

When you go into court you are putting your fate in the hands of twelve people who weren't smart enough to get out of jury duty
Norm Crosby

Worrying news for the BJP

The results of the just held civic elections in Gujarat bring no good tidings for the BJP. The hitherto down-and-out Congress in Gujarat has not only improved its tally significantly, what is more is that in the municipalities which the BJP has won, its margins of victory have declined. Its ally Chandra Babu Naidu of the Telugu Desam Party of Andhra Pradesh is hinting at snapping ties with the NDA. Its Government in Manipur has also become shaky as the Naga People's Front has indicated that it is likely to withdraw support to it. The NPP decision is the result of the BJP splitting the NPP in Nagaland where it was so long holding power in alliance with the NPP. The BJP has formed a rival party (the National Democratic Progressive Party) with the former NPP chairman Nethi Rto as its leader. If the NPP withdraws support in Manipur, the BJP may find it difficult to keep its government going.

The exposure of gigantic bank frauds - from a few hundred crores to thousands of crores - has caused lack of confidence in the banking system in tens of millions of depositors. They are worried about the fate of their hard earned money that they have deposited in the nationalized banks. They are least interested in the blame game between the BJP and the Congress. It is immaterial to them whether the scam started during the UPA regime or the NDA regime. Already, the Centre is toying with the idea of a Bill (Financial Resolution and Deposit Insurance Bill) which, if passed by Parliament, will enable the banks to take away the depositors' money. The bank frauds have confirmed what knowledgeable circles were suspecting for some time - that the checks and balances in the banking system are not working and any dishonest businessman or industrialist may swindle bank money with impunity and flee without anyone being any the wiser. From Lalit Modi to Vijay Mallya to Nirav Modi to Vikram Kohari, the list is being added to by the day.

How the electorate is reacting to these negative developments along with other negative developments like growing unemployment, stagnant investment, crisis in the farm sector, rising crude price and inflation will be known only after the next general elections. The heady wine of Hindutva seems to be yielding diminishing returns. Harsh economic realities are coming to the fore and swaying public opinion. The spell of Hindutva may not be enough to garner votes for the BJP.

Situation in Maldives, India's option

REFLEX ACTION

Barun Das Gupta

Maldives, a small island nation in the Indian Ocean south-west of Sri Lanka, with an area of 300 sq. kms a population of 4.5 lakh, is now in the grip of a political crisis that has international implications. Maldives has seen many political crises in the past. In November, 1988, armed mercenaries from Sri Lanka tried to capture power. Maumoon Abdulla Gayoom, who was the President of Maldives, sought India's military assistance and the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi readily responded. 'Operation Cactus' was launched. Paratroopers were airdropped on capital Male and the mercenaries surrendered in no time.

The present crisis was triggered by a confrontation between President Abdulla Yameen and the highest judiciary of the Maldives. Before going into that it would be helpful to remember certain facts of recent history. Maumoon Abdulla Gayoom had ruled the island nation with an iron hand for thirty years from 1978 to 2008, when, in the first ever democratically held elections, Mohamed Nasheed came to power. In 2013 Nasheed, who was close to India, lost power. He claimed he was "forced to resign at gunpoint." Abdulla Yameen, a half brother of Abdulla Gayoom, seized power. Nasheed was allowed to go UK for medical treatment where he has been living in self-exile since then. Now to what happened this time. Toward the end of January, the Maldivian Supreme Court set aside the criminal convictions against nine of Yameen's opponents and ordered their release. Yameen saw this as a threat to his continuing in power. He decided to hit back quickly.

He declared a State of Emergency for a fortnight. On February 5, under his orders, the army stormed into the Supreme Court building and arrested the chief justice and another judge. Soon enough, the other judges fell in line with Yameen and revoked the

release orders of his opponents issued earlier by the now detained chief justice. The fat was in the fire.

Former president Nasheed reportedly flew in from London to Sri Lanka to keep a close watch on the developments in his country. He appealed to India to send an envoy "backed by Indian military" to free the judges and a former president. India did not react officially but there were reports that units of the armed forces had been kept ready to act on short notice.

China reacted angrily, asking India to 'respect the sovereignty of Maldives' and 'not to complicate the situation' by 'meddling' in what it called a 'domestic crisis' of the island nation. China's reaction is expected as Yameen is known to be very close to China. Like the former Sri Lankan president Mahinda Rajapaksha, Yameen has signed a 'Free Trade Agreement' with China. Its terms are considered controversial by his opponents. Tourism is the principal foreign exchange earner of Maldives and China sends the largest number of tourists. If India chooses to put economic pressure on Maldives by discouraging visits by Indian tourists, China will not doubt send many more tourists to neutralize any fall in Indian tourist traffic.

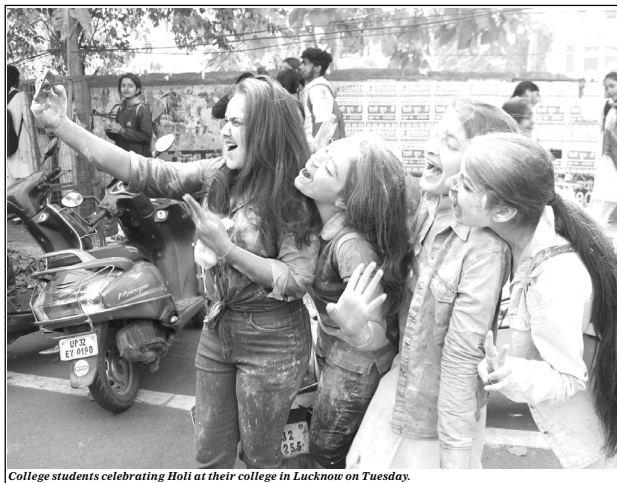
A report in the Maldives Times of December 21 last year said that in one year - from November, 2016 to November, 2017, the number of Chinese tourists rose by 11.8 per cent. A major concern for India is that Maldives under Yameen has recently passed a law

which permits foreigners to own land in the country. China may take advantage of this law to buy land and set up military bases in Maldives. Maldives' location is of immense geostrategic importance. Major oil export trade is carried between the Gulf of Aden and the Malacca Strait.

The Maldives archipelago is situated right in the middle of this area. As is well known, it is the waters of the Indian Ocean rather than the high Himalayas in the north which are becoming the central point for establishing China's supremacy in the region. The navies of both countries are going through intense expansion and modernization. India is constantly adding to its submarine fleet to neutralize Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean.

The recent crisis in Maldives has to be seen in the larger and long-term context of Sino-Indian rivalry to gain supremacy in the Indian Ocean Region and the Asia-Pacific Region. The situation in Maldives is indeed worrisome for India. But New Delhi must not allow itself to be driven into taking a hasty or precipitate action in Maldives. It should be borne in mind that in 1984, India sent its armed personnel in response to the call of the elected head of government, Maumoon Abdulla Gayoom. The present president, Yameen, has sent no such request, denying India any excuse to intervene directly.

It would be foolhardy for India to attempt to bring about a 'regime change' in Maldives. Its consequences will be unpredictable. Such a move may be resented by the people of Maldives themselves despite their desire for restoration of democracy. India's own image as a peace-loving, non-interfering nation may be hit in the eyes of the world. Diplomatic measures, taken in consultation with other friendly nations, would be far the best course. (IPA)



College students celebrating Holi at their college in Lucknow on Tuesday.

Faction battle in African National Congress

FOCUS

John Haylett

South African presidency spokesman Bongani Ngulunga was agast on Tuesday at Communist Party (SACP) demands that President Jacob Zuma confirm or deny plans to sack his deputy Cyril Ramaphosa and replace him with Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma. "The allegations reported in the media that President Jacob Zuma wishes to fire Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa and replace him with Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma are preposterous and outrageous," said Ngulunga. "The allegations of ethnic mobilisation by the president are equally without merit," he added for good measure.

The SACP statement issued by Alex Mashilo read: "SACP condemns ethnic mobilisation [and] challenges President Zuma to deny or confirm emerging information that, in pursuit of private interests, he is preparing to fire Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa. "The SACP calls upon the whole of our movement, as well as South Africans in general, to reject regressive forms of mobilisation and abuse of state power to try and manipulate and further polarise internal ANC and alliance politics." Ngulunga's case might have been stronger had he omitted the risible assertion that Zuma, who marketed himself as "100 per cent Zulu boy" when ANC deputy president and facing a rape charge, has

no truck with ethnic mobilisation. The president's supporters were expected to rally in numbers on Monday outside the ANC Luthuli House headquarters in Johannesburg for a Hands off Zuma protest against plans to instruct him to stand down as state president and be replaced by Ramaphosa. This would replicate the procedure by which Zuma took up the presidency after the ANC national executive committee told his predecessor Thabo Mbeki to step aside.

The protest was orchestrated by Black Land First (BLF), a schism from Julius Malema's Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) led by Andile Mngxitama, which retains the pro-Zuma stance once adopted, but long since dropped, by Malema. It was backed by Amabutho e-Sizwe Sema Zulu whose convener Sizwe Zuma declared that these Zulu "warriors" would converge on Luthuli House to ensure that Zuma stays in office. South Africa's rumour steady since the euphoric days of the country's first democratic elections in 1994. Voters' impatience to see the emergence of the advances envisaged in the ANC Freedom Charter is one factor, but more striking is popular awareness that the belt-tightening and self-restraint prescribed for them by their governments have not applied equally to those in office. When Mandela, who had favoured miners' union leader Ramaphosa as his

successor, was persuaded to back Mbeki by, among others, his close comrade Oliver Tambo, Ramaphosa took the BEE route, hovering up directorships and becoming, by repute, the second richest African in the country. Zuma has been embroiled in several financial scandals over the years, accused of selling political protection and influence, most notably over his complicity in state capture by the wealthy Gupta family from India. The nadir of this journey was his trial for the rape of Fezekile Kuzwayo, the lesbian daughter of close comrades, when Zuma testified to finding her in a state of arousal and Zulu tradition dictated that he could not leave her unfulfilled without doing his duty as a man.

Ramaphosa, who was backed strongly by the trade unions in Cosatu for the presidency against Zuma's estranged wife Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, is viewed by them as honest in comparison to the current incumbent. ANC NEC members have been tight-lipped about events of the past week which have seen the postponement of the president's State of the Nation Address (Sona) to both houses

of parliament and of a scheduled NEC emergency meeting. The ANC president knows that an 18-month election campaign, with Zuma still in office, will be an abtross around his and the party's neck.

Unspecific ANC statements about progress being made in talks between the two presidents gave way yesterday to Ramaphosa's clarification. His reference to "direct discussions on the transition and matters relating to his position as the president of the republic" leave no doubt as to what he wants, while the "postponement until further notice" of Sona indicates that Zuma will never deliver it. Both men know that the parliamentary opposition will not allow a Sona speech to proceed and that a no-confidence motion scheduled for February 22 could well be carried.

Even if and when Zuma leaves office, it won't be apocalyptic for the ANC and Ramaphosa because EFF leader Malema has already threatened to go after him more strongly than Zuma has been pursued, but as long as he remains the only way for the ANC is down. Ramaphosa's assertion that, "throughout this process, I am guided by the principle that the interests and needs of the South African people are paramount" ought to be superfluous but reflect the scale of the problem and the need for change. (IPA)

Conventional Crossword

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9			10		11		
						12	
							14
18			15		16		17
						19	20
21	22	23					24
25					26		27
28						29	
30							31

- ACROSS**
- 1 Spurious imitation
 - 4 Gem weight
 - 9 Infant's bed
 - 11 Fish
 - 12 Embellish
 - 13 S-shaped moulding
 - 14 Nuisance
 - 15 Upright
 - 19 Efface
 - 21 Precious stone
 - 25 Masculine
 - 26 Adult insect
 - 28 Level
 - 29 Present
 - 30 Irritable
 - 31 Probability
- DOWN**
- 1 Cicatrix
 - 2 Bricks carrier
 - 6 Make up for
 - 8 Takes as one's own
 - 9 Storm
 - 7 Top cards
 - 10 Imply
 - 16 Soften attitude
 - 17 Ship's small room
 - 18 Heavenly body
 - 20 Large antelope
 - 22 Form walking surface
 - 23 Alcoholic drinks
 - 24 Dairy animals
 - 27 Deity

SUDOKU: 2127

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

Yesterday's Solution 2126

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

Yesterday's Cross Word Solution 135

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

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