



Blunt pointers

The BJP did well in the by-elections, but the Congress arrested its slide in Karnataka

By-elections are no more than pointers to the popular mood. They are not firm trend-setters for a general election. When the winners of polls in 10 Assembly constituencies in eight territories are representatives of four different parties, there is no one big lesson to be drawn from the results. Even so, these will inevitably be interpreted as indicators of the public mood, especially when four of the States, which held by-elections, are due for Assembly elections by the end of 2018. The Bharatiya Janata Party, which is sitting pretty after sweeping the elections in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand earlier this year, did well to best the Aam Aadmi Party in Delhi, and win a seat each in Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Assam. The victory in Delhi should be especially satisfying for the BJP as AAP leader, and Chief Minister, Arvind Kejriwal attempted to cast himself in a larger-than-life image, pitting himself directly against Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his campaigns and public statements. That the AAP candidate lost his deposit is a shocker: the party had won 67 of Delhi's 70 seats in the 2015 Assembly election. As the AAP seeks to extend its reach and increase its clout, it seems to be losing out on its home turf. More than the victory in Assam, or even in Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh, what will be more gratifying for the BJP is the second place finish in West Bengal. Its candidate was ahead of both the Left Front and Congress candidates in Kanthi Dakshin in West Bengal, an indication that the party could grow in opposition to the ruling Trinamool Congress in the years ahead. That must be truly worrying for the Communist Party of India (Marxist), which had held power in the State for a record 34 consecutive years until 2011. As the 2014 Lok Sabha election showed, the BJP is no longer a party of the Hindi belt alone, and is now national in character.

If the BJP has cause to celebrate its position at the top of the heap, the Congress can draw some comfort in having arrested its slide in Karnataka. The party won both seats in the State, beating back the challenge from the BJP, which was on the comeback trail after the return of former Chief Minister B.S. Yeddyurappa to its fold. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, who was under pressure from sections within his own party, should get some additional breathing space till the Assembly election next year. By retaining one seat in Madhya Pradesh, the Congress has shown it cannot be written off despite having lost three successive elections to the BJP. Indeed, if there is one lesson for all parties in this round of by-elections, it is that there is still everything to fight for in the Assembly elections, whether they are to be held next year or later.

Cool minds

De-escalation, not deal-making, is needed to reduce tensions in the Korean peninsula

With tensions in the Korean peninsula continuing to escalate, Beijing took the rather extreme step on Friday of warning that something needs to be done to wind down the U.S.-North Korea confrontation, saying the "the storm is about to break". The heightened rhetoric of recent days follows Washington's display of naval power with the despatch of a U.S. aircraft carrier strike group to the waters off the Korean coast. Though U.S. officials described the move as merely cautionary, President Donald Trump, who has made North Korea a key foreign policy concern of his administration, used the word "armada" somewhat ominously. For their part, the North Koreans have threatened nuclear retaliation in the event of any attack. In late March, the U.S. had commenced installation of the so-called Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) anti-missile system in South Korea in response to missile tests by the North. The agreement, in the works since last year, has already increased regional tensions, entangling China as well. Washington and Seoul have emphasised that intercepting the North's advanced development of inter-continental ballistic missiles was the real objective behind the new system. But apprehensive that its own nuclear infrastructure would be inevitably exposed to snooping by the THAAD radar, Beijing has sought to counter Seoul with trade and tourism boycotts.

Mr. Trump's threat of unilateral action against Pyongyang in the event that China fails to rein in North Korea may partly echo the mood in Washington after the recent missile strikes in Syria. If the Chinese government views Pyongyang's growing nuclear capability with concern, as it professes to, then it must do much to use its leverage effectively. Merely stressing the need for a peaceful resolution to the conflict is not enough. Japan, Washington's important regional ally, would view with no less consternation any potential threat to stability in its neighbourhood. American air strikes in Syria last week have raised very valid concerns about their legitimacy under international law. But they also indicate that the Trump administration may be shifting politically from a populist-driven isolationism to more conventional interventionism. His latest observations on China point to a shift from open confrontation to a possible constructive engagement. Notable here, for instance, is a willingness to eschew the previous rhetoric on China as a currency manipulator. Against this emerging backdrop, a return to a reasoned and nuanced approach on North Korea would be a most positive development in these volatile times. That would, however, require a spectacular roll-back by Pyongyang of its current nuclear capability, which includes long-range missiles that can reach targets in the Pacific. As well as sustained cooperation between China and the U.S., it is time for cooler minds to weigh in – there is nothing to be gained by aggressively staring down adversaries.

Cross signals across the Himalayas

India must realise that China is no longer willing to remain a status quo power



M.K. NARAYANAN

The 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, was in Arunachal Pradesh recently, which has greatly ruffled China's feathers. Any reference to Arunachal Pradesh ('Southern Tibet' as China prefers to call it), in context or out of context, has the effect of raising temperatures in Beijing. The prolonged stay of His Holiness in the Tawang Monastery was, hence, the straw that broke the camel's back. The mild-mannered Dalai Lama spoke with unusual candour during his visit to Arunachal Pradesh, seeming to be at times even obliquely critical of China, something he had previously avoided. All these years, he had displayed remarkable restraint, despite constant Chinese provocations. On this occasion, his statements should, therefore, have come as a surprise to China.

Choice of words

Nothing that the Dalai Lama said during his visit can even be remotely viewed as accusatory of China, but the words he employed – "I've long forgiven China's Communist Government for occupying Tibet"; we support a 'One China policy', "all we want is the right to preserve our culture, language and identity"; "the 1.4 billion Chinese people have every right to know the reality (of Tibet)", "once they know the reality they will be able to judge"; "until now there has been only one-sided, wrong information" – had the effect of a whiplash and was bound to irk China. What should have provoked the Chinese even more is that at one point, reacting to Chinese objections to his Arunachal Pradesh visit, the Dalai Lama said, "I am the messenger of ancient Indian thoughts and values. I thank the Government of India for the support."

So far, China's reactions have been on predictable lines, though perhaps more incendiary than in the past. Beijing has issued a series of warnings, viz., that the Dalai Lama's visit to Arunachal Pradesh would cause "deep damage" to Sino-Indian ties, that New Delhi would need to make 'a choice' in its dealings with the Tibetan spiritual leader, that India had breached its commitment on the Tibet issue, taking particular umbrage at the Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister's statement that the State did not share its borders with China but with Tibet and asking India to stick to its 'political pledges' and not hurt China-India relations.

Official demarches were couched in still more intemperate language. Some were in the nature of a threat, that the visit would escalate disputes in the border area, fuel tensions between the two countries, impinge on China's major concerns and core interests, territory and sovereignty, and thus damage India-China relations. Chinese official media and the Chinese Communist Party, in turn, stepped up pressure on the Chinese government to take action against India. The *China Daily* observed that "if New Delhi chooses to play dirty... Beijing should not hesitate to answer blows with blows". Chinese official spokespersons have rounded off this kind of diatribe by affirming that issues concerning Tibet have a bearing on China's "core interests".

China's verbal outbursts on this occasion do not conform to type, even where they relate to the Dalai Lama. For China, a visit by the Dalai Lama to Arunachal Pradesh, including a sojourn in the Tawang Monastery, one of the holiest of Tibetan Buddhism, is no ordinary matter. As it is, China has certain deep-seated concerns about increasing political instability in areas such as Tibet, apart from the happenings in Xinjiang as well as other security problems. The Dalai Lama's visit to Tawang at this time could, hence, look like a provocation.

Very recently, China had floated



the idea of an Integrated National Security Concept, reflecting the extent of its prevailing insecurities. This has introduced certain 'red lines', that China would never compromise its legitimate rights and interests, or sacrifice its "core national interests". On more than one occasion during the current exchanges, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokespersons had referred to issues concerning Tibet (and Southern Tibet) as having a direct bearing on China's "core interests".

Current China-India exchanges, hence, need to be examined from the purview of both international relations as well as the domestic situation prevailing in China. It must not be overlooked that the that Sino-Indian conflict of 1962 occurred soon after China's disastrous Great Leap Forward, in which a large number of Chinese perished, and the Dalai Lama fleeing Tibet and taking sanctuary in India. In 1962, Beijing had masked its intentions skilfully, while India, in the absence of any major overt action by China, was lulled into a false sense of complacency.

We need to ensure that there is no repetition of lack of vigil on our part. In 1959-60, the Dalai Lama had not quite attained the same international stature that he currently enjoys as the most revered symbol of Tibetan Buddhism. Yet,

Doctors under siege

Workplace violence against health-care workers can only be checked in the backdrop of improved infrastructure



GEORGE THOMAS & J. AMALORPAVANATHAN

There have been numerous media reports of instances of violence against doctors and health-care institutions across India. In most cases, the proximate cause is the death of a patient. All reports suggest that most of these patients could not have been saved with the infrastructure available in the institution, yet their deaths have been seen as a case of neglect by medical personnel. Doctors have responded to these attacks with anger and anguish, by striking work, demanding more security and even taking to social media with messages about how the profession is seen as an easy target.

Growing violence

Violence against doctors is not new. The World Health Organisation published guidelines on handling workplace violence in 2002. However, the incidence and intensity of

violence against medical professionals in India is on the rise.

It is important to reflect on how the medical profession – always held in respect in our society – has come to such a sorry pass where health-care workers need protection from the very people they are meant to take care of. It appears that these attacks are symptomatic of a larger malaise, manifested in a general increase in violence as a method of demonstrating power, loss of faith in institutions, anger against perceived marginalisation, and lack of understanding of science and society. The state has failed to stand firm on the rule of law. Civil society has been complicit. Each group in our fractured society becomes vocal only when its interests are affected. Thus doctors, pillars of the establishment, have failed to ensure the security of the established society by standing up against violence as a method of settling differences.

The present health-care system in India has inequity built in. Patients can see it. The demand by medical professionals for better pay is seen as selfish. It has to be coupled with demands for patient care such as better access, better facilities, and more personnel so that



individual attention can be given. At present, most doctors are not advocates for patients. They play along with governments unwilling to spend on health care and accept the prevalent view that providing public sector health care is a favour and not a right. Doctors are seen as a part of the power structure. When they are attacked, public support and empathy is lacking.

A divide

Also, tremendous technological advances in medicine are not available to the majority in India. Increasing privatisation, corporatisation and commercialisation of medical care have ensured that many procedures

China was even then willing to risk a conflict with India, then the undisputed leader of the Non-Aligned Movement, angered by the grant of asylum to the Dalai Lama. The stakes for China are, if anything, greater today, as it seeks to emerge as a global leader. China would like to ensure that its 'rear' remains quiescent, rather than troubled, so as to devote its energies to attain its goals.

The Tawang factor

Indian commentators keep referring from time to time to the fact that China had shifted its stand on Tawang. This may be true, but there is little doubt about the centrality of Tawang (the birth place of the sixth Dalai Lama) in China's scheme of things for this region. During several rounds of discussions on the Sino-Indian border, my counterpart as the Chinese Special Representative for boundary talks, Dai Bingguo, made it amply clear to me that Tawang was non-negotiable. In 2005, China signed an Agreement on the Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the India-China Boundary Question (Dai Bingguo and I were the signatories) which stipulated that areas with settled populations would not be affected in any exchange. Even before the ink was dry, China began to dissimulate as far as Tawang was concerned, even though Tawang is the most 'Indianised' place in the entire Northeast. All this leaves little scope for compromise with regard to areas like Tawang.

Understanding the way the Chinese mind works is important. It tends to be eclectic, contextual and relational, leaning towards systemic content and history. Chinese thinking tends to be convoluted and its methodology obtuse. Chinese assertiveness is often rooted in strategic insecurity and a perceived sensitivity to domestic tensions. China constantly flaunts its 'exceptionalism' and its 'uniqueness'. Chinese exceptionalism tends today to be largely historical and revivalist. A combination of Mao's utopianism and Deng Xiaop-

ing's realism has left China in a kind of philosophical vacuum. It has led to an excess of nationalism and nationalistic fervour, making China's objectives clear-cut.

China's policymakers are cautious by temperament but are known to take risks. They are skilled at morphing the gains favoured by each past civilisation and adjusting these to modern conditions. They prefer attrition to forceful intervention, a protracted campaign to gain a relative advantage.

Currently, China has jettisoned the Guiding Principles laid down by Deng Xiaoping, "coolly observe..., hide your capacities, bide your time". Buoyed by its military muscle, and with a defence budget of \$151.5 billion (2017) which is much larger than that of all other nations with the exception of the U.S., China is no longer willing to remain a status quo power, or play by existing rules governing the international order. India must realise this, and avoid being caught unawares.

The OBOR outlier

As it is, China is constantly seeking ways to isolate India. It is engaged in building advantageous power relations, acquiring bases and strengthening ties with countries across Asia, Africa and beyond. China's latest One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative signifies its new outreach, extending from the eastern extremity of Asia to Europe – the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor represents its most significant strategic aspect – and has the backing of most countries in the region. India is an outlier in this respect, and perhaps the only major Asian nation that has not yet endorsed the concept. If as China anticipates that OBOR has the potential to alter the status quo across the region with most nations accepting a long-term commitment to China, India could find itself friendless in Asia and beyond.

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cannot be accessed by the general public. Examples of the privileged having access to extremely expensive care in the private sector, though many of these interventions are usually futile, propagates the idea that modern medicine can salvage even the most critically ill provided enough money is spent.

There is also a failure to establish and propagate a good understanding of modern science in India. Such understanding would encompass the knowledge that although medicine in the modern world has greatly improved the chances of survival in many serious conditions, there are also many situations in which no intervention will succeed. Otherwise, there remains a suspicion that all was not done to save the patient and that much more would have been done had the patient paid more for an expensive hospital and doctor. The frustration against their own position in society is vented by attacking the doctor and the facility.

A way out

What can be done? An immediate step is to ensure exemplary action against violence as a means of settling issues. More long-term measures require vastly improved health

infrastructure, fewer patients per doctor in line with international norms so that care can not only be given but seen to be given.

Doctors should participate in spreading understanding of science and society. At present, the public often does not understand the deeper structural problems underlying the apparent failures of the doctors. Medical practitioners should help highlight these.

Peoples' committees in hospitals will be a welcome step. There must be a constant audit of the working hours of medical personnel and the fatigued doctor should not be left in the front line to deal with an emotionally charged public. Social workers in crucial departments such as accident and emergency wards to handle anxious crowds will certainly reduce the stress of already overburdened postgraduates and house surgeons.

Civil society and the medical community must together to demand better health care for our population. We cannot falter now.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

The decline of AAP

Caught between the corrupt Congress regime and the purported communal intentions of the BJP, the formation of the Aam Aadmi Party provided the hapless common man a glimmer of hope. It was looked upon as a party with a difference and which upheld ethical values in public life, boosted by the presence of professionals who were joining politics after sacrificing their highly paid jobs. But power seems to have got the better of the AAP, which had promised good governance and values. Dogged by one controversy or the other, it has taken the easier way out by hitting out at those who criticise it in order to cover up its misdeeds. You can't fulfil the aspirations of people by merely indulging in rhetoric. Its bizarre reaction when dengue threatened Delhi is an example. Given this trend, it is no surprise

that people are losing faith in the party. ("BJP extends winning streak in byelections", April 14).

V. SUBRAMANIAN, Chennai

Rise of vigilantism

The death of a man at the hands of "cow vigilantes" in Rajasthan's Alwar district is not an isolated event (Editorial - "Barbarism unlimited", April 7). It is the result of continuous hate propaganda that is being propagated across the country. It is also an attempt to isolate a particular community in order to serve the vested interests of a few. There is an attempt to turn people into a mindless and faceless mob. What is the meaning of all the talk about development and economic growth when we cannot ensure the security and safety of a citizen? We must rein in the temptation to label all these as sporadic incidents. Today it is about Muslims. Tomorrow it could

be about Dalits, Christians or for that matter, anyone with a different point of view. There is an attempt to inject this poisonous venom of hatred in all of us. It is not a fight for any community but about the fight to save the idea of India.

GAURAV VATS, Patna

■ The activities of self-proclaimed cow vigilantes are disturbing the social order. The majority of the people involved in the trade related to cattle are Dalits and Muslims. Vigilantes are using the pretext of protecting cows to attack Dalits and Muslims and their actions are hurting livelihoods and the economy. These acts are growing so fast that it is becoming difficult to control their actions. It is time their activities are curbed before it leads to complete chaos.

KAMIL S.V., Androiti, Lakshadweep

The tree we love to hate

At last, the axe seems to have fallen on the *seemai karuvelam* (*Prosopis juliflora*), the firewood tree that is the woodcutter's favourite in Tamil Nadu, now orphaned by a High Court dictat and whose demise is being hastened by some politicians in Tamil Nadu who are spearheading a campaign for its eradication ("HC judges release book on ills of *seemai karuvelam*", April 14). It is said in our scriptures that no plant life, including weeds, is bestowed on our planet by nature without a purpose. If nothing, the species provides shade to living creatures. While passing through villages in Andhra Pradesh, I have seen poor mothers making cradles and swings for their children by tying their old saris on the branches of this tree. The sight of rural children playing a variety of rustic games under the

canopy of these trees is a sight to watch. The tree demonstrates how to brave and survive the hot sun of tropical India. There are large tracts and forests of these trees providing cover to an otherwise parched land. While we are always good at hasty deforestation, we need to scientifically assess what the botanical worth of this species to the Indian subcontinent is and whether we are on the right side of nature when we start loving to hate it.

PUSHPA DORAI, Nurai, Kerala

Discrediting judiciary

The manner in which Calcutta High Court judge,

C.S. Karnan, has passed an order directing seven judges of the Supreme Court, including the Chief Justice of India, to appear before him on April 28 at his residence in Kolkata is baffling ("Karnan directs SC judges to appear before him", April 14). How can a learned and respected judge function in such a manner? Will it not encourage 'lawlessness'? The President of India should intervene immediately to remove him to save the prestige of the judiciary.

G. CHITTIBABU, Madurai

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CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

The name of the U.K. aircraft carrier is *Prince of Wales* and not *Prince of Whales* as mentioned in the penultimate paragraph of a report, "Rolls-Royce, DRDO to tie up" (April 14, 2017).

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