

An Evil, Discriminatory Agenda

On March 20, 2018, the Supreme Court in its decision in SK Mahajan vs the State of Maharashtra examined the manner in which the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989 was being misused. While doing so, the Supreme Court unfortunately displayed selective amnesia by focusing on only certain instances of misuse, passing broad sweeping comments and issuing guidelines preventing such misuse while in essence ignoring the decades of abuse and exploitation that members of the scheduled caste (SC) and scheduled tribe (ST) have been and still are subjected to.

The judgment of the Supreme Court is another dispiriting blow to a country whose current Government formed by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has overtly and in some cases, subtly tried to implement the philosophy of division, discrimination and exploitation espoused by its philosophical father, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

In this week's column, I will attempt to highlight the manner in which this Government has failed our most downtrodden communities and why we must be wary of their hate-filled approach that places more importance on the varna system than the words of our Constitution. The state of affairs: When I say that SCs, STs and OBCs are some of our most downtrodden communities, I don't say so lightly. To give some perspective, STs constitute approximately 8.2 per cent of India's population but only 22.6 per cent of such STs have toilet facilities. In terms of dropouts, over 70.6 per cent of SC boys and over 71.3

per cent of SC girls drop out before Class X. In terms of absolute poverty, almost half of all Adivasis are classified as poor. These are just cold, hard numbers for thought and looking back over the past few years at the suicide of Rohith Verma, the hacking of Shankar, a 21-year-old Dalit in broad daylight and the innumerable instances of violence, paints a miserable picture where SCs, STs and OBCs are treated as second-class citizens in our country. Ideally, a responsible, sensitive Government which respects the words of our Constitution would take all efforts to ensure that this disparity in treatment, as well as the brutality that these communities are subject to, is addressed as a matter of priority. Sadly, the BJP Government does not classify as one such Government. Instead, through its words and actions, the BJP has betrayed the Constitution of the country and has failed these communities. Words and actions: As the numbers highlighted above show the status of SCs, STs and OBCs is deplorable. Reservation is an important tool, which can help bridge this disparity and enable SCs, STs and Dalits to achieve some amount of upward mobility and escape the shackles of poverty and deprivation. Clearly though, this is an idea which does not sit well with the BJP and the RSS. Repeatedly, we have seen comments from Mohan Bhagwat, Manmohan Vaidya and other leaders voicing their displeasure with the idea of reservation. This is because reservation is a mechanism, which can help ensure that people of all castes and communities enjoy the benefits of India's growth.

Now Oli is a political colossus, following the strategic alliance with the Prachanda-led Maoist Center and will soon be heading a Government with more than two-third majority, having swept the local Government elections and captured six out of seven Provinces and also won a commanding majority in the new upper House. No one in Nepal's tryst with democracy has amassed such infinite political power. If this was not enough, he has concentrated in the Prime Minister's Office, all investigative, intelligence and enforcement agencies, making Oli the master of all that he surveys. If power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely? Whether we will see an authoritarian and dictatorial Oli, only time will tell. In this column, on December 20 last year, after Oli's dramatic political success, this writer had predicted that despite the pro-China and

India, Nepal Must Turn The Page To A New Chapter

Nepal Prime Minister KP Oli who lambasted India after the 2015 blockade, accused it of toppling his Government in 2016 and travelled to Beijing in the interim to sign Nepal's first ever trade and transit treaty with China, will be on his first official state visit to India commencing April 7. The last time he was invited was in 2016 when he urged Union External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj to do so and she obliged but only after he had passed the first amendment to Nepal's Constitution, which only minimally granted rights to the Madhesi and other marginalised classes. On his last visit, he was ruling a shaky coalition Government.

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ultra nationalistic halo he had acquired, he would visit India first, before any pilgrimage to China as all elected Prime Ministers have done.

Despite teasing India with an interview to Hong Kong's South China Morning Post and an invitation to Pakistan Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, to which Kathmandu media attributed several creative reasons, including exploring the whereabouts of former Inter-Services Intelligence official, Lt Col Zahir Hussain who was kidnapped from Nepal ostensibly by the Research and Analysis Wing in 2017, the substance of the Oli messaging to India was China — that 'it will enable deepening explore additional options and leverages in dealing with India'. In 2008, shortly before Prachanda became the Prime Minister, he told a Nepali TV channel that Nepal needed China to balance India. In later years, Prachanda had a change in preference.

The second issue raised by Oli in the interview was about the recruitment of Nepali Gorkhas in the Indian Army. Two connections China desperately wants broken in the high Himalayas are India's special relations with Nepal and Bhutan.

Both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj did some nimble diplomacy to woo Oli. Swaraj's surprise visit to Kathmandu to congratulate and invite him to the Dilli Durbar was both spontaneous and an expression of regret over past misunderstandings, blockade et al.

Modi, meanwhile, worked

the phone lines repeating his Mann ki Baat of forgiving, forgetting and looking at the future. This diplomatic coup, coupled with Oli's missive to Modi on Republic Day, more than mad up for one of India's greatest foreign policy blunders, pushed Nepal towards China. During Holi, while in Pokhara, Nepal, this writer learnt a new Nepali phrase. It goes like this: 'Dukh payo Mangala le; afno hi dhang le' (the pain India suffered was due to its own fault.) The Madhesi cause has been put on the back burner and the fractious Nepali Congress party marginalised.

China will extract maximum political, economic and people-to-people benefit from a pro-China Left alliance Government which it inspired and invested in putting together. China's rise in Nepal is unstoppable. Nepal wishes to draw economic gains from the world's two fastest growing economies. It also wants to reduce its dependence on India but realises that geography, culture, language and religion point otherwise. Still,

Chinese presence, investment, involvement in domestic politics and creeping interest in the military and police have magnified rapidly. They have already bagged most of the rail, road, hydropower and airport projects. The new Pokhara and Bhairwa (Lumbini) airports and the expansion of the existing Tribhuvan International Airport are all with Chinese companies, financed by loans given by Exim Bank.

China has built a new \$350 million Armed Police Force Academy for which Prime Minister Modi had laid the plaque. Now India is making the police academy instead. The 800 MW Buddha Koshi hydro project will also be restored to China. The Chinese are investing heavily in Pokhara lakeside area. Thirty five to 40 Confucian Centres have come up in Terai. Chinese tourists arriving by air are second only to those coming from India. There is an unconfirmed report that a Chinese General was conferred an honorary General's rank like the ritual

followed between the Army Chiefs of India and Nepal.

China seeks parity with India. The Belt and Road Initiative blueprint is at an advanced stage. Nepalese are worried about a Sri Lanka-like debt trap. No one understands how Chinese invest and construct their projects. There is never any criticism of China in Nepal — which is reserved for India — even if fraud is involved.

Nepal can look forward to Achehe din. The two entities of the Left alliance — Unified Marxist-Leninist and Maoists — were to merge this month but the coming together has been postponed to April. Not everyone, especially among the Maoists, is happy with playing second fiddle, especially Prachanda who led the revolution of making new Nepal secular, democratic and a republic. One senior Maoist leader told this writer that the merger could lead to 'indigestion! Nepal will be stable, for the first two years as no-confidence motion is not permissible by the new Constitution. This writer heard

conflicting accounts on a gentleman's agreement on power sharing — all five years for Oli; two-and-a-half years each; and three years Oli, two years Prachanda. It is inconceivable that Prachanda will be satisfied with co-chairman of the merged Communist Party of Nepal.

India will want political stability after 25 Prime Ministers in 27 years. Its focus is on geo-economics (the economic package for the current year has been doubled from Rs 375 crore to Rs 650 crore), people-to-people, especially outreach to the youth and timely delivery of projects. India trusts the Oli Government will be mindful of its legitimate security interests, including honouring its traditional red lines. The red carpet is being laid out. No Nepali Prime Minister has been given the honour and respect Oli will receive, including being seated by Modi. It's to make Oli feel respected and help him consider India as Nepal's first neighbour.

New Economic Indicators

The World Bank's Global Economic Prospects report,

predicting India's gross domestic product (GDP) to grow at 7.3 per cent in 2018-19 and further at 7.9 per cent for the next two years thereafter, kicked off a major furore with the Opposition criticising it and the Government defending its policies. However, with world-renowned economists like International Monetary Fund chief Christine Lagarde, Nobel prize winner and Columbia University's Joseph Stiglitz and MIT's Erik Brynjofsson declaring that GDP has a poor way of assessing the health of our economies, shouldn't the political parties rise above the blame game, assess the relevance of GDP in today's digital age and take a lead in developing a more comprehensive and appropriate new measure to gauge the growth of the economy?

For decades, the growth of any economy has been measured by GDP, which is the monetary value of the goods and services that a country produces in a specific year. However, off late, it is being observed that this statistic that economies and businesses worldwide swear by may not be the correct measurement of growth after all because of some of its drawbacks. Although GDP measures income, it fails to measure poverty, income inequality, health and quality of life; although it measures growth but fails to measure environmental damage. Nevertheless, in spite of its shortcomings, GDP has become the single most important tool for Governments, financial institutions and policymakers since its inception in the 1930s.

With the advent of the fourth industrial revolution and its subsequent challenges, like reinvention of business landscapes, demographic shifts, expansion of inequality, worsening of climate change and advancement of technology at break-neck speed, GDP is losing its sheen. This latest industrial revolution, powered by tremendous growth in technology, has enhanced the quality of lives of millions across the globe with never before products and services that have enriched the efficiency and pleasure of their personal lives, be it ordering food, educating oneself, meeting a doctor or playing games online, technology has pervaded us deeply and, therefore, to assess the health of these new economies and the people living in them, a new measure other than GDP which is more comprehensive needs to be

found out.

According to experts, GDP is a partial and misleading indicator of growth and wellbeing. So, can a nation, hit by a natural calamity which led to massive destruction, lead to growth in GDP? The answer surprisingly is yes, and the fault lies in the way GDP is calculated. Since after a calamity, there is a lot of investment to rebuild the entire ecosystem, this is perceived as growth, whereas, it is nothing but physical and human loss. In addition, a country is classified as a healthier economy when it has a higher growth rate as compared to one with a relatively low growth rate.

However, it is not advisable to categorise economies merely based on GDP as it may lead their erroneous analysis and classification. A country with a low economic base would naturally have a high GDP growth rate compared to a developed country as it starts growing from a preliminary stage and basic infrastructural developments would translate into substantial GDP growth rates.

Some of the fastest growing economies in the world are almost always developing countries, mostly in Africa and Asia, that grow at eight or nine per cent and, sometimes, even experience double-digit growth rates. However, GDP growth rates of three to four per cent for advanced economies like the US, Canada or the UK are considered very impressive growth rates.

This is because advanced economies are mature economies which have sizable GDPs. This means that comparing a relatively high growth rate of a developing country with the relatively low growth rate of a developed country is meaningless. It does not indicate that the former has a more dynamic economy than the latter. GDP calculation also totally ignores the unorganised sector which is the most important and vibrant sector in any growing economy and does not adjust for leisure time and distribution of goods. It also does not calculate and adjust for environmental pollution and disasters.

Above all, the way GDP is calculated presently has a major inability to fully capture the benefits of technology. Countries worldwide are trying to adopt different ways to overcome these shortcomings like China is proposing to adopt 'green GDP' which attempts to adjust for environmental factors, OECD's 'GDP alternatives', which adjust for leisure, the 'Index

of Sustainable Economic Welfare', which accounts for both pollution costs and the distribution of income; and the 'Genuine Progress Indicator', which adjusts for factors such as income distribution, adds factors such as the value of household and volunteer work, and subtracts factors such as the costs of crime and pollution'. Bhutan, however, is a great example of a country that has chosen to use 'Gross National Happiness' as a performance measure instead of GDP for the last four decades.

Having identified GDP's failure to measure a number of things, Governments globally are trying to develop new system of indicators. Under Obama's Administration, a group of economists started working on 10 to 15 key measures from a set of around 300 diverse indicators, including health, education, crime and justice, art and culture, the environment and the economy. GDP was also deconstructed in Europe in 2009 with France taking the lead.

The UK has a committee to include natural capital in its national accounts by 2020. Earlier this year, World Bank published a report that analysed the wealth of 141 countries from 1995 to 2014 and argued that wealth is a better judge of economic success since it includes human capital, natural capital, produced

capital and net foreign assets. A focus on GDP is being considered more of a short-term in nature than being long-term and sustainable in nature. GDP growth rates neither reveal anything about the structure of the economy or its stage of development nor state anything about the prosperity and standard of living of its citizens. One must be very careful when making cross-country comparisons of GDP growth rates and an evaluation based solely on GDP growth rates would be misrepresentative when considering the economic health of countries. However, none of the measures proposed so far is perfect, and GDP may not be replaced anytime soon.

In the meanwhile, India has a bank of prestigious economists and in the backdrop of GDP losing its sheen as an ideal indicator of economic growth, there is a never before opportunity for the Indian economists to take the initiative and construct India specific economic indicator suitable for its agrarian economy, instead of aping the West. This an exciting quest in developing these economic indicators as it will also enable the greatest minds to create diagnostic tools, that could save endless money and debates on the economic and social benefits of Government schemes and policies.

Malcolm Turnbull questioned the team's approach to the game and the world over, there were murmurs on how Australia was bringing shame to the gentleman's game. And for this Kangaroo nation, the controversy couldn't have come at a worse time — the glory of Megan Schutt, a member of Australia's women's cricket team who created history as the first Australian woman to bowl a hat-trick in a T20 international, turned pale in the shadow of the ball-tampering row.

Over 1 Lakh Thalassaemia Patients Die before They Turn 20

Ahmedabad, India is one of the worstthalassaemia affected countries in the world with more than 4 crore carriers and over 1 lakh thalassaemia majors under blood transfusion every month. With the World Thalassaemia Day around the corner, the focus falls back on the efforts to curtail the disease.

"Thalassaemia is an inherited condition which is carried in the genes and passed on from parents to children. One of the major types of thalassaemia, Beta thalassaemia, happens when the gene that controls the production of a protein called beta globin becomes defective. The rising number of thalassaemic children is posing a threat on the public

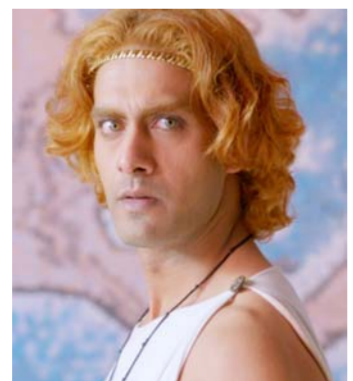
health of our country. Lack of awareness of the problem, failure in planning, no provisions for prevention and inadequate treatment leading to premature death among the affected children are the leading causes for the crisis", says Dr. Amruta Thakkar, Consultant - Paediatric Intensivist and Neonatologist, Columbia Asia Hospital, Ahmedabad.

The inherited blood disorder destroys the red blood cells extensively, leading to anaemia. Thalassaemia could be one of the important factors causing high anaemia rates in Ahmedabad. As per government data, around 74% of children between the age of 6 to 59 months are anaemic in urban Ahmedabad. (19-10)

Rohit Purohit's selfie-marathon!

The handsome Rohit Purohit who plays Alexander the Great in the Sony Entertainment Television's magnum opus show Porus has already impressed everyone with his acting prowess. Recently the actor was in his hometown Jaipur for a family function. The actor who went home after a long time was surprised to see all his relatives who were happy to see him. When we caught up with him, Rohit told us, "I was coming home after quite a long time. Since I am part of a daily soap, travelling gets very difficult. But this time, I did not want to miss out as we were having a grand celebration — a party for my father who retired from work. All our relatives and friends were here, so how could I miss it?"

Rohit who had taken a two-day break to be in town



for the celebrations. But the actor had to pay a price for his stardom — he had to oblige his friends and relatives, all of who wanted to click selfies with him. "I was in Jaipur for just two days and I didn't get much time to be with my family. I had to meet some 400-500 relatives! I was at the party for more the four hours and I was only clicking selfies with everyone!" Rohit told us. (19-8)

Smartron launches tbook flex

Smartron, India's first global technology OEM and premier IoT brand today announced the launch of the next generation of their multifunctional hyperlaptop, the tbook flex. Bringing in the best specs and features available for 2-in-1 laptops, at an exciting price point, tbook flex will be available at INR. INR 42,990 and INR 52,990 for the m3 and i5 version respectively, exclusively on Flipkart starting midnight on May 13, 2018.

The launch campaign for tbook flex, #TheFlexExperience, highlights the flexibility that the device offers to seamlessly move between work and play. Be it watching an episode of Game of Thrones or quickly responding to an email that pops in or

playing your favourite game with the tablet mode, tbook flex makes it convenient to switch roles on the go. tbook flex has been designed for those who are always on the move and require a multi-purpose and multifunctional laptop with increased mobility, productivity and performance.

Its differentiated design sporting a 12.2-inch WQXGA display, 2560 x 1600 resolution gives the user a stunning multimedia experience. The multi-touch display responds accurately to your finger-touch and the stylus pen. This dazzling display combined with front & rear cameras, dual mic, powerful speakers and fast dual-band WiFi brings the multimedia powerhouse for the user. (19-10)



Future Consumer launches a range of smart accessories



Purretta, the baby care brand by Future Consumer Limited (FCL), launches a range of easy to use, smart and affordable accessories for babies from 0 to 3 years. Assuring best quality, all Purretta products are made from 100% Food Grade Plastic, and are BPA Free. Purretta products are completely safe, non-toxic and adhere to international safety certifications such as ISI, BIS and EN standards. Speaking about the new range Ashni Biyani, Director, Future Consumer Limited says, "The organized baby care market in India is at a nascent stage. Purretta will be a national brand in this category

which will cater to all the needs of parents and baby's. Parenting is not an easy process as it demands both emotional and physical involvement. By offering smart and easy to use products, we want all parents to enjoy and nurture every moment of parenting without any hassle."

With the baby care accessories, Purretta promises to ease the parenting process by making it hassle free. The products are designed in consultation with a special panel called, 'Purretta Mother's Club' - A panel of mothers who have been an integral part in conceiving and co-creating the brand's offerings. (19-10)

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