



## Ending impunity

Delhi HC retrieves a lost cause and convicts those behind the Hashimpura massacre

The conviction of 16 personnel of the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) for the massacre of Muslims committed 31 years ago is a rare instance of the justice system responding to the cry for accountability and justice. By sentencing the 16 men to imprisonment for the remainder of their life, the Delhi High Court has signalled an end to the impunity they had seemingly enjoyed all along due to systemic delays and perfunctory investigation. An hour after sunset on May 22, 1987, about 45 men from Hashimpura village near Meerut in Uttar Pradesh were abducted in a PAC truck, most of them shot and their bodies thrown into two canals. They were among more than 600 people rounded up by the security forces after the brother of an Army officer was killed in communal violence and two rifles were stolen by rioters from the PAC. The police later established 38 deaths, but could not find the bodies of 22 of them. The U.P. Crime Branch-CID filed a charge sheet in 1996 against 19 PAC personnel, including Surrender Pal Singh, commander of the ‘C-Company’ of the 41st Battalion. The prosecution case was backed by the testimony of five men who survived being shot and thrown into waterbodies. In 2015, the trial court acquitted all the 16 available accused (three, including the commander, had died by then), as it did not have evidence on the identity of the truck or the PAC men travelling on it.

The *en masse* acquittal was a travesty of justice. There was great concern that documents that could have helped nail the accused had been weeded out. It is to the credit of the Delhi High Court that it was not content with merely examining the evidence produced before the trial court. Accepting a plea by the National Human Rights Commission, it allowed additional evidence to be recorded by the trial court even as the appeal was pending. The C-Company’s registers, with records of the movement of PAC vehicles and the deployment of personnel, provided the evidence to pinpoint both the truck that had left the Police Lines, Meerut, and its occupants. These records were not available to the trial court. Apart from bringing home the culpability of the accused, the High Court concluded that these were custodial deaths as well as targeted killings of people from a particular community. The Hashimpura massacre case will be long remembered both for the unconscionable delay the judicial system has become habituated to and for the manner in which a case almost lost has been retrieved by the higher judiciary. It is also a reminder that there is a constant need for reassurance that policing and the criminal justice process in the country will remain fair, and free from all manner of prejudice.

## Age of Bolsonaro

The victory of the divisive firebrand raises serious anxieties about the future of Brazil

In electing retired army Captain Jair Bolsonaro as its President, Brazil has chosen to be governed by a man described as the “Trump of the Tropics”, after the 45th U.S. President, Donald Trump. Mr. Bolsonaro swept a runoff election over the weekend, winning nearly 55% of the vote to defeat the left-of-centre Fernando Haddad. Mr. Bolsonaro’s campaign, run largely on social media, evoking comparisons to Mr. Trump’s 2016 campaign, vowed to tackle political corruption and economic mismanagement, and crack down hard on rising crime, especially gang violence. That this campaign promise resonated more with Brazilian voters than they were put off by Mr. Bolsonaro’s dangerously regressive outbursts and polarising verbal attacks denigrating women and minorities, supporting torture, and threatening opponents with violence, says much about the mood of the nation today. However, years from now, Brazilian pollsters, like the political pundits baffled by Mr. Trump’s win, will be asking how a presidential candidate such as Mr. Bolsonaro, who also openly professed his love of dictatorships, could not only find acceptance but soar meteorically in its domestic politics. To comprehend this outcome and the path on which Brazil has put itself in electing Mr. Bolsonaro, it is important to remember the legacy of former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, and his leftist Workers’ Party.

When Brazil’s military dictatorship ended in 1985, the balance of power tipped toward leaders of centrist and leftist leanings. After Mr. da Silva, known as Lula, and his Workers’ Party won in 2003, they settled in for 13 years of rule, including five years under Dilma Rousseff. Throughout this period the government made alleviating the poverty of millions of Brazilians its top priority and achieved remarkable strides in this space. Yet, over time Brazil’s political class became corruption-stained, and at some point most voters lost faith in that leadership. That happened as the economy gradually descended into deep recession, even as the far-reaching Petrobras “Car Wash” corruption scandal started toppling dozens of political and business elites across the spectrum, culminating in the controversial impeachment of Ms. Rousseff in 2016 and then the jailing of Mr. da Silva in April 2018 with a 12-year sentence for corruption and money-laundering. In the longest arc of history, the rise and fall of Brazil’s leftist politics may have brought succour to the most vulnerable demographic but it left the middle class feeling neglected. Now, the backlash is complete. Mr. Bolsonaro brings to high office the promise to reduce regulation and tax and boost investor confidence, and also the threat to more extensively exploit Brazil’s vast natural resources, including the Amazon rainforest; he has proposed to build a highway through it. This, along with his disdain for the Paris climate change accord, could mark a disturbing departure from Brazil’s historical sensitivity to keeping its precious environmental resources intact.

# Adrift on stormy seas

Dravidian politics must re-invent every aspect of itself: its modes of operation, its emotional motifs, and its leadership



NARAYAN LAKSHMAN

Tamil Nadu at different points in history has been considered the bane of Indian politics as much as it has been the enlightened torch-bearer of progressive reform. Today, the foundation of its political superstructure is facing tectonic shifts and an entirely new paradigm may be on the horizon.

In the heyday of the Dravidian movement, Tamil Nadu was one of those rare States that issued the clarion call of secession and autonomy for the Tamil people, ethnic-based demands that would, in today’s India, be instantly branded “anti-national”. Toward the turn of the century, one of its leaders brought down a coalition government at the Centre by suddenly pulling the plug on an alliance agreement. It has always been a State that has shown resistance to certain diktats from New Delhi, from the micro concerns about Hindi imposition in the State to macro disputes over inter-State river-water sharing arrangements.

Notwithstanding the frictions generated by Tamil Nadu’s posturing on all these contentious issues, it has simultaneously been the vanguard among its peers in the provision of mass welfare goods and services.

### Leader among States

It was an early pioneer of the Noon Meal Scheme that led to better nutritional, educational and inter-caste harmony outcomes across the State. Subsequently, seeing its dramatic impact on development goals, the Supreme Court made it a mandatory policy in other States, and the World Bank and others stepped in to extend its reach. It leads most other States in Programme for International Stu-

dent Assessment or PISA rankings that measure pedagogical effectiveness in school education. Almost every government in the State supplied mass welfare goods at a subsidised or zero cost, including essential household items such as rice, water, cooked meals, cooking stoves, personal clothing, television sets, bicycles, and even mass-wedding services.

Fast-forward to 2018, and every aspect of that political edifice is under strain, especially after certain earth-shaking events left its democratic machinery facing an uncertain future. How best to understand what outcomes these changes could bring to the Tamil Nadu polity? Consider two analytical threads that explain the underlying processes: power vacuums and governance.

First, the passing of All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) supremo Jayalalithaa and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) president M. Karunanidhi has created a black hole in the balance of power within and across the Dravidian parties. Both leaders single-handedly ran their party operations, including cadre organisation, networking, fund-raising, election planning and campaigning. Between them, Jayalalithaa concentrated power in her own hands to a much greater extent than Karunanidhi did. While his genius was in organisational planning, negotiations and bargain-making, Jayalalithaa, contrarily, degraded four rungs of leadership beneath her.

Consequently, in the aftermath of her death, the AIADMK’s relatively weak leadership has allowed the party to slip into a semi-comatose, slow-implosion mode. The informal power of the V.K. Sasikala clan, currently manifested in the troubles posed by her nephew T.T.V. Dhinakaran’s challenge to the ruling combine, threatens to rip the fabric of the party apart. In parallel there are unspoken insecurities about how long the uneasy truce between Chief Minister E. K. Palaniswami and Deputy Chief



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Minister O. Panneerselvam will hold, especially since the latter split from the main party faction last year. Other party heavyweights may flit with the idea of migrating to Mr. Dhinakaran’s party, the Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam. New entrants like Rajinikanth and Kamal Haasan may steal away slivers of the AIADMK’s vote share.

Simultaneously, M.K. Stalin, Karunanidhi’s son and inheritor of the DMK leadership mantle, remains an untested political quantity at a State-wide level, notwithstanding his experience as Chennai Mayor and posts in his father’s cabinet. His older brother M.K. Alagiri, a strongman from the southern districts, was ejected from the party by Karunanidhi in 2014 for “anti-party activities”, but has challenged Mr. Stalin’s otherwise unquestioned mandate within the party. Will Mr. Stalin hold his own in the upcoming Assembly by-elections and Lok Sabha elections? Will the man who appears far less comfortable before the public spotlight rally the troops and deliver an impressive victory like his father did so often?

### Governance concerns

Regardless of how this flux in the balance of power within both parties plays out, there is an unanswered but vital question about whether the Dravidian “movement” as such is coming, or has come, to an end or is metamorphosing into an entirely new paradigm in response to the power vacuum. This brings us to the second issue, governance.

In fostering and becoming de-

pendent upon a culture of what neoclassical economics would derisively label “freebies”, Tamils appeared to have entered a Faustian bargain with those they empower to lead them. The high values and political dexterity of the early leaders of the Dravidian movement in the 1950s and ‘60s – including Periyar E.V. Ramasamy and C.N. Annadurai – metastasised into something quite ugly by the turn of the century: leaders who ruled their parties with an iron fist and built up personality cults around themselves and their closest circles, but who also inflicted an enormous cost on the State by engaging in grand larceny, an unhinged loot on the resources of Tamil Nadu through extortion, bribe-taking, thuggery and corporate malfeasance.

### Opportunity for the BJP?

There are some who argue that the antidote to this crisis of runaway corruption could be the kind of “good governance” reforms that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has introduced at a national level, including a purported crackdown on bureaucratic inefficiency, the Goods and Services Tax, and macroeconomic shock-therapy policies such as demonetisation. Simultaneously, there has been speculation on whether, in its bid to saffronise the politics of every Indian State, the Bharatiya Janata Party is desperate to get a backdoor entry into Tamil Nadu through an informal partnership with the AIADMK.

Yet such expectations are built on heroic assumptions and reveal ignorance of Tamils’ historical voting preferences. It is true that Dravidianism no longer exists in its prior radical form, which implies that since the 1990s it has shed its anti-Brahmin, anti-Hindu, anti-Hindi, anti-Delhi rhetoric in favour of a broad, inclusive strand of political accommodationism for all Tamils.

Yet there is a residual feeling of Tamil exceptionalism among the voter demographic, which motiv-

ates their behaviour at the polls and continues to present an opportunity to politically mobilise.

Thus, notwithstanding the gradual creep of saffron politics in Tamil Nadu – notable here are rising incidents of communal clashes, generally a rarity in the State – the hegemonic influence of regional parties, which began in 1967, abides. The reasons for this are three-fold. First, half a century of mass welfare policies have left an indelible footprint on the electorate, which positions the Dravidian parties favourably as benevolent populists relative to a distant, alien, “north Indian” BJP or Congress.

Second, the genius of Annadurai, Karunanidhi, and AIADMK founder M.G. Ramachandran was to supplant the elites-driven fund-raising and campaigning networks of the Congress with grassroots, cadre-based networks of their own, a model that has now acquired deep roots and cannot be easily out-manoeuvred.

Third, it may be difficult for the likes of the BJP to breach the ramparts of Tamil politics because the people do not fret as much about high-level macro corruption as they do about the transactions cost of individualised micro corruption, which impacts their day-to-day existence. Mr. Modi’s utopian promise of delivering a hyper-efficient, digital-savvy vision of Indian institutions implies a reform that ostensibly targets the first kind of corruption. Since Tamils are well accustomed to rule by elite robber-barons, Mr. Modi’s vision may be no more to them than an abstract construct.

Nevertheless, in the broadest arc of history, it would be hard to deny that Dravidian politics has reached a tipping point at the current juncture. It must re-invent every aspect of itself – its modes of operation, its emotional motifs, and its crop of leadership – if it is to survive as the champion of Tamils in the coming decades.

narayan@thehindu.co.in

# Mapping Brazil’s far-right shift

The drift into the orbit of the U.S. will weaken global multi-polarity



VIJAY PRASHAD

Jair Bolsonaro, who will become the new President of Brazil early next year, will be the most extreme far right leader to govern a democratic nation. Brazil, the largest country in South America, has decided to go the way of the Philippines, the U.S., and Hungary.

Some have called Mr. Bolsonaro ‘Brazil’s Trump’, and there is truth in that statement. Like U.S. President Donald Trump and Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines, Mr. Bolsonaro believes that violence is a solvent for social problems. After his election, the military conducted an impromptu parade through Brazil’s streets. Crowds chanted their appreciation of the armed forces, while the soldiers basked in this reverence. Mr. Bolsonaro, who has spoken nostalgically of the military dictatorship (1964-1985), has given the forces a front seat in Brazil’s political world.

Three pillars won Mr. Bolsonaro the Brazilian presidency – of

‘Beef, the Bible and the Bullet’. The first pillar, of ‘Beef’, includes various commercial sectors such as the agricultural, livestock, mining, energy and logging industries. These businesses have chafed at environmental and labour regulations that prevent easy access to the 1.6-billion-acre Amazon rainforest and other protected areas. Mr. Bolsonaro has spoken of these regulations as restrictions on the sovereignty of Brazil placed by the United Nations. But his proposals will not give sovereignty back to Brazilians. They will placate commercial interests based in Canada, Switzerland, the U.S. and Australia.

### A social shift

One of the great social shifts in Brazil has been the weakening of Liberation Theology, a form of Catholic socialism. “The Church opted for the poor,” goes a popular saying, “and the poor opted for the Evangelicals.” U.S.-inspired evangelical Christianity – such as Pentecostalism – has made inroads into Brazilian society, notably among the poor. The growth of evangelicalism made an impact even in Catholicism through the emergence of the Charismatic Renewal movement. One of Brazil’s largest churches, the Universal



Church of the Kingdom of God, has about 10 million members across the world. Its leader, Edir Macedo, owns the second largest television network in Brazil, RecordTV.

The reach of these movements is considerable, with most of them promoting very harsh social policies, such as against abortion and gender equality. The evangelical and conservative Catholic groups put their heft behind Mr. Bolsonaro.

The third pillar refers not only to the military and the police – both of which saw Mr. Bolsonaro as their champion – but also to sections of the middle class who have been angered by rising crime rates (175 people killed per day in 2017). Mr. Bolsonaro was able to win over middle-class sentiment by his acidic rhetoric calling for more police violence against the

poor. The language, laced with racism, was harsh against the poor who are actually the main victims of crime. The prejudices of the middle class defined Mr. Bolsonaro’s campaign, which will define his presidency.

Brazil’s stock exchange, based in São Paulo, is called the B3. Its benchmark index is Bovespa, which contains some 60 stocks. Right after Mr. Bolsonaro’s victory, the Bovespa soared. It was as if those with money knew that their candidate had won. Champagne flowed in the boardrooms of mining and energy firms as well as in the offices of the National Agriculture Confederation. Analysts began to use words such as ‘pragmatic’ and ‘reasonable’ to define Mr. Bolsonaro, meaning that he will favour the business community over the millions of Brazilians who are slowly slipping back into extreme poverty.

Anna Prusa, a former U.S. State Department official, described the attitude plainly: “It could be a good time to be a mining investor in Brazil. Mr. Bolsonaro has said pretty publicly he would like fewer restrictions... he is a recent convert to market liberalism.” As long as Mr. Bolsonaro is good for business, his toxic policies are forgiven.

Right after his election, Steve Bannon – who had helped Mr. Trump win the U.S. Presidency – said that Mr. Bolsonaro had run the most effective social media campaign. What this means is that his team had used illegally funded WhatsApp groups very cleverly to spread fake news stories (such as that his opponents in the Workers’ Party were indoctrinating children on sex).

### Drifting towards the U.S.

Mr. Trump, who was jubilant at the electoral result, spoke on the phone with Mr. Bolsonaro, making it clear again that he was eager for a close link with the U.S. BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) is now fundamentally in jeopardy, as Mr. Bolsonaro will likely pull Brazil out of it, or at least minimise its role in the BRICS process. Brazil will return to its position of subordinate ally to the U.S. This is what Brazilian business interests want and the U.S. seeks. Brazil’s drift into the orbit of the U.S. spells doom for the independent regional process in Latin America and is a serious blow against global multi-polarity.

Vijay Prashad is the Director of Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research

## 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.

### Chief guest on Jan. 26

The invitation extended to U.S. President Donald Trump to be the chief guest at the Republic Day parade in 2019 was generally considered to help lift the image of the NDA government on the eve of the general election. But unlike the smooth tenure of former President Barack Obama, who made it to the function in 2015, and as the first U.S. head of state to do so, Mr. Trump’s has so far been affected by one controversy or the other *vis-à-vis* relations with India. Despite India’s growing stature, there has been talk of the superpower imposing sanctions on India over issues such as oil import from Iran and receipt of military assistance from Russia. The visa issue too hangs like a sword of

Damocles. Mr. Trump’s presence may not have suited either the hopes of the NDA or India (“Trump’s regret lands Centre in protocol difficulties”, October 31).

V. SUBRAMANIAN,  
Chennai

■ Why not invite Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan? It will not only be comparatively an easier task but will also provide India and Pakistan a platform to begin substantive talks about the future.

JATINDER SINGH,  
Panchkula, Haryana

### Foreign policy slide

There has been a steady slide in India’s foreign policy ever since this government came to power at the Centre. From the way the turmoil in the Kashmir Valley has been handled to the deteriorating

relationship with neighbour Pakistan, which has led to frequent border attacks and the loss of lives of many of our soldiers, to the snub from Mr. Trump, the decline is unprecedented. The developments in Sri Lanka also point to the failure of intelligence gathering and our diplomacy.

THARCIOUS S. FERNANDO,  
Chennai

### Remembering Patel

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, one of the forgotten heroes of independence, richly deserves the tributes paid to him (Editorial page, “The unifier of modern India”, October 31). But like Patel, we have many other unsung heroes and heroines of the freedom struggle. It is our bounden duty to remember each one of them as we owe them a great debt of gratitude. It is undeniable

that Patel’s personality, achievements and sterling contributions to the nation’s cause are taller than his statue on the banks of the Narmada river. He was indeed an illustrious son of India.

C.G. KURIAKOSE,  
Kothamangalam, Kerala

■ A true tribute to Sardar Patel would begin by adopting his policies in letter and spirit rather than constructing a huge statue. One wonders whether the statue will make the nation more united when the fact is our present-day leaders are all set to divide the society in the name of caste, religion and language for political gains.

KSHIRASAGARA BALAJI RAO,  
Hyderabad

■ The BJP may be enthusiastic to add Sardar

Patel to its pantheon of leaders but so would Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, or Rajaji, and V.P. Menon from the south whose contribution towards India’s unity and fostering of democracy are equally significant. V.P. Menon was Sardar Patel’s man-on-the-spot, tirelessly holding

### CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

The opening sentence of “India among nations that face grave danger to soil biodiversity” (Oct. 31, 2018) erroneously said the Global Soil Biodiversity Atlas was prepared by the *World Wide Fund for Nature*. Actually, it was prepared by the *European Commission Joint Research Centre*. WWF publishes Living Planet report, which cited the soil biodiversity atlas. In the fourth paragraph, there was a reference to a *biannual* Living Planet Report. It is actually *biennial*.

In the graphic that accompanied the OpEd article, “Who pays taxes and who doesn’t” (Oct. 30, 2018), there was an error in the colour coding: It was erroneously stated that the orange line showed the share of top 1% taxpayers in total tax payable. It is actually depicted by the red line and the orange line shows the share of top 5% taxpayers in total tax payable. Similarly, in the bottom part of the graphic, it is erroneously given that the blue line showed returned income >₹1 crore. It is actually depicted by the green line and the blue line shows returned income >₹100 crore.

The Readers’ Editor’s office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300; E-mail:readerseditor@thehindu.co.in