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# **BOOK REVIEW**

**Review: Stone Arabia**

Stone Arabia is one of those weird titles that sound brilliant only after you've finished the book. A Visit from the Goon Squad was another one, and it's curious that both these clever novels jump off the 1980s punk scene in Los Angeles and then move into the melancholy tones of middle age. Like Jennifer Egan, Dana Spiotta records the smothered dreams of a washed-up musician, but what she's really listening for is the melody of nostalgia that none of us can resist.

At the center of "Stone Arabia" sits a 50-year-old bartender named Nik Worth who sponges off his devoted sister, Denise. In the late '70s, Nik and his band almost made it big. "Nik had the sensibility down," Denise remembers. "And Nik had the look down. He was born to look pasty and skinny and angular." Like so many other musicians, though, he never attained escape velocity, and his career faded away, another no-hit wonder in the City of Angels. That's an old story, of course, the provenance of a million electric guitars offered up in neighborhood garage sales. But it marks the moment that Nik's life became startlingly strange.

Faced with the prospect of oblivion, Nik began throwing all his energy into creating an alternative history of a spectacular career, a sprawling collection of fake documents he calls The Chronicles. Even as his real life stagnated into loneliness and poverty, he wrote Rolling Stone profiles of himself, Los Angeles Times reviews of his music (good and bad), fan magazines and newsletters. He created his own concert posters and album covers. He wrote lyrics and recorded his own CDs. Eventually, "The Chronicles" grew to more than 30 volumes of faux history that describe the lifework of a musical colossus on a par with Elvis — complete with all the usual news about band breakups, court-

ordered rehab, divorce and paparazzi photos. “It was all quite systematic and gratuitously laborious.”

I was reminded of a hilarious novel that far too few people read: Simon Silber: Works for Solo Piano, by Christopher Miller, about a ghastly musician who hires a man to write his fictional biography. But Spiotta’s comedy is more muted and melancholy. And she’s got a casually epigraphic style that allows her to slough off clever lines: “When a young person smokes,” Denise says, “it just underlines their excess life. It looks appealing and reminds you they feel as if they have life to spare.”

“Self-curate or disappear,” Nik tells his sister; the awesome purity of his solipsism is sad, even if he knows it’s a “profoundly elaborated private joke.” Indeed, if Nik weren’t so laid back and cool, the whole thing would be downright scary: Jack Nicholson strumming “Blitzkrieg Bop” in an empty hotel. The level of detail in “The Chronicles” — the handmade ticket stubs and liner notes, the creation of rival bands and academic experts — suggests a misspent creative mania driven by deep disappointment.

And yet in a note at the end of the novel, Spiotta says she was inspired to create this “eccentric genius” by her stepfather, “a true artist,” who recorded a similar “chronicle of his life as a secret rock star.” After reading this dark novel, I’m not convinced by that praise, which sounds more like an effort to avoid unpleasantness at her next family get-together. But there is something essentially American about writing one’s own usable past, an act of self-creation that’s so confident it needs no confirmation from the outside world. Perhaps in our echo-chamber culture of vapid celebrity, Nik’s determination to create his own fame makes him a tragic hero.

In any case, we get only well-parceled glimpses of Nik and his postmodern autobiography. “Stone Arabia” is as much about Denise, the younger sibling who adores him, who thinks of herself only as a footnote

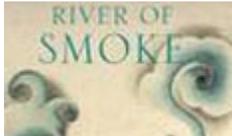
to her brother's private success. She may spend the whole novel looking at Nik, but she becomes the more fascinating, tragically resonant character for us. A hypochondriac who's desperately unhappy but terrified of dying, she's rubbed raw with "a nearly debilitating sympathy" for every tragedy she sees in the news. She articulates the common plight of living in a sea of images, videos, stories and Web sites that ask us to constantly witness the suffering of strangers all over the world. "What was a person supposed to do with all of this feeling?" Spiotta asks as Denise weeps through the television coverage of the Beslan school massacre in 2004. "Feeling nothing was subhuman, but feeling everything, like this, in a dark room in the middle of the night, by yourself, did no one any good."

Denise has the sense of herself dissolving in the acid bath of the world's pain pouring over her, and it's that terrifying loss of selfhood that unifies the strains of this novel and gives it the deep chords of profundity. While Nik meticulously constructs his own glorious past, Denise remains panicked about losing hers. She challenges herself every day with little games to forestall the symptoms of Alzheimer's that have already ravaged her mother's brain.

What's most remarkable about *Stone Arabia* is the way Spiotta explores such broad, endemic social ills in the small, peculiar lives of these sad siblings. Her reflections on the precarious nature of modern life are witty until they're really unsettling. She's captured that hankering for something alluring in the past that never was — a moment of desire and pretense that the best pop music articulates for each generation and makes everything else that comes later sound flat and disappointing.

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**Review: River of Smoke**



<sup>[1]</sup>It has been three years since we read Amitav Ghosh's tale of the Ibis, the battered schooner, navigating the choppy waters to Mauritius with its load of indentured labourers. River of Smoke is the second novel in Ghosh's planned trilogy, picking up the narrative from where it was abandoned; Ibis's cast, crew and destination, though, are now mere adjuncts in the grander quest on the trail of the afeem. A colonial diktat had replaced north India's verdant fields of crops and vegetables with an ashen sea of poppies, and now we must follow the inexorable logic of the market to arrive at the mouth of the Pearl river delta in Maha-Chin, where opium, the finished product, is consumed in prodigious quantities. And with the Great Manchu planning to throw a spanner in this merry operation of laissez faire, the rumbling of war cannot be far off.

Ghosh unravels his novel amid this tumult of events, and its visual impact on the reader is much like the Chinese scroll paintings that Edward Chinnery, the aspiring artist, discusses in one of his letters to the young botanist Paulette Lambert. A scroll unfolds, he writes, "in front of you, from top to bottom, like a story"; "events, people, faces, scenes... unroll as they happened". As a metaphor, it is apt for the fascinating, Dickensian array of characters that have converged in the melting pot that is Canton: the ruthless mercantilist to the fallen feudal lord, the enthusiastic botanist to the "sing-song girlies" plying their trade.

Except that Ghosh's characters are not broad brush strokes, they are not archetypes of the community or profession they represent but minutely etched figures with varied personal histories, idiosyncrasies and sartorial

choices. In their sheer wealth of detail, they are reminiscent of Madhubani's miniatures, a skill the character Deeti in the book had inherited and put to use while recreating the characters on the walls of her Mauritius shrine as an exercise in collective remembrance.

In the character of Bahramji Naurozji Modi, the Parsi trader from Bombay and the owner of the vessel Anahita, the vagaries of the opium trade find full expression. A dutiful father and conscientious husband while at home, it is as Barrie Moddie that he comes alive in Canton, where he is stripped of the "multiple wrappings of home, family, community, obligation and decorum". He docks a little further from Canton with his cargo, waiting for the strictures to relax on the sale of opium, and remains utterly unconvinced by the moral arguments that his friend Zadig Karabedian advances against the forcing of opium consumption on China's population. "...this is not some helpless little kingdom to be kicked around by others," he says. It is the Bahrams of the world who bear the weight of history, enjoy its fruits and pay its price, Ghosh shows, who tower over the course of events while the Napoleons (his appearance here somewhat contrived) must be reduced to cameo figures.

Given that *River of Smoke* roughly covers the period from September 1838 to July 1839, it is unwise to expect a blistering pace of narrative. What you get to see and vicariously participate in is the baroque grandeur of Canton, whose exoticism is heightened not just by the fact that it is the farthest a European is allowed to venture but also because European women are proscribed there. Ghosh abandons himself in creating that visual charm; this, after all, is his personal scroll where he must recreate the "tamasha" that outdoes "all others in chuckmuckery". Whether it is the minutiae of the botanical apparatus aboard the Redruth or the wares of the garment market (the stitched selvage and wadmarel, panelled chaopao coats and embroidered chang-fu robes), the descriptions are a treat for the senses.

The ebb and flow in the tides of Bahram's fortune obviously lacks the dramatic tension that had characterised Deeti or Neel Rattan's fate in *Sea of Poppies*; the multiplicity of tongues too, symptomatic of colonial-era churning, might appear somewhat forced after a while. What is far more abiding is the unavoidable resonance evoked by the image of the Chinese artists in Lamqua's studio, producing painting after painting in a strict assembly line, the products capable of taking on the best Europe has to offer.

And yet the sense of foreboding cannot be missed, if one keeps in mind China's impending capitulation in the Opium War, knowing that by the end of the novel, much of Canton's charm will be reduced to pictorial reproductions. A sensuous feast has just got over, and yet there is no satiety as the fate of the characters hangs in a balance till the next novel.

# **CIVIL SERVICE**

## TELEGRAPH 5.8.11 CIVIL SERVICE

### **Cheaper home loan for govt staff**

Patna, Aug. 4: Over four lakh employees of the state government would soon be able to buy homes at affordable rates.

Central Bank of India, along with the state government, will now provide housing loans up to Rs 30 lakh at base rates — the lowest rate of interest on loan offered by any bank in the country that is regulated by the Reserve Bank of India.

Both parties today signed the memorandum of understanding during the launch of the scheme in the state capital in the presence of chief minister Nitish Kumar and his deputy Sushil Kumar Modi.

“I would like to congratulate Central Bank of India for starting this scheme wherein all employees of the state government are given the opportunity to avail housing loans up to Rs 30 lakh. However, the existing scheme of the state government to give housing loans up to Rs. 7.5 lakh would run concurrently. Under the new scheme, the equated monthly instalments (EMI) would be deducted from the salary of the employees. Central Bank has also been the partner of the state government in the payment of wages through the E- Shakti card scheme under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act,” said Nitish.

Nitish, however, criticised the banks on their role in partnering the state in development schemes.

“Since our first term, the state government has tried their best to execute various development schemes where contributions from banks were not as expected. Earlier, we had started giving free school uniforms to

students from standard six and above and bicycles to high school girls. The uniforms cost Rs 750 and the bicycles cost Rs 2,000, all of which were borne by the state government. Also, we had given agriculture input subsidy during the floods in 2007. The contribution of banks in many similar schemes was not satisfactory. Moreover, even today there are many blocks in the state which do not have banks. But I am happy with the assurance of Central Bank of India that they would open branches in many such blocks. I hope more banks would come up and maintain this spirit,” the chief minister said.

Deputy chief minister Sushil Modi urged the bank to start similar low interest housing loan schemes for legislators of the state and vehicle loan schemes for government employees in the future.

Modi also raised concerns on the distribution of differential rate of interest (DRI) loans to economically backward people.

“The DRI loans are offered at four per cent interest rate. While in other states banks distribute one per cent of the total loan amount as DRI to economically backward people in a financial year, in Bihar the banks have distributed only 0.17 per cent of the total loan amount in the previous year. The banks need to pay heed in this regard,” Modi said.

Rameshwar Singh, principal secretary, finance, lauded the new housing loan scheme for government employees. “The scheme would not only provide easy finance options for government employees but also boost the housing sector in the state. Moreover, I would request Central Bank to start a helpline for these loans in the district headquarters,” the officer said.

Mihir Kumar Singh, the secretary of the state finance department, informed that three more banks are also in the pipeline for providing lower interest rate housing loans and they have also received the approval from the cabinet. He also informed that Central Bank would not levy any penalty for early payment of EMI.

Ten state government employees were issued these loans today during the launch of the scheme. State government employees are upbeat. “This is a good move as now we would be getting much bigger loans at lower rate of interest. Moreover, the terms of availing this loan are simpler and the EMI would be directly deducted from the salaries. Thus there would be no hassle in repayment,” said Om Prakash Yadav, an employee in the state secretariat.

# **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

## **Their capital gains**

Abhijit Banerjee

Sitting, as I am right now, in India, there is a certain grim pleasure in watching the world's largest economy teeter on the edge of defaulting on its government debt (with, no doubt, drastic consequences for the world economy), all because of the Republican Party's refusal to permit any increases in the income taxes paid by the ultra-rich, people who earn many times what the average American earns.

The extraordinary protectiveness for the interests of the very rich that this reflects is, depending on your point of view, one of the more bizarre or unique aspects of US political life. The US could easily balance its budget by a combination of taxing the super-rich at levels that most other developed countries consider normal, and raising the age at which people become eligible for a public pension, but seems politically unable to do so. By contrast, a lot of southern Europe also has a huge problem with government debt, but for the more conventional reason that they cannot easily raise tax revenues or cut spending enough. This is why countries like Greece, Portugal, Spain and even Italy seem to be headed towards a major crisis (Greece has already made it there, the rest seem uncomfortably close.)

We in India also have large and intransigent budget deficit and we have governments both in the states and at the Centre that seem to have no interest in reining back expenditures. Can we get into a European style crisis any time soon?

The short answer is no, as long as we keep growing. Deficits add to our debt burden, but growth adds to our GDP and this helps to keep the debt

to GDP ratio more or less within control. Equally importantly, growth is in part what is driving inflation, which means that the real value of the existing stock of debt is going down. In a more free-market environment, this would create pressures to raise interest rates on government borrowing, but this has been finessed by basically forcing the banking sector and other large financial institutions to hold Indian government debt at the stipulated interest rates.

This is obviously not a perfect arrangement. In effect the system survives in part because savers in India get paid very low real (i.e. accounting for the inflation that erodes their capital values) interest rates — indeed in the last few years real rates may have been negative. These savers are not the very rich, who have their money invested in the stock market and in their own businesses, and more recently been given limited access to world financial markets and therefore can protect themselves from inflation. They are the middle classes, people who are trying to have enough money when they retire to not need to rely on their children. It is not implausible that these people are actually target savers, and as a result, save more when interest rates go down, in an attempt to keep their post-retirement income more or less fixed. This might actually explain why our savings rates are now shooting through the ceiling. (I am told that a recent analysis based on Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy data shows that a lot of people are saving at rates that would make the Chinese blush.)

In other words, even though we do not have an explicit political commitment to protect the rich, unlike the US Republicans, we do end up letting the middle classes do a lot of the heavy lifting. We prey on the very middle class desire for secured old age, in order that the economy can live above its means.

In part this reflects the inherent constraints on the Indian tax system: our organised sector, which is the one sector that is easy to tax, is smaller than it should be, mostly as a result of a history of labour market and

other regulations, and agricultural incomes remain entirely shielded from any taxation. Therefore, the amount of extra revenue that can be extracted by raising the marginal tax rates on income may be limited, especially given the compliance issues. (That is no reason not to try, especially because the yields from the highest brackets will go up as the economy continues to grow.) However I see no reason we could not do more with wealth taxation, for example: financial wealth does not seem to come under wealth taxes and there are also no capital gains taxes on financial assets. We seem to be much too vigilant in promoting wealth accumulation by the wealthy, but not by anyone else.

Apart from just the unfairness of this, this is a system that actively encourages the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few. As if all those forces that already help wealth breed wealth were not enough, we are creating an oligarchy, as it were, by fiscal fiat. It is time to be careful.

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# **INTERNATIONAL RELATION**

**Of India's Pakistan policy  
Is Delhi chasing its own tail?**

Zorawar Daulet Singh

THE recent Foreign Ministers' dialogue has apparently restored the trajectory of engagement that has been periodically battered by the reality of India-Pakistan relations over the past decade. Pakistan's Foreign Minister declared that both sides desired to make the dialogue an "uninterrupted and uninteruptible process". India's Foreign Minister declared the visit as "a new era of bilateral cooperation". Clearly, the national mood has changed, and even the fiercest critics of an engagement with Pakistan have conceded that bilateral interactions cannot remain frozen. Even the political opposition is now positioning itself as the pioneers of India's diplomatic breakthrough with Pakistan!

The resumption of dialogue is an admission that India's principled stand on terrorism – "no talks before the Pakistani perpetrators of 26/11 are brought to justice" – has lost its steam. Of course, this strategic and elite rethink is shaped by geopolitics. The Indian government is acutely sensitive about the prevailing geopolitical situation vis-à-vis American dilemmas in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and is unwilling to rock the boat. Talks with Pakistan should be viewed in that backdrop – Delhi will do nothing to undermine the civilian façade in Islamabad and appears content in going through the motions of a dialogue.

Such a backdrop has made it easy for Delhi to rubbish its own post-26/11 Pakistan posture as a long and fruitless sulk. The American Secretary of State's recent visit and the re-elevation of a grand vision for India's impending rise has made re-engaging our troubled neighbour

easier. Plainly put, Washington's reassurance to Delhi has spurred the latter to reassure Pakistan.

This is an apt moment to step back and deconstruct India's Pakistan policy. Over the past decade, three distinct prescriptions have been proffered for a Pakistan policy. First, engage on the premise that Pakistan will transform. Second, adopt a posture of benign neglect or, to put it more bluntly, let Pakistan "stew in its own juice". Third, actively implement the policies of containment and covert insurrection as a quid pro quo for Pakistan's diabolical proxy war.

Each prescription is based on fundamental assumptions about the underlying power structure and strategic calculus that drives Pakistani actors. Engagement is premised on the belief that the civilian and military establishments form a genuine cleavage and only if India would offer sustenance and legitimacy to the former, Rawalpindi would ultimately become either subordinated to a liberal modernising civilian leadership or at least face a countervailing power centre. The second and third groups rebut such a vision of restructuring the civil-military hierarchy in Pakistan as a fool's errand because the civilian and military elite are two sides of the same coin and share a common legacy and legitimacy to power. In this view, the military underwrites the feudal-Punjabi monopoly, and a decline of the GHQ will also mean the decline of the old feudal order that feeds the present civilian leadership.

In more recent years, the first group has discovered a new rationale for engagement: the present Pakistani order, however, unpleasant is preferable to the radical Islamists that could follow. This is rebutted with the argument that the Islamists are nurtured and sustained by the status quo actors in Pakistan as part of a well-documented strategy, and radicalism would lose its resonance in a truly democratic Pakistan.

Finally, the first group reinforces its argument on the notion that there is no alternative to talking in an age where extensive use of force has been ruled out in a nuclearised subcontinent. This again finds a counter-view:

talking versus an outright war is a false binary choice deliberately contrived to suppress the several nuanced and complex postures that can be adopted in between. Here India's doctrinal and strategic inflexibility has arguably enabled Pakistan to overplay its nuclear deterrent.

To be sure, the most optimal policy should be informed by some or all of these perspectives. Using the arguments of the first group, India's actual policy is once again being driven by an impulse for engagement for its own sake. Ironically, both India and Pakistan appear content with the present mode of engagement. Neither expect to give or receive major concessions. The political flux in both countries circumscribes any radical overhaul in bilateral relations.

And then there are some aspects of Indian policy that are truly baffling. Delhi was presented with an extraordinary window of opportunity in the 2000s where Pakistan's Afghan pre-occupations should have made shoring up India's position on Kashmir a priority. Inexplicably, India expended an extraordinary amount of diplomatic resources on Afghanistan while barely providing strategic attention to a core interest on its own frontiers.

Today, India is in a situation where it has neither attained a sustainable position in Afghanistan that can hold its own after an American drawdown nor has it shored up its strategic advantage on Kashmir. It is now being suggested that engagement with Pakistan can help India raise its profile in Afghanistan. In other words, putting the cart before the horse!

The fundamental problem in India's Pakistan policy is that it is a series of tactical events masquerading as a strategy. Pakistan's policy remains driven by real tactical incentives where multidimensional security dilemmas such as pressure on its western frontiers and domestic instability have made it rational for Rawalpindi and Islamabad to pursue a détente with India. Pakistan's overall grand strategy of cultivating a permanent hostility with India, however, cannot change in the present

power configuration within Pakistan. The feudal-military nexus views genuine democratisation as accelerating the diminishment and perhaps denouement of the present Punjabi elite. And the India “threat” without and Islamisation within is seen as the only assured means to preserve the present power monopoly and stave off centrifugal pressures. India’s engagement then, ironically, legitimises and offers breathing space to the very actors that the policy is presumably intended to ultimately subdue – the feudal-military elite.

India has never seriously introspected on what it truly seeks within Pakistan. Does it seek a perpetuation of a farcical democratic status quo with the feudal-military superstructure at its apex even if this configuration of power produces a chaotic equilibrium in India-Pakistan relations with the occasional recourse to Washington’s good offices? Or does India seek a sincere democratisation in a federal multi-ethnic structure of power even if that weakens the present incumbents? Whether by design or sheer drift, India has been pursuing the former conservative path for the past decade.

Perhaps only a stronger and more stable India can contemplate a strategic future for Pakistan that envisages a truly transformational subcontinent. Until then, India will be chasing its own tail on Pakistan.

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# **MASS MEDIA**

## **Media's misplaced attention**

Hiranmay Karlekar

**Perhaps never in the history of diplomacy has there been a country with Pakistan's record of duplicity. Instead of swooning over the style and looks of Hina Rabbani Khar, India would do well to remember some harsh facts of recent history**

Pakistan's Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar is justifiably miffed over the attention her sartorial elegance, jewellery and looks received in the Indian media. While a certain amount of coverage might have been understandable, making it a substantial part of the reportage was not. There have been well-dressed and handsome men in politics. The former British Prime Minister, Sir Anthony Eden, was known for his looks as well as immaculately tailored suits. But these never got more than passing mention. The same would have been the case with Ms Khar had she not been a woman.

The focus should mainly have been on the talks and decisions these yielded, particularly since Pakistan is now assiduously trying to convince India that it is keen on good relations and is genuinely seeking to combat terrorism which is threatening its own existence. While it has been saying the same things before, there was during the recent visit a noticeable absence of the swagger that earlier marked the bearing of Pakistani ministers and diplomats and of the stridency characterising their pronouncements. The question has understandably risen: Is Islamabad turning over a new leaf?

Pakistan is doubtless under serious pressure. The Americans are in no

mood to listen to excuses after the killing of Osama bin Laden, which made clear that at least a section of Pakistan's Army and premier intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate, sheltered the Al Qaeda leader. The stock of the military, which calls the shots in the country, has fallen sharply for its inability to react to the American commando attack which killed Osama bin Laden. Within its own ranks, there is serious dissidence among a very large section of officers and men who have become intensely anti-American over the last two decades. And, of course, the *jihadi* groups, which have turned into Dr Frankenstein's monster, are taking their toll.

The danger of Pakistan falling apart, a subject of speculation for quite some time, seems no longer to be a mere conversational gambit. The present leadership will doubtless find itself in a better position to tide over the crisis if it can win some concession from India, particularly in the form of a Kashmir settlement which can be projected as a glorious victory. What happens if India makes such a concession? What kind of a concession is expected? Pakistan has made clear that it will not accept the Line of Control as the permanent international border between the two countries. Each of the various alternatives that have been discussed involves severe dilution of India's military presence in the Valley. This in turn means that India first and most important line of defence will not be the LoC but the planes below Jammu.

Herein lies the catch. What happens if, after Indian troops have withdrawn from the Valley, Pakistan is taken over by Al Qaeda, the various Taliban groups and terrorist bodies like the Lashkar-e-Tayyeba? *Jihadi* hordes from Pakistan would then just stream into India and launch massive terrorist attacks aimed at crippling the country's economic life. Is there any guarantee that the present Pakistani stance is not a ploy and that it would not launch a massive offensive once Indian troops are out of Kashmir?

That the question is more than warranted becomes clear on looking at

Kashmir's past record. India generously repatriated over 90,000 Pakistani prisoners of war home following the Simla Accord of 1972. The Ceasefire Line became the LoC which was expected to be an intermediate step towards its becoming the international border. India also returned the Haji Pir Pass and other strategic areas. What followed is history.

Second, in the winter of 1998-99, Pakistan silently infiltrated its troops in the Kargil region while India's Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, in a magnificent gesture of friendship, visited not only Pakistan but Minar-e-Pakistan built in Iqbal Park, Lahore, in commemoration of the resolution for Pakistan's creation passed by the Muslim League at the same spot on March 23, 1940.

Perhaps never in the history of diplomacy has there been a country with Pakistan sustained record of duplicity. Even the Americans, who have poured billions of dollars into it, have been victims. Instead of swooning over Ms Khar's style and looks, India would do well to remember some harsh facts of recent history.

# **POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT**

## **Why ballot rare moment in Indian politics**

Vandita Mishra

The secret ballot by the BJP in Bangalore to choose its new chief minister today may have confirmed outgoing CM B S Yeddyurappa's power to choose his own successor but at another level, it marks a rare departure in the process of selection of a state leader in a national party.

By all accounts, there have been only two instances of CMs being chosen by a formal process of secret ballot within the state legislature party — that is, through a local contest autonomous of the wishes/diktat of the high command. Both belong to an earlier political era of the 1950s-1960s.

In 1956, recalls political scientist Suhas Palshikar, there was an internal party contest between Y B Chavan and Bhausaheb Hiray for leadership of the then Bombay state. Chavan won.

The second instance is that of Bihar, 1963. The Indian Express columnist Inder Malhotra recalls that after the death in 1961 of “Bihar Kesari” Srikrishna Sinha, undisputed leader of the Bihar Congress since he first led a Congress ministry in Patna in 1937 under the Government of India Act of 1935, the leadership contest was suddenly thrown open. In the wake of the Kamraj Plan of 1963 to “strengthen the party”, Beer Chand Patel threw his hat in the party contest for Bihar CM; Krishna Ballabh Sahay was the other contestant. Patel proved to be no match for Sahay who polled double the number of votes as Patel and was sworn in as the fourth Chief Minister of Bihar on October 2, 1963.

Though Indira Gandhi herself had trounced Morarji Desai (Indira 355 versus Morarji 169) in the Congress leadership stakes at the Centre through a secret ballot after Lal Bahadur Shastri's death in 1966, the Indira Gandhi years in the Congress saw internal democracy, and particularly the autonomy of state leaderships vis a vis the high command, shrink spectacularly. The PM would choose the CM, no questions asked; she was said to change CMs at the drop of the proverbial hat.

“On one famous occasion in the 1970s, the entire Congress party of Madhya Pradesh was invited to come and meet in the lawns of the Prime Minister's house in New Delhi,” recalls Malhotra. “She (Indira) announced she had accepted the resignation of Shyama Charan Shukla, a resignation he never submitted. And she announced PC Sethi as his successor as Chief Minister”.

Later, PC Sethi was called to Delhi and Shukla brought back as Chief Minister.

That trend is less wanton, but it persists. Today, it is not the PM who chooses the Congress CM, but the Congress president. Election to a state Assembly is routinely followed by a resolution by the state legislature party “unanimously requesting” or “authorising” party chief Sonia Gandhi to choose the leader in the state.

Of course, one-on-one consultations may be held between central observers and state party leaders including MLAs, MLCs and MPs, but the process is kept strictly informal, its outcome is not binding on the high command and the final candidate is always anointed with the title of being the “unanimous” choice.

“The decision is taken by the high command after consulting everybody” says Congress old timer ML Fotedar, a permanent invitee to the CWC. “It is done democratically, to the satisfaction of everyone, and

in a way that does not create divisions in the party. In the Congress, the (central) leadership has always been strong”, he says.

Even in the BJP, so far, where far more leeway is allowed to state leaderships, the usual process has been that of internal consultations by central representatives with state leaders, followed by an announcement of the leader. Wednesday’s secret ballot to choose a leader in Bangalore, therefore, regardless of its outcome, is a precedent that both the BJP and the Congress need to follow.

## **UNDER DIRECT CONTROL**

### **- Central political leaderships are wary of regional leaders**

Swapn Dasgupta

The outgoing Karnataka chief minister, B.S. Yeddyurappa, isn't the first head of government to be dethroned by a quasi-judicial stricture. Nor, for that matter, is he likely to be the last victim of what can best be described as either a political accident or a constitutional coup. The history of independent India is replete with examples of both chief ministers and prime ministers who have been compelled, for one reason or another, to relinquish office mid-stream.

The phenomenon is hardly unique. However, what is disturbing, as this week's events in Karnataka indicate, is the monotonous regularity of the succession being mired in unseemly controversy. Both the Constitution and political practice suggest that the head of an elected government must enjoy the confidence of a majority of legislators. On paper, there is no violation of this principle and the person chosen or elected to assume charge invariably secures the 'unanimous' endorsement of the majority party legislators. Yet, it is the process of selection that invariably turns out to be contentious and, more often than not, contains the seeds of future inner-party discord and, occasionally, a formal split.

The reasons for this unhappy state of affairs are obvious. Despite more than six decades as a functioning democracy, the Indian political system is yet to evolve a standard procedure for either the election of the head of government or the head of a political party.

In the case of the Congress, a certain template procedure has come to be accepted. Upon a vacancy being notified, the central leadership of the party nominates two central observers to consult the party legislators

about their preference. The consultation takes place behind closed doors and once the process is complete, the legislature party meets and passes a resolution authorizing the party president to nominate a leader. The party president or the so-called high command is expected to factor in the wishes of the legislators when exercising its choice. If Delhi plays by the book, the succession is smoothly uneventful. However, as often happens, if the central leadership is hell-bent on imposing either an ‘outsider’ or someone who doesn’t have majority backing, the selection process becomes a nomination rather than an election.

In recent times, the Congress had to jettison democratic principles in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. In Andhra Pradesh, the mood among Congress members of the legislative assembly after Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy’s death in a helicopter crash was resoundingly in favour of his son, Jaganmohan Reddy. Unfortunately for the Reddy family, the idea of a regional dynasty in Andhra Pradesh was looked upon with disfavour by the central Congress stalwarts. To them, the party had room for just one national dynasty presiding over sub-regional feudatories. In his lifetime, YSR had successfully made the transition from being just another chief minister (on the lines of, say, Ashok Gehlot in Rajasthan and Tarun Gogoi in Assam) to becoming a resourceful regional *satrap*. The Congress high command didn’t want to risk making YSR’s legacy a matter of inheritance. It subverted the will of the members of the legislative assembly by imposing a central veto on Jagan’s claim to his father’s job. The consequences of derailing the democratic will (however flawed it may have been) have not been happy for the Congress. Andhra Pradesh seems poised to slip out of the party’s political control.

In Maharashtra, the political self-destruction of, first, Vilasrao Deshmukh and, subsequently, Ashok Chavan, prompted the Congress high command to deploy a paratrooper from the Centre to contain the damage. Prithviraj Chavan was highly rated in Delhi for both his integrity and sobriety. Unfortunately, he had no toehold in the murky

regional politics of Maharashtra and, consequently, the MLAs had to be bulldozed into accepting Delhi's man in Mumbai. The net result of this contrived injection of integrity into the Congress system may, however, not prove rewarding for the party. Successful politics needs principle to be blended with political management. It is now becoming increasingly clear that the new chief minister doesn't have the political muscle to force through tough decisions. The result is a near-paralysed administration.

The Congress, particularly under Indira Gandhi, acquired a measure of disrepute by emasculating regional leaders — a phenomenon that proved detrimental to the party's long-term health. The Bharatiya Janata Party began life as an over-centralized party with decision-making firmly vested with the national president, assisted by a few *swayamsevaks* on deputation from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh headquarters in Nagpur. However, as the party enlarged its social base and came to control state governments, the importance of strong regional leaders was recognized — but very grudgingly.

In Karnataka, the party owed its post-1990 growth to the ability of local leaders such as Yeddyurappa to link a national pro-Hindu sentiment to caste-based farmer movements. By the time the BJP won a majority on its own in 2007, Yeddyurappa had elevated himself to the level of an unchallenged regional leader — on a par with Narendra Modi and Vasundhara Raje. When he was removed by a crusading Lokayukta last week, he enjoyed the support of at least 75 of the BJP's 120 MLAs. Yeddyurappa's political clout should have ensured that the national leadership was appreciative of his determination to both clear his name — it is said that there is a strong case for the high court setting aside the Lokayukta report on technical grounds — and have a say in the selection of his successor. It is a commentary on the warped priorities of a section of the central leadership that it decided this was the moment to try and impose its direct control over Karnataka. The plan never had much of a chance of success and good sense finally prevailed. However, in

encouraging the discredited Reddy brothers of Bellary to put their resources behind an anti-Yeddyurappa campaign, the BJP vitiated the atmosphere to such an extent that a future split in the party is a real possibility. This situation would never have arisen had the BJP made it clear from the outset that the new leader would be elected on the strength of majority support of MLAs.

It was the overweening desire to emulate the worst of the Congress's high command structure that led to the rupture with the former Uttar Pradesh chief minister, Kalyan Singh, in 2000 and the breakaway of Babulal Marandi to form the Jharkhand Vikas Morcha in 2006. The possibility of Vasundhara Raje breaking away to form a regional party also became a real possibility two years ago, when she was unilaterally removed as leader of the Opposition in the Rajasthan assembly despite having the resounding support of a majority of BJP MLAs.

In Uttarakhand, B.C. Khanduri was peremptorily removed as chief minister after the party's dismal performance in the 2009 Lok Sabha poll. However, the selection of a nonentity as his successor suggested the national party's dread of a strong regional leader. With a pushover at the helm, the BJP national leadership has had a ball in Uttarakhand for the past two years — lots of junkets and many jobs for the boys. Politics was sacrificed at the altar of freeloading. All indications are that the BJP will be routed in next year's state polls.

Common sense would suggest that while a political party draws solace from inspirational leadership at the top, it derives its muscle from the grassroots and the regions. Yet, it is a mystery why, despite strong empirical evidence to the contrary, the leaderships of both India's national parties are so fearful of rooted politicians. Admittedly, the possibilities of distortion arising from over-zealous localism can never be discounted but democracy is never an uncluttered process.

## IMMATURE YOUNG INDIAN MINISTERS

### New-age leaders

Rajdeep Sardesai

*The Average age of the cabinet ministers after the reshuffle is 65 years while 60 is the average of UPA-II's council of ministers.*

If politics were to mirror celluloid, then clearly our netas seem out of step. A fortnight ago, two Hindi films were released: 'Buddha Hoga Tera Baap' and 'Delhi Belly'. The first had the legendary Amitabh Bachchan trying to recreate the magic of the 1970s, the second was a multiplex movie with young actors designed for the MTV generation.

Trade figures suggest that 'Delhi Belly' in its first week grossed twice as much as the Amitabh starrer. The main reason seems to be the demographic dividend: for a country where 60 per cent of the population was born after the original Amitabh hit 'Zanjeer', 'Delhi Belly' with its irreverent, almost blasphemous humour, has struck a chord with young India. Crude and crass it may be, but D K Bose is clearly the flavour of the season.

By contrast, the cabinet reshuffle (or political kho-kho as suggested by former Maharashtra chief minister Vilasrao Deshmukh) which took place this week appeared to embody an older India. The average age of the cabinet ministers after the reshuffle is 65 years while 60 is the average of UPA-II's council of ministers. While 14 cabinet ministers, including the prime minister, are in their 70s, just one -- Kumari Selja -- is in her 40s. A majority were born before India got independence in 1947. The average age of the ministers of state -- normally considered a nursery for 'young' politicians -- is a rather 'seniorish' 54 years.

Of the three ministers of state under 35, all of them -- Sachin Pilot, Agatha Sangma and Milind Deora -- are the dutiful children of influential politicians. It would be fair to assume that had they not been blessed with a political surname, their chances of being made ministers would be dim. In any case, being a minister of state in an elephantine cabinet is more ceremonial than substantive. All this in an era where a 45-year-old David Cameron is shaping the face of Britain, while a 50-year-old Barack Obama is poised for re-election in the US.

The easy option would be to blame the ancien regime in Indian politics for the predicament. After all, it is the old guard in politics that zealously guards the principle of seniority, partly because of tradition, but also at times out of necessity. The value of grey hair cannot be devalued in government: politics is not a game of cricket where matches can be won and lost by young legs.

Wisdom is a rare quality that can only be enhanced with the passage of time. Mastering the working of government requires administrative experience that can't be learnt in B school alone. Give me a 76-year-old tried and tested Pranab Mukherjee as finance minister any day compared to a foreign educated 40 something politician who may have the right vocabulary but can't deal with the complexity of governance.

### **Fresh ideas**

Unfortunately, the so-called 'young guns' of Indian politics have done themselves few favours by remaining prisoners of their lineage but offering little else by way of fresh ideas. A number of them are democratic dynasts, sons and daughters of politicians who see electoral politics as an extension of their family fiefdom. Blessed with an exaggerated sense of entitlement, we rarely see them speak out in parliament, take up socially relevant issues or give us a sense of what they stand for.

If our young MPs claim to represent young India, then why don't we

see them take up issues that directly impinge on generation next: jobs, education, corruption, environment, morality, AIDS, even gay rights. When the Article 377 judgment was delivered in the Delhi High Court, we didn't hear a squeak from our younger MPs, almost suggesting an inner social conservatism that didn't quite match their outward 'liberal' appearance.

When the Lok Pal anti-corruption campaign gathered momentum this summer, we again didn't hear from our young MPs, reinforcing a reluctance to publicly commit to a clearcut stand on a contentious issue. It wasn't always like this. The Nav Nirman agitation in the 1970s that eventually sparked off the anti-Emergency movement began on university campuses. Student activists then were unafraid in taking on the establishment and raising the concerns of the young. Many of them went to jail fighting state power.

Today, the youth outfits of political parties are like glorified event managers: the BJP Yuva Morcha organised a high-profile Tiranga Yatra that had little to do with youth concerns while the Congress's NSUI seems happy enough to parade Rahul Gandhi at well-choreographed interactions in college auditoria. Where is the cut and thrust of new ideas that should shape the minds of a new India?

But all hope is not lost. At a recent Young Indian leaders' conclave, the Congress's 40-year-old minister, Jyotiraditya Scindia, delivered an impressive speech on the need for preserving the idealism of the youth. At the same function, one met some remarkable young men and women who have become true change agents.

Take 32-year-old E Sarathbabu from Chennai. Growing up in a slum colony, he worked his way to IIM and then started a successful idli business that today employs several hundred people. He contested the Tamil Nadu elections, lost, but intends to fight again. The day the Sarathbabus are able to break open a closed and ageing political system,

India will be a better place.

Post-script: Rahul Gandhi still stays away from joining the government. We are told that he feels he is not ready yet. When a youth icon doesn't want to take up a ministerial responsibility at the age of 41, is it any surprise that we have one of the oldest cabinets in the world?

# **POVERTY**

## TRIBUNE 1.8.11 POVERTY

### **Hopeful signs on millennium goals**

Sha Zukang

**MORE** than 10 years have passed since world leaders established goals and targets to free humanity from extreme poverty, hunger, illiteracy and disease. The Millennium Declaration and the MDG framework for accountability derived from it have inspired development efforts and helped set global and national priorities and focus subsequent actions. While more work lies ahead, the world has cause to celebrate, in part due to the continued economic growth of some developing countries and targeted interventions in critical areas. Increased funding from many sources has translated into the expansion of programmes to deliver services and resources to those most in need.

Poverty continues to decline in many countries and regions. Despite significant setbacks after the 2008-2009 economic downturn, exacerbated by the food and energy crisis, the world is still on track to reach the poverty-reduction target. By 2015, it is now expected that the global poverty rate will fall below 15 per cent, well under the 23 per cent target. This global trend, however, mainly reflects rapid growth in Eastern Asia, especially China.

Some of the poorest countries have made the greatest strides in education. Burundi, Rwanda, Samoa, Sao Tome and Principe, Togo and the United Republic of Tanzania have achieved or are nearing the goal of universal primary education. Considerable progress has also been made in Benin, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Guinea, Mali, Mozambique and Niger, where net enrolment ratios in primary school increased by more than 25 percentage points from 1999 to 2009. With an

18 percentage point gain between 1999 and 2009, sub-Saharan Africa is the region with the best record of improvement.

### **Fewer children dying**

Targeted interventions have succeeded in reducing child mortality. The number of deaths of children under the age of five declined from 12.4 million in 1990 to 8.1 million in 2009. This means that nearly 12,000 fewer children are dying each day. Between 2000 and 2008, the combination of improved immunization coverage and the opportunity for second-dose immunization led to a 78 per cent drop in measles deaths worldwide. These averted deaths represent one quarter of the decline in mortality from all causes among children under five.

Increased funding and control efforts have cut deaths from malaria. Through the hard work of governments, international partners, community health workers and civil society, deaths from malaria have been reduced by 20 per cent worldwide—from nearly 985,000 in 2000 to 781,000 in 2009. This was accomplished through critical interventions, including the distribution of insecticide-treated mosquito nets, which, in sub-Saharan Africa alone, are sufficient to cover 76 per cent of the population at risk. The largest absolute drops in malaria deaths were in Africa, where 11 countries have reduced malaria cases and deaths by over 50 per cent.

Investments in preventing and treating HIV are yielding results. New HIV infections are declining steadily, led by sub-Saharan Africa. In 2009, an estimated 2.6 million people were newly infected with HIV—a drop of 21 per cent since 1997, when new infections peaked. Thanks to increased funding and the expansion of major programmes, the number of people receiving anti-retroviral therapy for HIV or AIDS increased 13-fold from 2004 to 2009. By end-2009, 5.25 million people were receiving such treatment in low- and middle-income countries—an increase of over 1.2 million people since December 2008. As a result,

the number of AIDS-related deaths declined by 19 per cent over the same period.

Effective strategies against tuberculosis are saving millions of lives. Between 1995 and 2009, a total of 41 million tuberculosis patients were successfully treated and up to six million lives were saved due to effective international protocols for the treatment of tuberculosis. Worldwide, deaths attributed to the disease have fallen by more than one-third since 1990.

Every region has made progress in improving access to clean drinking water. An estimated 1.1 billion people in urban areas and 723 million people in rural areas gained access to an improved drinking water source over the period 1990-2008. Eastern Asia registered the largest gains in drinking water coverage- from 69 per cent in 1990 to 86 per cent in 2008. Sub-Saharan Africa nearly doubled the number of people using an improved drinking water source- from 252 million in 1990 to 492 million in 2008.

Despite real progress, we are failing to reach the most vulnerable. Although many countries have demonstrated that progress is possible, efforts need to be intensified. They must also target the hardest to reach: the poorest of the poor and those disadvantaged because of their sex, age, ethnicity or disability. Disparities in progress between urban and rural areas remain daunting.

The poorest children have made the slowest progress in terms of improved nutrition. In 2009, nearly a quarter of children in the developing world were underweight, with the poorest children most affected. In Southern Asia, a shortage of quality food and poor feeding practices, combined with inadequate sanitation, has contributed to making underweight prevalence among children the highest in the world.

In that region, between 1995 and 2009, no meaningful improvement was seen among children in the poorest households, while underweight prevalence among children from the richest 20 per cent of households decreased by almost one-third. Children living in rural areas of developing regions are twice as likely to be underweight as are their urban counterparts.

Opportunities for full and productive employment remain particularly slim for women. Wide gaps remain in women's access to paid work in at least half of all regions. Following significant job losses in 2008-2009, the growth in employment during the economic recovery in 2010, especially in the developing world, was lower for women than for men. Women employed in manufacturing industries were especially hard hit.

Being poor, female or living in a conflict zone increases the probability that a child will be out of school. The net enrolment ratio of children in primary school has gone up by 7 percentage points only since 1999, reaching 89 per cent in 2009. More recently, progress has actually slowed, dimming prospects for reaching the MDG target of universal primary education by 2015. Children from the poorest households, those living in rural areas and girls are the most likely to be out of school. Worldwide, among children of primary school age not enrolled in school, 42 per cent- 28 million-live in poor countries affected by conflict.

Advances in sanitation often bypass the poor and those living in rural areas. Over 2.6 billion people still lack access to flush toilets or other forms of improved sanitation. And where progress has occurred, it has largely bypassed the poor. An analysis of trends over the period 1995-2008 for three countries in Southern Asia shows that improvements in sanitation disproportionately benefited the better off, while sanitation coverage for the poorest 40 per cent of households hardly increased. Although gaps in sanitation coverage between urban and rural areas are

narrowing, rural populations remain at a distinct disadvantage in a number of regions.

### **Poor need attention**

Improving the lives of a growing number of urban poor remains a monumental challenge. Progress in ameliorating slum conditions has not been sufficient to offset the growth of informal settlements throughout the developing world. In developing regions, the number of urban residents living in slum conditions is now estimated at 828 million, compared to 657 million in 1990 and 767 million in 2000.

Continued progress requires an active commitment to peace, equity, equality and sustainability. At the 2010 high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals, world leaders reaffirmed their commitment to the MDGs and called for intensified collective action and the expansion of successful approaches. They acknowledged the challenges posed by multiple crises, increasing inequalities and persistent violent conflicts. They called for action to ensure equal access by women and girls to education, basic services, health care, economic opportunities and decision-making at all levels, recognizing that achievement of the MDGs depends largely on women's empowerment.

World leaders also stressed that accelerated action on the goals requires economic growth that is sustainable, inclusive and equitable-growth that enables everyone to benefit from progress and share in economic opportunities.

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# **WOMEN**

## STATESMAN 4.8.11 WOMEN

### Women in governance

Amal Mandal

In comparison to the 2006 Assembly elections in West Bengal, fewer women may have been elected this time around. Fewer still may have been inducted into the Council of Ministers. But the watershed of this year's election is that West Bengal has got its first woman Chief Minister.

There are several women in the forefront of national politics ~ Jayalalitha in the South, Mayawati in the North, Mamata Banerjee in the East, Sheila Dikshit in Delhi, Sonia Gandhi at the Centre and Pratibha Patil in Rashtrapati Bhavan. The four women chief ministers are presently ruling over 400 million people. Five political parties are being led by women; some others are holding dominant positions in the Lok Sabha and Raj Bhavans. Mamata Banerjee is certainly unique in many respects ~ her political skills, strong personality and power of oratory, her sacrifices, and her bonding with the masses. Virtually single-handed, she has trounced the 34-year rule of the Left Front. Her success can be attributed to her grit, resolve, commitment and an electoral strategy that had a single-point agenda ~ to oust the CPI-M from power. Indeed, the Left may have scripted its own epitaph when she was assaulted by CPI-M cadres on 16 August 1990. On 7 January 1993, the police grabbed her by her hair to evict her from Writers' Buildings where she had organised a dharna in support of a deaf and dumb rape victim. She was so humiliated that she vowed to topple the 'autocratic regime' and enter Writers' some day with her head held high. That wish was fulfilled on 20 May 2011.

In a sense, the CPI-M has contributed not a little to her victory. The more it bungled and indulged in violence, the more determined she

became. Indeed, she was able to exploit to her advantage the Left's follies and high-handedness in Singur and Nandigram. She managed to enter the Left bastion of rural Bengal and mobilise the anti-CPI-M votes. Mamata Banerjee belongs to the de novo brand of politicians. She defies the conventional genteel image of women. Her lower-middle class background, simple lifestyle, abrasive and subaltern style, her style of communication are examples of leading from the front. She has been able to establish the right chord with the commoners.

As she struggled through the heyday of the CPI-M, she suffered physical injury and humiliation. She risked her life when she observed a 26-day fast in December 2006 over the forcible land acquisition in Singur.

As a woman, Mamata does not measure up to the stereotypical image. She has broken the set pattern. Unlike quite a few successful politicians, she is no martyr's wife or a dynastic daughter and doesn't boast of an educated and affluent background. She hasn't followed in the footsteps of a political godfather and has not inherited a party or legacy. She has risen to eminence by dint of her own efforts and a unique brand of politics. She is a self-made political leader who has matured by encountering adversity and by going through the rough and tumble of a political career.

Her rise, to quote the sociologist Andre Beteille, is a phenomenon. As Mahesweta Devi feels, she cannot be placed in a straitjacket. She showcases several features rolled into one ~ a conformist, a status-quoist, not a feminist per se, the harbinger of a new kind of political culture that tends to have integrated socialist imagery, land and human rights, justice, and development. There is a humane, religious and spiritual element in her interaction with the people. Sometimes a firebrand, sometimes fickle, she has taken her political opponents head on.

In sharp contrast to most of the Indian political superstars, Mamata has emerged on the political centre-stage virtually from scratch. During her association with the Congress she might have held a few important positions, such as secretary of the All-India Youth Congress or minister of state. Her gradual ascendancy is embedded in the formation of a

separate political party named the Trinamul Congress which was engaged in a relentless struggle against the Left Front. Many Congressmen ~ not women ~ severed ties with the Congress but had either returned to the mainstream rather sheepishly or remained on the fringe or gone into oblivion. Except Trinamul, no breakaway outfit has been able to make the Congress play second fiddle. This is exactly what has happened in West Bengal.

Unlike other women leaders, Mamata has been severely scoffed at by her opponents. She has been referred to as a pagal chagal (mad goat), a 'villain', 'a person not worth talking to' and even a 'sex worker'. As it turned out, the CPI-M has been humbled by an ordinary woman whom the party had always ridiculed.

As Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee has a stupendous task before her. For years, West Bengal has languished on several fronts ~ widespread poverty, food insecurity, unemployment, industrial stagnation, regional disparity and discontent. The focus of the Left Front government, specifically after 1987, was to cling onto power with scant regard to performance. The police was politicised. Trade unionism was institutionalised.

It will not be easy to effect a turnaround. She has a range of promises to keep. Her big bang approach to perform in haste has already created complications ~ the Aliah University fiasco over the insertion of the term madrasa, the announcement that the Left's agreement with the Tatas on Singur would be made public, and the move to promulgate an Ordinance on Singur when the assembly was in session. The last was turned down by the Governor.

History is not in Mamata's favour. Indira Gandhi's garibi hatao slogan lost its appeal within three years. The Janata Party rule was inept. Rajiv Gandhi lost his reformist zeal within three years. The first BJP government south of the Vindhyas is mired in corruption.

Already there is disenchantment within the Trinamul Congress over the undemocratic, self-centred and corrupt functioning of certain party leaders. Many are eyeing top political appointments in government undertakings. A section of CPI-M activists has switched sides. This is

said to have marginalised the genuine Trinamul footsoldiers. Given the expectations of the people and the state's virtual bankruptcy, Trinamul will have to proceed cautiously in governance. Populism is not policy. Mamata Banerjee's catchword is 'hurry', a variant of Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's 'do-it-now'. To quote the old adage, one moves faster when one is not in a hurry. The writer is Associate Professor of Political Science, Tufanganj College, Cooch Behar in West Bengal