



Change in Mizoram

The MNF faces the task of upgrading infrastructure and diversifying the economy

In the din over the Bharatiya Janata Party's losses to the Congress in three States in the Hindi heartland, the dismal defeat of the ruling Congress party to the Mizo National Front in Mizoram has gone insufficiently noticed. With this, the Congress has lost its last remaining State in the Northeast, a region in which it was traditionally dominant. The BJP managed to mark its first and only victory in the State by winning the Chakma refugee-dominated Tuichawng seat in south Mizoram's Lawngtlai district. But the BJP will consider the MNF's victory as a significant accretion to its set of fellow-travellers and alliance partners in the Northeast. The MNF is part of the North-East Democratic Alliance, an anti-Congress front formed by the BJP that includes all the other ruling parties in the region. While the MNF has come to power on its own, without an alliance with the BJP, its membership in the NEDA means it is an ally of the BJP for all practical purposes. Despite an improvement in social indices in the State over its decade-long tenure, the Congress was always expected to face an uphill task to retain power because of growing anti-incumbency sentiment following allegations of corruption in recent years. The MNF's victory was also aided by its strong positions on total prohibition, a promise that carried a lot of weight with conservative and influential Christian civil society groups in the State, which had implicitly lent support to the party.

The presence of the Zoram People's Movement, a collective of seven parties formed just a few weeks before the Assembly elections, hit the Congress's chances even more. The candidates of the ZPM contested as independents but garnered close to 23% of the vote, damaging the Congress in particular. The Congress's vote share dipped to 30.2%, a 14 percentage point swing from its 44.6% share in 2013. The Congress's total tally of five seats is its lowest-ever in the 40-member Mizoram Assembly. The MNF faces the task of diversifying the economy, given the disproportionately large section of the population dependent on agriculture and horticulture. The New Land Use Policy launched by the Congress did bring a significant pause to jhum cultivation (the practice of slash and burn), but fell short of encouraging sustainable agricultural practices as the scheme effectively provided patronage for commercial crop-growing by select beneficiaries. Mizoram has the potential to be a gateway in the Act East and BIMSTEC connectivity schemes to extend trade routes from the Northeast to Myanmar and onwards. But it requires better road connectivity and infrastructure. This should be an important priority for the new MNF government.

Rights, revised

Lok Sabha has passed a new Bill to protect transgender persons, but concerns remain

The passage of a Bill in the Lok Sabha to secure the rights of transgender persons is a progressive step towards extending constitutional protection to this highly marginalised community. The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2018, as passed, is an improved version of the legislation introduced two years ago. The earlier draft was widely perceived as falling short of the expectations of stakeholders and not adequately rights-based, as envisaged by the Supreme Court in its landmark decision on transgender rights in 2014. Experts, as well as the Standing Committee of Parliament on Social Justice and Empowerment, had criticised the original definition of 'transgender persons' for violating the right to self-determined identity. The revised definition omits the reference to a 'neither male nor female' formulation, and covers any person whose gender does not match the gender assigned at birth, as well as transmen, transwomen, those with intersex variations, the gender-queer, and those who designate themselves based on socio-cultural identities such as *hijra*, *aravani*, *kinner* and *jogta*. The requirement that a district screening committee must recommend the issue of a certificate to each transgender may be necessary to prevent misuse, but such a process goes against the principle of self-identification, a key right the Supreme Court had protected. The government has omitted the need to go through the same screening committee to get a revised certificate after a transgender has sex reassignment surgery, but the medical certification requirement remains. Transgender persons may question the need for such external gate-keeping.

There are other legitimate concerns in the revised Bill, which will now go to the Rajya Sabha. One refers to the bar on forcible separation of transgender persons from their families, except through court orders. It has been revised to cover transgender children. Earlier it covered adults as well, but the committee had noted that it was within the family that many transgender persons faced harassment and abuse, and often felt driven to flee their homes. Another concern is that the Bill criminalises begging by making it an offence for someone to compel or entice a transgender person into seeking alms. When begging itself is no more seen as an offence, it may harm the community if such a means of livelihood - in the absence of employment - is criminalised. The Bill, unfortunately, does not give effect to the far-reaching directive of the Supreme Court to grant backward class reservation to the transgender community. Nor have the Standing Committee's concerns about recognising civil rights in marriage, divorce and adoption among them been addressed. There is much good intention behind the welfare provisions, but social legislation is much more than high-minded clauses. It needs to be followed up with zealous implementation and framing of deadlines to achieve specific objectives.

Metropolis of the mind

Delhi is fast becoming a lost city to its inhabitants, a hazy shadow of its old glorious self



ANANYA VAJPEYI

Delhi in the cooler months, between early October and late March, once a six-month stretch of mild sunshine, blue skies, crisp air, festivals of every major religious community, associated with agricultural cycles, equinoxes and other natural and cultural punctuations of the annual solar calendar braided with the monthly lunar calendar, lives now only in memory. A pall of the world's worst air pollution descends on the city at the beginning of what used to be the festive season, and lifts only, if at all, as the harsh summer approaches, bringing with it its own problems of excessive heat and water scarcity. Our lifespans have been shortened, we are told, by sustained exposure to various pollutants, but things have reached a stage where one can only see this as a relief from having to live on in a place no longer fit for human habitation.

We cough, gasp and choke our way through these punishing winter months, with poor visibility, skies neither blue nor sunny, and a feeling of being trapped in a long nightmare from which we cannot awaken. A public health emergency engulfs us all, from children with permanently compromised respiratory systems to the elderly struck by lung cancer towards the end of their lives. The persistent itch in our throats and the dull ache in our heads will not go away for weeks at a time. Mornings and

evenings are unsafe for walks; any outdoor activity necessitates the use of masks if not inhalers; natural light can only be seen when one leaves town. Eerily simultaneously, a political fog descended on the capital in 2014.

Lost cities

In late August Ashis Nandy delivered the Daya Krishna Memorial lecture in Delhi, titled "Lost Cities and Their Inhabitants". He was careful to define and delineate what he meant by "lost". A "lost city" is one whose past one can remember and relate to; one whose memory as a living city is not overwritten by an episode of final destruction. Thus Hiroshima is not a lost city, since it was completely destroyed in the form in which it had existed by the detonation of an atomic bomb in August 1945. A city may be called lost when people remember its life and not its death. The city as it continues to be and the city's lost self are, in a sense, discontinuous with one another.

Lost cities are autonomous, to use Prof. Nandy's term, from their real counterparts. He spoke about Bombay and Jerusalem, Cochin and Dhaka, Lahore and Hyderabad, Calcutta and Lucknow. Needless to say, histories of war, genocide and mass migration are implicit in the stories of these cities, and many others in the world, ancient as well as modern. An age passes, sometimes, before our very eyes, and what used to be our home and our haven becomes the site of myth and legend. The past serves our emotional and psychological needs, so that we keep it alive in memory to nourish our desiccated present. But it is not easy to return to or take refuge in a



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lost city. To try to go there is a kind of madness; to try to keep on living there is to reiterate and perpetuate our trauma of the loss and alienation we experienced when we were overwhelmed by historical forces.

Delhi seems to exemplify the lost city. It has had so many lives that perhaps it is always a lost city, from the vantage of any present, looking back at a vanished past which would be but the most recent of a series of receding pasts that disappeared sequentially one after the other. We live in the debris of the Islamicate Sultanates and the Mughal Empire, Lutyens' city and its Nehruvian descendant. Both its medieval and modernist avatars survive in a hybrid and fragmentary fashion, joined by a colonial hinge, altogether a peculiar but graceful mélange of eras and styles spread out over more than a millennium.

Moments of catastrophic transformation - 1857, 1947 - at once break and remake the city, never the same, no going back. For my generation, the line splitting a before and an after in terms of polit-

Between rhetoric and reality

What the conviction of Sajjan Kumar says about the Congress



MANOJ MITTA

One of the low points in Parliament's history is that when 2,733 Sikhs were massacred in three days in Delhi in November 1984, it did not pass any resolution condemning the killings or even condoling those deaths. This was despite the resolutions sponsored by the Rajiv Gandhi government in January 1985, within days of the formation of the eighth Lok Sabha, condoling Indira Gandhi's assassination and the deaths in the Bhopal gas tragedy.

The Misra commission

The omission was compounded in February 1987 when an inquiry report on the 1984 carnage was tabled in Parliament. Misusing its brute majority, the Rajiv Gandhi government prevented any discussion on the report of the Justice Ranganath Misra Commission. This was despite its exoneration of the government and the Congress

party and its leaders of any culpability. Such muzzling of Parliament betrayed the government's own diffidence about the rigour of the clean chit procured by it from an inquiry conducted by a sitting judge of the Supreme Court. Justice Misra went on to become the Chief Justice of India, the first Chairman of the National Human Rights Commission and then a Congress party member of Rajya Sabha.

It was not until the Manmohan Singh government tabled the report of another judicial inquiry into the same subject in August 2005 that Parliament had a discussion on the carnage. It was only because Parliament forced the government to accept the Justice G.T. Nanavati Commission's findings that the FIR that has now resulted in Sajjan Kumar's conviction - he was Congress MP from the Outer Delhi constituency in 1984 - came to be registered at that belated stage. Interestingly, the same judge who had conducted the second judicial inquiry into the 1984 carnage happened to probe the Gujarat 2002 riots as well. But when Justice Nanavati finally gave his report in November 2014 on the post-Godhra violence, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) govern-



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ment in Gujarat did worse than what the Congress government at the Centre had done with the Misra report in 1987. The Nanavati report on the post-Godhra violence has not even been tabled in the Assembly.

That is perhaps only to be expected from a party like the BJP as it is, anyway, perceived to be ideologically communal. How different though is the performance of the Congress, given its pretensions of being a legatee to the secularism of Gandhi and Nehru? The conviction of Kumar this week vindicates the perception that the Congress has a long record of being opportunistically communal. If it took 34 years to convict the first political leader for Delhi 1984, it has a lot to do with the Congress regime's subversion of institutions to shield the culprits in the early years.

To begin with, Rajiv Gandhi did not deem the carnage worthy of an inquiry as he called it a "dead

issue". After deriving political mileage from it in the 1984 Lok Sabha election and the set of Assembly polls in March 1985, he yielded to the inquiry demand as Akali Dal leader Sant Longowal had insisted on it as a pre-condition for talks on the raging Punjab crisis.

A whitewash

Set up as it was rather reluctantly, the Misra Commission conducted all its proceedings in camera. Under the shroud of secrecy, it produced a whitewash. While holding that the Congress and its leaders were blameless, it conceded that its workers might have, on their own, participated in the mass killings: "The Congress party at the lower level - like any political party anywhere - has loose ends and from the fact of participation of people belonging to the party at that level it is difficult to accept the stand that the Congress (I) party had either organised or participated as such in the riots." Citing the evidence of stray incidents of pushback, Misra claimed that had the Congress party engineered the violence, the situation would have been so bad that neither the police nor civil society would have been effective anywhere in Delhi. "If the Congress (I) party or a powerful

gossip, smoke, flirt, fight and grow up into articulate, opinionated adults, and have done for decades. It is the seedbed of JNU's political culture and its argumentative nerve centre - the fountain-head of revolutions. For the very same reasons that students gravitate there, the current administration sees it as a threat to the BJP's rightwing government and its Hindutva agenda.

The university plans to shut down outlets such as the Ganga Dhaba construct a food court on the campus. This new structure will be sanitised, serving "clean" food and beverages, mirroring the drive to allow the circulation of only those ideas that the Modi regime considers palatable for India's youth. Dust, flies, anti-nationals and mavericks: all will be evicted. Countless social scientists, journalists, activists and artists, all graduates of JNU, met their conversation partners and life partners at Ganga Dhaba: almost every one of these relationships, friendships and marriages broke the rules of caste, class, religion, language and region.

Before it's too late

A crucible of diversity, dissent and solidarity, Ganga Dhaba, for all its apparent decrepitude, symbolises every value of a free, democratic and plural India that the current majoritarian dispensation is bent on destroying. Like the city of Delhi that surrounds it, JNU too is fast approaching the state of being lost. Can we attempt to save the city that is ours and the university that we love, before it is too late?

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force in the party played any role, neither of these two elements could have functioned in the manner each of them has been ascribed."

Using party resolutions to disregard the allegations made by victims, Misra said: "In the face of these resolutions of November 1, 1984, by the Central and Union Territory party organs, it is indeed difficult to allege, much less discover, unseen hands of the party behind the violence perpetrated so dastardly." He also set much store by the fact that several Sikhs belonging to the Congress party had not been spared during the carnage. "If the Congress (I) party or some of its highly placed leaders had set the rioters to operate, one would expect the Sikhs with Congress base and affinity to have escaped the depredation." Kumar's conviction confirms the tenuous basis on which the Congress and its leaders had been let off the hook in the first instance. More importantly, it exposes the wide gap between the rhetoric and reality of India's Grand Old Party.

Manoj Mitta is a Delhi-based journalist and co-author, with H.S. Phoolka, of the book 'When A Tree Shook Delhi: The 1984 Carnage and Its Aftermath'

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.

Waiver politics

The agenda of loan waivers that the Congress party is pursuing is in no way beneficial to the economy as a whole (Page 1, "We will not let PM sleep till he waives farm loans: Rahul", December 19). Increasing loan waivers will mean a greater fiscal burden on the economy and the government which in turn may slow down GDP growth in the long run. In the pursuit of power, the country's economic development should not be sacrificed.

DHRUV VYAS,
Chennai

Released

The report, "Hamid Ansari back in India after six years" (Page 1, December 19), made for happy reading. However, it, once again, highlights the plight of former Navy officer Kulbhushan Jadhav. There are also cases of a number of Indians languishing in prisons across Pakistan. A permanent mechanism such as a joint judicial committee can be thought of to look into the cases of

Indian and Pakistani prisoners. Their families have a right to know about their welfare.

R. SAMPATH,
Chennai

Path to justice

The conviction of Sajjan Kumar by the Delhi High Court must have brought tremendous relief not only to the families of the victims but also to every member of the Sikh community. No amount of praise would be sufficient for Jagdish Kaur, who fought a relentless and brave battle for justice. Looking ahead, there is a need to set up special fast track courts to deal with such horrendous cases of mass murders, lynchings and mob violence. Justice delayed is no doubt justice denied.

A. MOHAN,
Chennai

■ Kumar's conviction is a red letter day for the families of those killed and all those who fought for justice. At the same time, it is appalling to learn that it took 34 years for this verdict, which describes

the scenario of the justice system in our country. The BJP should stop playing politics with this issue as there are allegations too against its leaders in the 2002 Gujarat riots.

VIDHYA B. RAGUNATH,
Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu

■ The case also exemplifies what is wrong with our criminal justice system. The law will 'take its course' only if the investigating and prosecuting officials are allowed to do their jobs without having to take orders from the ruling party. The courts must shoulder part of the responsibility for the unacceptably long time taken to convict the accused. It is inexplicable why judges balk at working with a definite time frame to wrap up cases. Is it too much to ask the judiciary to bring criminal trials, including the appeal processes, to a conclusion within, say, a decade?

V.N. MUKUNDARAJAN,
Thiruvananthapuram

For balance

The Hindu, endorsed by everyone as unbiased and

objective in its reporting and news presentation, appears to becoming a political marketing agent. The front page report, on Congress president Rahul Gandhi's line that he will not allow the Prime Minister to sleep till he waives farm loans, makes one wonder whether the daily is becoming a publicity and marketing agent for the Congress party. A more important report, on the Prime Minister working to ensure that 99% items attract sub-18% GST, found a place in the inside pages. Which was more important for the nation? There was also wide coverage to the Opposition meet in Chennai recently on the occasion of the unveiling of the statue of DMK patriarch M. Karunanidhi. Even in the name of free speech, there has to be balance in reportage.

M. GANESH,
Chennai

Travel rule

The recent move by the Ministry of Railways to introduce new technology, where Travelling Ticket Examiners on board the Rajdhani Express and

Shatabdi Express trains will have hand-held, SIM-enabled tablets with a list of reserved passengers, is a step that will have a positive impact. The Railways should now quickly implement a system to allocate berths to RAC/Waitlisted passengers automatically across all the categories of trains for booked tickets. The Railway Board should also do away with an archaic rule which has no place in today's busy world. Its online booking system and an offline mechanism allows a reserved ticket holder to change the boarding point only 24 hours prior to departure of the train. Such a rule has no value as it is not practically possible to make a decision within 24 hours prior to departure to change the boarding point from the station of origin. A time frame of 36-48 hours is ideal. Passengers who travel for business or official work find such a rule infeasible.

VARUN DAMBAL,
Bengaluru

IPL auction

The recently concluded auction of cricketers for the

Indian Premier League will instil hope in the minds of nascent cricketers who are in a state of incertitude regarding a future in cricket. The case of C.V Varun, who fetched ₹8.4 crore, shows that talent never goes unrecognised. In a country where millions play the same sport but only a few make it to the national team, the need for talent hunting in regional matches become all the more important. The IPL is one platform where young talent can show the potential they possess.

P.L. SRIRAM,
Chennai

■ It is distressing that while spending crores on individual cricketers doesn't cause a ripple, there is no serious discussion on an issue such as agrarian distress. The IPL, apart from being the fount of financial irregularities, has inflicted great damage by corrupting the very values of cricket as a game, which have taken years to evolve.

NAGARAJAMANI M.V.,
Hyderabad

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