



Birds of a feather

India cannot peg its strategic plans on the chemistry between Trump and Modi

When he visits India for the first time later this month, U.S. President Donald Trump can expect thronging crowds in Gujarat and perhaps a substantive discussion on trade policy in New Delhi, but more than anything, it is his growing bonhomie with Prime Minister Narendra Modi that is expected to steal the limelight. Indeed, this chemistry was evident during the four times that they met in 2019. The pinnacle of those encounters for Mr. Modi was undoubtedly the public relations victory that he won when Mr. Trump graced the ‘Howdy Modi!’ event in Houston before some 50,000 Indian-Americans. Now Mr. Modi is returning the favour perhaps, as he has, in Mr. Trump’s words, promised an attendance of five to seven million, from the airport to the new Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel cricket stadium, the world’s largest; here, they will address the “*Kem chho Trump!*” event before an expected 1.25 lakh people. While there will always be areas of untapped potential in bilateral cooperation, things could hardly be better between the two nations at this time of global turbulence, in trade and security. On the former issue, despite skirmishes surrounding tariffs in specific sectors, such as medical devices, and counter-tariffs following the U.S.’s termination of its Generalised System of Preferences toward India last year, there is hope for at least a limited trade deal – pegged at \$10-billion – that could take a measure of stress out of the protracted closed-door negotiations. Prospects look brighter still on defence cooperation. India is reportedly moving toward approving a \$2.6-billion deal for 24 Lockheed Martin-built MH-60 Seahawk helicopters. An agreement to buy a \$1.867-billion integrated air defence weapons system is also on the cards.

Notwithstanding this slew of positive, if incremental, cooperative advances, it is the deeper fault lines across the two countries’ domestic politics that could, in the longer-term, impact the prospects for smooth cooperation in the bilateral space. For instance, the Indian government’s recent policy shifts regarding special status for Kashmir as well as the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, the National Register of Citizens and the National Population Register have spooked some U.S. Democrats, including Senators and lawmakers in the House of Representatives. Some have explicitly voiced concerns about the impact in terms of India’s commitment to remaining a tolerant, pluralist democracy. In this context, if the November 2020 presidential election puts a Democrat in the White House, it could potentially impact some of India’s plans. Even if Mr. Trump wins a second term, deepening Congressional opposition to India-friendly White House policies could endanger bilateral prospects. In this sense, there are limits to how much India can peg its strategic plans on the personal chemistry between its leader and the U.S. President.

Waiting for the winner

Ireland’s election results threw up no definite winner, opening up the possibility of a churn

Ireland’s general elections on Saturday have thrown up many paradoxes, offering few clues about the next government, or the future of the country’s three largest parties. Fianna Fáil, which has been out of power since 2011, has topped the tally. However, its 38 seats leaves it far short of the requisite 80 for a clear majority in the 160-strong Irish Parliament. Sinn Féin, the country’s Republican party has, perhaps with good reason, proclaimed itself the real winner: 37 seats, up 14 over the 2016 polls, and its best result. Yet, such a performance does not guarantee the party, with past links to the IRA, an automatic path to government in the current electoral arithmetic, notwithstanding the protestations of its leader, Mary Lou McDonald. The obverse is the position of the governing centre-right Fine Gael of Prime Minister Leo Varadkar, now relegated to third place with 35 seats, down 15 from the previous election. To be sure, Mr. Varadkar earned international recognition for steering Dublin’s negotiations with London to protect the soft border with Belfast, and in turn the peace on either side of the island’s political divide. The country is also forecast to emerge among the fastest growing economies in the European Union in 2020. But this putative achievement may only have brought into sharp focus voter disenchantment with Fine Gael’s domestic record.

Ireland has experienced severe shortfalls in affordable housing and health-care delivery, potentially rendering the party’s return to government politically more delicate. All the same, it would be premature to rule it out of contention for power in any coalition. Sinn Féin is said to have benefited from the prevailing discontent. In the run-up to the polls on Saturday, both Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil had ruled out an alliance with the left-wing Sinn Féin. But Micheál Martin, Fianna Fáil leader, has not dismissed working with Ms. McDonald even while emphasising differences over taxation policy and her party’s IRA past. She is believed to have sent out feelers to Labour, the Greens and independents to explore forming a coalition. Sinn Féin has in any case already set out its priorities, to work for the country’s unification with Northern Ireland. This stance will boost nationalist sentiment across the border, where Sinn Féin has consistently opposed Brexit. Under Britain’s EU withdrawal deal, Belfast is de facto member of the bloc’s single market. Sinn Féin’s participation in a new government would almost inevitably alter Ireland’s political configuration. But going by the 70-day stalemate in 2016, negotiations among the main parties could prove protracted. As deliberations commence, the traditional two parties must note that it is a democratic imperative now to engage Sinn Féin with an open mind.

Trump’s march and the Sanders factor

The U.S. President’s tenure and its baggage have given a new meaning to the term ‘American exceptionalism’



SANKARAN KRISHNA

For approximately half the U.S. electorate, a nightmare that began with the unlikely election of Donald Trump to the presidency, is beginning to look as if it may continue into a second term. The U.S. President’s current approval rating (at 49%, in one poll) is the highest it has been since the day he took office. Initial hopes that his evident venality and incompetence may lead to an early termination of his presidency have gradually given way to a shocked realisation that no matter what he does, says, or tweets, there is no diminution in his support among those who voted for him in the 2016 election or in the Republican party. Indeed, as the abortive attempt to impeach him underlined, his command over the party is stronger than ever today.

Nothing stuns

The eruption of each outrageous scandal followed by Mr. Trump’s brazen strategy of a scorched-earth counterattack has led the U.S. to a point where it is now impossible to conceive of any scenario that could lead his supporters to rethink their allegiance. A seemingly hyperbolic comment made by Mr. Trump way back in January 2016, when he was a complete outsider among the aspirants for the Republican nomination (“I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody and I wouldn’t lose any voters”) is reality today.

This presidency and the scandals of the last three years, on both domestic and foreign policy fronts, have given new meaning to the term “American exceptional-

ism”. Where it once stood for the idea, at least among the patriotic faithful, that the United States was a beacon for democracy and human rights, a land of opportunity for all comers, and unvested in the social hierarchies of Europe, today it signifies a country that elected, and may re-elect, a bigoted, climate-change-denying carnival barker incapable of distinguishing public office from private pelf.

Sanders and the Democrats

If Mr. Trump and his supporters present a united bloc impervious to self-doubt, the opposite is true of the Democrats. A crowded field of contenders caught in a seemingly endless series of primaries and caucuses with arcane rules has meant no candidate has really pulled clear of the pack. More importantly, Democrats are deeply divided in terms of a strategy to defeat Mr. Trump. One of the front runners, Bernie Sanders, is running on an explicitly socialist platform that clearly energises racial minorities, youth, poorer sections of society, women, and liberals looking for an alternative to a two-party system bereft of ideas in the face of global warming, endless war, and unprecedented polarisation of wealth.

Yet, socialism or anything vaguely associated with the term has long been anathema for many in the U.S. Mr. Sanders’s ideas on socialised medical care, free college education for everyone, and a more progressive tax structure evoke incredulity. Similar incredulity, however, is never expressed about the irrationality of a trillion dollar defence budget year after year; nor is there much recognition that in other industrialised democracies, variants on “socialized” medicine vastly outperform the U.S., or that college education is highly subsidised and incomparably cheaper in such countries.



The mainstream media’s conviction that the candidacy of Mr. Sanders will ensure Mr. Trump’s victory – one evidently shared by many in the Democratic Party leadership – is perplexing. He is the one candidate who seems to genuinely energise those groups that were central to Obama’s victories in 2008 and 2012: racial minorities, youth, and first-time voters. The self-confident pundits who prematurely dismiss Mr. Sanders prospects may do well to remember that even as late as the evening of November 9, 2016, as the first results were coming in, none of them gave Donald Trump any chance of defeating Hillary Clinton.

Carceral state

In a form of slow violence that has escaped the attention of many both domestically and abroad, the U.S., with just 5% of the world’s population is now home to about 25% of the world’s prison population (2015 data), the overwhelming majority of whom are black or brown minorities. A criminal justice system thoroughly vitiated by racism has interacted with a prison-industrial complex to produce a situation in which a young black man has a higher chance of ending up in prison than he does in college. In deindustrialising States across much of the U.S., one of the few growth industries is prisons staffed by poor whites guarding poorer blacks and Hispanics.

Recent scholarship and quality

investigative journalism have established beyond doubt that the emergence of the carceral state in the alleged “land of the free” was a bipartisan effort. Since the early 1980s, first Republicans and then Democrats competed fiercely to be seen as the party of “law and order”, of being “tough on crime”, and backing the relentless pursuit of the “war on drugs” – all euphemisms for appealing to the worst instincts, fears, and racism of whites seen as key to winning elections. At least three important remaining Democratic aspirants are tainted by their role in the creation and maintenance of this carceral state: Joe Biden, Mike Bloomberg and Pete Buttigieg.

Mr. Biden was a high-ranking Senator and Chair of the Senate Judiciary committee during the 1980s and 1990s, and instrumental in passing legislation that produced the carceral state. The billionaire Bloomberg is former Republican Mayor of New York City and architect of the city police’s notorious “stop-and-frisk program”, which racially profiled blacks and Latin Americans leading to disproportionate levels of arrests, often for trivial degrees of drug possession or petty crimes, if even that. Mr. Bloomberg has very recently, and unconvincingly, apologised for the disastrous results of “stop-and-frisk”. Mr. Buttigieg pursued similarly “tough” (read racialised) policies during his tenure as Mayor of South Bend, Indiana, from 2012-20, and has been unrepentant, even proud, of this aspect of his record.

It is hard to see any of these three candidates energising minorities or the young given this track record. Meanwhile conservative whites susceptible to such dog-whistle politics may well stay with Mr. Trump and his unabashedly white supremacist views: why opt for the ersatz when you already have the real thing? (Mr.

Trump’s faithful often cite the fact that he “says it like it is” as their reason for supporting him.)

Besides Mr. Sanders, at this moment the other seemingly strong and viable candidate in terms of appealing to the constituencies that could help the Democrats defeat Mr. Trump is Sen. Elizabeth Warren. Her impressive track record as economic manager (she was part of the committee that oversaw the post-2008 financial crisis recovery programme, and pushed for greater regulations over banking and finance, and for consumer protection) and the calm competence she radiates on matters of public policy could be an ideal complement to Mr. Sanders.

Trump’s cards

Besides the advantages of incumbency, Mr. Trump has a huge reelection war chest, the largest in U.S. history as a matter of fact; Republicans (like right-wing parties all across the world) have a pronounced advantage over Democrats in manipulating social media in their favour and against opponents; and polls indicate that as much as 63% of the electorate approves of the way Mr. Trump is handling the economy.

Those are dispiriting facts. Yet, if the long and unpredictable primary season ends with Mr. Sanders and Ms. Warren (or Ms. Warren and Mr. Sanders) as the Democratic ticket, they are likely to bring energy, the newest voters, and alienated minorities into the Democratic fold in a way that none of the other candidates is likely to do. All that may not be enough to unseat the current occupant – but at this point in time, it would appear to be the Democrats’ best bet.

Sankaran Krishna teaches politics at the University of Hawaii at Manoa in Honolulu, U.S.

Nutrition and the Budget’s fine print

While there are well-equipped schemes to address malnutrition, funding and policy gaps are problem areas



JAYASHREE B. & R. GOPINATH

A few months ago, the Global Hunger Index, reported that India suffers from “serious” hunger, ranked 102 out of 117 countries, and that just a tenth of children between six to 23 months are fed a minimum acceptable diet. The urgency around nutrition was reflected in the Union Finance Minister’s Budget speech, as she referred to the “unprecedented” scale of developments under the Prime Minister’s Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nutrition, or POSHAN Abhiyaan, the National Nutrition Mission with efforts to track the status of 10 crore households.

Plan and allocation

There are multiple dimensions of malnutrition that include caloric deficiency, protein hunger and micronutrient deficiency. An important approach to address nutrition is through agriculture. The Bharatiya Poshan Krishi Kosh which was launched in 2019 by Minister for Women and Child Development Smriti Irani, and Microsoft founder Bill Gates is a recent attempt to bridge this gap. Existing schemes can well address India’s malnutrition dilemma. However, where are the gaps in addressing this concern? We analyse Budgetary allocation and the expenditure in the

previous year to understand more.

First caloric deficiency. The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme provides a package of services including supplementary nutrition, nutrition and health education, health check-ups and referral services addressing children, pregnant and lactating mothers and adolescent girls, key groups to address community malnutrition, and which also tackle caloric deficiency and beyond. For 2019-20, the allotment was ₹27,584.37 crore but revised estimates are ₹24,954.50 crore, which points to an underutilisation of resources. The allocation this year is marginally higher, but clearly, the emphasis needs to be on implementation.

Another pathway to address hunger is the Mid-Day Meal Scheme, to enhance nutrition of schoolchildren. Here too, the issue is not with allocation but with expenditure. The 2019-20 Budget allocation was ₹11,000 crore and revised estimates are only ₹9,912 crore.

The second is protein hunger: Pulses are a major contributor to address protein hunger. However, a scheme for State and Union Territories aims to reach pulses into welfare schemes (Mid-Day Meal, Public Distribution System, ICDS) has revised estimates standing at just ₹370 crore against ₹800 crore allocation in the 2019-20 Budget.

Next is micronutrient deficiency. The Horticulture Mission can be one of the ways to address micronutrient deficiency effectively, but here too implementation is



low. Revised estimates for 2019-20 stand at ₹1,583.50 crore against an allocation of ₹2,225 crore. In 2018-19, the Government of India launched a national millet mission which included renaming millets as “nutri-cereals” also launching a Year of Millets in 2018-19 to promote nutritious cereals in a campaign mode across the country. This could have been further emphasised in the Budget as well as in the National Food Security Mission (NFSM) which includes millets. However, the NFSM strains to implement allocation of ₹2,000 crore during 2019-20, as revised expenditures stand at ₹1,776.90 crore. As millets have the potential to address micronutrient deficiencies, the momentum given to these cereals needs to be sustained.

Moving to POSHAN Abhiyaan, the National Nutrition Mission which is a major initiative to address malnutrition, had 72% of total expenditure going into “Information and Communication Technology enabled Real Time Monitoring for development and setting up Common Application Software and expenditure on components under behavioural change” according to Accountability Initiative. The focus of the bulk of the funding has been on tech-

nology, whereas, actually, it is convergence that is crucial to address nutrition. The Initiative also found on average that only 34% of funds released by the Government of India were spent from FY 2017-18 to FY 2019-20 till November 30, 2019.

Impact of linkage schemes

With underspending, allocations for subsequent years will also be affected, limiting the possibility of increasing budgets and the focus on nutrition schemes.

Next is the agriculture-nutrition link, which is another piece of the puzzle. While agriculture dominated the initial Budget speech, the link between agriculture and nutrition was not explicit. This link is important because about three-fifths of rural households are agricultural in India (National Sample Survey Office, 70th round) and malnutrition rates, particularly in rural areas are high (National Family Health Survey-4). Therefore, agriculture-nutrition linkage schemes have potential for greater impact and need greater emphasis.

So how can we bring about better nutrition in India? With the largest number of undernourished people in the world, India needs to hasten to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 2 of ‘Zero Hunger’ by 2030. The Economic Survey notes that India should give special attention although the Budget has not explicitly spelt out nutrition in greater detail in many ways.

The following are suggestions to move forward: Focus on nutrition-related interventions, beyond digi-

atisation; intensify the convergence component of POSHAN Abhiyaan, using the platform to bring all departments in one place to address nutrition; direct the announcement to form 10,000 farmer producer organisations with an allocation of ₹500 crore to nutrition-based activities; promotion of youth schemes to be directed to nutrition-agriculture link activities in rural areas; give explicit emphasis and fund allocation to agriculture-nutrition linked schemes; and ensure early disbursement of funds and an optimum utilisation of schemes linked to nutrition.

Nutrition goes beyond just food, with economic, health, water sanitation, gender perspectives and social norms contributing to better nutrition. This is why implementation of multiple schemes can contribute to better nutrition. The Economic Survey notes that “Food is not just an end in itself but also an essential ingredient in the growth of human capital and therefore important for national wealth creation”. Malnutrition affects cognitive ability, workforce days and health, impacting as much as 16% of GDP (World Food Programme and World Bank). In that sense, while Budget 2020-21 looks toward an ‘Aspirational India’, fixing the missing pieces on the plate, can make a difference not just to better nutrition but to build a wealthier nation too.

Jayashree B. and Dr. R. Gopinath work with the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation. 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.

Punishing hate

The electorate in Delhi punished the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for its hate-filled campaign. On the other hand, the resounding victory of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) was the outcome of the solid grassroots work done by the Arvind Kejriwal-Manish Sisodia duo. It is increasingly becoming clear, even to those in awe of the BJP-led Central government, that beyond the vast numbers in the Lok Sabha, the dispensation has nothing to offer to the people by way of positive economic agenda. Its arrogance, haughtiness and megalomania can barely conceal its cerebral

emptiness (Front page, “AAP sweeps Delhi with 62 seats,” Feb. 12).

M.A. SIRAJ,
Bengaluru

The Delhi model

The Delhi government has indeed revolutionised the public school education system by showing the political will to spend a large amount of money on an area that is often neglected in this era of populist politics. First, the government took steps to improve infrastructure. Next, it instituted school management committees, giving a sense of ownership to parents in the learning process of their children. These were not novel

concepts, they were very much present in the Right to Education Act; what was needed to put them into action was political will. However, the face of education is not something that can be changed in a span of five years; it needs sustained investment, both financial and political (Op-Ed page, “The Delhi model of education,” Feb. 12).

SANDEEP KUMAR MEENA,
New Delhi

No seat for Congress

The decimation of the Congress, with a vote share of just 4.26%, should serve as an eye-opener to the rank and file of the party on the futility of continuing with a dynastic leadership.

It is bizarre to note that instead of doing introspection, the party is celebrating the victory of AAP, which has no love lost for the Congress. This only exposes the fact that the Congress has given up hopes of being a frontline Opposition party and is content to piggyback on regional outfits to stay relevant. It is a great fall for an organisation which fought for the country’s freedom under selfless leaders and is now being staffed with sycophants in thrall to a single family. The Gandhis – Sonia, Rahul and Priyanka – should keep away from party affairs completely so that the outfit can be rejuvenated

with new young faces who currently have no baggage.

V. SUBRAMANIAN,
Chennai

The need of a Lokpal

It is unfortunate that the government’s lack of commitment and the Opposition’s indifference have reduced a landmark legislation like the Lokpal law into a farcical exercise. That the anti-corruption watchdog remains in a state of inertness even six years after the law’s enactment is an indictment of India’s political culture. A mere absence of corruption is not enough to satisfy public perception about the rulers’ integrity; there has to be an independent

authority that can stamp the seal of probity on the government’s functioning through fearless investigation. When a *de jure* Lokpal is in place, there is no reason the judiciary, groaning under the weight of a huge backlog, should continue to act as the *de facto* ombudsman. Acting only under the compulsion of a judicial diktat doesn’t enhance the government’s image. It must operationalise the office of the Lokpal (Op-Ed page, “Six years on, Lokpal is a non-starter,” Feb. 12).

V.N. MUKUNDARAJAN,
Thiruvananthapuram

In Kashmir, abnormal is the new normal

Placing senior leaders under detention robs them of the opportunity of queering the normalcy pitch



Three months ago, Home Minister Amit Shah assured the Rajya Sabha that “normalcy” had been restored in Jammu and Kashmir. Yet, the leaders of the two main parties in J&K – Omar Abdullah of the National Conference (NC) and Mehbooba Mufti of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) – have not only been under detention for more than 200 days, but have also been slapped with the Jammu and Kashmir Public Safety Act.

As Minister of State for External Affairs in Atal Bihari Vajpayee’s government, Mr. Abdullah defended India’s position on Kashmir to the world, hurled diplomatic epithets at Pakistan in international fora, and wore the national flag on his heart as it were. But now, according to the Public Safety Act dossier prepared by the J&K administration, he stands accused of coddling militants and mobilising the people of Kashmir to defy Pakistan-backed militants and vote in elections. Like Mr. Abdullah, Ms. Mufti has also been deemed “anti-national”. Given that she ran J&K as Chief Minister with her party in alliance with the BJP for three years, it is very strange that the same BJP overlooked her leanings then.

Extending the shelf of normalcy
To show the world that the people of J&K participated in elections used to be the Indian government’s primary goal. The government used to go out of its way to obtain diplomatic certification for turnouts in elections as a measure of the genuineness of the exercise. The usually abysmal turnouts made it all the more necessary for such measures to be taken. An election in J&K is not going to take place any time soon, but proving that such an election is genuine, when it is held, will still be the main aim of this government. The steady chapeironing of foreign diplomats into the new Union Territory is an indication of this. With every lot of them that enters the territory, the shelf of “normalcy” in J&K is extended. Since the situation is “normal”, the question



“With every lot of foreign diplomats entering J&K, the shelf of ‘normalcy’ in the UT is extended.” Envoys of different countries enjoy shikara rides on Dal Lake in Srinagar on February 12. ■NISSAR AHMAD

then is, when will an election take place?
The Public Safety Act dossier states that the capacity of Mr. Abdullah “to influence people for any cause can be gauged from the fact that he was able to convince his electorate to come out and vote in huge numbers even during peak of militancy and poll boycotts”. Does this mean that it is now normal for a District Magistrate to complain that a politician is able to persuade his constituents to come out and vote? In Kashmir, schools and colleges were open for months after the dilution of Article 370 on August 5, 2019, but nobody attended them. Is that also now normal? Every now and then, U.S. President Donald Trump reminds India that he is ready to mediate between India and Pakistan, even though New Delhi insists that Kashmir is an internal matter. For the American President to repeatedly make that offer was the norm in the worst of times in Kashmir; now it has become a routine in the best of times as well. Is this too the new normal?

Impressions
The government has been conducting focused, narrowly guided tours in batches for foreign diplomats to assess and make a broad certification of the normalcy that prevails in J&K to their home constituencies. These diplomats go to Srinagar and no doubt send rosy, impressionistic cables back to their capitals: ‘Shops are open; there are no barbed wires on

the main streets; and no menacing soldiers either. There are upwardly mobile politicians and green shoots of political activity. There is an upward tick in developmental trends. No one is complaining of the absence of the sham that was Article 370. There are myriad plans with timelines and bar charts and plenty of projects in the pipeline. Comparisons with the situation in West Bank are definitely far-fetched. And no one got killed’.
On the other hand, Indian politicians who cannot go to Kashmir and determine for themselves just how normal the situation is probably have to request the foreign missions to put out regular updates, in the form of newsletters or health bulletins, to get a better sense of the situation. The promotion of regular diplomatic tourism to Kashmir is apparently very different from the internationalisation of Kashmir, which happens, for example, when China intercedes on behalf of Pakistan at the UN and Indian diplomats exert themselves to temporarily dissolve that crisis.

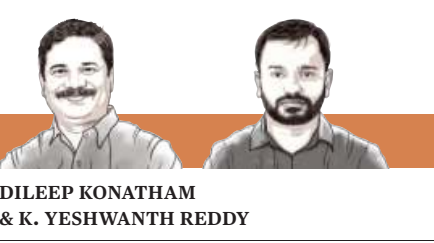
The challenge ahead
If making “unacceptable statements” can merit invocation of the Public Safety Act, especially when elections are nowhere in view, how much has the crisis in J&K really dissolved? The government can probably take heart that there have been no major instances of violence since August 5, 2019, and no major upheavals or killings. Terrorists have not run ram-

pant. Meanwhile, six months of New Delhi’s charm offensive notwithstanding, alienation is omnipresent, as is the keen sense of hurt, betrayal, anger and resignation.
To hold an election, the delimitation hurdle first needs to be crossed. With new political map-making in the region, there will be seven more Assembly constituencies in J&K. These have to be artfully identified and demarcated, which will be done on the basis of the 2011 Census. A delimitation commission is yet to be constituted. Even the panchayat polls, which the Prime Minister declared a resounding success, left half the seats empty because of the absence of candidates and boycott calls.
The challenge for the government then is how to balance the semblance of peace, which is a result of detentions, deployments and restrictions, and provide a platform of very modest political activity that is sanctified by New Delhi, in a manner that can give the seething resentment controllable political vent over what has been done to J&K. This alone explains the calibrated release of minor political leaders. It is presumable that they have been set free on the implicit understanding that they will not be crossing any red lines drawn by New Delhi. The diplomatic tourists hear and see exactly what New Delhi wants them to hear and see. New Delhi’s hope is that the local leaders of the PDP and NC come forward, give heft to the process, and grow into major politicians. The expulsion of PDP politicians can only be a marker for the inroads government agencies are making in signing on new political recruits. It is probably easier to alienate PDP politicians given the divisions already extant in that conglomeration, although it is odd that politicians associated with an “anti-national” like Ms. Mufti should escape that taint. The continued detention of Ms. Mufti and Mr. Abdullah is being done with the intention of starving them of the oxygen of a following, forcing upon them political atrophy, and robbing them of the opportunity to queer the normalcy pitch. In Kashmir, it could soon be argued that the more things are normal, the more abnormal they really are.

sudarshan.v@thehindu.co.in

Riding on data for mobility

Data-based governance can assist in reducing traffic congestion, as illustrated by a pilot study in Hyderabad



The digital revolution has made interactions between humans and machines, and among citizens, governments and businesses, seamless and efficient. Today, e-governance enables and empowers citizens to directly engage with the state, thereby eliminating barriers in the delivery of public services. The next wave of transformation in digital governance is at the intersection of data and public good. The key to this transformation lies in incorporating data as a strategic asset in all aspects of policy, planning, service delivery and operations of the government.
Transportation is one such critical area, where data-based governance is expected to provide a solution to the ever-growing threat of congestion to urban economies. Congestion caused an estimated loss of \$87 billion to the U.S. economy and \$24 billion to the four metro cities in India in 2018. Given the limited land resources available, the key to solving congestion lies in improving the efficiency of existing transportation systems.

Multiple sources
An efficient transportation system would help ease congestion, reduce travel time and cost, and provide greater convenience. For this, data from multiple sources such as CCTV cameras, automatic traffic counters, map services, and transportation service providers could be used.
A study by Transport for London, the local body responsible for transport in and around the U.K. capital, estimates that its open data initiative on sharing of real-time transit data has helped add £130 million a year to London’s economy by improving productivity and efficiency. In China, an artificial intelligence-based traffic management platform developed by Alibaba has helped improve average speeds by 15%.
Closer home, the Hyderabad Open Transit Data, launched by Open Data Telangana, is the country’s first data portal publishing datasets on bus stops, bus routes, metro routes, metro stations, schedules, fares, and frequency of public transit services.
The objective is to empower start-ups and developers to create useful mobility applications. The datasets were built after an intensive exercise carried out by the Open Data Team and Telangana State Road Transport

Corporation to collect, verify and digitise the data.
Hyderabad has also begun collaborating with the private sector to improve traffic infrastructure. One such partnership followed a Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Telangana government and Ola Mobility Institute. Under this collaboration, Ola has developed a tool, Ola City Sense, to provide data-based insights that can monitor the quality of Hyderabad’s roads and identify bad quality patches.
The data is provided to city officials on a dashboard, and updated every 2-3 weeks to capture the nature of potholes/roads. The information thus given is useful not only for carrying out road repairs, it also helps officials take initiatives to improve road safety, monitor quality of construction, and study the role of bad roads in causing congestion.

Planning road repair work
A pilot was implemented in a municipal zone to gauge the efficacy of the data in supporting road monitoring and prioritisation of repairs. The early results of this pilot project were encouraging. The dashboard helped city officials plan the pre-monsoon repair work and budget for repairs last year.
The pilot also demonstrated the willingness of government departments to apply data-based insights for better decision making. This tool is now being adopted across all municipal zones under the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation. This could also serve as a model for other cities to emulate.

The Hyderabad example shows that governments can make their departments data-centric by institutionalising data collection, building technology platforms and helping the departments develop capacity to handle the insights generated from the data. Command and control centres under the ‘smart cities’ initiative can be an ideal starting point. Such interventions, however, also need to address genuine concerns around data security and privacy.
The Telangana government has declared that the year 2020 will be the Year of Artificial Intelligence. It aims to run hackathons and masterclasses with AI as the theme. Discussions are on to include AI for Traffic Management. At the core of AI-based algorithms is good data, and partnership with key stakeholders can only help build such algorithms. Insightful data will be the key to transform Hyderabad into a ‘world-class city’ in terms of mobility.

Dileep Konatham is Director, Digital Media, Telangana government, and heads the ‘Open Data Initiative’. K. Yeshwanth Reddy is Lead-Urban Mobility at the Ola Mobility Institute

Parasites, poverty and privacy

The themes of the Oscar-winning film are all too familiar to the global South

One of the first things that strikes you about *Parasite*, the brilliant South Korean social satire that swept up four Academy Awards this week, is how familiar it feels to Indian viewers. Bong Joon-ho directs it like a perfectly timed high-wire act, but grounds it deeply in his understanding of the class divide.

The untouchability of class
The deep differences between the Park and the Kim family that *Parasite* focuses on mirrors the enormous income gap in India and, interestingly, takes the shape of what is essentially untouchability; only, it’s the untouchability of class. The wealthy Mr. Park’s one abiding fear is that his chauffeur Kim Ki-taek might “cross the line”. The line is left undefined – but it needs no definition for Indians, into whose homes chauffeurs and gardeners might enter, but might not sit on the sofa. We might foot the driver’s bill when we go out, but seldom will he share our table.

If the upper-class Indian justifies this by talking about ‘hygiene’, the young son of the Kim family has fewer inhibitions – he simply points out that all four members of the Kim family *smell* the same. There’s a poignant scene where Ki-taek’s daughter says this smell can never be scrubbed out because it’s the smell of the basement they live in. What’s left eloquently unsaid is that this is the distinctive odour of poverty. It sharply recalls the scenes from the Tamil play *Manjal*, where manual scavengers lament that the smell of sewage never leaves their skin. And it seems entirely apposite that it is the sight of Mr. Park recoiling from Geun-sae, hand covering nose, that finally pushes Ki-taek over the edge.

Bong extends the implicit untouchability of poverty with the metaphor of the toilet, that familiar forbidden ground. Two vivid scenes demonstrate how close to that re-viled toilet the poor lead their lives. First, when searching desperately for an Internet signal to tap, it’s by sitting

on the WC and holding phones above their heads that the Kim siblings are able to read their WhatsApp messages. Then, when their basement home gets flooded, Ki-jeong runs to slam down the lid of the WC to keep the rising sewage from spewing out, but later she’s forced to crouch on the same lid, smoking a cigarette, oblivious to the slime around her.
Secluded toilets, privacy and personal space are unaffordable luxuries for the poor. In fact, not long ago, India’s Attorney General had argued that “it’s not right to talk about the right to privacy for poor people”. Although the court ruled that privacy is a fundamental right, real life seldom offers it to people whose homes are pavements and cardboard-walled shanties.
This awareness makes the contrast between the Kim’s squalid basement and the Parks’ soaring, airy home even more stark. In one significant scene, the Kims, caught unawares by the Park family returning home early, hide under the drawing room table, unable to escape even as the Parks make love on the couch. Jammed there, they are forced to listen to an act of intimacy that mocks the lack of privacy for intimate acts in their own life. It reminds us inexorably of Indian chawls and slums – of people who must carefully time their return home to avoid interrupting others; of tiny rooms divided by saris to create the illusion of space; of couples who crowd beaches and parks desperate for solitude.

Universal theme
Parasite’s bottom-up, unromantic, searing take on poverty couldn’t have come from anywhere but the global South. But its triumph lies in how fluidly it universalises the theme, making it impossible for privileged juries to look away. The film’s fantasy and caprice give it a surreal air, but the mortifications it portrays are only too familiar not just to us, but to audiences everywhere in the developing world.

vaishna.r@thehindu.co.in



DATA POINT

Resounding return

The Aam Aadmi Party returned to power in Delhi winning 88% of the seats and over 53% of the total votes. Since 1972, no other party has received such a strong mandate in a Delhi Assembly re-election. Since the BJP’s win in the 2014 Lok Sabha election, there have been only 6 out of 33 State elections in which a non-BJP incumbent has returned to power. By **Nareesh Singaravelu, Srravya C and Sumant Sen**

AAP stands out | Table shows the contested seat share, contested vote share and total vote share of the winners and runners up in the 10 Assembly elections held in Delhi since 1972

Delhi Assembly elections	Party	Winner		Runner-up	
		Contested		Contested	
		Seat share	Vote share	Party	Seat share
1972	INC	84.62	52.54	BJS	8.93
1977	JNP	82.14	52.58	INC	19.23
1983	INC	60.71	47.5	BJP	38
1993	BJP	70	42.82	INC	20
1998	INC	74.29	47.76	BJP	22.39
2003	INC	67.14	48.13	BJP	28.57
2008	INC	61.43	40.31	BJP	33.33
2013	AAP	40	29.64	BJP	45.59
2015	AAP	95.71	54.59	BJP	4.35
2020	AAP	88.57	53.57	BJP	11.94

Exceptions | Apart from the AAP in ‘15 & ‘20, the BJD in Odisha, the TMC in West Bengal, the TRS in Telangana and AIADMK in Tamil Nadu have successfully fought anti-incumbency in polls since 2014. In Telangana & TN, the BJP is a weak force

Election	Party	CVS (%)	CSS (%)	Election	Party	CVS (%)	CSS (%)
Tamil Nadu 2011	AIADMK	54.06	90.91	Odisha 2014	BJD	43.41	79.59
	BJP	2.55	0		BJP	18.02	6.8
Tamil Nadu 2016	AIADMK	41.06	57.69	Odisha 2019	BJD	44.71	76.71
	BJP	3.57	0		BJP	32.49	15.75
Telangana 2014	TRS	34.3	11.11	West Bengal 2011	AITC	50.15	81.4
	BJP	19.3	52.94		BJP	4.14	0
Telangana 2018	TRS	47.09	73.95	West Bengal 2016	AITC	45.18	72.01
	BJP	7.13	0.85		BJP	10.28	1.03

CVS - Contested vote share; CSS - Contested seat share

The Hindu

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 13, 1970

Protecting bank nationalisation

The Union Cabinet to-night [February 12, New Delhi] decided to issue an ordinance to restore the status quo ante in regard to the nationalisation of the 14 banks, following the Supreme Court judgment last Tuesday invalidating the Bank Nationalisation Act of 1969. The ordinance will be issued to-morrow. The ordinance will meet the “twin” objections of the Supreme Court to the Act that was struck down, namely, hostile discrimination against the 14 major banks and payment of compensation. There is expected to be another Cabinet meeting tomorrow prior to the issue of the ordinance which is being drafted. It is reliably learnt that the ordinance will provide for the acquisition of the shares in the 14 banks nationalised in July last. It is also learnt that no further extension of nationalisation to other banks, Indian and foreign, is being contemplated. The Law Ministry is understood to be studying the bearing of the Supreme Court’s judgment on other matters - the reference is clearly to general insurance. The Cabinet discussion on the bank issue lasted for over two hours. The Cabinet met after the Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi had talks with leaders of Opposition groups. The Cabinet discussed the proposal for an ordinance mooted by the Ministry of Law in consultation with the Finance Ministry.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO FEB. 13, 1920.

Syndicate of the Punjab University

(From an Editorial)

The Syndicate of the Punjab University had appointed a committee to consider Lala Durga Das’s proposal regarding the framing of rules prohibiting students from taking part, active or passive, in politics. The Tribune understands that this committee has rejected the retrograde suggestion, although, as was to be expected, it has expressed itself against the active participation of students in political movements. The committee has also proposed the formation of students’ unions more or less on the lines of those at Oxford and Cambridge. The repeated attempts to coerce the student population to avoid politics as though it were poison can only have the effect, not always wholesome, of driving them to the other extreme, and it is only by allowing them to discuss political questions, conduct debates on the problems of the hour and utilise facilities for training them in citizenship that their minds could be directed in healthy channels and genuine public spirit among them created.