



Hope in Darjeeling

The Union and West Bengal governments and the GJM must urgently begin tripartite talks

With a breakthrough ending the 104-day-long blockade in the Darjeeling hills, the Union and West Bengal governments must move forthwith to consolidate the 'truce' and address the setback to livelihoods and the local economy suffered over this period. The announcement on ending the bandh came from Bimal Gurung of the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha, which had led the agitation. Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh's appeal to the protesters and his tentative offer of talks brought about this turnaround, but it is his specific mention of the beleaguered Mr. Gurung, who has been on the run from the West Bengal police, that made the difference. The blockade had severely hit life in the hill districts, and it is clear that local support for the agitation was waning. A section of the GJM, led by Binay Tamang, had shown an inclination to negotiate with the State government. In a move to cash in on the differences within the GJM, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had, a week ago, named Mr. Tamang the chairperson of a new board of administrators to head the now-defunct Gorkhaland Territorial Administration, which had been set up in 2012 as a semi-autonomous body with substantive powers. This followed statements from Mr. Tamang asking for a pause in the stir pending talks between the State government and rebel GJM members and allies. Mr. Gurung now found an opening in Mr. Singh's appeal. While the Minister did not commit to "tripartite talks" on the separate statehood issue as demanded by the GJM, he promised discussions on other issues while impliedly recognising the leadership of the official faction. That the blockade truly ended after Mr. Gurung's call suggests that the official faction of the GJM enjoys considerably more support in the hills than the rebels.

The current impasse is a direct outcome of the failure to substantively devolve power to the GTA as promised. While this summer's agitation was sparked by grievances over Ms. Banerjee's initial statement about Bengali being made a compulsory language of study in the State, the stir revived the demand for statehood. Put together, the maximalist position of the agitators, the discomfort within the BJP government at the Centre on officially responding to such aspirations, and Ms. Banerjee's ploy of using the issue to sharpen a Bengali chauvinist appeal in the rest of the State to gain more support for her Trinamool Congress, all contributed to the stalemate. Mr. Singh's appeal provided a face-saver to the GJM. The State government has suggested that it is not averse to tripartite talks over some of the GJM's demands, but it is not clear whether Ms. Banerjee will agree to talk to Mr. Gurung. Talks involving the Centre, the State government and the GJM are, however, essential. This is the best mechanism to discuss the empowerment of the GTA, which is necessary to address the grievances of the residents of Darjeeling.

Tokyo dreams

Shinzo Abe's decision to call parliamentary elections early could prove to be a gamble

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has gambled his career by calling snap elections to the Lower House of the Japanese Diet in late-October. The term of the House would have ordinarily lasted another year, but he clearly senses a turn in the popular breeze in his favour. Whether the electorate will vindicate his judgment, however, may well depend on the grit and tenacity of his challenger, Tokyo's first woman Governor, Yuriko Koike. The former television anchor achieved an unprecedented feat last year by taking the city's top job, trouncing the official nominee of Mr. Abe's Liberal Democratic Party in a triangular race. Ever since, Ms. Koike, who had served briefly as defence minister during Mr. Abe's first term in 2006-07, has become accustomed to thriving in a crisis. In a repeat of her growing penchant to take on a male-dominated establishment, Ms. Koike floated a local party earlier this year, which spectacularly captured the Tokyo city assembly in July. Now, following the surprise announcement of polls to the Lower House of the Diet, she has launched the Party of Hope, drawing a number of parliamentarians from across the spectrum, including the ruling camp. She has even pledged that her new party would field candidates across the country. In fact, Ms. Koike has been quick to exploit Mr. Abe's decision to seek a fresh mandate more than a year in advance as merely a device to shore up power.

But the Tokyo Governor, in turn, would also be mindful of criticism that she is abandoning her current responsibilities with the plunge into national politics. This is especially so given the coming Olympic Games in Tokyo in 2020, and any impression that she is abdicating the preparatory work could be damaging. Meanwhile, the divided and demoralised opposition Democratic Party, in the midst of a leadership crisis, could work to project Mr. Abe as a symbol of relative stability especially at a time when the North Korean crisis shows no sign of abating. His own personal ratings have also seen a remarkable revival, after allegations of his links to controversial transactions in a land deal had led to a significant dip in opinion polls. The Prime Minister still has his share of challenges to contend with. A new anti-conspiracy legislation to combat terrorism was criticised for lack of public scrutiny and for incorporating intrusive provisions on individual privacy and free speech. Even if he can win a re-election, regaining the current two-thirds majority for his party is far from certain. Such a tally is critical for Mr. Abe to legislate the controversial revision to Japan's pacifist constitution, over which he has staked his reputation. In substantial terms, though, voters may have little to choose between the conservative nationalist stances advocated by Mr. Abe and Ms. Koike.

The activist and the intellectual

When the moral temperature of a society falls, as it has globally in recent times, activists will arise



SUNDAR SARUKKAI

It is ironic that those who have always been an essential catalyst for a just society have also been those who have been kept at its margins. Activists have become increasingly unpopular and have become the targets of an upwardly mobile middle class. It is difficult to understand this phenomenon: why would those who have a comfortable life get so angry and upset at those who sacrifice their personal well-being for the good of others? The public and government reaction against NGOs, the killing of social activists, the cynicism towards those who decide not to follow the mainstream are all part of this larger trend, a symptom of the silent corporatisation of society itself.

In the line of attack

Intellectuals, including artists and academics, also bear the brunt of this hatred. As many have pointed out, it has never been as difficult as it is now to disagree about something without being called names. These are symptoms of what our society is becoming. As a society, we lack a culture of protest, whether in the public or in institutions. Disagreeing with a policy is always misinterpreted as if it is an attack on individuals associated with that policy.

It is not easy being an activist, although it is somewhat easier being an intellectual. The activist is in the middle of conflicts while the intellectual is in the midst of the world



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of ideas and scholarship. Historically, this tension is powerfully manifested in the apparent opposition between 'thinking' and 'doing'. The stereotype is that activists 'do' while intellectuals 'think'.

Like almost everything else, this is not an Either-Or situation. There are good arguments for supporting the view that some intellectual activity, especially that which develops new vocabulary and arguments for social change, helps activism. Similarly, major agents of social change have often contributed to the creation of new perspectives on society which academics have not been able to.

Nevertheless this tension persists. Activists working with a variety of marginalised groups often believe that scholarship and 'theory' is of little use to them. Intellectuals, on their part, seem to have got cocooned inside their academic spaces or other elite spaces with very little engagement with the people and the situations that they write about. This has led to a rejection of intellectuals by many activists, and a benign neglect of activists by the intellectuals.

However, there is an important difference between both these acts. There is something special to

the domain of activism which a knowledge-based intellectual activity does not have.

Being an activist

Becoming an intellectual is a long process and is often dependent on access to education as well as resources of various kinds. A school student will not be considered an intellectual but she can be an activist. She can join marches, shout slogans and write blogs. The opportunity to be an activist is more easily available. There is something more democratic and egalitarian about activism as compared to intellectualism, a feature which has often led to cynicism about intellectuals.

The idea of an organic intellectual, drawing from Gramsci's original use of this term, can be understood as a mediation between these extremes. The history of activism in India has shown us that some of the greatest activists have also been organic intellectuals. Nevertheless, this invocation of the organic intellectual is itself a response to the specific privilege of being an intellectual.

I believe that there is one significant difference between the activist and the intellectual. An activist

may or may not be a scholar. But what she does is far more important than the scholar because her action is most fundamentally a moral action. On the other hand, an intellectual's action is most often an epistemic action, an action that is concerned with information and knowledge.

An activist acts on behalf of, and with, others. In most cases, activists work with the dispossessed and the marginalised. They can imagine a better world for those the larger society forgets about and, in doing this, they sacrifice something. Their actions are not geared towards personal benefit but for the benefit of communities and individuals with whom they can stand in solidarity. For an intellectual's action to become moral, it needs the intervention of activists.

All activism involves a sense of giving and giving-up something. While 'normal' individuals in a society act in order to benefit themselves or their family, activists often act against their own interests. Often the actions of the activist improves the well-being of others (who are not just family and friends) more than that of the activist herself. And this is the real strength of an activist. Her actions are not rationally utilitarian but morally robust, as powerfully exemplified by countless activists who have worked with labour, women, the marginalised and the dispossessed.

This is the important skill that differentiates an activist and the intellectual. When a student goes on a protest, she is picking up an important skill — that of developing a moral sense of the social, a sense of concern and respect for others who may or may not be in a situation like hers. Her actions have

the benefit of others as her good. And this sense, akin to the truth or soul force as Gandhi would call it, is the most important quality of being an activist.

The intellectual does not possess this necessarily, although some intellectuals have a deep sense of the moral. The history of intellectual labour has consistently removed the moral from the accumulation of knowledge. This is best exemplified by science and the creation of scientific knowledge decoupled from moral considerations. Academic intellectualism is clever, deep in knowledge and understanding but less so in its moral force. Organic intellectualism can be seen as an attempt to put back the moral within this pursuit of knowledge.

So when the larger society falls in its moral sense or when its intellectuals ignore moral action, activists will arise to counter them. When the moral temperature of a society falls, as it has globally in recent times, activists will arise. If this does not happen, the moral force of a society gets depleted. It is only the activists who can make sure that the moral skills of a society do not vanish. It is activists, who give up their personal, material comforts for the larger values of dignity, respect and equality of individuals in a society, who can function as the moral compass for others. Activists and intellectuals are essential to protecting the society from two of the greatest dangers — power and profit. Getting rid of such people is to compromise our present as well as the future of our society.

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Expanding the common ground

James Mattis' visit buttressed the growing India-U.S. convergence on regional and global security issues



HARSH V. PANT

Hours after U.S. Secretary of Defence James Mattis landed in Kabul, he was welcomed with six rockets landing near Kabul's international airport, as if to remind Washington what's at stake in the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan. This visit came weeks after the Trump administration unveiled its South Asia strategy which in many ways marks a radical departure from the past by putting Pakistan on notice and bringing India to the centre stage of Washington's Afghanistan policy.

This was reinforced by Gen. Mattis during his visit to India this week when he suggested India and the U.S. would work together to fight terrorism. "There can be no tolerance of terrorist safe havens," he said. "As global leaders, India and the United States resolve to work together to eradicate this scourge." While announcing his new Afghanistan policy, U.S. President Donald Trump had mentioned, "We appreciate India's important contributions to stability in Afghanistan, but India makes billions of dollars in trade with the U.S., and we want them to help us more with Afghanistan, especially in the area of economic assistance

and development."

In line with this, Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman made it clear that while "there shall not be boots from India on the ground in Afghanistan," New Delhi will be stepping up its development and capacity-building engagement with Afghanistan.

Wider role in Kabul

India has decided to take up 116 "high-impact community development projects" in 31 provinces of Afghanistan. India and Afghanistan have also agreed to "strengthen security cooperation", with New Delhi agreeing "to extend further assistance for the Afghan national defence and security forces in fighting the scourge of terrorism, organised crime, trafficking of narcotics and money laundering". India will be training Afghan police officers along with Afghan soldiers. This is aimed at sending out a message to Pakistan, which continues to assert that India has "zero political and military role" in Afghanistan.

After handing over four attack helicopters to Kabul as part of its assistance package, India is keen to expand the scope of its security cooperation with Afghanistan which had remained limited in the past not only due to geographical constraints, but also due to Washington's desire to limit India's security engagement in the country.

The U.S. is sending about 3,000 more troops to Afghanistan, most of which are preparing to arrive in



REUTERS

the coming weeks. "A lot is riding on this of course as we look toward how do we put an end to this fighting and the threat of terrorism to the Afghan people," Gen. Mattis said in Kabul. "We are here to set the military and security conditions for that but recognise ultimately the responsibility for the Afghan leadership to step up and fully own the war."

The convergence between India and the U.S. on Pakistan has evolved at an extraordinary pace. The Trump administration's hardline approach on Pakistan's support for terrorism comes at a time when New Delhi has led an active global campaign to marginalise Islamabad and bring its role as a state sponsor of terrorism to the forefront of the global community. During Gen. Mattis' visit, Ms. Sitharaman reminded the U.S. that "the very same forces which did find safe haven in Pakistan were the forces that hit New York as well as Mumbai". Mr. Trump had made it clear that Washington "can no longer be silent about Pakistan's safe havens for terrorist organisations, the

Taliban and other groups that pose a threat to the region and beyond". The Xiemen BRICS declaration earlier this month also listed Pakistan-based terror organisations for the first time. It is not surprising, therefore, that Pakistan's Foreign Minister has had to admit that terrorist Hafiz Saeed and terror group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) are a "liability" for his country and for the South Asian region.

Stronger ties with U.S.

The visit of Gen. Mattis also underscored the growing salience of defence ties in shaping the trajectory of Indo-U.S. relations. Washington is no longer coy about selling sensitive military technologies to India. China's growing assertiveness in the wider Indo-Pacific is a shared concern and this was reflected in the reiteration by the two countries of the critical importance of freedom of navigation, overflight and unimpeded lawful commerce in the global commons. Bilateral defence ties have been growing in recent years, "underpinned by a strategic convergence". As Gen. Mattis suggested, the U.S. is looking forward to "sharing some of our most advanced defence technologies" with India "to further deepen the robust defence trade and technology collaboration between our defence industries."

The sale of 22 Sea Guardian Unmanned Aerial Systems, which was announced during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the U.S. earlier this year, is high on the

agenda. With this deal, the Indian Navy will not only acquire the world's most advanced maritime reconnaissance drone, it will also lead to greater defence technology sharing.

As India and the U.S. expand military cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, new alignments are emerging which have the potential to reshape the regional security architecture. In the past, India had been reluctant to play an active role in East and Southeast Asia. Now as part of its 'Act East' policy, India's engagement with the region has become more robust and Washington has been encouraging India to shape the regional strategic realities more potently. At a time when regional security in the wider Indo-Pacific has taken a turn for the worse, the U.S. is looking at India to shore up its presence in the region. And India, driven by China's growing profile around its periphery, is keen to take up that challenge.

Gen. Mattis' visit has highlighted the growing convergence between the U.S. and India on key regional and global security issues. As the two nations move ahead with their ambitious plans, the challenge will be to sustain the present momentum given the myriad distractions that Washington and New Delhi have to contend with.

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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.

Debating the economy

Home Minister Rajnath Singh, responding to former Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha's criticisms of the government's handling of the economy, said that India is one of the fastest-growing economies ("Congress hails Yashwant Sinha's take on economy", Sept. 28). But we must not forget facts. The problem began when the Prime Minister and the Finance Minister began to assume the role of economists and introduced massive changes. First, there was suspicion that Raghuram Rajan was asked to exit as he did not seek a second term as Governor of the Reserve Bank. Then the government introduced demonetisation, which threw many out of their jobs and hit the informal sector. Then it lowered fixed deposit rates to afford easy loans and created bad debts. The Goods and Services Tax has hammered

small and medium enterprises. These are facts, and the government must not ignore criticism.

BIDYUT KUMAR CHATTERJEE, Faridabad

First former Union Minister Arun Shourie came down heavily on the government, saying it is only "managing headlines", not the economy. He called demonetisation the greatest blunder in 70 years. Then Subramanian Swamy cautioned that the economy is heading for a major depression and said corrective measures must be taken immediately before it "crashes". And now Yashwant Sinha has criticised the government. Empirical data suggest that all these critics aren't far off the mark in their allegations. Multiple economic indicators and trends emerging from different sectors show that the economic problem is

serious and difficult to ignore, even for the most ardent of Mr. Modi's fans.

R. SRIVAKUMAR, Chennai

Buying diesel online

The Petroleum Ministry's decision to deliver diesel at customers' doorsteps seems unplanned ("Soon, you will be able to order diesel online", Sept. 28). There is great risk involved in handling and storage of petroleum products: they can cause serious damage to people and the environment. There are concerns of fire and adulteration of the fuel. India is still a developing country. We still don't have the kind of infrastructure that developed countries have, so we must not try to ape them.

JAMES EDWIN THOMSON, Chennai

The Central government seems to be suffering from

some online mania. Drivers never complain that it is difficult to take their trucks to bunks to fill tanks. To fill fuel tanks of individual trucks, diesel trucks are going to be driven around creating traffic jams and fire risks. This is a ridiculous move and a cruel joke on people who are already suffering from unreasonably high domestic fuel prices. Wouldn't it be better for the government to come up with a scheme to drop off rations at the doorsteps of the poor?

P. VIJAYACHANDRAN, Thiruvananthapuram

Letting women drive

In a modern world, half the population still faces discrimination ("Women rejoice as Saudi ban ends", Sept. 28). Saudi Arabia has enabled women to drive finally. But it isn't the only country to have such a feudal mindset. Patriarchy

is embedded everywhere, including in India where a khap panchayat dictates that girls should not speak on mobile phones nor wear jeans. Even the so-called world's superpower, the U.S., has not had a single woman President. While Saudi Arabia has a long way to go in achieving equality, India meanwhile must focus on making huge strides too. Without political representation, social and economic equality can't be attained. Parliament must pass the Women's Reservation Bill.

DIWAKAR P. TIWARI, Satna

The U.S. and terrorism

Every word spoken by the Pakistan Foreign Minister is true ("Hafiz Saeed, Lashkar a liability: Pak. Minister", Sept. 28). While terrorists seek refuge in Pakistan, it is true that many terrorists were Western allies during the last decades of the Cold War and supported them in the fight against the Soviet Union. If the U.S. is not ready to accept its responsibility in giving rise to terrorism, no wrong can be corrected.

KIRAN BARASAHEB RANSING, New Delhi

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CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS: >> In a report headlined, "Student launches campaign to change fate of village" (some editions, September 28, 2017), the river mentioned in the second paragraph should have been *Chambal* instead of *Yamuna*.

It is the policy of The Hindu to correct significant errors as soon as possible. Please specify the edition (place of publication), date and page. The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300 (11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday); Fax: +91-44-28552963; E-mail: readerseditor@thehindu.co.in; Mail: Readers' Editor, The Hindu, Kasturi Buildings, 859 & 860 Anna Salai, Chennai 600 002, India. All communication must carry the full postal address and telephone number. No personal visits. The Terms of Reference for the Readers' Editor are on www.thehindu.com