



Make or break?

In Bihar, the BJP will have to decide how to accommodate its allies' competing demands

It makes no sense to save the worst for last. The allies of the Bharatiya Janata Party in Bihar, the Janata Dal (United) and the Lok Janshakti Party, have their own reasons for pushing for an early agreement on seat-sharing for the Lok Sabha election next year. Unless the BJP is willing to sacrifice some of the seats it won in 2014, it is unlikely to be able to accommodate the JD(U). The LJP does not want to be squeezed out of its six seats, and the JD(U) will not be happy if it is given seats solely on the basis of its performance in the last Lok Sabha election, when it won from just two of the 40 constituencies. For the BJP to retain all its current allies, it must consider contesting fewer seats than the 22 seats it won in the last election. That is not easy to do, and there is a real possibility of the alliance breaking on the seat-sharing issue. After frequently switching electoral partners, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar does not enjoy high political credibility despite his efforts to couch opportunism in idealistic garb. If he is unable to tie up the alliance issue, Mr. Kumar may well become isolated in Bihar. The BJP's hand will only be strengthened the closer it gets to the Lok Sabha election, as the JD(U) will have fewer options. The national party may actually fancy its chances in a triangular fight as in 2014: leaving the JD(U) in the lurch might not be bad as a political tactic.

The JD(U) was the senior partner of the alliance in Bihar until Mr. Kumar broke away on the issue of Narendra Modi being named the prime ministerial candidate in 2014. But after its spectacular victory in 2014, the BJP feels it is on the ascendant in Bihar. Only a mahagathabandhan with the Rashtriya Janata Dal and the Congress allowed the JD(U) to make a comeback in 2015. Political manoeuvres have allowed Mr. Kumar to continue as Chief Minister as he alternately took sides against communalism and corruption, but the JD(U) is no longer the largest party in Bihar. The demand that the alliance fight the Lok Sabha election under Mr. Kumar is but a faint stab at regaining the JD(U)'s pre-2014 primacy in relation to the BJP. But while the JD(U) wants an understanding to be reached without loss of time, the BJP would like to put it off to the extent possible. BJP leader and Deputy Chief Minister Sushil Kumar Modi sought to downplay the differences, saying "when hearts have met" sharing seats was no big deal. But if there is one lesson in politics, it is that cold calculations of the mind always trump spontaneous emotions of the heart. Even if the JD(U) forces a decision in the short term, the seat-sharing may not be to its satisfaction.

Tainted by uranium

The groundwater contamination across India must be probed, and safe sources identified

Reports of widespread uranium contamination in groundwater across India demand an urgent response. A study, published in *Environmental Science and Technology Letters*, has found over 30 micrograms per litre (mcg/l) of the heavy metal in parts of northwestern, southern and southeastern India. Drinking such water can damage one's kidneys, and the World Health Organization prescribes 30 mcg/l as an upper limit. Unfortunately, the residents of the regions surveyed were using the contaminated wells as their main source of drinking water. These findings highlight a major gap in India's water-quality monitoring. As the Bureau of Indian Standards does not specify a norm for uranium level, water is not tested regularly for it. This is despite the fact that evidence of uranium contamination has accumulated from across India over the last decade. A 2015 Bangalore study, for example, found uranium levels of over 2000 mcg/l in the southern part of the city. Other studies found levels of over 500 mcg/l in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. The *Environmental Science* paper adds new data to this body of evidence by sampling wells in Rajasthan and Gujarat.

The health effects of drinking uranium-tainted water merit special attention. A few small animal and human studies have found that the heavy metal damages the kidneys. The studies indicate that this is a chemical effect, rather than a radiological one, even though uranium is radioactive. But the chronic effects of uranium consumption are still unknown. Could there be, for example, a link between the high rates of chronic kidney disease (CKD) in India and uranium exposure? In a survey conducted between 2005 and 2010, an Indian registry found 8,385 CKD cases with no known cause. One cluster of mystery disease, located in Srikakulam district in Andhra Pradesh, has stumped epidemiologists for years. It is impossible to say if these clusters have anything to do with groundwater contamination, unless researchers look at it systematically. Another critical area of research is the mechanism by which uranium enters groundwater. The *Environmental Science* paper identified two types of terrains with heavy contamination. In Rajasthan and other northwestern regions, uranium occurs mostly in alluvial aquifers; while in southern regions such as Telangana, crystalline rocks such as granite seem to be the source. When groundwater is over-extracted from such soils, the researchers suggest, the uranium is exposed to air, triggering its release. These hypotheses must be explored, because they will help determine where to find safer water. This is what happened in West Bengal, where a decade of research revealed why the contaminant arsenic mainly occurred in shallow aquifers. Researchers found that a combination of geological and chemical triggers brought arsenic to the Ganga delta in the Holocene era, and then released it into the sediments from that period. Similar research across India's uranium hotspots can uncover who is at risk, and how to protect them.

Chronicle of a victory foretold

Turkish republicanism is posing an incoherent challenge to Erdoğan's mix of nationalism and Sunni internationalism



E. AHMET TONAK & VIJAY PRASHAD

On Sunday, June 24, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) won both the presidential and the parliamentary elections. The elections were conducted in extraordinary circumstances. Hundreds of journalists are in prison, as are thousands of political opponents – including the leader of one of the main Opposition parties, Selahattin Demirtaş. The state-run media did not care to be neutral. Most state institutions, including the electoral commission, put themselves forward as the champions for Mr. Erdoğan's re-election. But while Mr. Erdoğan and the AKP certainly won the vote – including the presidential election by the first round – he will have a hard time winning legitimacy for this victory.

The state-run news outlet, Anadolu Agency, first announced that Mr. Erdoğan had won 70% of the votes in the presidential contest. Then, they adjusted the percentage downwards to 59% and eventually to 52%. The initial number was crucial. It created the sense of overwhelming triumph for Mr. Erdoğan. His margin of victory was slim, and even slimmer if we acknowledge that 11% of his party alliance's overall support of 53% in the Parliament came from the far-right Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). Without the MHP behind him in the presidential contest, Mr. Erdoğan may have been forced into a run-off against the standard bearer of the old national guard, Muharrem İnce of the Republican

People's Party (CHP).

But the fact of the matter is that in the end Mr. Erdoğan took more than half the vote. He was able to win votes in both his rural strongholds and in the urban areas. The way he positions himself is crucial – as a Turkish nationalist, including a protector of Turkish business interests, and as a Sunni internationalist. He remains able to mop up the votes of the Anatolian business communities of different sizes and of the pious electorate. It helped that he was in alliance with the MHP, the near-fascist bloc although it is startling to realise that in this election the Turkish people supported another right-wing party, the İYİ or Good Party. The Good Party is led by Meral Akşener, a former Minister of the Interior with a controversial background in the deep state. It was even more remarkably in alliance with the CHP.

None of this mattered to Mr. Erdoğan's steamroller effect. He swept up his core votes and managed to go past the margin with the help of his own tethered far right-wing allies.

Before the crisis hits

Mr. Erdoğan had called for elections a year before they were due. This was a clever political move. Undercurrents suggest that the Turkish economy will implode before the year is over. It would have been perilous for him to go to the people in the midst of a full-blown crisis. Careful monetary policy has put off the crisis. It is what gave him the opportunity to establish his political authority before he tackles the economic weakness of Turkey.

In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, new money was created to break the unavailability of credit. Turkey, like other middle-income countries (Argentina and Mexico), joined the larger eco-



nomies in a low-interest regime to stimulate economic growth. When the U.S. Federal Reserve began to reduce money supply and to raise interest rates, capital withdrew from places such as Turkey and Mexico, which made their currencies lose value. Mr. Erdoğan's financial managers prevented the Turkish central bank from raising interest rates to deal with this capital outflow. The Turkish lira dropped in value against the U.S. dollar from 3.75TL in early 2018 to 4.92TL by May. What this policy suggests is not that Mr. Erdoğan wished to stem the capital flight but that he wanted to protect his allies amongst the mid-level Anatolian business communities and the small artisans. They would have been wiped out without this assistance. Twice the central bank rushed in to support these sections of the population, and yet the bank remains under pressure to do more to prevent the lira's free fall.

These new manoeuvres of international finance capital added substantial fragility to Turkey's economy, which already accumulated substantial external debt of around \$500 billion (mostly private sector debt). By the end of the year, Turkey will have to pay down almost half of this debt. To do so, Mr. Erdoğan may be compelled to enact policies that favour the business communities and disadvan-

tage the working class and the peasantry. Higher rates of unemployment can be expected, as can inflation in essential goods.

Mr. Erdoğan will likely deal with this situation in the way he has tackled it in the past – by finding scapegoats in Turkey's Kurdish population or in unnamed 'outsiders'. He effectively uses a seam of Turkish anxiety about being targeted by outsiders, a symptom of having not properly come to terms with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and of the European Union's (EU's) awkward arm's-length relationship with Turkey.

Opposition's agenda?

In his press conference on Monday, Mr. İnce implied that his party had failed in its mission. Turkish republicanism poses an incoherent challenge to Mr. Erdoğan's combination of Turkish nationalism and Sunni internationalism. It is wedded to the EU project, including Turkish membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and is unable to grasp the concerns and expectations of the pious sections of the lower middle class and the working class. Without a clear economic policy that would capture the imagination of the people, the CHP and its allies simply appear as an anti-Erdoğan force, one that makes his personality the core around which it has constructed its opposition. What the CHP stands against – Mr. Erdoğan – is clear. What the CHP stands for, however, is unclear.

The People's Democratic Party (HDP), a combination of the mainstream left and Kurdish nationalist groups, went into the election at the greatest disadvantage. Its standard bearer, Mr. Demirtaş, had to run from prison. In his press conference, Mr. İnce said that he had hoped for a better result from the İYİ Party and the HDP. But, in fact,

the HDP crossed the 10% threshold in the parliamentary elections and will once more have its parliamentarians seated. The HDP's gains, however, came largely from western Turkey, where the Kurdish population voted to ensure that it would get its parliament. Faith that it can move an agenda against Mr. Erdoğan and the AKP is not high.

Between two worlds

At the start of the Arab Spring in 2011, Mr. Erdoğan was confident that Turkey would re-emerge as a major player in the region. A foreign policy outlook named neo-Ottomanism commanded Turkey's ambitions. A failed attempt to overthrow Syria's Bashar al-Assad and the defeat of Turkey's preferred Muslim Brotherhood from Tunisia to Egypt led to the desiccation of Mr. Erdoğan's hopes for the expansion of Turkish influence. Tension with the West and the failure in the Arab world have driven Turkey back towards relations with Russia, China and Iran.

Mr. Erdoğan's re-election will mean only that Turkey will continue to stumble between its obligations to NATO and the West as well as its need for close links to Russia, China and Iran. Long known as the hinge between Asia and Europe, Turkey is now more than ever caught in that position. Mr. Erdoğan will not be able to move an agenda out of this trap. He, like Turkey, is caught between two worlds, unable to choose, riding a tiger that he will not be able to control.

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Transplanting best practices

Public hospitals must be brought into the loop for deceased donor programmes



SANJAY NAGRAL

Heart transplantation has always been in the public eye right from the time Christiaan Barnard performed the first successful human heart transplant in 1967, in Cape Town, Africa. Therefore, controversy in India over a large percentage of foreign nationals receiving cardiac transplants from deceased donors in India is not surprising. This follows a report published by *The Hindu* (June 12, 2018) based on a leaked WhatsApp message from the head of the National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation. However, the debate around it is vital because it is a marker of the fault lines in transplantation policy in India that need immediate correction.

The senior surgeon, Mohamed Rela, wrote an article last week on the need for transparency in the organ allocation process (*The Hindu*, Editorial page, "Heart of the matter", June 19). He is right in say-

ing that Tamil Nadu's deceased donor programme is one of the best in the country and that public credibility is key to its continuing success. But it is also important to address certain key drivers behind foreigners getting cardiac transplants.

It may be pertinent to note that one of the first cardiac transplants in the world was attempted back in 1968 at Mumbai's King Edward Memorial Hospital by P.K. Sen (the world's fifth and sixth heart transplants). What is relevant to the debate is that Dr. Sen's transplants as well as India's first successful cardiac transplant in 1994 (by P. Venugopal at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Delhi) were performed in public institutions.

Market pressures

Along the way, organ transplantation in India (this includes Tamil Nadu) largely became a private sector activity. Hence while the act of donation is a public act and the organs a public good, from that point onwards whatever happens is largely under the private sector. The rules of market medicine thus dictate who the organs go to. And hospitals that invest large sums in transplantation programmes



which include huge payouts to surgeons look for returns.

Unlike the liver and kidneys, a heart transplant cannot be performed with a living donor. Incidentally, around 20% of living donor liver transplants performed in some of the large centres in India are also on foreigners. So patients with advanced heart failure from certain countries which do not have a deceased donor programme have no option but to try their luck in India. As these are largely performed in corporate hospitals, the costs in India are well beyond a large majority of the local population. This is where foreigner nationals who are often able to pay such sums fit in.

Cardiovascular practice in India is largely dominated by bypass and

stenting for ischemic heart disease partly because this is a cash cow. Treatment of ailments such as valve problems and advanced cardiac failure has been sidelined. For example, in Mumbai city while there are at least 30 cardiac centres with advanced expertise, only one hospital has chosen to start and support cardiac transplantation. As one who has been associated closely with deceased donation in Mumbai (especially the first few years) I often saw perfect hearts of young deceased donors remaining unutilised for the lack of recipients. Cardiac surgeons with training in transplantation who were appointed for this purpose did not have enough referrals and chose to leave or focus their attention on bypass. As has been pointed out, this may change in the future.

Revisit policy

While ensuring the credibility of the process in the public eye lies at the heart of deceased organ donation, we need to go beyond just general calls for transparency. We will have to demonstrate that organs will go to those who need them the most rather than to those who can pay for them. This will

mean considering hard policy changes that include strengthening the capacity of the public sector, subsidising transplantation and perhaps enabling affirmative action in the allocation process in favour of public hospitals. Thus every fifth or sixth organ could be mandatorily allotted to a public hospital or the private centre can be asked to perform a certain proportion of transplants free.

As Tamil Nadu has led the way in deceased donation and also has a good record of public medicine, it could lead the way here. One of the secrets behind Europe's high donation rates is public trust in their respective nationalised health schemes.

While India has enthusiastically embraced the idea of a liberalised economy and immediately applied it to health care, many countries have insulated their health-care systems from the ravages of the market. This too is at the heart of this matter.

Sanjay Nagral is a surgeon in Mumbai and also performs liver transplantations. He is the chairperson of the Forum for Medical Ethics and a member of the Executive Council of the Declaration of Istanbul Custodian Group

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.

Recalling Emergency

Those across the political spectrum wanting to recall the dark days of the Emergency must also explain two things. Why did someone such as L.K. Advani make a comment a few years ago that "Emergency-like" conditions are emerging? Second, how can we ignore that fact that in these past four years, certain sections of the population are being harassed and targeted by vigilante groups, even as the government looks the other way? Yes, the Emergency was a needless political exercise and a blot. But I can recall that the common man was not greatly exercised and even benefitted from a short-lived disciplined administration. Only some political leaders and activists were affected. Enough of the hand-wringing. We have enough on our plates to sort out. Therefore, recalling a 40-plus-year-old event is a needless distraction

("Indira, Hitler used similar methods", June 26).

M. BALAKRISHNAN, Bengaluru

There is no doubt that the Emergency was a dark phase in the history of our democracy. But if someone rewrites Arun Jaitley's blog, the person need only make a few changes as the situation now remains the same especially when it comes to contrarian voices. Some sections of the media too are not only bending but also crawling before the powers that matter.

N. NAGARAJAN, Secunderabad

Victim and the mob

The article, "At the crossroads", on violence in India, mobs and the victims, was moving. (Editorial page, June 26). I was overcome by emotion when I read the sentence, "He begs for water as he is beaten up but the mob refuses." How can people be so depraved? And why are the government and law

enforcement agencies so unmoved by certain communities being targeted?

B. SAHANA, Bengaluru

Malnutrition crisis

The government should ensure free nutritious meals in every tribal settlement using the template of the mid-day meal schemes in schools. Using digital technologies, it should also control manipulation by officials. There has to be a social audit of such a meal scheme. Besides this, the government should also ensure good education and basic facilities to all tribal children (Editorial page, An unequal platter", June 26).

V.R. AJITH KUMAR, Thiruvananthapuram

News in 'Brief'

That *The Hindu* is exploring the digital space is welcome but perhaps it can make it a free app as a gesture of goodwill towards its readers around the globe.

P.V. KRISHNA RAO, Bonner, ACT, Australia

The daily digital bulletin will be a boon to younger readers as they are constantly battling against time. One hopes that the app will gain an excellent subscription base and prove to be a game-changer.

P.K. VARADARAJAN, Chennai

The front page

There have been a series of positive changes taking place in the print media – layout, design and improved print quality. But one wonders why pages have to be flooded with commercial advertisements, most with multicolour pictures. I was shocked and surprised by *The Hindu*'s 'classified' front page of the edition dated June 25. We live in a moral climate which is relative, where all that matters is sensuality, glitz and glamour as it makes selling easy. It may appeal to the next generation but for senior citizens like many of us we are distressed.

JOSHUA DHANABALAN, Chennai

Twenty-five years ago, *The Hindu* set the bar high as far as advertisements were concerned. Certain subjects were never accepted. I say this as an art director with an advertising firm that worked with the daily earlier. The front page was also reserved exclusively for news reports; only 100cc was reserved for display advertisements. Times have changed as can be seen by what was advertised on the second page (June 25).

Advertisements may be the mainstay in terms of revenue generation, but is it asking for too much that there be a balance? *The Hindu* is read by many school-going children who may find such advertisements to be embarrassing.

P. SUBRAMANIAN, Thirissur, Kerala

Why should one of the daily's readers ("Letters to the Editor", June 26) be 'startled' by the 'assorted business' classifieds on page one? There is nothing new in the concept. When I started

reading *The Hindu* back in the 1950s, its page one had only classified advertisements. News began from page three. This was an old British tradition. The *Times* also followed the practice. In fact the transformation of the media in India has been dealt with in my book, *The Post-Truth Media's Survival Sutra*. *The Hindu* changed the practice some time in the mid-1950s.

P. RAMAN, New Delhi

FIFA goals

One of the pulsating features of the ongoing FIFA World Cup is the vast number of goals being scored during injury-time. It just means that even split seconds are extremely crucial as they can make or mar a match. How true it is that no game or match is normally over or finished until the final whistle is blown or the final point is won or lost.

C.G. KURIAKOSE, Kothamangalam, Kerala

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