



The last resort

Kerala Minister Thomas Chandy may have resigned, but it is a little too late

There is usually little to be gained in delaying the inevitable by a day or two. After the Kerala High Court passed strictures against him for filing a petition against his own government, Transport Minister Thomas Chandy should have had the good sense to resign immediately. But, quite inexplicably, he dithered on the issue, embarrassing Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and creating divisions within the ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF). Indeed, once Alappuzha District Collector T.V. Anupama submitted a report on alleged encroachments by a company in which he holds a stake, Mr. Chandy should have stepped down as a matter of propriety. By moving the court challenging the Collector's report, prepared on the orders of the government, he virtually invited the judicial reprimand on himself. That he entertained the hope of tiding over the political crisis engulfing him even after the court's strictures betrays a strange mix of nose-in-the-air arrogance and head-in-the-sand ignorance. For the past few months, Mr. Chandy has been caught in the encroachments controversy. The Lake Palace Resort, part-owned by him, came under a cloud over issues related to reclamation of paddy land to create a vehicle park, diversion of the course of rivulets for construction activities, and laying of an approach road to the resort by filling paddy fields. That the Minister chose to stand by the resort, and not with the government, was the real shocker.

As for Mr. Vijayan, he should have sacked Mr. Chandy instead of leaving it to the Nationalist Congress Party to secure his resignation. That the Minister belonged to a smaller allied party and that the LDF is bound by a coalition *dharma* are justifications that do not wash in the face of a strong judicial stricture. Not surprisingly, the Communist Party of India saw things differently and boycotted a Cabinet meeting on the ground that Mr. Chandy was a participant. The party argued that Mr. Chandy could not be expected to discharge his responsibilities as a Minister after having challenged the government in a court of law. The CPI's strident stand can also be explained by the fact that one of its members, E. Chandrasekharan, holds the Revenue portfolio and was monitoring the action against the encroachments. The eventual exit of Mr. Chandy on Wednesday might pave the way for the return of his party colleague A.K. Saseendran to the Cabinet. Mr. Saseendran had to resign following a questionable sting operation in which he is heard allegedly seeking sexual favours from a woman. The LDF is not short of talent, but coalition dynamics require that Mr. Vijayan replace Mr. Chandy with the only other MLA from the NCP. Despite a comfortable majority, Mr. Vijayan might not want to risk upsetting the political equations within the LDF. The real test for him will be to ensure that governance does not suffer amid his deft political manoeuvres.

Azzurri, fading

Italian football has hit its lowest point in decades and needs a thorough overhaul

A month ago, when Holland failed to make it to the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia, there was none of the shocked despair that hangs over Italy's non-qualification following its defeat to Sweden in the two-legged play-off. Football in the Netherlands is facing its worst crisis and its fans have perhaps become used to under-performance. Since 1982, the team has failed to make it to the quadrennial extravaganza on four different occasions. Dutch footballers were always expected to thrill but not necessarily to win. Even the legendary Johan Cruyff didn't bag football's most coveted prize. But Italy is different. The Azzurri have always found a way, regardless of the circumstances. Italy went into the 2006 World Cup with a match-fixing scandal raging back home; it ended up lifting the trophy. Another scandal erupted ahead of the 2012 European Championship, but Italy emerged a worthy runner-up to Spain. Four years later, Italy went in with arguably its weakest squad ever but still outwitted reigning champion Spain and lost to Germany in the quarter-finals only on penalties. This is what makes the four-time champion missing out on the World Cup, for the first time since 1958, astounding. It is true that the qualification process left very little margin for error, with only the group topper earning a direct entry. Clubbed alongside Spain, Italy was always expected to come second and be in the play-off. Once there, it was unlucky to draw Sweden, the toughest of opponents. But even so, its performances have been truly worrying.

Italian football has been stagnant for quite a while. In recent times the national team has even registered draws against novices such as Haiti and Luxembourg. There have been no credible replacements in sight for the likes of Andrea Pirlo, Francesco Totti, Alessandro Del Piero and Alessandro Nesta. Only manager Antonio Conte's brilliance saved the country at the 2016 Euros. There is such a dearth of emerging talent that in the first leg against Sweden, seven of Italy's starting 11 were older than 30. Supporters even sought comfort in the team's unblemished record at the iconic San Siro stadium in Milan, causing Pirlo to remark, "I've never seen a goal scored from the stands." There is much to be blamed on current manager Giampiero Ventura. He repeatedly ignored players who were adept and schooled in modern-day tactical methods. Midfielder Jorginho, who has been excellent for Napoli, was only handed his debut against Sweden while forward Lorenzo Insigne, the most creative of the lot, was an unused substitute because the formation that Ventura used didn't suit his best player. But history suggests Italy isn't alone. Both Germany and France underwent similar turbulence before emerging stronger with a complete overhaul of their footballing structures. What Italy needs is similar soul-searching.

An itinerary in search of a strategy

Donald Trump's transactional diplomacy during his East Asia tour has only created confusion



VARGHESE K. GEORGE

Parsing Donald Trump's statements and Twitter posts through his 12-day, five-nation tour of Asia – the longest for a U.S. President in 25 years – to decipher a new American strategy towards the region can be taxing unless the idea is to cherry-pick and substantiate pre-existing notions.

'Terrific' China

One can read resistance to China's expansive ambitions in euphemisms such as 'freedom of navigation' and condemnation of 'predatory' economic practices, used along with America's commitment to democracy, human rights, and free trade. When you read them alongside the U.S.-Philippines commitment to "share best practices" to prevent illegal drug use, which is a "problem afflicting both countries", and Mr. Trump's desire to be friends with the "short and fat" ruler of North Korea, the emerging picture could appear confusing, if not outlandish.

In his interactions with reporters as he travelled back, Mr. Trump gave an overview of the "terrific" tour and the new friendships that he has developed, how he enjoyed the unprecedented reception in Beijing, conversations with the "terrific" President Xi Jinping and the special honour he received at the Forbidden City. What topped the list of achievements for him were the business deals – he put the figure at \$300 billion and hoped that it would exceed \$1 trillion in the coming months, though the actual numbers remain unclear. He said security partner-



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ships with these Asian partners have also been enhanced.

Ahead of his travel, the White House had said his speech at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) CEO summit in Vietnam would elucidate his vision for the Indo-Pacific region, a term that the Trump administration has started using in a clear acknowledgment of India's prominence. Administration officials had been emphatic that his speech would demonstrate the U.S.'s continuing commitment to the region. His speech did not live up to the build-up, and may have actually added to the nervousness among traditional U.S. partners. Recalling the U.S.'s historical ties to the region, Mr. Trump said it is time the terms of engagement between these countries and the U.S. changed. In his reckoning, the U.S. has been taken advantage of by all countries and global institutions, particularly the World Trade Organisation (WTO). But he would not blame other countries or their leaders for this situation; it was all the fault of the U.S. administrations that preceded him.

"Those days are over," he declared. He was there "to offer a renewed partnership with America,"

the basis of which would be "bilateral trade agreements with any Indo-Pacific nation that wants to be our partner and that will abide by the principles of fair and reciprocal trade... I call it the Indo-Pacific dream."

What does he mean?

The U.S. has trade deficits with all the five countries that Mr. Trump visited and he told four of them that the U.S. would not tolerate them – putting China, Japan, South Korea and Vietnam in the same basket on this count. In the case of the Philippines, which has a small surplus with the U.S., the relationship is less about trade, he said, but more for "military purposes... it's called the most prime piece of real estate from a military standpoint."

What are the implications of Mr. Trump's statement that "those days are over?" First, America offers these countries technology, capital and access to its market. Second, America offers a security guarantee and a predictable world order based on multilateral trade and security pacts. China has also been a beneficiary of this system, and the rise of China has added additional buoyancy for neighbouring countries. The friction

between China and its neighbours heightened as Beijing's ambitions grew after the 2008 financial crisis. Vietnam, Philippines, Japan, and South Korea started to gravitate more towards the U.S., which was itself alarmed by the assertiveness of China. The Obama administration announced the Pivot to Asia strategy in response. Kurt Campbell, an Obama official who is credited with drafting the policy, described it as "a multifaceted approach that will involve a strong security component, working with allies, working constructively with China, a commercial dynamic that is about not shipping U.S. [jobs], but U.S. exports and services to Asia; a commitment to building institutions to multilateralism; bringing other partners into Asia, like Europe, working closely with Europe."

Like Mr. Trump, Barack Obama also wanted to open the Asian markets for American companies, but there was a broader blue print at play. Mr. Trump has knocked it down to a one-point agenda: buy our goods and services. His statement that countries in the "region [should] be strong, independent, and prosperous, in control of their own destinies, and satellites to no one," is a call for ending multilateralism. More than a newfound respect for the autonomy of these countries, it reflects American disinterest.

Mr. Trump also told his Asian hosts that they were free to pursue their interests solo, as he would pursue his. He hinted that America is washing its hands of any leadership role, making it clear that it could cut a deal with China on its own, regardless of its potential impact on other countries. China is the biggest trading partner of South Korea, Japan and Vietnam. Speaking after Mr. Trump at APEC, Mr. Xi presented a case for multilateralism and open trade. China is

also willing to offer technology, capital and market access, on its terms under the Belt and Road Initiative.

Security concerns

Now, what is America offering for the security of these Asian partners? Mr. Trump asked them all to join hands with the U.S. in stopping North Korea's nuclear adventurism. But that apart, he told Japan, Vietnam and South Korea to buy "our weapons".

"We make the best," he told them and cited how Saudi Arabia was using them effectively. In one Twitter post during the tour, he also gave a carte blanche to the Saudi Arabian regime to chart regional politics.

Mr. Trump's "Indo-Pacific dream" may not appear to be much of a dream for most countries in the region. In 2006, Mr. Trump had said he was waiting for a housing market crash, and boasted about his ability to profit from a falling market. Conflicts in Asia, in the west and the east, could appear to be good opportunities for profit from the realtor's perspective.

We may be looking for a strategy that does not exist, perhaps. American economist Lawrence Summers, now a Harvard professor, and a key player in the American-led globalisation over the last three decades, described the challenge before America: "... (we) confuse a strategy with a wish list. Our strategy is that it is very important that they open their markets, that it is very important that they cooperate with us on this security issue... Well, that is a good wish list... And I do not think we as yet have a strategy for thinking about the management of the global economic system that is appropriately respectful of the scale and achievements of the Chinese economy."

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Money can't always buy votes

Smaller constituencies and longer campaign periods are essential reforms

PRADEEP CHHIBBER, HARSH SHAH & RAHUL VERMA

There is a widely held belief that voters in India, especially the poor, sell their votes in exchange for cash, liquor, saris, and many other such goodies. Using evidence from the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections, we have argued that theories of large scale vote buying (patronage and clientelism) in India are myths ("Death of patronage?", *The Hindu*, May 23, 2017). We received several comments from readers, some of whom remain unconvinced that money does not buy votes. They asked, correctly, that if money does not buy votes, why is there a flow of cash and liquor during elections? And why is there an army of brokers at the local level, often aligned with politicians and parties, helping citizens navigate the State?

Probability stakes

It is indeed true that a candidate with greater resources has a higher probability of winning elections in India. This is true in many other parts of the world, including in the U.S., where a candidate with a larger war chest is more likely to win elections. There is also enough evidence to suggest that the supply of cash and consumption of liquor (and other items such as saris) in-

creases during elections, which is unexplained by a normal rise in demand of these goods.

In our view, cash flows during elections not to buy votes but rather to support a campaign. Cash is an important grease to run a smooth campaign machinery for a number of reasons. First, parties have weak organisations at the local level and face heavy institutional constraints. Most parties do not have enough committed volunteers to mobilise votes. Money acts as a substitute for the organisation as cash is used to engage vote mobilisers or local individuals who will seek votes for a party and/or candidate. Institutional constraints also make money extremely critical. The Election Commission (EC) allows only 14 days of official campaigning, which ends 48 hours before the scheduled close of polling. The fact that parties do not finalise their nominations for most constituencies until the very end puts pressure on candidates to mobilise votes as quickly as possible. Given the size of constituencies (both in area and the number of voters), a candidate requires an army of workers during the campaign period. Even if a campaign decides to pay the current minimum wage for agricultural labourers to each of its workers during the entire campaign period the candidate would end up exceeding the expenditure



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limit. To avoid this, candidates spend huge sums of money on cash, liquor and gifts that they hand out to their middlemen.

Second, money signals resources and power, or access to powerful networks. It allows candidates to mobilise supporters who in turn can pull a crowd together. The role of money as a symbol of power is especially important in a hierarchical society such as India, with the state wielding enormous power. Moreover, in many parts of the country, the display of money during elections is socially approved in certain ways, is a political necessity, and is born of cultural expectations. Voters ask themselves whether someone who has no clout – monetary, political, or familial – can work the levers of administration for them. In most cases, the answer is no. Witness how many independent candidates lose elections in India, and even when they win, it is because of attributes like family

legacy, money, and muscle power. This is an important reason why parties perceived as weak stand little chance of winning elections, and why they are likely to wither away even if they do win.

Studying vote banks

Our arguments find resonance with two outstanding ethnographies of vote banks and local clientelism. In her study of the 2012 Mumbai municipal corporation election, Lisa Björkman wrote that spending of money was not reflected in the vote count. The candidate who spent the most came nowhere near winning the seat, while the candidate who won a landslide victory did so with limited spending. She describes distribution of money as an uncertain investment and a leap of faith on the part of the candidate. Similarly, Mary Breeding in her study on the micropolitics of vote banks in Karnataka quotes a Congress worker: "Voters will take our party's gift, the other party's gift, and so on. Then they go into the polling booth and vote however they wish... I know that many voters find these benefits – liquor, saris, and such – to be very insulting. They vote their minds."

Likewise, Philip Oldenburg, who has been studying this question since the 1970s, described a conversation with a Delhi politician who explained to him the role of money

and goodies in elections: "Voters basically began to tell politicians that they had to keep the goodies (liquor, cash, and so on) flowing if they wanted their votes. Maybe the politicians would get their votes and maybe they wouldn't, but they definitely wouldn't if they didn't pass out the goodies."

What does all of this tell us about the role of money in elections? Cash and goodies do get distributed during elections, but their influence on vote choice is marginal. Competitive populism in Indian politics has led to the development of an "ante-up quid pro quo" system, with politicians and parties forced to put money and goods into the pot before they could play a hand. And this is amplified by weak party organisations, limited campaigning periods and the humongous size of constituencies. Thus, campaign finance reforms should begin by increasing the number of constituencies and the duration of the official campaign period. Smaller constituencies with longer campaigning period are more likely to curb the negative influence of money in politics in comparison to putting a cap on the expenditure limit.

Pradeep Chhibber and Rahul Verma are with University of California, Berkeley. Harsh Shah is an alumnus of the same university

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.

For a fair hearing

The order of the Supreme Court, on the powers of the Chief Justice in preparing the roster, does not appear to be correct given the circumstances of the case. It militates against the rights of citizens for a fair and impartial hearing, when the role of the Chief Justice is in question. It is a universally accepted principle that "no man can be judge in his own case". This principle was also adopted at a United Nations sponsored conference in Bengaluru, attended by judges from across the world, including India. It has come to be known as the "Bengaluru Principles of Judicial Conduct-2002" which, *inter alia*, covers independence, integrity and accountability of the judiciary. In a number of cases, judges of superior courts have recused themselves whenever there was conflict of interest. There is, therefore, a need to reconsider the decision.

M.M. KOTIAN,
Bengaluru

Snuffed out

Every winter, Delhi experiences acute air pollution. It is no exaggeration to say that it is like living in a gas chamber. Closing educational institutions on the bad days is only a temporary solution. Despite many theories, it is still not clear what causes this problem of smoke and smog. Surely there are environmental experts who should be able to pinpoint the major factors that make Delhi's air so polluted. If the burning of stubble by farmers in Punjab and Haryana is said to be the main reason, then immediate action should be called for to stop this practice by providing financial aid and suggesting alternatives to burning in order to get rid of the residue in fields after harvesting. Vehicular pollution is another major factor. The odd-even rule for vehicles has had no major impact on air pollution. There is no alternative but to limit the use of private vehicles by encouraging public

buses and the metro, which needs to be strengthened as soon as possible.

D.B.N. MURTHY,
Bengaluru

■ Air pollution in Delhi is not of recent origin and successive governments have failed in finding solutions. It is unfortunate that people here are caught between the devil and the deep sea and have to face hardship and health concerns as no authority is directly responsible for the mess they face today. A long-term and sustainable movement is necessary to educate all in Delhi about the perils of unplanned development and to conserve nature by planting more trees. There has to be a system in place to arrest the growth of motorised transport and other pollution causing industries. There have to be adequate safeguards to guard against dust generation.

V. PADMANABHAN,
Bengaluru

■ Pollution control boards are turning out to be

toothless tigers as they are increasingly failing to check violation of pollution norms. Vehicles, especially commercial and government owned, often ply without valid pollution control certificates. Even pollution checking centres are run without any proper machines and issue pollution control certificates in name. If a government can order the closure of 800 schools on account of air pollution, can it not act against pollution control boards and violators?

NAVNEET SETHI,
Dhuri, Punjab

Yashwant Sinha on BJP

In his interview, "I am raising issues because I am worried about the BJP's future" (November 15), former Union Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha makes useful suggestions such as the involvement of Vijay Kelkar (whose committee recommended the goods and services tax) in improving the process. But his claim that he has given his "blood and sweat" to the BJP is laughable. Mr.

Sinha was a minister in the Chandra Shekhar government till 2002. His move to the BJP came when he was past 50. In contrast, leaders such as Narendra Modi and Arun Jaitley have been in the BJP since their youth. Mr. Jaitley even went to jail during the Emergency. Mr. Modi is known to be a workaholic. Naturally they are more concerned about the BJP than Mr. Sinha is. The way Mr. Sinha is criticising his party leadership makes one wonder whether he has the interests of the BJP in mind.

Y.G. CHOUKSEY,
Pune

The squat survey

The Swachh Bharat Mission, launched with the noble vision of making the nation

open defecation free, ought to be pursued with a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach ("Labelling versus outcomes", November 15). The sustainable solution in making people use latrines lies in wiping out the notion of "pollution" associated with having a toilet within or near one's house. Villagers must be made aware of the lethal but preventable health issues stemming from defecating in the open. Schools must educate children on sanitation and the need to use toilets at home, thereby spreading the message to adults as well.

ANJALI B.,
Thiruvananthapuram

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CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

In the photo caption accompanying the Sports page story headlined "Virat, you are like Dalmiya" (Nov. 15, 2017), there was a wrong reference to *Virender Sehwal*. It was actually *Thilanga Sumathipala*.

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' Editor, The Hindu, Kasturi Buildings, 859 & 860 Anna Salai, Chennai 600 002, India. All communication must carry the full postal address and telephone number. No personal visits. The Terms of Reference for the Readers' Editor are on www.thehindu.com