



Andhra spectrum

Jagan Reddy is showcasing his widened social base with his choice of Ministers

Starting off as an unsure heir to his father Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy's legacy 10 years ago, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has since transformed himself into a mass leader. He has done this by sheer tenacity, but his political rise was devoid of an ideological thread. Deeply aware of this inadequacy, which is more pronounced amid the BJP's dominance nationally, Mr. Reddy has made an early move to fortress the wide-spectrum social coalition that accorded his YSR Congress Party a landslide victory, by appointing five deputies. The death of his father, then Chief Minister and better known as YSR, in 2009 had pushed the Congress over the cliff in the State, a downslide in fortunes that befell it nationally too. Humiliated by the Congress and jailed during its rule, Mr. Reddy continued his tireless travels across the State, finally arriving this summer at his destination, the CM's chair. The constitution of his Council of Ministers, including Mekathoti Sucharita, a Dalit woman, as the Home Minister, and five deputies, is evidently aimed at nurturing the coalition of social groups that he singlehandedly built up through his travels. The five Deputy CMs are from the Scheduled Caste (K. Narayana Swamy), Scheduled Tribe (Pamula Pushpa Sreevani), backward caste (Pilli Subhash Chandrabose), Muslim (Amzath Basha) and Kapu (Alla Kali Krishna Srinivas) communities.

Unitary projects such as nationalism have strong homogenising tendencies that consider particular identities and their aspirations for representation irrelevant or even fissiparous. Weaker sections of society are often at the receiving end of such projects, even if they are enthusiastic subscribers. Mr. Reddy's success in weaving together a political base that denied the BJP a foothold in Andhra Pradesh, a State where it could not win a single seat, and vanquished the Telugu Desam Party was built on a sensitive appreciation of the aspiration for representation among diverse sections of society. Mr. Reddy's predecessor, N. Chandrababu Naidu, had two deputies, one a Kapu and one from another backward caste; that was aimed more at accommodating formidable interest groups rather than empowering the weakest. YSR had won in 2004 and 2009 with an expansive welfare agenda. Mr. Reddy believes that welfarism alone is not sufficient and representation is critical in the changed situation. YSR's victories were the bedrock of the Congress in 2004 and 2009; Mr. Reddy's victory signals the decimation of the party in the State. But his politics holds out some useful lessons for the Congress and other parties seeking to challenge the Hindutva juggernaut: that material betterment of the citizenry needs to be complemented with wider social coalitions.

St. Petersburg consensus

Russia and China are strengthening ties amid tensions with the U.S.

The bonhomie between China's and Russia's leaders at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum last week was demonstrable. In a sign of the heightened tensions between the U.S. and the two countries, Russia's annual investment gathering was boycotted by the U.S. Ambassador to Russia, Jon Huntsman. His absence was ascribed to the prevailing environment in Russia for foreign entrepreneurs, typified by the detention of U.S. private equity investor Michael Calvey on allegations of fraud. Conversely, the Chinese telecommunications equipment manufacturer Huawei signed an agreement with Russia's principal mobile operator to start 5G networks, in a rebuff to Washington's attempts to isolate the firm internationally. Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping made it clear in St. Petersburg that the tensions with the West had only drawn them closer. The rift with Russia began with Moscow's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the stand-off in eastern Ukraine that continues. Russia's tensions with the U.S. and some EU countries stem also from their opposition to the 1,200-km-long Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline from Russia to Germany. U.S. objections draw in part from its eagerness to export liquefied natural gas to Europe, besides thwarting Moscow's ambition to dominate the region's energy market. Far more sensitive has been U.S. Special Counsel Robert Mueller's inquiry into possible Russian meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Washington's blacklisting of Huawei, prohibiting it from selling technology to the U.S. and barring domestic firms from supplying semiconductors to Beijing, falls into a class of its own among international trade disputes.

Amid these tensions, in St. Petersburg Mr. Xi and Mr. Putin emphasised that bilateral relations were at a historic high, marked by increased diplomatic and strategic cooperation. China participated in Russian military exercises on its eastern border last September, marking a watershed. Moscow and Beijing, hostile rivals of the Cold War era, have for a while been adopting common positions at the UN Security Council on critical international issues. Bilateral relations are also guided by pragmatism. Russia appears realistic about the growing Chinese economic clout in Central Asia, once firmly in its sphere of influence, thanks to China's massive infrastructure investments under the Belt and Road Initiative. Chinese cooperation would moreover prove critical for Russia's elaborate plans to exploit the Northern Sea Route along the Arctic as an alternative transportation hub. International sanctions have not been very effective in isolating Russia. European states, notably Germany, recognise the importance of engaging with Russia to contain Mr. Putin's expansionist aims. Equally, President Donald Trump's "America first" policy is compelling potential rivals to make common cause.

Inhumane, and utterly undemocratic

Mohammad Sanaullah's case must serve as an urgent call for rethinking the National Register of Citizens



GAUTAM BHATIA

On June 8, upon the orders of the Gauhati High Court, Mohammad Sanaullah was released on bail from a detention camp in Assam. He had been detained on May 29, after a Foreigners Tribunal had declared him an illegal immigrant. The Gauhati High Court's bail order came after a week of sustained public pressure, occasioned by the revelation that Mr. Sanaullah had served for three decades in the Indian Army.

In the intervening period, a shocking number of irregularities surfaced. In its inquiry report, the Assam border police had written that Mr. Sanaullah was a 'labourer'. The three men who signed the case report claimed that the investigating officer had fabricated their signatures. The investigating officer himself admitted that it might have been an "administrative mix-up". Yet, it was on the basis of such shoddy material that the Foreigners Tribunal – a quasi-judicial body expected to follow the rule of law – came to the conclusion that Mr. Sanaullah was a "foreigner", and packed him off to a detention camp – until the High Court stepped in to set him at liberty.

But Mr. Sanaullah is among the luckier ones. Investigative journalists have revealed over the last few years that 'administrative errors' of this kind are the rule rather than the exception. As Mr. Sanaullah acknowledged in an interview after being released, there were people in the detention camps with similar stories, who had been there for 10 years or more. For these individuals, without the benefit of media scrutiny, there may

be no bail – only an endless detention. But by forcing the conversation onto the national stage, Mr. Sanaullah's case has provided hope that we may yet recognise the unfolding citizenship tragedy in Assam for what it is, and step back from the brink while there is still time.

NRC, Foreigners Tribunals

According to the Assam Accord, individuals who entered Assam after March 24, 1971 are illegal immigrants. There are two parallel processes to establish citizenship: the Foreigners Tribunals operating under the Foreigners Act, and the National Register of Citizens (NRC), which is under preparation. While nominally and formally independent, in practice, these two systems bled into each other, with people who have been declared as foreigners by the Foreigners Tribunals, and even their families, dropped from the draft NRC.

For something as elemental and important as citizenship, one would expect these systems to be implemented as carefully as possible, and with procedural safeguards. This is especially true when we think of the consequences of being declared a non-citizen: disenfranchisement, exclusion from public services, incarceration in detention camps, statelessness, and deportation. Before treating an individual – a human being – to such drastic consequences, the very least a humane and civilised society can do is to ensure that the rule of law has been followed to its last degree.

The reality, however, is the exact opposite. In a vast number of cases, the legally mandated initial inquiry before an individual is dragged before a tribunal as a suspected "foreigner" simply does not happen – indeed, it did not happen for Mr. Sanaullah. The Tri-



RITU BALAKONWAR

bunals themselves are only constrained by a very limited number of procedural safeguards. This has led to situations where Tribunals have issued notices to entire families, instead of just the suspected "foreigner". Additionally, reports show that Foreigners Tribunals habitually declare individuals to be "foreigners" on the basis of clerical errors in documents, such as a spelling mistake, an inconsistency in age, and so on. Needless to say, the hardest hit by this form of "justice" are the vulnerable and the marginalised, who have limited documentation at the best of time, and who are rarely in a position to correct errors across documents. On occasion, orders determining citizenship have been passed by tribunals without even assigning reasons, a basic *sine qua non* of the rule of law. In addition, a substantial number of individuals are sent to detention camps without being heard – on the basis of *ex parte* orders – and the detention centres themselves are little better than concentration camps, where families are separated, and people not allowed to move beyond narrow confined spaces for years on end.

The process under the NRC is little better. Driven by the Supreme Court, it has been defined by sealed covers and opaque proceedings. For example, in a behind-closed-doors consultation with the NRC Coordinator, the Supreme Court developed a new

method of ascertaining citizenship known as the "family tree method". This method was not debated or scrutinised publicly, and ground reports found that people from the hinterland were not only unaware of the method, but those who were aware had particular difficulties in putting together "family trees" of the kind that were required (the burden fell disproportionately upon women). And recently, it was found that a process by which individuals could file "objections" against people whose names had appeared in the draft NRC – and on the basis of which these people would be forced to once again prove their citizenship – had resulted in thousands of indiscriminate objections being filed, on a seemingly random basis, causing significant hardship and trauma to countless individuals. However, when the people coordinating these "objections" were contacted, they brushed it off by saying that it was mere "collateral damage" in the quest to weed out illegal immigrants.

The role of the judiciary

In a process riddled with such flaws, and where the consequences are so drastic, one would expect the judiciary, the guardian of fundamental rights and the guarantor of the rule of law, to intervene. Instead, the Supreme Court, led by the present Chief Justice of India, has played the roles of cheerleader, midwife, and overseer. Not only has it driven the NRC process, as outlined above but it has repeatedly attempted to speed up proceedings, pulled up the State government when it has asked to be allowed to release people detained for a long time, and instead of questioning procedural violations and infringement of rights, has instead asked why more people are not in detention centres, and why

more people are not being deported. Most egregiously, the Court even used a PIL about the inhumane conditions in detention centres in order to pursue this project.

However, what the Supreme Court has failed to understand is that in questions of life and death, where the cost of error is so high, it is not "speed" that matters, but the protection of rights. But through its conduct, the Supreme Court has transformed itself from the protector of the rule of law into an enthusiastic abettor of its daily violation. And the Gauhati High Court has been no better, passing a bizarre and unreasoned order stating that it would be a "logical corollary" that the family members of a declared foreigner would also be foreigners, on the basis of which the border police have sent the names of entire families to NRC authorities. This is the very antithesis of how constitutional courts should behave.

Focus the spotlight

Mohammad Sanaullah is, for now, a free man. But a society in which his case is the exception instead of the rule, where it needs a person to be an ex-Army man, and his case pursued by national media for a full week before interim bail is granted, is a society that has utterly abandoned the rule of law. Yet Mr. Sanaullah's case can do some good as well: it can prompt some urgent national introspection about a situation where, in the State of Assam, thousands of people languish in detention camps for years, victims of a process that, to use an old adage, would not be sufficient to "hang a dog on". If anything can trigger an urgent and imperative call for change, surely this will – and must.

Gautam Bhatia is a Delhi-based lawyer

A clear arc from India to Nigeria

The leadership in both countries must take the initiative to energise bilateral ties



MAHESH SACHDEV

It was a coincidence straight out of the silver screens in Mumbai or Lagos: the leaders of India and Nigeria both began their respective second terms within a day of each other following their unexpectedly decisive election victories. The challenges faced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari during their first terms were uncannily similar: security against terror, monetary and fiscal conundrums, a communal and sectarian divide, chronic unemployment, rampant corruption, rural distress and a fragile neighbourhood being the recurrent themes.

Each of the two leaders is widely acknowledged as an outlier to the system riddled with corruption and nepotism and is admired for his personal probity, hard work and discipline.

For instance, Mr. Buhari, 76, returned to power in 2015 – 30 years after he ruled Nigeria as a military dictator. The intervening decades were spent variously in detention, farming and as challenger-candi-

date in three presidential elections.

Diverse trade

It may be tempting to both Indians and Nigerians to shrug at these similarities as banal trivia; however, under them lies plenty of substance and potential linking the two countries and aspirations of their people. First, Nigeria being Africa's most populous country (191 million) and economy (\$376 billion) as well as the world's sixth largest oil exporter (about 2 million barrels per day) is evidently important to us. According to the latest Indian Department of Commerce statistics, Nigeria is India's largest trading partner in Africa (19th overall) with total trade estimated at \$13.5 billion in 2018-19. As official Nigerian data show, thanks to our booming oil imports, India is Nigeria's largest trading partner. For the same reason, Nigeria enjoys 4:1 surplus in bilateral trade. Nevertheless, it is still a sizeable market for India's manufactured exports, such as (2018-19 figures) miscellaneous machinery (\$500 million), vehicles (\$495 million), pharmaceutical products (\$447 million), textile items (\$299 million), iron and steel articles (\$152 million) and plastics (\$109 million).

In contrast to the stagnancy in India's global exports, its exports to Nigeria surged by 27% last year



to reach around \$2,880 million. Indian investments in Nigeria are estimated at around \$15 billion with a further \$5 billion in the pipeline. There are at least 180 Indian companies operating in Nigeria with pharmaceuticals, steel, power, retailing, fast-moving consumer goods and skillings as their mainstay. Approximately 50,000 Indians reside in Nigeria, some of them for decades. Most of them are professionals, such as engineers, accountants, bankers, trainers and health-care experts.

Success despite apathy

While all these facts go to underline the substantive nature of India-Nigeria ties, they also point to two important contextual factors. First, all these achievements are the outcome of valiant attempts by individual stakeholders with scant official encouragement or support.

For instance, some simple tweaking in our visa procedure can help thousands of Nigerians avail of our medical and educa-

tional facilities, benefiting all sides and creating huge people-to-people goodwill. Despite the encouraging numbers, the two governments have not yet been able to facilitate direct connectivity of air travel, banking and shipping – steps which could have promoted the ease of doing bilateral business.

Second, enormous potential still waits to be leveraged in such sectors such as upstream hydrocarbons (despite India being the largest buyer of Nigerian crude), agriculture, health care and skillings. Despite their growth, Indian exports to Nigeria are still around a quarter of China's.

Much potential

Although bilateral ties have had to face strong headwinds during the past five years, more could have been accomplished. Mr. Buhari, who was trained in India as a military officer and holds this country in high esteem, attended the third India-Africa Forum Summit held in October 2015 and met Mr. Modi for bilateral talks. Then Vice President Hamid Ansari's bilateral visit in September 2016 broke the hiatus in top-level contact since Manmohan Singh's Nigeria visit, as Prime Minister, in 2007.

Though some ministerial-level visits took place in the past five years, these were mostly for multi-lateral events in India. The last ses-

sion of the Joint Commission Meeting was in 2011 and the Foreign Office Consultations were held in 2003. Bilateral ties have not drawn commensurate proportion of the resources offered by India to its African partners largely due to some systemic issues. Defence cooperation has been mostly episodic and training oriented.

As the two leaders begin their respective second innings, they need to give a push to India-Nigeria ties sooner rather than later. Actions along few force-multiplier axes suggest themselves. With oil and other commodities becoming a seller's market, an early summit between the two leaders is an obvious imperative. It could evolve a multi-pronged strategy to leverage evident economic complementarities in sectors such as hydrocarbons, infrastructure, institution-building, defence and agriculture. A purposive follow-up session of the joint economic commission soon thereafter could provide an incremental and sustainable road map empowering the relevant bilateral stakeholders. If handled deftly and with political will, it could usher in an India-Nigeria economic synergy that has been untapped for some decades.

Mahesh Sachdev was the Indian High Commissioner to Nigeria during 2008-13. He is the author of the book, 'Nigeria: A Business Manual'

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.

A word of advice

One wonders which direction Indian democracy is headed upon hearing Congress president Rahul Gandhi's renewed attack on the Prime Minister ("Modi's campaign filled with hatred: Rahul", June 9). The campaigning during the general election was marred by personal insinuations. Practically no short- or long-term policies for the welfare of people and steps to strengthen democracy were discussed. Mr. Gandhi knows very well that his 'chowkidar chor hai' line did not find resonance with the people. The Opposition must let the government begin work, while maintaining vigil.

P. R. V. RAJA,
Pandalam, Kerala

Party travails

The emerging fault lines within the Congress party,

right from its AICC headquarters to almost every State unit, are a serious setback to the party ("Congress travails go from bad to worse", June 9). The epidemic of open dissidence explains the parochial mindset of Congress leaders. The lack of ideological commitment is evident. The leaders of the party are supposed to be its soldiers who strengthen it during crises, but we have the reverse happening here.

N. SADHASIVA REDDY,
Bengaluru

Creeping fear

The report, "A thread of fear and hate" ('Ground Zero' page, June 8), holds a mirror to the harsh reality of fear gripping the minorities predominantly in north India as well as highlighting the danger posed to lives and

livelihoods by right-wing elements. The Prime Minister's pronouncement of 'Sabka Vishwas' immediately after the general election, his declared intention to win over the minorities and his dramatic gesture of highlighting the importance of the Constitution raised hope of a new beginning. It should not be allowed to fade away. The right wing should know that the greatness of India can never be realised by suppressing its multiple identities.

MANOHAR ALEMBATH,
Kannur, Kerala

Use with care

In our school days in the 1950s and 1960s, paper and stationery use were important especially in large families that worked hard to make both ends meet. In our family, for instance, we were given

strict instructions by elders not to leave any blank space in notebooks ('Open Page', "Go for the blank space", June 9). Any blank space was later combined with other such papers and bound afresh into small rough notebooks 4 inches by 5 inches in size. There were occasions when the opening side of a notebook and the pages thereafter were used for one subject, with the reverse end (upside down) used for another subject. I still remember how some of us did combined studies in mathematics. We used chalk pieces to work out the problems on a red oxide floor in order to save paper, and then used a duster cloth to wipe off our work. The 'use with care' habit was reflected in postcard writing too.

SESHAGIRI ROW KARRY,
Hyderabad

The wink

It was a delight to read the writer's delectable account of variants of the wink ('Open Page', "The simple pleasures of a momentary wink", June 9). I wonder whether the present generation, so busy with gadgets, has found time to even think about the fading of this 'simple pleasure'.

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

In the 'Life' page article titled "A glorious yellow bloom in honour of botanist E.K. Janaki Ammal" (June 9, 2019), a sentence that read "Mrs. Viraraghavan, who claimed that the rose named E.K. Janaki Ammal is the only tropical rose species in the world ..." should be corrected to say: "Mrs. Viraraghavan said that the rose named E.K. Janaki Ammal was bred from *Rosa clinophylla*, which is the only tropical rose species in the world..."

A sentence in the Business page report headlined "Banking system on the cusp of a transformation: Das" (June 8, 2019) read: "However, if we take into account the capital conservation buffer (CCB), some banks, especially public-sector banks (PSBs), are falling short of the required 10.875%." It should have been 1.875%.

In the story titled "Can't stop, won't stop: the rise of Tamil rap" (The Hindu Weekend, June 8, 2019), the reference to Singapore-based Lady Kash should be corrected to read as Singapore-born Lady Kash.

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