Bhagwat's Dasara message highlights Hindu undivided family

AHEAD of RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's annual Dasara speech on Tuesday morning, there were speculations among anti-government commentators and analysts that there would be hints of a rift within the saffron brotherhood. The invitation to former vice-president Jagdeep Dhankhar and the proprietor-editor of a prominent eight-leaning newspaper, whose ties with the government have recently reportedly been strained, kept the rumour mill churning. Dhankhar's unceremonious removal last year—though it was technically a resignation on health grounds—resulted in his complete marginalisation in the Sangh ecosystem. The newspaper has been publishing donation theft news in Ayodhya very prominently, which was seen as an attempt to annoy the Narendra Modi regime. The speculation, however, seems to be the result of wishful thinking rather than information and intelligence. At least, Bhagwat has not said anything that can be called critical of the government. In fact, he has come to the rescue of the powers that be by trying to link the ongoing violent protests in France and other European countries, and the earlier ones in Bangladesh and Nepal, with the agitation in India, thus validating the government's narrative that the movement against Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar is politically motivated. "A storm has blown in the west. Look at what transpired in France, Bangladesh and Nepal. Regime change will not happen in India. Such attempts continue in India as well. India has moved forward with steadfast resolve, and the collective vitality (purushartha) of its society has grown," he said. This must be music to the government's ears. "Problems arise and movements take shape; however, these should be directed toward finding solutions. The primary objective must be a resolution. Our actions should not sow animosity, and the boundaries of propriety (maryada) must be respected," he said. RSS functionaries are known not to name persons or groups; in this case, the use of the term maryada must be seen as a rebuke to the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP). During its successful agitation against the then education minister Dharmendra Pradhan in July, many activists used foul language (amaryadit bhasha, in RSS lingo). Whatever the RSS may be thinking, it doesn't look like regime change. The organisation may have its differences with the government, and its leaders may occasionally be displeased with the way the BJP functions, but such discontent should not be mistaken for a desire to dislodge the regime. The RSS has invested decades in building the political and ideological ecosystem of which the BJP is the principal beneficiary. Besides, Sangh functionaries, their friends and families have also benefited hugely. To expect that it would now seek to destabilise this symbiotic relationship will be unrealistic. The Sangh may want the government to be more attentive to the concerns of Gen Z and even the demands of CJP, but it is unlikely to jeopardise saffron hegemony because of such issues. Indeed, the RSS has little to gain from destabilising a government led by a party that has brought its ideological project closer to the centre of national politics than ever before. Any serious confrontation would risk weakening not merely the BJP but the larger Sangh Parivar, while potentially creating political opportunities for its ideological adversaries. The RSS's preference has traditionally been to settle differences through organisational channels rather than advertise them in public domain.

The agony and ecstasy in the high-stakes journalism career

TALKING OF MANY THINGS

DR MOHAN KANDA

TODAY'S world offers young and qualified people many opportunities for rewarding and productive careers. From medicine or engineering, through law, accountancy, and the civil services or journalism to politics, there are innumerable choices.

Counting out politics, which has been described as the 'last resort of scoundrels' by Dr Samuel Johnson, journalism as a career offers an exhilarating mix of frontline storytelling and profound social impact; paired, however, with severe physical, digital, and psychological risks. Since it is all about uncovering the truth, bringing hidden stories about systemic corruption and unheard voices out into the open, and into the public eye: catalysing societal change, holding power accountable, and giving a platform to the resilient or marginalized. Journalism, thus, offers deep personal fulfilment and excitement through storytelling. The life of a journalist is heady and dynamic and is characterised by an ever-changing daily environment where no two days are identical.

Among the pleasurable things the profession offers is the joy of sharing an unspoken bond and deep solidarity with fellow reporters navigating high-pressure deadlines across the globe.

The flip side, however, can hardly be ignored, as the occupation also comes with low starting pay and intense deadline stress. And those are just trivial concerns. Because exposure to hazards such as possible physical danger and, on occasion, even violence, especially in conflict zones, unstable environments, or targeted crackdowns, is not uncommon. Industry instability often poses issues. And, what with one having to navigate dwindling legacy newsroom budgets, deal with the relentless pressures of a 24x7 algorithmic news cycle, and handle rampant disinformation, especially in the form of fake news, a false, misleading, or fabricated information that is presented to look like a legitimate news report, it can be a severely trying job. Dealing with the chronic stress of tight deadlines, the vicarious trauma that invariably follows the covering of tragedies, and institutional or legal harassment can take their own severe toll on one's psychological reserves.

Meanwhile, despite growing numbers, women journalists often encounter deep-seated patriarchal structures, unequal assignments, a lack of representation in leadership, and the added pressure of balancing demanding news cycles with family expectations. They must balance the demands of reporting with the risks of working on the ground.

A well-known woman reporter says that, when she decided to pursue journalism, leaving behind what was considered a dream job for an engineering graduate, her mother worried that the profession was not safe for a woman. Even years later, the fear had not changed.

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The mother still had only one question for her daughter after every assignment, "Did you get home safely"?

Studies have shown that a high percentage of female reporters face multiple forms of attacks, leading many to consider leaving the profession. For instance, when reporting from conflict zones, protests, or restrictive regions, such as under Taliban ruled Afghanistan or during volatile local protests, female reporters face heightened risks of assault, detention, and targeted violence.

Other issues they face include marginalization and undervaluation: Non-privileged or rural reporters often lack institutional backing to combat systemic harassment, while others face professional scepticism that forces them to constantly over-prove their competence

To mark this year's International Women's Day celebrations, a seminar themed 'Women in the Media: Pages from the Past', was held in Karachi.

An effective and legally valid informal tool for exposing public corruption, known popularly as a 'sting' operation first appeared on the scene of investigative journalism in 2001.

By conducting 'Operation West End', which is widely regarded as India's first major high-profile sting, journalists from 'Tehelka' posed as arms dealers to expose widespread corruption in defence deals, forcing the resignation of the then-BJP president Bangaru Laxman and several military officials.

In my own experience, I had the privilege and honour of interacting with at least two eminent journalists. One was Anees Jung an Indian author, journalist and columnist, whose most known work, 'Unveiling India' was a chronicle of the lives of women in India, noted especially for the depiction of Muslim women behind the purdah. The other was Olga Tellis, a veteran Indian journalist and social activist best known for leading the landmark constitutional case, whose verdict remains one of the most significant judgments in Indian legal history. After authorities threatened to forcibly evict pavement and slum dwellers in Bombay, Tellis and the affected residents filed a writ petition while disposing of which the Supreme Court ruled that the Right to Livelihood is an essential part of the Right to Life guaranteed by the Constitution. I still cherish the memory of her interviewing me while I was assisting the District Collector of Guntur district in rescue, relief and rehabilitation operations in the aftermath of the cyclone and tidal wave that ravaged the East Coast of the state in 1977. While in service, I experienced the power and inference of the media on many occasions. One was when I was serving as Collector of Krishna district in Andhra Pradesh. A newspaper report spurred me into action which, while taken in good faith, created livelihoods for young unemployed people. It also, unfortunately, led to my being transferred as vested interests close to powerful political leaders were hurt by it.

It is time the high and the mighty pause, sit back and reflect upon the damage that can be caused to the fabric of good governance on account of their intolerant attitude towards the media. Like in every other profession, journalism also requires the ability to master the art of extracting information, real value incoming noise. A somewhat similar perception exists about the legal profession. There is a story about a young lawyer who began his career in the office of a senior colleague. The senior warned the new entrant that it would be tough to make both ends meet to begin with, the hours would be long, the clients and the judges sometimes uncooperative and even cantankerous and that even contemplating married life would be a thing of the distant future. Not to be put off, the youngster, with a brave smile, asked, "what next sir?". Oh, by then you will get used to it!" was the reply!

For the usual lighthearted end to my columns, here is a story used earlier, but highly relevant in the context of the present discussion.

An Italian Bishop was travelling to the United States as part of his missionary work. On the eve of his departure, he sought an audience with the Pope for a briefing on the proposed visit. His Holiness advised the bishop to be extremely cautious while dealing with the American media personnel, who were known to be aggressively intrusive and eager to sensationalise matters.

Upon arrival at LaGuardia airport, the bishop was besieged by media persons. Out of the blue a cub reporter asked him,

"Hey, Bishop! Will you be visiting any night clubs in New York?"

Somewhat startled by the unexpected and loaded question but remembering the Pope's counsel, his reply was quite guarded. Innocently he asked, "Are there any night clubs in New York?"

Any relief the bishop felt at avoiding potential embarrassment lasted only till the next morning when he read, with shock and alarm, the headlines that screamed at him in a local newspaper.

"Are there any night clubs in New York"? First question the Italian Bishop asks on arrival!"

Duly chastised by that experience, he started his sermon to a congregation in Boston that afternoon, first seeking to know whether any gentlemen of the press were around. A few hands went up. The bishop fervently pleaded with the reporters not to publish the contents of his address as that would make his messages stale even while he had to speak at several places across the country over the next few weeks. Confident, thereafter, that no further danger lurked ahead, he proceeded to deliver his speech.

And the headlines the next day were, "Italian Bishop tells many stories. All unprintable!"

They are really something else, the Paparazzi! Clearly there is no gaining the upper hand over them!

(The writer was formerly Chief Secretary, Government of Andhra Pradesh)

A strategy for nation building that should change the global order of consumption

DR KARNATI KIRAN KUMAR

THE global order of consumption has been changing over the years. New innovations have made some countries economically and politically strong besides changing the consumption patterns of developing and underdeveloped countries.

The wars of the 19th century to recent global conflicts have been intended to control resources and secure their procurement for technological or machine-made products, which are prominent in the process of economic development. Over the centuries, many countries were colonised. In the 18th and 19th centuries, western countries, such as Britain and Portuguese, among others, invaded and conquered various countries. As a result, crapping patterns and consumption habits in colonized countries changed in contrast to their traditional consumption patterns. Changes in people's consumption patterns led to occupational destruction and a sudden surge of unemployment in colonized countries. India was one of the colonized countries that was exploited immensely over the century.

A dominant strategy needed: The growth and development of the nation depend on the dominant perspective of the policymakers. Policymakers should opt for a policy suitable for the nation's progress, rather than simply adopting and imposing other nations' policies and ideologies. Sometimes, the origin of policymakers is a matter of concern. A policymaker from a rural area can understand rural issues and find solutions to resolve the issue Furthermore, those from urban backgrounds can develop effective policies for urban development. Historically, we failed to understand this logic, tried to imbibe another ideology, and failed to implement it. As a result, it has led to the failure of many public welfare programs and caused the persistence of structural unemployment and poverty.

Break the misconceptions:

The thought process in the country should change from importing goods and services to exporting them, so the world should depend on Indian goods and services. The country's innovations should be adopted by other countries rather than confined to the nation's use. India's path-breaking innovations, such as EVM voting machines, came into existence in the 2004 Lok Sabha elections to ensure the smooth conduct of the electoral process in the largest democracy. Before 2004, the election process was chaotic, with the pouring of ink in the ballot boxes, firing, stealing of them, crimes and physical attacks on officers. Since 2004, the electoral process in the country has undergone drastic changes, resulting in the election being conducted smoothly using indigenous technology. We failed to supply those innovations for introduction in other countries to ensure the smooth conduct of elections. Rather, our politicians are creating misconceptions about EVMs even after they have won elections. Moreover, the UPI digital payment system is another path-breaking innovation that we can use widely within the country, and the central government has also succeeded in introducing it in some countries to enable seamless transactions and benefit our fintech sector. By comparison, we failed to spread it across the world as other developed countries do with their Innovations.

In the world of competition and technological advancements, India happily adopted ATMs, credit cards, debit cards, digital technologies, and social media platforms from other countries without any misconceptions about their use. When it comes to Indian technological innovations, some political leaders create and endorse chaos without fact checking.

Getting into the details:

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Indian companies developed vaccines such as Covishield (Serum Institute of India), Covaxin (Bharat Biotech), and Corbevax (a heterologous booster option) to protect people and prevent the spread of the virus. But again, misconceptions spread and caused many deaths during the second wave. The misconception is whether it is an Indian organ or of foreign origin; it should be cross-checked with the government, and a comment should be made on it. But some people always start a game to make the situation worse and want to make themselves better off at the expense of others. There are many other innovations in the country. We failed to make it a global product rather we confined ourselves to India, and some lost existence.

Lack of vision:

The nation's politics should not come at the expense of the country's growth and development. At the micro level, our politicians are more interested in getting into power and acquiring assets for themselves. At the same time, at the macro level, it lacks responsibility for national growth and development. If one political party says a developed economy can be achieved by following one growth model, and the other political party says the nation should adopt a strategy for growth and development by following another development model. However, it should not undermine the economy's performance on either side. As competition between political parties exists, so too does competition among countries for control and command of markets and resources. Political parties and politicians need to craft their manifestos with national interest in mind rather than seeking power for its own sake. On the other hand, business tycoons in developed countries seek to expand their markets by dominating and controlling politics in developing and underdeveloped countries. Individuals or political parties (ruling and opposition) should not be their mouthpiece at the expense of domestic business and common people's lives.

Time for introspection:

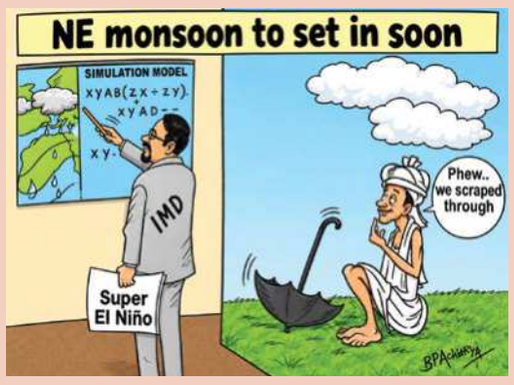
Regime change and deep states are underway in south Asia. In recent times, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal saw a surge in youth protests that created chaos and badly affected their economies. The disruption of a peaceful environment and political unrest will create negative economic consequences, such as low FDI and Investment, unemployment, inflation, and low purchasing power, ultimately leading to poverty. As witnessed in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal.

Bangladesh is the best example for understanding the impact of the political unrest on the economy. As per reports, the Bangladesh economy was about to get middle income status, but it has fallen to lower income status due to the political unrest in the country. Prior to that infrastructure building, the ready-made garment industry drove strong and consistent growth, averaging six to seven per cent, annually. According to a recent RBI report, "South Asia economic update" revealed that Bangladesh's overall GDP increased by an estimated 3.4 percent in FY2026–2027, which is the third year in a row that it has slowed down. Private investment shrank for the second year in a row as difficulties in the energy sector, banking sector weakness, tighter fiscal constraints, high production costs and subdued credit growth. The rate of inflation has continued to be higher than eight to 10 per cent. If anything is wrong in the system that can be corrected through the electoral process. No protest should disturb the smooth progress of economic progress.

India can become Viksit Bhaarat when Indian goods and services flood into the international markets with the absolute trade advantage. The business in the country should target the domestic and international markets. The Indian business community should collaborate with academia. That will bring new innovations to change the world order of consumption. At the same time, India must utilise own demographic dividend for nation-building.

(The writer is Assistant Professor (School of Economics), University of Hyderabad)

MEDLEY



LETTERS

A century of remarkable service

HAVING completed 100 years, the RSS stands at an important milestone in its journey. Its values of discipline, patriotism and selfless service, reflected in its work in education, disaster relief and community welfare, deserve appreciation. As it enters its second century, these contributions offer an opportunity to strengthen public trust further. Greater engagement with different communities, particularly minorities and disadvantaged sections, can broaden its social reach. Its efforts to promote national unity and preserve India's cultural heritage can become more meaningful through respect for diversity and constitutional values. Encouraging dialogue and mutual understanding will also help bridge social differences.

A Myilsami, Sulur (P O), Coimbatore–641402

India-US trade deal brings relief

THIS refers to "US close to finalising trade deal with India" (THI, Oct 21). The indication that the deal is "pretty close" comes as a timely relief. With the US being India's largest trading partner, any reduction in tariff uncertainty will help exporters, especially in textiles, pharma and IT, to plan better. It will also ease pressure on the rupee and support investor confidence. However, a quick deal should not mean a weak deal. India must ensure protection for sensitive sectors like agriculture and dairy, and secure clarity on H-1B and data issues.

S D Tejaswani, Bengaluru

EC data exposes Cong hypocrisy

THIS refers to news that the Election Commission has found over 30,000 voters as "ineligible" for final inclusion in the electoral roll. This means, out of the 92.65 lakh, who were issued notices for being ineligible, around 30,407 are 'fit to be removed from the rolls', including voters having no mapping and logical discrepancies. This information by the ECI should help demolish the mischievous campaign against the S I R and 'vote chori' propaganda of the Congress, INDIA block and the CJP. One hopes the rant for the resignation of CEC and the itch for regime change would end for the Congress as there are no takers for their stupid allegations and vicious propaganda.

Sakunthala K R, Hyderabad

Nip political dissent in the bud

APROPOS, "France protest fire singes Europe". Protests are a democratic right, but violence, vandalism and intimidation cannot be justified in the name of political dissent. The unrest spreading across European countries should concern governments and citizens alike. Governments must distinguish peaceful protesters from those who exploit public grievances to promote disorder. At the same time, dismissing every protest as politically motivated would be equally unwise. Authorities should address legitimate concerns about education, employment and the cost of living through dialogue and transparent action. Firm, impartial law enforcement, coupled with responsive governance, is essential to prevent peaceful dissent from becoming organised violence.

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BENGALURU ONLINE

Police department not a servant: Kharge asks RSS to seek permission

BENGALURU: KARNATAKA Home Minister Priyank Kharge on Wednesday launched a sharp attack on the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), questioning whether the Police Department was subservient to the organisation.

Reacting to a letter submitted by the RSS informing the police about its proposed march, Kharge said the organisation had provided information rather than formally seeking permission for the event. "The letter says that they are informing the police, not seeking permission. Let them seek permission. Is the Police Department their domestic servant?" he asked.Kharge also questioned RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's statements on changing the existing governments and politics, asking who had authorised him to speak about a change of regime and political matters.

"What regime change are they talking about? How can regime change happen? The Chief Election Commissioner is theirs, the EVMs are theirs, and the voter list is theirs. Can these be changed? Form 6 is theirs, and Form 7 is theirs. There is still no answer to the question: Why does the Chief Election Commissioner have judicial immunity?" he said, referring to Forms 6 and 7 associated with electoral rolls.

"There is a conspiracy to ensure that they remain in power permanently. This has already been exposed. Isn't the fact that people are taking to the streets today evidence of this?" he said.

He suggested that this was the reason some people were behaving with such confidence.Keeping up his attack on the organisation, he said: "Which evil force are we talking about? Who is the one developing links with Pakistan?"

He also called for an examination of the organisation's history and questioned what protests it had undertaken in the past.Kharge further said that protests taking place in foreign countries should not be compared with those in India, as the issues involved were different.

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