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SHAH LANDS IN MANIPUR TO INITIATE PEACE MEASURES

VIJAITA SINGH
RAHUL KARMAKAR
NEW DELHI/GUWAHATI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah arrived in Manipur on Monday on a three-day visit, his first since the violence broke out on May 3.

A senior government official said the Home Minister, whose flight landed in Imphal late in the evening, would hold several rounds of security meetings to assess the situation and plan steps to restore normalcy.

On his arrival, Mr. Shah met Chief Minister N. Biren Singh and other Ministers. He was accompanied by Union Home Secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla and Intelligence Bureau Director Tapan Kumar Deka. He later held a meeting with Governor Anusuiya Uikey in Imphal.

During his stay, Mr. Shah is likely to travel to Churachandpur, Kangkokpi and Moreh — some of the areas most affected in the ongoing violence. He would also meet civil society organisations representing the Meitei, Kuki-Zo and the Nagas.

The Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI), a Meitei outfit, said in a statement that Mr. Shah's visit was a positive step towards restoring peace in the State. "We are speaking for everyone, including the Kukis. We are for the unity of Manipur but we are against the Kuki militants. We are likely to meet the Home Minister on Tuesday," Jeetendra Nimgonba, coordinator, COCOMI, said.

The COCOMI (and other Imphal-based organisations) stressed the need to take action against poppy growers and drug dealers in the hills surrounding the Imphal Valley. "The people of Manipur will not be able to come to any solution unless the State and Central governments take immediate actions to uproot these narco-terrorist aggressors," it said.

The United People's Front (UPF) and Kuki National Organisation (KNO), Kuki militant organisations that are in a suspension of operations pact with the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and the Manipur government, said the Home Minister's visit has given a sense of security among the Kuki-Zo tribe.

"We look forward to his actions and directions to end this ongoing ethnic clash between the two communities... We appeal to the Kuki-Zo population to maintain peace and wait for the outcome of his peace mission to the State," the statement read. Meanwhile, one of the Kuki representatives made it clear that they would not travel to Imphal to meet the Minister.

Kuldip Singh, Security Adviser, Manipur government, told The Hindu that Internet services would remain to be suspended in the State as violence continued to be reported from several areas. "In some areas, abandoned



In favour: Union Home Minister Amit Shah's visit to Manipur is being seen as a positive step towards restoring peace in the State. ANI

Union Home Minister is likely to visit the Hill and Valley districts in the violence-hit State to assess the security situation, meet with civil society organisations; Meitei and Kuki groups welcome visit

houses are being burnt. In some places, houses that have already been burnt are being set on fire." However, officials said there were no reports of violence on Monday, unlike 24 hours ago.

Meanwhile, ahead of Mr. Shah's visit, the Armed Forces on Monday arrested 25 people possessing guns in the State. A Defence statement said Army personnel caught 22 people after receiving information about armed miscreants trying to target the security forces and torch houses in the hilly Yaingangpokpi area of Imphal East district. Five 12-bore double-barrel rifles, three single-barrel rifles, a country-made weapon, a muzzle-loaded weapon, and war-like stores were recovered from them. In a separate operation, the Armed Forces apprehended three miscreants in Imphal's New Checkon area and recovered an INSAS rifle, 60 cartridges, a Chinese hand grenade, and a detonator. All the 25 were handed over to the police and arrested.

The Indian Army said in a tweet that acting on specific intelligence, it has mobilised in Sanasabi, Gwaltabi and Shabunkhol Khunao villages in hill regions of Imphal.

ERDOGAN CALLS FOR UNITY; RIVAL SLAMS 'MOST UNFAIR' ELECTION



Taste of victory: Supporters of Turkish President wave a flag depicting Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Istanbul on Sunday.AFP

Turkey's re-elected President says, 'now is the time to set aside disputes and unite around our national goals', Kilicdaroglu claims 'all the means of the state were laid at the feet of one man'

REUTERS
ISTANBUL

President Tayyip Erdogan and supporters on Monday revelled in an election victory lengthening his rule into a third decade while Turkey's opposition, which once counted on winning, braced for "difficult days" against an increasingly autocratic government. His rival Kemal Kilicdaroglu said it was "the most unfair election in years" but did not dispute the outcome, which gave Mr. Erdogan a mandate to pursue policies that have polarised Turkey and strengthened its position as a regional military power.

The election had been seen as Mr. Erdogan's biggest political challenge, with the opposition confident of unseating him and reversing his policies after polls showed a

cost-of-living crisis left him vulnerable. But he prevailed with 52.2% of the vote to Mr. Kilicdaroglu's 47.8%. It reinforced Mr. Erdogan's image of invincibility in the deeply divided NATO-member country, whose foreign, economic and security policy he has redrawn.

Addressing his supporters, Mr. Erdogan declared democracy the winner. "Now is the time to put the disputes and conflicts of the election period

to one side and unite around our national goals," he said. But the prospect of five more years of Mr. Erdogan rule was a blow to an opposition which accused him of undermining democracy. Mr. Kilicdaroglu had promised a new "spring" if he had won.

Mr. Kilicdaroglu said the election outcome showed there was a will among many Turks to remove an authoritarian government, but "all the means of the state were laid at the feet of one man".

JANUARY-APRIL IMPORTS FROM CHINA RISE 4.6% TO \$37.86 BN

ANANTH KRISHNAN

India's imports of Chinese goods continued to rise in 2023, growing 4.6% in the first four months to \$37.86 billion.

Two-way trade climbed 4.5% year-on-year to \$44.34 billion at the end of April, data from China's General Administration of Customs showed. India's exports to China also rose by 3.7%, but still accounted for a smaller share of the bilateral trade.

In 2022, trade with China hit a record \$135.98 billion, driven by a 21% rise in imports. The trade deficit crossed \$100 billion for the first time last year. Analysts said the continuing increase in imports of Chinese goods highlight a rise in demand for intermediates required by Indian industry, as well as continued reliance on sourcing from China, a matter of concern for New Delhi amid frayed political ties.

In recent years, India's biggest imports from China have included active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs), chemicals, electrical and mechanical machinery, auto components, and medical supplies.

Trade with the EU and the United States, China's second- and third-biggest trading partners that have both been highlighting the need to "de-risk" supply from China, however, showed declines.

While trade with the EU slid 3.5% to \$262.53 billion, that with the U.S. contracted 11.2% to \$217.92 billion.

Import appetite

Imports of Chinese goods continued to rise in the January-April period, reflecting a continued reliance on sourcing from China

■ In 2022, bilateral trade hit a record \$135.98 billion, driven by a 21% rise in imports

■ India's biggest imports from China have included APIs, electrical and mechanical machinery and auto parts

■ Over the same period, trade with the EU slid 3.5%, and that with the U.S. shrank 11.2%



Two-way trade climbs 4.5% to reach \$44.34 billion at the end of April, data from China's General Administration of Customs shows; India's exports to China increase by 3.7% but share stays small

FASTER, STRONGER

India must use its supercomputers beyond weather forecasts

Later this year, India will have a new 'supercomputer' or, more correctly, an upgraded 'high performance computing (HPC)' system that will arguably be its fastest. This system is to be made and installed by the French corporation, Atos — an information technology service and consulting company. The Narendra Modi government signed a deal in December 2018 with France to procure high-performance computers worth ₹4,500 crore by 2025. These HPC systems will run at two institutions, the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune, and the National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting, Noida, that currently host two of India's most powerful such machines, Mihir and Pratyush. Like their predecessors, the Atos machines will be used primarily to run sophisticated weather models that, for some years now, are being used to prepare a range of forecasts, from long-term monsoon to fortnightly as well as daily weather changes. Extremely powerful machines are needed for this purpose as accurate forecasts are premised on being able to simulate the state of the atmosphere and oceans. 'Supercomputers' is a buzzword and term that is in constant flux. Supercomputers of two decades ago are today's student laptops and gaming consoles.

While many challenging research questions, apart from weather modelling, are extremely dependent on computing — protein biology, aerospace-modelling applications, and now AI-linked applications — the

possession of HPCs is also used as a medallion by countries wanting to signify their technological prowess. The Top500 project has for over two decades maintained a list of the top 500 most powerful HPC machines and this is updated twice a year, with countries prominently advertising the presence of their systems if they make it to the list. Currently, a machine housed at Pune's Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (CDAC) is the only Indian machine in the top 100 with a top speed of 13 petaflops. Floating point operations per second (FLOPS) are an indicator of computer processing abilities and 1 petaflop is a 1,000 trillion flops. The to-be installed French machines are expected to be 18 petaflops and India already has a handful of machines at multiple research institutions in the petaflop range. The possession of powerful supercomputers is certainly a reassurance that Indian scientists, wanting to solve intractable problems, can always tap these behemoths, but whether the use of these machines has translated into significant breakthroughs in fundamental science or engineering commercial products is another matter. Much like India has improved its short-term weather forecasts and made cyclone forecasts more accurate on the back of such machines, there should be greater accounting of their worth in other fields, rather than be content with epithets of speed and power.

THE ERDOĞAN VICTORY, A TRIUMPH FOR OTTOMAN GLORY

Talmiz Ahmad is a former Indian Ambassador to Saudi Arabia

May 29, 2023 marked the 570th anniversary of the capture of Istanbul (then Constantinople) by the Ottoman sultan, Mehmed II, in 1453. This day also signalled the electoral victory of Turkey's modern-day sultan, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who has begun a fresh term as President of the Turkish Republic.

The elections for the presidency and the 600-member Parliament on May 14 had upset most forecasts which had suggested that the incumbent President would finally bow out of office and his challenger, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, would replace him. However, with an 88% turnout in an electorate of 64 million, Mr. Erdoğan had then obtained 49.5% (27.1 million) of the vote, while his rival got 44.8% (24.6 million). Mr. Erdoğan's alliance, the People's Alliance, also won 323 seats in Parliament as against Mr. Kılıçdaroğlu's Nation Alliance that got

213 seats.

After the May 14 elections, Mr. Kılıçdaroğlu saw the swing to the nationalist right and adopted hard line rhetoric, promising to send back "ten million" Syrian refugees within a year. This did not attract any new support. Most commentators now conceded that Mr. Erdoğan would win in the runoff on May 28.

Erdoğan's appeal

This has now been confirmed. In the May 28 runoff, in a turnout of about 84%, Mr. Erdoğan has obtained 52% of the vote, while his rival got 48%. Both candidates have retained their earlier support base, but Mr. Erdoğan romped home with a larger number of votes — 27.7 million votes versus 25.4

million votes for Mr. Kılıçdaroğlu.

The results of both elections reveal a sharp three-way geographical divide among Turkey's voters. Most of the Turkish heartland of Central Anatolia voted for Mr. Erdoğan, giving him 72% of its vote. The Kurdish areas in the east, the more modern and better developed coastal areas in the west and south and most major cities voted for Mr. Kılıçdaroğlu. Mr. Erdoğan attracted the heartland by identifying with the region's Sunni identity and religious and nationalist values, even as he presented himself as the legate of Ottoman legacy, upholding its political and military achievements and its civilisational glory. Mr. Kılıçdaroğlu, with his Alevi identity and his liberal persona, was at a disadvantage in this area. However, in the Kurdish and more modern areas of the country, his agenda of returning to the parliamentary system, mainstream economic policies and improved ties with the West were found appealing.

The economy will be Mr. Erdoğan's primary concern. Many critics have blamed the President for the country's parlous situation — inflation at 44%, currency depreciation of 80% since 2018, and negative foreign exchange reserves of \$151 billion just before the May 28 elections.

But Mr. Erdoğan had also benefited from substantial foreign support. Last year, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia had deposited \$5 billion each in Turkey's central bank, while Russia had provided about \$10 billion to finance the Akkuyu nuclear power plant. Russia has also agreed to postpone a \$600 million Turkish gas bill to 2024.

Turkey's foreign policy

These developments suggest that Turkey is unlikely to change its foreign policy posture in the West versus Russia competition. Western powers find it impossible to accept that their allies could, over time, shape new ideas relating to their interests and role in world affairs. This is particularly true of

Turkey, a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member since 1952; it has clearly acquired the capacity and the aspiration to chart its own foreign policy positions.

Turkey under Mr. Erdoğan has also expanded its strategic horizons and interests, extending to the Mediterranean, North Africa, West Asia, the Caucasus and Central Asia, the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea, and wishes to shape its own place in the emerging multipolar order.

This approach, reflected in Turkey's role in the Ukraine war — where it is the only NATO member with close ties with both Ukraine and Russia — is, therefore, likely to continue. As will Turkey's close relations with China, based on the importance Turkey attaches to its place in the Belt and Road Initiative.

In West Asia, Turkish diplomacy will include building ties with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, while retaining close links with Qatar. Turkey will also pursue improved relations with Egypt and their working together, with the UAE, to address differences in Libya and the East Mediterranean. Ties with Iran, defined by shared economic interests as also differences in Syria, Iraq and the south Caucasus, will also be a priority concern for Turkey.

The challenge of Syria

The biggest challenge Turkey will face will be in Syria. Before the runoff, Mr. Erdoğan had spoken of engagement with the Bashar al-Assad government in Damascus. They will need to look at Turkey's concerns relating to the Syrian Kurds at the border as also Syria's unhappiness at Turkey's ties with the al Qaeda-affiliated Hayat Tahrir al-Sham at Idlib, and Mr. Assad's insistence on the withdrawal of Turkish troops from Syrian territory.

As Mr. Erdoğan commences his third decade in power, he will, to the chagrin of the West, ensure that Turkey asserts strategic independence in regional and world affairs. In the fresh electoral victory of the President, Turkish nationalism epitomised by Ottoman glory has triumphed.

THE LACK OF TEACHERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

PUSHKAR
EXPLAINER

Faculty shortages have existed in India's higher education sector at least since the 1980s, but seem to have become permanent today. The paucity of a sufficient number of faculty members undermines the growth of the country's knowledge sector and hinders its aspiration to be recognised as a "vishwa guru". Colleges and universities need a sufficient number of teachers and researchers to create and disseminate knowledge. There are two main obstacles to finding viable solutions to faculty shortages. The first is a lack of reliable data on current faculty resources in colleges and universities and the second is the partial understanding of faculty shortages as merely a quantitative issue.

Why is there no reliable data on faculty shortages?

In 2009, the (erstwhile) Ministry of Human Resource Development set up a task force to look into the problem. Its 2011 report titled 'Report of the Task Force On Faculty Shortage and Design of Performance Appraisal System', made a damning observation — "the fact that there is a huge shortage of teaching staff or faculty in the higher education system in India is not a surprise. What is, however, surprising is that this perception is not substantiated by factual data. There is no standing mechanism to collect this information regularly."

The report called for a standing mechanism to monitor the size and quality of faculty resources and for data on faculty members to be made available on the website of every academic institution. More than a decade later, little has changed. Most academic institutions have messy and incomplete websites containing only partial information about their faculty bodies.

While the government does collect data on colleges and universities, including the number of faculty members, for the annual All India Survey of Higher Education (AISHE), this is a voluntary process for various institutions. The responsibility for the accuracy of the data rests with the institution, meaning the information provided is not verified by any independent agency. Another problem is that there is often widespread use of adjunct faculty members and even 'ghost' members by colleges and universities. Adjunct or part-time faculty members are often counted as part of the regular faculty to show off a favourable teacher-student ratio. Therefore, it has become impossible to get a reliable estimate of faculty resources.

Are shortages a quantitative issue?

Stakeholders often misunderstand faculty shortages to be a quantitative issue. The nature and scope of the shortage is actually more complex. In fact, it is possible to identify six types of shortages, each with a different (but sometimes also overlapping) set of remedial measures.

The first kind is related to the fact that the number of faculty members varies across disciplines, institutions and locations. There may even be an



The Faculty of Arts in Delhi University, in New Delhi. File Photo

Why are faculty shortages a problem? What are the two main obstacles which stand in the way of finding viable solutions to faculty shortages? Is the lack of educators really a quantitative problem or does it go beyond that?

oversupply in some disciplines or locations and an acute shortage in others. The challenge here is to first achieve some kind of balance between demand and supply in specific disciplines, which could help plug the shortages at different institutions and/or locations. The second kind of shortage is one that many public institutions face — the inability to hire faculty despite a desperate need for them. The reasons for this are financial and affect nearly all State universities. Most of them, and their constituent colleges, are grossly underfunded. Despite a large increase in the number of students, State governments have not created or sanctioned new positions. And even when such positions exist, they are kept vacant due to a lack of funds.

The third kind of shortage exists due to the unwillingness of institutions to hire faculty members. This is common in many private colleges whose primary purpose is profit-seeking. The owners and administrators at these institutions prefer to make do with less. They also hire less qualified people in poorly paid part-time positions instead of better qualified regular faculty members, to keep costs down. The fourth kind of shortage, common to all public institutions, is due to the reservations for members of Other Backward Classes and Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe groups. Reservations reduce the pool of qualified people, sometimes severely. One result is that faculty positions remain vacant due to the unavailability of qualified applicants. However, in many cases, positions remain vacant due to caste-based discrimination.

The fifth kind is due to an unwillingness among faculty members to work

at select institutions due to their unfavourable location and/or the working and living conditions they present. And finally, faculty shortages are also of a qualitative kind where actual shortages may not exist, say, in terms of the number of applicants with PhDs but due to just a few candidates being really qualified for the corresponding position. This requires us to improve the quality of PhD programmes at Indian universities.

The six types of faculty shortages identified here are not necessarily mutually exclusive. However, they do indicate that a shortage is not about the numbers alone, and that any attempt at addressing it will require a nuanced set of policies.

Pushkar is director, The International Centre Goa (Dona Paula). Views expressed are personal.

WHAT HAS INDIA DONE TO CURB UNNECESSARY HYSTERECTOMIES?

What guidelines has the government put in place to check hysterectomy rates? What are treatment options?

SAUMYA KALIA

The story so far:

The Union Health Ministry recently urged State governments to audit hysterectomy trends in public and private hospitals, in response to a Supreme Court petition arguing that women from marginalised locations are at risk of unjustified hysterectomies for economic gains and exploitation. The Court also gave a three-month deadline to States, directing them to implement the guidelines previously issued by the Centre.

What are the criteria for getting a hysterectomy?

The highest percentage of hysterectomies were to treat excessive menstrual bleeding or pain (51.8%); 24.94% for fibroids; 24.94% for cysts and 11.08% for uterine disorder or rupture, according to NFHS-5 data. Yet, studies have shown that “many of these causes were considered to be treatable and surgery could be avoided”. A majority of these cases were reported among socially and economically disadvantaged women. The procedure can easily be misused by either private clinics who earn profits (from insurance money) or by contractors in unorganised sectors such as the sugar-cane-cutting industry, where ‘wombless women’ are the norm to eliminate the need for menstrual care and hygiene among workers.

What measures has the govt. taken?

The Union Health Ministry in 2022 issued guidelines to prevent unnecessary hysterectomies — listing possible indications of when hysterectomy may be required and alternative clinical treatments for gynaecological issues. Further, they recommended setting up district, State-level and national hysterectomy monitoring committees to monitor and collect data on age, mortality, and occupations, among other details. The monitoring committees are also tasked with creating awareness, among both practitioners and patients, about bodily anatomy, the role of uterus and when hysterectomies are actually indicated. A 2017 study from Gujarat found most women assumed that the uterus served no role outside of pregnancy and that removing the uterus would solve their health issues. There is a dearth of

awareness, experts say, and in the absence of sexual and reproductive health education, “informed consent” to conduct the procedure can never be taken.

A 2019 investigation found that women from rural areas look at hysterectomies as a way of increasing days of productive work and earning more wages. While on the one side are patients in need of medical care for different ailments, “on the other side of the table is somebody who is just out to make quick money and do quick surgery” as “people have turned healthcare into a business”, says Dr. Somya Gupta, a Delhi-based gynaecologist.

The government’s flagship health insurance programme, the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana provides health cover of ₹5 lakh for 1,949 procedures, including hysterectomies. The government has authorised 45,434 hospitals to conduct these operations.

Is there an implementation gap?

The gap thrives in a culture where gynaecological care and disorders — outside of pregnancy — exist in oblivion, experts say.

The Supreme Court and Centre’s reiteration of guidelines came in response to a petition by Dr. Narendra Gupta, a public health expert. He argued that despite the provisions, private hospitals in Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan engaged in unethical practices, unnecessary procedures and did not inform women of side effects or take their informed consent. In doing so, they “failed in providing and regulating constitutionally mandated reproductive healthcare to women” and violated their “rights to health, bodily integrity and informed consent,” the petition said.

Hysterectomies may cause long-term injuries and disabilities, requiring follow-up and post-operative care, both rarely available and affordable. In some cases, where hysterectomies are not justified yet still done, women may continue to suffer post-surgery and might need additional surgery. “If they had pelvic pain due to endometriosis, it might not be solved by hysterectomy alone,” Dr. Gupta says. In other cases, patients may need medical support such as hormone replacement therapies. But these interventions are limited to private hospitals and remain unaffordable for low-income groups.

SYMBOLS, SUBSTANCE

Religious rituals at the opening of new Parliament building defied propriety

The inauguration of the new Parliament building by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday was true to a style he has mastered: using every occasion to advance a form of politics that many of his critics find problematic. Mr. Modi presented the aesthetics of the new building as a representation of India’s myriad diversity, its rich cultural heritage and its soaring aspirations. A multi-religious prayer was a part of the ceremony, but there was no mistaking that Hindu ritualism overshadowed all else. By weaving an artful tale around a Sengol, a sceptre gifted to the first Prime Minister of India by a Shaivite sect of Tamil Nadu, the current dispensation has sought to reimagine the founding principles of India’s republican sovereignty. A Sengol symbolised divine right and is now installed in the Assembly of people’s representatives. The symbolism strengthens Tamil Nadu’s connection to the political centre of India, and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is trying to make political gains from it. It is also notable that the day of the inauguration was also the birth anniversary of V.D. Savarkar, the founding father of Hindutva. A quest to transition Indian republicanism to a new iteration was apparent in the style and substance of the ceremony.

The new building also turns the spotlight, tangentially, on an

approaching challenge of representation that will be upon India within the next decade. A nationwide delimitation will reallocate representation as per the current population, leading to a significant, relative reduction of the voice of linguistic minorities of the southern States in Parliament. The size of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha will likely expand in order to avoid an absolute reduction of representation of States that have stabilised their populations. But that may not be enough to assuage the feeling of disenfranchisement that is already palpable among many regions due to the geographical fragmentation of Indian politics. The BJP wins its parliamentary majority from its strongholds while many States remain outside its sphere of influence. On 38% of popular votes, the BJP has 55% of Lok Sabha seats currently. This imbalance will be aggravated after the delimitation. The BJP’s outreach to regions and communities outside of its current catchment areas is to be welcomed. But the Centre and the BJP will have to show more seriousness, sensitivity and maturity to deal with the regional imbalances of India. For this, they will need to take recourse to more than just symbolism.

THE INDELIBLE IMPRINT OF THE FIFTH ESTATE, IN KARNATAKA

M. Sridhar Acharyulu is a former Central Information Commissioner, and now Dean, School of Law, Mahindra University, Hyderabad

While political parties fought bitter battles in Karnataka in the run-up to the Assembly election, civil society in the State, without any alliance or imbibing any particular political hue, made an indelible mark in the history of elections in India. Civil society, with 102 associations or organisations, came together and fought against the strategies of the political parties. They struggled for around six months before the elections under the umbrella “Eddelu Karnataka (Wake-up, Karnataka)”, and the result is there for the nation to see.

They did not argue with the public, or campaign against any party, but just asked the people to wake up. They listened to the people intensely. They put forth the real issues confronting them. They fought against the powerful politics of bigotry orchestrated by communal forces that were stoking the issues around the hijab, azaan, and ‘love jihad’ to name a few. Their intervention opened new vistas for positive politics, secularism and peace. They did not talk about “Operation Kamala”, i.e. the dubious defection drama practised by one major party, followed by judicial interventions that involve a legal interplay of words and bizarre interpretations in court halls with a selective use of constitutional means to whitewash criminal acts. Indeed, political manipulation has become everyday play. One such political party, the Janata Dal (Secular), failed in a big way in the elections. The people of Karnataka rejected it. Dishonest game players were defeated.

As a campaign of awareness

A professor at Hyderabad University, and human rights activist G. Haragopal, said that “Eddelu Karnataka” had the singularity of a movement to wake people up from political inactivity during election time. He noted that in Karnataka, civil society comprised writers, poets, artists, and cinema makers who moved in unison during these polls. Revolutionary writers such as Basavanna and Devanur Mahadeva had influenced the people, campaigned for fraternity and fought against divisive forces. The campaign was intended to make people identify communal elements and parties.

Prof. Haragopal said that the campaign generated live discussion and debate within civil society during elections and won people over. More than 100 people from various social groups worked together for six months, held 250 workshops, met people in 103 constituencies, formed 192 groups, and over 2,000 workers campaigned among voters. They collected data from 41,000 families, distributed 650 posters, and produced 80 videos. Around 100 meetings with journalists were organised, and more than 50 dharnas involving farmers, labour, Dalits, women, students and tribals were organised. The campaign quietly spread to 151 taluk areas in 31 districts. It was a distinctive campaign to raise voter consciousness against the communal agenda, divisive politics and hate campaigns. Their commitment could not be questioned. One lakh pamphlets were printed and distributed. They were not political leaders but simple workers. These social groups did not campaign against any political party; instead, they worked by asking the people to vote in the polls, promoting friendship and opposing hate. They awakened civil society and supported democracy, the Constitution, and the unity of the people.

Generally, all the known political parties put up some candidates in order to ensure that the votes of particular candidates are split. But this time, civil

society groups met 49 candidates, negotiated over several weeks and successfully convinced them to withdraw from the contest so that the votes did not split so as to defeat candidates with a communal agenda. This was no mean achievement. They knew the strategies of splitting votes and ‘purchasing’ elected Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs). The campaign has grasped election politics and mastered the art of getting to know the public pulse in the elections.

Defections, overnight governments

The people of Karnataka have been the victims of defection dramas, as seen in elections in recent years in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Manipur. In an article, “Maharashtra Political Crisis: The Limits of Supreme Court’s Expiations” (May 15, 2023), the writer has called defection as ‘political skulduggery’. These Chanakya-like manoeuvres have resulted in the dislodging of the Uddhav Thackeray-led coalition government and the overnight formation of a new government led by Eknath Shinde that consists of a coalition of a faction of the Shiv Sena and the Bharatiya Janata Party. The drama shifted to the High Court and the Supreme Court of India too. The top court observed that it could not ordinarily adjudicate petitions for disqualification under the Tenth Schedule. Relying on Kihoto Hollohan vs Zachillhu And Others and Rajendra Singh Rana And Ors. vs Swami Prasad Maurya And Ors., the top court held that the disqualification of MLAs was up to the Speaker of the House, who must decide on the disqualification proceedings within a reasonable period.

The top court has also held that the Maharashtra Governor “did not act in accordance with the law in calling for a floor test” and that “the communications relied upon by the Governor did not indicate that the ‘rebel’ MLAs intended to withdraw their support to the Chief Minister”. This should have been a severe admonishment of the government at the Centre and the political party concerned. But nobody is bothered. The top court added that the Constitution does not “empower the Governor to enter the political arena and play a role (however minute) in inter-party or intra-party disputes”. The system of the Constitution has not thought about the rule of law.

Model role in civil society

The recent elections in Karnataka should be considered a model for the power of people’s democracy amid the thickets of criminal, religious and communal manipulations and in the backdrop of institutions being disembowelled. It sets an example for voters to fight against spin doctors and manipulative political pundits. Whenever defections are engineered to defeat definite electoral victors and manipulate judicial verdicts, the people should enhance the strength of the democratic power, just like the people of Karnataka, to defeat such political shenanigans.

Parliament, the executive and the judiciary (the three Estates) and the Fourth Estate appear to be in the iron grip of the regime in power. The ‘state’ is in control of money power. There is only one resort for the people — wielding the power of civil society. Some people call it the Fifth Estate. This is because we see that even the judiciary has largely failed to stop the chicanery and the tyranny of the mis-rulers. The thinking people should take the constitutional system into their hands and take charge of the situation, just like the people of Karnataka did. Compliments to Karnataka.

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