

A nation is a society united by delusions about its ancestry and by common hatred of its neighbors
William Ralph Inge

Preventing violence in panchayat polls

The Supreme Court has refused to interfere with the panchayat poll process in West Bengal. The apex court has not gone into the veracity or otherwise of State BJP's complaint that its candidates are not being allowed to file their nomination papers. It has directed the party to approach the State Election Commissioner with their grievances. Complaints of Trinamool Congress supporters preventing opposition parties — not merely BJP but the Left and Congress also — have been pouring in from all over the State. Regular clashes between the TMC and other parties, especially the BJP, lend credence to the opposition charge. The TMC stand is that the Opposition parties are so weak organizationally and so isolated from the people that they are not getting candidates and are blaming the TMC instead.

There is no doubt that compared to the TMC the Opposition parties are very weak. At many places they are finding it difficult to get candidates. Even the CPI-M finds itself in total organizational disarray in its former strongholds like Bardhaman and the Medinipur districts. Equally, there is no doubt that TMC activists are also threatening and physically preventing candidates of other parties from filing nominations. This is inexplicable. If the TMC is in an unassailable position in rural Bengal, there is no reason why it should use force to prevent Opposition candidates from contesting. For the widespread violence in Mahammadbazar in Birbhumi district, the TMC has blamed the BJP, accusing it of 'importing' armed 'outsiders' from Jharkhand. If so, then it is a failure of the State police and therefore of the State Government run by the TMC.

What the people of rural Bengal want is violence-free, fair and peaceful panchayat poll. It will be politically self-defeating for the TMC to resort to undemocratic means to make rural Bengal Opposition-mukt, even as the party rightly condemns Modi-Shah duo's call for a Congress-mukt Bharat. Preventing Opposition from contesting is not only undemocratic; in the long run it is suicidal. The example of the CPI-M which held both rural and urban West Bengal in its vise-like grip for nearly three and a half decades should serve as a lesson for the TMC. No political party can survive or retain power without the spontaneous support of the people. Use of force only exposes the weakness of a party. If the people of rural Bengal are all for Didi's development work, where is the need to use violence?

Politically motivated poverty eradication plans

REFLEX ACTION

Gyan Pathak

National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), launched in June 2011, was one of the flagship programmes to eradicate rural poverty in India. By the 7th year of its implementation it was to cover all the districts and blocks of the country. Only after two months the time will be over, but the government has failed to achieve the target. It succeeded only in renaming it Deendayal Antyodaya Yojna (DAY) in November 2015. It shows the commitment of the ruling establishment to the sectarian view of nationalism and lack of commitment towards poverty alleviation. Out of 716 districts, DAY-NRLM is being implemented only in 586, and the total number of blocks covered is only 4,459 out of about 6,000. Nevertheless, a recent propaganda material released by the government boasts about the physical achievements of this flagship programme aiming at image building.

But this is unacceptable because the high level of poverty in rural India is unacceptable. The year when the programme was launched, India's population was 121 crore, out of which 83.3 crore were living in the six lakh villages. Tendulkar line is the official line of poverty, which estimated poverty line at consumption level of 27.2 rupees per day per person for rural areas, and the incidence of rural poverty at 25.7 per cent. It was in fact the line of destitution. The real incidence of poverty was very high according to other national or international reports. Even the Working Group on NRLM had put rural poverty at 42 per cent. Moreover, the rural poor constitute 80 per cent of the poor of the country. Since then, the population has grown to about 133 crore, and 69 per cent of them (about 91.7 crore) are living in villages. The enormity of the task of poverty alleviation required much more effort than the present ruling establishment has managed to do for the last four years.

However, the government has failed in the timely and qualitative implementation of this programme. Rural poverty in 1989-94 was 50.1 per cent. During 1989-94 to 2004-05 it declined by 8.3 percentage points with

an annual average decline of only 0.75 percentage point per annum. In between 2004-05 and 2009-10 it further declined by 3.2 per cent at the average decline rate of 2.32 percentage points per annum. The data about decline in poverty under the present regime is not available, but the incidence of poverty must be at a very high level due to the increase in population and cost of living, apart from failure of the government.

It is stated in the release of the government that its DAY-NRLM seeks to alleviate rural poverty by building sustainable community institutions of the poor, which has seen a rapid expansion in the last three years. During FY 2017-18, an additional 320 blocks were covered under the "Intensive" strategy and more than 82 lakh households mobilized into 6.96 lakh Self Help Groups (SHGs) across the country. Cumulatively, more than 4.75 crore women have been mobilized into more than 40 lakh SHGs. Further, the SHGs have been federated into 2.2 lakh village level federations and more than 19,000 cluster level federations.

Cumulatively, these community institutions have been provided more than Rs. 4,444 crore as capitalization support. As part of its financial inclusion strategy, the Mission closely works with the Department of Financial Services, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Indian Bank Associations (IBA) to provide bank credit to SHGs. As a result of the sustained efforts, the loan outstanding to SHGs have increased from Rs. 22,238 crore in FY 2013-14 to Rs. 64, 589 crore as of Feb 18. Cumulatively, Rs. 1.56 lakh crore worth of bank credit has been leveraged by the SHGs during the last five years. Such a language does not reflect the reality, but misleads the

people to believe that the government is performing very well and is really working for the poor. Interest of the government is somewhere else. Our financial institutions are also more interested in such activities, which create more NPA at the cost of people's money. The recent disclosure about bank frauds by 'big' people in connivance with bank and government officials, and the ever increasing NPA by industrialist defaulters are its proof. However, the poor and their institutions are not smoothly getting loans, despite the fact that their NPA has declined to 2.4 per cent in 2017-18. Keeping in view the timely repayment by the SHGs, they must have been financed more smoothly by giving them timely and sufficient loans to manage their own efforts for overcoming poverty. More so because neither the rich nor the government is able to eradicate their poverty. The prevailing mindset of the bankers must change.

The remote rural areas have more difficulties in getting access to financial services because banks are yet to percolate sufficiently in the rural areas. Despite the fact that all the government transactions, including subsidies for food security programmes like Public Distribution System, MGNREGA, etc. are being made through bank accounts, there is a huge gap between the requirement and availability of banks. To overcome this, the mission envisaged last mile delivery of credit services through the agency of SHGs. However, only about 1,518 SHG members have been deployed as Banking Correspondents Agents (BCAs) to provide last mile financial services including deposit, credit, remittance, disbursement of old age pensions and scholarships, payment of MGNREGA wages and enrollment under insurance and pension schemes.

As of Feb this year, 1.78 lakh SHG members had availed banking services through the BCAs and over 8.9 lakh transactions amounting to Rs. 187.92 crore had been completed. It is too small an achievement compared to the requirement. (IPA)



People enjoying at the Shanghumugham beach in Thiruvananthapuram on Tuesday

Feeling of alienation among BJP's allies

The restiveness among the BJP's former and present allies has spread from the Shiv Sena, which was the first to say that it would not align with the BJP in 2019, to Telugu Desam and Hindustani Awam Morcha's Jitan Ram Manjhi to Nitish Kumar and perhaps even Ram Vilas Paswan.

While the Shiv Sena was the first to sense that Narendra Modi's magic was fading, the Telugu Desam realized that being with the BJP was becoming more of a liability than an asset and, therefore, used the denial of a special package for Andhra Pradesh as the reason for its exit. In the same vein, the nominal trigger for Jitan Ram Manjhi's revolt was over the allocation of seats for his party in the recent Rajya Sabha elections although he, too, may have seen the ebbing of the earlier pro-BJP tide in view of the RJD's victory in the Araria Lok Sabha by-poll despite its leader, Laloo Prasad Yadav, being in jail. Now, Paswan's invitation to Nitish Kumar to be the chief guest at a function to observe B.R. Ambedkar's birth anniversary in Patna is being interpreted as a sign that the minister for food and

public distribution is reassessing his future in the NDA as he did in Atal Behari Vajpayee's time after the 2002 Gujarat riots. What may have induced rethinking in the NDA camp is the familiar disadvantage of proximity to the BJP — sporadic communal violence in mofussil towns in which the saffron outfit is believed to play a part.

Given the manner in which the riots have taken place in Assam in West Bengal where a "Hindu consolidation" is taking place, according to BJP M.P. Subramanian Swamy, and in Bihar and Rajasthan, the vacuity of Modi's sabka saath, sabka vikas mantra has been exposed. It is obvious that the slogan has little meaning for the Hindutva storm-troopers whose latest gambit for sparking off riots is to use the supposedly festive occasions of Ram Navami or Hanuman Jayanti to chant provocative slogans to prepare the ground for a communal outbreak. In Bihar, the Nitish Kumar government has finally succeeded in arresting a Union minister, Ashwini Kumar Choubey's son for allegedly inciting violence in Bhagalpur on the occasion of Ram Navami,

but the delay in taking the step and the Union minister's earlier trashing of the FIR against his son haven't enhanced the chief minister's reputation as sushasan babu or a votary of good governance, not least because of the prevailing tension in towns such as Aurangabad, Nalanda and Samastipur. The chief minister is also said to be unhappy with the comments made by another Union minister, Giriraj Singh, that the RJD's victory in Araria will make the region a hub of terrorists. What he must have realized is that as the communal tension brews in the state, the sole gainer will be his former ally-cum-present foe, the RJD. Hence, he reports that he is considering constituting a block within the NDA comprising, apart from himself, Paswan and the Rashtriya Lok Samata party chief, Upendra Kushwaha (who is a Union minister), to keep the

FOCUS

Amulya Ganguli

BJP under pressure. If Nitish Kumar's fear is that the Muslims will drift away in even larger numbers to the RJD in Bihar, Paswan is probably uneasy about the increasing alienation of the Dalits all over the country even as more and more states of Ambedkar are being vandalized in U.P., which has an upper caste chief minister. Dalits are known to have been moving away from the BJP — they were never close to the party anyway except in 2014 — ever since the suicide of Rohit Vemula in Hyderabad central university following a confrontation with the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), the BJP's student wing, and the lynching of four Dalits by gau rakshaks in Una in Gujarat. That Modi's home province remains a hotbed of saffron violence is evident from the recent killing of a Dalit youth by upper caste men for the "offence" of owning and riding a horse. Incidents such

as these, including the attacks on the statues of Periyar in Tamil Nadu, have led to the emergence of the GenNext of Dalit leaders like Jignesh Mewani. At the same time, the BSP's czarina, Mayawati, has refashioned her brand of politics by aligning with Akhilesh Yadav, putting aside her two-decade-old enmity with the Samajwadi Party (SP).

All of these are significant straws in the political wind for the BJP's allies, including the electoral successes of the party's opponents in two perceived saffron strongholds in U.P. recently which has made another of the BJP's allies, Union minister of state for social justice, Ramdas Athawale, who is a Dalit, say that the SP-BSP alliance may cost the BJP 25-30 seats in the state. The possibility may have induced the state's chief minister, Yogi Adityanath, to think of introducing quotas within the quotas for Dalits and backward castes to wean away the extremely marginalized sections of these caste groups from the SP and the BSP. However, such manoeuvres are unlikely to succeed if the anti-BJP trends are strong enough, as they seem at present. (IPA)

Conventional Crossword

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10					11	
12							13
14			14	15			
16	17						
							20
21	22						
23				24	25		
26				27			
28					29		

- ACROSS**
- Copies
 - Melt, as snow
 - Absent
 - Metal-bearing rock
 - Tribal symbol
 - Strange
 - Company of lions
 - Small dog
 - Happenings
 - Nonvegian
 - Headwear
 - Bird
 - Consumed
 - Factory
 - Look after
 - Paradise
- DOWN**
- Courtyard
 - Female sheep
 - Specimens
 - Head and neck covering
 - Field
 - Marry
 - Daydream
 - Hat
 - Richly ornamented
 - Illustrious
 - Rational
 - Frank
 - Domestic animal
 - Of advanced age

SUDOKU: 2171

2		3						7
8	9	3		7	1			
	5					3		
	3		8	5				
	8						7	
				4	3		5	
		6					3	
4			1	2		5	6	4
					6			2

Yesterday's Solution 2170

8	3	2	7	4	5	9	1	6
4	5	9	8	6	1	3	2	7
7	6	1	9	3	2	5	4	8
1	8	5	2	9	6	7	3	4
6	2	3	4	5	7	1	8	9
9	4	7	3	1	8	2	6	5
2	1	4	5	8	9	6	7	3
5	7	8	6	2	3	4	9	1
3	9	6	1	7	4	8	5	2

Yesterday's Cross Word Solution 179

S	A	M	P	A	N	G	A	P
E	E	C	E	D	A	R		
E	N	T	I	R	E	S	T	
R	A	R	I	D	S	T	E	
	L	I	D	S	T	U	N	
M	E	S	F	E	E	T		
O			I	R	A	N	T	
P	O	P	D	E	M	U	R	E
B	E	R	E	T	R	X		
D	I	N	A	S	P	E	C	T

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