



Shock resignation

Urjit Patel stepping down as RBI Governor is a major embarrassment for the government

The Reserve Bank of India Governor Urjit Patel has cited personal reasons for resigning with immediate effect, but anyone who has followed the events of the last couple of months will know it was anything but that. It was a period during which the Centre and the RBI were engaged in an unseemly tussle over a clutch of issues that had a bearing on the RBI's autonomy, something that Mr. Patel had sought to preserve. As his predecessor Raghuram Rajan pointed out, when a public servant resigns, it is a sign of protest. Mr. Patel's decision clearly caught everyone by surprise as it came following perceptions of a thaw in relations between the Centre and the RBI, after an agreement was hammered out at a board meeting last month on some of the contentious issues, including a controversial proposal to use the central bank's reserves for fiscal purposes. But clearly, the larger issue that divided the Centre and the RBI – which related to autonomy and the independent functioning of the Governor – was never fully resolved. Mr. Patel's resignation is a serious embarrassment to the NDA government, which has scrambled to make statements expressing surprise at his action and praising him for his work. As attempts to signal that it had nothing to do with Mr. Patel stepping down and to reinforce that he did indeed quit for personal reasons, these remarks were largely unconvincing.

Mr. Patel's resignation is bound to raise questions about the Centre's ability to work with independent-minded economists, coming as it does following the departures of former RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan, who was at odds with the Centre on many issues, and the sudden resignations of Niti Aayog Vice-Chairman Arvind Panagariya and Chief Economic Adviser Arvind Subramanian. It is true that Mr. Patel's reclusive and non-communicative style may not have endeared him to some bankers, but his eminence as an economist and his understanding of macro-economic issues is undisputed. Governments have sparred with the RBI before on the issue of autonomy, but the NDA government went one step further by starting consultations under Section 7 of the RBI Act, which gives the Centre the power to direct the RBI to act in specific ways. The immediate priority now is for the Centre to fill the breach without wasting time. Global investors and the markets are already on edge, and they will be keenly watching, along with the ratings agencies, how the Centre handles this self-created crisis. The incoming Governor is bound to be judged, among other things, by perceptions about his independence. The RBI cannot be treated as if it is just another government department. And the Centre will now need to demonstrate that a post-Patel central bank will continue to enjoy operational autonomy. Anything less will not go down well with both investors and the markets.

Opening shot

India wins its first maiden Test of a series in Australia, firing hopes of a larger turnaround

When R. Ashwin dismissed Josh Hazlewood and Virat Kohli roared in delight at the Adelaide Oval on Monday evening, they firmly threw down the gauntlet to hosts Australia. India's 31-run victory over Australia in the gripping first Test of the four-match series is significant on two counts. So far on India's much anticipated Test tours of Australia, maiden clashes have mostly been lost, with the occasional draw wrested by the visitors. The struggle dates back to India's inaugural Test in Australia, played in 1947. Lala Amarnath led the squad, and in the first game at Brisbane the Indians were blown away by Don Bradman's brilliance. The master scored 185 and the hosts won by an innings and 226 runs. That result set a debilitating pattern and subsequent visits ended up with two grim realities – the inability to crack the first Test jinx, and the larger failure to win a series Down Under. With this Adelaide Test firmly in their grip, Kohli and his talented squad have demolished one bogey. The larger goal now should be to rectify the other glaring anomaly: the failure to swing a Test series in Australia, a tour which inevitably demands the very best from visiting teams. The current visit is India's 12th Test tour of Australia; during its previous sojourns, only in three series were draws secured. The rest were lost.

India arrived in Australia last month ranked number one in Tests, but painfully conscious of having lost Tests outside the subcontinent. The last tours of South Africa and England were fresh in memory. As the current tour across Australia's vast landmass, clocking air-miles and playing hours, the Twenty20 series was shared 1-1. In Tests, India sensed the edge, a direct consequence of Australia's inherent abilities as well as the turmoil within its ranks following the ball-tampering controversy at the Cape Town Test in March. The subsequent bans on Steve Smith, David Warner and Cameron Bancroft enfeebled Australia, and the few threats it held hinged on its pace-attack and on spinner Nathan Lyon. When the Adelaide Test commenced and India was in no time reduced to 41 for four, the ghosts of losses past seemed to stir the rest awake. India overcame Australia's diminished strength with Cheteshwar Pujara's glorious 123; the niggardly spells, potency and craft displayed by Ishant Sharma, Mohammed Shami, Jasprit Bumrah and Ashwin; the better batting on view in the second innings as reflected in Ajinkya Rahane's knock. Yet, the series is alive and there are three remaining Tests at Perth, Melbourne and Sydney. Surely the performance over the last five days, which also masked a rare batting failure from Kohli with just 3 and 34 in the two innings, should hold India in good stead.

Ascent to the temple of democracy

The opposition to the Sabarimala order is reflective of a wider gender inequality in Malayali society



PULPAPRE BALAKRISHNAN

Kerala's reputation as a society that has evolved to an exceptional degree may have taken a bit of a beating. The reputation itself has been built on the strides made in the sphere of development, by now internationally recognised to be human development as reflected in the health and education status of a people.

The Kerala paradox

When it was first noticed over four decades ago, Kerala's perceived uniqueness had stemmed from the realisation that it was among India's poorest States. To have achieved fairly high human development despite relative poverty was considered noteworthy. What was not apparent in the usual indicators, however, was something even more unique, the ending of social hierarchy. The caste system, which was at the centre of Kerala's social arrangements, disintegrated virtually overnight. This was fuelled by the enactment of a land reform programme that ended feudalism. With feudalism went the equivalence between caste dominance and economic power. If evidence ever was needed for the Marxian view that it was the economic base of a society that undergirded its 'superstructure' this was it. What is significant is that the transition had been smooth, without recrimination for loss or retribution for injustice. Social distance in terms of caste distinctions just died.

Given the experience of the

ending of a feudalism that had persisted for centuries in Kerala, the reception to the Supreme Court's verdict on the practice of excluding women of menstruating age from the shrine at Sabarimala is disappointing. It is not as if the ruling has been received with sullen acceptance alone. It has been followed by vigilantes actually preventing the very few women who have attempted to enter the shrine since from doing so. Reports of heckling and intimidation that have led to disheartened women returning without darshan is likely to have left many a Malayali patriot ashamed.

To understand the reaction to one of the last bastions of male privilege being thrown open to women, we may turn to the work of the philosopher Michel Foucault. Foucault had observed that while Marxism, a powerful tool for social analysis, emphasises the relations of production, it ignores the relations of power. Power for Foucault is ubiquitous and ramifies into every dimension of human association. Patriarchy or the idea of rule by men would be one of the sources of power. Heteronormativity and the claim of the racial superiority of certain ethnic groups have also served as sources of power. Power for Foucault can draw its force from sources that are entirely unrelated to economic class. Thus in Kerala, for instance, patriarchy is entrenched across all classes and social groups. It did not vanish with the land reforms, even if its architects had wanted it to happen. From the recent events at Sabarimala we can see that some sections do not want it to lose its stranglehold even today.

The opposition to women's entry at Sabarimala is at times met with an appeal to history, that the



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temples of Kerala have witnessed far greater transformation in the past, having been thrown open to all sections of Hindus over 75 years ago. While this history is correctly recounted, the issue of women's entry into temples is not a matter of accepting the inevitability of change, it is a matter of recognising what living in a democracy implies for its members. Even as democracy guarantees rights to the individual, it requires him to acknowledge the rights of others. It is easily overlooked that it is democracy that grants the freedom to practise a religion. The Church was discouraged in the former Soviet Union, China frowns upon the faith of the Uighurs, and the Saudi Arabian state is not exactly tolerant of religious plurality.

Linked to representation

However, while democracy assures freedom to practise religion, citizens are expected to practise it in a way that is consistent with democracy. So the traditionalists on the Sabarimala issue must recognise that by excluding women, they are not keeping their side of the social contract as it were. In a democracy, the social contract is not between the state and the people, it is one entered into by citizens among themselves. As B.R. Ambedkar is believed to have ad-

Anchored in human rights

Instead of surveillance technologies, help TB patients by providing rights-based interventions

ALLAN MALECHE, BLESSINA KUMAR & JOHN STEPHENS

Decades of global neglect have resulted in tuberculosis (TB) becoming the leading cause of adult deaths in most of the global south – it kills nearly two million people a year. This is shocking given that TB is curable and preventable. But there are signs of change as the spotlight shines on TB; including the United Nations Declaration of September 2018 titled “United to End Tuberculosis: An Urgent Global Response to a Global Epidemic”, where heads of state and government have “reaffirmed their commitment to end the global TB epidemic by 2030”.

Intrusive technologies

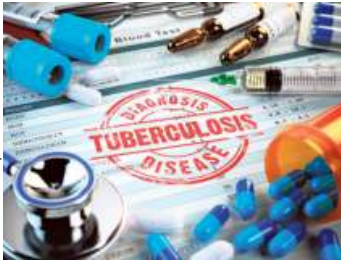
But not all attention is good. An emergent and disturbing arsenal of surveillance technologies has caught the attention of international and domestic policy makers and threatens to detract from an effective response to TB that is anchored in human rights and has a human touch. For example, a plan in India is to implant microchips in people in order to track them and ensure they complete TB treatment. There are also seemingly endless technological tweaks to the Directly Observed Treatment, short course (DOTS) strategy, which requires patients to report every day to a health authority,

who watches them swallow their tablets. Now, governments use, or plan to soon use, a strategy of video, tablets, phones and drones to carry the old DOTS strategy into the technology era.

An obsession with new gadgets in disease management – in the context of a disease that could be eliminated in a relatively inexpensive way through human-rights based interventions – is strange. This thinking envisions a TB response that is not with and for people who have TB but rather against suspects who must be targeted, tracked, traced and, above all, never trusted.

Some interventions

December 10 was World Human Rights Day, which is a reminder also that we can only beat TB using an approach anchored in human rights. Such an approach focusses on creating health systems that foster trust, partnership and dignity. This approach regards people with TB not as subjects to be controlled but as people to be partnered with. It assumes that people with TB have dignity, intelligence and empathy that motivate them to act in the best interests of themselves and their communities when empowered to do so. We cannot beat TB through a response rooted in control and coercion. Therefore, we suggest three interventions to which the funding for surveillance technology should



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be redirected.

The first is new treatment. In contrast to the dozens of whirling and chirping surveillance gizmos are bedaquiline and delamanid, the only new TB drugs to have come to the market in 50 years. These drugs are far more effective against drug-resistant TB than prevailing treatments made up of toxic drugs and painful injections that only work about half the time and often cause disability and psychosis.

New guidelines by the World Health Organization (WHO) recommend the use of bedaquiline and delamanid against drug-resistant TB. But to date, only about 30,000 people have received the new drugs; compare this to the over 500,000 people who get sick with drug-resistant TB every year.

In other words, we mount an arsenal of cutting-edge technology to corral people into taking torturous, ineffective drugs even while we fail to use available drugs that work far better. If adherence is the goal, providing drugs that work would be a good place to start.

vised Jawaharlal Nehru, you cannot have a republic within a republic. In the Indian context, the implication of this principle is that religion must be practised in a way consistent with constitutional values; at a minimum the practices cannot be discriminatory. Legal provisions against domestic violence and the ill-treatment of children point to the reach of democracy even into our homes. Religion cannot claim special dispensation. It need hardly be emphasised that the principle that religion be practised in accordance with the norms of democracy extends to all religions. Indian secularism would be tested on this idea.

In a way, the opposition to the entry of women to Sabarimala is reflective of a wider inequality between men and women that may be observed in Malayali society. Two indicators point to this, despite the very high literacy levels registered by women and a significant presence of women with higher education. First, female labour force participation is low in Kerala in comparison with other States. Surely the equality of women must be visible in their participation in the workforce. In Kerala, women were once a major presence in agriculture but this declined when paddy cultivation atrophied. The low female labour force participation in Kerala affects their ability to influence social norms, especially social attitudes towards female agency.

Second, the presence of women in governance roles is very low in Kerala. Three indicators may be noted, namely, the percentage of women legislators, judges in the High Court and leaders of political parties. It may come as a surprise to note that for the former two indicators the number is lower for

the State than it is for Tamil Nadu and Gujarat. This despite the fact that Malayali women participate in elections at least to the same extent as men. Political parties of Kerala have made little effort to induct women into leadership positions. How much of this is due to male chauvinism and how much to inadequate women's agency is a question to be debated. However, a recent incident does help us see through the thicket. The union of Malayalam film actors, a highly fetted body, was in the news for trying to protect an actor accused of abetting assault against a co-star despite the fact that he had been jailed. They held out till its leadership was publicly dragged over the coals by four determined women, some of them quite young. Such endings are few and far between but give rise to hope that women will eventually receive their due in Kerala.

A longer journey

It is hoped that the Sabarimala shrine, a site of popular worship with a long history and of great beauty, will henceforth be open to women of all ages. But for Kerala ending exclusion at this one site can only be the beginning of the much longer journey to gender equality in its society. The present situation bears comparison with what Nirad Chaudhuri had said of the British Empire, that it “extended subjecthood but denied citizenship”. In the case of Kerala's women, its society may have extended education but withheld empowerment. So long as women are not represented in the upper echelons of decision-making it will be difficult to break this mould.

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International institutions, donors and countries need to focus and collaborate on the urgent production and distribution of affordable generics of bedaquiline and delamanid. Meanwhile, we must escalate from all levels pressure on companies such as Johnson and Johnson and Otsuka to drop their prices to a dollar a day for each medication so that their exorbitant prices no longer exclude the vast majority of people from accessing the drugs.

The second is the human touch. Employ and deploy community health-care workers. Many domestic TB policies envision community health-care workers as the backbone of the response, yet, in practice, these front-line workers remain shockingly underused. In sufficient numbers equipped with proper training and dignified conditions of employment they would lead the response by bringing care to those furthest from the reach of traditional health-care systems. Such programmes would also have the incidental, yet hugely significant, benefit of employing millions of people. WHO should focus on recommendations around this cadre of workers and donors should focus funding to programmes that make the most of them.

The last is accountability. The TB response can only be as good as the health-care systems through which it is implemented, and

health-care systems are only as good as the structures that hold them to account. Community-based structures such as “clinic committees” ensure accountability while also fostering partnership and trust between communities and their health-care systems. Grassroots civil society and community-based organisations also ensure accountability. Such organisations are indispensable and would thrive on comparatively small amounts of funding. Accountability is a necessary condition for success. We must recognise that it is owed to communities, not donors or international institutions, and fund their efforts to ensure it.

People with TB do not need to be watched, they need to be heard. People with TB are saying they want what anyone wants – including health and dignity. The shiny allure of surveillance technology threatens to distract us from the real work of the TB response; work that involves partnering with communities to employ human-rights based strategies to beat TB.

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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.

Exit polls

Exercising one's franchise is strictly the individual's choice and the democratic norm is for him/her to keep it a private entitlement which is not to be divulged to anybody. But psephologists appear to be busy creating sample surveys that make voters reveal their choices. First, such an exercise invalidates the ballot's significance as a decisive tool of voters, whose decision is sacrosanct. Second, asking a voter to reveal his choice goes against the principle of a secret ballot. Hence both have to be banned as it destroys the noble goal attached to the massive polling exercise.
C.R. NARAYANAN,
Cuddalore, Tamil Nadu

Opposition meet

The call by some in the Opposition parties for a meet to discuss forming a grand alliance to take on

Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections might have emanated from the encouraging predictions of exit polls of the five State Assembly elections (Page 1, “Key Opposition meet today to give unity call a boost”, December 10). Such moves initially spell hope but, ultimately, success in such alliance talks will depend mainly on the selfless and common approach of Opposition leaders. A major setback could be the absence of key parties that have a base in Uttar Pradesh. Only time will tell whether the move will succeed without a hitch.
D. SETHURAMAN,
Chennai

Human rights, at 70

Seventy years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was proclaimed, the end to a

winter of despair is nowhere in sight (Editorial page, “Delhi and Paris: A tale of two cities”, December 10). I would use a phrase which sums up our journey as a nation: “History is a Rorschach test. What you see when you look at it tells you as much about yourself as it does about the past.” More than the state, it is for the individual to desire that change and make it happen. It is only when we shed some of our greed, selfishness and hypocrisy that things will begin to change, leading us toward the spring of hope.
SANGEETA KAMPANI,
New Delhi

■ It is only apt that the country which gave us the three pillars of modern society, liberty, equality and fraternity, would also be the place where the UN proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human

Rights, in 1948. As we celebrate the 70th anniversary of that historic document, it is important to note that there are numerous struggles, big and small, that are still raging in various corners of the world for rights that have been enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The international community must see to it that these rights do not remain on paper but manifest themselves in people's lives.
SARBANI MOHAPATRA,
Kolkata

Dirty air

The grim statistic – of 1.24 million deaths in India in 2017 because of air pollution – must make planners take note (Editorial, “Death in the air”, December 10). The use of traditional fuels, more numbers of motor vehicles, deforestation and industrialisation are the main reasons, that are hardly

under check. It is not surprising that governments in India are not in a hurry to tackle air pollution as it is a problem that does not directly affect people. People must now lead the way and draw attention to the problem.
UNNIKRISHNAN MANGALASSERI,
Manjeri, Kerala

■ With air pollution increasingly becoming a major factor for mortality, it is time to politicise the issue as in the case of Australia when people protested the destruction of the Great Barrier Reef, forcing political parties to take note. If one can add 1.7 years to one's life expectancy by controlling air

pollution, we must implement strict policies. One also eagerly waits to see the formation in India of a new political party with an ideology dedicated to the environment and climate change.
SOURIYA RAY,
New Delhi

■ The day may not be far off when we would have to be purchasing a can of fresh air to breathe. The parameters to measure air pollution are of no use as the standard for fresh air crossed the safe zone a long time ago.
A. ASHOK,
New Delhi

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CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

In a front-page story headlined “Centre amends rules for minorities from three nations” (Dec. 10, 2018), in the second paragraph, “Jains” has been left out of the communities listed.

In the Data Point graphic, “Scourge Persists” (OpEd page, Dec. 10, 2018), the map has misidentified Punjab as Haryana, while the figure of 21 sewer deaths in Haryana remains correct.

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