

# 14 THE EDITORIAL PAGE

WORDLY WISE

IF CEO COMPENSATION WAS PERFORMANCE-DRIVEN, NOBODY WOULD EVER ARGUE.

—LOUIS V. GERSTNER, JR.

**The Indian EXPRESS**

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

## Sinking Valley

New Delhi's strategy of containment by force has failed, there is a deepening death wish in Kashmir



PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

IT IS AN unmistakable sign of the corrosion of Indian democracy that an odd combination of illusions and nauseating bravado is being spun in Delhi around the grim political situation in Kashmir. Every element of Indian policy in Kashmir lies in tatters. And yet, instead of asking forthright questions, our denial goes deeper. Kashmir now seems to be going from a deep and violent conflict to a state where there seems to be a death wish all around: Security forces with no means to restore order other than by inflicting death, Indian nationalism now more interested in showing machismo than solving real problems, increasingly radicalised militancy with almost a touch of apocalyptic disregard for life, foreign powers fishing in troubled waters, scores of young men and children even, who are making a statement that courting death seems a better option than what they regard as suffocating oppression. They are all feeding off each other.

The roots of the Kashmir problem are deep, and the point should not be to gloat at one government's failure. The deep gulf between what the Indian state wants and what Kashmiris in the Valley want has always been unbridgeable. But over the last decade and a half, beginning with Vajpayee, there was an attempt to create at least some kind of modus vivendi that had three elements: Containing insurgency, relying on local political forces and elections to at least create partial modes of incorporation, and reaching out under some nebulous appeal to "insaniyat" or humanity.

What has transpired in the last few months has made it clear that every shred of Indian policy is now ineffective even to produce a modicum of a modus vivendi in Kashmir. Whatever our counter-insurgency, or counter-militancy policy is, it is backfiring profoundly: Kashmir is more in the grip of militancy and radicalisation than at any point in the last 15 years.

Whatever our hope that some modicum of local democratic process can create a sense of participation has been belied by the single-digit turnout in the Srinagar by-polls: A stinging rebuke to faith in Indian democracy. Admittedly, the fear of violence and threats by militants contributed to this stunning de-

bacle. Let us for a moment assume that it is just the threat of violence that kept people away. But isn't that supposed to be the point? Why, after three years of this government's strategy, are we less able to protect Kashmiri voters? What does that say of our counter-insurgency strategy?

It's a fool's errand to think that coercion alone will win India Kashmir. But more deeply worrying is the fact that the legitimacy of almost all conventional political actors on whom we have relied, from the PDP to the National Conference, is dipping rather than increasing. Their hold was always very tenuous. But it should be obvious now that they are not even remotely plausible instruments of placating Kashmiris. What other political interlocution will there be? And there is no space left for a dialogue outside of the realm of politics, a dialogue that can address the almost unbearable suffering this conflict has produced. We have regressed to a new and, even by Kashmir's standards, a frightening low, in Kashmir, pure and simple.

But the disquieting thing is that no one in Delhi wants to face this truth squarely. The Indian emperor has no clothes. I am trying to imagine what the headlines would have been on Kashmir five years ago. This column was often critical of Manmohan Singh. But on Kashmir and Pakistan, he was wise, and it is a pity that he frittered away a slender historical opportunity to make progress on Kashmir. Yet, I can imagine, if the current catastrophe we are seeing in Kashmir had occurred under the UPA, Manmohan Singh would have been roasted and held to account. But we dare not say the truth that, for the moment, Kashmir has been lost on Modi's watch.

The point is not to apportion blame. Maybe there is an overdetermined futility about Kashmir. But we are doing ourselves a disservice by engaging in a politics of diversion. More than militant propaganda, the way we talk about Kashmir does more harm to India's cause in Kashmir which desperately requires breaking the cycle of othering and humiliation that has marked this conflict. It creates difficulty even when groups in the Valley do this. But it is inexcusable when those more distant wage their bravado

wars of revenge to perpetuate this cycle, as if we were not talking about fellow citizens. We do this by making territory efface all considerations of the people: The militants did this by forcing out Pandits; but we risk doing the same by not recognising the core issue is not holding territory, it is giving people confidence in the Indian project.

Second, we are gullible enough to buy diversionary tactics. At the height of this unfolding catastrophe, what was most of Delhi discussing: Were some stone pelters paid to throw stones? The faux outrage at what might be true of some stone pelters completely obscured the larger question of why our Kashmir strategy is a failure, pushing us to new lows. Our discourse on Kashmir is enough to convince anyone that if the Indian state needs this much propaganda and diversion to convince people in Delhi not to ask hard questions, it must surely mean that it has lost the plot. Even our jawans will be better served if, instead of fantasies of revenge, we asked hard questions about why we have put them in this situation in the first place. But treating a serious situation as a farce does not do our credibility any good.

The quality of Indian democracy may not be sufficient to enable an opening in Kashmir. But surely it is a necessary condition. It is difficult to shake off the sense that as Indian politics continues on its pathway of jeopardising individual liberty, and finding proxies for targeting minorities, whatever toehold Indian democracy hopes to have in Kashmir will erode even further.

There is a long and arduous summer ahead. The international environment is turning against India: China is more aggressive; our obsessive desire to get aligned with the American military industrial complex will not yield dividends on Pakistan. In short, Pakistan's strategic space has increased, not decreased. But we are looking at a situation where our strategy of containment by force has failed, our political instruments are hollow, and there is a deepening death wish in the state. Kashmir is looking at an abyss. Who lost the plot this time around?

The writer is President, CPR Delhi and Contributing Editor, The Indian Express

## CULTURE VS STRATEGY

It's the wrong battle for Infosys to be fighting at this moment. Both founders and board must recognise this

INFOSYS IS MAKING an effort, it seems, to address the concerns raised by its promoter, N.R. Narayanamurthy. On Thursday, it announced the appointment of its independent director of six years, Ravi Venkatesan, as a co-chairman. Murthy had recommended Marti Subrahmanyam. That apart, the company also announced it would spend Rs 13,000 crore in dividends or share buyback during 2017-18. Two ex-CFOs of Infosys had made a strong pitch for buyback pointing to cash reserves of Rs 40,000 crore that have been lying idle in the company's books. Clearly, the board led by its chairman R Seshasayee wanted to buy peace and minimise distractions that CEO and MD Vishal Sikka talked about in his email to the company's 2,00,000-plus staff. But it is not clear if Murthy's concerns on falling standards of corporate governance — high severance packages, CEO compensation — have been addressed. The company had engaged law firm Cyril Amarchand Mangaldas in February this year to take inputs from the promoters, evaluate them and then make recommendations to the board.

The ongoing confrontation between the founders and a professional board-led company may be far from over. Proxies representing the founders have already complained the Rs 13,000-crore payout is not good enough. While Murthy himself has remained silent, the appointment of Venkatesan as a co-chairman has also been taken with a pinch of salt by those backing the founders who prefer to wait and see if the core issues of transparency and disclosure raised by Murthy are indeed attended to by the board led now by two persons — chair and the co-chair. In this melee, the company's results have been disappointing, Sikka's variable pay has dropped as a consequence, even as the entire information technology sector braces for new challenges in a rapidly changing external environment.

Given this backdrop, where Sikka is strategising to reinvent the company that was once the toast of India at every global forum, and Murthy is trying to preserve its culture, it looks like the board and the founders are fighting the wrong battle. Management guru Peter Drucker said culture will eat strategy for breakfast. But it is also true that culture needs to be refined and tuned for gaining competitive advantage. The new management is doing that, and as it does, trying to take the culturally-rooted founders along. Having taken a remarkably bold decision to walk out of the board, founders, including Murthy and Nandan Nilekani, can offer their ideas and advice if they feel compelled, but they must let the management take a call. That will let the company focus on growth and building shareholder value.

## IN FREE FALL

Bengal bypoll result shows a Left that is far from regaining lost ground

KANTHI DAKSHIN, AN assembly constituency in South Bengal, has never been a stronghold of the Left Front (LF) — it has lost every election from this seat since 1987. However, the results of the recent bypolls here have special significance for the Left. The LF candidate, a CPI leader, finished third behind the BJP nominee, while the winner, the Trinamool Congress candidate, bagged over 56 per cent of the votes polled. Last year, the same CPI nominee had finished as the runner-up to the Trinamool candidate, with 34 per cent votes while the BJP finished with just over 8 per cent. This time, the BJP polled nearly 30 per cent votes, pushing the LF share down to 10 per cent. While it indicates the fast rise of the BJP as a major player in Bengal politics, it also reveals that the saffron outfit seems to be growing at the expense of the Left. The decline of the Left that set in following the 2011 Bengal assembly election and the 2014 general election only seems to have gathered pace in recent months.

The Left's crisis is not limited to Bengal. If it is battling long years of incumbency in Tripura, headed for polls next year, the record of the CPM-led government in Kerala has also been uninspiring. Appointments by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and highhandedness of the state police have triggered bickering within the Left Front. The CPI, the second largest constituent of the LF, has been unsparing in criticising the government's failures. Kerala's complex social matrix calls for deft and delicate political leadership, while Vijayan refuses to shed the style and image of a party apparatchik. This could cost the Left in the long run as the state heads for a triangular contest: The BJP bagged nearly 15 per cent votes and a seat in the last assembly election and has been building a third front by roping in communal groups that have failed to find space in the Congress and CPM-led fronts. The political scenario in Tripura too is fast changing with the BJP focused on riding the tailwinds of its recent success in other states of the Northeast.

Ironically, the Left is on unsteady ground even in its strongholds at a time when the opposition to the BJP, at least on the university campus, increasingly speaks in an idiom once associated with it. Lacking in energy and ideas, the Left seems set to let go of yet another opportunity to reinvent itself as a relevant political player.

## RONALDO'S CENTURY

An incredible achievement from a player who has sustained his goalscoring, despite losing some of his power and speed

CRISTIANO RONALDO'S CLAIM to greatness has never been in question. His halo is brighter than ever, now that he has become the first player with a century of goals in the prestigious Champions League competition. It's an incredible personal achievement. When you weave in the significance of the goals, it's an even more glittering feat — 44 of those goals have come in knockouts, including 10 in semi-finals and two in the four finals he has featured in.

While the Portuguese has pipped his great rival Lionel Messi to this landmark, this is not the time for the "who's the best player" debate, which shall continue to rage. Ronaldo's Champions League career can be divided into two halves: The Manchester United sojourn and the Real Madrid days. With United, he scored 16 goals in 55 matches, that is, one goal in nearly three games. With Real Madrid, he has netted a whopping 84 goals in 87 outings. He took both those clubs to Champions League glory, but it was in Madrid rather than Manchester that the legend of Ronaldo was born and propagated. At Old Trafford, he was a spectacularly gifted, though at times erratic, wunderkind. At Santiago Bernabeu, he has been a relentless goal machine.

Tellingly, Ronaldo has sustained this goal-scoring habit, despite losing some of his power and speed over the years. From a left winger to an out-and-out striker, he has now evolved into the best penalty box player in world football, thus extending his playing career at the highest level. His twin strikes against Bayern Munich testified to his poaching skills rather than his dribbling verve. Under coach Zinedine Zidane, he has showed considerable positional flexibility too. These days, from wide on the left side, he frequently cuts in to create chances. At times, he is deployed in the conventional number nine role. For Portugal, he remains an out-and-out striker as it maximises his incredible aerial ability. At 32, Ronaldo is in the autumn of his career. But the sharpening of cerebral powers, even as his physical prowess wanes, will continue to make him a lethal proposition.

## TOO MUCH ON MY PLATE

Government must keep out of it, but portion control in restaurants is a good idea



KALYAN KARMAKAR

A RECENT article seemed to suggest that the central government in India is concerned about the amount of food served in "standard" (read: non-dhaba) restaurants and that it plans to talk to hoteliers about this. The thought apparently stemmed from the wastage of food that happens in restaurants. While the article was rather brief, the responses that followed on social media weren't: They ranged from protests about a nanny state to whether focusing on grain storage, rather than restaurant menus, is a better way to curtail food loss.

While I'm no political expert, the discussion did bring back memories of the time I'd moved to Mumbai, about 20 years ago. My new friends and I loved the independence that living alone, with a salary, offered. Part of the fun was eating out as often as we could.

The problem was when I'd eat out by myself. The first time I had a biryani in Mumbai, I was flummoxed by how different it tasted. Then I saw it was a lot more expensive than the biryanis in Kolkata, the perfect budget meals in our college days. As I dug in, I realised the amount of rice and the number of mutton pieces were a lot more than in Kolkata. The higher price seemed fair then. However, even my 20-year-younger self, with a higher metabolism and a more active lifestyle, could not finish the biryani.

The same issue occurred when I went to a Chinese restaurant. Unlike Kolkata, there was no concept of a half-plate, priced at 60 to 70 per cent of a full plate. The fried rice I ordered was too much to finish. It was rather

bland, clearly engineered to need a "side dish". In contrast, a good plate of fried rice in Kolkata could serve as a one-dish meal. Once again, I couldn't finish what I ordered. Then came my first encounter with a sizzler. With our limited exposure back then, this was far more exciting than any foaming molecular gastronomy dish I might encounter today. We excitedly worked through the vegetables once the dish stopped sizzling, leaving the meat for the last. But, by then, one was full and the dish again went back unfinished, although sizzlers were not cheap.

Mumbai challenged my value equations: When eating alone, I'd be faced with meals I couldn't finish and yet, had to pay for in full. That hurt me. Soon, I met my future wife. We had dinner out together every night while dating. At sizzler places, we'd order a single portion of mixed meat grills, ask for French fries instead of vegetables, and finish the dish. I came to the wry conclusion that restaurants in Mumbai were geared for those in love rather than those living by themselves.

Yet, several places across the world allow you to decide how much to eat while eating out. In Singapore's Newton Centre Hawker Market, the Hokkien Mee I ordered at a stall came in serving options of: 1 person/2 person/3 person. Tapas in Spain came in small plates, allowing you to try dishes without filling yourself up. In Europe, good steak places give you an option to order your dish by weight. These meals are geared to not encourage excess.

Interestingly, food and beverage control is

an integral part of the syllabus of the Institute of Hotel Management in India. Future restaurateurs and chefs are taught the values of standardising portion sizes in their menus, to manage business projections. The nutritional value of a meal is taken into consideration too; planning aims that the meal should be wholesome, yet not excessive.

There is no denying the fact that no one, including the government, should tell restaurants what or how to serve — however, with portion control, as a consumer, you can decide what works for you. I still prefer places which offer manageable servings I can finish, where I don't waste my money. There are restaurants in Fort, Mumbai, meant for value-seeking office-goers. The dosas in Udupi joints there are smaller than those in Bandra, and cheaper too. The omelettes in old-school Irani cafes are not as gigantic as those in the modern European cafes of the suburbs. A fish curry thali in the Malvani joints in Parel are easy to finish, as are the dhansaks in the Parsi restaurants in the south.

Ironically, you also find trimmed-down portions in the modern high-end European restaurants, where the food served on a plate is usually perfect for one — though a lot more expensive. I urge you to look at portion sizes when you eat, for eating a smaller biryani is often a more fun diet than having to eat biryani made with "cauliflower rice".

Karmakar is a food blogger and has authored 'The Travelling Belly: Eating Through India's By-Lanes'

## APRIL 15, 1977, FORTY YEARS AGO

SANJAY NOT ON ROLLS

BANSI LAL, THE man who masterminded the Emergency operations along with Sanjay Gandhi, was expelled from the Congress for six years. The Congress Working Committee met in Delhi to take the momentous decision to expel Sanjay from the party, but discovered that he was not enrolled on the party rolls even as an ordinary member. Congress spokesperson Purabi Mukherjee said newspapers had reported some time back that Sanjay had resigned from the party. "How can we take action when he is no longer in the party," she said. The CWC also authorised the new party chief, Swaran Singh, to reprimand V.C.

Shukla, who handled media and press censorship in Mrs Gandhi's Emergency regime. Mrs Gandhi chose to stay away from the crucial meeting where the party top brass wielded a knife against her confidants. The decision to expel Bansilal was the last act of the CWC performed under the presidency of D.K. Barooah, who vacated the seat for Swaran Singh, the new provisional president.

KERALA'S RAJAN CASE

THE JUDICIAL PRONOUNCEMENT on the Rajan case was set to impact the political situation in Kerala. Opposition parties have been quick to demand the resignation of the

Chief Minister, K. Karunakaran, and the suspension of police officers involved. Disbelieving Karunakaran, then-Home Minister, and the police, the high court held that the police took Rajan, a student, into custody on March 1, 1976. The court has directed them to produce the boy on April 21.

STONE THROWERS HELD

NINETEEN MORE PERSONS were arrested in connection with incidents of stone throwing in the interior of Srinagar city. This brings the total number of arrests made in the city to 56. A government spokesperson said the situation in the Kashmir Valley, including Srinagar, was peaceful.





# 15 THE IDEAS PAGE

## The biggest of them all

In recent times, works of public art in India have been large in size and expenditure, short on imagination



KAVAS KAPADIA

DOES SIZE REALLY matter? Looking at the recently commissioned works of public art and memorials for our heroes, it sure does. States seem to be competing to combat a strange sense of insecurity by commissioning public works of art that have little to offer by way of the established norms of architectural aesthetics governing space, form and colour, and instead opt for the overriding criterion of size. Is this a covert way to gain public confidence or popularity?

Who or what is responsible for keeping public tastes so abysmally low while distracting the people with non-consequential issues? This question needs to be examined in the context of a noticeable culture of feudal control in our social, cultural and political landscape that has seen a blatant resurgence in recent years.

For a country clearly short on taste in public art, India is dotted with statues of heroes, mainly politicians, saints and a few sportsmen, writers and scholars. Invariably a steel stair, incorporating a landing, terminating near the head of the idol, dilutes the spatial dominance of the statue by its ugly presence. The steel structure is a contraption to reach up to garland the "neta" on auspicious occasions and to be seen doing the same.

According to reports, the government of Maharashtra is asking for an additional budgetary allocation, over the Rs 3,600 crore already sanctioned, to increase the height of the proposed Shivaji statue up from 192 metres. The only people pessimistically concerned were the fishermen around the proposed site who see this as an unwarranted intrusion in their fishing territory and income. Some individuals and groups raised objections over a project which is large on public expenditure and short on imagination. These and other voices of dissent seem to carry little weight.

Close on the heels of this venture is the proposed statue of Sardar Patel in the Narmada region which will soar to a height of 182 metres. This "statue of unity" will cost nearly Rs 3,000 crore and shall be fabricated in China, based on an Indian design. These two mortals, Shivaji and Sardar Patel, leave behind their nearest rivals with an established global presence, the Statue of Liberty at 93 metres and Christ the Redeemer at a mere 38 m. These larger-than-life Indian commissions are just a further step in the direction of the large statues of lord Hanuman and Shiva that have sprung up in several locations in recent times.

The immaculate sculpture of the traditional temples of India has not contributed to lifting the level of art appreciation for the public to any appreciable level. In fact, over time, the sense of public aesthetics has descended seamlessly into kitsch of the lowest common denomination. The Lingaraj temple complex at Puri demonstrates this ugly aesthetic side of religious autonomy, where age-old walls and sculptures have been painted and a mish-mash of unsightly steel stirrups condescendingly "support" the world-famous stone kalasha atop the main temple. So much for religious men showing concern towards heritage conservation.



Subrata Dhar

This hierarchical, feudal system reflects, also, in the spatial geometry of the city. A community fed on the tragic traditions of "mai baap" and "ji hazoor" has been led somewhere along the line to believe that "big" is beautiful. Not that the public has much to choose from. Acceptable levels of the public good have continued to plummet to immeasurable depths while the political tricks department keeps the public from noticing garbage, filth, dirty roads, parks, polluted rivers and water bodies and falling public norms. We are surrounded by ugliness of all shades and hues. The role of artists and architects in shaping public taste has been painfully slow and inadequate.

The monuments and parks created by Mayawati are worth a mention here. The Noida Dalit Prema Sthal, a Rs 685 crore venture, is a paradoxical contradiction. A park in the name of Dalit inspiration is a highly compromised version of the landmark Indo Saracenic style of architecture introduced by the British in India. The Indian habit of lionising political heroes, to such an extent that the idea that a large project can be dedicated to a theme or concept other than a person, and that too a political figure, is quite unthinkable, is on show here. The Ambedkar park in Lucknow is similarly an exercise in self-aggrandisement. The flip side of these parks is that however you may disagree with the aesthetic content of these, they do provide much-needed breathing space in the city. The 43 acres in Lucknow and the 82 acres in Delhi are a permanent asset for the future of the city.

Statues of political figures in stiff and rigid postures have made us oblivious to the fact that there is another side to sculptured beauty, appropriately set and modulated in space. This attitude of complete aesthetic detachment has prevented us from creating works of significance in the public domain that match momentous global landmarks such as the Manneken Pis in Brussels and the Little Mermaid in Copenhagen. Anish Kapoor's Cloud Gate in Chicago, also referred to as 'the bean' because its shape resembles one, is a 13 m-tall sculpture of shining seamless steel polished to reflect the surroundings as a trick mirror.

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It is not that India is deprived of things beautiful and that we cannot appreciate good things when we are given an opportunity. The architectural marvels, such as the step wells, the forts and palaces, the most intricate jalis and carvings on Hindu as well as Islamic buildings, the stone carvings from Buddhist times to the British Raj era, are scattered across for us to see. But post-independence, we seem to have succumbed to the systemic scyphancy of spatial dominance by a self-serving elite class, in keeping with our hierarchical social order.

Though we have not had the fortune of the Italian towns or other European cities who had the services of great masters in shaping public tastes in art and architecture, we can hope that some recent works of significance that have been taken up as open competitions in the field of art and architecture will throw up some world-class works to make us proud.

The writer is former Dean of Studies and Professor and Head, Department of Urban Planning, School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi

### WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Fundamentally, the H-IB program should be retooled to ensure that genuinely high-skilled labor is prioritised. That may disadvantage the big Indian outsourcing firms who flood the system with applications; so be it."

—THE WASHINGTON POST

## Preachers and polls

With religious groups entering the electoral fray, Pakistan's polity is tilting sharply



KHALED AHMED

A MUCH-ADMIRED Canadian cousin of mine, Khan Zia, has written to inform me of research that finds Pakistan among the most "racially tolerant" societies in the world: "About 6.5 per cent of Pakistanis said they would not like to have a neighbour from a different race. In India, on the other hand, more than 40 per cent of people would apparently not like it" (Max Fisher, *The Washington Post*, May 15, 2013).

I would agree that in Pakistan, people don't mind being near a person who looks different. When foreigners are served advisories by their countries about not going to Pakistan, these are not based on "racial intolerance" but on terrorism and the tendency of terrorists to kidnap foreigners — especially white, belonging to a rich country — and quite a few Japanese visitors have been kidnapped in Pakistan in the past.

The inward intolerance is not racial — but it can be religious. A shopping plaza in Lahore has put up a notice on its glass-front, recommending the state force Ahmadi citizens to wear a special dress, so that they could be identified easily and treated insultingly. This intolerance is religion-based and can extend to Shias and Christians in certain parts of the country. On the road from Peshawar to Parachinar, people have been killed on the basis of name endings, discerned from their national identity cards.

Zia has sent another important insight about religious parties not winning elections in Pakistan, perhaps disabusing me of excessive alarm about them: "You cannot judge a country by its fringe (sic!) elements. Prior to the 1945 general election, Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani of Darul Uloom Deoband, the fountainhead of Islamic extremism, declared it haram to vote for the Muslim League. Yet 90 per cent voted for it and Pakistan from every corner of India. The situation has not changed. In every election since then, less than 10 per cent of Pakistanis have cast their votes for the religious parties."

He draws the following conclusion: "Pakistanis are among the most tolerant people in the world — more than in France, Germany and Holland. Only Norway, Sweden and Britain have a higher rating." I mildly object to his mixing racial tolerance with religious tolerance.

It is true that Pakistan's religious parties don't get to make governments and are now leaning for power on other means related to the Constitution of Pakistan. Under the British Raj, Muslim faith grew in darul ulooms (madrasas) that actually organised the Khilafat Movement, impressing

Mahatma Gandhi enough into owning it. But the progressive, secretly pro-Home Rule British bureaucracy encouraged the formation of political parties. After the Congress, the Muslims formed the Muslim League, but its followers were still wont to address Jinnah as Maulana Mohammad Ali Jinnah.

The "unreality" of the Khilafat Movement's clerical charter — which repelled the England-educated lawyers Jinnah and Muhammad Iqbal equally — taught the clerics a few lessons of realism. One lesson was: To stay out of politics where the principle of compromise set them on the edge. Madani became a realist and thought the Hindus and Muslims of India were one nation rather than two. Others, like Amin Ahsan Islahi, thought politics should be shunned. He fell out with Maududi when the latter took his Jamaat-e-Islami to the polls in Pakistan.

This happened to the Muslim Brotherhood too in Egypt, before it became the dominant political party. The Muslim mind, like the European mind, somehow still doesn't accept clerics as politicians. But over time, power in Pakistan has become less related to the electoral process. There are two reasons for this: The Islamisation of the constitution and the empowerment of the madrasa through jihad. The embedding of the sharia in the constitution has taken the normal interpretive authority away from the judiciary and vested it with the madrasa, where a fatwa can be issued, although no law allows it. This has influenced the politician as well as the judiciary. The political party too, by adopting the plank of orthodox Islam, steals the thunder of the religious party.

The Muslim League has grabbed the Punjab vote that, by rights, belonged to the Jamaat-e-Islami headquartered in Lahore; it has done so by becoming more conservative-Islamic than Jinnah could ever have imagined. Many judges in the high courts look like religious leaders; a "liberal" judge, like the early Justice Muhammad Munir, would be an anachronism now. The name-endings of some Supreme Court judges today inspire reverence.

As power came from a deniable jihad, religious parties could afford to rest on the margins. But now, as the state of Pakistan reacts against the jihadi "recoil", two terrorist-declared outfits are ready to become political parties, hoping to secure more votes at the polls than the Jamaat-e-Islami. The Sipah-e-Sahaba or Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat, dominant in South Punjab but also ascendant in Parachinar. Kurram Agency, has announced its changeover into a political party. Hafiz Saeed's Jamaat-ud-Dawa, allowed to become dominant in Sindh, has similar plans. Like the religious parties in the Knesset of "constitution-less" Israel, they plan to rule through coalitions in Pakistan, under an Islamic constitution.

The writer is consulting editor, *'Newsweek Pakistan'*

## Many a slip

Systemic glitches impede government attempts to rid economy of black money



RAJESH M. KAYAL

THE NARENDRA MODI-LED government has taken several steps in the last three years to reform the Indian economy. Many of its decisions were taken regardless of their potential political fallout. These bold steps pertain to eradicating black money on which the government seems to have declared war. It intends to put the Indian economy on the fast track. But the results of the government's endeavours have not always been up to expectations.

The government's first important decision, as per the BJP's poll promise, was related to bringing back to the country black money parked as overseas assets by resident Indians. The Black Money (Undisclosed Foreign Income and Assets) and Imposition of Tax Act, 2015 aimed to bring back a few lakh crore of unaccounted money parked as overseas assets. But only 644 declarations were received, and just Rs 2,428 crore was collected in taxes. Ninety per cent of the collections came from just five per cent of those who declared their assets. This meant that the act could accomplish only 5 to 10 per cent of what was expected of it.

In 2016, the Income Declaration Scheme was launched. It gave an opportunity to people with unaccounted income or assets to come clean by paying 45 per cent tax on such wealth. This scheme pertained to unaccounted assets in the country. It was

expected that a few lakh crore of unaccounted wealth would be declared, but the government could get declarations amounting to only Rs 55,000 crore.

November 8, 2016, when the prime minister took the bold decision of demonetising currency notes of Rs 500 and 1,000, will be regarded as a momentous day in Indian history. This step was also taken without considering its potential political fallout; large economic gains were expected. The government's idea was that counterfeit notes of Rs 500 and 1,000 as well as black money will remain undeposited and thus would go out of circulation. It was expected that around three lakh crore of unaccounted notes would not be deposited in banks.

But these hopes weren't fulfilled and the RBI has not yet declared the final figure of the deposits it has received. It is busy segregating the counterfeit notes and trying to trace the banks which accepted these. The expectation, that the parallel economy of black money will be wiped out, has been belied.

The defunct notes deposited in third-party bank accounts are now being withdrawn and the parallel economy of black money seems to be back. Seen from the perspective of the digitisation of payment systems, demonetisation was not justified.

After it announced demonetisation, the government launched the Pradhan Mantri

Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMKGY), 2016. The scheme was launched to enable people who had deposited unaccounted cash in their own bank accounts or the accounts of third parties to make a declaration. Again, only about Rs 12,000 crore of declarations were received — a very small amount compared to what was expected. Emails were sent to around 1.8 million people asking for explanations of the source of deposits of defunct notes in their bank accounts. But this step was not of much help.

The Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Amendment Act 2016 was passed with a view to curb deposits of black money in third party accounts. Under the Act, *benami* transaction means "where a property is transferred to, or is held by, a person and the consideration for such property have provided, or paid by, another person and the property is held by for the immediate or future benefit of the person who has provided the consideration".

In small towns and villages, there is a big difference between market value and stamp duty value of properties, particularly land. In most cases, stamp duty valuation is 25 per cent of market value. Suppose a person has unaccounted cash amounting to Rs 75 lakh and accounted cash of Rs 25 lakh. He need not invest in a third party account but can directly buy land in his name and use 75 per

cent of his unaccounted money.

These decisions were taken with honest intentions. But there was a problem in their implementation which meant that the results were not upto expectations. A system that has been operating with loopholes for 65 years cannot be changed overnight. People exploited the loopholes in the system to foil moves to demonetise the economy. People allegedly took the help of bankers and also used others' bank accounts to deposit their unaccounted money. Banks did not make proper arrangements to detect counterfeit currency. Bold steps are not enough in themselves; they must be preceded by proper planning. One hopes that other important decisions like the GST will not be implemented in haste. The loopholes in the system have to be plugged before any major reform is undertaken.

The steps taken by the government in the last three years will surely yield positive results. The stringent provisions of the foreign assets declaration scheme will discourage people from parking unaccounted money in overseas assets and investments. Also, stringent provisions under other laws and the Income Tax Act will discourage people from generating more unaccounted money.

The writer is a chartered accountant

### LETTER TO THE EDITOR

#### PARTY IN CRISIS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'BJP, not Congress-Mukt' (IE, April 13). The Congress had the image of a secular party till 1984. But that image took a beating after the anti-Sikh riots in 1984. People joining a party whose ideology is completely opposite to that of theirs can only be called opportunists. And Congress seems to be full of such people. It will take a long time for the party to come out of this crisis.

Phiza Moulavi, Pune

#### INTROSPECTION TIME

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Aam Aadmi reply' (IE, April 14). The common citizen in Delhi seems to be disillusioned with the performance of the AAP government and sore over the scandals which have rocked the party. It is not merely the loss, but also the magnitude of the defeat which must make the AAP chief introspect. The party had captivated Delhiites with promises of providing clean, transparent and accountable government. But the AAP government went into confrontation mode with the Centre on trivial issues, ignoring the nuances of administration. Delhi suffered as Arvind Kejriwal's national ambition grew.

Ganapathi Bhat, Akola

#### CHINA'S BLUFF

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'New India, different China' (IE, April 13). By quoting *Global Times*, the author tacitly accepts the implied threats from China as being real. That is not correct. China is not as powerful as *Global Times* projects. The country is supposed to have three trillion dollars of forex reserves. But these were hollowed out in the financial crises of 2008 and 2015. China was the biggest loser in the housing derivatives crisis of 2008. That is a best-kept secret. China then turned to build airstrips on uninhabited micro-islands

#### LETTER OF THE WEEK

##### UNFAIR CHARGE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Blaming the people' (IE, April 13). The editorial excoriates Assam's draft population policy but shies away from taking into account the repercussions that surround Assam's unabated population growth. To accuse the government that it has failed to implement south Indian standards of population control is partly true, but the fact that the current demographic momentum poses a serious risk to social stability cannot be ignored. The government does not intend to "blame the people" but it intends to build a secure and resilient future for a mosaic-like Assamese society.

Bibhuti Das, New Delhi

in the South China seas, squandering more of its capital reserves. China is a nothing but an ineffective bully.

Sithamali Balasubramanian, Pune

#### A BETRAYAL

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Soft power, harder choices' (IE, April 14). Composite culture and fundamental rights were among the ideals of the freedom struggle. The country's founding fathers assured liberal democracy. But the now not-so-uncommon incidents of violence against the minorities and Dalits are a blot on our soft power. That blurs the political difference between India and China today.

Manish Rao, Jaipur