# 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. Postwar 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

negaluru's aerial mission to produce a three dinensional 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 Ilich 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

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 'slaving' 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



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 sam-

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

### The response

The nationwide response to the vandalisation 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.

And the Prime Minister, sensitive to world opinion, and aware of the reaction to the Tripura shame, has asked the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) to say that what has happened is not acceptable. He has done what is only right and proper. And quickly enough. He deserves to be complimented. The new Chief Minister, too, deserves appreciation for his expression of disapproval. Those who said things that seemed to explain away the *dhakka* will be hopefully be sobered by the Prime Minister's admonition.

But is the admonition enough? The questions remain: Why do supporters of his party feel that they can do what they have done, in the first place? Why do they feel they can do that and get away with it? Or that - even if the administration was to prosecute them - the dhakka has done its work and so,

The Prime Minister's chastisement, last year, of cow vigilantism was salutary, though it came not nearly as fast as his response to the Lenin dhakka. But did cow vigilantism stop? Is the cattle trade now free of fear? We know the answer.

Why? Because the culture of dhakka is abroad. And so it will be until India gets another clear message, direct and unmistakable, in continuation of his advisory to the

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 vandalisation reflects political coarseness, un-democratic bellige-

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 disentitle 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 runup 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 mainte-

nance mechanism. Relay and retaliatory dhakkas are likely, with the defacement of a Periyar statue having been already attempted, incredibly, and a Svama Prasad Mukherjee statue in Kolkata being black-inked. This is an incendiary risk which only pol-

itical 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 copycat 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.'

### **Bulldoze bulldozing**

Strong words. The communist parties of India and the Trinamool Congress can recall violence for which they hold the other squarely responsible. But surely the time has come for them and all parties that sense a new danger from dhakka-ism to democracy to now arouse India's faith in democratic choice and thereby bulldoze bulldozing.

Gopalkrishna Gandhi is a former

# The ecologically subsidised city

What Dhrubajyoti Ghosh closely observed and learnt from Kolkata's wetland communities



ASEEM SHRIVASTAVA

Tf ever there was someone who ved 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 eve, 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-



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.

Dhrubajyoti Ghosh recognised + this and did more than perhaps any other individual in creating public awareness in India about the need to conserve its wetlands. His efforts were recognised internationally, when he was named, in 1990, as a UN Global 500 Roll of Honour laureate. In 2016, he received the prestigious CEM Luc Hoffmann Award from the Interna tional Union for Conservation of

Ghosh was an ecologist, not an environmentalist. Based on his close observations of wetland communities and their organically renewable livelihoods, he argued for several new concepts relevant to ecological pedagogy and policymaking. For him, the environment was not a mere after-thought in the operations of a market economy; and the forgotten natural world was no mere 'resource'. Such a perspective illustrates the holistic quality that an ecologist brings to his vision and work. Ghosh was that sort of a man.

Aseem Shrivastava, a writer and ecological thinker, is the the author (with Ashish Kothari) of 'Churning the Earth: The Making of Global India'

vote share. The success or

governments depends on

together based on a common

programme without being

hampered by the agendas of

Proportional representation

is a double-edged sword. It

would also be unproductive

how the partners work

failure of coalition

individual parties.

## 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.

#### Road for the Left The Left is bereft of a

political future in India because of its own insurmountable defects - a blind adherence to an obsolete ideology that still talks about class struggle; its arrogance when in power; and its pathetic lack of insight in the case of environmental issues. The world has gone far ahead of the Left. As far as Kerala is concerned, the so-called development policies of both the Right and the Left are increasingly transforming Kerala. The greatest defect of the Left is its inability to formulate a sustainable development policy ("After the Tripura setback", March 7). SUKUMARAN C.V., Palakkad, Kerala

■ Surprisingly, issues such as employment and price rise are more related to the policies of the Central government. It is pertinent to note that the achievements

by the Left-led government especially in the area of education and tackling divisive forces are unparalleled. K. GANESH,

**Statue politics** Winning an election is a part of the process in a democracy. But the ugly spectacle of violence in Tripura which has led to incidents such as statues of the leading lights of Communism being brought down or razed need to be condemned. The Bharativa Janata Party must ensure that the democratic transition is peaceful. One is unable to understand why statues of historical importance should be targeted. Netas from the winning side need to exercise caution and control. R. RAMAMURTHI,

■ The post-election violence and vandalism in Tripura,

democracy. Those who have won should understand that the CPI(M) was in power for 25 years not through any revolutionary means but through victory via the ballot box and using a certain ideological model. The Bharatiya Janata Party has a full five-year term to prove that its ideology is superior to that of the Left. Let it try and stay in power for another 50 years and so on in election after election. This is the path and the spirit of democracy. Citing similar

incidents from the pages of

debate on the relevance of a

particular political ideology

should happen. However, the

which includes targeting

unacceptable in a civilised

statues is totally

Commissioner S.Y. Quraishi history and attempting to draw a parallel to justify has given us an insider's despicable acts must be condemned. VICTOR FRANK A., ■ Every ideology has its pros and cons. Hence, a healthy

perspective (The Wednesday Interview "It is time to have a debate on proportional representation'," March 7). Of particular significance were his views on the need to initiate a debate on proportional representation, or PR. The existing first-past-

the-post system has

razing of statues of political

thinkers reeks of arrogance

and intolerance towards the

opponents' political mascots

The demolishing of a statue

does not necessarily mean

proposed by that thinker.

One must also keep in mind

that there are many statues

of Indian leaders across the

government's tough stance

on this issue should be

**Electoral reforms** 

The interview with the

former Chief Election

the end of the ideology

globe. The Union

welcomed.

K.B. DESSAI,

Fatorda, Goa

representative nature of democracy by creating a mismatch between the percentage of votes polled and the outcomes. That a party polling 20% of votes should draw a blank in the final tally of seats is a travesty and trivialises the voting preferences of a sizeable section of the population. The introduction of of coalition governments

considerably diluted the

proportional representation could facilitate the formation

with smaller parties getting seats in proportion to their

to speculate on the impact of a major electoral reform without actually experimenting with it.

V.N. MUKUNDARAJAN, Thiruvananthapuram MORE LETTERS ONLINE:

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

The Business page report headlined "India to join multilateral lender EBRD" (March 7, 2018) had erroneously listed Russia among the countries that are stakeholders whose companies are able to invest in EBRD projects, but do not receive financing for do

mestic projects. The last paragraph of the report, "AVA Group plans to expand footprint" (Business page, March 4, 2018), said 750 tonnes of soap was being produced per annum. It should have been per month.

It is the policy of The Hindu to correct significant errors as soon as possible. Please specify the edition (place of publication), date and page. The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300 (11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday); Fax: +91-44-28552963; E-mail:readerseditor@thehindu.co.in; Mail: Readers All communication must carry the full postal address and telephone number. No persona visits. The Terms of Reference for the Readers' Editor are on www.thehindu.com

