



● POLITY

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MAHARASHTRA, U.P. AMONG 7 STATES TO GET TEXTILE PARKS**All-in-one parks****The PM Mega Integrated Textile Regions and Apparel (PM MITRA) scheme was announced in October 2021.**

- The parks will come up by 2026-27

- The total outlay for the project is ₹4,445 crore, though the initial allocation in the 2023-24 Budget is only ₹200 crore

- States have offered to provide at least 1,000 acres, says Minister Goyal



- Spinning, weaving, processing/ dyeing, printing and garment manufacturing will be done at one location

- Effort is to reduce logistics cost of textile industry and make it globally competitive

5F (Farm to Fibre to Factory to Fashion to Foreign) vision," Mr. Modi tweeted, adding that the scheme would be a great example of the government's policy of 'Make in India' and 'Make for the World'.

The Centre envisages an investment of nearly ₹70,000 crore into the parks, with employment generation for about 20 lakh people, Textiles Minister Piyush Goyal said.

The parks will function as centres of opportunity to create an integrated textiles value chain — from spinning, weaving, processing, dyeing and printing to garment manufacturing — all at one location. "The textile industry has been unorganised. This increased wastage and logistical costs impact the competitiveness of country's textile sector. The cluster-based approach, a vision of the Prime Minister, will solve several problems of the sector," Mr. Goyal said. Environmental clearances would also be eased under the scheme, he said.

Textiles Secretary Rachna Shah said the Ministry had selected the locations in a transparent manner, having considered 18 proposals from 13 States.

Mr. Goyal hoped that the proposed world-class industrial infrastructure would attract cutting edge technology and boost foreign direct investment and local investment in the sector. The Textiles Ministry will oversee the execution of projects in the PM MITRA parks, according to an official statement.

"An SPV [Special Purpose Vehicle] owned by Centre and State Government will be set up for each park which will oversee the implementation of the project. The Ministry of Textiles will provide financial support in the form of Development Capital Support up to ₹500 crore per park to the Park

Centre expects the parks to attract investments worth ₹70,000 crore, generate jobs for 20 lakh people and create an integrated value chain for the sector, says Textiles Minister Piyush Goyal

The Centre has selected sites in Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Karnataka, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh to set up new textile parks, a year and a half after the PM Mega Integrated Textile Regions and Apparel (PM MITRA) scheme was announced.

Listing the seven selected States in a tweet on Friday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the parks would "provide state-of-the-art infrastructure for the textiles sector, attract investment of crores and create lakhs of jobs". The scheme was announced in October 2021, and the parks will be set up by 2026-27. The total outlay for the project is ₹4,445 crore, though the initial allocation in the 2023-24 Budget is only ₹200 crore.

"PM MITRA mega textile parks will boost the textiles sector in line with

SPV," the Ministry said.

"A Competitive Incentive Support (CIS) up to ₹300 crore per park to the units in PM MITRA Park shall also be provided to incentivise speedy implementation. Convergence with other Government of India schemes shall also be facilitated in order to ensure additional incentives to the master developer and investor units," added the statement.

Mr. Goyal said that State governments have offered to provide at least 1,000 acres of land for free for the parks and will also facilitate provision of all utilities such as power and water. He said that ₹200 crore has been allotted as an initial investment.

"PM MITRA Parks represent a unique model where the Centre and State governments will work together to increase investment, promote innovation, create job opportunities and ultimately make India a global hub for textile manufacturing and exports," the Ministry added.

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'U.S. BANK ISSUES HIGHLIGHT NEED FOR PRUDENT ASSET LIABILITY MANAGEMENT'

Ring-fencing banks

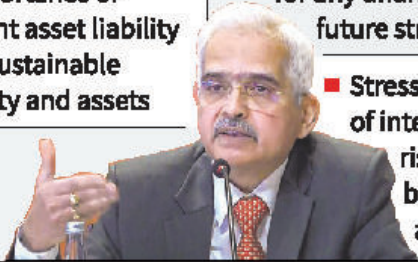
RBI's Shaktikanta Das highlights the importance of ensuring robust risk management in order to safeguard financial stability in the economy

■ Developments in the U.S. drive home importance of ensuring prudent asset liability management, sustainable growth in liability and assets

■ Banks must undertake periodic stress

tests, build up critical buffers for any unanticipated future stress

■ Stress arising out of interest rate risks need to be properly assessed



This is the last part of a series of articles looking at Sri Lanka's economic recovery and political course

Reserve Bank of India Governor Shaktikanta Das said on Friday developments in the U.S. banking sector highlight the importance of ensuring prudent asset liability management and robust risk management in the sector in order to preserve financial stability in the economy.

"The recent developments in the United States' banking system have brought to the fore the criticality of banking sector regulation and supervision. These are areas which have significant impact on preserving financial stability of every country," Mr. Das said, delivering the K.P Hormis commemorative lecture organised by the Federal Bank. "More specifically, these developments in the U.S.... drive home the importance of ensuring prudent asset liability management, robust risk management and sustainable growth in liability and assets, undertaking periodic stress tests and building up critical buffers for any unanticipated future stress," he observed.

Mr. Das added that the developments also flagged the real danger that cryptocurrencies or similar assets could pose to banks. "We have been engaging with our banks over the last several years. Indian banking system continues to be resilient and stable," he stressed.

"Naturally, when inflation goes up, there will be rate hike by the central bank. So therefore, the interest rate risks and likely stress arising out of the interest risks need to be properly assessed and appropriate stress tests need to be done. RBI has been driving home this point to all banks," he emphasised.

XI JINPING TO PUSH UKRAINE PEACE PLAN ON RUSSIA VISIT



Deal maker: Russian President Vladimir Putin with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping in Beijing on February 4. Reuters

President will visit Russia from March 20 to 22; Foreign Ministry says China 'always believes political dialogue is the only way to resolve conflicts'; Beijing had earlier called for a ceasefire

Chinese President Xi Jinping will start his third term with a symbolic visit to Russia starting March 20, Beijing announced on Friday, coming amid stepped up Chinese diplomacy on the Ukraine crisis. Mr. Xi "will pay a state visit to Russia from March 20 to 22 at the invitation of Russian President Vladimir Putin," the Chinese Foreign Ministry said. Asked if the visit will see China push its Ukraine peace plan, spokesperson Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said China "always believes political dialogue is the only way to resolve conflicts and disputes".

Beijing, on February 24, the one-year anniversary of Russia's invasion, released a position paper that called on both sides to reach "a comprehensive ceasefire". The paper reflected Beijing's approach of, on the one hand, saying it supported the "sovereignty" of all countries, while on the other, criticising the West, which has questioned Beijing's

credentials as a mediator, citing its close "no limits" relationship with Russia.

Mr. Wang on Friday once again rejected Western criticism of both China-Russia ties and its position on Ukraine, saying "fanning flames during the fight and imposing unilateral sanctions will make matters worse". He rejected Western accusations of China supplying arms to Russia during the war, saying, "China-Russia cooperation is completely above board" and "shall be free from disruption or coercion from any third party." "China always handles export of military items in a prudent manner and dual-use articles in accordance with relevant laws and regulations," he said, adding that Beijing was "opposed to long-arm jurisdiction or sanctions that are not in accordance with UN laws."

Beijing's recent hosting of landmark talks between Saudi Arabia and Iran has turned the spotlight on its aspirations to emerge as a key player in the Ukraine crisis. Over the past year, China hasn't condemned Russia for its invasion. It has called for peace, but at the same time justified Russian security concerns with regard to the West and NATO. Mr. Xi's visit next week will see both

leaders "charting the course and providing guidance for the sustained and steady development of the China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era", Mr. Wang said, adding that Mr. Xi "will have in-depth exchanges with President Putin on bilateral relations and major international and regional issues of mutual interest" as well as jointly develop "a blueprint" for relations.

Strategic cooperation

The visit would "boost strategic cooperation and inject a new impetus" in bilateral ties," he said. "The changes unseen in a century are moving at a fast pace and the world has entered a period of instability and turbulence. China and Russia are permanent members of the UN Security Council and major countries. The significance and influence of the relationship goes far beyond the bilateral scope."

"This will be a trip for friendship," he added. "It will boost bilateral cooperation across the board".

Mr. Wang did not comment on reports suggesting Mr. Xi will, in the coming days, also reach out to Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang on Thursday held a rare phone conversation with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba.

Mr. Wang neither confirmed nor denied whether the two officials had discussed a possible phone call between Mr. Xi and Mr. Zelenskyy. "China will uphold an objective and fair position on the Ukraine crisis and play a role in promoting talks for peace," he said. "We maintain communication with all parties."

In Thursday's phone call, Mr. Qin said China was "concerned that the

crisis has dragged on and escalated and may even spiral out of control" and hoped both sides "will keep alive the hope of dialogue and negotiation, and will not close the door to a political settlement. "China will continue to play a constructive role in bringing an end to the conflict, mitigating the crisis and restoring peace," he said according to a readout, which quoted Mr. Kuleba as saying "China is not only an important cooperation partner of Ukraine but also a key and indispensable major country in international affairs." He also "noted that China's position paper on the political settlement of the Ukraine crisis shows its sincerity in promoting a ceasefire and an end to the conflict" and "expressed the hope to maintain communication with China", it said.

INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT ISSUES ARREST WARRANT AGAINST PUTIN OVER UKRAINE



The International Criminal Court (ICC) on Friday announced it had issued an arrest warrant against Russian President Vladimir Putin for the

"unlawful deportation" of Ukrainian children. The Hague-based ICC said it had also issued a warrant against Maria Lvova-Belova, Russia's presidential commissioner for children's rights.

Russia is not a member of the ICC. It was unclear how the ICC planned to enforce the warrant.

"Today, pre-Trial Chamber II of the International Criminal Court issued warrants of arrest for two individuals in the context of the situation in Ukraine: Mr. Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin and Ms. Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova," the ICC said in a statement.

Mr. Putin "is allegedly responsible for the war crime of unlawful deportation of population (children) and that of unlawful transfer of population (children) from occupied areas of Ukraine to the Russian Federation."

The ICC said the crimes dated from February 24, 2022, when Russia invaded Ukraine. "There are reasonable grounds to believe that Mr. Putin bears individual criminal responsibility for the aforementioned crimes," it said.

Mr. Putin was allegedly responsible both directly by committing the acts and for "failure to exercise control properly over civilian and military subordinates who committed the acts, or allowed for their commission".

ICC prosecutor Karim Khan launched an investigation into alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity in Ukraine. Mr. Khan said after a visit to Ukraine that the alleged abductions of children "are being investigated by my office as a priority".

The Kremlin said that the ICC's decision to issue an arrest warrant for President Vladimir Putin was legally "void" since Moscow does not recognise the court's jurisdiction.

HOUSE MATTERS

The government should not avoid a debate on issues of governance

The second leg of the Budget session of Parliament is in a deadlock. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) wants Congress leader Rahul Gandhi to apologise for remarks that he made in London recently about democratic backsliding in India; the Congress is insisting on the constitution of a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) to probe allegations of dubious financial transactions and dishonest business practices against the Adani Group of companies. Available evidence suggests that Mr. Gandhi had categorically stated that the challenges to Indian democracy had to be sorted out domestically, and ruled out any role for foreign forces. With the Indian diaspora expanding, the ripple effects of politics in India are inevitable beyond the country's geographical boundaries. In fact, the BJP has for long believed in cultural nationalism which is not contained within the geography of India. Mr. Modi has discussed national politics before audiences around the world. A democracy that does not allow criticism, including of democracy itself, is a contradiction in terms. Mr. Gandhi has not been able to speak in Parliament and explain his remarks; meanwhile, a BJP Member has initiated a process to terminate Mr. Gandhi's Lok Sabha membership. It is an ill-advised move, and if carried out, will further amplify the

The fears of a democratic deficit in India.

In their clamour for an apology by Mr. Gandhi, BJP Ministers are also evading questions regarding government patronage of the Adani Group. The Congress has been seeking answers from the government on the links between the public sector Life Insurance Corporation of India and the State Bank of India with the Adani Group. The BJP and the government have been silent on this serious issue of governance that spans the government and the public and private sectors. Arbitrariness in decision making, followed by a lack of accountability, amounts to governance failure, if not collusion. The government, the Rajya Sabha chairman and the Lok Sabha Speaker should work with the Opposition for a discussion on the issues arising out of the Adani controversy. Coming clean is essential in maintaining the government's credibility, the regulatory environment and the private sector. There have been precedents of a JPC in cases of financial scandals. The BJP has the numbers to get away with any disregard for parliamentary norms, but it should rise above that temptation and evolve as a true party of governance. Parliament has a role to play in fixing accountability, and the BJP should not avoid it and betray a new level of executive impunity.

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ENDLESS DELAY

Constitutional functions should not be held hostage to personal differences

The frequency with which the conduct or inaction of Governors comes up for judicial scrutiny reflects poorly on the state of relations between incumbents in Raj Bhavans and the respective Chief Ministers. The Supreme Court will soon hear an extraordinary petition from the Telangana government, seeking a direction to the Governor, Dr. Tamilisai Soundararajan, to grant assent to Bills passed by the State Assembly. Recently, the apex court disposed of a petition from the Punjab Government that was aggrieved by an alleged delay in the Governor summoning the Assembly. The matter was resolved when it was submitted on behalf of the Governor that the Assembly would meet on the day desired by the State government. In earlier decades, a petition seeking a direction to Governors or questioning their inaction on constitutional matters would have been thrown out at the threshold itself. However, such is the extent to which the gubernatorial office is being overtly politicised by those holding it that courts may now be constrained to examine whether such inaction is justified. One sees a disturbing tendency in recent years of some Governors making use of the absence of a time-frame in the Constitution to indefinitely delay decisions. This tactic effectively stalls the elected regime's legislative agenda.

The conflict between Raj Bhavan and the Chief Minister's office

witnessed in several States is quite acute in Telangana. Dr. Soundararajan has alleged that she is being boycotted by Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao and that her queries are not being answered. The State government, for its part, is apparently upset that she may be trying to act independent of the Cabinet. A recent tweet from her account the day after the State government went to court — conveying a message that Raj Bhavan was closer than Delhi — indicates that her stand is linked to her view that the government is unfriendly and discourteous. These considerations ought not to matter on constitutional issues. The Governor can either grant assent to a Bill or decline it, or reserve it for the President's consideration. In suitable cases, it may also be returned for reconsideration. However, none of this should be based on the Governor's personal view on the Bill's content. One can understand an occasional query if any Bill seemingly violates fundamental rights, but a relevant question that requires an authoritative pronouncement from the court is whether the Governor should decide on its legality or the legislature's competence each time a Bill is presented for assent. As the Supreme Court remarked recently, dialogue between constitutional functionaries should not become a race to the bottom. Constitutional functions should not be held hostage to political and personal differences.

THE FORECAST AFTER A FAKE NEWS CAMPAIGN IN TAMIL NADU

In early March, a malicious online disinformation campaign led to law-and-order issues and made media headlines across the country. Over a period of four days, there was a concocted and continuous narrative about migrant workers hailing from Bihar being subjected to violence in Tamil Nadu. Though the Tamil Nadu police responded with alacrity and countered these false claims with factual reports, on-the-spot investigations and personalised appeals, the spectre of disinformation that has been highlighted should not be disregarded so easily. The propagation of fake news will be one of the biggest threats to democracy in an election season, when most information is likely to be consumed through social media sources. As such, this issue should be ranked high as any other in terms of potential to destabilise democratic institutions.

A cycle of disinformation, counter-steps

On March 1, at a public meeting in Chennai to mark the 70th birthday of the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and president of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), M.K. Stalin, various national leaders such as Indian National Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, Jammu and Kashmir National Conference leader Farooq Abdullah, Deputy Chief Minister of Bihar Tejashwi Yadav and Samajwadi Party Chief Akhilesh Yadav were present. It was a significant political event as it brought together a group of leaders from parties that are opposed to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The next day, video clips of migrant workers leaving Tamil Nadu for Holi holidays and festivities began to be shared to say that there was an exodus from the State because of incidents of violence.

To nurture this narrative, stray news stories about the death of a migrant worker were seeded online in order to build a wider campaign that there was targeted violence in Tamil Nadu against North Indians. Social media handles of BJP office-bearers from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh shared the disinformation on social media while some media outlets such as Dainik Bhaskar, a large media group, projected these stories as news, without attempting to verify the authenticity of these clips. It was left to fact checkers (Alt News) to step in and break the cycle of disinformation on social media.

In order to contain the spread of fake news, the Government of Tamil Nadu used the services of its various officials including the head of the police force to present the truth. The Tamil Nadu police put out a specific clarification that the video clips being circulated were both false and mischievous. Mr. Stalin also assured the Chief Minister of Bihar, Nitish Kumar, that there was adequate protection for migrant workers in Tamil Nadu. Helplines were set up by the Tamil Nadu government at the district level, particularly in the areas with a concentration of migrant workers. Mr. Stalin visited a surgical glove manufacturing unit near Tirunelveli and interacted with its migrant workers who were from Jharkhand, reassuring them about their safety. A high-level government delegation from Bihar also visited Tamil Nadu and confirmed first hand that there was no truth to the rumours about migrant workers being targeted in the State. In this particular instance, the response of Tamil Nadu was a textbook case of rebuttal to stop the spread of disinformation and contain its symptoms. However, the malaise of disinformation runs much deeper. When one looks at what is

happening in other parts of the world, it is apparent that disinformation campaigns have the potential to unfairly manipulate social and political outcomes.

Measures overseas versus the Indian scene

Keeping this in mind, several countries have already felt the need to have in place robust responses to disinformation. The European Union (EU) has put out the Code of Practice on Disinformation 2022. Some of the strengthened initiatives of the EU Code include transparency in political advertising, empowerment of fact-checkers and researchers, tools to flag disinformation, and measures to reduce manipulative behaviour. The United Kingdom has proposed enacting an Online Safety Bill which will expect social media platforms (intermediaries) to actively monitor problematic content. Even as the U.K. Bill is being reviewed by a committee in the House of Lords, there are already calls from a number of companies, including WhatsApp and Signal, to scrap the legislation in the interest of privacy. During the progress of the U.K. Bill, the provisions to monitor "legal but harmful" content have already been replaced with greater onus on social media platforms to enforce their terms and conditions in accordance with their policies.

On the other hand, there has been little or no serious discussion on the menace and the extent of disinformation in India. The Union of India has only employed knee-jerk measures such as Internet shutdowns across jurisdictions without due regard to the doctrine of proportionality. This response, to put it mildly, is over-simplistic, non-transparent and autocratic. A more studied, comprehensive and calculated set of legislative actions is required if there is to be a balance between allowing free speech under Article 19 of the Constitution of India, and protecting citizens from falling prey to malicious disinformation.

In the case of *Tehseen S. Poonawalla vs Union Of India* (2018) the Supreme Court of India had held that it is the duty of the Union and State governments to take steps to curb dissemination of "irresponsible and explosive messages and videos having content which is likely to incite mob violence and lynching of any kind". Many people can recollect the panic India witnessed in many instances as a result of fake news during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Supreme Court in *Alakh Alok Srivastava vs Union Of India* (2020) dealt with A Public Interest Litigation on the plight of migrant workers walking thousands of kilometres back home when the country went into its first lockdown. Such instances illustrate the real dangers to public order as a result of the dissemination of fake news.

In the name of 'unpalatable content'

Rather than coming up with a robust framework to tackle the root causes of disinformation, the Union has granted itself greater powers to strike down any content that is found to be unpalatable. With the use of Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000, the Union Government has blocked access to any information online that it considers necessary in the interest of the sovereignty and the integrity of India, the security of the state or public order. More recently, the Union brought out the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, or IT Rules, 2021, to regulate content by online publishers of news and social media intermediaries.

The recent draft amendments to the IT Rules, 2021, empower the Press Information Bureau, which functions under the Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to 'flag inaccurate and fake news related to government bodies on social media platforms' amounts to disinformation. It is apparent that the focus has more to do with containing criticism against the Union Government and its leaders than about blocking fake news as such. The spate of disinformation projecting discord between Tamils and migrant workers residing in the state of Tamil Nadu is nothing but an attempt to incite

THE PLAN OF A 'RIGHT OF WAY' IN SOUTH INDIA

When the Ayodhya movement led to the dramatic rise in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s Lok Sabha seat tally — two in 1984 and 85 seats in 1989 — it was explained away as a largely North Indian story. The BJP, it was further argued, would not be able to replicate these results in the south because of its distinct history. By 2008, with the formation of the BJP government in Karnataka, the argument turned out to be wrong.

Clearly, the south is neither invincible nor impenetrable for the Hindu Right, though it does offer some challenges that are of a different kind when compared to the other regions of India. Ever since 2014, when the BJP came to power at the Centre, the party has unleashed an aggressive campaign at multiple levels to win over the rest of the south.

While it is hard to predict when the BJP could emerge to be electorally hegemonic in the south, the right is showing great determination to mobilise voters in every southern State.

In September 2022 and in February this year, the Madras High Court had directed the Tamil Nadu police and passed an order, respectively, allowing the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) to conduct its marches in Tamil Nadu — the RSS conducts such marches quite regularly. Elsewhere, where these are conducted, there have been conflicts between RSS cadres and cadres of rival secular parties, such as the Left and the Congress in Kerala. Karnataka, particularly its coastal region, has seen a massive rise of Islamophobia.

The Popular Front of India (PFI) is alleged to have contributed to the radicalisation of Muslims in the region for many years, leading to its banning in September 2022 by the Ministry of Home Affairs. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on the other hand, has been calling for a BJP outreach to Pasmada Muslims.

In the wider context of the churn in India's polity, the politics of religious polarisation across Hindu-Muslim lines in India's south is steadily becoming the name of the game.

Threats to nuanced social links

Islam arrived in the south as early as the Eighth or Ninth century. According to historian Susan Bayly, Islam in the south expanded by means of Sufi traditions and Arab settlers through trade. By the 13th and 14th centuries, it began to spread in the hinterland. Social stratifications in the south have also been quite distinct from that in the north. For instance, in Tamil Nadu, Muslims of Arab origin are known as Marakkayars and the local converts are called Labbais.

Social relationships among Hindus and Muslims in the south are

communal disharmony between the two groups. It is unfortunate that several social media handles that belong to BJP office-bearers as well as some media outlets propagated these untruths without any regard for consequences. However, it is the timing of the campaign, especially after the March 1 event, which points the needle of suspicion to the BJP and its affiliates. Though the overall damage this disinformation campaign has caused was contained on this occasion, it serves as an ominous indicator of what lies ahead in the lead up to the general election in 2024, where voters will rely on information through social media more than any other source.

also deeper and more nuanced. In vast parts of Tamil Nadu, the Muslim Allah was and still is referred as Allah Swami. In Tiruchirapalli, Muslims and people of the Kammalan caste address each other as mani, or paternal uncle. Likewise, Muslims address people of the Pallan caste as grandson and granddaughter, and in turn, Muslims were called grandfather.

Such deeply intertwined cultural and religious practices between Hindus and Muslims should stand in the way of the right's politics of polarisation, but that does not seem to be the case. Strategies such as a weaponisation of history (like that of Tipu Sultan or the hijab controversy) that are very similar to strategies that brought the right's dominance in the north are now being unleashed in the south. The Asaduddin Owaisi-led All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) is being attacked as a party of razakkars by the BJP — though secular parties have been attacking the AIMIM as the BJP's B team. In the offensive that the right has been unleashing, an incredibly rich Sufi history of Muslims in the south is becoming fragile and vulnerable.

Forging an identity

In making Muslim identity as the south's native identity, the Dravidian movement (specifically, Periyar's leadership), played a decisive role. The force and the rationale for his campaign for Tamil Muslims as integral to Dravidian identity was so persuasive that even Mohammad Ali Jinnah has to concede to it. In the 1940 Lahore resolution, Jinnah famously argued Hindus and Muslims to be separate nations; but a year later, in April 1941 in Chennai, at the 28th annual session of the All India Muslim League, Jinnah said, "In this land of ours, there is another nation Dravidstan. This land is really Dravidstan... I shall do all I can to establish Dravidstan and we Muslims will stretch our hand of friendship and live with you on lines of equality, justice and fair play."

It has been argued that given the distinct brand of politics that regional parties stand for, the BJP cannot expand in the south. But the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam have had political alliances with the BJP at various times since the 1990s.

It is true that regional parties have defeated the BJP in many States — in Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh, for instance. While this sounds persuasive, it may not hold true for ever. The BJP has been able to weaken regional parties by using state agencies and backdoor machinations, examples being the cases of the Aam Aadmi Party in Delhi or the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra. Given such strategies, one is not too sure how long regional parties will be able to sustain their struggle. Given this scenario, there is a fair opportunity for the right's expansion in the south, thus creating a new set of challenges for its minorities, particularly Muslims.

LAW PANEL TO EXAMINE SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS

The issue of holding simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies has been referred to the Law Commission for further examination, Law Minister Kiren Rijju told the Lok Sabha on Friday. The Minister argued in favour of holding simultaneous elections as it would not only result in savings to the exchequer but it also enlist "imperatives" such as amending the Constitution and bringing all political parties on board.

He said that simultaneous elections would require amendments in "not less than five" Articles of the Constitution — Articles 83 relating to duration of Houses of Parliament, 85 dissolution of Lok Sabha, 172 duration of the State legislatures, 174 dissolution of the State legislatures, and 356.

CENTRE SETS ACCOUNTING NORM FOR ADJUSTMENTS TO PAST ERRORS

To check wrong accounting methods followed by most States to record adjustments for errors made in past years' accounts, the government has notified a new accounting standard for States, Union territories and the Union government on how to account for such prior period adjustments.

The standard, prescribed on the advice of the Comptroller Auditor General (CAG) of India, however, does not cover transactions such as payment of arrears arising due to increase in salaries or revision of pension or increase in dearness allowance as they cannot be attributed to errors or adjustments in government policies. Under the cash system of accounting followed for government accounts, there are no rules for States for dealing with prior period adjustments to rectify errors and adjust financial statements for earlier years whose accounts have been closed. The new standard "not only aims to disclose such information which pertains to prior period errors but also covers entries requiring prior period adjustments arising out of changes in government decisions which may impact current balances and progressive amounts during the earlier years for which accounts have been closed," the Finance Ministry said. The Ministry, which notified the new norm — Indian Government Accounting Standards-4 — stressed that defaults of loans and grants-in-aid shall not be included in its ambit.



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