



Hard landing

Airlines must take stock of their collective plight and sell seats at the real cost

To the long line of private airline carcasses dotting the bleak landscape of Indian aviation, one more may soon be added. Jet Airways announced a temporary halt of its operations from Wednesday night as funds to keep the airline going dried up. Despite intense lobbying by the bankrupt airline, banks stood firm on their decision to not release emergency funds to sustain operations until a white knight is found. With operations halted and the half a dozen or so planes that were flying till Wednesday grounded, the airline is staring down the barrel, especially because most of its prized departure slots at major airports across the country have either already been or will soon be allocated to other airlines. Jet will be able to regain these slots only if it bounces back before the end of the summer schedule in October. Whether that will happen is now in the hands of prospective buyers, who are said to have evinced interest in buying the airline during the Expression of Interest (EOI) process called by banks last week. The fact that the banks refused to extend emergency support is probably an indicator of the quantity and quality of the EOIs received by them. It is hard to believe that they would not have temporarily supported Jet if the EOIs had been serious. In sum, it does appear at this point that a miracle will be needed for Jet to take wing again.

The collapse of Jet has caused turbulence in the market and also raised some serious questions over why the domestic airline industry is proving to be so perilous for enterprises. There have been more than half-a-dozen private airline companies that have fallen by the wayside in the last decade and more, and it is well-known how Air India is propped up with government support. While it is true that fuel costs, which account for about half of the expenses of running an airline, have been difficult to manage, the fact is that reckless competition is responsible for the sorry plight of the industry. Margins in the airline industry are wafer-thin in the best of times and the combined effect of rising fuel prices and the inability to pass them on to consumers due to competition has proved to be a deadly cocktail. In the race to the bottom, it was Kingfisher seven years ago, Air Deccan and Air Sahara before that, it is Jet now, and who knows which airline could be next. It is notable that airfares have largely stayed stable over several years, benefiting passengers but biting airlines. It is time that airlines took stock of their collective plight and stopped undercutting each other on fares. The Centre can help too by reviewing fuel taxes and surcharges apart from airport levies, which the airlines complain are too high. After all, a healthy airline industry can only be good for government revenues over the long term.

Beijing surprise

The Chinese economy has grown faster than expected, but concerns over stimulus remain

China's economy is showing signs of a rebound. According to figures released by its National Bureau of Statistics on Wednesday, the Chinese economy grew at 6.4% in the first quarter of the current year compared to the same period last year. While this rate of growth is equal to the pace registered in the December quarter and faster than economists' expectations of a 6.3% expansion, it is still slower than the growth rate of 6.8% recorded in the same period last year. Retail sales and factory output also showed strong growth momentum. The latest growth figure is seen as a sign that the Chinese government's efforts over the last few quarters to stimulate what is the world's second largest economy are beginning to have a positive effect. Total social financing grew by almost 40% to 8.2 trillion yuan in the first quarter of the year, pointing to a credit expansion that will boost growth in the coming quarters. With trade tensions with the United States subsiding significantly for now, export growth may accelerate, further boosting the Chinese economy. Chinese exports reached a five-month high in March, rising 14.2% when compared to the same month last year. The Chinese stock market has also been buoyed by the early signs of an economic turnaround and increased liquidity, with the CSI 300 index rising by over a third in value since the beginning of the year.

Gross domestic product growth that is generated largely by increased lending, however, poses the risk of losing momentum once the stimulus is withdrawn. Beijing, of late, has once again been prodding its banks to boost lending to public and private businesses, apart from implementing various fiscal measures to boost consumer spending. This could lead to a tricky situation where businesses that resort to heavy borrowing when credit is easily available become burdened with disproportionately high amounts of debt once the economic boom cycle reverses. Chinese authorities may eventually be forced to crack down on exuberant lending by banks when the economy is found to be overheating. It was such a crackdown that contributed to the fall in property prices in the last few years. For now, though, property prices have begun to rebound after restrictions on the real estate sector were eased lately, in an attempt to stimulate growth in the economy. The Chinese government is now walking a tightrope as it attempts to keep the momentum from slowing in the short term, even as market forces try to correct imbalances within the economy. Such macroeconomic policy, focussed too narrowly on the short term while ignoring the long-term consequences, however, does not bode well for either the Chinese economy or the wider global economy.

A shameful marker of five years

India's dubious contribution to a global epidemic of hate is a spate of performative mob lynchings



HARSH MANDER

The most malignant legacy of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's five years in office is that he has made India a more frightening and dangerous place for its religious minorities, particularly Muslims and Christians. His leadership has been scarred by a massive surge in hate speech and violence against these groups. In particular, this period has seen the rise of a form of hate violence that targets its religious and caste minorities, better known as "lynching". In these five years, this word entered popular discourse in India, for the first time, by describing frenzied attacks by mobs against people mainly because of their religious or caste identity, Muslim and in some cases Dalit.

Contours of hate

Right-wing regimes that are hostile to minorities have risen to power in many countries. But in no other country than India has this current anti-minority, far-right politics resulted in a concerted pattern of lynch attacks against minorities – and emerged as a scourge in the country today.

Lynching itself is of course not unknown in many countries. I have found three broad kinds in the modern world. The first is as occasional and random criminal acts, without any pattern or regularity to signal a significant social phenomenon. This can and does occur anywhere.

The second is as 'rough justice', of people frustrated by failures of

legal justice, attacking people alleged frequently to be petty thieves or rapists. This has been common, for instance, in Indonesia and Latin America.

The third kind is as hate crime, one which targets persons not because of what a person has done, but because of who they are. This is what India is currently witnessing. These hate crimes are often dressed up as rough justice: people rationalise cow lynching as popular anger because state systems have not implemented cow protection laws. But the targets of lynch mobs are particular communities, and the allegations of crimes against them are usually patently false – and, in any case, just an excuse.

The closest global parallel to lynchings in India is the one of racial terror against African-Americans in the American South in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The motive of both was/is to target people because of their identity, to instil fear, and to convey a message of violent dominance.

The environment

I would characterise lynching in India not just as communal terror but specifically as command hate crimes. India Spend found that as many as 97% of cow-related attacks since 2010 occurred after Mr. Modi was elected to office; and that 90% of all religious hate crimes since 2009 have occurred under his watch. These point compellingly to the conclusion that an environment has been created since the Prime Minister assumed office, in which people feel safe, enabled and even encouraged to act out their hate and attack religious minorities.

This permissive environment is stirred firstly by frequent toxic hate speeches by senior leaders of



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the ruling party. A leading television channel found a 490-fold rise in hate speech by leaders in the four years of the current government compared to five years earlier. Mr. Modi has been remiss in condemning both hate speech and lynch attacks by communal vigilante formations, except in the most general terms. The police has tended mostly to criminalise the victims of these attacks and protect the attackers. They, therefore, feel emboldened and encouraged to attack people of minority identities, assured of their impunity, and convinced of their nationalist fervour and heroism.

Hate violence targeting religious, caste and gender minorities is, of course, not new in India. Violent clashes and attacks based on religious identity, most often targeting religious minorities especially Muslim, but also on occasion Sikh and Christian minorities, have continued after Independence. According to some estimates, the numbers of people who died due to communal violence in India could be significantly more than 10,000.

There are no accurate official data of casualties by lynch attacks

Predictable chaos in Libya

The Iraqi-Libyan species of intervention, with UN 'approval' but under the West's watch, is a post Cold-War phenomenon



KRISHNAN SRINIVASAN

General Khalifa Haftar, head of the Libyan National Army, is advancing on the capital Tripoli, having taken control of the east of the country including most of the oilfields. Gen. Haftar had helped Muammar Qaddafi seize power in 1969 before going into exile in the U.S. in the 1980s, but returned to Libya in 2011 to join in Qaddafi's overthrow. He now casts himself as a conservative Salafist opposing Islamists and the Muslim Brothers, and has the backing – for their individual reasons – of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and some West Asian states, apart from Russia (openly) and France (covertly).

Libya's descent

The United Nations recognised Tripoli's administration is called the Government of National Accord, but is anything but that, being dependent on a motley of warlords, militant or moderate Islamists, secessionists and monarchists, all split on regional and ethnic lines. Even before Gen. Haftar launched his offensive, West Libya was replete with inter-militia battles and kidnappings. The Tripoli government commands no security forces, public administration scarcely exists, water, petrol and power shortages abound, and few banks operate. Thousands are

fleeing towards Tunisia, and 180 people have been killed so far in the recent fighting.

The rule of the gun prevails in Libya ever since western forces overthrew Qaddafi. The oil-rich country, now a departure point for thousands of migrants travelling to Europe, once had one of Africa's highest standards of living, free health care and education, with high female literacy and percentage of women in the workplace. Its inland waterway to green the eastern desert was called the world's largest irrigation project. But after the western armed intervention supported by some Arab sheikhdoms, a perceptive commentator noted, "Nothing was certain, least of all what kind of country Libya would now become."

The revolt against Qaddafi began in Benghazi, and western intervention was legitimised by the fig leaf of a UN Security Council resolution calling for a ceasefire, a no-fly zone and protection of civilians, on which there were five abstentions which included India, Russia and China. Qaddafi accepted the resolution. Shortly thereafter, France, the U.K. and the U.S. attacked Qaddafi's forces and NATO assumed responsibility for regime change at the same moment that an African Union mediation mission was en route to Libya.

The Libyan tragedy, like those in Iraq, Syria and Yemen, and most probably to ensue in Afghanistan, illustrates wider issues at play. Iraqi warring militias after the Second Gulf War empowered jihadists, made Iraq ungovernable, U.S. withdrawal inevitable, and led to the Balkanisation of the nation.



AFP

No lessons were learned, causing former U.S. President Barack Obama to confess that his worst mistake was a failure to prepare for the aftermath of western intervention following Qaddafi's overthrow. Western wishful thinking persists in the belief that Libya could arrive at a path to democracy that revives the country's collapsed institutions, rather than falling under military rule.

Post Cold-War phenomenon

In 1965 and 1981, the UN adopted declarations on the inadmissibility of intervention in the domestic affairs of states, and until the 1990s the UN was the custodian of state sovereignty. The Iraqi-Libyan species of intervention, professedly with UN approval but actually under western control, is a post Cold-War phenomenon, the motivation being to implant liberal democratic institutions and human rights, along with security concerns, usually thinly justified by 9/11 and lately the Islamic State. Exogenous state-building and a peripheral role for local leaders characterise this innovation in international relations. The spectre of failed states became a major concern, leading to the imposition of a neo-liberal agenda in the guise of human

and hate crimes in the past five years. But the numbers of persons killed in all such hate crimes are likely to be far less than those killed in even a single major episode of mass communal violence.

What then makes this present form of targeted hate violence, through lynch mobs and occasional solitary attacks, so worrying? Every episode of mass communal violence of the past, however grave, would occur in a particular area, and would unfold over some hours, some days, or in the rare instance of the Gujarat communal carnage of 2002, for some weeks. The difference with the new phase of lynch mobs and solitary hate crimes under the Prime Minister's watch is that it is no longer bound by geography and time, and so it mounts pervasive fear.

Signal of impunity

Historian Amy Louise Wood writes vividly of the performative character of American lynching. In these "hundreds, sometimes thousands, of white spectators gathered and watched as their fellow citizens tortured, mutilated, and hanged or burned their victims in full view" This, she said, lent to lynching a "tremendous symbolic power precisely because it was... public and visually sensational".

In India this same performative symbolic power has been attained with the video camera. In 28 journeys of the Karwan e Mohabbat to lynch victims in 14 States, we have found that almost every lynching was videotaped by the perpetrators and triumphally and widely circulated online. Through this the perpetrators signal that they feel assured of their impunity, that despite their posting their images of committing murder online, they will be valorised as 'nationalist' heroes of the Hindu nation.

rights protection.

The ambiguous legal justification for interventions not specifically authorised by the UN, such as the creation of safe havens in Iraq, established a pattern despite negative precedents that showed that attempting nation-building in societies divided by ethnic, factional, ideological and religious lines is beyond the capacity of any minority group of UN members, let alone of one super-power. None of the interventions could have taken place without the projection of U.S. power or its indirect underwriting.

Two factors paved the way for these neo-protectorates; activists with rights-based agendas joined the political mainstream, and western outrage to televised suffering. Activists united with foreign policy establishments, and third world disorder presented opportunities for sly expansion of mandates into new operating areas. Added to these was post-1990 revisionism towards state sovereignty and permissiveness to humanitarian interventions. Relativism towards sovereignty was anathema to post-colonial independent states, especially when western interventions were selective and political in nature, and the victims of intervention lacked the power to oppose.

Western nations came to contemplate, albeit fitfully and inconsistently, neutralising a number of sovereign states in the third world that were illiberal, war-torn or internally weak, as potential threats to international peace. But this essentially political project was pre-

But they also seek through these videos to convey to the targeted community what they have been reduced to, begging vainly for their lives from their powerful attackers. Prof. Wood recalls: "Even one lynching reverberated, traveling with sinister force, down city streets and through rural farms, across roads and rivers... To be black in this time was to be 'the victim to a thousand lynchings'." In the same way, each lynching in India is reverberating to every inner-city and rural Muslim area: to be Muslim in India today is to be victim to ten thousand lynchings.

The message that such performative lynching communicates is stark and unambiguous. That if you are of the targeted community, you are no longer safe. In no place, and at no time. You can be attacked in your home: a mob can enter it and check what meat is cooking, and bludgeon you to death claiming it is cow meat. For being visibly Muslim, you can be lynched on a train, while walking down the road, at your workplace or a park. This fear, assiduously encouraged by the ruling establishment, is the most shameful marker of these five years.

India sometimes creates its own specific cruelties. These include untouchability, caste atrocities and the cruel burning of brides for dowry. While politically encouraged bigotry and hatred against minorities are growing into a malign global epidemic, India's dubious contribution to this is its spate of performative mob lynchings, bludgeoning its religious minorities and disadvantaged castes into the pervasive fear of everyday living that this has brought in its wake.

Harsh Mander is a human rights worker, writer and teacher

sented as a high-minded enterprise with altruistic motivations, similar to the post-war occupations of Germany and Japan.

There were many reasons for the failure of state-building in the new protectorates. The new elites were never very different or more liberal than those deposed. Organised criminality was invigorated by opportunities created by the absence of proper law enforcement due to outsiders not understanding the consequences of their policies. This was because the interveners were more concerned with checking the power of institutions rather than building them, and to appease domestic opinion back home, concentrated on exit strategies and political markers such as holding elections. If the outcome was doubtful even in Kosovo in Europe, the challenge of transforming political and social cultures in the world beyond Europe, where there is no economic pull factor and traditions have little in common with western liberalism, was obviously far more formidable.

As for humanitarian arguments and the Responsibility to Protect doctrine, such reasoning is malleable enough to be appropriated by Russia in Georgia and Ukraine. Whether in Libya or elsewhere, expeditionary interventions to implant human rights and democracy have a certain heuristic value in understanding the illusions of western hegemony which rose to prominence in our times and sought to mould the third world in its image.

Krishnan Srinivasan is a former Foreign Secretary

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 real issue

It is strange that the Congress party has taken so long to realise that unemployment is the real national issue (Page 1, "Unemployment is the real national security issue: Rahul", April 18). The issue of unemployment is a certitude that is often overlooked by successive governments but conveniently raked up only during election season. The Congress is largely to be blamed for having failed to generate adequate employment in its long years of governance. The party's unprecedented struggle to try and change the narrative of Election 2019, from national security to that of unemployment, is

nothing but hypocrisy and easily comprehensible. It is a do-or-die battle in the face of the formidable challenge posed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the ruling party. The seriousness and concern of the Congress over critical issues are dubious, lack honesty and with the general election in mind.

N. SADHASIVA REDDY, Bengaluru

■ One of the main factors in this election will be employment. India, as many reports suggest, is a power house with prolific talent and skills. The current government has hardly paid attention to job creation. This election is also sensitive in its own right as it will

determine how the 'New India' will evolve.

AMBARISH APPAT, Nallepilly, Palakkad, Kerala

Rahul interview

Congress president Rahul Gandhi terming the 2019 general election as a fight for the very idea of India is only a vain attempt to take a high moral ground ('Interview - Rahul Gandhi', "This is a fight for the very idea of India", April 18). The fact is that the dynastic Congress party and its equally dynastic regional allies are fighting for their own credibility and survival. There is an imperative need to get rid of them once and for all for the very idea of India and the sake of its democracy. Mr. Gandhi comes across as if he

has all the solutions to the problems of the country and that only he and his party represent the idea of India.

His die-hard habit of belittling the Prime Minister at every opportunity betrays his lack of maturity.

C.G. KURIAKOSE, Kothamangalam, Kerala

■ It is refreshing to see purpose and clarity in Mr. Gandhi on what he proposes to do if given a chance. He is quite right that the nation's potential lies in its huge economic potential and in the millions of aspirational youth. On the contrary, the cacophony by the NDA over the national security issue is making people tired. The ruling party should realise that people have travelled

some distance from the rhetoric-based approach.

J. ANANTHA PADMANABHAN, Tiruchi

Poll notes

The elections in Tamil Nadu may have been held in a peaceful manner but in quite a few polling stations, some voters were put to difficulty as officials refused to let us vote even though we had our

voter ID card. In the Villivakkam constituency many of us were not given our booth/voter ID slips. The excuse was that we may not have been at home when officials visited our place. As a senior citizen, I have been denied my right to vote.

BHANUMATHI RAJAGOPALAN, Chennai

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CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

There was an erroneous reference to Sri Lanka beating India in the quarterfinal in Kolkata of the 1996 World Cup (Between Wickets column, Sport, April 17, 2019). Actually, Sri Lanka defeated India in the semifinal.

A report, "India to launch coffee consumption drive" (Business page, April 14, 2019) inadvertently said that the country has a domestic consumption of more than 5 mn bags (60 kg each) of coffee. Actually, the country produced 5.84 mn and consumed 1.47 mn bags (60 kg each) of coffee during 2017-2018 as per International Coffee Organisation.

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