The Echo of India·Kolkata
Thursday·May 17, 2018

Be not ashamed of thy virtues; honor's a good brooch to wear in a man's hat at all times

Ben Jonson

The changing political landscape

Who will form the next government in Karnataka will be known on next Tuesday. But whoever wins or loses, one thing is certain: the political landscape of the country is changing and a re-alignment of political forces against the BJP is taking place. In Uttar Pradesh, in the Kairana Lok Sabha and Noorpur Assembly by-elections, Mayawati has extended her support to the SP-RLD candidates against the BJP. In Maharashtra, BJP's estranged ally Shiv Sena has withdrawn its candidate in the Palus Kadegaon assembly constituency in favour of the Congress candidate. What is more, the Sena mouthpiece has supported Rahul Gandhi's claim to be the next prime minister if the Congress emerges as the single largest party in 2019. It has projected Rahul Gandhi as the biggest challenge to Prime Minister Narendra Modi

As the political situation is developing, the BJP may have to face a united opposition in 2019. What is more, it will have to take Rahul Gandhi more seriously than it has done hitherto. Ridiculing or taunting him and dismissing him as a political lightweight is no longer possible. The Congress is getting support of a section of the CPI-M, too, and of all places in Kerala, which Prakash Karat considers his personal fief. State Finance Minister and a member of the party's Central Committee, Thomas Isaac has come down heavily on the BJP for its "motivated propaganda" against Rahul Gandhi. In Karnataka, where the CPI-M has fielded as many as 19 candidates, V. G. K. Nair, a former secretary of the State Committee, has said he will vote for the Congress and has also appealed to his comrades to vote for the Congress "to prevent the BJP from capturing power."

While Sitaram Yechuri and Prakash Karat fight it out in the Party Congress and the Central Committee whether or not to ally with the Congress against the BJP, the opinion of the rank and file workers and the middle-level leaders is clearly in favour of a tie-up with the Congress. The fact is standing out in sharp relief that despite its recent defeats at the hands of the BJP, the Congress still remains the largest among the opposition parties and is strongest to take the BJP head on. Others, willy-nilly, will have to be with the Congress, if they want to defeat the BJP. BJP's victory in 2019 will only hasten their dissolution and demise.

Managing job generation figures

REFLEX ACTION

Nitya Chakraborty

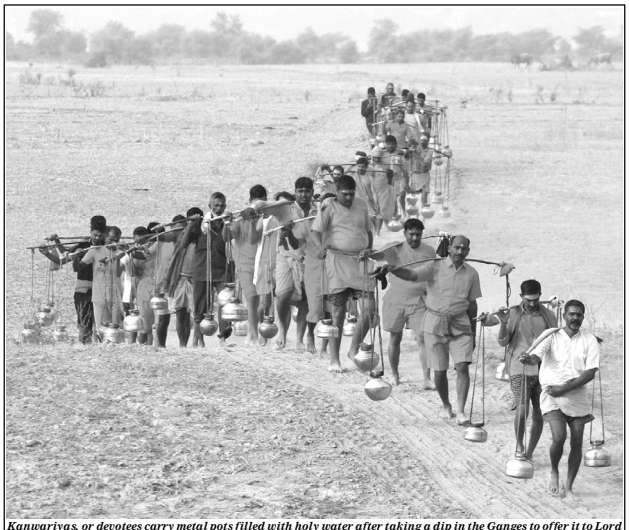
The demonetization done by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi on November 8, 2016, is still having its crippling impact on the informal sector of the Indian economy while the officials and economists close to the PM, are busy inflating the job generation figures in the last four years of the NDA regime and minimizing the impact of the demonetization on the unorganized sectors.

A latest study by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) shows that demonetization struck hard at the 15-24 age group and those over 66 in 2017 the main year after the PM announced his decision. The young group lost jobs to the level of 7.22 million during the year and the older group over 66 lost jobs to the level of 3.18 million. So, a total job loss of 10.40 million took place during the year 2017 and this was the immediate impact of the demonetization. In fact, this loss nearly wiped out the gains in jobs of 11.83 million in the25-64 age group during the year. But the PMO officials and the economist members of the PM's advisory council are bragging about the job generation figures in the 25-64 age group without mentioning the job losses that took place in the younger and the older age groups. These two groups are most vulnerable and they belong to the informal sector.

Very recently, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) released a report on the informal sector in which it said that in the South Asian region, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka fare much better than India and Nepal where informalisation of jobs is high, especially among the younger people. The figures of ILO show that close to 81 per cent of all employed persons in India make a living by working in the informal sector with only 6.5 per cent in the formal sector and0.8 per cent in the household sector. Among the five south Asian countries, the informalisation of labour is most highest in India and Nepal. The higher the education level, the higher the chance to obtain formal employment. In the Indian economy, the informal sector plays a very important role in creating employment but this sector has been given a bad jolt by the Prime Minister through demonetization. The impact still persists. The Government agencies have still no clear idea about the job losses in the informal economy. While the Prime Minister constantly talks of the poor in his election speeches, his actions have only worsened the plight of the poor. The CMIE study says that the 15-19 year olds are usually employed in low paid jobs requiring little education. Wages are generally paid in cash. Poverty drives these younger people to low paid work rather than studying in schools or colleges. In the wake of cash shortage following demonetization, these younger people were hit first. They became jobless, They had nowhere to go as cash became scarce.

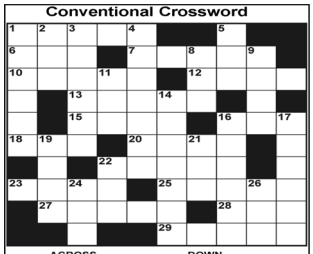
But the Modi Government people are totally ignoring what is happening in the informal sector. They do not care to mention the job losses in this particular sector and flaunt the job generation figures in the 25-64 age groups which showed more than 11 million new jobs in 2017, according to CMIE figures. But overall, the new job generation was only 1.4 million during 2017 after taking into account the job losses in the informal sector. One expects that the Government will make an honest assessment of what has gone wrong and try to correct the errors committed in the course of implementation. But the Govt economists, instead of making honest appraisal, are trying to hoodwink the people by cherry picking data to suit their theory of high job growth. Dr. Surajit Bhalla, a member of the PM's economic advisory council and a loudmouthed Modi loyalist, has claimed a total generation of 15 million jobs in 2017 by dubious statistical analysis. The CMIE director Mahesh Vyas has blasted the data of Dr. Bhalla, by alleging that Bhalla picks data for the ages 25-64 from the CMIE and ignores the data on the age group of 15-24 and higher than 64.This was the cherry picking of selective data that suits the objective of the PMO economist which is pre determined.

The ILO report has reminded all the developing countries including India that the concerned governments will have to give priority to transform the informal sector by dealing with its present problems and creating conditions for its speedy transition to formal economy. Globally 2 billion people – more than 61 per cent of all employed people-work in the informal economy and 93 per cent of the world's informal employment is in emerging and developing countries with the level of education seen as a key factor. Globally, when the level of education increases, the level of informality decreases, the report says, adding that people who have completed secondary and tertiary education are less likely to be in informal employment. For the Narendra Modi Government, no holistic development of economy is possible without taking due care of the problems of the informal economy. The high incidence of informality in all it6s forms has multiple adverse consequences for workers, enterprises and societies and is, in particular, a major challenge to the realization of decent work for all and sustainable and inclusive development.PM may go on with his election campaign demagogy about New India and high job growth, but a crippled informal economy is a reminder that the four years of NDA regime is a big failure. (IPA)



Kanwariyas, or devotees carry metal pots filled with holy water after taking a dip in the Ganges to offer it to Lord Shiva for the betterment of their families and society, in Allahabad---REUTERS

Conventional Crossword



ACROSS

1 Infatuate
6 Limb
7 Traffic light
10 Journeys
12 Violently deranged
13 Ancient tongue
15 Prepare for publication
16 Donkey
18 Printers' measures
20 Tidings
22 White heron
23 Puppet
25 Mature person
27 Send money
28 Golf mound
29 Fencing swords

DOWN

1 Hostile encounter
2 Do wrong
3 Shows amusement
4 Sampling
5 Precious stone
8 Prohibit
9 Decays
11 Cushion
14 Repeat
16 Shrewd
17 Reviews unsparingly
19 Make fast a vessel
21 Marry
22 Tree
24 Constellation
26 Sheltered side

SUDOKU: 2195

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

Yesterday's Solution 2194

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

Yesterday's Cross Word Solution 203

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

Citizenship issue in Assam

FOCUS

Barun Das Gupta

BJP's divisive politics in Assam is ripping open old wounds and creating new fissures – between Hindus and Muslims, between Assamese and Bengalis, between the Brahmaputra and the Barak Valleys.

It all started during the Lok Sabha election campaign of 2014. The BJP's prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi promised to deport all illegal immigrants from Bangladesh living in Assam if the BJP came to power. The BJP did come to power – at the Centre in 2014 and in Assam two years later, in 2016. But then the BJP did a volte face. It decided to grant citizenship to all non-Muslims who had come to Assam from Bangladesh after March 25, 1971 (the cut-off date, as per the Assam Accord of 1985). It was only the Muslims immigrants from Bangladesh post 1971 who would not be granted citizenship but be deported to Bangladesh.

(Whether it is at all physically possible or not is a different matter. Bangladesh has declared many times that no Bangladeshi is living in Assam or anywhere in India illegally and that the country will not accept anyone sought to be deported as 'Bangladeshi'). On coming to power, the Modi Government introduced the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016, which seeks to grant citizenship to "illegal immigrants" who are Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

The inclusion of Afghanistan and Pakistan are just an eyewash. The real intent is to make non-Muslim immigrants from Bangladesh, post-1971, Indian citizens. The requirement is that the person should have been a resident of India for the last 12 months and for six of the previous 14 years. Immediately there was strong opposition from the Brahamaputra Valley, which is predominantly Assamese-speaking. The opponents pointed out that Para 5.3 of the Assam Accord of August 15, 1985, signed between the All Assam Students Union (AASU) and All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP), one the one hand, and Rajiv Gandhi, the then Prime Minister, on the other, states:

"5.3. Foreigners who came to Assam after 1.1.1966 (inclusive) and up to 24th March, 1971, shall be detected in accordance with the provisions of the Foreigners Act, 1946, and the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1964." (As is obvious from the text, the Accord makes no distinction between illegal immigrants on the basis of their religion.) The Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016 will, in effect, make the Assam Accord just a scrap of discarded paper as far as the most relevant part of it, namely, the detection and deportation of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, is concerned.

After decades of hostility and ill-feeling, the relationship between the Assamese and Bengalis started improving and a relationship of amity and cordiality between the two major linguistic groups started to grow. The ill-conceived Citizenship (Amendment) Bill threatens to undo all that. The Assamese-speaking people see in the BJP's move an attempt at reducing them into a minority in their own land, by making lakhs of Bengali Hindus from Bangladesh Indian citizens. For the same reason, the Amendment Bill has received widespread support, cutting across party lines, from the Bengali-speaking Barak Valley. The Bengali Hindus are happy at the prospect of their tribe increasing in population percentage vis-à-vis the Muslims.

According to the 2011 Census, Hindus constitute 50.1 per cent of the population of Barak Valley, Muslims 48.1 per cent and the rest other religions. In the prevailing situation, the Asom Gana Parisah (AGP) has been caught in a bind. The AGP is the successor party of the original All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) which, along with the AASU, spearheaded the anti-Bangladeshi agitation of 1979-85, which ended with the signing of the Assam Accord.

In the 2016 Assam Assembly polls the BJP won 61 seats in a House of 126. As it fell short of an absolute majority, it had to form an alliance with the AGP, which won 14 seats. Now there is a strident demand in the Brahmaputra Valley that the AGP quit the alliance against this 'betrayal' of the Assamese people by the BJP. The AGP's quitting the alliance will reduce the BJP into a minority and its government will fall. On the other hand, the AGP ministers in Assam are in no mood to give up power. If the AGP comes out of the coalition government, there is the possibility of a revolt in the party, with one section joining the BJP. The present situation in Assam is very fluid and volatile. New fissures have appeared. Old animosities have been revived. The two major valleys – Brahmaputra and Barak – are divided on the question of granting citizenship to Bengali Hindus from Bangladesh. Even some Bengali Congress leaders of the Brahmaputra Valley, like former minister Ardhendu Day, have gone against the party stand on this question.

Meanwhile, the police arrested six BJP supporters on May 7 at Belsor in Nalbari district, for pasting posters, written in Arabic, asking people to "join ISIS". There are both Hindus and Muslims among those arrested. At whose behest they were working is not known but their role was that of agents provocateurs. The situation in Assam is volatile, indeed. (IPA)

DISCLAIMER

The views in the articles published here are absolutely the views of the author and The Echo of India does not stand liable for them.