



## Act firmly

Sri Lanka's government must decisively and impartially put down anti-Muslim violence

The sudden spurt in violence targeting Muslims in Sri Lanka may only be limited in comparison to previous racial attacks in the island, but it is serious enough to cast a dark shadow on ethnic relations. That it has caused enough concern and disquiet to warrant the imposition of a state of emergency across the island is a reflection of the prevailing precarious situation. This is the first time since 2011 that Colombo has had to invoke emergency provisions to bolster the security apparatus, indicating official concern that the current violence could escalate. As an urgently needed security measure, this is a crucial intervention as it enables the quick deployment of armed forces in areas of strife, and strengthens the hand of the law and order machinery. The reverberations of early incidents that took place in Kandy district are still being felt. The first spark that ignited the violence would have gone down as just an instance of road rage, as a Sinhalese truck driver was beaten to death by a group of Muslims for blocking their way. But this was followed by attacks on Muslim houses, business establishments and mosques. There was one more death, that of a Muslim man, whose burnt body was found in a house. Hardline Sinhala groups then waded in with rumour and inflammatory social media posts, adding to the incendiary mood.

Muslims, the third largest ethnic constituent in Sri Lanka, were not a party to the protracted armed conflict that ended in 2009. However, they were also victims then, suffering massacres and displacement at the hands of the Tamil militants. In the manner of their political mobilisation, they have remained an integral part of the Sri Lankan mainstream. In recent years, Muslims have been targeted by extreme right-wing groups, which are presumably looking for new enemies after the fall of the LTTE. The violence has sometimes been attributed to Sinhala majoritarian groups such as the Bodu Bala Sena. More recently, there was hate-mongering against the community in the backdrop of some Rohingya refugees seeking shelter in Sri Lanka. Post-war triumphalism had proved to be the undoing of the Mahinda Rajapaksa regime, and it is the duty of the present rulers to avoid a relapse into ethnic strife. The present regime does not carry an anti-minority tag, but it has still attracted criticism for allowing an atmosphere of impunity to prevail over the last few days. It should strive to avoid the impression that hardliners in the majority community can get away with anti-minority intimidation and violence. President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe should redouble efforts to ensure that the authorities on the ground act with decisiveness and impartiality.

## Rooftop energy

Surveys to map usable rooftops for solar power must be undertaken nationwide

Bengaluru's aerial mission to produce a three dimensional map of rooftop solar power potential using Light Detection and Ranging (LIDAR) data can give this key source of power a big boost. Similar mapping exercises have been carried out in several countries over the past few years to assess how much of a city's power needs can be met through rooftop solar installations. A survey helps determine usable rooftops, separating them from green spaces, and analyses the quality of the solar resource. With steady urbanisation, solar maps of this kind will help electricity utilities come up with good business cases and investment vehicles and give residents an opportunity to become partners in the effort. An initiative to rapidly scale up rooftop solar installations is needed if the target of creating 40 GW of capacity connected to the grid by 2022 is to be realised. Rooftop solar power growth has demonstrated an overall positive trend, including in the fourth quarter of 2017 when tenders for 220 MW represented a doubling of the achievement in the previous quarter. But this will need to be scaled up massively to achieve the national target. Going forward, domestic policy has to evaluate the impact of factors such as imposition of safeguard duty and anti-dumping duty on imports, and levy of the goods and services tax on photovoltaic modules. The industry is apprehensive that the shine could diminish for the sector during the current year, unless policy is attuned to the overall objective of augmenting capacity.

Major solar projects that connect to the grid often face the challenge of land acquisition and transmission connectivity. This has led to a delay in planned capacity coming on stream during 2017: nearly 3,600 MW did not get commissioned during the last quarter, out of a scheduled 5,100 MW. What this underscores is the importance of exploiting rooftop solar, which represents only about 11% of the country's 19,516 MW total installed capacity at the start of 2018. The Centre should come up with incentives, given the enormous investment potential waiting to be tapped and the real estate that can be rented. The southern States and Rajasthan together host the bulk of national solar infrastructure on a large scale. With some forward-looking policymaking, they can continue to lead by adding rooftop capacity. India, which is a founder-member of the International Solar Alliance launched in Paris during the climate change conference more than two years ago, must strive to be a global leader. Initiatives such as the Bengaluru mapping project can contribute to assessments of both real potential and risk. This is crucial for projects on a large scale involving significant exposure for financial institutions, including banks. With ongoing improvements to solar cell efficiency and battery technology, rooftops will only get more attractive in the future.

# Be alert to Operation Dhakka

The toppling of the Lenin statue in Tripura is a reminder of the grave danger to Indian democracy



GOPALKRISHNA GANDHI

There one moment, gone the next – statue of Vladimir Il-ich Ulyanov, known internationally as Lenin, March 5, 2018, Belonia, Tripura. “*Bharat Mata ki jai!*” saffron-sporting men yelled as they felled the statue of the Russian communist revolutionary. It did not matter to them that Lenin had hailed that same Bharat, its revolutionary ardour, for struggling to free itself from British imperialist and indigenous yokes. It did not matter to them that Lenin had been the inspiration to generations of Indians, leaders and led, in their strivings for a just Bharat. What mattered to them was that Lenin had inspired the Communist Party of India (Marxist)-led government in that northeastern State, which had been un-seated after an un-broken 25 years of ‘red rule’.

A second Lenin statue was to be similarly toppled at another site in the State shortly thereafter. A report said the statue's decapitated head was turned into a ‘football’. Visuals of the statue's ‘slaying’ and of the ‘slain’ figure lying amidst what looks like garbage sped across the globe. And millions watched them in disbelief. ‘What ever happened to Tripura? Where is Indian democracy headed?’

### Operation Dhakka

And the chronology unfolded in thinking, remembering minds of other demolitions, charrings that seem to belong to a family of hate, of violent hate. The Babri Masjid, Ayodhya, December 6, 1992. The Wali Dakhani Mazaar, just outside the office of the Commissioner of Police, Ahmedabad, March 1, 2002. An estimated 272 minority



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shrines in Gujarat over six days thereafter. St. Sebastian's Church, Dilshad Bagh, Delhi, Christmas eve, 2014.

“*Ek dhakka zor se* (one more shove, and make it strong)” was an inflammatory cry that was heard at the time of the Babri Masjid demolition. The list of demolitions together can be called ‘Operation Dhakka’.

What does one say to this sample scroll?

That the mindset of the people of India is now happy with the bulldozer? That it now endorses the blade that cuts, crushes, decimates the ‘other’? Does it approve the claw that then moves the heap away?

### The response

The nationwide response to the vandalism rejects that despondent hypothesis. So swift was the reaction, all in real time, even before the news condensed into cold print the following day, that the Bharatiya Janata Party functionary who tweeted with the speed of sound to the effect that ‘Lenin today, Periyar tomorrow’ had to retract that with the speed of light. Thank God, one might say, begging Periyar's atheistic pardon, for Periyar's giant stature. Even in death, his stature remain stronger than any statue bulldozer.



ASEEM SHRIVASTAVA

If ever there was someone who lived true to his name, it was Dhrubajyoti Ghosh. In Sanskrit, “Dhrubajyoti” refers to the light (*jyoti*) emitted by the pole star (*dhruva tara*). The ecologist, who passed away in February, was unwavering in his commitment to the cause he lived for and fearlessly defended: saving the ecologically critical East Kolkata Wetlands from the greed of developers for almost four decades, right up until his passing away.

### Rural ecological wisdom

What Ghosh discovered serendipitously, as a public sanitation engineer in the early 1980s, was that Kolkata's wastewater is introduced into and detained in shallow waterbodies (*bheris* in Bengali) which serve as oxidation ponds because of the presence of algae. Under the open tropical sun, the water un-

dergoes change, getting comprehensively treated and cleaned as the bacteria disintegrate and the algae proliferate, serving as food for fish. The treated water is used by villagers in the area to grow vegetables and paddy.

The beauty of what Ghosh discovered is that these villagers have been following such sane ecological practices for many decades without any help from the State, and well beyond the gaze of the media. It suggests remarkable ecological wisdom on the part of largely illiterate villagers, based on knowledge of local conditions and wetland hydrology.

Thanks to his dedicated work, the 125 sq km area of the wetlands were recognised internationally in 2002 as a ‘Ramsar site’, or a wetland of international significance, which made it incumbent by both the State and the Central governments to protect them from invasive encroachments.

To the untrained eye, wetlands are easily and frequently mistaken to be wasteland, a point of view that shows remarkable ecological ignorance. Greater Kolkata, with a population of more than 14 million people, is one of the largest metro-



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politan areas in the world. A growing population of this size in a developing economy puts huge pressures on the infrastructure, sanitation being foremost among them.

### Nature at work

Kolkata is fortunate to be home to the world's largest organic ‘sewage treatment plant’, the wetlands. Unobserved by the rest of the world, sun-fed algae and the bacteria in the sewage perform this wondrous function.

A conservative estimate of this great service being performed quietly by nature would give us this data: the capacity to treat 750 million litres of wastewater per

day. In monetary terms it would be over \$25 billion (₹162,500 crore) annually.

But this is only one part of it. These wetlands are also home to a wide variety of aquatic life, vegetation, and hundreds of species of birds. Moreover, after nature's organic treatment, the sewage that drains into the wetlands results in 55,000 tonnes of vegetables and paddy and 10,000 tonnes of fish annually, giving a community of 100,000 people a livelihood. In effect, the wastewater works as a costless fertilizer to produce cheap food for what Ghosh called an “ecologically subsidised” city.

Because these invaluable benefits cannot be calculated, they are often brushed aside in the calculations of developers. No textbook of development economics in India or elsewhere talks about “the developer's model of development”, the one that is actually the dominant understanding of development at work across 21st century India.

In 2005, the UN Millennium Ecosystem Assessment found ecological degradation to be more prominent within wetlands than any other ecosystem on Earth.

MHA, from the Prime Minister saying he is deeply troubled and hurt by what happened in Tripura, that no one owing allegiance to ‘saffron’ will ever conduct such an ‘Operation Dhakka’ again, not just because a statue of a great world leader was vandalised but because that vandalism reflects political coarseness, un-democratic belligerence.

Bullies are not democrats. And democracy is not a bully. That adds up to a paradox: the bullying of democracy and the enfranchising of the bully.

Democracy, as organised for us by our Constitution, does not dis-entitle bullies from participating in election campaigns, electoral contests. Why? Because, to borrow and adapt, begging his pardon, Gandhi's famous description of God, the bully is “an indefinable mysterious power... which makes itself felt and yet defies all proof...”

Unveiling the electoral process for the electing population, our democracy says to the voter what a voter may or may not do as that essential digit in democracy, namely, the elector. It says to the candidate and campaigner what they may or may not do in the run-up to the polls. It says to election officers what they may or may not do as the polls are on. It says to Presidents and Governors what they should or should not do, how they should and should not act when scrutinising results to see who should be called to form governments.

But democracy does not tell the public to not let the anti-social, the anti-democracy bully take the law into his hands and hold peace to ransom, peaceful change to ransom, the democratic process itself to ransom. Democracy does not tell us that but governance can, administrations should. And that, through the medium of the laws, the dicta of ‘law and order’.

Operation Dhakka has therefore happened right under democracy's nose and above governments’

heads. It has happened, I said. But that is surely an under-statement and, in fact, a mis-statement. It has been allowed to happen, it has been enabled to happen. ‘No flout without clout.’ Certainly no flout of the scale that Operation Dhakka represents.

But stopping the culture of *dhakka* cannot be left to the administration's law and order maintenance mechanism.

Relay and retaliatory *dhakkas* are likely, with the defacement of a Periyar statue having been already attempted, incredibly, and a Syama Prasad Mukherjee statue in Kolkata being black-inked. This is an incendiary risk which only political leadership can address.

Treating the risk as a ‘law and order matter’ is not the answer, for the *dhakka* challenge runs deeper. It threatens to erode the very fabric of our democracy.

It is imperative that all democratic forces unite in saying no one should repeat or retaliate in copy-cat shames, the Tripura shame. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's statement has been frank and fearless. “Karl Marx or Mohamati [The Great] Lenin are not my leaders,” she said. “But they do matter in Russia. Different people are leaders in different countries and different places formed this [the world]... but you [the BJP] do not have the right to raze the statues of Marx or Lenin, just because you came to power.”