

The Resurgent India

A Monthly National Review

March 2024



“Let us all work for the Greatness of India.”

– The Mother

Year 14

Issue 12

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SUCCESSFUL FUTURE

(Full of Promise and Joyful Surprises)

Botanical name: Gaillardia Pulchella

Common name: Indian blanket, Blanket flower, Fire-wheels

Year 14

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A Declaration

We do not fight against any creed, any religion.

We do not fight against any form of government.

We do not fight against any social class.

We do not fight against any nation or civilisation.

We are fighting division, unconsciousness, ignorance, inertia and falsehood.

We are endeavouring to establish upon earth union, knowledge, consciousness, Truth, and we fight whatever opposes the advent of this new creation of Light, Peace, Truth and Love.

– The Mother

(Collected works of the Mother, Vol. 13, pp. 124-25)

HIGHLIGHTS

DEVELOPMENTS IN RUSSIA AND UKRAINE

Two major events, in recent times provide a stark contrast between the reality and projections of the Putin regime in Russia. These were the predictable Presidential elections in Russia propelling Putin to power with an overwhelming majority, and the subsequent terrorist attacks at a concert in Moscow which stood in stark contrast to the image of invincibility that the Presidential propaganda of Putin has consistently spread.

The two events underline the massive internal challenges plaguing Russia, even as the war of attrition with Ukraine continues to drain off the country and make it more and more of a pariah state. The farcical Presidential elections in Russia were held in the middle of March. More than the election results which saw a predictable victory of Putin, it was the pre-election developments that were more significant. Despite the murder of Alexei Navalny and the virtually non-existent state of Russian Opposition, there were people who attempted to run for elections – such as Ekaterina Duntsova and Boris Nadezhdin – but were disqualified on various grounds. They espoused anti-war ideas. That they had a high probability of getting the required number of popular votes to file a nomination reveals that anti-Putin sentiment may not express itself freely, but people are looking for alternatives.

Their disqualification reveals the depth of insecurity in the Putin regime regarding dissent. While the Putin regime is already overstretched on military and security manpower and has deployed security personnel mainly for cracking down on

internal dissent, Russia was hit by a massive terror attack after the elections in the Moscow suburb of Krasnogorsk. The attack was executed by Islamic State affiliate in Khorasan, ISKP, which operates in Central Asia, and in this case was traceable to Tajikistan. Its avowed motive for attacking Russia was that it does not treat its Muslim minorities well. The terrorist group has long regarded Russia as a key enemy, due to its support for Shia regimes in Syria and Iran, its role in fighting the ISIS in Middle East, its role in countering Islamists in Africa through the Wagner Group, its history of anti-Islamic insurgency in Afghanistan, and Muslim repression in Chechnya. The fact that the terrorist massacre at the Crocus City Hall in Moscow could not be prevented despite advance intelligence of a possible terror attack shared by the US, reveals the insecurity of the Russian regime.

In a carelessly surprising turn of events, even after the deadly attack, Putin attempted to steer the Russian public opinion by using the attack as an opportunity to imply that Ukraine – and the West – was behind it. While several arrests were made by Russian security officials in Russia and Tajikistan and the investigation is ongoing, the damaging rhetoric of the Russian regime continues to overplay the Ukrainian threat and downplay the Islamic threat. Putin, while acknowledging the Islamic terrorist nature of the attack, attempted to suggest that it was West which was behind the Islamists. A part of the reason behind this surprising narrative could be the fact that Russia has a substantial Muslim population, and many Muslims are deployed in the Russian military, contributing to the war against Ukraine. Regardless of whatever the case maybe, the Islamic threat in Moscow is magnifying – we have already noted in previous issues how Iran is also systematically expanding its

religious activities in Russia – and the war against Ukraine is damaging Russia more deeply than is visible.

Diplomatically also, Russia continues to suffer isolation and loss of influence in the immediate neighbourhood. Most recently, in a blow to Russian footprint in the South Caucasus, Armenia decided to sever ties with the Russia-led bloc, Central Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and has begun to cultivate relationships with the West, especially with United States (US), France and European Union (EU).

On the military front, the war continues to see a delicate balance between Ukraine and Russia. While Ukraine has struck oil infrastructure deep inside Russia and has caused considerable damage, Russian response in targeting Ukrainian energy infrastructure was withstood by Ukraine as its energy infrastructure is now much more resilient compared to last year. Thus, even as the war continues to be stuck in a deadlock, the psychological damage being wrought on Russia is immense.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY: GOVERNING AI – THE REGULATORY LANDSCAPE

In yet another significant step towards the regulation of Artificial Intelligence (AI), the US and UK have signed an AI testing agreement. The deal comes on the heels of a series of AI regulatory measures being taken across the world, even as private AI companies are making strides in developing new AI technologies. As it presently stands, the regulatory landscape in the field of AI spans areas such as safety measures including prior testing of AI applications before they are deployed (such as the now-withdrawn Indian government advisory soliciting companies to take permission from the government before

testing new AI applications, and the risk-based approach followed by China to ensure that AI deployment is accompanied by safeguards), measures seeking to protect privacy (such as the EU AI Act), and laws seeking to protect the rights of consumers (for instance, the AI Bill of Rights piloted by the US as a prospective model and the Executive Order issued by the White House).

Besides these national-level regulatory measures, recently, at the global level, the United Nations also passed a Resolution on Artificial Intelligence, which focuses on acknowledging the risks associated with AI and the need to promote its responsible use. It flags the adverse consequences of unethical use of AI on the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals in social, economic, and environmental domains, and flagged the adverse outlook for the workforce in developing countries with large working populations vulnerable to AI deployment.

Among the developing AI regulations, the EU AI Act is being widely regarded as a model framework for AI regulation. The EU AI Act is mainly focused on countering the risks of AI systems by categorizing AI systems into four categories based on the level of risks viz. unacceptable, high, limited, and minimal risks. Each category has certain guidelines to be followed. Those AI systems which risk the rights of citizens (including manipulation of human behaviour, emotion recognition, mass surveillance etc.) are outrightly banned. The EU AI Act also seeks to regulate generative AI applications, such as Chat GPT and many other similar ones. For, generative AI has become one of the most widely pervasive fields of AI deployment among civilians in everyday life.

In contrast to the EU AI Act, China follows a model of AI

regulation which is mainly based on reinforcing control over the AI landscape and ensuring that AI applications by private companies do not become so self-regulating as to pose a challenge to the governance and power of the state. In line with this, the Chinese regulatory model is based on online content moderation, algorithmic control (to control autonomous interactions between consumers and AI) and personal data protection.

While the regulatory landscape to govern AI totters along, the developments in the field are happening at a pace that has alarmed policymakers across the world. Three sets of developments bring this out:

First, most recently, AI technology company, NVIDIA, unveiled new AI hardware which has new chips that will work five times faster than previous versions, thereby catapulting the deployment of AI faster than what was expected.

Second, generative intelligence is also progressing fast, with Open AI recently unveiling a software, called Voice Engine, which can clone an emotive and realistic voice imitation based on a 15-second original recording. While the company claims it will have positive effect in speech translations and other areas, the development has already triggered fears of misuse in perpetuating political misinformation or misuse for other criminal activities.

Finally, one of the most significant developments is the report that confirms how Microsoft and Open AI are working together on a \$100 billion project to build a supercomputer that can secretly train advanced and more powerful AI. The project has been codenamed Stargate and is scheduled to go online in 2028.

In the light of such daily developments, it is not surprising that a new report commissioned by the U.S. State Department says that artificial intelligence (AI) is progressing so fast that it now poses an “extinction-level threat to the human species.” While AI deployments are being undertaken positively in several fields – such as, healthcare (to develop new products and procedures), mental healthcare (increasingly common use of AI as a therapeutic tool in Metaverse, where people with mental issues are asked to face their fears in a safe environment). Education (use of generative AI and other services), and various other services (such as accurate prediction of natural disasters, military deployments, deployment in entertainment and media etc.) – what has become of prime concern to policymakers is the jarring speed with which AI deployments are taking place.

It is now no longer a debate between the positive and negative impacts of AI, but a question of when AI will reach a level of strategic intelligence wherein it will be capable of destroying much of what humanity has built. Already, US policymakers have flagged how increasing dependence on AI has catapulted cyberattacks to a level of serious threat to critical infrastructure (such as health, national security etc.) of countries. It is now no longer a question of AI being weaponized by one country against another, but also of autonomous AI continuously exceeding itself to reach a level where it will prove difficult to control. This possibility is now seriously being discussed in the emerging regulatory landscape.

CAA RULES OPERATIONALIZATION

The Indian government has finally notified the rules to operationalize the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), 2019.

With the operationalization of the rules, the CAA, 2019 can now finally be implemented. The operationalization of the rules just before the Lok Sabha elections, while reviving the debate on CAA, have not led to any major protests or incidents of violence.

The CAA was passed in 2019. It provides that the members of Hindu, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain and Parsi communities who are minorities in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh, will be eligible for acquiring Indian citizenship on humanitarian grounds. The cut-off date for acquiring such citizenship would be December 31st, 2014, that is, refugees from these communities who have entered India – and have been living in India as either illegal immigrants or on Long Term Visas (LTVs) – before the cut-off date will be eligible for Indian citizenship. The humanitarian ground for the grant of such citizenship is religious persecution faced by these communities in the three Muslim-majority states.

The landmark Act now has a set of rules to operationalize it. These rules have considerably eased the process of acquiring Indian citizenship for the target group of minorities from the three countries. Some of the key rules are:

First, the period of citizenship by naturalization has been cut from 11 years to 5 years.

Second, very minimal information is required from the applicants to facilitate the grant of citizenship. This includes basic details such as country of origin, their religion, date of entry into India and knowledge of an Indian language.

Third, the requirement to prove the country of origin has also been relaxed significantly. While earlier, applicants needed to possess the valid passports issued by their country of origin

along with a valid residential permit of India, now, under the new rules, these documents have been done away with. Under the new rules, a birth or educational certificate, identity document of any kind, any license, land or tenancy records or any other document issued by the three countries which proves that the applicant was their citizen, will also suffice. Any other document can also include any record to show that the parents or grandparents or even great grandparents of the applicant are or were citizens of the three countries. Further, such documents will be admissible even beyond their validity period.

Fourth, documents to establish the date of entry into India lists twenty items as options, of which any can be used as a proof. The earlier mandatory requirement of a visa along with some other documents has been done away with.

Fifth, significantly, to ensure that the applications do not get rejected due to politically motivated reasons by the state governments (for instance, states like Kerala and West Bengal have declared their intent to not implement the CAA), the central government has completely bypassed the states in the processing of the applications. Unlike earlier times, when citizenship applications were made to the District Collector (who is under control of the state government), under the new rules, applications will be processed by a special Empowered Committee and a District Level Committee (DLC) which will be established by the central government. In this process, applications will be made to the DLC, and the final decision will be made by the Empowered Committee.

The necessity for bringing about the long overdue rules cannot be emphasized enough. India has large numbers of refugees from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan in many

of its states. West Bengal has a huge population of refugees from Bangladesh, many of them Dalits belonging to Matua and Rajbanshi communities. In Assam, the politics of CAA is more complex. Assamese have viewed Bengali migrants (including Hindus) with suspicion and CAA was seen to be running contrary to the Assam Accord which stipulates the cut-off year for entering the state as 1971 (whereas in CAA, it is 2014). Other states with large migrant populations include J&K, Rajasthan, Punjab and Delhi.

Those opposed to rules are arguing on a mainly two-fold basis – using religious criteria is discriminatory and against the constitutional Fundamental Right to Equality (Article 14), and, CAA combined with National Register of Citizens (NRC) will lead to disenfranchisement of Indian Muslims (as allegedly those non-Muslims not being able to provide valid identity documents under NRC exercise will effectively get Indian citizenship through CAA, while those Indian Muslims not having valid identity documents will be declared illegal immigrants).

These are moot arguments based on questionable assumptions. First, the Constitution does provide various exceptions to Fundamental Rights and if a law can be justified based on reasonable classification and other constitutional criteria it could easily withstand legal scrutiny. Religious persecution is an important humanitarian criterion recognized even by international law to create such exceptions. Second, the idea that Indian Muslims will be disenfranchised through CAA is based on completely politically motivated imagination. The NRC that was conducted in Assam in 2020 led to exclusion of around 19 lakh people, out of which majority were Hindus. Attempts to club NRC and CAA – two unrelated policies – have led to much fearmongering over the years.

While politically motivated discourses have questioned the implementation of the CAA, the reality underscores why this step is the need of the hour. Data shows how religious persecution in neighbouring Muslim majority countries have led to systematic decimation of their minority populations. In 1947, the Hindu population in Pakistan was around 24 percent. It is less than 1 percent today. In 1947, the Hindu population in East Pakistan (Bangladesh) was 30 percent. It is less than 7 percent presently (Prakash, 2024). Further, human rights violations against minorities in these countries are rampant. According to data, around 1000 Hindu and Christian women in Pakistan are abducted and converted to Islam annually. Between 2004-2018, the officially reported figures of women abducted and converted from Sindh alone is 7430 (Prakash, 2024). The real figures would be much higher.

Even among these wide numbers of persecuted Hindus, majority belong to the Dalit community, borne out by the fact that out of 5764 eligible families applying for Indian citizenship, 70 percent are Dalit (Prakash, 2024). While Opposition political parties back home rarely hesitate to play politics in the name of Dalit vote-bank and endlessly manipulate votes based on identity, when the human rights of these communities are being violated in a region, they have turned a blind eye conveniently.

THE ARREST OF ARVIND KEJRIWAL

In the first instance of a sitting Chief Minister being jailed, Delhi Chief Minister, Arvind Kejriwal, was finally arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in the Delhi Excise Policy case on March 21st, after having ignored repeated summons from the ED for several months. The Delhi High Court refused to grant him protection from arrest and a plea challenging his

arrest was also withdrawn from the Supreme Court on March 22nd.

The Delhi Excise Policy case arose in 2022 based on a report submitted by Delhi Chief Secretary to the Lieutenant Governor (L-G) of Delhi. The report alleged that there were procedural lapses in the formulation of the Delhi Excise Policy 2021-22. The policy briefly came into force in November 2021 but was later scrapped in July 2022. The crux of the allegations made in the report was that Aam Admi Party (AAP) received kickbacks from liquor companies in exchange for giving them preferential treatment and these, in turn, were used to influence the 2022 State Assembly elections in Punjab and Goa. This preferential treatment included relaxation in license fee, various other waivers on penalties, relaxations during the COVID-19 pandemic etc. In 2021 itself, the ED had, in its first report, maintained that the excise policy was formulated with deliberate loopholes which could be exploited and promoted cartel formations. It led to a loss of nearly 600 crores to the exchequer.

As per the ED investigation, the scam involved giving wholesale liquor businesses to private companies with a fixed margin of 12% in return for a 6% kickback. Over the last few months, the ED had arrested several top AAP leaders – apart from businessmen involved in the scam – with direct links in the money trail. These include well-known names like Manish Sisodia and Sanjay Singh (released on bail), apart from others. However, it is for Mr. Kejriwal that the ED reserved the distinction of label as the *kingpin and key conspirator* of the scam. The ED also maintains that the excise policy was drafted, with direct involvement of Mr. Kejriwal, to, particularly, give favors to what is known as the South Group – which includes influential people in southern India who received favourable

terms in setting up alcohol businesses and in turn paid around 100 crore rupees to AAP. Around 45 crore rupees received from the South Group was also allegedly used by AAP, again under the direct control of Kejriwal (as evident through video calls and other corroborative evidence) during the Goa assembly elections. In connection with this, the arrest of K. Kavitha, daughter of former Telangana Chief Minister, K. Chandrasekhar Rao, from Bhartiya Rashtra Samiti, was one of the most high-profile arrests in the scam.

The ED chargesheet explicates how AAP was a beneficiary listed as a company which would directly receive the kickbacks. To investigate money laundering, a political party can be treated as a company incorporated under the Companies Act, 2013, which defines a company to mean *any body corporate and includes a firm or other association of individuals* (Explanation 1 of the 2013 Act). Therefore, people responsible for the company become liable, with Mr. Kejriwal not only being individually liable, but also vicariously/derivatively liable by being the national convener of AAP, under whose decision-making laundered funds were used in Punjab and Goa elections. This is permitted by Section 70 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002, which states that those who were part of the company when an offence of money laundering occurred would be held liable for contravention of rules. The exception is if the liable persons can prove that the contravention of rules occurred without their knowledge or that they had exercised due diligence to prevent such contravention. In making the AAP liable as an accused in the case, the ED can have the assets of the party attached or confiscated under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002. If AAP is treated as an accused in this case, it will be the first

instance of a political party being prosecuted under the provisions of PMLA, 2002.

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THIS IS THE PUNYA BHUMI

“Formerly I thought as every Hindu thinks, and as the Hon. President has just pointed out to you, that this is the **Punya Bhumi**, the land of Karma. Today I stand here and say, with the conviction of truth, that it is so. **If there is any land on this earth that can lay claim to be the blessed **Punya Bhumi**, to be the land to which all souls on this earth must come to account for **Karma**, the land to which every soul that is wending its way Godward must come to attain its last home, the land where humanity has attained its highest towards gentleness, towards generosity, towards purity, towards calmness, above all, the land of introspection and of spirituality – it is **India**.** Hence have started the founders of religions from the most ancient times, deluging the earth again and again with the pure and perennial waters of spiritual truth. Hence have proceeded the tidal waves of philosophy that have covered the earth, East or West, North or South, and hence again must start the wave which is going to spiritualise the material civilisation of the world. Here is the life-giving water with which must be quenched the burning fire of materialism which is burning the core of the hearts of millions in other lands. Believe me, my friends, this is going to be.”

– Swami Vivekananda

(CWSV 3:104-05)