explicitly, but it's a distressing read – about girls selling their bodies, for ₹50 and two bread pakoras (*November is the Month of Migrations*), for instance. Then again, isn't that a reflection of reality? Just turn to the newspapers; haven't we read about girls from Jharkhand being rescued from the brothel or from a house where they had been abused?

In 2015, award-winning Tamil writer Perumal Murugan declared himself literary "dead" after conservative caste groups harassed him and sought a ban against his novel *Maadhurubaagan* (One Part Woman), written in 2010, saying it was prurient. A year later, the Madras High Court rejected the demand for banning the book, advising those who were hurt by it to stay away from it. Murugan's One Part Woman is about a couple's efforts to conceive a child and the taunts they face from the community; and why they pin their hopes on an age-old temple festival when rules on sex are relaxed for one night. In his *Treatise on Tolerance*, French philosopher Voltaire argued that while "tolerance has never provoked a civil war; intolerance has covered the Earth in carnage." We are unfortunately seeing a lot of it around us.



CONCEPTUAL

Miracle on the Rhine

ECONOMICS

Also known as the Miracle on the Rhine, Wirtschaftswunder refers to the rapid rise of Germany into one of the world's leading economies after its devastation during the Second World War. Pro-market economic reforms under Ludwig Erhard, Germany's Economics Minister, were the major cause behind the revival. Influenced by the ideas of economist Wilhelm Röpke, Erhard first tackled hyperinflation through radical currency reform that introduced the Deutschmark as the new German currency. He also tore down war time price-controls which had discouraged the production of several essential goods.

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FAQ

The Maduro muddle

How the Venezuelan dream unravelled

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN

What is the current state of Venezuela's economy?

Venezuela, a country with more oil than Saudi Arabia, currently faces rapidly declining foreign exchange reserves, poverty and hyperinflation – projected at 720% this year and 2069% next, according to the International Monetary Fund. Under President Nicolás Maduro, Venezuela has been experiencing an acute shortage of food, medicine and other vital supplies. Venezuela is in the throes of a political crisis that is inextricably linked to its untenable economic situation.

What was oil's role in this?

A quarter of Venezuela's GDP and 95% of its export earnings are from crude oil, the price of which has plummeted since 2014 when it was trading at over \$110 per barrel to under \$30 per barrel last year. As a result Venezuela's GDP and U.S. dollar reserves fell; the country has just \$10.2 billion in reserves. As money was in short sup-

ply, the government started printing cash – a factor contributing to spiralling inflation. Venezuela has borrowed at least \$55 billion from allies in recent times. As the price of oil fell, more oil was required to honour the oil-for-financing deals and Venezuela has not been able to keep up with these shipments. Mr. Maduro has been criticised for prioritising debt servicing over feeding his people.

How did the Chávez regime contribute to this situation?

Hugo Chávez came to power on the promise of setting up a modern socialist republic and bringing inclusive growth to Venezuela, which had low growth, high inflation and high levels of poverty. He nationalised over 1,000 companies, funded welfare programmes and cash transfers to the poor from oil revenues, and offered an economic and political counter-narrative to what the U.S. proffered. All this earned Chávez wide popu-

lar appeal; poverty declined, employment increased as did college enrolment. However, Chávez's rule was marked by an increasing authoritarianism and a gross mismanagement of the country's oil.

How was the economy mismanaged?

Rather than saving some of the oil revenues, which came pouring in because of booming oil prices for the decade up to 2014, or investing the cash in other industries or diversifying investments via a sovereign wealth fund, the economy was over-concentrated in oil while other sectors became uncompetitive and unproductive; the economy became dependent on imports. A regime of excessive price controls meant a misallocation of resources and a fixed exchange rate created opportunities for corruption among the regime's elite. Many of these problems have been compounded since Mr. Maduro took charge in 2013.

FROM The Hindu. ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO AUGUST 10, 1967

Party MPs' absence in Lok Sabha

Senior Congress leaders have taken a serious view of the absence of a number of M.Ps. in the Lok Sabha yesterday [August 8, New Delhi] when an Opposition amendment seeking to declare that the safeguards provided in the Constitution for Scheduled Castes and Tribes were not being fully implemented was carried. While Mr. Ram Subhag Singh, Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, has written to all Cabinet Ministers and other Ministers pointing out that it was unfortunate that a number of members should have been absent at the time of voting, the Congress Parliamentary Party executive also discussed the matter to-day [August 9]. The executive noted with some satisfaction that ultimately when the Government and Opposition forces regrouped themselves immediately after the reopening of the doors of the House lobbies, the Congress Party succeeded in rejecting the substantive motion incorporating the amendment. (The motion was rejected by 115 votes to 107). At to-day's [August 9] meeting of the Parliamentary Party Executive, which discussed yesterday's [August 8] happenings, members were of the view that it was not due to any of the members deliberately staying from the House but because they did not expect a trial of strength at that time.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO AUGUST 10, 1917

Bengal prohibition order.

A deputation consisting of Messrs. Surendranath Banerjee, B. Chakrabarty, C.R. Das, the Hon'ble Dr. Nilratan Sircar, the Hon'ble Mr. Surendranath Roy and the Hon'ble Mr. Fazlul Huq, waited upon His Excellency Lord Ronaldshay, yesterday [August 9, Calcutta], in connection with the prohibition of the town hall meeting. His Excellency the Governor received the members very cordially and discussed the matter with them for an hour and a half. It is understood that the members of the deputation assured the Governor that they would do their best to conduct the proceedings of the meeting in a responsible manner.

DATA POINT

More revenues, slower job growth

Revenues in the IT industry went up in the last three years. But correspondingly, the total number of new jobs in the sector came down in each of these years.

