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Foreign attention on CAA a self-goal

It will be an unprecedented development if the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights were to formally insert itself as an amicus curiae to the Supreme Court over the Citizenship Amendment Act. The court is yet to take up the nearly 150 petitions filed against the amendment since December. The government's position is rightly that it is a domestic law and India has the right to determine its own policy on citizenship and refugees. Nevertheless, the expressions of concern over the CAA from across the world, especially in the wake of the Delhi riots, is a self-goal that the Narendra Modi government has scored by its cavalier approach to law-making in the spirit of the Constitution and India's international human rights commitments as well as in its approach to the domestic opposition to the CAA and the larger political project behind it.



Govt must act to restore citizens' trust in its intentions

What should worry us more is the adverse impact the CAA-NRC project and the events unfolding as a result of it are having on India's relations with our neighbours and other friendly powers, and on India's moral standing. Bangladesh, unconvinced of Delhi's intentions despite frequent diplomatic outreach, has cancelled a series of high-level visits and engagements with India. The UK parliament has spoken out, cutting across party lines, against what the Modi government put up on blatant display to the world during the Delhi riots. The US State Department and members and committees of the US

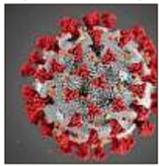
Congress have expressed concerns repeatedly. The Modi government and the BJP's response has been to hit back, at times in the most undiplomatic language, at whoever criticises it.

Yet, the struggle over the CAA-NRC project is our own fight, for the soul of India. More than any foreign government or agency, it's we, the people of India, who must decide what kind of citizenship law behoves our nation, whether we should let religion intrude into it and slip down the slippery path to a theocratic State, a concept we abhor in others. The makers of our Constitution debated this issue and rejected the idea. We must in our generation, too, debate it. But the government is in no mood for it. Instead, it has so far indulged in propaganda, allowed hate speech to flow freely from its leaders, precipitating a riot, and even allowed police forces to act in a completely biased manner, which was on display to the whole world. The way to ensure that foreign agencies do not get to meddle in internal debates is for the government and the courts of the land to win the confidence of its people. The government can begin by giving a public assurance that there will be no nation-wide NRC process, or any other attempt to render people State-less for lack of documentation. The Supreme Court should take up the CAA petitions expeditiously.

Viral rumours more dangerous than virus

The social media and some regional news channels may have us believe that the very existence of humanity is under threat with the outbreak of coronavirus, or COVID-19, but nothing can be farther from the truth, though the situation calls for caution. The virus has spread rapidly across the world, affecting nearly one lakh people in 66 countries now. But the World Health Organisation has confirmed that the global mortality rate for COVID-19 is 3.4%, far less than say that for, say, cardiovascular diseases. In China, about 36,000 coronavirus patients have already been discharged from hospitals, and official data shows that so far only 2.3% of those affected have died. While the threat cannot be dismissed casually, experts insist that contracting the virus is not a "death sentence", though the pallbearers of doom may claim otherwise.

The flood of information available on the internet and social media, and those viral WhatsApp forwards, make it difficult to separate fact from fiction, while myths surrounding the virus range from stupid to bizarre. One message



Be sceptical about all info on Covid-19 on social media

ludicrously puts the blame on the consumption of Corona beer, the Hindu Mahasabha has apparently decided to organise a 'gaumutra party' in Delhi claiming that drinking cow's urine will immediately kill coronavirus. Many such 'natural cures' like eating ginger and garlic or sipping lime juice with warm water, which are in circulation, are falsely credited to scientists or even non-existent experts to make them seem authentic. While naturopathy may have its own benefits, at this point of time, it lacks scientific validation as a cure for coronavirus and it would thus be best to consult a qualified medical practitioner. The breakout of the virus has also inspired several racist and insensitive jokes. While one forward says, "Everything made in China has an early expiry date," another adds, "Never knew my death would be manufactured in China." Such jokes that mock at the suffering of others are most uncharitable and a reflection on the lack of sensitivity of the people sharing them.

Rumour-mongering has emerged as a bigger threat than the virus itself. Unfortunately, even the so-called educated class derives some vicarious pleasure out of forwarding unsubstantiated messages that not only lead to a fear psychosis among the general public, but also mislead patients about possible cures, which are usually unverified. Since self-restraint is not one of the virtues of the smart-phone-toting masses, remember to be sceptical about every bit of information you get, and make that scepticism a habit. In times like these, there is no greater danger than misinformation.

The four sins of Delhi Police

They were thugs in uniform at Jamia, complicit at JNU, bystanders during Delhi polls. And they were all of these during the riots

RAMANI VENKATESAN

One dislikes passing judgement on others, mindful of the Biblical saying "judge not lest ye be judged." And yet, a time comes when it is difficult to be dispassionate, particularly when there is organised violence aimed at creating fear and poisoning relations between India's two largest religious communities. What makes the recent horror in north-east Delhi totally unforgivable, especially for those of us who have served in one of the two All-India Services (IAS/IPS), is the complete abdication of its statutory duties by Delhi Police.

The events of the last week of February 2020 were the tragic denouement of a sequence of happenings over the past two months, as Delhi Police slipped deeper and deeper into the mire of partisanship and extremely unprofessional functioning, when one was left wondering if the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) were applicable in the National Capital Region of Delhi. There were four instances when Delhi Police gave short shrift to the laws of the land and, indeed, to the very Constitution they are sworn to uphold.

In the case of the Jamia incident of December 15, 2019, the videos of the library assault point to a mentality in the guardians of law and order of "teaching a lesson" to students. India's criminal laws do not permit the police to use force to an extent greater than is needed to restore normalcy. Helmeted police assaulting with lathis students in the library could hardly be termed as mob control. By this one action, Delhi Police set off a chain reaction that has since reverberated across university campuses throughout the country.

Even more inexcusable was the police apathy when armed thugs invaded the JNU campus on the evening of January 5, 2020. The police decided to stay put at the JNU gate even when there was enough evidence that cognizable offences involving danger to life and

property were being committed on the campus. What is worse, two months after the incident, no FIRs have been registered against those who indulged in violence and vandalism; instead, FIRs have been lodged against the victims of the assault.

Three violations of the Election Commission's Model Code of Conduct, two by elected Members of Parliament (one of them a minister in the Government of India) and one by a BJP candidate, during the Delhi Assembly elections, merited action under the IPC. Delhi Police did not invoke Sections 153A/295A of the IPC, which would have served as a salutary reminder to politicians not to resort to incendiary campaigning to



win votes.

The final nail in the coffin was hammered in when the BJP's Kapil Mishra decided to refurbish his eroded electoral standing by threatening direct action if the anti-CAA/NRC protesters in north-east Delhi did not remove their blockage of public spaces. The resultant outbreak of violence spiraled into full-fledged arson and murder. It strains credulity that with protests across the city since December 2019, followed by elections in January 2020, the police were not alert enough to take preventive action against criminal elements, check illegal firearms and seal Delhi's borders with neighbouring states, especially UP, to prevent infiltration of outsiders. Over three days, the inaction (at best) and complicity (at worst) of the police was in full view, both nationally and internationally.

Three basic lessons in maintenance of law and order were ignored by Delhi

Police:

Convey control: At no stage should politicians, their henchmen and anti-social elements get the feeling that they can operate in violation of the law. Strong preventive action under the CrPC and the local police laws, externment from Delhi of certain criminal elements and, where required, use of draconian laws like the National Security Act would have sent a clear message to those intent on disturbing the public peace.

Zero tolerance: Unless incidents of assault and arson are dealt with firmly and promptly, they tend to snowball into a free-for-all between members of different communities. Lathi charges are normally enough to cool down even impetuous hotheads; however, on occasion, stronger action, such as police firing, may be required to restore order in a short timeframe and reduce casualties.

Leading from the spot: By far, the most crucial element in law and order policing is the quality of leadership. The leader (the District Magistrate/Superintendent of Police/Police Commissioner) must inspire confidence in his/her force by being on the street. It was inexcusable that senior police officers, from the Delhi Police Commissioner down, were not visible till the third day of the disturbances. A leaderless police force took the path of least resistance since there was no one in authority to spur it to action.

Delhi Police has suffered serious damage to its image and self-esteem. A new Police Commissioner has taken charge. It is now time for Delhi Police to assert its authority and make it clear that it will not tolerate violations of the law from any quarter. It is also time for all governments, including the central government, which supervises Delhi Police, to act on the 2006 directions of the Supreme Court in the Prakash Singh case, aimed at professionalising the police and insulating them from political interference. Above all, it is time for my fellow colleagues in the two All-India Services charged with the maintenance of law and public order to reaffirm their complete faith in and loyalty to the Constitution of India and rise above all sectarian considerations in discharging their duties honestly and diligently.

(The writer, a retired IAS officer, has served as District Magistrate and Divisional Commissioner in Maharashtra)

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE

A unifying flight to the moon!

The space agency is now a household name and its employees are heroes

SAHANA PRASAD

The country watched, mesmerized, forgetting to sleep. Who said only cricket matches and Hindi movies are unifying factors in India? Unlike the swagger and hype associated with other events, here it was sheer knowledge and skill.

There was a deep sense of service, a strong feeling of patriotism and fervour, which engulfed all of them. People waited with bated breaths. Anticipating the presence of their country in space, their presence marked out in by a special landing.

The people who were responsible and their families kept their fingers crossed. Only they knew how much of

effort and skill had gone in, how many days of sleep, food and rest had been sacrificed. How much family and socialising time was reduced and how other things had taken a back seat. It was not just a mission, it was a passion.

Though only a few were given credit and media covered only a handful, these scientists were not bothered. They were not doing a job or looking for fame or money, they were creating history, a legacy.

As the countdown began, one could feel the palpating hearts, the silent prayers and the agony of the wait. Would it, would it not?

There was a sudden sense of foreboding—and yes, it was confirmed. Love's labour was not lost but seemed little distant. Communication was lost, that too at the last leg. There was some tension and then, a sense of gloom descended. As the official announcement was made, most eyes were moist.

The dreaded moment had come to

life. The secret fears were true and so was the collective sense of loss.

What saved the occasion was the leadership. This was how some leaders take charge and instill hope. This is how they soothe and pacify.

They know that failure is an orphan and they rush to protect those involved. It isn't a failure, there is hope still, they said. Social media rallied around the people who put in effort. "We are with you," screamed every post on this matter. Yes, we are one, one nation, one people. How else can we be, as we have proved to the world, time and again, how strong our skills are?

The space agency is now a household name and its employees are now heroes, a role long that was long denied to them.

It brought all of us together, strengthened the bonds and made us one happy and proud nation. I am blessed to be born in this era and as the wife of one of these scientists!

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Intervention by the UNHCHR was inevitable

The concerns of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) were inevitable given the implications of the Act on the rights of refugees. In the absence of a national policy for the refugees and as India is not party to the 1951 Refugee Convention or 1967 Protocol, the CAA violates the rights of refugees in the context of international norms. It is true that the CAA enactment is entirely within the domain of Indian state; however, as a nation-state, we need to be in concurrence with global

Treat everyone equally

With regard to the article about mental health issues among the LGBTQ community, yesterday's op-ed discusses an issue that nobody talks about. In our society, major issues that the community faces are not highlighted because of an inherent bias. Many people are judgemental when it comes to the LGBTQ community and this attitude causes mental health issues in people who are from the community. It's important to treat everyone equally and normally.

Bindya TS, Mangaluru

Subsidise cost of masks

Following the frenzy that the coronavirus has generated, wearing masks has been advised as a preventive measure. Therefore, there is a great demand for N95 masks. The cost of one such mask

is set at Rs 250, and as it is a disposable mask, it has to be changed every day. In a country like ours, hardly 10% of the population can afford to spend approximately Rs 7500 per month. But considering the dire need to use such a mask, the government should act fast and see to it that they are made available at affordable prices.

RN Hoskeri, Bengaluru

Revoke blanket ban

The blanket ban imposed on holding peaceful protests in front of Town Hall in Bengaluru is unjustified and must be withdrawn immediately. This action is against peoples' fundamental right to protest. People can protest as long as the protests are held in a peaceful manner and the public is not inconvenienced in any way. It is the bounden duty of the government to respect this constitutional right with respect and

should not restrict people's rights by banning protests near any venue without applying their mind and examining cases by their individual merits and then deciding to grant or deny permission based on such evaluations!

V Padmanabhan, Bengaluru

Death of tusker shameful

Death of a 25-year-old tusker due to electrocution at a fence on World Wildlife day is shameful. Such incidents need special attention of the authorities concerned to develop a system to protect farms on the fringes of forests, and also see to it that the wildlife is not under threat.

AK Shariff, Mysuru

Our readers are welcome to email letters to: letters@deccanherald.co.in (only letters emailed – not handwritten – will be accepted). All letters must carry the sender's postal address and phone number.

SPEAK OUT



We have full faith in all our MLAs, we have no doubt on their integrity, honesty.

Kamal Nath, MP Chief Minister

There are honest politicians. They haven't won the elections yet.

Ljupka Cvetanovic

TO BE PRECISE



IN PERSPECTIVE

Pakistan gets FATF reprieve, again

China, Turkey, Malaysia helped Pakistan stay off the blacklist, with perhaps tacit US approval

ANAND KUMAR

Pakistan, which has been on the 'grey list' of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) since June 2018, has managed yet another reprieve from it. Pakistan has not been put on the 'black list' of the terror finance watch body despite Islamabad not taking any significant action to check either terror financing or money laundering. Pakistan played its limited cards well. Indeed, it sensed the situation well in advance and was quite sure it would not be blacklisted. Instead, it actually mounted a diplomatic offensive to get off even the grey list.

The FATF is a Paris-based inter-governmental body created in 1989 to check money laundering but its mandate widened after 9/11 to check even terror financing. It has 39 members and it judges the conduct of member countries on certain bases. The support of 12 countries is required to take a country away from the grey list, while the support of three countries is enough to prevent one from being blacklisted.

Pakistan's conduct has not improved since June 2018. The terror groups, especially the Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad, have continued to engage in terrorist actions against India. India has pleaded on international fora that the United Nations should be objective in taking action against countries like Pakistan that sponsor terror groups. In November last, India's permanent representative to the UN, Syed Akbaruddin, called for a 'zero tolerance' approach, without any double standards, to combat the global threat from the crime-terror nexus. He pointed out that UN-sanctioned terror groups such as the LeT and JeM continued to destabilise regions through their cross-border financing and propaganda.

Even the US State Department castigated Pakistan for not acting against terror groups. In its assessment, regionally-focused terrorist groups remained a threat and Pakistan-based LeT — which was responsible for the 2008 Mumbai attacks — and JeM maintained the capability and intent to attack Indian and Afghan targets. It accused the Pakistani government of failing to significantly limit the LeT and the JeM from raising money, recruiting and training in Pakistan, and of allowing candidates affiliated with LeT front organisations to contest the July 2018 general election.

Despite this assessment, the US did not go beyond a point. President Trump had, during his election campaign, promised that he would bring US forces back home from Afghanistan and end the longest war in America's history.

He cannot fulfil this campaign promise without the cooperation of Pakistan from where the top leadership of the Taliban operates. Last week, US peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad and Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the Taliban group's top political leader, signed a peace agreement in Doha. The US knows that if Pakistan is put on the blacklist, its behaviour towards the US-Taliban peace deal would be hostile.

While the FATF meeting in Paris was on, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres visited Pakistan for an international conference on Afghan refugees. Guterres appreciated the role played by Pakistan in hosting Afghan refugees but was careful not to point out the role of the Haqqani network in creating terror. He tried to further please Pakistan by offering mediation in Kashmir, like President Trump has done, too.

The international community also fears that if Pakistan is put on the blacklist, then its troubled economy would deteriorate further, which could cause the country to implode, resulting in further trouble for its neighbours and the world.

Pakistan also tried to use the politics of the Muslim world to its advantage. In recent times, the situation in the Gulf has been in a flux. There is a decline in the political influence of Saudi Arabia while Iran has risen in status. In this environment, Turkey is looking to emerge as the new leader of the Muslim world. With this objective, a summit was organised in Kuala Lumpur and Pakistan was also invited to attend. But Pakistan withdrew at the last minute after the Saudis threatened to send back four million Pakistani citizens and withdraw billions of dollars kept in Pakistani banks. Imran Khan subsequently tried to please Malaysia by visiting that country and invited Turkey's President Tayyip Erdogan to visit Pakistan. Turkey and Pakistan also have a strong defence partnership. Erdogan visited Pakistan on the eve of the Paris meeting of the FATF and promised to help Pakistan escape being blacklisted.

Pakistan also took some cosmetic measures, as it does on the eve of every plenary meeting of the FATF. It arrested Hafiz Saeed on charges of terror financing and said that another terror kingpin, Masood Azhar, was untraceable. However, India gave evidence of Azhar's presence in Pakistan.

Pakistan needed three countries to vote in its favour to keep out of the blacklist. These three votes were easily managed with Turkey, Malaysia and China. Moreover Pakistan's "all-weather friend" China is also current heading the FATF. The exercise perhaps also had the tacit approval of the US, which is hoping that Pakistan would help it to extricate itself from the Afghan quagmire. Whether that will happen or not, only time will tell. For now, Pakistan has got the reprieve it needed.

(The writer is Associate Fellow, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi)