

**The difference between a moral man and a man of honor is that the latter regrets a discreditable act even when it has worked and he has not been caught**

H. L. Mencken

## Gurung back to his old game

Bimal Gurung, the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha supremo, is back at his old game. He has revived his old demand for a separate Gorkhaland. He spread a totally false propaganda that the West Bengal Government was making the study of the Bengali language in the hills compulsory. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has already stated categorically that Bengal will be 'optional' not a 'compulsory' subject. But that did not prevent Gurung to lose his cohorts to set fire to government offices and vehicles, attack the police, threaten the tourists at the peak of the tourist season and create utter lawlessness in the hills.

Meanwhile, Mamata's decision to send a special audit team to audit the accounts of all the three municipalities in the hills and the GTA has frustrated Gurung. This is another reason for his raking up the separate State demand. The last thing that Gurung wants is a thorough probe into what he and his followers did with the crores of rupees of money – public money – that the GTA and the civic bodies were given. The real picture will emerge only after the audit is completed and Gurung is intent that the real picture is not known to the people – to his own people.

That Gurung's Gorkhaland movement was not going to be a peaceful democratic movement is now obvious. The huge cache of arms, ammunition, explosives, cash, night-vision binoculars and wireless transceivers that the police recovered from his house and GJM offices speak eloquently of what he was planning to do. It is for the policemen to unearth the sources of both the arms and ammunition and the money. Another factor that has not been much highlighted is that before starting his 'movement', Gurung visited Kolkata and had a closed door meeting with the leader of a political party. This leader did not conceal his glee when Gurung went back and set the hills aflame. The role of this party behind the GJM movement also needs to be gone into.

Mamata and her party should try to strike roots among the hill people and wean them away from the influence of the GJM. Only that can create the conditions for the development of both the hills and the plains and remove the feeling of 'otherness' among the hill people. Police action is an immediate response to a law and order situation but a lasting solution lies in the feeling of a common identity of all the people living in Bengal.

# Ad hoc arrangement for Defence Min

## REFLEX ACTION

Nantoo Banerjee

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley is undoubtedly one of the most efficient performers in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's cabinet. And, at the moment, Jaitley is also probably the most over-worked minister, implementing a total budgetary expenditure of Rs 21.47-lakh crore proposed for 2017-18. Jaitley looks after the corporate affairs ministry as well. And, since Manohar Parrikar was sent to Goa after the state election to form a BJP-led government there, the defence ministry came under Jaitley's care.

The defence function of the world's seventh largest country by geographical area and second largest by population has been under constant pressure from India's two important nuclear-armed and difficult neighbours – Pakistan and China. Significantly, at this moment, Jaitley is also leading the government's most important indirect tax reform programme ever, GST – the one-nation, one-tax system. The finance minister wants to implement the Goods and Services Tax with effect from July 1. Several of the country's 29 states are yet to pass the GST Bill. West Bengal has asked a month's time more. The finance minister's hands are full. Mountainous NPAs of public sector banks, impact of demonetisation of high value currency notes, pressure on digitisation without adequate cyber security and economic growth slow-down need to be tackled fast. Few will disagree that overseeing the country's complex defence policy framework and administration in addition to the function of the finance ministry is neither easy, nor desirable.

Four most important independent functions of any national government are: home affairs, external affairs, defence and finance. In all large countries, they operate under full-time function heads. This is the second time in the last three years of the Modi government that the country's defence ministry has been given to the finance minister as an additional charge. India's north-western border with Pakistan is boiling with armed intrusions and terrorist attacks. India shares a 3,323-km-long border with Pakistan along Jammu & Kashmir, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Punjab. With China, it has been witnessing a different

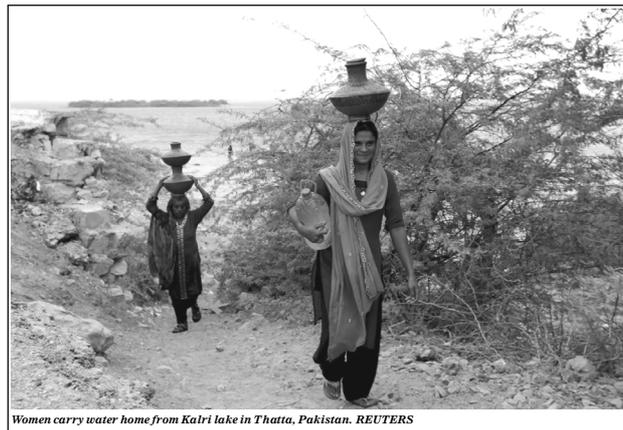
kind of tension along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). The effective border between India and the People's Republic of China traverses 4,057 kms along the states of Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. Mighty China also has strategic presence in countries around India, including Pakistan, Nepal, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Defending the country's total international land and coastline frontiers of over 12,700 km is by no means an easy task that can be managed for long by a part-timer as the head of the ministry.

As it looks now, Jaitley's jobs are most stressed at both ends – finance and defence. The GST implementation is a major challenge for the Modi government and Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP), which is getting ready for the next Parliamentary election in less than two years' time. The impact of GST on the country's industry, trade and commerce and the nature of peace along India's borders are bound to influence the election. As of now, BJP seems to be in a strong position to return to power in the 2019 Lok Sabha election. The tempo needs to be built up further in the next 20 months or so. And, that may not be an easy task. India's international borders in the north, north-east, west and north-west continue to trouble. On the other hand, the four-level GST slabs, set at 5 per cent, 12 per cent, 18 per cent and 28 per cent for different products and services, have come under fire from several industrial and trade organisations, many of which are staunch supporters of BJP and the prime minister. They have made specific complaints about GST rates for certain mass consumption goods and services that may alienate the common man and impede growth. Recently, trade bodies such as Maharashtra State Consumer Products Distribution

Federation and Confederation of All-India Traders (CAIT), the country's largest organisation of traders, have sent their representations to Jaitley to reconsider GST rates for a host of items. They include malt-based nutrition products, food items for daily consumption such as ghee and butter, spices for cooking, pickles, hygiene products to automobile and tractor spares, soaps and toiletries, fabrics and garments, education, affordable housing and gems and jewellery. CAIT's national general secretary, Praveen Khandelwal, has even sent a separate representation to the prime minister. Under pressure, Jaitley had to revise GST rates for some 66 of these items on June 11. The rates were fixed mostly by bureaucrats in the CBEC, basically focussing on the need for higher net central government revenue after sharing the agreed percentage with the states.

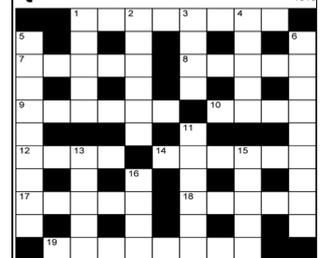
Last week, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, soon after his return from the four-nation European trip, himself reviewed the status of GST. The review meeting, which lasted over two-and-a-half hours, was attended by the finance minister and top officials from his ministry, the prime minister's office (PMO) and the cabinet secretary. The prime minister was specific about aspects of implementation such as IT and human resource readiness, training and sensitisation of officers, and query handling mechanism and monitoring. The smooth implementation of GST is a big challenge before the government.

Surely the prime minister will not leave the affairs of the defence ministry to be managed under the present arrangement for long. He may be already looking for a right choice for the job. He may pick up one of the top performers in his government for the task. They include M. Venkaiah Naidu, Rajnath Singh, Nitin Gadkari, Ravi Shankar Prasad and Piyush Goyal. Jaitley, a top performer leading a host of financial, banking and tax reforms, is unlikely to be disturbed from his main assignment. Modi may also choose one from among the star performers in BJP-ruled states as chief minister. However, the earlier it is done, the better it is for the government and the nation. (IPA)



Women carry water home from Kalri lake in Thatta, Pakistan. REUTERS

## QUICK CROSSWORD



- Across**
- Called (8)
  - Steering straps (5)
  - Glossy fabric (5)
  - In layers (8)
  - As well (4)
  - Tidings (4)
  - Flourish (6)
  - Messenger (5)
  - Reinforcing strut (5)
  - Successful student (8)
- Down**
- Grab hold of (5)
  - Become proficient in (6)
  - Expel (4)
  - Praise (5)
  - Feigned (9)
  - Exposed (9)
  - Extreme irrational fear (6)
  - Vacillate (5)
  - Silly (5)
  - Watched (4)

**Previous solution**  
Across: 1. Truthful, 6. Toga, 7. Ducked, 9. Laden, 11. Minus, 12. Alert, 13. Agape, 16. Enigma, 18. Tops, 19. Disloyal.  
Down: 1. Trillate, 2. Urged, 3. Fade, 4. Lacking, 5. Tie, 8. Dispersal, 10. Enraged, 14. Agony, 15. Boss, 17. Nab.

# Move to resist new US policies

## FOCUS

John Wojcik

Senator Bernie Sanders told thousands gathered at Chicago on June 10 for the People's Summit, that President Trump poses an unprecedented threat to democracy and to the very lives of 99 percent of the U.S. population. To a standing ovation, he declared a political revolution is underway to replace right-wing Republicans across the nation with progressives who represent the people rather than a handful of oligarchs.

"Trump campaigned as a supporter of the working class, but within hours of assuming office he put the president of Goldman Sachs in as his chief economic adviser," Sanders said. "Do not tell us, Mr. Trump, that you are a friend of the working class while you try to throw 23 million people off healthcare," he declared. "Do not tell us you are a friend of the working class while you cut \$800 million out of Medicare and kick two and a half million people out of Planned Parenthood.

"Do not tell us you are a friend of the working class when you give the Waltons (owners of Walmart) who have 130 billion dollars, a tax break of 52 billion. That is morally obscene," Sanders struck a hopeful note, however, by recalling movements throughout American history that were able to turn things

around. "Just 150 years ago, workers in this country were essentially beasts of burden," he said, "and by starting the long struggle to form trade unions, the fight to get the vote for women, to end Jim Crow, to win healthcare for more people, we are positioned today for succeeding in our political revolution."

He noted that legislation to raise the minimum wage nationally to \$15 an hour already has been cosigned by 31 U.S. senators and 155 representatives in the House. He listed numerous electoral victories that have already thrown a wrench in the works of the Trump agenda. Sanders polled the crowd of thousands from the stage, asking how many of them were either running for office or working on campaigns to unseat right-wing Republicans in special elections and in the coming 2018 elections. More than half the audience stood up and applauded. Sanders noted, however, that a lot of work remains if the Democratic Party is going to be able to rebuild itself.

He pointed to Republican control of two-thirds of the governorships, the House, the Senate, the presidency and the loss by Democrats of 1,000 state legislative seats across the country. "We can't be absent from half the country," he declared, calling for a

grassroots strategy of rebuilding the party from the ground up in all 50 states. "And just as important," he said, "the Democratic Party has to be the party of the people, supporting the people's agenda, not corporate lobbyists who back some of them." He said that parties committed to workers do best when they put forward progressive programs, "not when they forget which side they should be on." He said the strong fight on the issues by the Labour Party in Britain was the reason it gained so many votes in the recent election there. Sanders called for elimination of corporate money in elections and an end to control of the government by what he described as a "dangerous" oligarchy.

What was heartening was that thousands of progressive activists held a three day gathering in Chicago on June 9-11, determined to take the already impressive national mass movement against the Trump agenda several huge steps forward. At the "People's Summit", folks who have already played leading roles in mass actions coast to coast

hammered out plans for a program that goes beyond resistance to Trump, whom they unanimously consider to be the most corrupt and dangerous person ever to have occupied the Oval Office. Conveners of the summit included National Nurses United, People's Action, United Students Against Sweatshops, The People for Bernie, Our Revolution, United Electrical Workers union, Color of Change, Progressive Democrats of America, Democratic Socialists of America and Million Hoodies. Carmen Perez of the Justice League NYC and Linda Sarsour, former director of the Arab American Association of New York, key organizers of the largest demonstration in U.S. history, the Women's Marches that occurred the day after Trump was inaugurated, both addressed enthusiastic crowds on Saturday night. Perez pointed out that what was different about this conference is that participants are spent three days building "power." "This includes taking concrete steps for further progressive movement

building, including candidate training, independent political action, civil disobedience, educational workshops and how to build unity in mass actions," she said. Sarsour called for unity of all the movements that have been taking on the Trump agenda, declaring, "We must take care of each other, and unity is the only way that we can make any progress."

Many attended a workshop on fighting attacks on democracy. In the minds of thousands who were here those attacks include, but go well beyond, hacking scandals that the media is focusing on. There was deep concern about the attacks on voting rights, women's health care, civil liberties, the right to organize unions, civil rights, LGBTQ rights and many other issues. The wealth gap and control of the U.S. economy by a small group of home-grown oligarchs was seen here as a major threat to democracy. Another highlight on June 10 was "The People Speak," featuring an all-star lineup of actors and musicians celebrating the often neglected working-class history of the United States.

Performers included Hong Chau, Jesse Eisenberg, Frances Fisher, Laura Gomez, Brian Jones, Melissa Leo, Aasif Mandvi, Susan Pourfar, Kendrick Sampson, and Wallace Shawn. (IPA)

## SUDOKU: 1891

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## Yesterday's Solution 1890

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

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