



Aftershocks in Goa

By aiding defections, the BJP is shrinking opposition space in an unseemly fashion

The near liquidation of the Congress legislature party in Goa, close on the heels of a rebellion of Congress and Janata Dal (Secular) legislators in neighbouring Karnataka, is the latest aftershock of the national election results in May, but it is unlikely to be the last. The BJP's victory in the 17th general election was not unexpected, but its scale and depth appear to have thrown opposition politics into a tailspin. The Assembly election in 2017 had returned a hung Assembly in Goa, with the Congress as the single largest party at 17 of 40 seats. The BJP had only 13, but was quick to cobble together a coalition and form a government. As things stand, the BJP has 27 MLAs and the Congress only five, with the defectors set to escape disqualification under the anti-defection law since they constitute two-thirds of the strength of the legislature party – turning the verdict on its head. This split in the Congress was in the making since May 23 when the party lost three of the four by-elections that were held along with the Lok Sabha polls. Any hope of a bid for power in the State was dashed, and with the party's national standing continuing on a descending slope, the lawmakers did what opportunism impels. Any party is well within its rights to lure members of other parties, and after all, that is how political realignments take place. But by encouraging and welcoming defectors who had won the election on a platform that was its polar opposite, the BJP has further lowered the bar for legitimate democratic processes and expansion of the party.

Apparently learning from the cost of its indecision in Goa in 2017, the Congress had moved swiftly to offer the post of chief ministership to the JD(S) that had won 37 seats out of 224 in Karnataka in 2018. Initially hailed by many as a potential model to build an anti-Hindutva coalition nationally, the JD(S)-Congress coalition has exposed its inherent contradictions. There is little that the current spectrum of Opposition parties have to offer to build a better politics other than their tired dynasties. Opportunistic alliances, devoid of any fresh ideas or inspiration, could only augment the BJP's plank that its opponents have a dark history and a bleak future. Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi's abrupt renunciation of the post has forced a churn in the party, perhaps as was intended. It is, however, difficult to predict whether the party will emerge stronger from the churn: the withdrawal of Mr. Gandhi from the leadership is an opportunity for the Congress to rid itself of the dynasty tag, but equally it could be left rudderless for long in the absence of an obvious successor. If the party is looking for a youthful leader, there is none outside of the scions of other political dynasties. The Goa debacle is as much a harbinger of a further shrinking of the opposition space as it is of the continuing advance of the BJP into more regions and social groups. Grace in defeat is difficult to achieve; the BJP's behaviour perhaps shows that even in triumph it is not easy.

The climax

India fell at the last-four stage, and cricket will now have a new World Cup winner

The ICC World Cup awaits its Sunday climax with England taking on New Zealand in the final at Lord's. However, closer home, disappointment lingers over India's exit at the last-four stage. It is a conclusion that has shadowed the Men in Blue for a while as even in the 2015 edition when Australia and New Zealand were the co-hosts, India lost to the former. In the latest championship, it was New Zealand that stunned Virat Kohli's men at Manchester's Old Trafford in the semifinal. India was one among the title favourites and it enjoyed a red-hot streak studded with seven wins besides a loss to England and a washed-out fixture involving New Zealand. The league was topped with 15 points, and its top order led by opener Rohit Sharma, who amassed 648 runs, and a pace attack featuring Jasprit Bumrah, were in form. But there were flaws, primary among them being a flickering middle order. The top troika contributed 69% of the runs while the central core yielded a mere 30%. And once New Zealand seamers Trent Boult and Matt Henry dismissed Rohit, K.L. Rahul and Kohli to leave India hobbling at five for three in five overs, chasing 239 proved incredibly tough. The efforts of Ravindra Jadeja and M.S. Dhoni at best delayed the inevitable 18-run loss. Still, this is a squad that has the right ingredients and it will be able to cope with Dhoni's eventual retirement.

The stage is now set for England and New Zealand to correct some historical deficiencies. One thing is certain: the World Cup will have a fresh champion as neither team has ever won the title since its inception in 1975. The Old Blighty last played a World Cup summit clash at Melbourne in 1992, and at the same venue, New Zealand lost the 2015 final to Australia. Being the host, England is playing on familiar terrain and has the backing of its enthusiastic fans. Skipper Eoin Morgan, himself an attacking player, has a strong top order in openers Jason Roy and Jonny Bairstow with Joe Root stepping in at three. Ever since recovering from a sore hamstring, Roy with a strike rate of 117.03, has been sensational and he demolished Australia with a 65-ball 85. There is all-rounder Ben Stokes in the mix and speedsters Jofra Archer and Chris Woakes head-line a probing attack. From the opposition, New Zealand is expected to mount a strong counter. It has a supreme batsman and crafty leader in Kane Williamson. He and senior Ross Taylor have to shepherd the innings while a clutch of astute seam and swing bowlers helmed by Boult can test the very best. England has the edge but New Zealand, as it showed against India, can punch above its weight.

A case of confused thinking

The draft National Education Policy lacks the very abilities it emphasises – critical thinking and deeper understanding



ROHIT DHANKAR

The draft National Education Policy (NEP) 2019 recommends a restructuring of school years and the curriculum, in a wide-ranging manner. If properly implemented, many of the suggested changes may help education. These include flexibility and wider scope at the secondary level, space for moral reasoning, re-emphasis on the true spirit of the three language formula, a focus on the core concepts and key ideas in subjects, vocational courses, and also a focus of assessment on understanding. However, the draft NEP also recommends much that may have just the opposite effect. These are, for example, 15 subjects/courses at the upper primary level, three languages in early childhood education, and confusing statements on a number of curricular issues. The curriculum the draft NEP suggests at the upper primary level has started looking like a laundry list, perhaps because of a lack of a coherent vision and the curricular thinking it adopts.

India-centric aim?

The policy envisions an "India centred education system that contributes directly to transforming our nation sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society". The proclaimed "India centred-ness" of education is limited to recommendations on Indian languages and a mention of Indian knowledge systems. The operational vision is that of a "knowledge society", almost entirely contained in UNESCO-preached "21st century skills". The democratic ideal is neither mentioned nor used in articulating the

aims of education or curricular recommendation, though democratic values are mentioned in the list of key "skills" that are to be integrated in subjects.

The vision of a knowledge society directly leads to the objectives of curricular transformation "in order to minimise rote learning and instead encourage holistic development and 21st century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, scientific temper, communication, collaboration, multilingualism, problem solving, ethics, social responsibility, and digital literacy". The most important and educationally worthwhile term is "skill" and everything has to fit in within that; even ethics and social responsibility.

Shaping an individual

"The goal", according to the draft policy, "will be to create holistic and complete individuals equipped with key 21st century skills". This makes it quite clear what the definition of "holistic and complete individuals" means. After a host of curricular recommendations which includes new subjects/courses comes another statement which may sound like an articulation of curricular objectives or aims of education. Under the heading "Curricular integration of essential subjects and skills", it says: "certain subjects and skills should be learned by all students in order to become good, successful, innovative, adaptable, and productive human beings in today's rapidly-changing world. In addition to proficiency in languages, these skills include: scientific temper; sense of aesthetics and art; languages; communication; ethical reasoning; digital literacy; knowledge of India; and knowledge of critical issues facing local communities, States, the country, and the world".

The broad goals are to send out "good, successful, innovative, adaptable, and productive human beings"; not a critical, democratic



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citizen who may want to change the situation rather than adapting to it. The list of eight "skills" (*sic*) is supposed to "create" such individuals. And to enable such an aim, it is no wonder that everything is a "skill" which includes among others a "sense of aesthetics", "ethical reasoning", "compassion" and "curiosity". The phrase "Evidence-based and scientific thinking" is used together everywhere implying that there can be "scientific thinking" which is not evidence based. The policy assumes that "evidence-based and scientific thinking... will lead naturally to rational, ethical, and compassionate individuals". I wonder how "evidence based" this claim itself happens to be. How scientific thinking will develop "compassion" is beyond one's understanding. Further, it is interesting that "evidence-based and scientific thinking" is supposed to help create an ethical, rational, and compassionate individual but not a "logical and problem solving" individual as they are listed separately as "skills". I wonder what part of logical and problem-solving abilities remain outside evidence-based, scientific and rational thinking.

The comments made above may be seen as a case of nit-picking by some. However, a policy document is read and interpreted at many levels and influences educational discourse. A document which places much emphasis on clarity of understanding and critical thinking cannot itself afford to fail in meeting the same standards. Shoddiness of thinking at the national level does not encourage

hope of proper interpretation and implementation of the policy. This is already reflected in some policy recommendations. Here are a few such examples.

Language teaching

The draft NEP rightly criticises private pre-schools for being a downward extension of primary school and of there being formal teaching in them. But it goes on to recommend preparing children for primary by prescribing learning the alphabets of and reading in three languages (for 3-6-year olds). All this in the name of "enhanced (*sic*) language learning abilities" of young children. Further the draft policy mistakes "language acquisition when children are immersed in more than one languages" with a "language teaching" situation where immersion is impossible in three languages. It then extends it unjustifiably to a learning of three scripts. It prescribes teaching script and reading in three languages to three-year-old children, but writing is supposed to be taught to six-year-old children. It also wants to introduce "some textbooks" only at age eight. One wonders why there is a three year gap between teaching reading and writing. If script and reading are already taught, then why withhold textbooks till age eight?

Here is another example of similar and confused thinking. The draft policy stipulates that the "mandated contents in the curriculum will be reduced... to its core, focussing on key concepts and essential ideas". This is to "yield more space for discussion and nuanced understanding, analysis, and application of key concepts". But it goes on to block more than the space vacated by prescribing six new laundry-list subjects/courses in addition to the existing eight. Some of these new courses such as "critical issues" and "moral reasoning" can be taught in a much better way in a revised curriculum of social stu-

dies as the context for both is society. Social studies needs more space in the upper primary curriculum. The subject has to be taught in such a manner that it connects with society and can be a very good way of introducing critical issues and moral thinking. Abstract moral reasoning is likely to have the same fate as so-called "moral science" that is taught in many schools. Similarly, "Indian classical language" and "Indian languages" can constitute a single rich subject rather than being split into two courses.

Missing link

Identifying key concepts and essential ideas are a matter of rational curricular decision making; not listing ideas as they come to one's mind. The absence of discussion on socio-political life seems to be another casualty in the emphasis on a knowledge society and 21st century skills. Social studies seems to be missing entirely as it has been mentioned once and then left out of the entire discussion on curriculum. In the end, the vision of the draft NEP rests on UNESCO declarations and reports rather than the Indian Constitution and development of democracy in this country; this in spite of wanting to make education India-centred. Thus, in the suggested curriculum changes, socio-political life is almost invisible.

All this goes to show that the draft NEP 2019 itself lacks the very abilities it emphasises, namely critical thinking and deeper understanding. It is a badly written document which hides behind a plethora of terms that are half-understood and clubbed under the overarching master concept of "skill". In short, the policy lacks depth and loses focus of the richness of secular democratic ideals by aiming for 21st century skills.

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Game of chicken that can end in disaster

The confrontation between the U.S. and Iran in West Asia could snowball with damaging economic consequences



MOHAMMED AYOOB

On July 7, Iran announced that it would begin enriching uranium above a concentration of 3.67% permitted under the nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), reached by Iran and the P5+1 (China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) on July 14, 2015.

This followed its July 1 announcement that it had breached the limit of the 300 kg of enriched uranium stockpile that was allowed by the JCPOA. It appears Iran's patience is wearing out.

These steps come in the wake of increasing tensions between the U.S. and Iran following the shooting down of an unmanned U.S. drone over the Strait of Hormuz in June. The circumstances surrounding this event and the locale of the downing are contested. However, it led to the U.S. President, Donald Trump, first ordering a retaliatory strike on Iran and then rescinding it at the last minute. It is possible that had this strike taken place it would have become the first act in a major military confrontation between the U.S. and Iran.

The mayhem could have spread to the entire West Asian region with Iran attacking strategic American, Saudi and Emirati targets around the Gulf and attempting to block the Strait of Hormuz in an effort to choke off the supply of Gulf oil to the international market.

Further, Iranian allies in Lebanon, Iraq and Syria might have launched attacks against American troop concentrations as well as against U.S. ally Israel, thus inviting further American and Israeli counter-retaliation and dragging the U.S. into its third major war in the region.

The downward spiral in U.S.-Iran relations started with Mr. Trump's decision (announced in May 2018) to withdraw from the JCPOA against the advice of the U.S.'s European allies France, Germany, and the U.K. that are parties to the deal. The Trump administration followed it up with the reimposition of stringent economic sanctions against Iran that were being gradually dismantled following the 2015 nuclear deal. These included sanctions against foreign companies doing business with Iran and against countries buying Iranian oil.

List of demands

Finally, the U.S. announced in April this year that it would not ex-



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tend waivers granted earlier to eight countries (China, India, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Turkey, Italy and Greece) which had been the largest importers of Iranian oil. This decision was aimed at totally choking off the export of Iranian oil – the primary foreign exchange earner for Tehran – in order to bring Iran to its knees and force it to accept American demands spelt out by U.S. Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo. These included further curbs on Iran's nuclear programme including total stoppage of uranium enrichment even at low levels permitted by the JCPOA and monitored by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Further, Mr. Pompeo demanded that Iran stop all support to Hezbollah and Hamas which the U.S. considers to be "terrorist" groups, permit the disarming of Shia militias in Iraq, and stop aiding Houthis in Yemen fighting Saudi and Emirati forces in that country. Above all, Mr. Pompeo demanded that Iran end building

of ballistic missiles and halt further launching or development of nuclear-capable missile systems.

All these demands went far beyond the limits placed on Iran by the JCPOA and most were unrelated to Iran's nuclear programme. Iran's government rejected these demands while still keeping the door open for negotiations, hoping against hope to draw the U.S. back into the nuclear deal. However, persisting and escalating moves by the U.S. during the past year now seem to have made it impossible for Tehran to simultaneously maintain the contradictory position of resisting American demands while continuing to comply with restrictions imposed on its nuclear programme by the JCPOA.

The stance of Iran's Hassan Rouhani government became increasingly untenable in the light of recent American actions. The latter provided the hardline opposition in Iran, composed of right-wing factions and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the opportunity to attack the government for conforming to an agreement that had been rejected by the U.S. and that had provided no economic relief to the Iranian people, the primary selling point in favour of the JCPOA. Moreover, the Iranian Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, whose support for the JCPOA was crucial, has for all practical purposes withdrawn his en-

dorsement of the agreement in turn leaving the duo of President Rouhani and Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif without any protective political cover.

Tit-for-tat measures

Therefore, the Iranian government, in order to maintain its standing with the populace, has been left with no option but to undertake tit-for-tat measures, further heightening the political temperature in the Persian Gulf. This has turned the U.S.-Iran standoff into a game of chicken in which either one of the parties to the game blinks and concedes victory to the other or a "crash" becomes inevitable. The American-Iranian confrontation seems to be inexorably heading towards the latter outcome. If taken to its logical conclusion this scenario can turn out to be catastrophic for the entire West Asian region as well as for the international economy. Oil supplies from the Persian Gulf are likely to be greatly reduced if not totally eliminated sending oil prices skyrocketing, especially threatening the vulnerable economies of the global South.

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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.

Data on jobs

The article, "Jobless growth becomes systemic" (Editorial page, July 12), raises an issue being overlooked. The fact that the female workforce is the one to suffer the most is expected in a country which is predominantly patriarchal. Women do face a doublewhammy: of exclusion from the workforce and, once in the system, discrimination of various forms. More importantly, as far as the agriculture sector is concerned and a major contributor to the GDP, the fall in farmer numbers is distressing. We must not forget that this sector is also a key employment sector for rural women.

PINNENTY MRUDULA, Bengaluru

■ The article needs to be read along with the Editorial, "Tread with caution" (July 12). The cold facts and figures of unemployment and the ills of diluting labour laws, euphemistically in the name of ease of doing business, do not augur well for the Indian working class. It will not be out of place to mention here a report, "State of Working India", which shows that 92% women and 82% men in the unorganised sector earn less than ₹10,000 per month. The Global Wealth Report of the Credit Suisse Research Institute (2018) shows that the top 1% Indians hold 51.5% of the country's wealth, the top 10% own 77.4% while 60% Indians fade away holding 4.7%. In the Budget speech, the Finance Minister described India Inc. as a creator of wealth, ignoring

agriculturists and the rest – proof on whose side the government is. These disparities and income inequalities are bound to widen with the present government toeing the line of the affluent. Combined with a dilution of labour laws, one is sure to have a labour force facing a perennial threat of exploitation and retrenchment.

G.B. SIVANANDAM, Coimbatore

■ The government appears to be a one-man led army, with a Utopian view of our country's future. The biggest issue now is a shrinking of the labour force and growing unemployment. Unemployment is a problem in urban and rural India regardless of gender. Though

education levels may be improving, job opportunities are scarce. Finally, does the labour force have the skills/awareness of opportunities in various job fields?

KEZIAH MARIAM JAYAN, Bengaluru

Tackling plastic

There is no doubt that plastic waste management is faulty (Editorial, Picking out plastic", July 12). Until such time as multinational companies take the lead in investing in plastic recycling systems, there is every reason to believe that plastic waste will be a major threat. There also a dire need of recycling cooperatives.

CHANDRASEKHAR V., Chennai

■ Some plastic packaging in this country comes with an

instruction in a corner that it is recyclable and would fetch around ₹5 a kg. It also has the address of the manufacturer. However, this labelling is not as visible as it should be. As far as plastic recycling is concerned, the Hyderabad municipality has taken the lead. Some public parks use recycled waste plastic-based tiles.

LAKSHMI SWATHI G., Hyderabad

True picture

The Men in Blue are a blow hot, blow cold national cricket team who some pander to with a bout of hazy hurrahs. Potent threat, but for how long? Five years, a decade or till the cows come home? India has won league games against weak sides that the so-called batting juggernaut loves to

annihilate, but with insipid bowling, right? India scraped through against Bangladesh and almost made a meal of it against Afghanistan. And if the Pakistan eleven had got it right, all the chest thumping nationalism could have turned into torturous self-flagellation. Except for a Jasprit Bumrah, Virat Kohli and a Rohit Sharma, the team disintegrates into bits and pieces against top quality sides. Propped up by a media frenzy and goals of personal aggrandisement, sample Ravindra Jadeja's cocky swagger on reaching his 50 when the team is yet to cross the hurdle. The team has a shallow and brittle character.

ANAND MATHEW, New Delhi

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