



Search, seize, cease

The IT department needs to deepen the probe against political figures in Tamil Nadu

Tn Tamil Nadu's politically surcharged atmosphere, almost everything takes on a political hue. Searches ▲ and seizures by the Income Tax department following the death of Chief Minister Jayalalithaa were without doubt integral to the clean-up operation in a State known for brazen corruption and abuse of power at different levels. But some of the actions of the enforcement agencies have given the impression that they are selective in nature, leading to charges that they were motivated by the political interests of the Bharatiya Janata Party, which heads the government at the Centre. In the latest instance, Income Tax officials searched the residence of Jayalalithaa, following up on seizures made at properties held by the family of her friend V.K. Sasikala. But curiously, Income Tax officials were insistent that the rooms used by Jayalalithaa were not the object of inquiry, only those used by Sasikala and secretary S. Poongundran. Jayalalithaa remains a revered figure in Tamil Nadu's politics, and the BJP's efforts over the last several months have been two-fold: to acknowledge her political legacy and to denounce the claims of the Sasikala family as its true inheritor. Not surprisingly, in an attempt to undermine the BJP's control of the narrative, Sasikala's nephew, T.T.V. Dhinakaran, described the searches as an assault on Jayalalithaa's soul. The credibility of the searches thus hinges on the Income Tax department widening the net beyond the Sasikala family and cracking down on corruption at the highest levels.

Adding to the credibility issue is the evident lack of serious follow-up on searches made earlier. Within weeks of Jayalalithaa's death, Income Tax officials conducted searches against the then Chief Secretary, P. Rama Mohana Rao, and claimed to have unearthed assets disproportionate to his known sources of income. But almost a year later, there is little forward movement in the case. Similarly, searches at the properties of Health Minister C. Vijaya Baskar, a confidant of Mr. Dhinakaran, have yielded little in terms of framing of charges. Mr. Baskar remains a Minister, but he is a little warier of associating openly with Mr. Dhinakaran. The political impact of the searches is infinitely greater than their legal consequences. Both factions of the AIADMK seem eager to please the BJP, which does not have much more than a toehold in the State. In the absence of the searches resulting in serious action, the Central enforcement agencies will appear as no more than political weapons in the hands of the BJP. Widening the scope of and deepening the probe consequent to the searches are essential for taking the drive against political corruption to its logical end. Just as important, however, is the need for enforcement agencies to demonstrate their independence and credibility.

Pacific Ocean's 11

The revival of the Trans-Pacific Partnership minus the U.S. opens opportunities for India

Then Donald Trump abandoned the 12-nation Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in his very first week after being sworn in as U.S. President, there were doubts whether the trade agreement, painstakingly negotiated over more than a decade. would survive. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had termed the TPP without the United States - which contributed 60% of the combined Gross Domestic Product of the 12 members – as "meaningless". Ten months on, exactly at a time when Mr. Trump was visiting Vietnam, trade ministers from the remaining 11 nations agreed in Danang in principle to a new pact, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for the Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), revising some of the features of the TPP. For the agreement to take effect, the pact requires domestic ratification, which is expected to be complete by 2019. This major step taken by the 11 countries of the Pacific Rim excluding the U.S. is a reflection of two things. First, these countries recognise that multilateral free trade, contrary to any misgivings, is beneficial in the long run. The TPP in its current form has significant protections for labour and environment and is in this regard an advance over other free trade agreements. Second, the U.S.'s self-exclusion reflects a failure on the part of the Trump administration; studies have shown significant benefits in comparison to minor costs - in terms of jobs – to the U.S. on account of the pact.

As things stand, the pact without the U.S. can only be interpreted as yet another step that diminishes American power and the international order that it has so far led. Already, Mr. Trump's decision to pull out of the Paris climate accord and his repudiation of the Iran nuclear deal have raised suspicions about American commitment to well-negotiated treaties that seek to solve or have solved long-standing issues. Mr. Trump couches his regime's policies as populist nationalism – 'protecting labour' in the case of the abandonment of the TPP, promoting jobs in fossil fuel-intensive sectors to justify the repudiation of the Paris Accord, and retaining American exceptionalism in West Asian policy in scrapping the Iran nuclear deal. While rhetoric to this effect had fuelled his presidential campaign with a heavy dose of populism, the actual effect of going through with these actions has been to create a suspicion among America's allies about his reliability when it comes to standing by old commitments. Mr. Trump's agenda to pull his country out of multilateral agreements has coincided, ironically, with the rise of China as the leading world power promoting globalisation. Now the ASEANplus-six Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), on which China is pushing for an agreement, could benefit from complementarities with the CPTPP. India, which is also negotiating the RCEP, must utilise this opportunity to win concessions on services trade liberalisation as part of the plan.

The other side of an election

Mention of the 2002 riots or secularism is strangely absent in the Gujarat campaign



SHIV VISVANATHAN

ne of the biggest casualties of the Gujarat elections is memory. The manner in which the polity is remembered and the act of contestation visualised completely erases the riots of 2002. The clerically minded might say that the file is closed, and the Special Investigation Team's report has cleared Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was Chief Minister at the time. However, I do not think we are talking about the guilt of one man; rather, one is discussing the aftermath of an act of violence and how it filters into the layers of our memory, colouring everyday behaviour.

As one reads editorials, it is as if the riots never happened, or people write as if some great act of sublimation or exorcism has taken place. These riots were different. They affected ordinary life and even the mentality of Ahmedabad. In a sense it was a civic and cosmic catastrophe that is regarded as politically incorrect to talk about.

Telling stories

A few small stories from the aftermath might illustrate what I am worried about. The first comes from a concerned mother, a schoolteacher who asked me to talk to her children. She was concerned about the new metaphors and attitudes that had infected them. She had two children, the older was a girl of 12 and the younger a boy of 10. She said every time the two fought, the boy would tell the girl, "If you do not listen to



did to Muslims." The normalcy of rape and murder occupies a different colouration. One wonders whether a society recovers easily from such violence.

I remember a driver who was ferrying me around Ahmedabad, a gentle man, 30-ish and extremely informative and helpful. He drove us around the riot-hit areas and would keenly listen to our discussions about our interviews with victims and survivors. A few weeks later he was driving us across Ellis Bridge and he suddenly stopped midway. He said, "I have to tell you something. I was one of them. I joined the crowd during the riots. What should I do?" I was flabbergasted and yet impressed by the honesty of the man. At that moment, I sensed that Gujarat has never returned to normal after 2002. Instead it has followed an artificial process of normalisation, with the victim forced to abandon his sense of loss.

A façade of normalcy makes the society feel surreal. It also reveals that 2002 was not an example of the usual ritual of a riot, where victims return to the neighbourhood after a while. Tens of thousands of people did not return to their

homes. These riots were also exterminist in nature. They sought the elimination rather than suppression of an ethnic group.

There has been an attempt to suppress the narratives of both victim and witness. I remember a woman being asked by a member of an audience in a TV programme why she did not return to normalcy and forget things. She answered, "I want to but you won't let me.'

Probably one of the most ironic and poignant of these stories comes from R.B. Sreekumar, the police officer who took a courageous stand against the regime. He is a gregarious character who loves discussion. His wife told me that every time he went for a walk in Gandhinagar, bureaucrats in the park shied away from him. The stigma of bearing testimony is attached to witness and survivor.

How to move on?

I am not saying that one should not forget, that it is unhealthy to move on. Such memory erodes and can become acidic. But erasure and amnesia are not normal processes. They reveal the ailments of a society that is too quick to accept the logic and rationale of violence. Behind such normalisation is also a atiya Janata Party (BJP) is too powerful and the dissenter an easily disposable fragment of vulner-

Yet the communal card is not a tactic the BJP is going to forget, especially as the patina of development wears thin. As Congress Vice-President Rahul Gandhi becomes unpredictably impressive, as local politicians find usable issues, the BIP might begin to play its old games. In fact, ethnicity has almost been suppressed as an issue, and caste in its multifarious aspects has played out. In Gujarat today, there is a Dalit issue, a Patidar issue, and the BJP has long worked its spell around Mandir and Mandal. But as its Mandal charm wears thin, it might reveal its older and truer colours. In fact, one senses both a fear of talking about violence and a fear of such a violence. As politics changes and the current stalemates wear out, the BJP is bound to be tempted to return to its ancestral self, its attempts at a civility of table manners worn out by this reassertion of its primordial historical self.

The Congress's abdication

There is a second failure of a more drastic kind, and it is the failure of the word secular. By tacit agreement, it is the new taboo word of Indian politics with the Congress, which once thrived on it, now completely wary of its use. Secularism as an electoral idea seems a nostalgia. It is as if the word secular is a ticket to doom and people are tired of the word and its connotations. The abandonment of the word secular is another epochal but unnoticed moment in this election. The wariness of Opposition parties to use this term is a tribute to the impact of the BJP in rewriting the discourse of politics, and it has also

become an index of the cowardice and tiredness of an Opposition which has lost its chutzpah and imagination.

The silence of the lambs about broader issues and values has affected the quality of debate in many ways. The election is more a battle of interests rather than a debate about a future vision of society. It is reduced to a numbers game. One senses it particularly around two other silences. First, it is the somnolence of the Gandhian imagination. By beating the Patel drum, a Gandhian frame almost seems secondary to Gujarat. Gandhi appears like a secondary figure in the BJP pantheon. One senses a failure of the Gandhian imagination in confronting Mr. Modi and even a readiness to be appropriated. Second, the silence around the global controversies surrounding the Adani efforts seems intriguing. The controversy around the Carmichael coal mine has become a major environmental and rights issue in Australia but it has created few questions in Guiarat, Worse, the slow appropriation of the coast line raises little tremor of doubt.

The 2019 frame

There is a final element in this narrative. People mention it almost as an afterthought. It is the fear and silences around politics. The BJP is not only majoritarian but seems inevitable for 2019. Dissenters, minorities, many democrats express a sense of fear but as footnotes. My fear is that these events that look like footnotes will one day determine the future of our politics.

Shiv Visvanathan is Professor, Iindal Global Law School and Director, Centre

More than just a counting game

Urban India must focus on more than toilets to address sanitation woes



KAVITA WANKHADE

esterday, November 19, 2017, was World Toilet Day, with the theme 'Wastewater and Faecal Sludge Management'. There is greater awareness about the importance of using toilets, largely due to the Swachh Bharat Mission launched in 2014, so much so that even Bollywood capitalised on this topic in the recent film Toilet - Ek Prem Katha, where a marriage is saved thanks to toilets. However, in real life, the sanitation story only begins with toilets, something clearly stated by the targets under the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals. These targets are not just about 'toilets' but also suggest improvements to the entire cycle of sanitation, which certainly begins with toilets but has to end with safe waste disposal.

Four stage cycle

Sanitation is intrinsically linked to health, and unless faecal waste is treated properly and disposed of safely, it will make us sick either by contaminating our sources of

drinking water or getting into the food chain. The full cycle of sanitation has four stages: access to toilets; safe containment; conveyance either through the sewerage network or de-sludging trucks, and treatment and disposal. The waste needs to be handled safely at each of these stages in order to gain public health benefits.

Urban India faces considerable gaps along the full cycle of sanitation. One probable reason was the belief that sewerage and sewage treatment systems could be built in all cities. Sewerage refers to fully sealed underground pipes, and must not be confused with open storm water drains that are supposed to carry only rainwater. After decades of investment, India has managed to connect only a little more than a third of its urban households, most of which are located in metropolitan cities, to sewerage systems. This is because sewerage systems and sewage treatment plants (STPs) - a preferred system in most western countries – are not only expensive but are also complicated to main-

An alternative to sewerage systems is something known as on-site systems. Septic tanks and pit latrines, which are prevalent in many Indian households, fall into this category. If these systems are de-



signed, constructed and managed properly, they can be perfectly safe options. Safe containment, collection and treatment is known as septage management or faecal sludge management (FSM), and is being increasingly recognised by the Government of India as a viable

Multi-stage challenges

Though viable, there are several challenges for FSM across all

Emerging evidence from across the country indicates that on-site systems are not constructed properly. While the designs of 'septic' tanks and leach pits have been set out in standards issued in government documents, houseowners and masons are often not aware of these. The most severe consequence of these poorly designed pits is the potential contamination

of groundwater. In addition, they are not de-sludged at regular intervals. Faecal waste needs to be transported using de-sludging vehicles (and not manually) but only some States, Tamil Nadu for example, have these vehicles. Once collected, the waste needs to treated properly to ensure that it does not land up in our lakes and rivers. There aren't enough treatment facilities to guarantee proper treatment of the sludge.

A way forward

After the National Urban Sanitation Policy (NUSP) in 2008, a national Septage Management (FSSM) was released earlier this year. Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Odisha have released State-wide septage management guidelines and taken concrete steps to execute these policies. While de-sludging vehicles and robust informal markets exist for de-sludging services in some States, others are either procuring vehicles for their urban local bodies or encouraging private players to get into this.

Raising awareness about correct design and construction practices of on-site systems (new and legacy) will perhaps remain the biggest hurdle in the years to come. But, urban local bodies and State governments could start by ensuring

that the larger containment systems such as community toilets and public toilets are properly constructed and managed. In addition, permission could be granted to new buildings, especially large apartment complexes only when the applicants show proper septage construction designs. The safety of sanitary workers who clean tanks and pits must be ensured by enforcing occupational safety precautions and the use of personal protective equipment as set out in the law. The last two suggestions are actions for us as citizens. As home-owners and residpolicy on Faecal Sludge and ents, our tanks and pits must be emptied regularly, thereby preventing leaks and overflow. We must ask our governments to invest in creating treatment facilities that our cities can afford.

Let us move beyond the cute poop emojis on our smartphones and make this an acceptable discussion topic in the drawing room. Maybe the biggest victory will come when citizens realise that the focus needs to be on more than just

Kavita Wankhade works at the Indian Institute for Human Settlements, Bangalore, and is part of the Tamil Nadu Urban Sanitation Support Programm (TNUSSP) in Chennai. The views

unearthed is mind-boggling.

questions asked about the

There are bound to be

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.

harbour bacteria, Bacteria

grow in this waste which

serves as a culture media.

Liquid waste management

regulated in India and is a

sovereign rating is definitely

a shot in the arm for the

in mortuaries is not

serious violation of

Pollution hot spot

Distressing reports of antibiotic pollution call for urgent steps to curb pollution and create awareness about the growing reality of antibioticresistant bacteria ('Ground Zero' page - "The superbugs of Hyderabad", November 18). Special cells can be created within our respective pollution control boards to monitor pharmaceutical industry waste and ensure that the issue gets undivided attention. The red line campaign - of marking a red line on antibiotic prescriptions in order to help curb their irrational usage – was lauded at the global level. The campaign needs to be intensified. Finally, a collaborative and participative approach between the pharmaceutical sector and the public will check the growing misuse of antibiotics. ARCHANA VENKATAMADHVARAJ,

■ The detailed article has established beyond reasonable doubt that the efficacy of existing antibiotics to treat infections

Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu

bacterial cultures in which organisms are susceptible to no other drug except colistin these days. The infamous case of NDM-1 haunts researchers studying antimicrobial resistance. It is a fact that the hazardous levels of antibiotic effluents from the pharma industry are a potent source of the emergence of antimicrobial resistance. Interestingly, there is also untreated liquid waste from mortuaries being disposed of, untreated, into water bodies which is leading to a toxic explosion of resistant bacteria. This is the case with a general hospital in Hyderabad which dumps its waste in the Musi. Autopsy procedures generate blood, shreds of tissue and necrosed flesh as waste, which is then washed into the drains. When all these join sewers which

contain hospital waste,

another story happens. As

blood and flesh are a rich

culture media for bacteria,

in-patients. Sewer lines also

hospital waste contains

antibiotics excreted by

suboptimal levels of

is almost reaching the end.

Very often we, as medical

practitioners, come across

Biomedical Waste Management Rules. DR. KATTAMREDDY ANANTH RUPESH, Moody's nod Moody's upgrade, no doubt. will come as great relief to the Modi government (Editorial - "Timely recognition", November 18). However, before going overboard about the rating, one needs to ask a few questions: whose interests have rating agencies such as Moody's traditionally served? Are they bothered about the pattern of jobless growth? Do they care about who bears the brunt of "ease

It is only just and fair that Indira Gandhi's of doing business"? Is there contributions to the nation a place in their metric for are always weighed against the mounting economic her undemocratic inequality in the country imposition of the and the social tensions and Emergency and brazen conflicts it can engender? introduction of the culture MANOHAR ALEMBATH. of dynastic succession in Indian politics. This legacy continues to do incalculable ■ The upgradation of India's harm to the nation and our

democracy ("Such a long

legacy", November 18). She

government, Moreover, a higher GDP growth rate forecast would do a world of good to India's economy. While accolades pour in from around the world in appreciation of the government's firm steps such as GST and demonetisation, the Opposition is only showing that it is on a weak footing by even calling reports of independent agencies as "fixed". It shows the frustration that has crept in. There will be short-term sacrifices for long-term good. The period of policy paralysis under the previous political dispensation is still fresh in our minds. AJIT K. MENON,

Operation clean-up Indira Gandhi's legacy value of the assets

of V.K. Sasikala have not come as a surprise. The

The raids by the Income Tax department on properties owned by family members

could easily be called the

first autocrat of free India.

National Congress, which

fiefdom. Her policies did

irreparable damage to our

institutions. The chieftains

dynastic parties in India owe

a great debt of gratitude to

succession in politics. Her

most grievous fault is that

expressed remorse or regret

she never felt sorry or

She made the Indian

won freedom for the

country, her family's

and dynasts of all the

her for ushering in the

culture of dynastic

for her misdeeds.

C.G. KURIAKOSE, Kothamangalam, Kerala

extent of corruption within the AIADMK, from its tallest leader down to Ministers. There have been a series of incidents such as the ostentatious wedding of the foster son of Jayalalithaa, the acquisition of vast amounts of property, the Koovathur resort episode, the dark happenings in the run-up to the R.K. Nagar by-election, and IT raids which show that there is much to be probed in the party's affairs. Under the circumstances, one expects the Income Tax department and other enforcement agencies to do their duty. This would help partymen who are clean to prove their innocence. THARCIUS S. FERNANDO,

MORE LETTERS ONLINE:

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

The Centre had acquired 20 million tonnes [of pulses] at market rates or minimum support price, said a front-page report – "Govt. abolishes curbs on export of pulses" (Nov. 17, 2017). The correct

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