

Trying to be a first-rate reporter on the average American newspaper is like trying to play Bach's 'St. Matthew's Passion' on a ukulele
Bhagician's Observation

The weakness of the Opposition

The Opposition has conceded another victory to the NDA despite its majority in the Rajya Sabha. In the election for the deputy chair man's post, NDA's Harivansh Narayan Singh of the JD(U) had a easy win over his rival, Congress B.K. Hariprasad by a comfortable margin. The BJP won over the support of Orissa Chief Minister Navin Patnaik's BJP and Telanga Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao's TRS. The BJP is naturally exulting over this victory as the Opposition parties failed to close their ranks. This is an obvious truth. But beyond this there is another truth which the NDA cannot dismiss contemptuously. The undeniable fact is that the fight between the BJP and the Opposition is no longer limited within the precincts of the Parliament. The fight has extended beyond Parliament and involves the 120 million people of the country. It is possible to 'manage' a couple of parties or a handful of MPs through questionable means but it is not possible to 'manage' the entire people. The contours of the battle ahead will become sharper in the coming days.

In the political field a change over to the GenNext is taking place. The old political leaders are gradually giving place to a new generation which, unlike its predecessors, does not have to live down a past. Tejaswi Yadav in Bihar, Sachin Pilot in Rajasthan, Jyotiraditya Scindia in Madhya Pradesh, Hardik Patel, Alpesh Thakore and Jignesh Mevani in Gujarat, Akhilesh Yadav in Uttar Pradesh, M. K. Stalin in Tamil Nadu are an entirely new crop of young leaders. Except Akhilesh, none of them had ever been in power and no accusing finger can be pointed at them for corruption. They will take up the saffron challenge. Then there are others like Kanhaiya Kumar who may not have joined politics as yet but have strong influence over students and other sections of the people. Together they will throw a formidable challenge to the ruling establishment and its ideology.

Infact, Rahul Gandhi has lately been repeatedly stressing on the ideological battle. The saffron camp runs thousands of educational institutions that brainwash young minds and win them over to its ideology at the formative stage. The Opposition has, so far, limited its battle only to the political arena. It has to be taken to the grassroots level and conducted patiently and painstakingly for years and decades like the RSS has done since the 1920s. Democracy and secularism are ways of life and articles of faith that can be defended only by those who are deeply committed to these ideals.

Rising police and army atrocities

REFLEX ACTION

Amulya Ganguli

The BJP intends to bring a law which will equate stone-pelting with lynching. Although the original idea about a fresh look at mob violence only concerned lynching, the government appears to be thinking of widening its ambit. Hence, a ministerial reference to the stone-pelters in case anyone dies as a result of their lawless acts.

Lynching in common parlance stands for the targeted killing of an individual by a group or causing grievous injury. The person who is attacked is generally unarmed or is unable to protect himself when four or five of the assailants pounce on him. In the case of the stone-pelters, a phenomenon associated with Kashmir, it is the other way around. The pelters themselves carry no weapons other than the stones while those whom they "attack" are usually heavily armed. The latter, therefore, are not as defenceless as the victim of a lynching elsewhere in the country. It is the vulnerability of the person who is lynched which is of importance. Historically, wherever lynching has taken place - whether of the blacks in the US by the Ku Klux Klan or the Jews in Nazi Germany by the fascists or the Muslims in India by saffron groups - the sufferers are always weak and at the mercy of the attackers. The tying of a man to the bonnet of an army jeep as it drove into a trouble-prone area in Kashmir can be compared with lynching since the person, who may not have been physically harmed, was held hostage by those who immobilized him and must have been terrified during the humiliating and degrading experience.

The so-called custodial deaths are another example of lynching where the suspects, who may or may not have faced a magistrate, are sometimes beaten to death inside a police station. Similar treatments are also

meted out to the accused when they are subjected to what is known as third-degree methods which is another name for torture.

It is a barbaric practice which goes back to the colonial era and which independent India has now made it the country's own. If the government wanted the committee probing the menace of lynching to bring other forms of mob violence under its purview apart from the beating to death of alleged cow smugglers or beef-eaters, it could have thought of custodial deaths rather than of stone pelting. The reason is that as Justice A.N. Mulla of the Allahabad High Court memorably observed in 1960: "I say with all sense of responsibility that there is not a single lawless group in the whole of the country whose record of crimes comes anywhere near the record of that organized unit which is known as the Indian police force".

The focus on stone pelting, which involves mainly Muslims, rather than on deaths in police custody says much about the government's outlook. Besides, the very act of setting up a high-level committee to examine lynching is an implicit admission of the government's failure to deal with the crime although there are laws aplenty for tackling the outrageous incidents, especially when the perpetrators are usually no more than four or five in number while the rest who are caught on camera are onlookers. While

arrests have been made, the subsequent pursuit of the cases has left a lot to be desired since the police haven't always been able to ensure that the guilty are sentenced by the courts. Lack of evidence is one reason for this "failure", but the suspicion remains that the police have been tardy in their investigations because of the political connections of the assailants, which were evident when a Union minister garlanded some of the convicts.

Against this background of a mixture crime and politics, only an incorrigible optimist will believe that the committee will be able to come out with a foolproof solution. A new law will only make the statute books bulkier without providing any remedy because the nexus between the police and the politicians is unlikely to be broken. The lynching of Muslims has seemingly replaced the widespread communal riots which were seen earlier. The last such a major outbreak was in Gujarat in 2002. However, the effects of lynching are more insidious and longer-lasting as they can make the targeted community feel more vulnerable at all times even in public spaces and in broad daylight, for no one knows when an attack can take place. This was what the teenager, Junaid Khan, found out when he was killed inside a train compartment following a dispute over seat sharing.

A volatile atmosphere conducive to lynching has been building up ever since the Muslims were specifically targeted by the Sangh Parivar from the 1980s, reminding them of being the children of invaders - Babur ki ulad - of being destroyers of temples in medieval times and of being responsible for the country's partition. The venom which the saffron brotherhood injected into the minds of its followers then is now yielding its poisonous fruit. (IPA)



Workers making Indian National Flags ahead of the Independence Day celebrations, in Ahmedabad on Thursday

Downslide of economy

FOCUS

Prabhat Patnaik

What this means is that in order to manage the balance of payments the government will have to make India even more attractive for globalized finance, for which interest rates have to be hiked further, government expenditure has to be cut back, and "austerity" measures in general have to be adopted. All of these would push the economy towards further stagnation, and impinge adversely upon the poor.

At the same time the impact of these measures upon inflation would be minuscule per se, since, by the government's own claim, the current inflation is of the cost-push kind which has accelerated because of the oil-price hike. As long as oil prices keep rising (and the general view is that this is likely to happen, even upto \$100 per barrel), and the impact of any such rise is "passed on" in the form of higher prices for the consumers (which is the government's current policy), there is no reason, other things remaining the same, why there should be any let-up in inflation. Not "passing on" the higher prices of

imported crude to consumers in turn would require raising resources through some other means, and if these means are themselves to be non-inflationary, then through larger direct taxation or through larger borrowing, i.e. fiscal deficit. But any such means of additional resource mobilization would be anathema for globalized finance, appealing which would be essential for managing the balance of payments. Hence the cost-push inflation arising from the oil price-hike will not, other things remaining the same, be countered in this manner.

It would be ensured therefore that other things do not remain the same: the operation of cost-push would be kept restricted by ensuring that there is no wage or salary push in response to inflation, i.e. that the working people are not compensated for the rise in prices. In other words, the effect of the rise in oil prices would be sought to be countered by reducing the claims of the working people including the salary earners on social output, which amounts to "controlling" inflation at

their expense. India's economic experience under the neo-liberal regime is thus set to undergo a fundamental change in the coming days. Neo-liberalism in India has always squeezed the workers, peasants and petty producers, even when it was not afflicted by any overt crisis; but now that it is being afflicted by an extremely serious crisis, with globalized finance turning its back upon the economy, the squeeze on the working people will multiply many-fold, and even the salary-earners and urban middle class will not escape this squeeze. We are now going to have neo-liberalism with its fangs bared.

This however need not happen, if we follow an alternative set of policies that do not aim to appease globalized finance. But of course following such alternative policies could trigger a flight of finance, against which capital controls would then have to be imposed, and these would mean a withdrawal from the neo-liberal regime. This alternative set of policies would include the following: controlling imports through higher tariffs, and some non-tariff restrictions, as a means of managing the balance of payments (which Donald Trump as the President of the world's most powerful capitalist country is doing anyway); controlling inflation inter alia by not passing on the rise in oil-prices to the consumers; using the instrument of direct taxation for raising government revenue, both to compensate for the revenue-loss incurred owing to not passing on the oil price increase, and also to enlarge government expenditure, especially on education and health (for instituting for instance a universal healthcare scheme along the lines of the National Health Service). Higher government expenditure on

the one hand, and protection against imports on the other, would enlarge the demand for domestic goods immediately (which will have to be followed subsequently, for a more sustained increase in domestic demand, by a revival of peasant agriculture); this will also serve to overcome the stagnation that has afflicted for long the material commodity producing sectors of the economy under the neo-liberal regime. (The claimed impressive growth in GDP has arisen entirely because of the service sector whose expansion is empirically questionable and theoretically dubious merit).

To be sure, there would be transitional difficulties with such a policy-sift, as international capital and the Indian corporate-financial oligarchy that is integrated with it, puts up a resistance against any such shift; but with the neo-liberal regime in India coming to the end of its tether, there is no alternative to effecting such a shift if the working people are to be spared the viciousness of the "austerity" that would inevitably be imposed upon them. (IPA/Concluded)

Conventional Crossword

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

- | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------|
| ACROSS | DOWN |
| 1 Hawaiian dish | 1 Danger |
| 3 Morse elements | 2 Lyric poem |
| 6 Cast off | 4 Spoken |
| 7 Colour | 5 Result of addition |
| 9 Tree | 7 Tally |
| 10 Kimono sash | 8 Underwater worker |
| 11 Object of worship | 9 Assumed attitude |
| 13 Has fondness for | 12 Frighten |
| 16 Measuring instrument | 14 Leave out |
| 18 Discharge | 15 Time in grammar |
| 19 Possess | 17 Scoundrel |
| 20 Black deposit | 18 Gaffer's warning |
| 21 Floor covering | 20 Mineral spring |
| 23 Govern | 22 Rounded vase |
| 24 Summit | |
| 25 United | |

SUDOKU : 2279

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

Yesterday's Solution 2278

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

Yesterday's Cross Word Solution 287

F	A	K	I	R	B	E	S	T
O	M	O	T	I	V	E		
S	P	R	A	T	S	E	C	T
T	I	M	A	G	O	T		
E	G	O				N	O	O
R	A	T	S			A	R	E
C	L	A	R	I	E	S	A	T
R	E	A	L	M	S		E	
V	E	I	N	S	T	A	L	L

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