



Temple timing

The Centre should not create a political crisis over the Ram temple issue

As the Lok Sabha election draws nearer, the Bharatiya Janata Party and affiliates of the Sangh Parivar have begun mobilisation in the name of a Ram temple at Ayodhya. This is part of an attempt to force a political solution to what is essentially a legal dispute over the title of the land where the Babri Masjid once stood. The show of muscle at the Dharma Sabha of the Vishva Hindu Parishad in Ayodhya was clearly intended to pressure the executive, the judiciary, and the various stakeholders in the dispute to pave the way for the construction of the temple. Although the Supreme Court is seized of the issue, the Sabha appealed to the Muslim community to give up their claims to the land in dispute, and urged the government to expedite the process for construction. The court is due to fix in January 2019 a date for hearing the title suit appeals, and a ruling in the case is unlikely before the general election. But the Sabha was told that the date for the building of the temple would be announced at the 2019 Kumbh Mela. Clearly, for the Hindutva outfits at the forefront of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, the question is when, and not if, a Ram temple will come up at the disputed site. There is no sign of a willingness to wait for, and abide by, the Supreme Court verdict.

BJP president Amit Shah has been reported as saying that the party will wait for the Supreme Court's hearing in January. But the party has been anything but unequivocal about this position, lending the impression that it is courting a political constituency by speaking in more than one voice. The absence of a clear denial that it is not considering an ordinance as a solution to the legal dispute is another instance of equivocation. Any attempt to bypass the legal process through an executive order will be ill-advised and likely to be struck down by the court. But in a situation where political signalling is what counts, many in the BJP-led government might indeed contemplate such a course. That the government would have liked to have the case decided before the election was made clear by Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself when he charged that the Congress had scared the judges of the Supreme Court from giving an early judgment by threatening impeachment. Mr. Modi gave little credit to the Supreme Court in framing the issue in this manner, but his statement is an indication of the political pressures that are brought to bear on this case. The BJP also faces political intimidation on the issue from its far-right ally, the Shiv Sena, which is calling for action on the issue, saying that the government had slept over it for the last four years. The proper course for all stakeholders in the dispute, including political parties, is to step back and leave the issue to the Supreme Court to rule on, and not to stare down the Muslim community. Any attempt to polarise the country over this case must be resisted at every level.

Magnificent Mary

With a sixth World Championship gold, Kom affirms her place as one the greatest boxers

M.C. Mary Kom enhanced her already legendary status when she defeated Ukraine's Hanna Okhota in the 48 kg segment of the Women's World Boxing Championship in Delhi on Saturday. It was her sixth gold across World Championships, drawing her level with Félix Savón, the Cuban great who ruled amateur boxing in the 1980s and 1990s. Kom has always defied the odds. She has busted gender stereotypes, and overcome the odds posed by the lack of resources and poor infrastructure that hold back so much athletic talent in India. In doing so, she firmed up Manipur's place on India's talent map, brought India on the world boxing landscape, and reinforced women's sport by winning consistently with exceptional determination and grace. Kom, who is now 35 and a mother of three, has had a good 2018, winning her maiden Commonwealth Games gold medal earlier this year. She extended that form in Delhi and cemented her place in the history of the World Championships with an overall haul of seven medals, including a silver on debut in 2001. A bronze medallist at the 2012 London Olympics, Kom said that the latest of her six world titles, secured after a gap of eight years, was the toughest of them all. It has come at a time when the competition has risen manifold following the inclusion of women's boxing as an event in the Olympics in 2012. Kom, who got past other strong opponents before clinching the bout against Okhota, also had to bear the additional pressure of the expectations of home crowds.

In the event, the victory has fuelled further expectations from this late-career burst. Kom will switch to the 51 kg weight class in the pursuit of a medal at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. As a Rajya Sabha member of Parliament and idol for many upcoming women boxers, she has a full schedule, and will be aware that it will take all she has to fight with younger and stronger rivals in a higher weight category. Hailed as 'Magnificent Mary' by the International Boxing Association, which has chosen her as its representative in the International Olympic Committee athletes' forum, Kom has been an inspiration globally. Her rise from a humble background to be an international role model has inspired a book and a Hindi movie chronicling her life. Raffaele Bergamasco, the India coach, sums up Kom's legend with these words, "Mary in boxing is like Maradona in football." The gender comparison is crucial too – at a time when the women's competition at diverse levels and different sporting events is being sought to be placed on a par with the men's, in terms of infrastructural support and remuneration, Mary Kom's record will indeed give heart to all women athletes.

Yet another fiasco in J&K

New Delhi must not allow the downward spiral to continue through to the general election



RADHA KUMAR

Last week's dramatic development – of Jammu and Kashmir Governor Satya Pal Malik's decision to dissolve the Legislative Assembly immediately after rival parties staked claims to form a government – was so patently wrong as to be outrageous. What was Governor Malik thinking?

The question is, of course, rhetorical. Mr. Malik's actions clearly reveal what he was thinking. Having given five months to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to try to cobble together a government, the surprise challenge by the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), supported by the National Conference (NC) and the Congress, forced him to reverse course, and hastily dissolve an Assembly that he had kept in suspended animation without once consulting the MLAs.

Strange reasons

The Governor's reasons for dissolution are not only disingenuous, they are downright dangerous. The allegation that political parties with opposing ideologies should not come together can more plausibly be levelled against the coming together of the People's Conference (PC) and the BJP than against the PDP-NC-Congress grouping. The PDP, the NC and the Congress share several common positions, including on confidence-building measures (CBMs), peace talks and safeguarding con-



NISAR AHMAD

stitutional rights. As to horse-trading, it was the PC, with the BJP's support, that succeeded in breaking the PDP and winning over one of the NC's most articulate spokesmen. Irrespective of who was being targeted, however, if a Governor can decide which parties may ally with each other, or take five months to recognise the horse-trading that was an open secret in the Valley, then we might as well give up the pretence of democracy.

More worrying still, what does Mr. Malik mean by the reference to security? Is he suggesting that a PDP-NC-Congress alliance would impact negatively on the "fragile situation" in the Valley? That is a very serious allegation, made even more serious by statements from as senior a BJP leader as Ram Madhav, who also happens to be in charge of Jammu and Kashmir for the party. He tweeted that the three parties received instructions from Pakistan to stake a claim to govern. Absurd as the allegation is, its absurdity does not veil the fact that it is disgusting. What possible grounds can there be for such an accusation, or have we now come to a point where no grounds are required since the purpose is solely to tarnish?

The greatest damage done by

Mr. Malik has been to strengthen Kashmiri cynicism about New Delhi. Most Kashmiri commentators, in any case, argue that there has never been more than a pretence of democracy on the part of New Delhi when it comes to Kashmir. What happened last week vindicates their argument. Sadly, it also represents a return to the dark days of political meddling by the Centre in State politics, a practice that had been gradually relinquished between 2002 and 2014, a period which saw three of the freest and fairest elections in the State. Those years, of partial peace-building, have been forgotten in the Valley.

The the graph has been of rising violence since 2014 not only in the Valley, but in the border districts of Jammu as well. In this volatile situation, the impact of the events of the past six months, from the BJP toppling its coalition government with the PDP to the Governor thwarting the PDP-NC-Congress claim to forming a government, has been disastrous. It has driven even those who sought a peaceful and feasible resolution to the sidelines.

By his actions, Mr. Malik has joined a line of Governors appointed by the BJP-led government at the Centre who have skated far too

close to constitutional red lines, violating the propriety of their office. As numerous constitutional experts have pointed out, this is a fit case for the Supreme Court to overturn a Governor's decision, but there are few Kashmiri parties which wish to go to court. The PC might have greatest reason, but it cannot go against the Governor. The NC, the PDP and the Congress all stand to gain from elections.

Will the Governor try to postpone elections again, on the pretence of security? Violence has increased under his mandate. Governor's (or President's) Rule is rarely more stable than under an elected government, even an unstable coalition as the PDP-BJP combine was. A more coherent coalition – the most likely outcome of Assembly elections – will certainly provide better political conditions for reconciliation than a Governor can, since the latter will have neither the grassroots reach nor the experience of local conditions that the former does.

Time to build confidence

Meantime, it is worth noting that while New Delhi debates Mr. Malik's actions, Kashmiri attention has turned to a low-profile visit by former Norwegian Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik, organised by the Art of Living Foundation. Mr. Bondevik met Mirwaiz Umar Farooq and Syed Ali Shah Geelani, and has now travelled across the Line of Control (LoC) to meet local leaders there. Whether the Narendra Modi government will accept inputs from him is unclear. What is clear is that Kashmiris continue to hold hope for the revival of peace initiatives, irrespective of elections.

Can we read the opening of the Kartarpur corridor across Indian and Pakistani Punjab as a sign of other peace initiatives to come, in particular for Kashmir? The Kartarpur agreement has been widely welcomed by India-Pakistan experts, but the hope that peace initiatives on Kashmir will follow could be misplaced. The Modi government's acceptance of the Kartarpur proposal might have been prompted by the desire to garner credit, especially for its alliance partner, the Shiromani Akali Dal, rather than to pave the way for peacemaking on Kashmir. But in its earlier incarnation, the India-Pakistan peace process combined Punjab to Punjab and Sindh to Rajasthan connectivity with cross-LoC CBMs. Former Army chief General V.K. Singh, who is Minister of State for External Affairs, recently spoke of delinking the Kartarpur corridor from the 26/11 Mumbai attacks case. Why not consider Kashmir CBMs in the same spirit?

Think big

All the factual information – whether political, security, social or economic – shows that the Modi government's counterinsurgency-alone policy has gravely damaged the Valley as well Jammu and Kashmir's relations to the Union. Will the Central government allow this downward spiral to continue through to the national elections next year, with increasing rhetoric on terrorism, anti-national elements and the like, or will it put the interests of the State and the Union first?

Radha Kumar's latest book is 'Paradise at War: a Political History of Kashmir'

Preventing another scuffle

Smooth civil-military relations require delicate oversight through statesmanship



MANMOHAN BAHADUR

In a disturbing incident in Bomdila, Arunachal Pradesh recently, two soldiers of the Indian Army were arrested by the local police and reportedly beaten up for alleged incorrect behaviour during a festival, which was then followed by alleged retaliatory high-handedness by their Army compatriots. This is an apt example of the leadership on both sides not using their superior skills to prevent the unsavoury happenings and living up to the requirement of statecraft. In aviation, for example, there is a maxim, 'a superior pilot is one who uses his superior judgment to avoid situations which require the use of his superior skills'. The term 'statecraft' is important because the leadership at every level of the government is a vital cog in maintaining a harmonious relationship with other arms, all the while respecting the other's domain specialisation.

The Bomdila incident is not the first instance of the civil administration and the military having locked horns. It is just that earlier

incidents did not get publicity in the absence of fast communication. Though the issues were "resolved", tensions have continued to simmer. Social media and near instantaneous communications now amplify the damage, as seen at Bomdila.

Here is another example. Last month, a spokesperson of the Ministry of Defence was sent on leave after a tweet from the spokesperson's official Twitter handle was viewed as an insult by veterans. The controversial tweet, which was in response to a remark made by a former Indian Navy chief, is another example of the attitude of some in the civil administration towards the uniformed forces. The fallout in both cases has been unsavoury to say the least, highlighting the vital intangible called 'civil-military' relations.

There is a delicate thread that links the uniformed and non-uniformed sections. Pride in one's job should not translate to contempt for another's job. The civil administration has challenges that no uniformed person ever faces, such as the pressures from social strife, economic hardships, and law and order. The uniformed services, on the other hand, see themselves as protectors of the nation even at the cost of their own lives. This requires implicit faith of the soldier, the sailor and the airman in their leadership. A com-



REUTERS

mander's order is sacrosanct and a soldier on the front line follows it unflinchingly despite knowing that he could lose his life the next moment. It is this implicit faith that permeates the psyche of a uniformed person based on the belief that his commander is supreme and will always look after his interests as well as those of his family. This is how the military works, by laying emphasis on the point that military effectiveness requires a military culture that is different from that of a civilian's. This is the heart of the 'chip on the shoulder' feeling that drives a soldier to sacrifice his life at his superior's command.

Core issues

So, just as a uniformed force must acknowledge the expertise of the civil administration, so too should the latter respect and ensure that a soldier does feel a bit special. 'Feeling special' is not the customary platitudes on television, politi-

cal rallies and slogans in times of conflict, but in finding solutions to the everyday pressures that a soldier and his family face, such as issues of pay and allowances, precedence with civilian counterparts, a lack of good schooling on account of frequent postings, housing issues, land litigation and the like. This results in healthy civil-military relations.

At the heart of civil-military relations are two questions that Professor Mackubin Owens of the Institute of World Politics, poses in an essay. First, who controls the military and how? Is there civilian control or has it degenerated into civilian bureaucratic control? Second, what degree of military influence is appropriate for a given society? While direct intervention in domestic affairs is a big no, on the other extreme is the utilisation of the armed forces in happenings that should logically come under the civilian domain.

Here is another example. Worrisome air pollution levels in Delhi have been in the news and a Twitter post focussed attention on the lack of faith in the civil bureaucracy in tackling the issue. 'Bring in the army,' said the poster. Not good, I would say, but one can explain this as a follow-up to the Army being called in to construct railway foot overbridges in Mumbai and even clear up litter left behind by tourists in the hills of

north India. There are pitfalls when lionising translates to deification.

Do not deify the military

Deification of the military could lead to resentment among certain sections of society. And here is where the politician comes in: using the armed forces very often as a bulwark to sort out civil issues is detrimental to military philosophy. So also is the absence of oversight to prevent civilian bureaucratic control and delays in resolving the problems service personnel face. The trick is to anticipate and prevent a Bomdila type incident so that 'superior judgment is not required to firefight something that could have been prevented had those superior skills been used at the right time'.

An unequal civil-military dialogue, wherein a soldier begins to doubt his 'uniqueness' (not deification) in society does not bode well for good civil-military relations. Similarly, the important role played by the civilian bureaucracy in governance should be acknowledged. Civil-military relations is an art that require delicate nursing through statesmanship. Good leadership from both sides is the key to preventing new Bomdilas.

Manmohan Bahadur is a retired Air Vice Marshal. The views expressed are personal

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.

Temple pitch

It is indeed frightening to read about the single-minded agenda of the Vishva Hindu Parishad to build a Ram temple at the disputed site in Ayodhya (Page 1, "VHP raises temple pitch in Ayodhya", November 26). And even more frightening to hear the VHP international vice president say: "We want the entire land. The day we get it, there will be peace and happiness in the country and development." This flies in the face of all efforts of the Supreme Court to bring about an amicable settlement to the issue. The VHP appears hell bent on pressuring the government to issue an ordinance to enable temple construction. The Ram temple appears to be an emotive issue only in north India and the VHP is trying to make it a national issue for political gain.

R. RAGHUNATH MENON, Hyderabad

It is strange that the Prime Minister has alleged that "the

Congress threatened Supreme Court judges with impeachment when they tried to hear the Ayodhya dispute cases earlier this year". Given the sudden flurry of activity and charges, it appears that the right wing is beginning to realise that the government's days of absolute parliamentary majority are numbered. Hence this is the last chance before the general election to turn on the heat as far as the temple is concerned.

BIDYUT KUMAR CHATTERJEE, Faridabad, Haryana

The desperation in the BJP camp to somehow capture and corrupt the minds of the electorate by feeding them doses of Ram mandir and statue issues is palpable ("Page 1, "U.P. to build Ram statue", November 26). Mr. Modi's claims about the Congress are quite far-fetched. Why should the judiciary be apprehensive of the Congress? If the BJP think-tank believes that the people of India, this time around, can be made to vote in its favour by whipping up

a frenzy on the temple issue and also announcing the project of another colossal statue, it cannot be more off-target. People have not forgotten the BJP's tall promises of a corruption-free government. Tough times may be ahead for the BJP and its brand ambassador, who appears to have done precious little in terms of real development.

G.B. SIVANANDAM, Coimbatore

It is not the government's business to be constructing statues that represent the deity of a particular religion. The BJP government is leading the country in an autocratic way which is proving to be disruptive for the country's peace environment and communal harmony. The government must pay heed to the core issues crying for attention.

F.R. MURAD, Kolkata

Come elections and we see virulent communalism being stoked by political parties in their unscrupulous quest for

power. The non-political proxies of the BJP have now come to the fore to discharge their responsibility of polarising the country. They blatantly brandish moral insouciance, thus showcasing the confluence of religious obduracy and Hindu majoritarianism in their ideology.

UTKARSH AGRAWAL, Allahabad

Upgrading intelligence

The suggestion that intelligence agencies must be ahead of the perpetrators of terror in order to snuff out untoward incidents needs to be addressed by the government immediately (Editorial page, "Ten years after the Mumbai attack", November 26). When novel methods are adopted by terrorists, mere sophistication of spy equipment will not yield results. Suitable persons must be inducted into the intelligence system. The intelligence recruitment process needs a relook.

V. LAKSHMANAN, Tirupur, Tamil Nadu

U.K. and Brexit

The Brexit imbroglio is a lesson in the pitfalls of too liberal a democracy. It started when elected representatives in the U.K. abdicated the onus of policy decisions to the citizen under the guise of a referendum. The result: a stoic, imperial and trading nation such as Britain voted needlessly for Brexit, inviting isolation overnight and a substantial cost of separation besides extending the period of uncertainty. The ensuing cost of its complex repair will be largely borne by Britain.

R. NARAYANAN, Navi Mumbai

How to type

As a person who has been using manual typewriters for over five decades, I think the importance and usefulness of the manual typewriters has not been dealt with

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

K. Satyagopal is not *Principal Secretary*, Revenue, as mentioned in a front-page story "Situation in Gaja-hit districts grim" (Nov. 26, 2018, some editions). He is *Additional Chief Secretary and Commissioner of Revenue Administration*.

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