

# LISA JOURNAL

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## LISA

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## EDITORIAL

### Election India

India's electorate has given their verdict; they love their Modi. The BJP-dominated alliance has won 351 seats and the Congress has to be content with just 95. Undoubtedly a landslide victory for the schemer of Gujarat pogroms against Muslims.

Many India experts say Modi's electoral victory was facilitated by the so called 'surgical' attack on Pakistan in February. It may well be true as the Indian media made it look like a bold step by Modi but we all know that the India military action was an utter disaster as the Indian air force jets targeted an empty camp and that too it missed resulting in destroying some trees in the valley and also losing two planes shot down by Pakistan air force. Futile sabre rattling and jingoism may have helped but the fact is majority of Indian voters preferred the BJP to the fragmented national opposition ruled by the remnants of a crumbling dynasty.

The electoral key was again in the so-called "Hindi Belt", located in the north of the republic, which includes nine states where the Hindi language is the majority, among them the one of Uttar Pradesh, the most populated of India.

Tariq Ali the famous activist and intellectual writes "The BJP, and its parent RSS, are now pacemakers, embedded in the heart of a modernising Indian state. And they are using all its resources to impose their ideology and punish those who do not conform. History is a crucial battleground. They have not yet burned the books of Romila Thapar, Irfan Habib or Arundhati Roy. But most mainstream publishers will be scared away from publishing critical, scholarly works on the origins and development of Hinduism, the RSS etc. This has already happened and will get much worse."

It is interesting to note that the BJP did indeed fail to win a single seat in the southern state of Kerala, but Kerala was not 'the only state which didn't fall to the BJP'; Modi's party also failed to win a seat in two much larger southern states, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. The Communist-led Left Front did not win 'handsomely' in Kerala. Quite the opposite, it was reduced to a single seat; this was the one state where Rahul Gandhi's Congress made significant gains.

The BJP made dramatic inroads in West Bengal, and the Communists were wiped out in the state that was for decades their bastion – but this does not mean that all

secular forces there have been banished. West Bengal's dominant party remains Trinamool (it means 'grassroots'), whose charismatic leader, Mamata Banerjee, campaigned loudly for secular values. There are four Muslims among Trinamool's new batch of MPs, roughly in proportion to the size of the Muslim community in West Bengal.

Hindu nationalist BJP put up six Muslim candidates nationwide. All six lost. So in the new Indian Parliament, among the 303 directly elected BJP MPs, there is once again not a single Muslim.

The problem is that India, politically, is tearing itself apart as viscerally as the United States. And the incontestable triumph of Modi, supporter of the so-called "Hindutva" (Hindu radicals), reinforces that dangerous tendency towards polarization. In case he continues to follow his policies of class inequalities and the institutionalised discrimination against Muslims, Dalits and Adivasis, India shall remain at war with itself - thanks to Modi.

### **Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) is a global terrorist organisation**

The United States on Tuesday 2 July 2019 declared the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) as a global terrorist organisation in a significant development, which shall restrict BLA space to operate. The US State Department said it was classifying the BLA as a global terrorist group, making it a crime for anyone in the United States to assist the militants and freezing any US assets they may have. It further stated that "the BLA is an armed separatist group that targets security forces and civilians, mainly in ethnic Baloch areas of Pakistan."

The move to declare BLA as terrorist organization is seen in Pakistan as "positive development" since Pakistan had long been calling for such a decision. It is hoped that the perpetrators, organizers, financiers and external sponsors including those glorifying these acts of terror against Pakistan are held accountable and brought to justice.

Commentators in Pakistan have termed the US designation of BLA as terrorist organisation as diplomatic victory for Pakistan. "BLA has been the proxy of RAW and it is certainly a setback for India,"

The United Kingdom has followed an inscrutable policy on terrorism by BLA in Balochistan as it has been hosting terrorist belonging to the BLA to carry out terrorist activities against Pakistan. The Pakistani authorities have officially charged "Balochistan Liberation Army" (BLA) leader Hyrbyair Marri and 12

others for terrorist attack against the Chinese consulate in Karachi, which the group's fugitive UK-based leader is suspected of masterminding.

We have persistently maintained that nations should not have double standards on terrorism. The UK's granting of political asylum to "Balochistan Liberation Army" (BLA) leader Hyrbyair Marri and hosting of this fugitive reflects adversely on Britain's credentials as a state having zero tolerance for terrorists. Marri received political asylum from the island nation in 2011 and has been living there since then, meaning that Britain has blood on its hands for the crime that he's accused of cooking up while under their protection. This doesn't necessarily mean that the British government had a role in carrying it out, but just that they're nevertheless culpable for at the very least indirectly facilitating it by granting him a safe haven from where he can systemize terrorism.

It is however hoped that UK too shall follow the USA and declare BLA a terrorist organization.

### **Corrupt rulers of Pakistan**

Prime Minister Imran Khan tweeted on 12 June 2019, "Time for nation to stop glorifying money launderers who have damaged our nation & impoverished our people & now seeking refuge behind "democracy". No protocol should be extended to them. Where are plunderers of public wealth given such special treatment? Time to treat them as criminals"

An era of accountability and transparency in Pakistan has started under the leadership of Imran Khan. His anti- corruption agenda has made powerful enemies amongst a wide array of politician from the political combines of Zardari PPP, Nawaz Sharif PML and Maulana Fazalur Rehman JUI who are doing their utmost to demonize the elected government of Imran Khan. Alleging that he has direct support from Pakistan military and hence their preparations to lead a rebellion as the 'democracy is in danger'.

Even Asif Zardari, a man well known as "Mr. 10%" for the kickbacks he allegedly favoured on government contracts, became the President of Pakistan and he became acceptable as a face of democracy for the hapless people of this poor country. Add to that 5 years of rule of theft and plunder by Nawaz Sharif and surely the patience of younger generation has worn thin. In an overwhelmingly young country, where a new generation fears for its own prospects, there is a deepening resentment of what they see as inept, distant, and

venal elites who have ruled for decades. All eyes are now on the Imran and the superior judiciary of Pakistan. Can they deliver?

Ikram Sehgal a senior journalist writes, “The stolen and amassed money has been used by the elite to lead a luxurious life based on imported goods but a major amount has been taken out of the country to be parked in off-shore accounts and invested in property abroad. Run on borrowed money most of Pakistan citizens are poor, living at or below the poverty line, a tiny minority has become unbelievably rich with stolen money. Over the decades this plunder of the country has been going on unabated, the current government is trying to make an honest effort to change this vicious cycle of growing debt intertwined with growing corruption.”

### **Nepal being beleaguered by big power game**

In a recent report filed by Gao Liang from Sichuan University, the US Department of Defense lists Nepal as a participant of the Indo-Pacific Strategy and seeks to expand their defence relationship on this basis. Nepal has always hoped to maximise its national interests by maintaining a dynamic balance between its two neighbours. In recent years, the progress of Nepal’s domestic political situation and the adjustments of China and India’s respective strategies have evolved in a direction conducive for it to achieve such a balance. *If Nepal joins the US strategy to contain China in such a background, it may cause a fundamental change in the hard-won balance and change the geopolitical environment of the whole region.*

Policymakers in Nepal have adopted a pragmatic approach to this issue. Despite its acceptance of the US Millennium Challenge Corporation Compact programme, the Foreign Ministry’s denial of a role in Indo-Pacific Strategy clearly indicates that Nepal is far from ready to join this strategy. What Nepal needs most now is development and prosperity, and what it does not need most is to take sides in a big power game. Joining that strategy and pushing the country to the forefront of the US containment against China will be a nightmare for both China and Nepal.

### **Bhutan the Kingdom of Heavens seeks more freedom**

Since 1949 Bhutan is de facto protectorate of the Indian regime and lately there are indications that Bhutan is assessing the possibilities of freeing itself from the stranglehold of the Indian regime. There were several pointers in this direction made public by the Prime Minister of Bhutan, Dr. Lotay Tserin.

Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa (DNT) is a relatively a new party in Bhutan headed by Dr. Lotay Tserin. The party has aspirations of creating a more balanced relationship with India. The party visualises a freer and independent Bhutan that is currently wrapped by the 1949 Treaty with India. The new Prime Minister wishes to see visible changes in India –Locked Bhutan. His approach is subtle and pragmatic in carving a comfortable distance from total Indian domination. He is apparently seeking some space from the confinement that was imposed by the 1949 Treaty with India. He is aware that his options are circumscribed by the Treaty and to some extent by the King of Bhutan preference favouring India yet he has shown some resolve and publically dared talk about issues that were virtually unthinkable by his predecessors.

Lately a vibrant Civil Society has emerged in Bhutan comprising the nationalist youths who aspire to diversify its relationship with the rest of the world and the neighbours so that overtime it can reduce its dependency on India.

Talking to Indian newspaper The Hindu Prime Minister Dr. Lotay Tsering talked about his preference of SAARC than the Indian favoured BIMSTEC.

He is on record having said, “If India and Pakistan don’t work together for the region, nothing can move ahead”. He said that the two most important countries of South Asia, Pakistan and India, must remain friendly if SAARC were to work effectively.

Nepal’s PM Oli during his visit to Delhi on 01 June 2019 amazingly also spoke in favour of SAARC and in Bhutan on 16 June 2019 PM Lotay Tsering spoke fully supporting it. Both tiny landlocked nations almost speaking the same language as regards SAARC has irked Indian diplomats.

# Bringing Thieves to Justice

Ikram Sehgal

PTI's electoral victory in the last election has not been accepted by the political opposition parties in Pakistan. Calling the elections 'rigged' and the PM 'selected' is the political opposition's way to undermine Imran Khan's credibility and that of his government. This is despite the fact that no rigging has been proven. This simple gesture of acknowledging political reality as a matter of fair play is obviously too much to ask for in the democracy of our country that is run as a formality rather than a political system which should be designed to bring prosperity to the country and improve the lot of its people. Democracy in Pakistan has been used to suit tiny ruling elite and neglect the majority of its population. For that purpose education the masses have been kept uneducated so that they won't protest and demand a fair share in the produce. A split educational system – in the government sector non-existent or only rudimentary primary and secondary education for the poor and good but expensive education in the private sector for the elite – has been upheld and used over the decades to keep the power in the hands of the traditional landowning feudal and tribal elites of the country.

Those elite used its power to amass wealth and lead a life of affluence instead of using it to develop the country into a prosperous nation. Instead of industrialization that would have needed educated and skilled workforce a consumer-oriented economy has been developed based on borrowed money. Encouraged by international organisations like IMF and World Bank borrowing over the years suited our local elite just fine. Pakistan was turned into a consumer society before it learnt to truly produce. Large amounts of the borrowed money that was flowing into the country ended up in the pockets of the rulers. The staggering amount of debt accumulated has now reached a level where the debt service takes away such a big part of the budget that the funds required for necessary investment into the defence of the country, into the social sector like health care, education and poverty reduction and in the infrastructure, agriculture and industry is not possible and can be paid only with new loans and more debt.

The stolen and amassed money has been used by the elite to lead a luxurious life based on imported goods but a major amount has been taken out of the country to be parked in off-shore accounts and invested in property abroad. Run on borrowed money most of Pakistan citizens are poor, living at or below the poverty line, a tiny minority has become unbelievably rich with stolen money. Over the decades this plunder of the country has been going on unabated, the current

government is trying to make an honest effort to change this vicious cycle of growing debt intertwined with growing corruption.

The current accountability drive is necessary not only in order to put the economy on a healthier track and try to bring stolen money back but also to punish corruption and the corrupt and bring back justice into society. One important case that has been under investigation for some time – and not only by the current government- is the detected scam about how stolen and untaxed money has been transferred out of the country with the help of fake accounts. Information regarding the fake accounts came to the fore when an intelligence agency picked up a prominent money changer in an unrelated case. In December 2015, the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) began a discreet investigation into certain bank accounts through which multi-billion rupee transactions had been made. Investigators identified 29 accounts which received payments, totalling at least Rs35 billion. But this turned out to be only the tip of iceberg. In 2018 a joint investigation team was formed to quicken the pace of the dragging investigation. The JIT identified another 11,500 bank accounts and 924 account holders at the start of their investigation.

Why is it not surprising that at the very center of the investigation the names of the former President of Pakistan Asif Zardari and his family members have turned up. Companies M/s Landmarks and National Gases (Pvt) Limited (M/s NGS) were revealed in addition to already identified companies which were used to launder billions of rupees. M/s Landmarks is owned by Mr. Zardari, his sisters Faryal Talpur and Azra Pechuho in a partnership. Both companies were discovered from the hard disks which were recovered when Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) raided Khoski Sugar Mills owned by Omni Group. The Zardari family is the head of the Zardari tribe, a Sindh-Baloch tribe from the area of Nawabshah district where it owns thousands of acres of land and the people tilling it. By 1985 Zardari tribe is said to have consisted of around 70,000 people which by today may have doubled at least thus forming a strong power base that allowed the feudal Zardari family to extend their power into new spheres. The marriage into the Bhutto family, another feudal landowning family of Sindh was such a manoeuvre that opened new vistas to make money and bring it out of the country. To bring members of such a powerful family to court is in itself no small achievement.

The arrest of PML (N)'s Rana Sanaullah, ostensibly on drug running related charges, is significant. He has been accused on many counts of murder mayhem, etc but without adequate proof. Very much like Al Capone he tends to intimidate and scare witnesses, nobody dares open his (or her) mouth against him. Recently some drug smugglers who were caught by the Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF)

claimed that they were doing it on his behest to “raise funds”. It is believed that when the vehicle carrying Rana Sanallah from Faisalabad to Lahore was intercepted it was found carrying a large amount of drugs. Having escaped being incarcerated for murder, bribery and corruption, how he manages to escape this latest incident should be interesting. For the Sharifs his being in the jug is a disaster, Rana Sanallah was their “enforcer“in their mafia-type political regime, how are they going to keep their MNAs and MPAs in line without his “Sword of Damocles” hanging over them? Worse, how many of their collaborators/associates in crime will run to NAB to become approvers now that their “enforcer-in-chief” is in for the long haul?

What the NAB and the courts are engaged in today is not a personal vendetta against the Zardaris but the need to stem corruption and money laundering that have destroyed the basis of Pakistan’s economy. Many more crooks have been free-loading the same way; they also have to be brought to justice. But this is not easy. To fight the extremely powerful structures upholding corruption, decisive measures are needed. One such measure could be to plug the leaking of money outflow by taking over the false accounts and firms by expropriating them. While the state has the obligation to protect honestly earned and taxed money it has no such obligation for ill-gotten assets. Thousands of the elite can be jailed for perjury, only then we will get our ill-gotten wealth back. Only decisive steps can stop the fraud and bring justice back to Pakistan.

*Ikram Sehgal is a senior defence and security analyst*

# Arundhati Roy on India's Elections: "A Mockery of What Democracy Is Supposed to Be"

Samuel Earle

*The author and activist talks to The New Republic about Narendra Modi, the decimation of India's opposition, and the way forward.*

"In India," Arundhati Roy wrote in 2002, "if you are a butcher or a genocidist who happens to be a politician, you have every reason to be optimistic." Roy was referring to Narendra Modi, the then-chief minister of Gujarat who had been implicated in the 2002 anti-Muslim riots in the state that killed at least 1,000 people. Modi has always maintained his innocence—implausibly so, in many eyes—but Roy's assessment of his future proved prescient. Following India's latest elections, which Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won with an unprecedented landslide on a brazen message of Hindu supremacy, he is set for a second term as president—and is more powerful than ever.

As Roy puts it, the "world's largest democracy"—a proud national epithet Roy places within scare quotes—exists in several centuries at once, caught between tradition, the caste system, and the chaos of turbo-charged capitalism. Modi embodies these contradictions more than most: a figure at once authentic and inspirational, promising both the glorious resurrection of Hindustan and neoliberal reforms; the mythical child *chaiwala* who now wears \$16,000 suits.

Modi was not named in Roy's long-awaited second novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, published in 2017. But his vision of a Hindu nation haunted the book. "Perhaps I shouldn't say this," she has said, "but if a novel can have an enemy, then the enemy of this novel is the idea of 'one nation, one religion, one language,'" which is the slogan of Modi's *Hindutva* ideology.

Though Roy first rose to fame for her fiction, winning the Man Booker Prize in 1997 with her debut novel *The God of Small Things*, she never wanted to be known, as she once said, as "some pretty woman who wrote a book." Nor was she interested in becoming a cultural ambassador for the modern, "rising" India that has dominated the Western media's characterization of the country in the 21st century. Today, Roy is known as much for her politics as for her fiction. She has been imprisoned and charged with sedition, joined Maoists in India's jungle, and

thrown her weight behind political movements across the globe. In June, she publishes her collected non-fiction, *My Seditious Heart*, a book that runs to over a thousand pages.

I recently spoke to Roy over email about the Indian election result, the meaning of Modi, and the role of a writer when—in her words—“the world is in a churning.” This interview has been lightly edited for clarity and style.

**Amid all that’s changed in your writing and the world, Modi has always stood as a consistently terrifying figure within your work. Has the “tragedy” of his presidency played out how you expected, or has his leadership surprised you in some ways?**

Modi’s first term played out in ways I expected as well as in ways that I did not. I did expect him to behave like a dedicated worker of the proto-fascist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the mothership of the BJP, dedicated to formally declaring India a Hindu nation. So, I expected the attack on the Muslim community, the demonization of Christians and communists, the drive to attack as well as co-opt and “Hinduise” Dalits. That went to script. I even expected (and anticipated in writing) a terrorist strike/war just before elections. I expected the embrace of big corporations, the privatization drive, but did not expect his policy of demonetization which he announced one night on TV, declaring that 90 percent of Indian currency was no longer legal tender. It dealt a hard blow to people—but it has not prevented them from coming out in numbers to vote for him again.

Modi is back once again, even bigger than before, worshipped like a deity. It’s fascinating psychology—pain turned into pleasure for the sake of the “nation.” It is a formidable victory—enabled by voters across castes, classes, regions, and ethnicity.

*In his victory speech to the thousands chanting his name he said two very frightening things—first, that the 2019 election marked the official death of secularism in India. Not a single political party dared to campaign under the banner of being secular, he said. He was more than right—the main opposition party, the Congress Party, did not have the nerve to mention the word “Muslim” for fear of being labelled “Muslim-lovers.” So, the lynching, the massacres of Muslims were all airbrushed out of the story. Majoritarianism—Hindu nationalism won the day.*

Second, Modi declared that this election proved that by soundly defeating parties that claimed to represent the “lower” castes, the BJP had defeated caste. The only two castes he recognized, he said, were the poor and those who work to end poverty. So, while socially, the BJP thrives on portraying The Enemy in economic terms, apparently, there are no enemies. In a country where nine people own the combined wealth of the bottom 500 million—the rich are missionaries. This is a terrifying view. And having been re-elected and achieving God-status by throwing crumbs to the poor, a gas cylinder to rural families stalked by hunger, a gift of 2000 rupees (30 dollars) to farmers deep in debt and committing suicide in their hundreds of thousands, by arming millions of jobless youth with nothing but vicious rhetoric, Modi has earned himself the right to continue with the economic policies that created this problem.

By claiming that there are no more castes except the poor and those who want to alleviate poverty, he is claiming that he and the RSS have done what Dr B.R Ambedkar, a pioneering advocate for Dalits, could not—they have annihilated caste. This is an extremely disturbing statement. Because, as Ambedkar said—Hinduism is caste. What the RSS-BJP has done in this election is to reinforce caste—to work with caste divisions, exploit the material contradictions between castes and sub-castes, and pit them against each other with mathematical precision.

**It seems he has effectively redefined the political center in his image. Do you see ways of challenging this “new normal” over his next term?**

In the days after he was elected, following some harsh criticism in the international press, Modi made a speech in which he spoke about protecting minorities and upholding the Indian constitution. He more or less directly contradicted what he himself and his senior colleagues had said the previous day. This sort of expediency is pure RSS tactics. Interestingly, the deification of Modi has overshadowed the idea of the BJP as a party. Its massive wealth, its party machinery, has all been harnessed to the crowning of the monarch. There is a ridiculous hagiographic Modi bio-pic, full of falsehood that has just been released. No doubt it will contribute to his deification. But despite all this, Modi can only be the monarch for as long as the RSS wants him to occupy the throne. RSS-rule is the new normal.

You ask how this can be challenged. At this moment, in northern India, most of the other political parties are in shambles. The Congress has been vanquished, the Communists destroyed, the political parties that identify themselves as Dalit/backward caste parties have been more or less decimated. On the whole, the opposition parties behaved pettily and arrogantly with each other, diminishing

each other while their ship went down. Hopefully they are asking themselves some serious questions.

The RSS has about 600,000 disciplined, highly trained cadres it can deploy. The others have almost none. This time around the BJP had 20 times more money than all of them put together. Next time that will probably become 50 times more money. And certainly, elections in India are more and more about money, about spectacle, about controlling the mainstream media and social media. Every institution in this country was bent to their will, including the Election Commission and, who knows, perhaps the electronic voting machines. That money bought them tens of thousands of IT experts, data analysts, social media activists who ran thousands of Whatsapp groups with carefully directed propaganda—tailored and tweaked for every section, region, caste, and class, every voting booth in every constituency.

That kind of money can sell anything it decides to sell—in this case a product so toxic, it created an epidemic. Not a single thing of importance, not climate change, not the looming economic crisis, not health, not education was a part of the campaign. Nothing except toxic, medieval stupidity on an epic scale. How can we treat this as a fair election? It was a race between a Ferrari and a few bicycles—and the media cheered the Ferrari as though they hadn't noticed anything unusual. And now lathers it with praise while it mocks the bicycles for their poor performance.

So, what are the avenues that remain to challenge this formation? Existing political parties in this particular model of first-past-the-post democracy will not easily be able to take on this formidable, money-filled hate-filled machine. I believe that peoples' rage will one day break the machine. I'm not talking about a revolution. I'm talking about an outbreak, the re-emergence of non NGO-ized social movements. It will come. And that will create new energy and a new kind of opposition that cannot be managed. We will have to play a new game—one that has not been fixed like this one has. This election in India that is being hailed as a great exercise in democracy is the opposite—just a mockery of what democracy is supposed to be.

**Do you see the BJP's success as of a piece with other recent nationalist convulsions in places like Britain, America, and Brazil?**

I think it is very much of a piece with prevailing nationalist convulsions. Although in India the RSS has been conscientiously working towards this

moment for 95 years. It has systems in place that no other current fascists or white supremacists do.

**In 2009, you dedicated a collection of your essays to those who have “learned to divorce hope from reason.” What’s hope and reason’s relationship like now? Are there any signs of a reunion on the cards?**

I practiced that doctrine during the run-up to the elections. While all the pundits predicted a win for the BJP [with a reduced majority], some of us insisted they would lose. I said so publicly, because I felt the certainty of the outcome needed to be punctured. There were those who dreaded the victory of the BJP who publicly predicted they would sweep to victory. It was probably meant to advertise the fact that they had their finger on the pulse of “the people.” It was no great shakes to feel the pulse. It was all around us. But those doleful predictions only added to the propaganda, to the sense of inevitability. So those of us who had learned to divorce hope from reason stubbornly insisted that the opposition would win, that they had secret pacts and clever strategies. But it is precisely that kind of mad hope that will eventually make people rise up against this nightmare. So yes, hope divorced from reason. And add to that, defiance divorced from reason. That’s what we need.

**India’s mindset seems increasingly militarized, and Modi did his best to drum up this sentiment during his election campaign, aligning himself with the armed forces and stoking fears of purported “enemies of the nation.” What is the place of a writer—especially one with a “seditious heart”—in such an atmosphere?**

Ha! Tenuous I’d say, and extremely dangerous. Because we have been reduced to a situation in which even those opposed to Hindu nationalism are weakly offering up various brands of “better” Hinduism and better nationalism. Our brains are being shrink-wrapped in the national flag. The attack, not on intellectuals, but on any form of intelligence is going to be ferocious. While politicians, corporate CEOs, and their service-partners in the media are millionaires and billionaires—wealthy beyond the realm of imagination—students, professors, writers, independent journalists are being targeted as elitist “anti-nationals.”

“The attack on universities, on intelligence itself, is on hand.”

“Elite” is the stand-in word for anybody of above-average intelligence who harbours non-servile instincts. Amit Shah, the president of the BJP, and Ram Madhav, the general secretary, issued their un-adorned threats on day one. Amit

Shah, from the victory pulpit on the very night the results were declared; Ram Madhav, in a newspaper column the next day called “The Leader is the Truth,” in which he said that the “remnants” of the “pseudo-secular/liberal cartels that held a disproportionate sway and stranglehold over the intellectual and policy establishment of the country” needed to be “discarded” from the country’s “cultural and intellectual landscape.” Age-old, straight-up, fascist-speak. In this second term, they will try and finish what they started five years ago—the shut-down of any real learning, real scholarship, real thinking, real art. The attack on universities, on intelligence itself, is on hand.

**You’ve always refuted those who try to impose a distinction between your “art” and your “activism,” saying “writer” will suffice. Is this constraint—where serious, active engagement with the world is put beyond the remit of a writer—something you feel more strongly in India?**

No, actually not. I feel it more strongly in Europe and America, where I used to sense a sort of smug complacency—an assumption that there were no more questions—there was no better aspiration other than to strive to be like them. I think that is changing now—destabilization has set in. Great fears have arisen. Big questions are once again being asked. The whole world is in a churning. Art and literature will reflect that.

**Language, in the broadest sense, has become a focal point in your thought—its pluralities, its possibilities, its political perversions. Is this partly a response to the Hindutva doctrine of “one nation, one language, one religion”—a doctrine which all nationalists share—or is language simply the natural terrain of a writer?**

It’s the natural terrain of this country—this complexity. And naturally, being a writer, I delight in it. The funniest part of the Hindu Nationalists’ “one language, one religion, one nation” doctrine—known here as “Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan”—is that all those three words are actually Persian words. But more seriously, in a region where there are 780 spoken languages, 20 of which are recognized by the Indian Constitution, can you imagine the violence of that doctrine? Then you have the English-speaking elite who routinely accuse each other (in English) of being English-speaking elite, you have the upper-caste non-English speaking elite who send their children to English-medium schools, but want to deny the poor the right to learn a language that will give them opportunities that they would not otherwise have.

Finally, over the course of your life you've expressed yourself across many different mediums, including fiction, film, plays, reportage, essays, even acting and architecture. Is there a form—or a setting, a time, a place—where you feel most at home?

I'm a story-teller. I think in stories. They are my home. My true love.

*Samuel Earle is a freelance writer who lives in London. His work has been published in the London Review of Books, Jacobin Magazine, openDemocracy and other media. Follow him on twitter @swajcmanearle.*

# **US declares Baloch Liberation Army a terrorist group**

Abdus Sattar Ghazali

The United States on Tuesday (July 2) declared Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) as a global terrorist organization.

The US State Department said it was classifying the BLA as a global terrorist group, making it a crime for anyone in the United States to assist the militants and freezing any US assets they may have.

“The BLA is an armed separatist group that targets security forces and civilians, mainly in ethnic Baloch areas of Pakistan,” the State Department noted, citing reason behind the move.

“The outfit has carried out several terrorist attacks in the past year, including a suicide attack in August, 2018 that targeted Chinese engineers in Balochistan, a November, 2018 attack on the Chinese consulate in Karachi, and a May, 2019 attack against a luxury hotel in Gwadar,” it added.

Jiyand Baloch, the official spokesperson of the Baloch Liberation Army, termed the US State Department’s ban as “beyond comprehension and unjustified”.

In a press statement reported by the Indian Wire, Baloch said the US has become a “victim of Pakistani diplomatic blackmailing” even when the BLA has been “abiding by international laws while resisting Pakistani and Chinese expansionist designs” in resource-rich Balochistan region, where Beijing is constructing its multi-billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

“BLA is a moderate, secular and an armed defence organization. BLA is resisting, on its motherland, against foreign intruders to protect its people. The international laws allow any person or nation to act in self-defence. The US State Department’s ban on BLA is beyond comprehension and unjustified,” Baloch said.

## **Pakistan's reaction**

The move to declare BLA as terrorist organization is seen here as “positive development” since Pakistan had long been calling for such a decision.

“We have taken note of the designation by the US Administration of the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) as Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT),” said an official statement issued by the Foreign Office shortly after the US announcement.

It pointed out that the BLA has remained a proscribed entity in Pakistan since 2006 and in recent times has carried out several terrorist attacks in the country. “It is hoped that this designation will ensure that BLA’s space to operate is minimised,” the statement said.

“It is important that the perpetrators, organisers, financiers and external sponsors including those glorifying these acts of terror against Pakistan are held accountable and brought to justice,” it added.

Defence analyst Lt-Gen (retd) Amjad Shoaib termed the US designation of BLA as terrorist organisation as diplomatic victory for Pakistan. “BLA has been the proxy of RAW and it is certainly a setback for India,” Gen Shoaib commented while reacting to the US decision.

Shoaib also said the timing of this decision suggested that the Trump Administration wanted to send a positive message to Pakistan ahead of Prime Minister Imran Khan’s upcoming visit to Washington.

Washington’s announcement comes as Prime Minister Imran Khan is expected to undertake his maiden trip to the US from July 20. He will have a face-to-face meeting with US President Donald Trump.

Pakistan declared the BLA a terrorist organisation in 2006 after its involvement in a number of terrorist attacks, targeting both civilians and security personnel. The group was recently involved in a terrorist attack targeting a five-star hotel in the strategically important Gwadar Port.

## **Indian Connection**

Designation of BLA as a global terrorist organization is seen a setback to India which was reportedly backing it to destabilize Pakistan.

Tellingly, in August 2016, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi affirmed that India is backing Baloch separatists.

In August 2016, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi stated: “Today from the ramparts of Red Fort, I want to greet and express my thanks to some people. In the last few days, people of Balochistan, Gilgit, [and] Pakistan-occupied Kashmir have thanked me, have expressed gratitude, and expressed good wishes for me.”

On another gathering in August 2016, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said: The time has come when Pakistan shall have to answer to the world for the atrocities committed by it against people in Baluchistan.”

The separatist Balochistan Republican Party (BRP) leader Brahamdagh Bugti, who has applied for political asylum in India, thanked Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi for raising the issue of the situation in Balochistan in the latter’s Independence Day speech.

In August 2016, India’s National Security Advisor Ajit Doval said that Pakistan has many more vulnerabilities than India and it may lose Balochistan.

Indian newspaper, The Hindu reported that the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) commanders, in the past, had sought medical treatment in India’s hospitals, often under disguise or with fake identity.

In one such case, a militant commander in charge of Khuzdar city was based in Delhi for at least six months in 2017 when he underwent extensive treatment for kidney-related ailments. Baloch militant’s visits to India were often under assumed identities.

Similarly, another Baloch Liberation Army commander, Aslam Baloch alias Achu, was also alleged to have visited India in the past where he met people who were sympathetic to the cause. Aslam Baloch was also alleged to have been treated at a hospital in New Delhi.

In June this year, a Baloch woman activist has urged Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to fulfil his government’s earlier promise of making the world aware of Pakistan’s brutalities in Balochistan.

Professor Naela Quadri Baloch, the President of World Baloch Women’s Forum, made the request while congratulating Modi for securing a massive mandate to lead India for a second term.

“Halfway into its first term, his government had promised to raise our plight at the international level. While in practical terms this did not translate into any significant change in India’s approach to the Baloch issue, Pakistan used the stray statements issued by India to demonise our seven-decades-old struggle for independence as an India-sponsored movement,” Naela said.

“The Baloch people hope that the Modi government will fulfil its earlier promise of making the world aware of Pakistan’s brutalities in occupied Balochistan,” she added.

In July last year, Amir Ahmed Suleman Daud, officially known as His Highness the Khan of Kalat, welcomed Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s intervention in favour of Balochistan during his Independence Day address from the Red Fort.

“India is one of the powers of region, the biggest democracy in the world. The Prime Minister’s [Modi’s] was the only voice we heard in a long time coming out of the neighbourhood and appreciated the intervention. We know we have got a friend,” Daud told Press Trust of India at a media briefing in London.

Tellingly, in March 2016, Pakistan arrested an Indian operative Kulbhushan Yadav who was imparting Naval fighting training to Baloch separatists in an attempt to target Pakistani ports.

During interrogation it was revealed that Yadav had purchased boats at the Iranian port in Chabahar in order to target Karachi and Gwadar ports in a terrorist plot.

It was also revealed that Yadav used to visit Pakistan and lure Baloch students to carry out anti-national and other destabilizing activities by offering huge funding. Installations in coastal areas of Gwadar, Pasni, Jiwani and other places in Balochistan were the target of Yadav.

According to the DG Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) Lt-Gen Asim Bajwa Yadav was given the task to attack a five-star hotel in Gwadar where Chinese nationals used to stay.

### **Balochistan Liberation Army**

The Balochistan Liberation Army (also Baloch Liberation Army or BLA) is a militant organization based in Balochistan, a mountainous region of western Pakistan, according to Countering Violent Extremism Monitor of Stanford

University. The Baloch Liberation Army became publicly known during the summer of 2000, after it claimed credit for a series of bombing attacks on Pakistani authorities. The group has an estimated strength of 10,000 members.

BLA (Balochistan Liberation Army) was built around the core of BSO (Baloch Students Organization). BSO was a group of students in Quetta and some other cities of Balochistan. Misha and Sasha can be considered among the architects of the original BLA. The BLA remained active during the Russo-Afghan war and then it disappeared from the surface, mostly because its main source of funding – the Soviet Union – disappeared from the scene.

### **China-Pakistan-Economic-Corridor (CPEC)**

Balochistan is crucial to the success of the China-Pakistan-Economic-Corridor (CPEC), but the restive province through which the initiative passes poses a stiff challenge to China as Baloch nationalists are up in arms against what they see as Beijing's designs to exploit the area.

A number of attacks in recent weeks against Chinese assets in Balochistan, which also is home to the Gwadar Port, have roiled Beijing.

Baloch nationalists, led by the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), have alleged that China is a so-called 'partner in crime' with Pakistan's national government in "looting the natural resources of Balochistan," said an expert who tracks Pakistan's internal affairs.

Baloch rebels believe that China is militarily supporting Pakistan Army in its efforts to crush the Baloch insurgency.

China has been involved in projects in Balochistan even before CPEC was put in place.

China's state-owned China Metallurgical Group Corporation (MCC) received a contract in the 1990s to extract gold and copper from the Saindak mine in Balochistan.

Baloch nationalists allege that such projects represent exploitation of the mineral resources of Balochistan.

The BLA is one of the oldest, and arguably the largest, of at least six nationalist groups fighting Islamabad for an independent Balochistan.

The BLA and other Baloch insurgent groups have conducted a series of attacks against Chinese interests since last year.

These attacks have significantly affected Chinese economic projects, most particularly by inhibiting the free movement of the Chinese people in the region, according to news reports published by Pakistan's Dawn newspaper

The Chinese are present in Gwadar, where they work under strict security protection. In Quetta, the Baloch capital, Chinese expatriates are unable to move freely, and must travel.

The attacks have also increased security costs at the CPEC. To protect Chinese personnel working on CPEC projects, Pakistan has raised a special security division of more than 15,000 personnel.

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## A handy checklist of fascism

Jawed Naqvi

WHILE India's communists may be grudgingly opening up to the probability, if they ever do, that fascism is knocking hard on India's doors, a first-time woman MP from West Bengal's Trinamool Congress — the left's hyper *bête noir* — took the Lok Sabha by storm recently with her recounting of the stark warning signs of the menace stalking the country. Defiantly, Mahua Moitra pushed back hecklers from the treasury benches to raise the alert.

It was unusual coming from the opposition benches, who haven't recovered from their defeat in May. For her speech and more, she became an instant star with whatever remains of critical media in the country. Mahua quit a lucrative banker's job in the US a few years ago to do grass roots work in her native Bengal. And, tellingly, she spoke with the vigour once associated with the left. In her compelling analysis, she harked back to the times when Bhupesh Gupta or Hiren Mukherjee spoke her language and gave hope to millions, usually with a Mahua Moitra-like warning. Before discussing the signs of India's democratic erosion let's, however, fill in an important blank Ms Moitra left in her dire summation of where India is headed.

It was in the early 1990s that I learnt a few useful things from several discussions I had with Sharad Pawar, then chief minister of Maharashtra. He was supervising relief operations from a camp near the site of a devastating earthquake that killed thousands in and around Latur. I was assigned to report from ground zero. Pawar told me he was defence minister when he met then Chinese premier Li Peng, who had expressed his worry for India's unplanned and equally unpopular transition from a state-planned economy to a free market system. MPs were bribed and subsequently jailed for helping the wafer-thin majority that ushered India's free-market system.

There was a price to pay, and that was the tearing down of India's social fabric. Li cited Mikhail Gorbachev, who presided over the fall of his powerful communist state by trying to create a new country in the image of the West. "Had Gorbachev followed *perestroika* (restructuring) before allowing *glasnost* (openness), the results would perhaps have been less damaging. But he went for economic change and democracy simultaneously." Li's reference was to Gorbachev's recasting of the Soviet Union into a hazy imitation of the West's liberal democracies in which he failed miserably. He hadn't fathomed how the seductive charm of capitalism — *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* — was raised on Dickensian nightmares with decades of colonialism and slave trade.

“Your government hasn’t taken the last man into confidence,” Li cautioned Pawar. It wasn’t as if China had conferred with the poorest for its own adventurous departure from Maoist socialism. But it had the political muscle to absorb or, where necessary, suppress the pain.

Years later, I met Rahul Gandhi for the only chat I was going to have with him. Manmohan Singh had just become prime minister and I told him to be careful of his direction. He looked unwilling to continue the conversation. “You mean Jaswant Singh,” he probed, referring to the genial BJP MP. I said I was referring to Manmohan Singh. The soft-spoken economist was credited with ushering India’s IMF-advised market-friendly policies, but he had put the poorest of the poor right at the back of the prescribed never-ending queue, lined up to collect the manna from the promised trickling down of the magical nectar.

Nearly the same problem had occurred in China when Deng Xiaoping ushered state capitalism in the 1970s. It, however, had the steel frame of the party together with the powerful state both equally determined to push through the haemorrhaging changes. Also, when the Chinese caught their variants of Harshad Mehtas stealing from the leaky public kitty — and there were and still are those around — they dealt with them as only the Chinese do.

Unlike the Soviet Union or China, the argumentative Indian never needed state intervention to inaugurate political glasnost, a genetic centrepiece of the national character, a factor no doubt in the burgeoning sales of mobile phones and related bandwidth corruption. Introducing Singh’s painful perestroika in India required a distraction, a foil to the pervasive native glasnost, curtailed briefly by Indira with a cost. L.K. Advani’s chariot race and Singh’s economic jig courted each other, and in doing so foiled Li Peng’s worry momentarily. There was a price to pay, and that was the tearing down of India’s social fabric.

Should any proof be needed, the finance minister was presenting the budget in parliament when people were being raped and lynched in Gujarat on Feb 28, 2002. Evidence that neo-liberal economics would fail with an open society came from West Bengal during the rule of the Left Front. Hobnobbing with big business, offering them land that belonged to the peasants, while ignoring Li Peng’s warning that democracy and neo-liberalism don’t mix, the left was saddled with a political cost from which it hasn’t yet recovered.

The communists may blame the BJP’s rise on Mamata Banerjee’s alleged appeasement of Muslim communalism. It doesn’t wash. They would be better off explaining honestly what it meant when they urged Indians not too long ago to “defeat the Congress and isolate the BJP”. How was that meant to translate in the polling booth in a one-on-one contest between the BJP and Congress? Defeating

the Congress was a doable command, but seeking the BJP's isolation in the booth?

Anyway, if she considers how neo-liberal depredation drives and funds fascism in India, Mahua Moitra's ominous pointers would be truer. Her list includes powerful and continuing nationalism; disdain for human rights; identification of enemies as a unifying cause; rampant sexism; controlled mass media; obsession with national security; religion and government intertwined; corporate power protected; labour power suppressed; disdain for intellectuals and the arts; obsession with crime and punishment; and rampant cronyism with corruption. Tick the boxes.

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# Trump is finished with the Afghan war

MK Bhadrakumar

There could be several ways of interpreting the US State Department's decision on Tuesday to designate the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist, which imposes economic sanctions on the group and anyone affiliated with it. What is absolutely certain is that this is by no means an altruistic decision by Washington.

The BLA is based in Afghanistan and has been waging a violent armed struggle against Pakistan for the past decade and a half upholding the right of self-determination of the Baloch people and demanding the separation of Balochistan province from Pakistan, apart from being involved in ethnic-cleansing of non-Baloch minorities in Balochistan.

Curiously, the BLA's timeline (starting from 2004) has been co-terminus with the US' occupation of Afghanistan. It is inconceivable that the US and NATO forces in Afghanistan were unaware of the BLA's subversive activities or who were its mentors. Islamabad has been shouting and screaming from the rooftop all this while that its adversaries exploited the group as a proxy to destabilise Pakistan.

Put differently, the timing of the State Department decision banning the BLA is noteworthy. Why now, at this juncture?

These are extraordinary times when almost anything and everything that the US does in the Greater Middle East would have an eye on Iran with which it is locked in an epochal rivalry. Can it be that by making this gesture, Washington hopes to recruit Pakistani military and intelligence to strengthen further its 'maximum pressure' strategy against Iran? The possibility cannot be ruled out. Of course, this is not to suggest that Pakistan will make hostile moves against Iran. Although Pakistan-Iran relations have been highly problematic through the past four decades since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, and their mutual animosity kept frothing from time to time, things never reached a flashpoint as both sides observed certain ground rules of how far to go and what not to do. In the present context, Pakistan will take utmost care not to get entangled in the US-Iran standoff.

Having said that, there is a vital US-Pakistani convergence over Iran that cannot be overlooked, either. That is, when it comes to the Afghan situation. Iran has

made it clear that if the US attacks it, it will retaliate against American assets all across the region. American assets in Afghanistan. Iran, of course, has stoutly rejected the allegation, but the US insists. There have been two statements at least by senior US officials lately that Iran is moving against a paranoid — and not without reason.

The point is, apart from the traditional links with the Shiite groups in Afghanistan, Tehran also has dealings with the Taliban. Coincidence or not, Washington moved against the BLA within days of an incident in the eastern Afghan province of Wardak on June 26 in which two US soldiers were killed by the Taliban in an ambush.

The incident took place only a day after Pompeo stopped in the Afghan capital, Kabul, for daylong talks with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani as well as other senior leaders and opposition politicians to discuss two topics, namely, the US' ongoing efforts to reach a peace agreement with the Taliban and the potential that Iran has to carry out actions that would jeopardise the US exit strategy out of Afghanistan. (Read a report in the Geopolitics magazine entitled Two Topics Dominating Pompeo's Visit to Afghanistan.)

In fact, the US apprehends that an extremely dangerous situation is arising in Afghanistan even as the withdrawal of American troops accelerates. President Trump disclosed in an interview this week with Tucker Carlson on FOX television that the US troop level has come down to 9000 from 16000 already. Trump made no bones about the fact that he is finished with the war in Afghanistan.

At one point in the interview, Trump bursts out, "I'd like to just get out." Trump claims that he intends to keep a "very strong" intelligence presence in Afghanistan. He couldn't care less anymore whether there will be a broad-based government in Kabul or a Taliban takeover. He's well past that point of agonising. At one point, Trump implied to Carlson — who also happens to be an inveterate critic of America's "endless wars" — that he no longer trusts the judgment or integrity of the military commanders. (By the way, Carlson accompanied Trump to the meeting with North Korea Kim Jong-Un in Panmunjom while NSA John Bolton was sent away to Mongolia.) This is where Pakistani help becomes critical. Ghani's government lacks legitimacy but the holding of presidential election in September, as planned, depends heavily on a settlement with the Taliban. The US expects Pakistani help in three directions: one, persuading the Taliban to reach an agreement at the Qatar talks without any further delay; two, enabling the US to withdraw the troops expeditiously and in an orderly fashion; and, three, creating politico-security

conditions to facilitate a peaceful transfer of power in Kabul. Of course, it is a tall order.

The Americans know that Iran can escalate in Afghanistan anytime it wishes. Afghanistan falls within the domain of the elite Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, commanded by the legendary general Qassem Soleimani who was the *bête noire* of the US and Israel in Iraq and Syria. Of course, if Soleimani creates a hopeless situation like in Vietnam (which forced the US into a humiliating retreat from the rooftop of the American embassy in Saigon), that will be highly damaging for Trump politically in the midst of his campaign for the 2020 election. And that is precisely why Trump is impatient to cut loose and get out from Afghanistan without even waiting for the implementation of any peace agreement with Taliban.

All this should be a morality play for the Indian strategists and policymakers as they pick up the debris of their own Afghan policies and its \$2 billion price tag, which has been predicated so heavily through the past decade and a half on the US strategy. Equally, this should be a wake-up call for the Indian lobbyists who still want to bandwagon with the US in other regional theatres such as Sri Lanka, the Maldives or Nepal. (See blog US eyes Sri Lanka as its military logistics hub.)

For sure, the Afghan war has not ended. Trump recalled poignantly that the 9/11 attacks were not staged by Afghans but the Hindu Kush provided the plotters a "lab for terrorists". Now, the US can only take the word of the Taliban that such a thing will not repeat. Washington's best hope will be that Pakistan will keep an eagle's eye to ensure that the terrorists from Afghanistan will not come visiting the US.

In turn, that is going to create an inter-dependency between the US and Pakistan. The IMF bailout, ban on the BLA, the near-certainty that Pakistan is off the hook at the upcoming plenary of the Financial Action Task Force, an official visit by Prime Minister Imran Khan to the White House — these are for the starters from the US side. Pakistan is highly experienced in dictating the terms of engagement with the US.

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## How to Exterminate Muslims in India?

VT Rajshekar

Muslims ruled over Spain from 712 AD to 1492 AD for 780 years, yet today there are no Muslims in Spain though every aspect of Spanish life has a touch of Islam. Spanish language has many Arabic words, its music has an Arabic tone, its culture has more Arabic influence than the European, and proper nouns in Spanish often have the Arabic prefix al. From 1492, when the last bastion of Muslim political strength Grenada fell, the Muslims of Spain were on the decline and its culmination took place after 120 years when the last batch of Muslim die-hards left Spain in 1612. From that year, Islam vanished from the Spanish horizons.

A particular noteworthy point is that during this period of Islamic decline from Spain, the entire civilised world was ruled by Muslims. The Ottoman Turks had conquered Constantinople in 1553, and were ruling the entire Balkan Peninsula, Egypt was ruled by the powerful Mamiukes, Persia was at its political pinnacle under the Abbasi rulers, and India was ruled by the Mughals. Still Islam vanished from Spain and none of these great Muslim armies did anything to protect the Muslims of Spain. How Islam was ejected from Spain had been a subject of keen study by India's Hindu Nazis in the 30s and 40s of this century. They studied this aspect to be copied in India and to counter this possibility; the Muslim leaders also studied this to prevent a repetition of the Spanish methods because Muslims (forming 11.35% of the population as per 1981 census) as India's single largest minorities have become the biggest headache to the upper caste Hindus. But the present-day Muslims are totally ignorant of the history of Islamic decline in Spain and hence of the designs surrounding it. Through this we intend to shed a little light on this subject so that the thinking section of the Muslims and their sympathisers may do some more research on this subject.

As in India, Spanish Muslims had three categories: (i) the descendants of the original Arabs, (ii) descendants of Arab fathers and Spanish mothers and (iii) Christian converts to Islam. Immediately after the fall of Grenada many of the original Arabs to save their lives (not property, as they were not permitted to carry their wealth) left Spain to Tunisia and Morocco; many died on their journey by the attacking Christian hordes. Rest of the original Arabs who opted to live in Spain itself were subsequently branded 'foreigners' (as in India) and destroyers of

Spain. The other category of Muslims viz. the descendants of Muslim fathers and Christian mothers and converts from Christianity opted to live in Spain believing in the declaration of King Ferdinand that complete religious freedom would be guaranteed. The attacks by Christian on their lives and property during the earlier years were pardoned as a temporary phenomenon.

Compare it with the development that took place in India after the partition (1947). But these attacks on Muslim life and property in Spain did not abate but continued for about 50 years with lesser intensity in a sporadic manner, just as it is happening in India today. In the earlier years, the Indian Muslims resisted and fought back. There were mini-battles in the streets, but gradually there were one-sided attacks and every time Muslims were the losers. Of late, the Hindu police itself is let lose to kill the Muslims in India.

While the organized Christian groups were committing such massacres, Ferdinand's Govt, in Spain adopted the policy of eliminating Muslims from the services and adopting the following measures:-Arabic was removed from administration; schools attached to mosques were debarred from teaching academic and secular subjects like science, history, mathematics and philosophy. Only religious teaching could be imparted.

Lessons in history were faked by which the Muslim rule was dubbed as barbaric. Contribution of Muslims to the development of Spain was avoided, Muslim houses were made objects of constant searching by police on allegations of arms hoarding and secret meetings, Original Arab Muslims were projected as enemies of Christians and destroyers of Spain. Christian converts were persuaded to reconvert to Christianity on the ground that their ancestors were forced to become Muslims and as there is no more coercion, they should revert to Christianity.

Muslims who were from Muslim-Christian parentage were branded as bastards and ridiculed and persuaded to revert to Christianity. Marriages performed in the Islamic manner were directed to be registered with the judicial officers. Islamic law was declared illegal. Every method followed in Spain is being experimented in India with better precision and timing. Thus Muslims in Spain were made objects of ridicule, condemnation and continuous attack. Burning of Muslim houses and shops was encouraged to destroy their economy. Mock ceremonies of reconversion of Muslims to Christianity were held and publicized. In India, Hindu Nazis of all hues-Arya Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission, Vishwa Hindu Parishad etc are doing the same. The first two generation of Spanish Muslims adopted passive methods to save their religion by teaching Arabic to their children at home and mosques, and telling them orally about the realities but

gradually they lost the zeal. When marriages were ordered to be celebrated only through Govt. agencies, Muslims in early stages performed dual marriages - one with the Govt. authorities and again privately in their homes in the Islamic manner. Gradually the second ceremony was given up as even such a private ceremony was banned.

During this period, Muslim masses gradually fell out of the grips of the Muslim leadership and Muslim elites started flocking to Turkey, Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt where they were received with sympathy. Poor Muslim masses were left uncared for. This is exactly what is happening in India. The richer English-educated Muslims are getting Brahminised. They have become imitators of upper caste Hindus as they live not in Muslim localities but in Hindu areas. The poor Muslims (they form 95% of the Muslim population) live in ghettos and being better followers of Islam, they are left high and dry. Hence they are getting killed in all anti-Muslim riots.

The seeds sown in the first half of the century in Spain started yielding results in the second half. There was no political leadership, no organization to protect Muslims and enlightened personalities to save the situation. Religious leaders knowing nothing but Islamic' theology tried their best to save the situation, but against heavy propaganda by the Govt. agencies, lures and offers to reconverts, ignorance of Islamic values by the masses and sense of inferiority nurtured in the minds of Muslim masses were too big a force to be undone by the theologians. This needed a political leadership and an organization with arms to counter, but there was none. Those who spoke of invoking the help of Muslim powers of Turkey and Egypt were feared and exposed before the authorities (by the Muslims themselves) to be condemned. Without willing fighters, other Muslim powers could not help. Those who had settled in Turkey and Egypt advised the authorities there to desist 'from such a thought as otherwise atrocities on Muslims of Spain would increase. An Ahmed Shah Abdali was needed but there was none. And the Muslim masses joined the "mainstream" of Spanish life and the mullahs finding no job for their preaching gradually left Spain. And the last batch to leave Spain consisted of the diehard mullahs in 1612. In India also the political leadership of the Muslims became a tail of the Hindu parties led by the upper castes. Only the theological leadership like that of Maulana Syed Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi (Ali Miyan) has tried to maintain the cultural identity of the Indian Muslims.

This "Spanish experiment" is being tried with greater energy and efficiency in India. Urdu, which is as Islamic in India as Arabic was in Spain, is being eased out. Muslims are voluntarily holding on to Madrassas. English-educated richer

Muslims are away from the Muslim masses. We saw this at the Tablighi Jamaat International conference held in Bangalore (DV, March 15, 1985). They are not going to Muslim countries, but are taking refuge in their psychological and physical seclusion. Any move to organise them to protect the Muslim life and property is branded as communal. Any Muslim flirting, if not supporting the upper castes, is called a "nationalist Muslim".

The gulf between the Muslim masses and educated rich Muslims is widening every day. Mass killing of Muslims is considered something natural by the Muslim leadership itself. Whenever it is raised at international Islamic platforms such actions are called interference in the internal affairs of India. Muslims history is deleted from the syllabus. Names of Muslims who died for India are avoided. A great martyr who died for India like Tipu Sultan is unknown to youngsters, whereas the name of Tantia Tope, who fought not for India but for his pension, and Jhansi Laxmi Bai, who fought for her adopted son's heirship to the throne, is brought on the lips of every Indian. No Muslim gets awards for his contribution to science, medicine, music, art or gallantry.

Even those who fought from the ranks of the ruling Congress Party like Maulana Azad, Kidwai, Syed Mahmood, Humayun Kabir etc. do not have a road or extension named after them. But there are half-a-dozen in the names of each upper caste leaders in our towns and cities. History is being re-written. ("Falsifying Indian History", DV editorial, April 16, 1985). Muslims are killed daily and their houses and shops burnt. The doors of the Army, police and administration are closed to them. And yet Muslim organizations to protect Islam are coming up like mushrooms. Everybody wants to protect Islam and nobody wants to protect Muslims. We are really worried.

A study of the Ruling Class policies reveals that it has great similarity with the one followed by Ferdinand and Isabelle in Spain. The only difference is that the Hindu upper castes are more sharp and sophisticated because of the limitations imposed in the 20th century by the checks exercisable by the United Nations Human Rights Charter and international public opinion. The systematic and daily anti-Muslim riots resulting in loss of life and property, and above all the sense of fear in the hearts of every Muslim, elimination of the martial Muslims from the Defence, paramilitary and police forces and brahminising of these forces, closing the doors of appointments in Govt. services and public undertakings, Brahminisation of education and mass.media like radio, TV and advertisement, elimination of Urdu as official language from those areas which form the present-day States of Punjab, Haryana, UP, Bihar, parts of Madhya Pradesh, Maharastra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka overnight in 1947-

48, gradual closing of Urdu schools are all examples of positive anti-Muslim policies.

On the Brahminical psychological warfare side comes the cries of Personal Law amendment, now diluted as common civil code, greatness of the Indian (Hindu) culture, projection of notorious anti-Muslim personalities like "Mahatma" Gandhi, B. G. Tilak, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Veer Savarkar, Lala Laipat Rai as heroes of India to belittle the contribution of Muslims for the development and progress of the country, re-writing of Indian history, describing Muslim professions like beef-selling as a sin and glorifying cow protection policies, introduction of mechanical slaughter of animals to throw out of job butchers, declaration of import and export business carried on by Muslims as smuggling are policies through which vulnerable Indian masses are misguided, resulting in a psychological anti-Muslim bias. Muslim electoral constituencies are divided horizontally and vertically so that they don't have an effective voting power anywhere and thrusting upon them ultra-secular Muslim leaders who have started worshipping Hindu idols and such scenes being systematically televised. Unfortunately Muslim leaders, who are dejected with the Govt., repose much confidence in Hindu masses and hope to secure their help ignoring the fact that the poor Hindu (Dalit) masses are as much victims of such propaganda. And as on this day only seeds are being sown. The harvest is yet to come. When the harvest season comes, what will be harvested in India is repetition of Spain, unless the Muslims resort to counter measures soon.

It is high time the Muslim/ intelligentsia rises to the occasion to undo the repetition of the history of Spain in India. Islam has always been protected by the Muslim masses and not by the classes. Rich Muslims, who are not even 5% of the Muslim population (with minor exceptions), are joining the upper caste exploiters. They may talk of Islam but they have forgotten the fellow Muslims. Please note: religion does not protect its followers, but followers protect the religion. Remember if Islam has to be saved in India, Muslims have to be saved.

*VT Rajshekar is an activist and great supporter of Dalits and Muslims in India. He was the Editor of Dalit Voice. He is now retired and writes occasionally.*

## **Blowback from India's strategic blunder in Bhutan?**

Bhim Bhurtel

New Delhi was rattled by Bhutan's general election, the outcome of which may soon accelerate the decline of India's influence over the Himalayan kingdom.

The center-left Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa (DNT, Bhutan United Party) won 30 seats out of 47 in the National Assembly, Bhutan's lower house of parliament, in the second round of the election.

Focusing on Bhutan's ties with domineering India was not permitted during the election campaign – violators faced fines and reprimands. However, the so-called pro-Indian ex-prime minister Tshering Tobgay's People's Democratic Party (PDP) lost in the first round on September 15.

Consequently, Indian strategic analysts worried that New Delhi's influence over the northern frontier nation would be further diminished over the next five years as a result of India's friend Tobgay being ousted. The Bhutanese people endorsed the DNT's election manifesto and newly elected Prime Minister Tshering Lotay said he was firmly committed to honouring his party's election promises.

This recent development in Bhutanese politics matters for India. The DNT's election manifesto outlines three fundamental policies. First, it aims to diversify Bhutan's economy to reduce the Indian monopoly of its hydroelectricity.

Second, the DNT emphasizes the reduction of Bhutan's external debt of US\$2.5 billion. The DNT surmises that unless Bhutan reduces its foreign debt vouched by India, it will remain subject to overbearing New Delhi's influence in the future.

Third, the DNT's manifesto also underscores private-sector investment for sustainable economic growth and Lotay's economic policy goal is to attract foreign investment from sources other than India. If the Bhutanese economy starts to diversify, India cannot offset China's foreign direct investment in Bhutan.

These three critical economic policies aim to free Bhutan from India's domination. Therefore, Bhutan's new government will continue its efforts to achieve the status of an independent country in the days to come, and India's influence will decline further.

Many analysts believe India's influence in Bhutan began to wane after the Doklam standoff in the summer of 2017. However, the tipping point for diminishing Indian hegemony in Bhutan goes back to 1990 when India used scaremongering tactics to get the government to exile more than 110,000 Nepali-speaking-Hindu Bhutanese (one-fifth of Bhutan's total population at that time) called Lhotshapas from Bhutan.

India's strategists and intelligence officials feared that the popular uprising that overthrew the Nepalese king's despotic regime in early 1990 could happen elsewhere. They miscalculated the likelihood of a collective demand for a separate independent nation by the Nepalese-speaking people of Sikkim, Darjeeling, Kalingpong, Duars, and southern Bhutan because the Lhotshapas were already demanding respect for human rights and democracy in late 1989.

Driven by paranoia, India used scare tactics to persuade Bhutan to drive out the Lhotshampas. Hari Sharma, an aide to then-prime minister Girija Prasad Koirala (1992-95) and then-president Ram Baran Yadav (2008-15), quoted Bhutan's former King Jigme Singye Wangchuck in the Nepalese daily Naya Patrika on October 27: "Lhotshampas were exiled due to Indian PM Rajiv Gandhi's pressure, and Indian intelligence also paid for ULFA (United Liberation Front for Assam) to exile them from Bhutan."

Similarly, Balaram Paudel, the Bhutanese People's Party's exiled leader, wrote in Kantipur, a leading Nepalese daily, on July 22: "The Bhutanese king suppressed the Lhotshampas with the slogan of 'one nation, one nationality' and India indisputably backed up the King of Bhutan."

The Hindus believe in the notion of moksha, emancipation from the cog of life and rebirth; all their karmas (actions) and the dharmas (rectitude) aim to secure moksha or rebirth in heaven. One of the key karmas and dharmas of Hindu is to go on a pilgrimage to Char-Dhams (Four Abodes), which are situated in India. For Hindus, India is crucial for not only this life but also for life after death.

Thus, if the Lhotshapas had not been driven out of Bhutan, they would have been represented in the political life of Bhutan, and they would, because of their Hindu beliefs, been more inclined toward India than the Drukpa people. However, the

Indian foreign-policy mandarins ignored this Hindu factor and persuaded the Bhutanese king to exile the Lhotshapas to prevent a separatist movement they feared would emerge in the Indian Chicken's Neck in 1990.

Bhutan is an India-locked country, and the nearest Nepal-India border is about 350 kilometres by road from the Bhutan-India boundary. The Indian Border Security Force (BSF) and the West Bengal Police kept trucks at the Bhutan-India border to take Bhutanese refugees forcibly into Nepal. Moreover, the BSF did not permit Bhutanese refugees to re-enter India when they tried to return to Bhutan several times using the same route, repeatedly expelling them to Nepal. If India had not initiated the expulsion of the Lhotshapas, Bhutan never would have considered such a move.

India's strategy of fomenting racial friction in Bhutan later turned counterproductive. The Bhutanese king has started to foster diplomatic relations with many countries. When India realized that Bhutanese King Jigme Singye Wangchuck was playing a game to overcome Indian dominance, it forced him to relinquish the throne to his son in 2006.

India also pressured Bhutan to initiate democratic reforms. However, India's move became counterproductive because, during the tenure of Bhutan's first democratically elected Prime Minister, Jigme Y Thinley (2008-2013), the kingdom forged diplomatic ties with 32 additional countries.

Thinley wanted to develop diplomatic ties with China, its northern neighbour and one of the veto countries of UN Security Council, and he met with his counterpart, Premier Wen Jiabao, on June 21, 2012, in Rio de Janeiro without consulting India in advance. India's angrily reacted with an "LPG subsidy cut" between the first and second round of the election in 2013. As the result, Thinley lost the election in the second round.

However, it was too late because Bhutan already had the centrifugal force needed to offset the centripetal force of India's influence. Lotay's victory in the 2018 general election indicates that Bhutan is an increasingly independent nation.

No one sees any point in Bhutan looking toward India once its economy diversifies, which was stressed in the DNT's election manifesto, and Bhutan develops its ties with China, leading to Bhutan securing maritime access through Chinese routes in the future. The culture, language and religion of the Drukpa are distinct from those of India, as their forefathers were migrants from Tibet in the 9th century.

Indian foreign-policy makers think they are meticulously calculating in the case of Bhutan, but they actually seem quite obtuse. India's foreign-policy makers felt they had secured their country's strategic interests with their political manoeuvring in Sikkim, Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Duars, and Bhutan by exiling Lhotshapas; however, their idiocy boomeranged 28 years later because Bhutan will not need India in the future.

I still remember when I met in person then-prime minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai (1990-91) in 2008, as he decried Indian foreign policy: "They [Indians] don't know in New Delhi what this [Indian role in exiling Lhotshapas from Bhutan in 1990] can lead to in the future." Bhattarai was right to be sceptical regarding India's strategy in Bhutan.

Bhutan will continue its efforts to free itself of Indian domination by diversifying its economy, reducing external debt and private-sector development by attracting foreign direct investment from China in the next five years. Perhaps now India is realizing that it made strategic miscalculations in Bhutan.

I am wondering what kind of cartoon Puthukky Nair Kutty would draw to depict India's geopolitical locus in Bhutan right now. If Kutty were still alive, I surmise, he would draw an Indian man wearing an Indian flag-coloured outfit with his knees offering a receptacle (on which the official documents that hand over the power to manage the security and foreign affairs of Bhutan is placed) to a Chinese man wearing a Chinese flag-coloured outfit and says, "Mr China, could you please accept my offer to you?"

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# Indo-US-Afghan collusion hinders peace

Asif Haroon Raja

## **Pakistan's strained relations with India-Afghanistan**

Pakistan's bilateral relations with its eastern and western neighbors severely deteriorated after Narendra Modi led BJP took over power in June 2014. From 2015 onwards the two arch rivals have been engaged in low intensity war. The Line of Control and Working Boundary in Kashmir has been kept bloody and on the boil by India. Terrorism in Baluchistan and FATA that had been controlled has been reinvigorated by India. She is resorting to covert war, water terrorism and hybrid war in collusion with Afghanistan. Nefarious activities of the duo are fully backed by USA and Israel.

## **India-Afghanistan motivated blame game**

Indian Prime Minister Modi used anti-Pakistan slogans for rallying the support of radicalized Hindus during the last state elections in India and later for national elections. He blamed Pakistan to hide his internal weaknesses and socio-economic failures. Ashraf Ghani-Abdullah Unity Government in Kabul has also constantly blamed Pakistan to camouflage its failure of establishing its writ in eastern and southern Afghanistan.

Despite the baseless allegations, the Pakistani ruling elite continues with its efforts to engage both the neighbors constructively for regional peace and prosperity and has considered the policy of appeasement as the best option to keep the two antagonists as well as USA in good humour. Though Islamabad did its best to engage constructively with both New Delhi and Kabul, yet it failed due to Modi's domestic politics priorities and President Ghani's internal political and security challenges.

## **RAW-NDS collusion**

The bloody terrorist attacks in Lahore in February 2017 followed by another attack on a Sufi shrine in Sindh sponsored by RAW-NDS forced Pakistan to launch Operation Raddul Fasaad to complement Operation Zarb-e-Azb to destroy the terrorist sanctuaries located on Afghanistan-Pakistan border as well as

sleeping cells in urban centres and to nab facilitators and handlers. In addition, Pakistan intensified its border management undertakings. The two main border crossings at Torkhum and Chaman were closed and border management improved to prevent infiltration.

In April 2017, Ehsanullah Ehsan, spokesperson of the Tehreek-e-Taliban's (TTP) splinter group Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, surrendered to Pakistan Army. He claimed that RAW and NDS were supporting terrorist groups by imparting training, and providing funds, weapons, equipment and intelligence to subvert the internal security of Pakistan. Pak Army is now fencing the entire length of western border much to the chagrin of USA, India, Afghanistan, the three states sponsoring terrorism in Pakistan. Concurrently, Islamabad is endeavouring to convince the Taliban to hold talks with Unity regime in Kabul.

### **BJP's hate-filled politics**

The biggest problem while dealing with New Delhi is the prevalent xenophobic domestic Indian political atmosphere. From 2017 till May 2019 elections, Premier Modi used warmongering as a tactic for mustering the support of radicalized hawkish Hindu voters and to win the elections comprehensively. With this objective, his party adopted a vicious policy against the Indian Muslims.

The BJP's hate-filled politics against the minorities, particularly the Muslims, due to which lynching of Muslims and low-caste Dalits for eating beef and slaughtering and trading in cattle had risen, adding to the anxiety of India's 170-million-strong Muslim population, didn't dent BJP vote bank or the popularity of Modi among near 80% Hindus. Under Modi, several cities with names rooted in India's Islamic Mughal past have been re-named, while some school textbooks have been changed to downplay Muslims' contributions to India. Trend of marrying Muslims girls by Hindus is on the increase and so is process of Hinduisation.

### **Kashmir imbroglio**

Kashmir is the bleeding wound of India where its 750,000 are pinned down since 1990. After the martyrdom of Burhan Wani in July 2016, Indian security forces and the RSS gangs unleashed a reign of terror and employed all sorts of horridly cruel tools including pellet guns to crush the movement. The innocent Kashmiris have been persistently suffering from the brutality of the Indian armed forces.

After Pulwama incident, level of atrocities has increased. Despite the worst type of state terrorism and human rights abuses, the Indian civilian and military law enforcement agencies have failed to restore the writ of the state in the Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK). Demoralization among the lower ranks has set in as was seen in 2004-05 and cases of suicides are multiplying.

Modi has made plans to rob IOK of its special status by revoking the Article 370. He also has devious plans up his sleeves to change the demography of IOK by settling Hindu Pundits, Indian retired officers and soldiers and Kashmiri refugees; and also to carry out ethnic cleansing of the Kashmiri youth or force them to leave IOK.

### **Kulbushan discomfords India**

Another major irritant which has greatly upset India is the arrest of Indian Naval Officer, Commander Kulbushan Sudhir Jadhav on March 3, 2016 in Baluchistan. He had been working for RAW at Chahbahar since 2003. Death sentence awarded to him by the military court in 2017 has further disturbed RAW and Indian hawks. Kulbushan admitted that he was involved in terrorism and other subversive activities and had established big networks in Baluchistan and Karachi. Indians have been seeking his release but Pakistan has not relented. This could be one reason of India's constant browbeating tactics and refusing to talk with Pakistan.

### **Hindutva**

The other reason is BJP's penchant for Hindutva. The resumption of a dialogue between New Delhi and Islamabad is not acceptable to the preachers and followers of Hindutva.

### **India's leniency toward Hindu terror groups**

While India has all along accused Pakistan of abetting terrorism without providing a shred of evidence and has constantly pressed Pakistan to punish the proscribed groups like Jaish-e-Muhammad, Lashkar-e Taiba and Jamaat ud Dawa, allegedly involved in terrorism in India and IOK and has succeeded in blacklisting them, India has always been lenient towards its own Hindu terrorists groups which over 1000.

On June 13, the Bombay High Court granted bail to the accused – Dhan Singh, Lokesh Sharma, Manohar Narwaria and Rajendra Chaudhary, who were in prison since 2013. Four Hindu suspects, who were prime accused in the 2006 terror bombing case that killed 37 people in a Muslim town of Malegaon.

The serial bomb blasts near a mosque had also injured 100 people. Local police initially arrested nine Muslims, accusing them of engineering blasts. But, when the probe was shifted to the National Investigation Agency (NIA), it concluded that the blasts were carried out by the Hindu extremists.

In connection with another terror attack in Bhopal in 2008, Sadhvi Pragya Singh Thakur and former Lt Col Srikanth Purohit were arrested in connection with the incident. Both of them are out on the bail. Thakur recently won parliamentary elections; she contested on the ruling BJP ticket, from Bhopal.

Swami Aseemanand (real name Naba Kumar), linked to RSS is an ideological mentor of BJP. He and three other co-accuseds Lokesh Sharma, Kamal Chauhan and Rajinder Chaudhary were blamed for three terror attacks. All four who had confessed their crimes were acquitted early this year by an anti-terror court in Haryana in the February 18, 2007 bombing of the Samjhota Express that left 86 people dead, mostly Pakistanis. Last year Aseemanand was among five men acquitted in the 2007 blast in Hyderabad's Mecca Masjid. In 2017, he was acquitted in the Ajmer Dargah blast case. An Indian court has now ordered release of four Hindu suspects, who were prime accused in the 2006 terror bombing case in Malegaon.

It has now been amply proved that the much publicized Mumbai attacks on November 26, 2008 was an in-house affair. Till today, India has consistently blamed Pakistan and has refused to open dialogue until and unless Pakistan agrees to keep terrorism over the issue of Kashmir.

Books written on this subject – namely ‘Betrayal of India’ by Elias Davidson, ‘The Attack on Mumbai’ by Vir Sanghvi, and ‘The Siege’ by Cathy Scott-Clark & Adrien Levy have laid bare the truth that it was a joint venture of RAW-Mossad and CIA to discredit Pak Army and Kashmiri movement and to get Pakistan declared a terrorist state. And yet India has never been questioned. Same is the case with false flag operation in Udhampur, Pathankot, Uri and Pulwama, all engineered to hide the cruelties of India in IOK and to dub the liberation movement in Kashmir as Islamic radicalism duly supported by Pakistan.

## **Pakistan has ample proofs**

With Kulbushan and Ehsanullah have divulged the entire racket of RAW-NDS against Pakistan with its tentacles spread from Iran, Pakistan's coastal belt to Afghanistan, what more proof is needed to prove that the duo backed by USA are the real source of instability in Af-Pak region and much-maligned Pakistan is the victim of terrorism.

## **India's jingoism**

The biggest problem while dealing with New Delhi is the prevalent jingoistic domestic Indian political atmosphere. Premier Modi, during the last year state elections campaign, used warmongering as a tactic for mustering the support of radicalized hawkish Hindu voters. The BJP secured a majority in the important state elections and constituted its governments. The campaign, however, amplified anti-Pakistan feelings in the Indian society.

## **BJP's landslide victory**

Modi led BJP surprised the world by bagging 303 votes in the Lower House of 543. The BJP's main rival Congress, couldn't win a single seat in 13 states and five union territories. Congress managed to secure 52 seats only which was an 8-seat improvement over last elections. Rahul Gandhi – the great-grandson, grandson and son of three premiers, even lost his own seat in Amethi, a family bastion but managed to win a seat in Kerala. Congress BJP's landslide win has crushed the Gandhi dynasty's comeback hopes. Rahul tamely threw in his towel after the election results were announced.

## **Modi's victory attributable to Pakistan bashing**

Modi achieved a landslide victory because of his Pakistan rhetoric, aggressive policies against Indian Muslims and Kashmiri Muslims, and lies and false promises and not on performance. He won despite being likened to Hitler, a compulsive liar and a "gutter insect", alleged corruption in a Rafael defence deal, the desperate plight of farmers, the lacklustre economy and humiliations suffered at the hands of Pakistan in September 2016 on account of fake surgical strike, and then in the aftermath of stage-managed Pulwama attack in February 2019. In fact, killings of over 40 soldiers in Pulwama on February 14 incensed the Hindus, escalated Hindu extremism and further bolstered BJP's votes.

The air intrusion in Balakot on February 27 was a complete fiasco since the Mirage 2000s with Israel-made Spyke missiles could uproot few pine trees only, but Modi helped by Indian media claimed it as a roaring success, falsely claiming destruction of Jaish-e-Muhammad camp and killing over 300 militants. He roared, “Wherever the terror groups and perpetrators may hide, our security forces will flush them out and punish them. Every drop of blood of our slain soldiers shall be avenged.”

This high-sounding rhetoric made the Indian public ecstatic and hysterical. Exploiting their sentiments, Modi named himself as the Chowkidar (Watchman) and the only who can defend India and make it great.

### **Indo-Afghan hostility hinders peace**

Surely, the continuity of such collusive nefarious activities of NDS-RAW would not be tolerable for the sake of dialogue process. Although the Afghan Unity Government constantly levels baseless allegations against Pakistan to camouflage its own failure, yet Islamabad is determined to engage Kabul for cordial bilateral relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

India has inflicted tens of thousands of cuts on the body of Pakistan and has openly expressed her desire to break Pakistan into four parts, and yet Pakistani leadership is bending over backwards to resume dialogue with India which have been wholly unproductive due to Indian intransigence and deep-rooted hatred.

### **Will Modi fulfil his promises?**

Now that Modi is firmly in the saddle, will he fulfil his unaccomplished promises? Will he be able to make India Great as claimed by him? Will he be able to tackle the economy and unemployment which has surged up particularly among the women? Will he create higher number of jobs needed? Can he address wealth inequalities? Agriculture industry is also in an awful state. Drought, low prices of agriculture products and heavy debts has driven thousands of farmers to commit suicide. The country’s waterways are filthy and India is home to 22 of the world’s 30 most polluted cities. Open latrines and millions sleeping on footpaths are other unresolved problems. Religious minorities – including India’s 170 million Muslims – are terrified and feeling insecure.

Will he continue persecuting the minorities or balm their wounds to integrate the heterogeneous society which is an ethnic museum? Will he exploit his brute

majority to revoke Article 370 and make IOK integral part of India, or allow the Kashmiris their right of self-termination? Will he continue to tread on the beaten path of jingoism, whipping up war hysteria and keeping the people mesmerized in a mythical world in pursuit of his mission to make Pakistan a compliant state, and become a world power, or else adopt a saner approach and adopt a reconciliatory approach in the overall interest of South Asia?

It is most unfortunate that the US-Israel-Afghan-India nexus is a collection of spoilers who have chosen the path of hostility, which is bound to lead to catastrophic results. Sudden rise in temperature in the Persian Gulf stoked by USA has added to the gravity of the situation. Conversely, Russia-China-Central Asian Republics-Pakistan and ASEAN vie for co-existence, peace and collective prosperity and are placing their hopes in BRI and CPEC.

Afghanistan and Pakistan have suffered a great deal on account of wars imposed by outsiders in Afghanistan and making Pakistan a frontline state. Both earnestly need peace. No peace is possible in the region without the resolution of dispute in Kashmir and end of war in Afghanistan. Therefore, it's imperative that Russia, China, Turkey, Iran should play a constructive role in resolving the two issues.

Modi seem to have climbed down the high horse he was riding and has asked Pakistan to rebuild trust and develop enabling environment for progress in ties. This whiff of fresh air has come in response to two letters written by Imran Khan. He however, once again reiterated that for cooperative ties, it was important to build an environment free of terror, violence and hostility. Coming months will indicate the seriousness of Modi's apparent desire for re-engagement.

To conclude, the mistrust hinders constructive engagement. Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan need to appreciate the usefulness of the connectivity between the neighbors for the prosperity of their people. All three should disperse the clouds of distrust and hatred and build trust, bring in amity and cooperation. Enduring peace and stability in South Asia hinges on resolution of long pending dispute of Kashmir and end of war in Afghanistan.

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# The rot from within

M Hali

MUSLIM history is replete with examples where its enemies exploited persons from within the community to treacherously betray the nation and grant victory to the inimical forces. Mirza Muhammad Siraj-ud-Daulah commonly known as Nawab Siraj-ud-Daulah was the last independent Nawab of Bengal. The end of his reign marked the start of British East India Company rule over Bengal and later almost entire South Asia. Siraj succeeded his maternal grandfather, Alivardi Khan as the Nawab of Bengal in April 1756 at the age of 23. Betrayed by Mir Jafar, then Commander of Nawab's Army, Siraj lost the Battle of Plessey on 23 June 1757, almost a hundred years before the War of Independence. The forces of the East India Company under Robert Clive invaded, and the Administration of Bengal fell into the hands of the Company. Siraj-ud-Daulah was executed on 2 July 1757 by Mohammad Ali Beg under orders from Mir Meerun, son of Mir Jafar in the aptly named Namak Haram Deorhi as part of the agreement between Mir Jafar and the British East India Company.

Siraj-ud-Daulah's tomb can be found at Khushbagh, Murshidabad. It is marked with a simple but elegant one-storied mausoleum, surrounded by gardens. More importantly it tells the sordid tale of treachery by Mir Jafar, which has become a synonym of traitor. Then there is Tipu Sultan (20 November 1750 – 4 May 1799), who was the ruler of the Kingdom of Mysore. He was the eldest son of Sultan Hyder Ali of Mysore. Tipu Sultan introduced a number of administrative innovations during his rule, including his coinage, a new Mauludi lunisolar calendar, and a new land revenue system which initiated the growth of the Mysore silk industry. He expanded the iron-cased Mysorean rockets and commissioned the military manual Fathul Mujahdeen and is considered a pioneer in the use of rocket artillery. He deployed the rockets against advances of British forces and their allies during the Anglo-Mysore Wars, including the Battle of Pollilur and Siege of Seringapatam. He also embarked on an ambitious economic development program that established Mysore as a major economic power, with some of the world's highest real wages and living standards in the late 18th century.

Napoleon Bonaparte, the French Emperor and Commander-in-Chief, sought an alliance with Tipu Sultan. Historically it is noted that owing to the treachery of his Minister Mir Sadiq, the British broke through the city walls, and French military advisers told Tipu Sultan to escape via secret passages, but he replied, "Better to live one day as a tiger than a thousand years as a jackal". Tipu Sultan

died defending his capital on 4 May. Similarly, in an anti-state article published in Weekly “Friday Times” (8-14 March 2019) by Ayesha Ijaz Khan it has been surmised that India is not the only country that blames Pakistan for cross-border terrorism. Similar allegations have been made by the US, Afghanistan, and more recently, Iran. This should give Pakistan pause. She asks the ultimate question: Why does the world tilt towards India’s position more than ours? Perhaps it is time to address this rationally without playing the victim card. Sure, it could have something to do with the fact that India is a bigger economy and that the West is looking to India to contain China, but that alone does not explain it. There are other factors too. India’s narrative of terrorists trained in Pakistan attacking the Indian Parliament in 2001, Mumbai in 2008, an army camp in Uri and Pathankot Air Force base in 2016.

It may seem unfair that questions are not asked by global powers of India for all the state terrorism it perpetuates in Kashmir. It is easy to pin the war-mongering on a hysterical Indian media and Modi’s upcoming election. She sermonizes that if Pakistan wishes to bolster its image globally, it must dismantle terror networks. In order to do this, the state requires a clear vision and must understand that it needs as much support as it can get. It cannot, therefore, be hounding and disrespecting political opponents and simultaneously expect to make headway on this existential threat. She believes that the current govt is lucky that the opposition is mature. She downplays the peril arising from the “Dawn Leaks” and calls it a hoax. To add fuel to the fire, Ayesha claims that “It may seem unfair that questions are not asked by global powers of India for all the state terrorism it perpetuates in Kashmir. But here is a thought: does harbouring terrorists help Kashmir in any way?

It may harm India and its soldiers, but does it help Kashmiris? More importantly, has it helped Pakistanis?” And then there is the young Bilawal Bhutto, who in a bid to deflect attention from the corruption cases against his family, says that he doubted the actions of the government against leaders and workers of the banned organizations under the NAP. He claims: “I do not believe that you arrested them rather than you took them in your protective custody so that they are not hit by Indian aircraft,” he said, adding that how could he believe that the government had frozen accounts of leaders of banned organizations. Reiterating his demand to sack three federal ministers having alleged links with banned outfits, Bilawal warned the PTI government that it would be responsible for consequences if it does not stop blackmailing and using authoritarian tactics. If Pakistan has to move forward, it must stem the rot from within

*(Hali is a writer and a security analyst based in Karachi)*

# **Hindu Extremist Attacks on Minorities continue in India: US Report**

Abdus Sattar Ghazali

*The US State Department in its annual 2018 International Religious Freedom Report says Mob attacks by violent extremist Hindu groups against the minority communities, particularly Muslims, continued in India in 2018, amid rumours that victims had traded or killed cows for beef and the authorities often protected perpetrators from prosecution.*

The US report also said that some senior officials of the ruling BJP made inflammatory speeches against the minority communities.

The report said that as of November 2018, there were 18 such attacks, and eight people killed during the year. On June 22, two Uttar Pradesh police officers were charged with culpable homicide after Muslim cattle trader died of injuries sustained while being questioned in police custody, the report said.

Mandated by the Congress, the State Department in its voluminous report gives its assessment of the status of religious freedom in almost all the countries and territories of the world.

In the India section, it said that there were reports by nongovernmental organizations that the government sometimes failed to act on mob attacks on religious minorities, marginalized communities and critics of the government.

The report also said that the central and state governments and members of political parties took steps that affected Muslim practices and institutions.

The government continued its challenge in the Supreme Court to the minority status of Muslim educational institutions, which affords them independence in hiring and curriculum decisions, it said.

In its World Report covering 2018, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said the government failed to “prevent or credibly investigate” mob attacks on religious minorities, marginalized communities, and critics of the government. At the same time, according to HRW, some BJP officials publicly supported perpetrators of such crimes and made inflammatory speeches against minority communities, which encouraged further violence. According to HRW, mob violence against minority communities amid rumours that they traded or killed cows for beef,

especially Muslims, by extremist Hindu groups continued throughout the year. As of November, there had been 18 such attacks, and eight people killed during the year.

The US report pointed out that twenty-four of the 29 states apply partial to full restrictions on bovine slaughter. Penalties vary among states, and may vary based on whether the animal is a cow, calf, bull, or ox. The ban mostly affects Muslims and members of other Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. In the majority of the 24 states where bovine slaughter is banned, punishments include imprisonment for six months to two years and a fine of 1,000 to 10,000 rupees (\$14 to \$140). Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and Jammu and Kashmir penalize cow slaughter with imprisonment of two to 10 years. The law in Gujarat mandates a minimum 10-year sentence (the punishment for some counts of manslaughter) and a maximum sentence of life imprisonment (the punishment for premeditated murder of humans) for killing cows, selling beef, and illegally transporting cows or beef.

In February the first public display of “*ghar-wapsi*” (reconversion activities facilitated by Hindu organizations for those who had left Hinduism) in Kolkata took place when the organization Hindu Samhati featured 16 members of a Muslim family who were “reconverted to Hinduism” at a public rally. Hindu Samhati founder Tapan Ghosh said he had organized similar events previously for quite some time but decided to showcase the “reconverted” people in public as “the time was right.”

In its official newspaper, the Shiv Sena, a Hindu nationalist regional party, stated the country’s Muslim community had too many children and “needs a family planning policy.” The paper’s December 4 editorial said the policy was needed to “ensure stability in the country and maintain national security.” It added, “the population of Indian Muslims is proliferating at the speed of a bullet train”. Implementing family planning on them is the only solution.”

“Throughout the year representatives from the embassy and consulates general met government officials to discuss challenges faced by religious minorities, especially Christians and Muslims, incidents of cow vigilantism, the status of religious freedom in the country, and religiously motivated violence,” the US report on International Religious Freedom concluded.

### **Muslim minority under siege**

The US International Religious Freedom Report gave specific examples of religiously motivated killings, assaults, riots, discrimination, vandalism and actions restricting the right of Muslims:

“As of November 2018, there were 18 such attacks, and eight people killed during the year. On June 22, two Uttar Pradesh police officers were charged with culpable homicide after Muslim cattle trader died of injuries sustained while being questioned in police custody. In a separate incident, a court in Jharkhand sentenced 11 individuals, including a local BJP official, to life in prison for beating to death a Muslim, whom his killers believed to be trading in beef.

“On July 17, the Supreme Court said violence in the name of “cow vigilantism” was unacceptable and the onus of preventing such incidents lay with the states. Attacks on religious minorities included allegations of involvement of law enforcement personnel.

“On January 10, Jammu and Kashmir police arrested eight men, including four police personnel, in connection with the kidnapping, gang rape, and killing of an 8-year-old girl. The men allegedly kidnapped the victim, took her to a nearby temple, and raped and killed her in an effort to drive her nomadic Muslim community out of the area. In September Uttar Pradesh authorities suspended three police officers after videos surfaced of them abusing a Hindu woman in Meerut for reportedly consorting with a Muslim man. The central and state governments and members of political parties took steps that affected Muslim practices and institutions.

“The government continued its challenge in the Supreme Court to the minority status of Muslim educational institutions, which affords them independence in hiring and curriculum decisions. Proposals to rename Indian cities with Muslim provenance continued, most notably the renaming of Allahabad to Prayagraj. Activists said these proposals were designed to erase Muslim contributions to Indian history and had led to increased communal tensions.

“There were reports of religiously motivated killings, assaults, riots, discrimination, vandalism, and actions restricting the right of individuals to practice their religious beliefs and proselytize. According to Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) data presented in the lower house of parliament on February 6, communal incidents increased by 9 percent from 2015 to 2017, with 822 incidents resulting in 111 deaths and 2,384 injuries in 2017.

“Authorities often failed to prosecute perpetrators of “cow vigilante” attacks, which included killings, mob violence, and intimidation. On July 21, a group

attacked and killed Rakbar Khan, a Muslim dairy farmer from Haryana, while he was transporting two cows at night. In December (2017) an estimated 300 persons, angered by reports of cows being slaughtered in the area, set fire to the police station in Chigrawati and killed a police officer. An 18-year-old protester was also killed in the violence.

“A mob assaulted two Muslim men, killing one, in Madhya Pradesh’s Satna District on May 17, alleging they were slaughtering a bull. Police arrested four assailants and filed a complaint alleging cow slaughter against the injured survivor.

“In December the Shiv Sena Party published an editorial calling for government to curb the growth of the country’s Muslim population through such measures as compulsory family planning for Muslims. On September 28, the Supreme Court overturned a ban on females aged 10 to 50 years from entering the Hindu Sabarimala temple in Kerala, a move that, according to media, sparked political controversy across the country.....

“On September 18, media reported a village council in Haryana passed a decree urging Muslim residents to adopt Hindu names, refrain from such actions as growing beards or wearing traditional skullcaps, and avoid praying in public. The announcement reportedly came a month after police arrested Yamin Khokhar, a Muslim villager, whom local authorities accused of illegally slaughtering a calf. Subsequent media reports stated the village council denied it passed the decree....

“On June 11, Hyderabad police charged a member of the Telangana legislative assembly, T. Raja Singh of the BJP, for making hateful and derogatory remarks against Muslims and the Quran. The police arrested him on charges of promoting enmity between different groups. This was the 19th case filed against Singh. In a live Facebook video session, Singh allegedly demanded a ban on the Quran, stating that its verses called for killing Hindus.

“On February 7, BJP Member of Parliament Vinay Katiyar said Muslims had “no business” staying in India. Speaking to a media organization, Katiyar said Muslims should instead settle in Bangladesh and Pakistan since they were responsible for the partition of India....

“On July 8, Union Minister Jayant Sinha came under public scrutiny after embracing individuals convicted of killing a Muslim trader in Jharkhand in 2017. The eight men who met with Sinha were convicted of murder in the killing of Alimuddin Ansari, who they said was transporting beef. Social commentators

criticized Sinha, particularly for not speaking about the victim or about justice for his surviving family members. Following the public backlash, he issued statements condemning violence and vigilantism....

“State and local jurisdictions submitted 25 proposals to the MHA during the year to rename cities across India, mirroring a similar trend of renaming train stations, islands, and roads that previously had British or Islamic names. According to Asia News and *Reuters*, BJP leaders in Uttar Pradesh decided to rename some cities that “sounded too Islamic.” In October Uttar Pradesh changed the name of Allahabad to Prayagraj. In November authorities changed the name of the Faizabad District to Ayodhya, the place where Hindus believe Lord Ram was born. Activists said these proposals were designed to erase Muslim contributions to Indian history and had led to increased communal tensions....

### **Attacks on Christian minority**

The US International Religious Freedom Report gave specific examples of attacks on Christian minority.

“According to the website Asia News and Catholic media outlet Crux, four men attacked a Catholic priest, Vineet Vincent Pereira, who was conducting a prayer service in Ghohana, Uttar Pradesh on November 14. The four attackers were allegedly members of a Hindu group trying to “reconvert” Hindus who had earlier changed their religious beliefs. After the attack, police took Pereira into protective custody, but charged him the next day with rioting and unlawful assembly. The attackers were not charged.

“On December 15, police in Assam arrested two men who vandalized a Catholic church and a grotto in the village of Chapatoli. Police stated they believed the two to be responsible for the desecration of the church’s crucifix and for toppling a statue.

“According to NGO sources, authorities reportedly denied three U.S. citizens entry under non-missionary visas due to concerns they intended to engage in missionary activity, although the U.S. citizens denied that this was their intention.

“On April 21, Bharat Singh, a BJP Member of Parliament from Uttar Pradesh, said, “Christian missionaries are a threat to the unity and integrity” of the country and the opposition Congress Party is “controlled by them [Christian missionaries].” The president of the GCIC, citing a survey by news channel NDTV, stated that hate speech by BJP representatives had increased by 490 percent since 2014.

“In August Catholic bishops in Jharkhand sent a memorandum to the state governor in response to perceived harassment and intense scrutiny of Christian organizations by government agencies after allegations emerged regarding a baby-selling scandal in a home for unwed mothers run by the Missionaries of Charity (MOC) in Ranchi. Church leaders said the crackdown on the MOC by the Jharkhand government was a ploy to discredit the organization as part of the state government’s anti-Christian agenda....

“According to Asia News, on December 16 in Tamil Nadu, a crowd of approximately 150 individuals attacked a group of 16 Christians singing Christmas carols....

“ADFI reported members of Hindu nationalist groups attacked Christian leaders and their ministries, mainly in rural communities, under the pretext the Christians were practicing forced conversions, and 15 churches were closed due to concerns about ensuring the security of the churches. The government was working to reopen the churches at year’s end. ADFI also stated a pastor was assaulted in Fatehpur while conducting a Sunday service and a mob protested the singing of Christmas carols by members of 35 different churches that came together in a Catholic church in Varanasi.

“The Religious Liberty Commission of the Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI-RLC) documented 325 cases of violence and attacks against Christians and churches during the year, compared with 351 in 2017 and 247 in 2016. Its 2018 report tracked incidents in which Christians were targeted for violence, intimidation, or harassment, and noted over 40 percent of the documented incidents occurred in Uttar Pradesh, with a significant rise between September and December. Churches were allegedly targeted by Hindu nationalist groups claiming “conversions through force or fraud” resulting in disrupted worship services, harassment of pastors and worshippers, and the arrest or detention of pastors and lay Christians. Twelve percent of the incidents were reported in Tamil Nadu.

“The NGO Prosecution Relief reported 477 incidents of violence against Christians in its 2018 annual report, compared with 440 in 2017. The organization also stated that the state of religious affairs was worsening in the country, as perpetrators of religious violence were often not prosecuted. The most common form of persecution was “threats, harassment, and intimidation.” According to the NGO, such incidents increased by 118 percent over 2017.....

“On June 3, Archbishop of Goa and Daman Filipe Neri Ferrao in his annual pastoral letter called upon Catholics to fight social injustice and the trend of “mono-culturalism,” which attempted to dictate how Indians “eat, dress, live, and even worship.” In response, Surendra Jain, a leader of the Hindu nationalist group Vishwa Hindu Parishad, said the country’s Christian churches “conspire with the Vatican to destabilize the current elected government” of the BJP. According to Asia News, “Jain further said the Vatican not only denigrates the Hindus all over the world but also India as a nation and the Indian churches are acting as puppets in their [i.e., the Vatican’s] hands.” Jain also criticized the section of the letter in which Ferrao wrote of “the trampling of human rights in India.”.....

“Several acts of vandalism targeting Christian sites and symbols occurred during the year. In March a sculpture of the Virgin Mary was found headless in a grotto dedicated to her in a church in Aligondo, Odisha. Vandals attacked another Catholic church in Odisha the night before Easter Sunday, setting fire to a room storing sacred objects. On April 10, a crowd estimated at approximately 500 persons threw stones at a Christian retreat center in Neyyattinkara in Kerala, shattering windows and entrance doors. On the night of March 31, unknown individuals in Punnamoodu, Alappuzha District vandalized an Orthodox Church hall, breaking windows and kicking down a door.

“Media reported on March 11 that a Pentecostal church in Madurai, Tamil Nadu, was vandalized and copies of the Bible were burned, allegedly by members of a Hindu group. According to the GCIC, multiple churches in the state of Tamil Nadu experienced acts of vandalism during the year.

### **Jewish community minority given status**

On July 6 2018, Gujarat became the third state, along with Maharashtra and West Bengal, to grant the Jewish community minority status, providing members with “benefits of welfare schemes formulated for religious minority communities within the jurisdiction” of the state.

Interestingly, in March a publisher included Adolf Hitler in a children’s book on world leaders. Annushu Juneja, a publishing manager for the B. Jain Publishing Group, said Hitler was featured because “his leadership skills and speeches influenced masses.” Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, said in a statement, “Adolf Hitler? This description would bring tears of joy to the Nazis and their racist neo-Nazi heirs.” The publisher subsequently discontinued sales of the book.

**Demographics:** India has 1.3 billion populations as per July 2018 estimate. According to the 2011 national census, the most recent year for which disaggregated figures are available, Hindus constitute 79.8 per cent of the population, Muslims 14.2 per cent, Christians 2.3 per cent and Sikhs 1.7 per cent. Groups that together constitute less than one per cent of the population include Buddhists, Jains, Zoroastrians (Parsis), Jews, and Baha'is.

The constitution states any reference to Hindus in law is to be construed as containing a reference to followers of Sikhism, Jainism, and Buddhism, meaning they are subject to laws regarding Hindus, such as the Hindu Marriage Act. Subsequent legislation continues to use the word Hindu as blanket categories that includes Sikhs, Buddhists, Baha'i, and Jains, but clarifies these are separate religions whose followers are included under the legislation.

According to the Supreme Court, converting from Hinduism to another religion ordinarily “operates as an expulsion from the caste” since caste is a structure affiliated with Hindu society. Societal definitions of caste affiliation are determinative of a person’s eligibility for government benefits.

Federal law provides minority community status to six religious groups: Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Parsis, Jains, and Buddhists.

**Bharatiya Janata Party:** Not surprisingly, the Bharatiya Janata Party on Saturday dismissed the US official report saying it shows a clear bias against the Narendra Modi government.

“The basic presumption in this report that there is some grand design behind anti-minority violence is simply false,” BJP media head and Rajya Sabha MP Anil Baluni was quoted by the PTI as saying. “On the contrary, in most of such cases, these instances are carried out as a result of local disputes and by [people with] criminal mindsets,” Baluni claimed adding that Modi and other leaders have always deplored violence against minorities and other weaker sections of the society.

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# Front Line Defenders: Global Analysis 2018

Representative GLD

*19 Indian human rights defenders killed in 2018.*

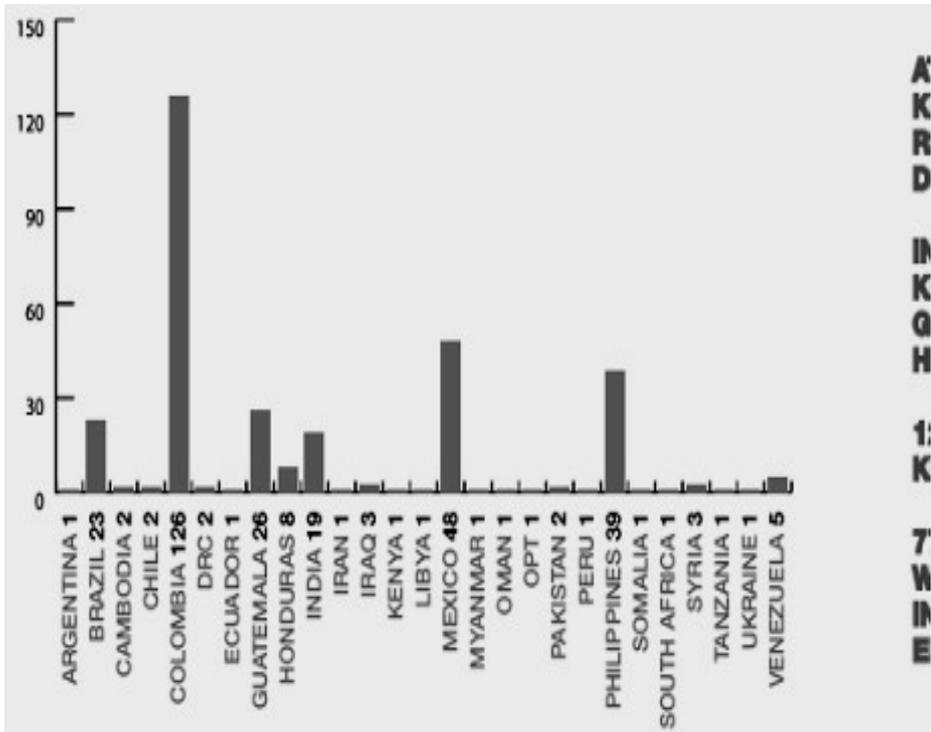
A new report, “Front Line Defenders Global Analysis 2018”, has noted that as many as 19 human rights defenders (HRDs) were killed across India last year, which is the sixth highest among a group of 28 countries for which it has made an assessment. The highest number of HRDs killed was in Colombia, 126, followed by Mexico 48, Philippines 39, Guatemala 26, Brazil 23, and India 19. Brought out by Front Line: International Foundation for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a human rights organization based in Dublin, Ireland, and founded in 2001 with the specific aim of protecting HRDs at risk, it has an EU Office in Brussels, and regionally-based field staff in the Americas, Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

The names of HRDs who were killed last year in India, mentioned in the report, are: Sandeep Sharma, Poipynhun Majaw, Nanjibhai Sondarva, Shujaat Bukhari, Valmiki Yadav, Ashish Dahiya, Suresh Oraon, Jayant Kumar, Ajit Maneshwar Naik, Kedar Singh Jindan, Snowlin Vinista, P Tamilarasan, N Jayaraman, Gladston Maniraj, B Sailu, Rajendra Prasad Singh, Manoj Tripathi and Amit Topno.

Providing a case study of how police is being used in India to brand HRDs as ‘Urban Naxals’ to justify their arrests, the report especially takes strong exception to the manner in which in June and August 2018, Indian police arrested 10 prominent HRDs “under the regressive Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) in a series of coordinated raids and arrests across the country.”

It says, “Several other activists had their offices and homes raided and documents, computers and equipment confiscated in simultaneous raids. On 6 June, police arrested HRDs Sudhir Dhawale, Rona Wilson, Mahesh Raut, Prof. Shoma Sen, and advocate Surendra Gadling, all of whom remained in jail at year end.”

It adds, “On 28 August, police carried out raids during which they arrested five more defenders: lawyers Sudha Bhardwaj and Arun Ferreira, academic and writer Vernon Gonsalves, poet Varavara Rao and journalist Gautam Navlakha. Apart from Gautam Navlakha, whose arrest order was quashed by the Delhi High Court, all others continue to be detained under police interrogation.” The report notes, “The police have branded the HRDs as ‘urban Naxals’ and falsely claim that those arrested were involved in inciting the violence that broke out on 1 January during the commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the battle of Bhima Koregan. Authorities have sought to draw a false connection between the HRDs’ work, especially on the rights of the Dalit and Adivasi communities, and Maoist rebels.”



*Number of human rights defenders killed in different countries*

It continues, “The police, through their media statements and false documents, have also attempted to implicate other Dalit and Adivasi rights defenders and human rights lawyers in working with the Maoists or inciting violence. The raids

and arrests were widely condemned as unlawful, baseless and as a clear attempt to silence the HRDs.”

The report comments, “In a system where the process is also punishment, the arbitrary detention and judicial persecution of HRDs without bail is a clear violation of their rights and a deliberate attempt to suppress their peaceful activism. Bail applications have stalled before courts due to the police failure to file a charge sheet within the stipulated time. The conduct of the police has created an environment that is hostile to the work of HRDs; especially those implicated in this case, and have severely compromised their security and safety in India.”

Coming to Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) in India, the report notes that, no doubt, “the long-term marginalisation of women and the enduring patriarchal structures which perpetuate these trends were challenged by the #Me-too movement, which gained ground in 2018 most notably in Asia, where it started making an impact in India.”

It adds, “A rush of allegations about sexual misconduct by prominent men in India in October pierced the protective bubble of celebrity and political worlds which had ensured that most accusations had previously remained unspoken or had been ignored, with the accusers often being attacked.” However, report regrets, serious concerns about the treatment of WHRDs remain in the country. It says, “In India regressive laws on criminal defamation are currently being used to silence and intimidate women campaigners who have spoken out on their own cases and on behalf of others. The level of social and political sanction afforded to powerful men has created an environment that is fundamentally hostile to women’s voices.”

***Global Analysis 2018**, the annual Front Line Defenders Global Analysis, details the physical assaults, defamation campaigns, digital security threats, judicial harassment, and gendered attacks faced by HRDs and women human rights defenders (WHRDs). December 2018 marked the 20th Anniversary of the HRD Declaration and the 70th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but HRDs around the world continue to face lethal threats from state, non-state, and corporate actors in their peaceful struggles for rights.*

## **Human Rights Watch Holds Egypt Govt Responsible for Morsi's Death**

**CAIRO** – A human rights group says the Egyptian government bears responsibility for the death of former Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi, amid pressing international demands for a fair and transparent investigation into the circumstances surrounding his final hours.

According to authorities, the first democratically elected president in Egypt's modern history died on Monday after collapsing in a court in Cairo while on trial on espionage charges. The Egyptian public prosecutor said a medical report showed no apparent recent injuries on Morsi's body.

The 67-year-old, who had been behind bars for nearly six years after his overthrow in a military coup in 2013, had a long history of health issues, including suffering from diabetes, as well as liver and kidney disease.

Rights groups and international observers had long decried the medical neglect Morsi was suffering during his "harsh" imprisonment, including years of solitary confinement.

"The government of Egypt today bears responsibility for his death, given their failure to provide him with adequate medical care or basic prisoner rights," Human Rights Watch (HRW) said in a statement to Al Jazeera.

"He's been in prison and treated worse than the already terrible conditions for Egypt's prisoners," Sarah Leah Whitson, executive director of the HRW's Middle East and North Africa division, told Al Jazeera, decrying Morsi's "terrible but entirely predictable" death.

"The Egyptian government has known very clearly about his declining medical state. He had lost a great deal of weight; he had fainted in court a number of times and was being kept in almost around-the-clock solitary confinement."

HRW's statement echoed a report released in March 2018 by a panel of British members of parliament and lawyers, which warned that the lack of medical treatment could result in Morsi's "premature death".

“Our conclusions are stark,” Crispin Blunt, chairman of the Independent Detention Review Panel, said at the time.

“The denial of basic medical treatment to which he is entitled could lead to his premature death,” he added.

“The whole overseeing chain of command up to the current president would have responsibility for this.”

The members of the panel were denied access by Egyptian authorities to visit Morsi, and relied on testimonies, witness statements, NGO reports and independently submitted evidence.

They said that Morsi was being kept in solitary confinement for 23 hours a day, which would be classified as torture under UN guidelines.

“He has been held under conditions that we found on the balance of probability was actually so bad – in terms of how degrading they were and how tough they were for him – that they could amount to torture,” Blunt told Al Jazeera on Monday.

“Torture is a crime of universal jurisdiction. And we found that the responsibility for that would sit all the way up the Egyptian chain of command,” he added. “So, if they had looked after him since our report, then it would be in Egypt’s own interest to establish [an independent inquiry].”

Also on Monday, Amnesty International urged the Egyptian authorities “to conduct an impartial, thorough and transparent investigation into the circumstances of Morsi’s death, including his solitary confinement and isolation from the outside world”

It also called for a probe into the medical care Morsi was receiving, and for anyone found responsible for mistreatment to be held accountable.

### **‘Unlawful isolation’**

The calls came two years after the HRW reported that Egyptian authorities had unlawfully isolated Morsi, preventing him from contacting or receiving visits from his family and lawyers since the military coup in 2013.

On June 4, 2017, Egyptian authorities allowed Morsi to receive visits from his family and lawyer for only the second time in nearly four years, according to the HRW.

These conditions undermined Morsi's right "to mount a legal challenge to his detention and a defence against the many prosecutions filed against him" and may have contributed to a decline in his health, HRW noted.

"Morsi's treatment is a window into the appalling conditions suffered by thousands of political detainees in Egypt," Joe Stork, HRW's deputy director of Middle East and North Africa, said at the time.

According to the report, during the first week of June in 2017, Morsi fainted twice and experienced a diabetic coma.

A relative of Morsi told HRW in 2015 that a prison nurse or doctor usually checks the former president's blood pressure and sugar level every few days but provided no other healthcare.

The relative said the authorities had never allowed the family to deliver any food or medicine – as most relatives of prisoners do to supplement the often dangerously meagre provisions in Egyptian prisons – and that Morsi had been buying his own insulin using money deposited by his family.

The authorities had also denied Morsi any access to newspapers, television and phone calls, the relative added.

In October 2018, Morsi's son, Abdullah, was arrested days after he told The Associated Press news agency in an interview that his father's health had deteriorated due to prison conditions and that the family was rarely allowed to visit.

Abdullah said he was seeking more visitation rights and better healthcare for his ailing father.

## **Mamata determined to rid West Bengal of the toxin of Hindutva**

Subir Bhaumik,

*As the BJO seeks to break Mamata Benerjee's support base by engineering defections, the feisty grassroots leader is preparing for a long and bitter struggle to face the Hindutva challenge*

Anti-saffron intellectuals are planning to launch a citizens' movement to curb the "poison of divisive religious politics" in West Bengal in the backdrop of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's description of "Hindutva" as being "alien to Bengali culture."

Analysts say that the BJP's threat to wrest Bengal in the forthcoming State Assembly polls, after their Lok Sabha stunning performance, may lead to the growth of an aggressive brand of pan-Hinduistic politics alien to the secular humanism of Bengal.

"It is unfortunate that Bengal's law and order situation was described as worse than Kashmir by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Mamata will now fight Hindutva with *Bangaliana* (Bengaliness)," said political commentator Dipankar Dey.

Harvard Professor Sugata Bose, who was a Trinamool Congress MP in the previous Lok Sabha, has already proposed the formation of an apolitical secular and liberal citizens' forum.

"This kind of forum, rooted in Bengal's great liberal and secular intellectual and political tradition, should take the lead in curbing the pernicious influence of majoritarian religion-driven politics," Sugato Bose told media-persons.

Bose said the movement against Hindutva should be driven by the cultural inspiration of Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam and the political legacy of Deshabandhu Chittaranjan Das and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose.

Both Das and Bose broke away from the Congress and formed their own parties.

Sugato Bose said that the citizen's movement should not suffer from the limitations of party politics and should bring together all citizens who oppose the politics of religious majoritarianism.

“And it should be led by the secular, liberal Bengali intelligentsia who enjoy the respect of the people,” Bose said.

The History Professor said he has already discussed the dangers of the intrusion of saffron politics in Bengal with Nobel laureate Amartya Sen.

“He is very concerned,” Bose said.

The Harvard Professor is a great grandson of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, as is his cousin, Chandra Bose, who joined the BJP and contested the Lok Sabha polls.

Without referring to his cousin, Sugato Bose said Netaji's politics was totally secular which is evident from the way he organised the Azad Hind Fauj with its common *langars* (community kitchens which cut across caste and religious distinctions).

“So, there is no way one should confuse Netaji with Hindutva. We all know what he stood for,” Sugato Bose said.

He called for reforms within the Trinamool Congress if it were to uphold West Bengal's secular political traditions, flagging the need to get rid of ‘opportunists and bad elements’.

## **Two Bahinis**

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has called for setting up two cadre organizations to counter the RSS, which, she feels, played a major role in the BJP's better than expected poll performance this summer.

She told media persons that the male organization will be called *Jai Hind Bahini* and the women's group will be called *Banga Lallona Bahini*.

“We will counter RSS and BJP with our culture. We will educate our people about the dangers of divisive religious politics,” Mamata Banerjee said.

“Netaji gave us the Jai Hind slogan and we will stick to it.”

Analysts see this as a belated effort to set up a dedicated, apparently apolitical cadre that can counter Hindutva in the cultural space.

“Bengali cultural traditions run very deep. Our Muslim brothers fought Pakistan with Tagore and Nazrul on their lips in 1971. It is time we did the same here now,” said singer Suchetona Majumder, a specialist in Rabindra Sangeet or Tagore’s songs.

“Tagore is not only about songs and dances; he gave us a world view. That is why RSS wants to remove him from the school syllabus,” she told *South Asian Monitor*.

Bengal’s liberal and secular intelligentsia largely supported the Left until many of them shifted allegiance to Mamata’s Trinamool which displayed a more pronounced Bengali ethos.

Bengal’s leading writer Sunil Ganguly, who was close to former Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, had even refused to a high tea invitation from late Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in 2002 for “the politics he represents”.

Ganguly is no more, but he remains a popular author in both Bangladesh and West Bengal.

Ever since the stunning results of the Lok Sabha polls, Mamata Banerjee has been describing the BJP’s Hindutva politics as “alien to Bengal.”

“Bengalis are a divided people and many of them seem to be having memories of partition-time violence,” says political commentator Sukhoranjan Dasgupta. “We don’t want divisive religious politics again,” he asserted.

“Our culture is syncretism and partition was never finality in Bengal, at least in our consciousness,” says novelist Samaras Majumder.

“Even Hindutva icon Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee joined the Muslim League ministry of Fazlul Huq in the forties” Dasgupta recalled.

On the day the BJP was getting seat after seat in West Bengal, leading poet Shankhya Ghosh told Bangladesh’s leading TV channel ATN: “Bangladesh is in my heart, that is where my roots are.”

The shrill anti-Bangladesh rhetoric of the BJP and threats to implement the National Register of Citizens or NRC in West Bengal has not gone down well with many.

That it has led to the exclusion of nearly four million Bengalis, more Hindus than Muslims, in Assam, is something Mamata Banerjee seems destined to play up as she prepares to resist ‘any imposition of NRC’ on West Bengal.

As the BJP seeks to break Mamata Banerjee’s support base by engineering defections, the feisty grassroots leader is preparing for a long and bitter struggle to face the Hindutva challenge.

“We will fight them in the streets,” she declared.

BJP supporter and top model Payel Rohtagi recently described Ram Mohan Roy, the father of Bengal renaissance, as a “British stooge”.

This has created a furore in Bengal and there are fears that the Hindutva brigade is systematically seeking to undermine Bengal’s social modernity and the renaissance which it saw.

As Modi was being sworn-in, Mamata was challenging saffron supporters chanting *Jai Shri Ram* at the approach of her convoy in the industrial belt, north of Calcutta.

“If I am alive, I will see how far you go. Bengal will be ours,” shouted Banerjee, alluding to the State Assembly polls barely two years from now.

“We are for Ram Mohan, not Ram,” said a Facebook post on Waalbengal. “Our tradition upholds reason, not mythology and religious hate built on it.”

*Subir Bhaumik, a senior Fellow with Indian think-tank, Centre for Studies in International Relations & Development (CSIRD), is a former BBC correspondent and author.*

# The rise of Islamophobia

Siraj M. Shawa

The horrifying incident of 9/11 led to catastrophic consequences for Muslims around the world. It metamorphosed their lives for the years to come. Thereafter men sporting beards were perceived as threats. In certain instances panic broke out and flights were delayed until the fellow passengers had established their identity and hence had been convinced of their innocence. They were generally taunted, ridiculed, and judged as terrorists in the United States and most of other western countries. Women with scarves tied over their heads were made mockery of on the streets of New York, Washington, and other cities. Spectacles pertaining to unwinding of their shawls by racist elements were recorded on cameras. Administrations failed to control such anti-Islamic sentiments which are now getting stronger and more diffuse with time.

On the very next day pursuant to 9/11 “war on terrorism” was declared by the United States without any careful consideration. The then POTUS Bush while giving a speech to the nation said, “The United States of America will use all our resources to conquer this enemy. We will rally the world. We will be patient. We will be focused, and we will be steadfast in our determination. This battle will take time and resolve, but make no mistake about it, we will win.” The fact is they have been neither patient nor focused. Their determination is laid bare and it is proved now this war can never be won.

First Afghanistan and then Iraq fell into ruins due to unwarranted aggressions. Ill-thought policies of the White House and 10 Downing Street have made a terrible mess of the Middle East. A clear bias against Muslims is manifested in their strategies and actions.

When people, predominantly Arab Muslims, had to leave their homes and countries due to wars begun by the West, their immigration was seen as a stealth invasion of Europe and America. Those who made it beyond their frontiers are being treated disgracefully while time and again a vast majority is returned from their sealed borders. Far-right political parties have gained popularity and slogans like “Protect Europe from Islam” have been raised. Islamophobia industry was developed around the year 2009 when some people in the US came on roads, marched, and protested while denouncing Islam and Sharia. Mainstream media, social media, and internet were used to spread misinformation and generate hysteria. Gradually the movement gained strength.

Mosques were attacked and thrown bombs at. Even some extremists called for setting a mosque on fire during the prayers time while putting chains on the exit. Just after the Christchurch savagery when a terrorist carried out a mass shooting in the Al Noor mosque, two tragic events took place in Europe. In France someone smeared the walls of an under construction mosque with the blood of a pig (an animal considered impure in Islam) with its severed head kept at the main entrance. While five mosques in Birmingham were vandalized, their windows were smashed and walls rendered damaged by unknown people.

According to Al Jazeera, police in the US were told during one of their training sessions that 51% of the mosques in the country were infiltrated by terrorists and their management support Sharia and violence. Radical demands such as to confine Muslims to particular settlements in the same way as Japanese were incarcerated in internment camps during World War II have been made. Muslim politicians are usually labelled as spies of the Muslim Brotherhood who would impose Sharia if voted for. Having a Muslim mayor Sadiq Khan, London has been termed as Londonistan by critics.

The number of organizations which stir up and exploit feelings of blind hatred towards Islam has been tripled in the last three years. Whereas the number of incidents encouraged by anti-Islam propaganda doubled in the period between 2014 and 2018. The rise of Donald Trump, who is a well-known Islamophobe and a white supremacist, contributed further to this phenomenon. He called for a total and complete shutdown on Muslims entering the US and later imposed a partial ban in this regard during his presidency. Even the terrorist who carried out the Christchurch shooting and recorded it live on social media had drawn inspiration from Trump's radical rhetoric.

Blasphemy against the Holy Prophet (Peace Be upon Him) is committed frequently on the pretext of freedom of speech which deeply hurts Muslims' sentiments throughout the globe. And at the same time holocaust is a sacred cow in the West, and its downplaying or denial can end up a person in jail.

Though the direct victims of Islamophobia may be Muslims, it is the whole Western World which would suffer in the long run. This needs to be dealt seriously and effectively as it can potentially tear apart the very fabric of their society. Unbridgeable chasm is in the making which would not only bring Muslims into confrontation with the others but may also lead to pitting other races against each other.

For a white terrorist to get the same coverage on media as a Muslim would, the attack has to be perpetrated with seven fold higher intensity. Terrorists and mass killers of western origin are prima facie seen as mentally ill and disordered, the favour which Muslims don't deserve in eyes of the West. The media, both electronic and print, need to put their houses in order and quit biased reporting. Because it's the media which control the minds of the people. It can fuel as well as put a stop to Islamophobia—which is a veiled threat to the peace of the world.

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## **Modi 2.0: Majoritarianism Normalised?**

Subhah Gatade

*This election verdict will have vital ramifications for democracy's onward journey for decades together, and silencing and further invisibilisation of religious minorities would be its logical outcome.*

A journalist friends' prophesy has finally come true.

The day India launched 'surgical strikes' across the border supposedly to avenge the Pulwama terror attack, this friend immediately sent a message on a Whatsapp group that Narendra Modi has ensured himself a second term. He stood his ground despite few heated exchanges on the group from Left leaning friends.

In the coming days, this not so expected debacle of the secular camp and the surge of the Hindutva Supremacist camp in newer areas and communities would be further analysed/debated/discussed from various angles. It will be debated why despite the caution expressed by the likes of Amartya Sen, who had concluded how India has taken "a quantum jump in wrong direction since 2014"; how despite being cautioned by leading scholars, intellectuals, scientists of our times that the very idea of India is at stake in the elections, the people in general did not pay any heed to their appeals and have resolved to continue the journey with a renewed frenzy in the same direction or have fully supposedly embraced this idea of 'New India' jettisoning the old one. Remember, not only has the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) been able to garner more seats than last time but its vote share has also increased more than 5%.

No doubt, the results have shocked many but the signs were ominous with new factors at play and new players in power and with the 'project to radicalise Hindu India' by design and delusion gaining further momentum.'

People will also try to analyse how far the elections were influenced and impacted by the rapid spread of social media, especially Whatsapp in India, which helped the rapid spread of Right-wing ideas and exclusivist agendas much to the detriment of voices of moderation and inclusion.

For anyone who had looked at the pre- and post-poll surveys done by more professional institutions, say the CSDS-Lokniti survey, it was amply clear which way the wind was blowing. How there was less traction for the issues of farmer

distress, unemployment, rise in prices etc., and growing traction for issues of security, nationalism, Balakot etc. and how the election “may have been driven by personality, at least partially”. And this despite the fact that even members of PM Modi’s think-tank had themselves acknowledged the ‘crisis shadow on India’s economy’ and how it is ‘[r]unning the risk of a structural crisis, and could soon be ensnared in a “middle-income trap”’.

The question arises what prompted this less traction for real livelihood issues and a surge for issues of passion, issues of emotions? Why this huge gap between promise and performance as well as rhetoric and reality did not worry the populace.

As an aside, it can be shared that the coarse sounding discourse from the ruling dispensation, vis-a-vis the ‘arch rival’ (*ghar mein ghus kar mara*) (entered the enemy’s home and killed them) or the casual manner in which use of nuclear weapons found mention, must have found a deep resonance in the citizenry which has been bred on Pakistan bashing, which it equates with nationalism.

It is true that not only Congress but other political formations like the Samajwadi Party, Bahujan Samaj Party, Nationalist Congress Party, Trinamool, Left etc. will have to do a lot of soul searching to understand why they collectively failed to stop the Modi juggernaut and how they need to strategise in the coming months so that the idea of Hindutva which — to paraphrase a famous revolutionary, has become a material force since it has been gripped by the masses — could be challenged effectively.

The plight of the entire ‘secular camp’ can be described by a simple fact. It will be the second consecutive term of Parliament when there would be no Leader of Opposition (which demands that at least the largest opposition party should get at least 10% of the total seats)

A few aspects of this verdict will have important ramifications for democracy’s onward journey for decades together in this part of South Asia.

- It appears that majoritarianism — rule by majority — which sounds very similar to democracy but which essentially stands democracy on its head, which made powerful entry last elections, would be normalised here.
- Silencing and further invisibilisation of religious minorities would be its logical outcome.

- The 2019 elections, which were fought around the image of Modi — a continuation of the 2014 experiment — have inadvertently or so ushered this parliamentary system in a presidential form.
- This development where personalities take centre-stage will severely impact the whole idea of party organisation and the tedious process of building it.
- The BJP, the ruling party at the moment, which had tried to project a collective leadership of sorts, also finds itself at a cusp of great change, and would now grow more in the shadow of the personality cult of PM Modi.

The tremendous challenge which awaits secular Indians could be gleaned from what Professor Suhas Palshikar had to say about this ascendance of BJP in India. According to him, it has definitely contributed to what is being seen as ‘[e]mergence of a new ideological framework to India’s democracy and public life in general’ and ‘politics of crafting a new hegemony’ is underway. (*Economic & Political Weekly*, August 18, 2018, Vol LIII, No 33, Towards Hegemony – BJP Beyond Electoral Dominance)

This Hindutva asks its followers ‘to become Hindu politically’ and become “religious Hindu” by way of public manifestation of religiosity, and conflation between nationalism and Hindutva is the ‘backbone of the new ideological dominance’. This ideological stand not only helps it in ensuring that “anti-BJP” would not only be equated with “anti-national” but also helps it attract new recruits for whom ‘being a staunch Hindu becomes a vehicle that expresses their nationalism’.

Palshikar also discusses how it has been possible to weave together ideas of Hindutva and development with nationalism, turning them into an arsenal of ‘political and ideological offensive’. Underlining the utility of “separate yet connected” network of affiliated organisations of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which has helped it push further the ideological battle, it also tells us how this ‘new hegemony’ may usher in a new “normal” as far as our collective imagination of what democracy means and what it should do, is concerned.

This craving for establishing hegemony has always been one of Hindutva’s long cherished ambitions. RSS, the self-proclaimed ‘cultural organisation’, which is the key figure in all these transformations in tandem with plethora of its affiliated organisations, has always described itself not as *Samaj me Sangathan* (Organisation in Society) but as *Samaj ka Sangathan* (Organisation of Society).

And before one brainstorms around counter strategies to challenge the hegemony, it would be rather apt to brood over a query posed by an incisive documentary titled, *Azmaish: A Journey Through the Subcontinent*, made by a promising Pakistani filmmaker. The documentary tried to understand whether after 70 years after Partition: is India, like Pakistan, turning to religious extremism? The film looked at a retreat from liberal democracy on both sides of the border.

For any independent observer, while Pakistan's slow metamorphosis into an Islamic country is well documented and fairly well understood, India's changing of colour has been a recent phenomenon which still baffles many. How and why does a country which refused to have religion as a basis of nationhood despite a bloody Partition, which saw deaths of around two million people and forcible displacement of 10-12 million, and which had a robust leadership with firm commitment to secularism to handle the post-Independent challenges, is slowly on the way to look like its 'arch rival'.

Is this type of journey unique to a country like India, which was under colonial regime, where a largely secular nationalist movement led its struggle for independence, or can one see similar examples in other ex-colonies where a similar non- religious/secular leadership led struggles against colonial bondage?

Or could it be seen as part of the burgeoning of Far Right the world over, where a party, the BJP "[h]olds governmental power on its own" with a specific history unlike in any other country where the Far Right "with obvious fascist characteristics, that has existed now for over 90 years" and involves the rise and spread of neo-liberalism with obvious devastating consequences, leading to 'new and more powerful forms of social disorientation and alienation', with people rushing to "seek psychological refuge in clinging to 'unchangeable' ascribed identities of ethnicity, religion, race, caste, and nation, either separately or in combination"?

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## **New India expects Pak obedience, not camaraderie**

MK Bhadrakumar

It is no big secret that the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is a damp squib. The impression becomes unavoidable that the decision to invite the little-known BIMSTEC leaders to PM Narendra Modi's inaugural ceremony on May 30 is prompted by the genuine urge to give a 'regional' colouring to the Indian mega event while also giving it a historicity — but, in reality, to somehow exclude Pakistan from the guest list.

In an ideal setting, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) could and should have been the authentic geopolitical union of regional states in South Asia to embellish such a historic occasion, but, clearly, that is too much to expect when Modi government is, on the other hand, holding even the group's annual summit hostage to the India-Pakistan tensions.

However, there is also a greater logic in the Indian decision. First, the ceremony on May 30 is all about Modi and there is the great risk that Imran Khan who is a rockstar among Indians might end up stealing the show — that is, if he were to accept an Indian invitation and travel to Delhi at such short notice (of which there is no absolute certainty, of course.)

So far, Imran Khan has avoided excessive globe-trotting and has travelled abroad very purposively with clear-cut result-oriented agenda in mind — Persian Gulf, Malaysia and Turkey, apart from two visits to China. But this charismatic international celebrity is not to be underestimated for his panache for grandstanding and might find irresistible to pose as a conquering hero in the backdrop of the old Moghul capital.

Second, on a serious note, an invite to Imran Khan would have meant an overnight jettisoning of all the diatribes against Pakistan that provided the ammunition for Modi's fiery election speeches up until last week. That U-turn would have been a bit too much to expect, as it could expose Modi to ridicule for having hoodwinked the Indian public and manipulated their sense of patriotism for extracting votes out of them.

Third, most importantly, Modi is also wiser today about international diplomacy. The impulsive actions vis-a-vis Pakistan in his first tenure as PM — invitation to the Pakistani PM to attend the inaugural in May 2014 (but only to scuttle under the flimsiest of excuses soon thereafter any form of dialogue with Pakistan at any level) and the stunning quasi-official trip to Nawaz's home in Lahore in December 2015 (which probably triggered the terrorist attack on the IAF base at Pathankot) are even today often cited as acts of monumental folly.

Suffice to say, Modi 2.0 would engage with Pakistan, but in good time and with the ground prepared in advance. Meanwhile, why such tearing hurry? An opportunity is coming up anyway within the coming fortnight for Modi to interact with Imran Khan on the sidelines of the summit meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in Bishkek on June 13-14.

However, the big question remains: Where is it that India-Pakistan relation are headed? To be sure, at some point in the future, the incoming Modi government will engage with Pakistan. But the question is, of what avail?

To be sure, Pakistan is willing to look away from the anti-Muslim attitudes of the Indian ruling elite or the violence and discrimination directed against Indian Muslims, which is almost daily occurrence. But then, in the prevailing milieu, rational give-and-take in diplomacy at the official level becomes unsustainable.

It is practically impossible for the new Modi government to overlook the mandate it received from the Indian electorate for pursuing a hardline policy toward Pakistan — including the use of nuclear option, if necessary. That is to say, the burden will be on Pakistan to work for amity with India by making concessions and reconciling with the status of a junior partner apropos of the range of issues that affect the relationship, starting from the Kashmir problem.

The recent Indian rejoinder to the latest report by the Geneva-based Human Rights Council alleging violations and torture in the militancy-hit Jammu and Kashmir, which rejects the highly critical report and virtually tells the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights to go hell — “India does not intend to further engage with these mandate-holders or any other mandate-holders on the issue.” — makes no bones about Delhi's current haughty mindset.

Simply put, iron entered into India's soul and it will no longer accept the UN or Pakistan or anyone under the sun as an interlocutor on the Kashmir issue where the only unresolved question concerns the vacation of illegal occupation by Pakistan.

Indeed, the Modi government's thinking bears striking similarity with the Israeli approach to the annexation of the Palestinian Territories. In fact, considering the massive mandate received by Modi to lead the new government, it is entirely conceivable that the abolition of Article 370 of the constitution granting special status to J&K may be entering the realm of possibility during the coming 5-year period.

Islamabad must be quite aware of the consequent uncertainties that lie ahead in normalising relations with the incoming Indian government. Clearly, the two overblown myths — that normalisation of India-Pakistan relations goes down well with the Indian public at large and/or that a right-wing government in Delhi makes an ideal partner for the Pakistani establishment — have fallen by the wayside. The matrix has changed.

The fact of the matter is that a tough, muscular policy toward Pakistan has brought rich electoral dividends to the BJP and to Modi's leadership, in particular, by far exceeding anyone's expectations. And this tested trajectory has far from exhausted itself. Quite possibly, it has vast untapped potential still remaining for the making of 'New India'.

Pakistan never before figured in an Indian election in such a manner as happened in recent months. And so long as a government that is based on the Hindutva ideology is in power in Delhi, India's domestic politics and the government's Pakistan policies will be living a conjoined life — inseparable.

The New India expects Pakistan's obedience. There can be no compromises on this score. The decision to exclude Imran Khan from the ceremony in Delhi on May 30, which Indian dailies have reported as a deliberate 'snub', is consistent with this overall approach.