

The
Hindustan Times

ESTABLISHED IN 1924

A distorted view of nationalism

Petty ministers and celebrities forced Gurmehar to withdraw her campaign

Delhi University student Gurmehar Kaur may have withdrawn her campaign against the violence that the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) unleashed on the campus last week, but she has left the ground with her head held high. In fact, it would not be wrong to say that the goons ABVP's goons — helped by Union ministers and a few prejudiced celebrities — hounded her out of the unfolding narrative. But fortunately they have not been able to scare others: Hundreds of students, who believe in freedom of speech and peaceful protests and dislike the ABVP's strong arm tactics, came out against the violence on Tuesday. The students were joined by teachers from Delhi University and Jawaharlal Nehru University and have also been supported by international academics. Faculty members of Lady Shri Ram College, where Ms Kaur is a student, also expressed support for her campaign.

All those who have been trolling and threatening Ms Kaur would not have had to the guts to do so if senior members of the BJP-led government, including Union ministers, had not fanned the flames and made wrong associations between different events to vitiate the atmosphere. Union minister Jitendra Singh said the country will not allow "premium on anti-India activism" and outlined the "need to draw a bottom line on it". In the same speech, he attacked separatists in Jammu and Kashmir for engaging in the politics of convenience and indulging in anti-national activities. Needless to say that there is no connection between what is happening in the Valley and in Delhi University, and by conflating these two issues, the minister has sent out a dangerous signal. His colleague, minister of state, home affairs, Kiren Rijiju put out another seemingly innocuous question: "Who's polluting this young girl's mind?" He also said that "freedom of expression is not a licence to shout anti-national slogans in campuses. Criticise the government but don't abuse the motherland".

It is surprising to hear that Mr Rijiju is making that distinction between the government and motherland, when actually it is the BJP-ABVP-RSS leaders are the ones who tend to conflate it all the time. Any kind of questioning is seen as an affront to the government and by extension, the "motherland". This touchiness about any form of protest or dissent being anti-national is what is emboldening the likes of the ABVP.

Keep your money safe

The Reserve Bank of India must roll out a set of guidelines to plug the basic loopholes in ATM security

The incident of a State Bank of India (SBI) ATM in south Delhi dispensing fake Rs 2,000 notes last week reveal a deeper malaise in the way cash is managed. The country's 2.2 lakh machines have been running without any basic security. The country's largest lender issued a statement after the incident took place suggesting that it was an act of mischief. Later, the police arrested the cash van custodian who admitted to having replaced the fake notes while shifting cash from the currency chest to the ATM. The incident brought to light how simple it is for anyone to tamper with ATMs. The fact that this took place in the Capital, and not in some remote place, raises the possibility that this may be more prevalent than we think. For years now, ATM management and security have been ignored. The blame for this must be shared equally by the banks, the Reserve Bank of India and even the government. There is no "proper" set of guidelines addressing the working of ATMs in the country.

The delivery of cash from currency chests to bank branches and ATMs has been outsourced to cash logistics companies. The cash that is taken out from the currency chest for loading at ATMs and bank branches is carried in vans, which have a driver, two security guards and two "custodians". There is no bank official who accompanies them. Most ATMs are fitted with CCTVs but there is no monitoring. Most of the ATMs do not have any one time combination locking system. Cash custodians have been given passwords to operate the ATMs and while they are supposed to be secret numbers, they are often shared with friends and others.

Instances of ATM thefts have risen and the latest incident at the SBI ATM throws up several questions. The need of the hour is to have a re-look at ATM management and techniques related to cash dispensation. All the ATMs must be upgraded and OTC locking systems installed. The RBI needs to roll out a set of guidelines to plug the basic loopholes.

@ghoshworld

BOBBY GHOSH



A leap of faith will decide UP

Voters liking one leader but voting for another party seems to be a consistent pattern in the Uttar Pradesh assembly elections

This column usually occupies itself with important international events, as viewed from my perch in New Delhi. This week, I will devote myself to an event of global import unfolding closer home: The world's fourth-largest demonstration of democracy, currently under way in Uttar Pradesh. (The only three larger, measured by the number of people qualified to exercise the franchise, are the Indian Lok Sabha polls, the American presidential vote, and the Indonesian general election.) I've had the good fortune to witness and cover some extraordinary elections around the world: Hong Kong's first post-colonial poll; Iraq's first experience of a free and fair vote; the election of the first black man to the White House; and last year's Brexit referendum in the UK. None of them has approached the complexity of the contest for the UP state legislature, playing out like a seven-episode Netflix political drama. To travel through the heart of the heartland state, as I did last week, is to marvel at the sheer scale of the election, and at the fact that it has proceeded so smoothly as with so little violence. Those looking on from parts foreign are more likely to be mystified by the whole thing. Why does it take seven rounds of voting? How come there are no exit polls after every round? What are Other Backward Castes? And what is all this talk about... wild asses?!

Truth be told, few people outside India currently pay close attention to the politics of places like Lucknow, Rae Bareilly, Allahabad and Varanasi, all stops on my route last week. But international interest in the minutiae of Middle Indian power struggles is bound to grow in years to come, commensurate with the country's growing importance in the global economy. Just as the national elections this year in France and Germany will be scrutinised for their political and economic impact on Europe, the UP election will one day be parsed for what it tells us about the direction India is heading.

The smarter India-watchers already know that if the scale alone makes the UP election automatically a political bellwether, this time around its function as a barometer of the national mood is all the more important because it comes midway through the term of the Modi government, and just as that government's hugely ambitious demonetisation drive nears completion. But for those trying to analyse how it's gone so far, I have the greatest sympathy.

In the absence of exit polls, they will have to take on faith the analysis of Indian experts — including that of many of my colleagues — that no clear winner has yet emerged. There is no state-wide "wave" in favour of any of the three contenders: The SP-Congress alliance, the BJP, or the BSP. Beyond that safe bet, any prediction of the outcome seems to me as much gamble as analysis.

For my own part, I used the trip to try and understand, not how the vote might go but what is in the minds of voters — the distinction is important. More specifically, I wanted to know if voters are inclined to break from the pattern of caste- and faith-based voting that has characterised the state elections for as long as I can remember. The picture that emerged was, you will not be surprised to know, complex and open to more than one conclusion.

Here are mine: Voters appear closer than ever to break away from the old block politics, but many are hesitant to take the final leap; those who make the jump will be influenced more by personalities than by issues. Over and over, I heard people say they would vote for the SP or the BSP, but that they admired Prime Minister Narendra Modi as a leader; or that they would vote for the BJP, but thought

highly of chief minister Akhilesh Yadav. I also met some who self-identified as traditional SP or Congress voters and were minded to switch to the BSP, but interestingly, none of them expressed admiration for Mayawati's leadership qualities. They seemed to be guided more by her party's choice of candidates, by the calculations of caste and creed, and by the need to defeat the BJP. This view was the strongest among Muslim voters in Lucknow, who assured me that their hearts were with Akhilesh, but that they had picked the BSP candidates because they were likelier to win.

This pattern of voters expressing a liking for one leader but voting for another party was striking and consistent, and when I described it to a colleague in Delhi, he offered a uniquely Indian analogy: These people are saying they would ideally like to have a love marriage, but that they will probably settle for the spouse chosen by their parents.

How will this affect the outcome? That will depend on how many voters made the leap of faith (or will do, for those in the remaining two rounds) at the moment of truth, in the polling booth.

Those who allowed their hearts to lead them beyond older political impulses would for the most part have picked Modi, or Akhilesh, those who went with their heads will more likely have opted for Mayawati's BSP.

These voters will determine the final result. Their numbers will be small, but in a tight three-way race, they will have a disproportionate impact. For even the most perceptive India-watchers abroad, this makes the outcome on March 11 fiendishly difficult to predict. Perhaps there will be some consolation in knowing that it's no less difficult for those in Lucknow, Rae Bareilly, Allahabad, or Varanasi.

Letters@hindustantimes.com



Women queue up at a polling booth in Amethi during the fifth phase of Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh on February 27.

newsmaker

DIMPLE YADAV, Samajwadi Party MP

BJP SAYS 'KA' STANDS FOR CONGRESS, YOUR AKHILESH BHAIYYA SAYS 'KA' IS FOR COMPUTER, 'SA' FOR SMARTPHONE, WHICH WILL HELP YOU GET INFORMATION ABOUT GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND 'BA' FOR 'BACHCHE' (CHILDREN) OUR FUTURE.



Illustration: SIDDHANT JUMBE

THINK IT OVER »

MY FELLOW AMERICANS, WE ARE AND ALWAYS WILL BE A NATION OF IMMIGRANTS. WE WERE STRANGERS ONCE, TOO.

BARACK OBAMA

Combat 'hidden hunger' with fortified foods

Ruchika Chugh Sachdeva

India's performance in the recently released Global Hunger Index (GHI) report is tragic. The country which is one of the largest producers of cereals, vegetables and fruits in the world, ranks 97 among 118 countries and is home to over 184 million undernourished people. India also pays a very heavy price for vitamin and mineral deficiencies, often called "hidden hunger", as it loses \$12 billion in gross domestic product across the world each year as per the World Bank estimates. This calls for a shift in focus from approaches for tackling hunger towards improving quality of diets to promote health. India has 70% anaemic preschool children, 59% anaemic pregnant women, and 24% anaemic men. Iron deficiency anaemia results in an eight point lower intelligent quotient (IQ) in children. Alongside, deficiencies of B group vitamins, zinc, and vitamin D are also widely prevalent. All these deficiencies have a devastating impact on the population in the form of

impaired cognitive and motor development among children, growth retardation, reduced immunity, less capacity to do physical work, and increased mortality and morbidity among mothers and newborns.

Despite four decades of a national supplementation programme, little progress has been made to reduce critical nutrient deficiencies in India. Recent national data reveals that annual declines in anaemia prevalence among women and children have been dismal, from 1% to 1.5% only.

In this context, food fortification as a complementary strategy presents a good opportunity to address vitamin and mineral deficiencies on a mass scale. Food fortification involves addition of minute quantities of missing vitamins and minerals in our diet to commonly consumed food such as rice, wheat flour, salt, and milk. It improves the nutritional value of such staples and enhances intakes at a population level.

India has also experienced the power of food fortification with the successful salt iodisation programme started in 1962 by the

National Goitre Control Programme (NGCP). Today, over 90% of the country's population consumes iodised salt. Fortification can be highly effective, if implemented through the government's safety net programmes like the Public Distribution System (PDS), Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDM), and Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). In 2016 there was a major landmark development in the field of fortification as the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) launched fortification standards for five staples (rice, wheat flour, oil, milk, and salt) and a logo for consumers to make an informed choice. It is an important step as the government has created an enabling environment for all key stakeholders to adopt fortification. The need is now to fortify awareness: for industry to ensure supply side readiness, a regulatory mechanism to ensure enforcement and among consumers to create demand.

Ruchika Chugh Sachdeva is team leader, Nutrition, at PATH India. The views expressed are personal

Rights wronged

Don't participate in this race to the bottom

Instead of replicating each other's failures, South Asian states should compete in valuing human dignity

Biraj Patnaik

For all the differences South Asia's countries insist on, they have depressingly similar attitudes when it comes to human rights. After a gruesome 2015 in Bangladesh, where five secular bloggers were slain in separate attacks, the machete killings continued without any determined action from the government. LGBTI activists, Hindus, Christians, Sufi Muslims and academics became new targets. In Pakistan, this year began with the suspicious disappearance of four bloggers. They've all since returned home, but the government hasn't probed it.

In 2016, according to the Pakistani Press Foundation, two journalists were killed, 16 injured and one abducted. In India, two journalists were also killed last year. Freedom of expression was curtailed by the authorities in several cases. In Bangladesh, Dilip Roy, a 22-year-old

student activist, ran afoul of the country's Information and Communications Technology Act for allegedly making "derogatory remarks" about Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajid.

In Sri Lanka, despite commitments to deliver on accountability for alleged crimes under international law, the authorities made frequent use of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). Tamils suspected of links to the LTTE continued to be detained under the PTA, which permits extended administrative detention and piles the burden of proof onto the detainee alleging torture or other ill-treatment. In Afghanistan, the conflict has been widening.

The humanitarian catastrophe is set to worsen as the world turns its back on Afghan refugees and asylum-seekers. In Pakistan, the UN refugee agency worked with the Pakistani authorities to forcibly return tens of thousands of Afghan refu-

gees. That the UN is complicit in this does not bode well for the rights of refugees in the region. Like so many other countries who have abandoned refugees over recent years, Pakistan justified its behaviour on grounds of national security.

It's a principle that the Pakistani authorities have abandoned in Karachi and Baluchistan, and the Indian authorities in Jammu and Kashmir. Last year, authorities imposed curfews in the Valley and security forces deployed excessive force against protestors.

Instead of replicating each other's failures on human rights in a race to the bottom, South Asia's countries might want to focus their rivalries instead on who can provide a better future for their people — where each country is distinguished by the value it puts on human dignity.

Biraj Patnaik is Amnesty International's South Asia director. The views expressed are personal

innervoice

Focus on your duty and the rewards will arrive

Shilpi Singh

Life seems difficult when one loses purpose. Norman Mailer once said, "I don't think life is absurd. I think we are all here for a huge purpose. I think we shrink from the immensity of the purpose we are here for." The perspective of this novelist helps us look at our own lives to evaluate how we feel about the quality of life we are living. Most people between the age group of 19 to 35 are considered to be most stressed throughout the world. The reasons can be many but the one that none of us can afford to overlook is that the young and the restless are retreating from their purpose of life.

The pace with which markets, business houses, in short the world is moving is unimaginably fast. In such a scenario, it becomes difficult to sit and take a deep breath to figure out where and in what direction is life moving. After realising this truth, the only question one ponders is: What is the way out? This recurring question leads one to search for answers in movies and books.

This is the time when the verse from the Bhagvad Gita "karmanya-hivadhikaraste ma faleshu kadachana" proves practical. This is the time when along with our work we also search for happiness. This very verse seems above all the conflicts, philosophies, disputes and is feasible to practice in our daily lives. Let all of us work honestly without anticipating its results; instead one should love the work that we are entrusted with. It will give an answer to the question that your inner voice is asking and guide you towards making the best of all worlds.

Innervoice comprises contributions from our readers. The views expressed are personal. Innervoice@hindustantimes.com