

Notes on the BJP's manifesto

The party is obsessed with technological fixes to humanitarian problems



SHIV VISVANATHAN

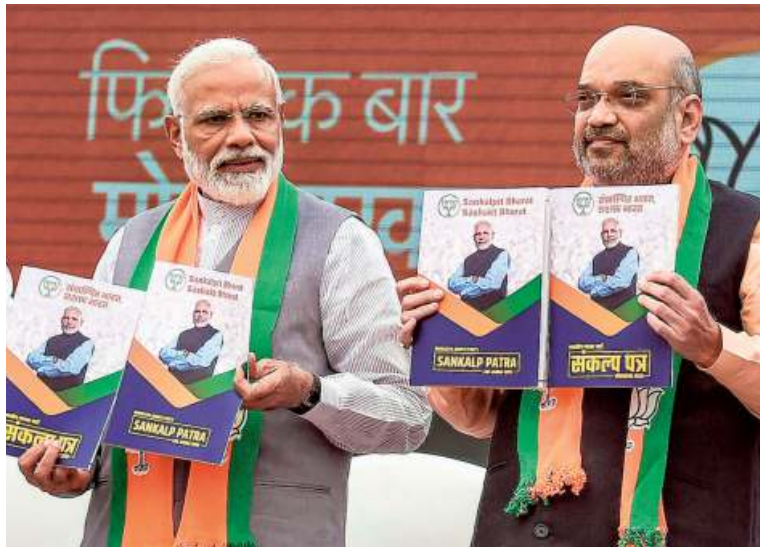
Manifestoes are acts of communication. They seek to inspire with rhetoric. When the BJP's manifesto was released, I was not sure if the party was even trying to communicate with the people. There is a humourless ferocity in the document that makes one wonder about the mindset of the communicators. It's like an exam where the examinee awards himself full marks, regardless of the questions the public is asking. There is an attempt to force the discourse towards what the party is obsessed with rather than answer questions about its performance.

To switch metaphors, it reads as though three directors of a board are sending letters to stockholders about profitability. The marginalisation of the stakeholders is obvious. On pages 34 and 35, for instance, minorities, the elderly, the disabled, shopkeepers, and artisans each get a line not as a statement of concern but as a recognition of their marginality.

A checklist

The cover shows Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and the back page features Syama Prasad Mookerjee, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya and Atal Bihari Vajpayee assuring ideological continuity. If the three letters from Mr. Modi, Home Minister Rajnath Singh, and party president Amit Shah reveal some attempt to communicate, the rest of the document achieves a change in style, which is intriguing. It reveals a checklist, a 'take it or leave it' attitude. There is no attempt to even correct typos in the document. One cannot quite figure out if it is indifference to quality or the arrogance of a group convinced that it is returning to power, performing an unnecessary but unavoidable exercise.

Mr. Modi called the elections a festival of democracy. One wishes the manifesto was an invitation to it. It is clear that Mr. Modi has turned development into a dismal science and he invites us to this dismal India. The document celebrates elections but has little sense of democracy. The



"There are prescriptions without a real sense of the polity in the BJP's manifesto". Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP president Amit Shah release the manifesto for the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, in New Delhi. •PTI

confidence of ushering in *achhe din* is missing in it.

Development is second to security. Terms like "surgical strike" and "zero tolerance towards terrorism" are summoned to dance to the BJP's idea of national security. There is a quiet sense of paranoia as security gets defined as the standard obsession of the right. Yet, the way the roads in Kashmir were shut down creating a humanitarian problem reveals scant sensitivity to the problem.

On agriculture, the responses are rote. There is barely any grasp of the crisis of agriculture, of the rampant drought, of the epidemic of suicides. The assumption is that a bit of tinkering with prices and insurance can restore the livelihoods of a people. What is stark is the separation of security from livelihood. Agriculture is broken down to a few programmes and missions. During World War II, soldiers would be made to dig ditches and fill them up to keep themselves occupied. They coined an irreverent term for it: SNAFU ('situation normal, all fouled up'). The SNAFU sense of agriculture in the BJP document stands out. There are mentions of technological fixes, but there is no exertion to tie technology, the political economy and culture. For a party which invokes culture, agriculture is reduced to a set of price and technological fixes.

The claims about the Swachh Bharat Mission leaves one wondering whether the BJP has heard of Bezvada Wilson. As Mr. Wilson, who is national convener of the Safai Karmachari Andolan, said, behind all Swachh programmes there are scavengers and septic tanks. To ignore the scavengers and tanks is to deny justice and dignity to people. By emphasising technology, the BJP seems blind to the humanity of scavengers.

There is a fixation with technology and management everywhere, but as a result, one loses the imagination of the city and the informal economy. There is no sense of civics or civic life as transport grids cover the city. The city is conceived of as a grid of technologies. The question of plurality, culture, difference and migration is lost in this monolingualism of technocracy.

There is an absent-mindedness to the document when it talks of unity and Ram Janmabhoomi in the same breath. The confusion of majoritarianism with national unity is a lethal flaw. But the BJP refuses an attempt to correct the error.

There is no urgency about climate change, no sense of the Anthropocene. Ecology gets reduced to a fixation on the Ganga.

One returns repeatedly to the language of the report. First, it has a sense of a submission to the Guinness World Records rather than a report to a people. The subconscious humour turns sour as the document,

ignoring the problems brought about by the National Register of Citizens, the Rohingya crisis, and the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, claims the Northeast is now closer to the mainstream than ever before.

The document barely mentions demonetisation, which caused havoc across the country.

It emphasises Artificial Intelligence and "robotic research". Do such technologies add to jobs? We don't know. There is little sense of biological and ecological technologies. Anthropocene and urban planning are forgotten as India joins the technological bandwagon without any sense of ecology, culture or context.

A managerial model

India wants to be a world-class nation without even asking what the term means and what its consequences are. There is hardly any thought on the quality of science or education. What one confronts is a huge promise of access to seats without any understanding of the university as an organic institution. The question of expansion is treated linearly in terms of technology and admissions but the role of the teacher as an autonomous academic is ignored. We face the prospect of universities serving government and industry but lacking any function beyond this service model. Even the question of women's empowerment lacks a vision of rights-based strategies.

Reading the document one sees an emphasis on policy without culture, of prescriptions without a real sense of the polity. It is an attempt to create a managerial model of governance while quietly downplaying the demands of democracy. Here again, language is the key. There are haunting silences — about violence, freedom, alternatives — as the BJP pretends it is a juggernaut moving linearly towards its goals. What one misses is a nod to debate and doubt. Everything gets subjugated by indicators and indices, which show little awareness of the actual lives of the people. The dreariness of the future becomes obvious in the document when a democracy, like development, is reduced to dismal science.

Shiv Visvanathan is an academic associated with the Compost Heap, a group in pursuit of alternative ideas and imagination

Algeria after Bouteflika

While the long-serving President's exit is a tactical triumph of the popular will, it pushes the nation into uncharted territory



MAHESH SACHDEV

Abdelaziz Bouteflika's resignation as Algerian President on April 2 was a momentous development. The popular disaffection that forced him out after two decades in power was triggered by worsening socio-economic conditions largely due to lower oil and gas revenues. It can also be seen as a delayed arrival of the Arab Spring, with the youth feeling increasingly disconnected from the gerontocrats and their *hogra* (insolence).

Algerian peculiarities

However, the Algerian socio-political context has at least two peculiarities. First, since Algeria's independence in 1962, the country has always been ruled by an informal coalition of the National Liberation Front and army generals (collectively called *le Pouvoir*, or 'the Power'). While this has ensured continuity, durability and predictability, it has resisted political evolution. Second, from the late 1980s, Algeria endured a long period of socio-political crisis which resulted in the emergence of the Islamists led by the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS). This party was denied victory in the 1991-92 elections, and this led to a gruesome insurgency causing nearly 200,000 deaths. In fact, *le Pouvoir* brought in Mr. Bouteflika in 1999 to close this chapter and foster national reconciliation. It is because of this bitter legacy that Algerians prefer a stifling stability over any uncertainty. As a result, the recent demonstrations, though massive, were peaceful.

However, Mr. Bouteflika's attempt to seek a fifth term was the proverbial last straw. In popular perception, the country was being ruled in Mr. Bouteflika's name by *le Pouvoir*. The popular opprobrium against his fifth term intensified and morphed into a call for his resignation, removal of the entire old guard, and a new political structure that is more transparent and responsive to the people. *Le Pouvoir's* initial response to the popular discontent was to be in denial, prevaricate and resort to tokenism. It was only recently that the army chief publicly called for Mr. Bouteflika to be declared as incapacitated. 'Boutexit' followed, paving the way to a transitional presidency, which was ratified by the national Parliament on April 9.

Although Mr. Bouteflika's exit is certainly a tactical triumph for the popular will, it also pushes Algeria into uncharted territory.

While nominal political institutions and processes exist in Algeria, these lack both efficacy and credibility. On the other hand, the protests were largely spontaneous, without orchestration, organisational structure and leadership. Boutexit seems to have emboldened the protesters to expand their wish list to exclude *le Pouvoir* from the future dispensation. Though on the defensive, *le Pouvoir* (and the oligarchs tagged to it) is unlikely to ride willingly into the sunset. Thus, an immediate and uncompromising pursuit of this ambitious popular agenda runs the risk of unleashing a protracted battle of attrition resulting in instability, radicalisation and/or regime repression. The substantive issues of socio-economic reforms, corruption, and the Arab-Berber divide are likely to be held in abeyance till political issues are resolved. This could further accentuate these grievances. Any long-winding transition would strengthen Gulf influence, French meddling and simmering Islamic militancy. Avoidance of such pitfalls would require everyone to show maturity and flexibility. After all, the stakes are quite high: Algeria's 42 million population is second only to Egypt's in the Arab world. It is an OPEC member, a major gas supplier to Europe, and a large importer of goods ranging from automobiles to pharmaceuticals. Protracted uncertainty in Algeria can affect Europe by disrupting energy supplies, causing a surge in immigration and in radicalisation of the four million Algerians living in Europe.

Significance for India

For India, too, Algerian developments have multiple significance. First, Mr. Bouteflika was a friend of India and paid a state visit in 2001. His successor will, hopefully, continue the bilateral amity. Second, bilateral economic ties are robust and growing. Algeria is an important market for India's foodstuff, automobiles, farm machinery, pharmaceuticals, mobiles and cosmetics. It is also India's source for strategic commodities, especially hydrocarbons and phosphates. A number of Indian contractors have been active in Algeria, notably Larsen & Toubro, which recently won a \$1 billion hydrocarbon project from Sonatrach, the national oil company. At the political level, Algeria has been one of the few members of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation to have consistently supported India's case against terrorism. India can play a vital role in ensuring that Algeria's imminent socio-political transition is smooth by helping the country with institution-building and infrastructure.

Mahesh Sachdev was Indian Ambassador to Algeria from 1999 to 2001

SINGLE FILE

Gubernatorial impropriety

The promise of the institution remains as underwhelming as ever

SHIVAM & ANMOLAM



The political endorsement that was recently given to the BJP by the Rajasthan Governor has reignited the debate on the independence and neutrality of the constitutional post. The Governor's office has often courted controversy for the incumbent's political views. However, there is a marked difference between seemingly routine deviations from strict constitutional norms and the present case, in which the alleged impropriety is neither subtle nor cloaked in specious constitutional justifications.

The Sarkaria Commission described the Governor as "a Constitutional sentinel and a vital link between the Union and the State." In *S.R. Bommai* (1994), the Supreme Court said, "The office of the Governor... is intended to ensure protection and sustenance of the constitutional process of the working of the Constitution by the elected executive." M.K. Gandhi said about the Governor's office: "He would be an arbiter when there was a constitutional deadlock in the State and he would be able to play an impartial role."

Given the vagueness surrounding the process of appointing and removing the Governor, doubts have been raised about the 'legal nature' of his office. According to B.R. Ambedkar, "He is the representative not of a party; he is the representative of the people as a whole of the State. It is in the name of the people that he carries on the administration." In *Hargovind Pant v. Raghubir Lal* (1979), the Supreme Court affirmed that the "office of the Governor was not subordinate or subservient to the Government of India".

In the contemporary constitutional landscape, the Governor is expected to advance the cause of 'federalism' and 'democracy', which form a part of the basic structure of the Constitution. In *Government of NCT of Delhi v. Union of India* (2018), then Chief Justice of India, Dipak Misra, clarified that democracy and federalism are firmly imbibed in India's constitutional ethos, while reiterating that democracy requires the constant affirmation of constitutional morality.

Despite his unique constitutional positioning, the Governor is sometimes not seen as willing or able to discharge his functions as judiciously, impartially and efficiently as envisaged by the first Administrative Reforms Commission. A perusal of the reports of the Sarkaria, Punchhi and Venkatachaliah Commissions reveals that the independence and dignity of the gubernatorial office is invariably undermined by the appointment of persons not suited to the post, the lack of security of tenure, the lack of an appropriate removal mechanism, with no reasonable post-retirement benefits and limitations on post-retirement political ingratiation. Consequently, the promise of the institution remains as underwhelming as ever while the perils continue to multiply. It is high time that the recommendations of the relevant commissions are implemented in letter and spirit to obviate the danger of a full-blown constitutional crisis, to buttress constitutional morality and to restore the dignity of this office.

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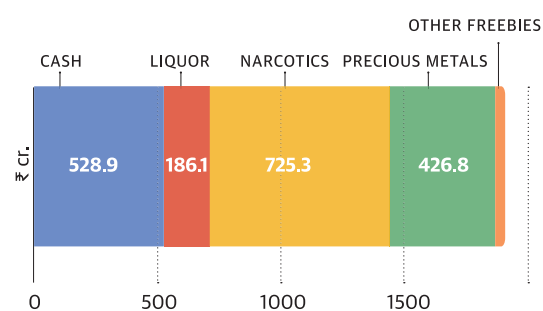
DATA POINT

Bid to bribe?

Since the announcement of the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, Election Commission officials have seized cash, liquor, narcotics, precious metals and other freebies worth ₹1,908.76 crore (as on April 9). The cash seized so far is ₹529 crore, which is already higher than the amount seized before the 2014 Lok Sabha election (about ₹313 crore). By Varun B. Krishnan

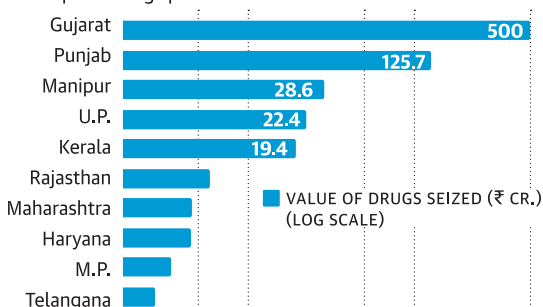
What was seized?

Drugs accounted for the highest value of seizures, followed by cash and precious metals. Overall, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh topped the list in seizures



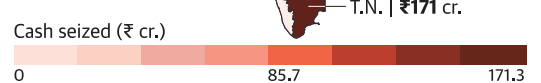
Drug haul

Drugs worth over ₹500 crore have been seized in Gujarat. This amount is far higher than in Punjab, where there is a widespread drugs problem



Cash is king

The highest amounts of cash seized were from Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. In the 2014 election, the highest amount of cash was seized from undivided Andhra Pradesh



Election high

The values of seized liquor were highest in Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. In terms of volume, Maharashtra topped the list (22 lakh litres were seized)



FROM THE HINDU ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO APRIL 11, 1969

UK Sikhs force lifting of ban on turbans

Civic chiefs of Wolverhampton last night [April 9] lifted a two-year ban on Sikh busmen wearing beards and turbans - and averted a ritual suicide threat. The ban had angered Britain's 130,000 Sikhs who considered it an affront to their religion, and it sparked demonstrations in India. The British Government, fearing a race crisis could blow up here [Wolverhampton, England], intervened, and last night the Wolverhampton Transport Committee reversed its policy - just four days before Sikh leader Sohan Singh Jolly planned to burn himself to death. Mr. Jolly, 66, a former Inspector in the Kenya Police, had declared that unless the ban was lifted, his self-immolation on Sunday would be followed by other prominent Sikhs in a chain of death-by-burning. A British Government junior Minister paid a surprise visit to Wolverhampton on Tuesday. The Committee, in apparent deference to this, said it was lifting the ban because of outside pressure.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO APRIL 11, 1919.

Railway Nationalisation.

In the [House of] Commons [on April 2], replying to Sir J.D. Rees, Mr. Fisher stated that [Secretary of State for India] Mr. Edwin Montagu had proposed that as soon as convenient after the war there would be an enquiry in India regarding the desirability or otherwise on administrative and financial grounds of modifying the present management of Railways in India which were owned by the State, but worked by Companies domiciled in England by incorporating the lines in existing State-worked systems, or converting them into separate State-worked lines or handing them over to Companies domiciled in India. Mr. Fisher also stated that the reports of the Southborough Committees had not yet been received from the Government of India.

POLL CALL

Electoral bonds

Electoral bonds are bearer instruments in the nature of Promissory Notes issued by banks. They are interest-free instruments that can be purchased from specified branches of the State Bank of India by any citizen of India or body incorporated in India within fixed periods. The government's argument was that banks would be able to track the buyers of electoral bonds through their KYC details and thus ensure that clean money comes into the system, while protecting the donor's anonymity. However, critics argue that this has made political funding more opaque since there is no way of knowing who donated and how much to a political party. There is also no cap on the quantum of electoral bonds. The BJP was the biggest beneficiary of electoral bonds in 2017-18, accounting for 94.5% of the bonds worth a little over ₹210 crore.

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