

*Be not ashamed of thy virtues, honor's a good enough to wear in a man's hat at all times*  
**Ben Jonson**

## Exit Nawaz Sharif

Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has been made to resign after the Supreme Court found him guilty in the money-laundering, wealth-concealment cases and in using a string of offshore companies linked to the Sharif family to buy a number of luxury properties in London. The apex court of Pakistan has disqualified him for life from holding a public office. Sharif has kept up the tradition of no elected prime minister of Pakistan having ever completed his full term of office. Corruption allegations against Sharif date as far back as 1993 when investigations first began to look into thirteen specific allegations of corruption.

The Supreme Court's order forcing Nawaz to resign as prime minister has the full support of the Pakistan army with whom Nawaz had all along had an uneasy relationship. As things stand now, his brother and former Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif is likely to succeed him after some time. He has first to get himself elected to the Parliament. For the present, the ruling PML (N) has to nominate an interim prime minister. One of the reasons of Nawaz Sharif's undoing is believed to be his attempt to assert the independence of the civil government over the military which holds the actual levers of power. Sharif antagonized the army greatly when he ordered it to conclude the probe into the Pathankot air base attack and resume the inquiry into the Mumbai terror attacks and warned the brass-hats that Pakistan was facing growing international isolation for its perceived sponsoring of terrorism.

Nawaz, despite his occasional anti-India rants, seemed to be in favour of a peaceful relationship with India, much to the dislike of the army. Whoever becomes his successor will be more circumspect in antagonizing the army if he has to remain in power. As Pakistan's relationship nosedives with Donald Trump's USA and it gravitates more and more toward China, it may face internal problems also. The proposed China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) promises great prosperity for Pakistan but it involves a political cost. Pakistan will have to be more and more subservient to Beijing. Already, the possibility of Pakistan becoming a colony of China is being discussed by the people there in hushed tones. As the economic squeeze following Trump's decision to drastically slash aid begins to have its effect on the economy, the army may have to deal with rising public discontent also. Nawaz Sharif has been thrown out of power but Pakistan's problems - both short and long-term - persist.

# Quality of Railways' services: An issue

Ever since the NDA government returned to power after a decade of wilderness in 2014,



the new dispensation under the inescapable but all the more intrepid leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi is blazing a new trail on the economic landscape with gusto. Whether it was the dismantling of the erstwhile Planning Commission, a relic of the socialist past, the demonetization of high denominational currencies or the merger of the rail budget with the general budget, the Schumpeterian paradigm of creative destruction has been the hallmark of this government, regardless of the wider ramifications this wrought on the body politic in its wake.

For the Indian Railways, the appointment of a former Shiv Sena leader Suresh Prabhu who was expelled from his party but who was greeted with open arms by the BJP with a ministerial berth as the Railways Minister, the auditor-turned politico was a better choice, given the past record when coalition partner satraps from the State ruled and ruined the arterial mode of transport. True to his salt, Prabhu did not refrain from undertaking a thorough overhaul of the existing business as usual approach and co-opted external agencies and institutions for funding its vast infrastructure development projects and programmes of a humongous order of eight lakh crore of rupees spread over a five-year span. How far his efforts in this direction would pan out to retrieve the lost ground the railways suffered from the users' growing preference for roadways would be known only after the new projects are through from the drawing board before long.

Interestingly while adequate weightage arrangements were not made/ensured by the railways for weightage of leased parcel traffic, rules were framed for termination of contracts after fourth default of overloading! These were, however, not a

## REFLEX ACTION

G. Srinivasan

deterrent as weightage was not being done as a regular measure to check overloading despite laid down norms. Stating that response for booking of leased parcel traffic through brake vans as well as parcel vans was inadequate, the report said that while offers received were far less than space offered on lease, railways did not allot parcel vans in 65 per cent of the cases.

As such, leasing space remained grossly unutilized, it said adding that leased traffic services suffered from lack of customer friendliness and from malaises like delays in internal processes and deficiencies in decision-making. For leasing of parcel space, a delay of upto 240 days in finalization of tenders by zonal railways was noticed. Customers had to cancel tenders for parcel vans due to non-supply by railway administration and in many cases parcel vans were declared "sick after being loaded". A transport system aspired to be the swiftest and eco-friendly can ill-afford to lose its image on flimsy alibi like vans being sick as no business worth its name would accept such frivolous excuses when competing modes of transport carry without much hassles and least complaint quotients.

What is more shocking is that for non-leased traffic, zonal railways carried parcels beyond their intended destinations in a significant number of cases. In the two months test checked, railways carried 13565 over-carried parcels back to their original destinations. Over carriage of parcels also took away space in Assistant Guard's Cabin (AGC)/ Brake Vans which could be utilized for transportation of parcel traffic. This resulted in hardships to the customers and fostered operational problems to the

railway administration, the CAG report deplored adding that this also reflected on the quality of services being provided to the customers. There can be no direct hit on the railways for being slovenly in their remit to service customers with care and due regard to their legitimate concerns.

The CAG report also dealt with the management of linen in IR as the coaching stock consist of 390 AC first class coaches (7500 berths), 2375 AC (2-tier) coaches (112350 berths) and 5302 AC 3-tier sleeper coaches (345091 berths). Noting that a robust system for procurement, washing and distribution of linen is indispensable to provide clean, hygienic, well-ironed and good quality linen to all passenger travelling in upper classes, audit found that as on end-March 2016 in respect of some of the linen items in selected General Stores Deposits (GSDs), the stock in hand was less than one month's requirement. It further noted provision of inspection of a prescribed percentage of new supply was not being used effectively to ensure quality of the linen received. The storage space of GSD was not adequate and items were not stored in proper milieu, it said adding that the storage space in the coaching depots too was also not adequate and proper storing arrangements were not made at many places. To compound the woes of the travelling public paying through their noses, blankets and pillows were not dry cleaned and/or sanitized for long periods before supply to the passengers, the CAG candidly said.

What galls the glibble travelers in premier trains is that at the end of the journey, the cleaning staff comes for bakshesh (tips) round as if the materials supplied were all spotless, free from germs and whatnot? The audit findings discussed here pertain only to two facets of the vast array of services the IR provides to its customers. But if the tip of the troubling iceberg is a pointer as to what great tasks lay ahead for the railway authorities to clean up the system that itself would be a sobering thought that each die perhaps may dawn in the foreseeable future, if not in the medium-term. (IPA)



A girl buying rakhi at a road side vend ahead of Raksha Bandhan in Mumbai.

# Solution to small farmers' woes

How long will the country multiply witness thousands of its debt-stricken small farmers committing suicides year after year, no matter which political party is in power at the Centre or states? With 67 per cent of India's farmland held by marginal farmers and continuous shrinkage of acreage under their control provide an alarming picture of the future of those poor farmers and India's agriculture.

Unfortunately, political parties do not seem to be concerned about addressing the real issue of making agriculture scientifically sustainable without such political doles as writing-off poor farmers' loans and certain farm subsidies that indirectly benefit industrial producers of power, fertilisers and pesticides more than their direct users. By its geographical size, India is the world's most populated country. A continuously unremunerative domestic agriculture can ruin its all other economic advantages. It is another matter that financially-sick farmers across the country may someday organise themselves to revolt against the government or administration, instead of cheaply ending life by committing suicides.

Also, if the crisis persists, India may have to live substantially on food imports in due course. It is high time that both the central and state

governments take a serious view of the last agricultural census to address the situation through legal and social measures. The government's own official statement puts "the average size of the (farm) holding at 1.15 hectare. And, the size of these holdings has shown a steady declining trend since 1970-71." The large holdings of 10 hectares and above account for less than one per cent of the country's farmland.

Few will disagree that the small and marginal farmers should have been induced and incentivised by the government to go for cooperative farming instead of playing politics on their plight. Cooperatives are meant to help such marginal farmers benefit from economies of scale. They could lower their costs of inputs, cultivation, storage and transport. Such cooperatives could enable farmers to improve production, service quality and reduce financial risks. Marginal farmers would not have been marginalised to become victims of lenders, private loan-shirks, middleman and market. They would have also probably kept at bay those political parties and leaders who have long been converting farmers' distress and suicides into votes during state and parliamentary elections.

Cooperative farming witnessed a grand success in China, the world's most populous country, and also in highly industrialised nations

such as the UK, Germany, France and Sweden. Advantages of cooperative farming are many. They include consolidation of small units of land; liberal use of mechanisation; adequate and timely use of inputs like fertilisers and pesticides; technical guidance to improve skills and productivity; secure fair price of products; and build brotherhood among members to help each other to pull their resources and promote common interests. The cooperative farming movement is not new to India. It made a tremendous success in Gujarat, parts of Maharashtra and a few other states contributing substantially to the production of milk and sugar among others. There is no reason why it should not be an equal success in agriculture.

Despite a rapid growth of India's services sector since the 1992 economic reform, it is still largely an agricultural country in terms of direct and indirect jobs the farm sector creates. Statistics II, agriculture contributes around 18 per cent of India's GDP though providing employment to nearly two-third of its total population. Rural women play a vital role

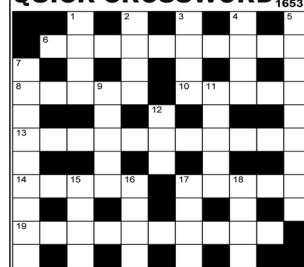
in agriculture, representing almost 50 per cent of farm labour. Agricultural accounts for around 15 per cent of the country's export earnings. In China, agriculture accounts for about 11 per cent of its GDP, which is over four times larger than India's. In 2016, India's GDP was \$2.5 trillion. China's GDP was \$11.4 trillion. Some 330 million or over 45 per cent of China's total labour force live on farming although only about 15 per cent of China's total land mass is cultivable. Over 75 per cent of China's total cultivated land grow only food crops. Properly organised under cooperatives, India's marginal farms hold the promise of doing better than China's. Earlier they are in it for the better it is for poor marginal farmers and agriculture.

It's important that the government ensures that groundwater, on which India's agriculture is substantially dependent, is not exploited by consumer industries making soft drinks, bottled water, alcoholic beverages, etc. The latter can use municipal water, drawn mostly from rivers, for a small fee. India's agriculture is mostly rain-fed. The proportion of net irrigated area to net area sown was 45.70

percent at the beginning of this decade. This means that half the country's farmland rely entirely on rains for their crops. Deep tube-wells are a major source of irrigation. While the total cropped area is estimated at 193.76 million hectares, nine states account for almost 78 per cent of it. They are Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, and West Bengal.

Incidentally, Maharashtra, Andhra, Telangana, UP and Karnataka have among the most debt-trapped farmers. Maharashtra has always seen the highest number of farm suicides every year. Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi, now championing the cause of poor farmers, may be aware that the state was ruled by the Congress-NCP coalition for 15 consecutive years, until BJP came to power in 2014. Of the country's total net irrigated area of 64.57 million hectares, about 48 per cent are shared by small and marginal holdings. Under cooperative farming, the marginal holders can put together their resources and seek help from the government and local bodies to improve their access to irrigation. Nobody denies that agricultural cooperatives can also be subject to corruption and political exploitation. Yet, they seem to be the best option before the country's debt-ridden, suicide-prone marginal farmers. (IPA)

## QUICK CROSSWORD 1653



- Across**
- 6. Nonsense (10)
  - 8. Very angry (5)
  - 10. Soldier's decoration (5)
  - 13. Plant-eating (11)
  - 14. Japanese mattress (5)
  - 17. Shoulder warmer (5)
  - 19. Seaside tower (10)
- Down**
- 1. Computer input (4)
  - 2. Slight advantage (4)
  - 3. Affectedly proper (4)
  - 4. Employee (4)
  - 5. Sell to retailers (9)
  - 7. Dusk (9)
  - 9. Forbidden (5)
  - 11. Planet (5)
  - 12. Spreading plant (3)
  - 15. Pulls (4)
  - 16. Jot down (4)
  - 17. Exhibit (4)
  - 18. As well (4)

**Previous solution**  
Across: 1. Altire, 3. Twin, 7. Core, 8. Hammer, 10. Compete, 13. Success, 16. Trough, 17. Fact, 18. Derry, 19. Rhythm.  
Down: 1. Arch, 2. Terror, 4. Wipe, 5. Narrow, 6. Pattern, 9. Upsurge, 11. Gifted, 12. Aslant, 14. Soon, 15. Stem.

## SUDOKU: 1934

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

## Yesterday's Solution 1933

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

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