



No show

The poor turnout in the Valley for local polls is a wake-up call for the Centre

In elections held in Jammu and Kashmir, the turnout itself is a kind of verdict. The fact that just over a third of the electorate (35.1% provisionally) turned out to vote in the four-phase urban local body elections is a wake-up call to the Union government. The extremely low turnout in the Kashmir region – only 6.7% of those eligible voted in the first three phases, and 4.2% in the fourth phase – reflects the level of disconnect in the Valley. The turnout was not expected to be high, given the boycott by the two main regional parties, the National Conference and the Peoples Democratic Party. Their immediate protest was over the legal challenge in the Supreme Court to Article 35(A) of the Constitution that accords special powers to the Jammu and Kashmir legislature to decide who are the “permanent residents” of the State and on whom special rights and privileges can be conferred. Given the boycott by these two parties and others, there was little political mobilisation in the Valley. In Jammu, where both the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Congress have a strong base and where issues such as Article 35(A) don’t have as much resonance, there was greater participation. The absence of any viable political competition in the local body polls in the Valley will only undermine the institutions and the victors. This dismal turnout comes against a particularly fraught timeline in Kashmir. With the collapse of the PDP-BJP coalition government in June this year, the absence of Kashmiri parties from the fray could heighten alienation at the street level.

The reversal is discouraging as voter turnouts had increased significantly in this decade, growing ever since the mid-1990s. Even between periods of intense protests, Assembly and parliamentary elections saw increased turnouts despite boycott calls by separatist groups. This indicated a willing acceptance of the need to engage in electoral democracy to address civic concerns even if there were substantive differences and anger with the State and Central governments over issues such as security, human rights violations and the status of J&K. The inability of the PDP-BJP government to come up with a coherent response to the unrest and protests that raged in 2016-17, and the subsequent imposition of Governor’s Rule have only exacerbated matters. The work of the Centre’s interlocutor, Dineshwar Sharma, to carry forward a dialogue with various groups and individuals in the State has also not been enough to arrest misgivings in the Valley. The Centre must see the lack of participation in the polls in the Valley as a serious sign of alienation among the people and double down on ways to forge greater engagement. Misguided steps taken to reverse the special status of J&K might appeal to the BJP’s core constituency, but are bound to have a serious fallout in the Valley.

Another outbreak

A proper awareness campaign is vital to contain the Zika outbreak in Jaipur

With 80 laboratory-confirmed cases of the Zika virus already in Jaipur, including 22 pregnant women, the latest outbreak is India’s most severe so far. In January 2017, three confirmed cases of Zika were reported from Ahmedabad, including a pregnant woman, and in July the same year a single case was reported from Tamil Nadu’s Krishnagiri district. Unlike in the case of the Ahmedabad outbreak that was kept under wraps by the Health Ministry (even the World Health Organization was informed only in May), there has been more transparency in the last two instances. About 4.5 lakh people at the outbreak site in Rajasthan have been brought under surveillance. While steps to halt mosquito breeding have been initiated, it is to be noted that controlling the breeding of the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, which transmits the Zika virus, is very challenging. Controlling the spread becomes even harder as the mosquito is widely prevalent in India, and the infection remains asymptomatic in about 80% of cases, allowing the virus to silently spread from one person to another. It can also spread from a pregnant mother to the foetus. Even when the infection manifests itself, the symptoms are very mild and non-specific, making it difficult to correctly and easily diagnose it. A study published in the journal *Neurology India* found 14 of 90 patients with the Guillain-Barré syndrome (a neurological complication seen in Zika-infected adults) in the Pudukkottai-based Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research tested positive for Zika virus antibodies. Four of the 14 patients also tested positive for an anti-dengue antibody. There is a remote possibility that the virus is circulating in some parts of India and could cause an epidemic at some point.

It is not clear if the first person (index case) or others who had contracted the infection had travelled to any country where there is a Zika infection risk. The absence of travel history outside India in the recent past by any of the infected individuals indicates the virus is prevalent in the mosquito population. Spread through sex, without multiple instances of infection by mosquitoes is unlikely, given the spurt in the number of cases within a narrow time window in a small community. Since Zika infection during pregnancy can cause severe birth defects, particularly microcephaly (small size of the head), all the 22 pregnant women infected must be monitored. Also, as there is no cure for microcephaly at birth, there should be campaigns to educate people living in the outbreak area to avoid sex, particularly with the intent of getting pregnant, till the outbreak is under control. The long winter ahead in north India and the imminent onset of the northeast monsoon in the eastern coast of India is conducive for the mosquito to multiply and spread. This calls for a high level of alert.

Myanmar and the limits of pan-Islamism

The paradox of Muslim solidarity is that its global character is dependent on the West, conceptually and politically



FAISSAL DEVJI

Since Myanmar’s latest bout of violence against the Rohingya began in 2012, there has been a slow uptick of outrage in the Muslim world. But it was only recently, once international observers described what was happening there as an ethnic cleansing, that Muslim concern became more vocal than protests in Europe or the U.S. In the past, Muslim-majority countries such as Bangladesh and Malaysia, at the receiving end of refugee flows from Myanmar numbering in the tens and even hundreds of thousands, have acted forcefully to prevent the Rohingya from entering their territories.

But last year everything changed, with Bangladesh, Turkey, Malaysia, Indonesia and Pakistan at the forefront of international demands to stop the flight of refugees from Myanmar and alleviate their suffering. Behind this change lay a number of causes, from the humanitarian, political and economic emergency created by the influx of refugees among Myanmar’s neighbours, to growing Muslim protests around the world at the treatment of the Rohingya. The crisis also presented an opportunity for politicians to claim leadership in an otherwise fragmented Muslim world by demanding relief and justice for the Rohingya.

Turkey’s President made strong statements about the crisis, putting it at the top of the agenda at the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. His wife made a highly publicised trip to Bangladesh to be filmed and photographed in Rohingya camps, while donating and

promising more Turkish aid. Turkey, Indonesia and Malaysia also competed to deliver assistance in Rakhine state while engaging the Myanmar government in talks. The Bangladesh Prime Minister spoke about the plight of the refugees at the UN and demanded safe zones for the Rohingya in Myanmar.

Yet both Turkey’s President and the Bangladesh Prime Minister use the same accusations of Islamic terrorism against their domestic opponents as are levelled against the Rohingya in Myanmar. And they do so for the same reason, in order to de-legitimise suspect minority groups and political opposition in their own countries. Like Myanmar, these states are all heirs to the ‘War on Terror’, deploying its language and practices to forge a new politics. What we are seeing is not disagreement between Muslim and non-Muslim states on the subject of the Rohingya, but instead fundamental agreement on a narrative of counter-terrorism that has been globalised beyond American control.

The Rohingya cause represents the return of states to leadership roles within the Muslim world, and it has made Islamic unity possible for the first time since the sectarian bloodletting of the Syrian war, to say nothing of the divide between Saudi-led and pro-Iranian movements across West Asia. All over the world, bar Afghanistan and Somalia, states are triumphing over their religious critics to champion Islamic causes long held by the latter. By suppressing such groups in the name of counter-terrorism, however, these states have also adopted their narrative of Muslim victimisation.

The victim’s tale

Non-state groups had been among the first to promote a narrative of Muslim victimisation, with jihadis as much as liberals drawing from a



FILE PHOTO/AFP/DOBANGSHU SARKAR

familiar humanitarian repertoire in which suffering demands an immediate and therefore violent response. But this storyline only dates back to the aftermath of the Cold War, beginning with Muslim mobilisations over the fate of the Bosnians during the breakup of Yugoslavia. International Muslim causes had earlier been political rather than humanitarian. They called for the establishment of certain kinds of states, rather than emergency measures to guarantee a people’s survival.

In the ideologically defined conflicts of the Cold War, groups like the Palestinians emerged as political heroes rather than simply humanitarian victims. But nowadays they, too, are seen by their supporters as representing a humanitarian cause. This is due to their loss of an institutionalised political identity with the creation of the Palestinian Authority as an Israeli partner and the sequestration of Gaza. It is therefore their Israeli enemies who ironically are the only ones to grant Palestinians a political existence, by considering them actors motivated by ideas freely adopted rather than by purely biological needs.

Humanitarianism today is premised upon a distrust of politics, which is blamed for every crisis humanitarians seek to resolve. This means that any relief or intervention deemed to be political is condemned as hypocritical. Indeed, hypocrisy has become the gravest charge in the lexicon of liberals and militants alike. And it is the humanitarian or anti-political

Advantage Bolsonaro

As the final round of a polarised election nears, Brazil’s future tilts towards the far-right



VIJAY PRASHAD

Anticipation is in the air. Three weeks divide the first round (October 7) of the Brazilian presidential election from the second (October 28). In the first, the far right’s candidate, Jair Bolsonaro, won the most votes, a convincing 46%. His closest challenger, Fernando Haddad of the Workers’ Party (PT), earned 29% of the votes. Had Mr. Bolsonaro won over 50% of the votes, he would have become Brazil’s eighth president since the fall of the military dictatorship (1964-1985). However, there are as many as those who voted for him who are not for him, saying that they will never vote for him. The hashtag – #EleNão or #NotHim – continues to resonate. But, many people fear that in the time left, Mr. Bolsonaro might appeal to enough of the deeply polarised electorate to win.

Regional pull

Polling data favours Mr. Bolsonaro. Datafolha announced that 58% of voters favour him over the 42%

who are with Mr. Haddad. In the country’s northeast, the centre of Brazil’s Afro-Brazilian population, Mr. Haddad has a clear lead, while in the populous and more prosperous south-east, Mr. Bolsonaro wins by a considerable margin. It will not be easy to alter this margin. Nonetheless, the PT is struggling to build a ‘national anti-fascist front with the left and progressive, humanist and liberal democratic sections’, says Professor Monica Bruckmann who teaches politics at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. The PT, she says, hopes to attract the 54% who voted against Mr. Bolsonaro in the first round. Mr. Haddad and the PT, she adds, warn that a victory for Mr. Bolsonaro will mean a ‘regression to the darkest days of authoritarian governments in Brazil and in Latin America’.

Dark days ahead

Evidence of these ‘darkest days’ has not had to wait for the final election result. In Salvador, a Bolsonaro supporter murdered a 63-year-old man who had said he voted for Mr. Haddad. In Nova Iguaçu, a 41-year-old transgender person was attacked by Bolsonaro supporters who chanted, “such trash should die.” In Porto Alegre, a gang of men attacked a 19-year-old woman who was carrying an



AFP/MAURO PIMENTEL

LGBTQ flag and had an anti-Bolsonaro sticker; they carved a swastika on her skin. In Copacabana, along the beach, men without shirts and in military fatigue pants jogged in formation down the avenue for Mr. Bolsonaro. At football matches, the cheer has gone up – Bolsonaro will kill all queers. Several reporters have also been threatened and attacked, according to the Brazilian Association of Investigative Journalism (Abraji). Mr. Bolsonaro, a military man, has surrounded himself with military men, which include the vice-president, defence minister and infrastructure minister. Mr. Bolsonaro has said he would give greater powers to the police and the armed services to tackle crime. He is on record as having said that the main problem with the military dictatorship is that it did not kill enough people. Ugliness governs the Bolsonaro camp.

Why would more than half the

character of Muslim outrage that has allowed states such as Bangladesh and Turkey to appropriate it, just as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State had done before them for very different reasons.

It is not simply state violence that has muffled the voice of non-state actors in mobilising Muslims globally. Their outrage over Rohingya suffering has been viewed with suspicion among Muslims more widely. Pakistani newspapers have levelled accusations of hypocrisy against the religious and militant groups that specialised in charging others with it. And so Islamists outraged by the treatment of the Rohingya are reproached for their own violence against non-Muslim or sectarian minorities. Signalling the decline of such actors, this mistrustful response illustrates the internal shifts in Muslim opinion and protest.

European midwife

The narrative of Muslim victimisation is arbitrary in its application. Palestinians, Bosnians and now the Rohingya might enjoy global attention as victims of this kind, but not Uighurs, Somalis, Yemenis or Chechens. The lack of Muslim solidarity in these cases cannot be attributed to politics understood as hypocrisy. Neither are they explained by the economic interests that are often thought to underlie such hypocrisy. They must instead be understood in terms of familiar storylines. Only a crisis that can be attributed to western imperialism, or Zionism understood as its surrogate, is a candidate for global Muslim solidarity.

Muslim outrage over the persecution of the Rohingya follows a familiar script. Like all such global mobilisations, whether prompted by the victimisation of fellow believers or Islam itself in alleged insults to its prophet, these demonstrations of solidarity are midwived in the West. This was the case with the first global mobilisa-

tion of Muslims in 1989, against Salman Rushdie’s novel *The Satan-ic Verses*. It is only books, cartoons, speeches or desecrations in Europe and America that give rise to Muslim protests globally, with similar publications or events in other places possessing merely local significance. Similarly, it is only those wars and humanitarian crises receiving either positive or negative attention in the West that end up as Muslim causes worldwide.

This trajectory illustrates the consequences of Western political and economic dominance. Since colonial times, Asians, Africans and Latin Americans have had to relate to each other through Europe and America. But such mediation also suggests the intimate way in which Islam’s globalisation is linked to a West often seen as its enemy. As Myanmar but also Bosnia and Kosovo demonstrate, global forms of Muslim solidarity are not only prompted by calls for humanitarian relief in the West, but also favour the kind of military intervention whose deployment by western powers Muslims otherwise criticise.

Linked as they always have been to the West, global forms of Muslim protest are transient and easily dissipated. The ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya having been accomplished by Myanmar, and Muslim politicians with their constituencies around the world having had the chance to denounce it, the matter can be dropped until Rakhine’s violence and refugees once again attract the interest of a European or American public. The paradox of Muslim solidarity is that its global character remains dependent on the West conceptually as well as politically, even and especially when it is explicitly anti-western in form.

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Brazilian electorate elect a man who wants to reintroduce a military dictatorship to the country; someone who is vicious against women and homosexual? The parallels with U.S. President Donald Trump are easy – both men are open in their intolerance and fantasise about using the hammer to shape society in their image. But, there is something specific in Mr. Bolsonaro’s rise. He has emerged – for the elite – as the antidote to the left-leaning policies of the PT and – for the middle class – as an angel, a Seraphim (as Ms. Bruckmann put it), against violence.

The extreme right

There is no question that Brazil’s oligarchy despised the governments of the PT (2002-2016). During this period, the PT under Presidents Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff used high commodity prices to conduct a modest redistribution scheme for the very poor. Hunger was defeated, and educational opportunities opened up to the most marginal sections (Mr. Haddad was the minister of education in both the Lula and Rousseff governments). Ms. Rousseff’s impeachment – a legislative coup – and Mr. Lula’s arrest – a judicial coup – pushed the PT out of power. Polls show that if the judiciary had not denied Mr. Lula

from running in this presidential election, he would have won outright in the first round. Prof. Valter Pomar, who teaches international relations at the Federal University of ABC and a leader of the PT, says the ‘normal’ right encouraged the extreme right to overthrow Ms. Rousseff and ensnare Mr. Lula. They thought that this extreme right – represented by Mr. Bolsonaro – would do their work and then get out of the way. Of course, Mr. Bolsonaro is going nowhere.

Democracy does not appeal to Brazil’s oligarchy. Terrible violence in the country (175 murders a day in 2017) has turned some of the middle class towards the hardness of Mr. Bolsonaro and against the PT’s progressive values. It is this combination of the oligarchy – which controls the media and has depicted Mr. Bolsonaro as reasonable – and the middle class that is pushing him forward. It is still possible for the verdict on October 28 to go against Mr. Bolsonaro. A quarter of voters did not cast their ballot on October 7, despite voting being mandatory in Brazil. If they do come to the polling booths, it will be hard to predict this election.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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RAW ‘plot’

The startling allegation by Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena that India’s Research and Analysis Wing is plotting to eliminate him needs to be taken with a pinch of salt (Page 1, October 17). There is no denying the fact that Mr. Sirisena, of late, is under immense pressure from his partymen to quit the ruling coalition and explore other political possibilities. Such an unfounded charge is hardly expected of a leader from a neighbouring country with which India shares long-standing cultural and trade interests. Has Mr. Sirisena unwittingly laid the foundation to triggering ethnic conflict again?

V. SUBRAMANIAN,
Chennai

Sabarimala issue

Events in Kerala subsequent to the Supreme Court

judgment permitting the entry of women to the Sabarimala temple are disturbing, especially as Kerala is an advanced State in terms of social indices. It is not understood what the protesters are trying to convey. If tradition, faith and belief are the basis for retaining religious customs and practices, several obsolete and inhuman practices would still be prevalent. Till a review petition is filed, such protests would be out of place.

B. HARISH,
Mangaluru

Cutting down on oil

The over-dependence in India on petrol, diesel and other crude petroleum products is in fact spawning off finances that should be available for other developmental projects in the country (Editorial, ‘Slippery slope’, October

17). A solution is not impossible. It should ensure an improvement in transport infrastructure and promotion of mass transport. Energy efficient methods should be made mandatory in all sectors and industries. Energy audits too.

JUJI PANICKER K.,
Chengannur, Kerala

The Rafale deal

With reference to the article, “Decoding the Rafale controversy” (Editorial page, October 16), the sentence, in the ninth paragraph, “This is inconsistent with former French President Francois Hollande’s statement to a French news website, Mediapart, in September, that Reliance was proposed by the Indian Government and that the French did not have a choice in the matter”, has overlooked the statement of Mr. Hollande –

in an interview to AFP, and published in the *Le Monde* on September 24, 2018 – which said, “Dassault partnered Reliance without the French Government being consulted about it. The two partners found each other by themselves.” In the next paragraph, the sentence, “Adding to this is a set of timing coincidences. Reliance Defence Limited was registered in March 2015, weeks before Mr Modi’s visit to France. Reliance Aerostructure Limited was registered on April 24”, does not reflect Reliance having registered as many as 14 different companies between November 2014 and April 2015. There was a public announcement about Reliance’s entry into the defence business at ‘Aero India’ [air show], in February 2015. In any case, Reliance Defence is not an offset partner for the Rafale

aircraft deal. Therefore, any coincidences and their linkage to the offset contract are purely imaginary. In the 11th paragraph, the sentence, “The agreement for the 36 aircraft was signed by two Defence Ministers on September 23, 2016. DRAL was registered on October 3...” overlooks that Dassault Reliance Aerospace Limited (DRAL) was registered on February 10, 2017. Finally, in the penultimate paragraph, the sentence, “Since Reliance subsidiaries were awarded a clutch of

defence licences during 2016-17, it is unclear as to how many of these are engaged with the Rafale offsets”, overlooks Reliance Defence having issued a press statement and conducted a formal interview clarifying all issues related to Reliance Defence. DRAL is the only Indian Offset Partner (IOP) of Dassault Aviation, in which Reliance holds 51% equity and Dassault Aviation 49% equity. RAJESH K. DHINGRA, CEO, RELIANCE DEFENCE

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CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

The third paragraph of “Ten at home is great, but zero where it matters is not” (Between Wickets column, Oct. 17, 2018) said: “Four years ago, after a wipe-out in England (1-4), India took on the Windies at home.” India actually lost that series 1-3. After the first Test was drawn, India won the second and England took the last three.

In “India’s air-walker poised for lift-off” (Weekend Sport, Oct. 13, 2018), Sreesankar’s profile erroneously gave his year of birth as 1997. It should have been 1999.

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