

If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail
Abraham Maslow

Law against property destruction

The State Government is contemplating to bring a Bill in the next session of the State Assembly which will make destruction of property, whether public or private, during political agitations an offence punishable by a heavy fine. It is not yet known whether failure to pay will lead to the imprisonment of the offenders(s). The idea behind the proposed law is laudable. Wanton destruction of property on any pretext cannot be supported. But when passions run high, agitated mobs do not behave rationally. In big cities like Kolkata there are CCTV cameras on thoroughfares and in important buildings like government offices, banks and hotels. This makes it easy to identify the individuals indulging in violence. But in rural areas, such as Bhangar, there are no CCTVs. Identifying the offenders beyond doubt will be difficult.

The best way to prevent destruction of property is to create civic sense. In Kolkata, once known as the michhili nagari or the city of processions, burning of buses and trans during political agitations have become very rare, though not totally stopped. In the Bhangar troubles it has been alleged by the police and the political leadership that Naxalite, Maoist and even terrorist elements got involved. If so the local leadership of the ruling party and the Intelligence departments should have been aware of it and taken timely steps to prevent what happened. It has been alleged that for weeks politically motivated propaganda against the proposed power sub-station had been carried on in the area. There was no attempt by the political leadership to counteract this propaganda and foil the provocative agenda of the trouble-makers. The Intelligence also obviously failed to alert the Government in time. A stitch in time saves nine is old wisdom.

Usually an explosive political situation builds up over time. Measures to defuse the situation by removing the causes of unrest or grievance and countering mischievous propaganda should be taken right at the beginning rather than after the situation has reached a flashpoint. It may be necessary to revise official policies which are obviously wrong or unpopular rather than allow interested elements to fish in troubled waters. Such corrective measures can be taken by the ruling party when it has live contact with the people. When the political leadership loses touch with the people, interested elements get the opportunity to create troubles as in Singur and Nandigram. It is always better to prevent the commission of an offence rather than penalize the offenders after the offence has been committed.

Options for Jaitley's fourth budget

With less than a week to go before the Narendra Modi government presents its ninth budget to Parliament on February 1 for the fiscal year 2017-18, the Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley appears to be satisfied with the finer details he has dovetailed into the budget when he posed for the traditional halwa ceremony! Now that the budget is prepared and is under print with more than a hundred officials from the North bloc cooped up in the Raisina Hill, there is no point in speculation as to what would be the contours and colors of this budget, considering the fact that the feisty Finance Minister has not had any memorable one in the past couple of years when he donned the role and responsibility of the ace man in the Finance Ministry. No doubt, the Modi government spared itself any ignominy of getting bogged down in corruption or scams even as it experimented with a great gambit of demonetising high value notes that had accounted for 85 per cent of the country's notes in circulation and in an economy which is more than 90 per cent cash-driven.

Post-demonetisation after the agony people of all walks underwent in standing in the queue to get their own money from the banks with the latter working only to cope with the currency exchange and deposits of the public, leaving their core areas pigeonholed or attended to in a perfunctory fashion, not much was happening in the economy after November 8, 2016. Even the Central Statistical Organization (CSO) came out with an advanced revised GDP growth of 7.1 per cent for the current fiscal not factoring in the demonetisation-induced slackness in activities in the real sectors of the economy.

Even as demonetisation was putatively meant to make house cost affordable by ridding the menace of black money that was in full pelt in this domain, housing sales in October-December quarter of 2016 plunged by a whopping 44 per cent in the largest eight cities which is again a record of sorts in the last 16 years. Yet another barometer of somber business

REFLEX ACTION

G. Srinivasan

operations emanated from the survey of the All India Manufacturers' Organization (AIMO), hosting small and medium units, which showed that revenue had plunged by 50 per cent and jobs by 35 per cent among its member enterprises.

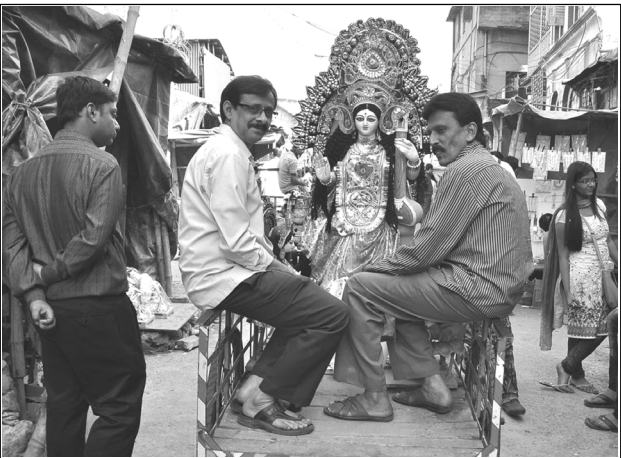
The fact that a lot of reverse migration from cities to the rural hinterland supervised because the latter people could no longer stay in urban conurbations for want of wages and lack of employment opportunities only reveal the implicit grim reality. With the economy struggling to revive itself under the enforced slackness due to demonetisation that would definitely leave its repercussions for at least two to three quarters, what sort of gravy measures the budget could devise to spur activities in the economy? If public investment is to be stepped up as it had been the wont of this government going by its immediate past records, how the resources could be gleaned without subjecting people to unduly harsh tax burdens is an open secret. It has been leaning heavily on non-tax revenue such as disinvestment and proceeds of auction of natural resources including spectrum sales.

In fact, the proclivity of the Centre to augment cess and surcharges on income tax and other Central taxes like swachh bharat cess, krishi kalyan cess which it is under no obligation to share with the States as per Article 270 of the Constitution is budgeted at a massive Rs 2, 51, 481.23 crore for the current fiscal, as disclosed by the Minister of State for Finance Mr. Arun Ram Meghwal in a written query in the Lok Sabha on December 9, 2016. Probably with the GST deadline pushed to July 2017, the Finance Minister will have leeway to tap this for the next fiscal too till

all the indirect taxes are subsumed into the GST. Similarly the NDA Government, unlike the UPA government, did not dilly-dally on the disinvestment of the Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) as it was able to obtain Rs 24,349 crore in 2014-15 in its very first year and Rs 23,997 crore in 2015-16, though the target was Rs 43,425 crore and Rs 41,000 crore respectively. These targets excluded strategic sale target of Rs 28,500 crore for 2015-16. In the current fiscal against a reduced PSU disinvestment target of Rs 36,000 crore but an additional Rs 20,500 crore for strategic sale target, the government had netted Rs 21,401 crore and Rs 20,966.35 crore respectively by mid-November 2016. So working on the twin track of 'minority stake sale' and 'strategic disinvestment', the pro-business NDA government does not suffer any socialist shibboleth of carrying on with the deadwoods in the public sector. The forthcoming budget might see more such PSUs getting lined up for stake/strategic sales for fetching non-tax revenue unobtrusively. But the sale of the family jewels or even a part of it needs to be ensured at a remunerative way lest the government's expanding welfare programmes get adequate funding so that social upheavals should be obviated, if not obliterated.

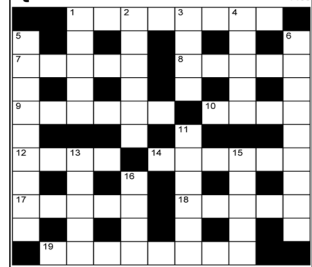
With five crucial States going to the polls in the immediate aftermath of the budget, the agrarian agony needs to be addressed in a subtle way lest the farmers voting in most of these not well developed States should be appeased. Already the Prime Minister unveiled in December a raft of pro-farmer measures including easy access to loans from cooperative societies, providing RuPay debt cards to 30 million kisan card holders and an interest waiver for two months for those who had taken loan for their rabi crops from district cooperative banks.

With the Hobson's choice of appealing the large swathes of the country's population post-demonetisation, the Finance Minister may well miss out on the big bang policy reforms for which investors, both domestic and foreign, would have scant option but to remain sore and sulking. (IPA)



A Goddess Saraswati idol being taken for worshipping in Kolkata today—Arijit Ganguly

QUICK CROSSWORD 1465



- Across**
1. Site (8)
7. Volunteer (5)
8. Replica (5)
9. Small in breadth (6)
10. Weapons (4)
12. Hobbling (4)
14. Big wine bottle (6)
15. Seller's patter (5)
18. Fish (5)
19. Hygienic (4-4) (8)
- Down**
1. Long-term prisoner (5)
2. Police line (6)
3. Weighty volume (4)
4. Decree (5)
5. Futility; to no purpose (9)
6. Fellow student (9)
11. Stocking band (6)
13. US state (5)
15. Rope loop (5)
16. Stone fruit (4)

Previous solution
Across: 1. Reversal, 6. Gone, 7. Girder, 9. Tempo, 11. Being, 12. Closure, 13. Slope, 16. Spouse, 18. Till, 19. External.
Down: 1. Righteous, 2. Venom, 3. Sage, 4. Largest, 5. Due, 8. Regretful, 10. Posture, 14. Alien, 15. Neat, 17. Pal.

SUDOKU: 1752

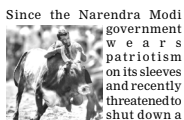
3		5	9					
	1		7					9
7			2	6				4
	6			1				
	3	8				7	5	
	4	8	1			2		
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		9	2					3

Yesterday's Solution 1751

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

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Tamil sub-nationalism



Since the Narendra Modi government wears patriotism on its sleeves and recently threatened to shut down a TV channel for a day for its coverage of the terrorist attack on the Pathankot airbase, it had to take the Sri Lankan minister for mass media to call upon the media houses to stop promoting nationalism by saying that such news becomes "part of the conflict".

According to Gayantha Karunathilaka, since the "market value" for nationalism is "very high", the "politically and commercially driven media have to be replaced by good ethical and public interest driven media". In India, the hype about loyalty to the motherland was "very high" during the recent agitations in New Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) and in the Hyderabad central university. The activities of the Left-Liberal students of the two groves of acedemle to the student leader of the JNU being arrested on charges of sedition and beaten up in the court premises by lawyers loyal to the BJP. In Hyderabad, a student activist

committed suicide following a clash with the BJP's student wing, the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, at a time when a central minister described the university as a den of anti-nationals. If these were instances of the BJP-led centre targeting suspected unpatriotic elements, there have also been examples of provincial sub-nationalism running amok as the mealy-mouthed governments looked on helplessly.

The most well-known examples of such lawlessness have been in Maharashtra where parochial parties like the Shiv Sena and the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena have been terrorizing the people from other states by accusing them of stealing the livelihood of the locals. At the root of their antics is a willful disregard for the law of the land. There is also a sense of hauteur and pride over standing up for the state's rights. The essence of such an attitude is an undifferentiated black-and-white view of the world. The absence of nuances is akin to the angry outpourings of trolls in the social media. These denizens of cyber space live in a closed room where only their opinions are seen as the right ones. All else is either fake or the

handwork of sinister conspirators. The blinkered outlook of the social media has begun to infect the mainstream media as well. This degeneration was apparent during the one-sided discussions a few months ago on a TV channel which carried a fiery montage to denote the intensity of the debate. Now, the Tamilian anchor of another English channel airing his views from among the Jallikattu supporters on Chennai's Marina beach shed all pretensions of being impartial as he lectured the PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) on what it should do to win over the protesters. The bull-taming "sport" of Jallikattu is not the only example of Tamil sub-nationalism coming to the fore.

An early example was when the DMK's C.N. Annadurai told the Rajya Sabha in 1962 that he came from "a country, a part of India now, but which I think is of a different stock, not necessarily antagonistic... I say that I belong to the

Dravidian stock and that is only because I consider that the Dravidians have got something concrete, something distinct, something different to offer to the nation at large. Therefore it is that we want self-determination". Three years later, the anti-Hindi agitation in Tamil Nadu was yet another instance of Tamil sub-nationalism. Yet, not all displays of parochialism are condemnable. Since the anti-Hindi agitation ensured the continuation of English, it kept India's window open to the world to the distress of Hindi chauvinists like Ram Manohar Lohia and their regressive intellectual progenies like Mulayam Singh Yadav and the Jan Sanghis of yore and the Rajnath Singhs of today who say that English is responsible for the "loss of our language and culture" as few speak in Sanskrit now. If the anti-Hindi agitation proved to be beneficial to the country as a whole, the uproar over Jallikattu is of little interest to the rest of India. However, it

FOCUS

Amulya Ganguli

can raise concerns, first, about the show of disrespect for the Supreme Court; secondly, about the dilution of legal safeguards for animal rights; thirdly, about the inordinate primacy of culture and tradition over the law; and, lastly, over the silence of the dissenters. It is noteworthy that none of the Tamil stalwarts who support Jallikattu ranging from film stars to chess players to cricketers had a word about the "cruelty and the risks to life posed by the sport", as the Chennai-based newspaper, The Hindu, said.

The risks were highlighted by the deaths of two people participating in the "sport" in Pudukkottai on the day the game was reintroduced. The references to culture and tradition cannot but recall what happened during the Ramjanmabhoomi movement in the 1990s when the saffron enthusiasts of cultural nationalism insisted that the judiciary could have no say in a matter of faith and the then U.P. chief minister, Kalyan Singh of the BJP, proudly went to jail for a day on the Supreme Court's order for having failed to save the protected 16th century monument of the Babri masjid from the Hindutva storm-troopers. (IPA)