



## Party and symbol

Delhi HC order on 'Two Leaves' deepens T.T.V. Dhinakaran's political dilemma

The Delhi High Court verdict upholding the allotment of the 'Two Leaves' symbol to the AIADMK jointly led by Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami and Deputy CM O. Panneerselvam has come as no surprise. The Election Commission's November 23, 2017 order had ruled in its favour based on the group's majority in its organisational and legislative wings. The claim of the faction headed by V.K. Sasikala, a confidante of the late Jayalalitha, and her nephew, T.T.V. Dhinakaran, to the party's name and symbol weakened after Mr. Palaniswami and Mr. Panneerselvam, who were in rival factions earlier, decided to come together in August 2017. Since then, they have consolidated their position by getting Mr. Dhinakaran's loyalists among MLAs disqualified and outmanoeuvring him in both the party structure and in court cases. Their unity was forged with the common aim of keeping out Ms. Sasikala, who was briefly elected interim general secretary of the AIADMK after Jayalalitha's death in December 2016, and her nephew. The court has ruled that the EC was well within its powers to apply the majority test and allot the symbol to the faction that had more members in the general council and in its complement of MLAs and MPs. The court did not entertain arguments that the Commission should have ruled against the Panneerselvam-Palaniswami faction because it had changed the party's basic structure by abolishing the post of general secretary; and the contention that the Commission's order was vitiated by malice because it granted additional opportunities for filing affidavits, after which many reneged on their earlier statements on which group they belonged to.

The Dhinakaran faction has decided to appeal in the Supreme Court against the order that has set back his political fortunes. At the same time, it wants a common symbol to contest elections. Mr. Dhinakaran himself won a by-election to the Assembly from the RK Nagar constituency as an independent with the 'pressure cooker' symbol. He may have to register his party, the Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam (AMMK), with the EC to get a common symbol. Ever since he began running a faction in the absence of Sasikala, who is serving a four-year prison term, he has been trying to make the best of bad situations. He spent months in a Delhi prison himself on an allegation that he attempted to bribe an unknown EC official to get the party symbol. His political survival has so far hinged on tactically preserving a dual identity: running a party on the one hand, and keeping his group's claim to the AIADMK's identity alive through court cases. It is clear he is seeking to preserve his claim until the mainstream leadership is defeated in an election, in the hope that a majority of the party's primary members will rally behind him. The coming general elections and as many as 21 Assembly by-elections will be an acid test of his political survival.

## Alarming spread

With H1N1 now a seasonal flu strain, care workers and others at risk must be vaccinated

In a short span of 55 days (till February 24) this year, the number of influenza A (H1N1) cases and deaths reported from India reached an alarming 14,803 and 448, respectively. The highest numbers were from Rajasthan (3,964), Delhi (2,738) and Gujarat (2,726). Uttar Pradesh was next, with 905. While Rajasthan and Gujarat had the highest number of deaths, at 137 and 88, respectively, Delhi recorded seven deaths despite recording around the same number of cases as Gujarat. There appears to be no let-up, with the number of cases and deaths steadily rising. What is more disturbing is that the number of cases reported till February 24 is nearly the same as that recorded in the whole of 2018 (14,992). At about 450, the number of deaths till February 24 is nearly half the total reported in 2018 (1,103). The actual number of cases and deaths this year is likely to be higher as West Bengal has not reported the data to the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme. Moreover, the IDSP data are based only on laboratory confirmed cases and deaths. The H1N1 virus, which caused a pandemic in 2009, has since become a seasonal flu strain globally, including in India, and causes fewer deaths. According to the WHO, in 2009 the number of laboratory confirmed deaths caused by the pandemic strain was at least 18,500. But a 2012 paper in *Lancet Infectious Diseases* mentioned 2,84,000 deaths, which was 15 times more than the number of laboratory confirmed deaths.

On February 6, the Union Health Ministry had reviewed the preparedness and action taken by States to deal with influenza cases when the number of H1N1 cases and deaths stood at 6,701 and 226, respectively. Despite the number of cases and deaths more than doubling in less than 20 days since the review, the Ministry has made no additional effort to contain the spread. It has issued a guidance "recommending" vaccines for health-care workers, and deeming them "desirable" for those above 65 years of age and children between six months and eight years. Surprisingly, people with pre-existing chronic diseases, who are most susceptible to H1N1 complications according to the WHO, have been ignored – though its own statement released on February 6 had said more deaths were seen in people with diabetes and hypertension. With H1N1 becoming a seasonal flu virus strain in India even during summer, it is advisable that health-care workers and others at risk get themselves vaccinated. Despite the sharp increase in cases and deaths, the vaccine uptake has been low. Besides vaccination, there needs to be greater awareness so that people adopt precautionary measures such as frequent handwashing, and cough etiquette.

# The language of Pakistan

India must guard against the type of politics that shaped, and continues to ruin, Pakistan



VARGHESE K. GEORGE

"Our fight is for Kashmir, not against Kashmiris," Prime Minister Narendra Modi said at a Bharatiya Janata Party rally at Tonk in Rajasthan on February 23, which it now turns out was setting the scene for the military strike inside Pakistan three days later. The Indian strikes followed a suicide terrorist attack that killed 40 Central Reserve Police Force personnel on February 14 in Pulwama in Jammu and Kashmir. The Jaish-e-Mohammad, a jihadi group that operates from Pakistan, claimed responsibility for the attack.

Mr. Modi spoke in some detail to explain how violence against Kashmiris that erupted in other parts of India could strengthen divisive forces, but the same speech had another statement that showed where the edge of his politics is. "I regret how some people who live in India continue to speak the language of Pakistan," he said. It is this pronouncement of the Prime Minister that has caught on following the Indian air strikes. On Sunday in Patna, he accused all Opposition parties and professionals who have raised questions regarding India's Pakistan and Kashmir policy of helping Pakistan.

### A fifth column?

"People who live in India but are loyal to Pakistan", a fifth column that threatens the nation, has been a recurring allusion in Sangh Parivar politics. Mr. Modi has, like he has done with several components of Hindutva politics, raised this to

a higher pitch. In October 2017, Congress leader P. Chidambaram said in response to the appointment of a new Government of India interlocutor for Jammu and Kashmir, Dineshwar Sharma: "The demand in Kashmir Valley is to respect in letter and spirit Article 370. And that means that they want greater autonomy... Therefore, I think we should seriously examine that question and consider on what areas we can give autonomy to Jammu and Kashmir." Mr. Modi responded: "Why are Congress leaders lending their voice to those who want zaadi in Kashmir? Congress is shamelessly using the language that is used by separatists in Kashmir and is spoken in Pakistan." Mr. Modi's statement ended Mr. Sharma's mission as soon as it was announced and the former chief of the Intelligence Bureau is now cooling his heels.

"If the BJP loses in Bihar by mistake, then victory-defeat will be in Bihar but crackers will be burst in Pakistan," BJP president Amit Shah had said during the 2015 Assembly election campaign in the State. If that insinuation is not self-explanatory, Mr. Modi went a step ahead in the 2017 Gujarat campaign: "Pakistan's former army director general Arshad Rafiq said that in Gujarat, Ahmed Patel [political secretary to then-Congress president Sonia Gandhi] should be made the Chief Minister." He went on to accuse his predecessor, Manmohan Singh, and the Opposition Congress party of being in collusion with Pakistan to make an Indian Muslim the State's Chief Minister.

According to the notion of citizenship and territory in what may be called the Hindutva Strategic Doctrine, Indian Muslims are often understood as an appendage of Pakistan. This is not a thought



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that comes out only in campaign rhetoric. Jaswant Singh writes of the India-Pakistan rivalry that Partition "compartmentalised and then tightly sealed the Hindu-Muslim animosities; cementing festering grudges into near permanent hostilities; what was domestic (Hindu-Muslim) became international (India-Pakistan)."

The Congress's Pakistan policy "in effect was only an extension of Congress's Muslim appeasement policy," wrote A.B. Vajpayee in 1973, only two years after the Bangladesh war. When India's Pakistan policy is understood only as "appeasement" of Indian Muslims, one Hindutva leader thought the best way to reach out to Indian Muslims was to appease Pakistan. That led to L.K. Advani travelling all the way to Karachi and praising Mohammad Ali Jinnah in 2005. That move, however, boomeranged, set him on the downside and paved the way for the launch of his loyalist, Mr. Modi, who would displace him as the more authentic bearer of the Hindutva mantle.

Mr. Modi made Pakistan a leitmotif for Hindutva mobilisation in which the idea of an external enemy and an internal alien fuses into a convenient ensemble. He perfected this tool in the 2002 Gujarat campaign, which was almost entirely on 'Mian Musharraf,' a refe-

rence to the then military dictator of Pakistan. "Speak to Pakistan in the language Pakistan understands," Mr. Modi said in 2013, when asked what he would have done if he were the Prime Minister during the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks.

### Post-Pulwama air strikes

Last week's military strike inside Pakistan has been characterised by many as a clean break from the past. The real break from the past came in 2014 itself when Mr. Modi called off a scheduled bilateral meeting with Pakistan citing its High Commissioner's meeting with Kashmiri separatists, a routine affair. Mr. Modi overturned Vajpayee's Kashmir policy which had three components: empower regional mainstream parties, engage the separatists, and involve Pakistan. Mr. Modi shut Pakistan out of the equation; disengaged with the separatist groups; and has constantly undermined the mainstream parties in the State, namely the Peoples Democratic Party and the National Conference, in the last five years. A principle that the current government has followed in faith and the practice is that there is nothing to be negotiated with anyone in Kashmir or about Kashmir with anyone, least of all Pakistan. Anyone suggesting anything out of line with this is accused of talking the language of Pakistan.

If Pakistan is projected as representing the internal and external threats to the nation, Kashmir becomes the location of Hindu victimhood, an essential component of Hindutva mobilisation. The massive violence and dispossession faced by the Hindus in the Valley at the hands of jihadis validates the Hindutva notion that the community is a victim of appease-

ment of Muslims, which is otherwise impossible to establish. Conversely, Kashmir also becomes the site for the demonstration of the resolve of the 'New India' where 'appeasement' is replaced with brute show of strength.

### 'Internal enemies'

The cries for revenge against 'internal enemies' is getting louder and shriller, pushing the entire country to the edge. "India's biggest threat comes from its own invisible internal enemies," a Hindi film director posted on Twitter along with a video clip of National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, in which he makes the case that India never lost to a foreign power unless betrayed by internal enemies. A Delhi lawmaker, formerly of the Aam Aadmi Party and now a Modi supporter, circulated a video last week, in which he asks Mr. Modi to deal with the enemies across the border while offering that people would meanwhile deal with the traitors inside. YouTube has since removed the video, but the lawmaker has found support on social media. "Deal with them right now, the mood in the country is suitable," a 'spiritual guru' told a prime time anchor who helpfully asked what is to be done with those who are against India.

This level of intolerance and call for mindless violence, fuelled by religious majoritarianism, and calls to cleanse the nation of internal enemies are indeed the language that first shaped but continues to ruin Pakistan. Prime Minister Modi is right – it is a matter of grave concern; a lynch mob might just succeed where the suicide bomber has repeatedly failed. To turn India into a cauldron of strife like Pakistan.

varghese.g@thehindu.co.in

# A pivotal election in Thailand

The system is configured to the military's advantage, but Thaksin Shinawatra may hold the key



PINAK RANJAN CHAKRAVARTY

After repeated postponements by the military government in Thailand, the country's general elections are now scheduled to be held on March 24. Princess Ubolratana Rajakanya Sirivadhana Barnavadi, 67, the daughter of the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej, and eldest of four siblings, created a political tsunami recently by announcing her candidature for prime ministership. Ms. Ubolratana's political bid – she had renounced her royal status and privileges after her past marriage to an American national – was rejected by her brother, the current King, Vajiralongkorn Bodindradebayavarangkun, who said that such a high-ranking member of the royal family entering the political fray was against the country's royal customs, tradition and culture.

### Electoral realities

Ms. Ubolratana challenged the Election Commission guidelines which prohibit parties involving members of the royal family in politics and elections, by claiming that her status is that of a commoner. The King objected to this argument, asserting that she remains a member of the royal family despite her renouncing her

royal status. Ms. Ubolratana's announcement and the King's public statement opposing her candidature left no wiggle room for the Election Commission, which has since announced the list of official candidates for prime ministership without her name on it.

A colourful personality, Ms. Ubolratana, who is very well educated, has been active in social welfare projects in Thailand. She established a close rapport with former Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who is currently in exile. She registered as the prime ministerial candidate for the Thai Raksa Chart Party, which is allied with the Pheu Thai Party he had established. His sister, Yingluck Shinawatra, was Prime Minister too, till she was overthrown in 2014 by the current military junta, headed by the former Army Chief, General Prayuth Chan-ocha. Ms. Shinawatra too is in exile after the military junta managed to convict her in a case of rice subsidies for farmers.

The Pheu Thai Party remains the most popular political party in Thailand, with a largely rural vote base in the relatively more populated rice growing north-east of the country. Mr. Shinawatra, a telecom tycoon, retains his popularity among Thailand's rural voters and urban sections of the working class, primarily because of his efforts to institutionalise cheap health care and subsidies for agriculture. His supporters appear to have glossed over his financial malpractices.

Ms. Ubolratana is the first royal



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family member to throw her hat into the ring of politics since Thailand became a constitutional monarchy in 1932. Pitched against a royal opponent, Gen. Prayuth would have run into the realm of the unknown, given the respect and adulation that Thais extend to the royal family.

A staunch royalist, Gen. Prayuth may possibly be receiving a helping hand from the King who may want to avoid any political upheavals before his formal coronation in May. Gen. Prayuth has already announced his candidature for Prime Minister representing the Palang Pracharath Party, which is pro-military. Gen. Prayuth's main opposition will come from the Pheu Thai Party.

The electoral outcome will dictate the shape of the next government. Will there be a national unity government with participation by the major parties? This question has arisen because the King may want a show of unity, with him being the rallying point. It is no secret that the King had close ties to Mr. Shinawatra.

The pro-royalist Democratic

Party, led by former Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, is holding its cards close to its chest; his public stance is that his party will not join any coalition with the Pheu Thai or any party which is seen as a front for the military.

The Pheu Thai Party is tipped to win a free and fair election in Thailand. Hence the military government has worked assiduously to scuttle this prospect. One such threat is a possible ban on the party by the Election Commission if Mr. Shinawatra is found to be involved in the party's decision-making. Mr. Shinawatra meanwhile has been refusing to kowtow to military diktats and uses social media to broadcast his views, some of them critical of the ruling military junta. The Pheu Thai Party in turn strictly avoids any mention of Mr. Shinawatra in its campaign and public pronouncements.

### The military's gameplan

The Thai military junta has consistently tried to re-engineer politics, first by promulgating a new Constitution in 2017, prohibiting political meetings and campaigning by political parties. In this it has found a ready pool of political opportunists, hankering for power. Gen. Prayuth has used the opportunity to campaign in the countryside under the cover of roving cabinet meetings. The 2017 Constitution was crafted to prevent the Pheu Thai Party from forming a government again, and a proportional representation system designed to deprive it of parliamentary seats,

even if it won the majority of constituencies. The Pheu Thai has, therefore, created a front of several political parties, so that all get a few seats under the proportional representation system. This network will also help it function in the extreme event of any ban being imposed on the party.

Thai politics, long dominated by the royal family and the Thai military, with the support of the Bangkok-based business elite, remains in eternal search of an orderly democratic transition. Elected civilian governments are routinely ousted by the army, earning Thailand the dubious distinction for among the highest number of coups d'état. The cat-and-mouse game between the army and political parties has persisted for decades.

Thailand's military is loathe to part with power and has skewed the polity to prevent a strong and vibrant democracy from taking root. Yet the democratic urge of the Thai people cannot be suppressed. The outcome of the forthcoming election – under a flawed Constitution – may not truly reflect the people's mandate, though the restoration of the democratic process will redeem in some measure the people's democratic aspirations.

Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty is a Distinguished Fellow at the Delhi-based Observer Research Foundation. He is a former Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India and a former Ambassador to Thailand. 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.

### Behind restraint

The writer (Editorial page, "Lines being crossed", March 4) says that all countries including the U.S. have been reluctant to cross the Rubicon and enter into an open confrontation with Russia. But the fact is the U.S. did cross into Pakistan by air to get Osama bin Laden. That was not construed as an act of war. Our government too did not cross the Rubicon and tried diplomatic means to get Pakistan to wipe out terrorism on its soil. That didn't work. Hence we crossed into Pakistan to kill the terrorists who have been targeting our citizens in Jammu and Kashmir. Why is this any different? Let the people in power today do their jobs as they deem fit. The media should

also recognise this.

SURESH GOPALAKRISHNAN, Hyderabad

With due respect to former and top officials under the United Progressive Alliance, I have to say this. During their innings they did their best to counter Pakistan. But, unfortunately, it was not effective as Pakistan still continues with its successful policy of bleeding India. Times are changing and we also have to change our tactics. Earlier methods are past their expiry date.

M.S. MANI, Chennai

The writer's justification for inaction post the 26/11 attacks is most unconvincing. The attacks struck at the vitals of our national interest. Yet the

writer appears concerned over the inappropriateness of crossing international boundaries even when the U.S., Russia, Israel and Turkey have done so with impunity when their national interests were threatened and challenged. The government was duty bound to protect its citizens, which it failed to do, despite international approval. To say that "India's finest years were during the period 2009-2012" is strange. This was a period when governance began unravelling with corruption, inflation and a deteriorating situation in Kashmir.

P. VAIDYANATHAN, Chennai

The incident of an Indian pilot being captured and later released may have

postponed war between the sworn enemies. But it will be naive to think that this air strike will deter Pakistan from carrying out anti-India activity. The only plausible remedy is to co-opt the local populace in Kashmir; otherwise India will be fighting a war not only with Pakistan but also with its own citizens.

DEEPAK SINGHAL, Noida

### Economy watch

There is no denying the fact that the government resorted to demonetisation without fully comprehending the basics of the Indian economy. Added to that was a hurriedly imposed GST, which contributed to sluggish economic growth (Editorial, "Deepening slowdown", March 4).

Demonetisation hurt the informal sector, leading to an employment crisis. The stance of the government that the move was initiated mainly to root out black money was changed to one about achieving digitisation. On the agricultural front, there was a lack of focus on improving methods of cultivation. Instead, populist measures such as writing off loans and compensatory allowance are being attempted to garner votes. These ad hoc measures are not going to bring in a lasting solution.

V. SUBRAMANIAN, Chennai

### Note for the media

In order to be ahead in the scoop news supply to the public, it is indisputable that many TV channels in India

are in a competitive mode and they are becoming opinion makers instead of being news providers. The print media is smug that a dexterous heading will be indistinguishable to readers but should be aware that the common man can discern biased reportage. On TV channels, panel discussions are noisy and often test the patience of viewers. There are numerous burning social issues in the country that remain untouched by the visual media and the larger focus is only on politics. The media's social responsibility is found wanting (OpEd page, "From the Readers' Editor", March 4).

R. SRIDHARAN, Chennai

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