

## A difficult campaign

In the run-up to the election, Pakistan's judiciary and military are showing their hand

emocracy has always been fragile in Pakistan. It was only in 2013 that a transfer of power from one democratically elected government to another was realised for the first time. As the country heads for the second such transfer, with a general election scheduled for July 25, the celebration is muted, overshadowed by a series of dramatic developments. Last week, former Prime Minister and Pakistan Muslim League leader Nawaz Sharif was sentenced to 10 years in prison in a corruption case involving undeclared property in London. The case, first outed in the Panama Papers, has seen Mr. Sharif disqualified from office and then barred from holding a party position in the ruling PML(N) after being held guilty by the Supreme Court. The charges are serious, even for a country plagued by corruption in high places. But many Pakistanis, including Mr. Sharif's critics, believe the anti-corruption court was overzealous, and even motivated by those in the deep state unhappy with his recent run as Prime Minister. In an unusual move, military and intelligence officers had been despatched to cities around the world to gather as much evidence as possible against him. Mr. Sharif, who has been sentenced along with his daughter and son-in-law, accuses the Opposition parties led by Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf of having received support from the establishment to hold massive rallies calling for his ouster. This was a role Mr. Sharif himself played in the 1990s, when he was the politician favoured by Pakistan's all-powerful establishment.

While the attempt to neutralise Mr. Sharif's political role in Pakistan's future is the biggest story in this campaign, it is by no means the only destabilising trend. In the past few weeks, the media have battled harassment, with copies of the Dawn banned from cantonments. Journalists have faced death threats. This week, Awami National Party leader Haroon Bilour became the second member of his family to be assassinated, pointing to a systematic targeting of politicians who don't adhere to an Islamist line or kowtow to the military. The atmosphere is by no means conducive to the conduct of a free and fair election and has been further vitiated by terrorist groups being 'mainstreamed' in the polity. The most notable such group is the Allah-o-Akbar Tehreek. Sectarian groups and radical Islamist ideology are being tolerated by the military, despite harsh strictures on terror funding from the Financial Action Task Force, and an international grey-listing that threatens to cripple the economy. The elections will serve as one marker for the democratic process; the larger struggle in Pakistan for the deepening of democracy will continue.

## High on rhetoric

Punjab's drug menace demands an all-out war that goes beyond empty gestures

t has taken Punjab Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh over a year and a half to launch his much-anti-Leipated war on drugs. This he did on July 4 by ordering mandatory drug tests for all government employees, including the police. While this is welcome, even if belated, it is a very small and insubstantial measure towards curbing the pervasive drug menace. For someone who promised to wipe out drugs from the State within a month of being elected, the conduct of annual drug tests on some 3.25 lakh employees is a piece of tokenism. More steps are needed; less missteps, too. The decision of the Punjab Cabinet to recommend the death penalty to drug-peddlers is an example of the latter. Capital punishment is abhorrent. Given that there is evidence that suggests it is also no guarantee of deterring crime, this is more of an empty signal. What is required is a comprehensive war on drugs fought on several fronts, including interventions in the community to spread awareness and foster a culture against the use of drugs. The challenges faced by the State are huge. Estimates vary but by some accounts as many as two-thirds of all households in Punjab have a drug addict in their midst. Punjab's prisons are overcrowded with drug-users and peddlers, and its streets and farms witness the easy availability of narcotics and opiates. Last year the government arrested 18,977 peddlers and treated some two lakh addicts. The sheer extent of the problem suggests it is more than just a few profiteers that have been responsible for causing this menace or helping to sustain it. Something of this scale required a wide network, a well-oiled and smoothly run machinery that has the secret support and collaboration of at least a few of those who work in government.

Given the geography, the drugs, whether it is opium or heroin, make an easy and assisted entrance into Punjab from the Golden Crescent (Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan), and synthetic drugs are thought to come in via Himachal Pradesh. That means those guarding Punjab's 553-km border with Pakistan must take serious steps to plug the inflow. The Central security forces are obviously beyond the control of Amarinder Singh. Therefore, security-planners in New Delhi have to make sure that the border is properly barred to the flow of narcotic substances. This is a national problem as a substantial portion of the drugs that land in Punjab make their way to the rest of the country. Given the links between drugs and terror, this poses a national security threat. Then there are the politicians. The previous Akali Dal-BJP alliance had also promised to drain Punjab's vast drug swamp. The political class has a critical role to play in winning the war on drugs. It is not enough that politicians merely line up to have themselves tested for drugs to win political brownie points. They need to put the State and the nation above self-serving political ends and agree that this battle must be fought in concrete ways, going beyond photo-ops and sound-bites.

# Caught in a cleft stick

Nitish Kumar's move to rejoin the NDA could end up hurting him, as events in the past year show



VIDYA SUBRAHMANIAM

s anticipated, Nitish Kumar has decided to continue his **L**troubled alliance with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), at least for now. The Bihar Chief Minister had no option but to lump it, and as a Hindi newspaper picturesquely put it, it was a case of "aage kuan, peeche khai?" (fall into the well or fall off the cliff)

Mr. Kumar has indeed been in a state of perpetual quandary ever since he embraced Prime Minister Narendra Modi in July last year. The Bihar Chief Minister, who up until then had held Mr. Modi in contempt and bitter enmity, said the Prime Minister and his party were preferable to the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD). He savaged the RJD, at the time his partner and a constituent of the Bihar Mahagathbandhan, as "corrupt and criminally-inclined".

#### Changing winds

Yet, in this one year, the BJP has done all it could to deeply embarrass Mr. Kumar. Today, it seems unstoppably on a mission to wreck the one thing closest to his heart: his often reiterated vision of a secular, multi-faith India. On the other hand, the RID, lately helmed by Tejashwi Yadav, the party's rising star and an angrier version of the now-jailed father, Lalu Prasad Yadav, has unambiguously rejected all suggestion that he reconcile with Mr. Kumar and facilitate his return to the Mahagathbandhan.

In many ways, the Assembly seat of Jokihat, falling in Bihar's

cy, sums up all that is going wrong for the Chief Minister. His party, the Janata Dal (United), or JD(U), recently lost two State Assembly by-elections, one of which was Jokihat, a seat it had held through four Assembly elections, two in 2005, one each in 2010 and 2015. Jokihat has a Muslim population of over 70%, and the JD(U)'s successive victories seemed to affirm Mr. Kumar's claim that he practised inclusive politics regardless of where he was situated, within the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) or in opposition to it.

#### The 'MY' factor

Mr. Kumar's short point: His philosophy and convictions overrode who he was in alliance with, and his voters, Muslim or Hindu, had an innate understanding of his ability to navigate ideological contradictions without losing his moral compass. Significantly, of the JD(U)'s four victories in Jokihat, three had come by defeating the RJD whose voter base is formed by the iconic MY (Muslim-Yadav) acronym. By way of comparison, Mr. Yadav is that rare politician who, even in the face of extreme adversity, has not cohabited with the BJP, which explains the 'M' part of his MY constituency. Mr. Kumar in contrast had spent 17 years with the BJP before dumping it in 2013, outraged that Narendra Modi had been assigned to lead the NDA. If between 2005 and 2010, the ID(U) thrice won Muslimmajority Jokihat as an ally of the BJP (in 2015 it won as part of the MGB), what changed in 2018 that it lost the same seat? The only change from 2005 to 2018 is Mr. Kumar's return to the NDA, but now with Mr. Modi as Prime Minister. Expectedly, the Modi factor turned Jokihat-2018 into an acid test for the JD(U), a fact reflected in

the heavy deployment of State ministers for the campaign. The Chief Minister's own pitch was around his years of service to the Muslim community. None of this mattered in the end, and with Yaday Junior harping on the JD(U)'s betrayal, the RJD candidate, Shahnawaz Alam, won the seat by over 40,000 votes. It didn't help that the JD(U)'s candidate had serious cases against him.

Ties with the BJP Mr. Kumar's previous aversion to Mr. Modi was premised on a perceived difference between him and the earlier generation of BJP leaders such as Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Lal Krishna Advani. This despite their shared belief in Hindutva and the fact that each had witnessed serious sectarian violence under his command of the party. As BJP president in 1990, Mr. Advani had led the Ram rath yatra which has been correctly judged to be the forerunner of the poisonous politics that has today enveloped and polarised In-

Mr. Vajpayee was the Prime Minister and Mr. Modi the Chief Minister at the time of the 2002 anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat. Mr.

responsible for the violence and publicly advised him to follow Raj Dharma (righteous justice). But in a U-turn thereafter, he implied that the pogrom was retribution for the Godhra train carnage. "Kisne lagayee aag?" (who lit the fire?) he asked at the BJP's national executive meet in Goa on April 12, 2002, echoing Mr. Modi's own citing of Newton's law of action and

Nonetheless, in the larger public perception, and especially in the eyes of the BJP's regional allies in the NDA, Mr. Vajpayee was a middle-roader, a gentle, compassionate leader wedded to the tenets of Raj Dharma. In 2005, Mr. Advani attempted to mitigate his Ram temple legacy by visiting Pakistan and praising Mohammad Ali Jinnah, a transformation which immediately made him acceptable to the liberal constituents of the

With Mr. Modi's advent, the cosy arrangement between the BIP and its allies broke. Mr. Kumar apprehended a danger to his proposition that he could be secular even while in an alliance with the Hindutya BIP. Addressing the State Assembly after breaking with the BJP in 2013, he insinuated that Mr. Modi was antithetical to the 'idea of India' which was his own guiding philosophy. Mr. Kumar had almost till the end pushed for the more acceptable Mr. Advani to be made the NDA's prime ministerial candidate.

In July 2017, Mr. Kumar swallowed his pride and returned to the NDA on Mr. Modi's terms. The RJD's alleged corruption was one reason for the switch. But the other, by his own admission, was Mr. Modi's emergence as the only national leader of consequence. However, events since then have severely tested the Chief Minister's

belief that he had made the right choice and the alliance would not hurt his secular image or dilute his commitment to minorities and the most deprived castes, including Dalits. In his recent address to the JD(U)'s national executive, Mr. Kumar spelt out the bottom line. His stand on the three evils, corruption, crime and communalism, remained non-negotiable.

#### On the ground

The question, though, is: How would he reconcile his own ideals with the starkly different scene emerging under Mr. Modi? The nation-wide spate of gau rakshak-related lynchings, the rabid speeches and actions of Central ministers and the violence on Dalits, not to mention the BJP's shrill insistence on building the Ram temple, have all combined to bring the fringe to the mainstream. The economic scene has turned dismal with survevs recording a slight but perceptible dip in Mr. Modi's popularity. In Bihar, the sympathy factor is with Mr. Lalu Prasad Yadav, jailed and sentenced cumulatively to several years in different corruption cases. His son's fiery speeches have firmed up the RJD's MY base even as there are indications of the Mahagathbandhan gaining from a MahaDalit consolidation via alliances with Jitan Ram Manjhi's Hindustani Awam Morcha and Mayawati's Bahujan Samaj Party. This is not what Mr. Kumar bargained for.

P.S.: Before he rejoined the NDA, Mr. Kumar was the favourite to lead the Opposition in 2019. Today he has to be thankful merely to save his place in Bihar.

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# A clean cooking strategy

In its drive towards sustainability and energy security, India must ensure an awareness of better cooking fuel choices

Chart plots emissions against fuel cost

Darker the circle, higher the emission

Bigger the circle, costlier the fuel

Most cost-effective,

biogas 🌢



ABHINAV TRIVEDI & ANURAG MISHRA

Inergy use, a key indicator of living standards across the ✓ world, is also instrumental in raising it. The choice of cooking fuel in households (especially ruconditions especially for women and children. On an average in India, household spending on cooking fuel accounts for around 5-6% of its total expenditure. Factors such as socio-economic (availability and easy access, also determined by household income and price of fuel, education and awareness), culture or lifestyle, and, to a large extent, government policies also influence cooking fuel choice.

Affordable, reliable and clean energy for cooking is essential not only for reducing health and environmental impacts but also helping women to do more productive work and developing the rural economy.

### Comparing the options

Among the various fuel options available (firewood, pellet, biogas, kerosene, liquefied petroleum gas or LPG, piped natural gas or PNG) biogas accounts for the lowest effective greenhouse gas emission; PNG and then LPG are next. An as-

sessment of annual life cycle emissions of various fuels per household per annum is based on the estimation of life cycle emissions, feedstock processing, fuel processing, distribution and cookstove use. Further, a comparison of the levelised cost of various fuels (non-taxed and not subsidised), annual life cycle emission per household (kg/CO2 equivalent) and extent of in-house air pollution for various cooking fuels suggests that biogas and PNG are the best cooking energy options. amounts of toxic pollutants (respirable particles, carbon monoxide, oxides of nitrogen and sulphur, benzene, formaldehyde and polyaromatic compounds) which contribute to indoor air pollution. In households with limited ventilation – common in rural household and semi-urban areas - these pollutants could lead to severe health problems. Among the various options available for cooking fuel, firewood and pellet are the most polluting, LPG and kerosene are moderately cleaner, and biogas and natural gas are cleaner fuels for combustion.

### The push

National level programmes to ensure that most switch to clean cooking fuels have been initiated since the 1980s, the National Project on Biogas Development (NPBD) being an example. But the programme has been hampered by mala fide practices, poor construction material, a lack of main-

Emission per household per annum (Kg CO<sub>2</sub> eq.) tenance, misrepresentation of achievements and a lack of accountability and follow-up services. Once again, in order to ensure access to clean energy -a key focus area for poverty alleviation -the government launched a flagship programme, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana in May 2016. with a cumulative target of providing LPG connections to more than eight crore families. Further, the Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) has been holding auctions across cities for distribution of gas for cooking through PNG.

However, since conventionally, governments have been subsidising LPG and as such a consumption-based subsidy is not available for biogas and PNG, it has led to a preference for LPG over other cleaner, safer, more cost effective and locally available options (biogas in rural areas). Further, LPG import along with large subsidies are a drain on government resources which hamper the focus on other social development pro-

Traditional firewood stove

### What can work

To promote biogas in rural and semi-urban areas, adopting the service-based enterprise model with suitable resource availability offers a sustainable approach. It will also help self-drive the programme. The model is being successfully implemented in Hoshiarpur, Punjab using a 100 cubic meter biogas plant. The plant supplies clean and piped cooking biogas to 44 households and a school every day.

Such models can also generation employment significantly at the grass-root level an important additional benefit of running a biogas programme. However, there is a need to provide financial support and facilitate capacity building in order to promote enterprise-based models community-level plants.

The cost-competitiveness of natural gas (including imported re-gasified LNG) calls for scaling its penetration in urban and semi-urban/rural areas. PNG needs to be promoted in urban areas beginning with the densely populated Tier-I and Tier-II/III cities, making LPG just one of the options to choose from rather than it having an edge over others. For this, the cost of LPG must be set as the upper-cost ceiling and the PNGRB could focus only on the setting up of safety regulations, with distritributors.

To further enable a consumer to freely make cooking fuel choices, consumption-based need to be replaced with a functional subsidy that is provided on the basis of household income levels and local variables. Possibility of leakages must also be eliminated by ensuring that subsidies of any kind are provided only through direct benefit transfer. Such an approach will provide a neutral thrust and promotion to different types of cooking fuels on the basis of their original virtues.

As India takes a long-term view on sustainability and energy security, it is important to create an environment where its citizens are aware of the options and make their energy choices based on the nature of the fuel and not because of socio-economic constraints.

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## 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.

The photographs of floodhit Mumbai are distressing. It is also the plight some other cities across India face – going under water during the monsoon after a summer of hardship. This is mainly due to an inadequate number of storage reservoirs and tanks thanks to greed of people, realtors and politicians who have the least concern for the environment. We should learn from the past where rulers successfully managed floods and drought. There were also regular desilting measures. Kshirasagara Balaji Rao,

### Tag of eminence

The grant of status 'institute of eminence' or 'institute of excellence' has to be earned and not conferred

("Ministry defends eminence tag to Iio varsity", July 11). Just because the expert committee has persons of repute and impeccable integrity on its panel, it is no licence to automatically confer such a status of excellence. Top universities across the world have earned this by fostering excellence in such a way that it results in a stream of Nobel laureates and original research being taken up. Soon after Independence, Jawaharlal Nehru created institutes of technology, economics and science; they did not become "schools of excellence or eminence" from day one but grew to this position by dint of hard work and vision. Even so they are nowhere near the top 10 of the world's best

universities. In the case of the proposed Jio University, it shows that the government must keep its distance from corporates. A.V. NARAYANAN,

Pakistan today The blunt article (Editorial page, "Deep state, deeper problems", July 11) shows how democracy appears to be a farce in Pakistan. Without tall leaders who can impart purpose and direction to the overall development of the nation, Pakistan will continue to be haunted by radical groups, politicians with vested interests and the overbearing military dictating governance. Conducting elections as a ritual will have no impact on the ground reality unless there is bold and

pragmatic change. R. RAMANATHAN.

### Cave rescue

A reader has criticised India's inaction in connection with the successful rescue in Thailand of 12 boys and their soccer coach from a cave ('Letters to The Editor', July 11). Sections of the Indian media do not seem to have reported an Indian firm making an offer to supply pumps. In a letter to the Thai government, the Indian Ambassador to Bangkok said India would be willing to offer the "technical expertise" of the company which has a subsidiary in Bangkok. Experts from the company were at the cave. S.R. PRAKASH,

impossible but pulled off with the help of expert divers from across the globe, backed by the Thai military and scores of volunteers. What better example could there be of the world coming together to save people in grave distress? A rescue attempt from the bowels of the earth is definitely out of anyone's comfort zone but it was done spectacularly. As a

■ Thailand should take pride

in achieving something

which most thought near

found the response to help to be incredible. Afraaz Sidhu,

■ There are no words left to praise the rescue team; in turn, they too seem to have been astounded by its successful ending. Their words "we are not sure if this

13-year-old school student, I

is a miracle, a science or what" sums it up. Compliments to everyone who was involved with this astounding and breath-taking rescue mission

B. PRABHA,

■ The massive rescue effort, which breached the barriers of nationality and language with the sole aim of saving the hapless youngsters, is bound to go down in history as humanity's finest hour where no obstacle was too big to scale in the face of fierce human determination. Our hearts go out to the brave diver from Thailand who lost his life during the initial stages of the risky mission.

K. NATARAJAN,

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