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A witch-hunt

On Monday, as 17 of his colleagues stood trial at an Istanbul court, Bülent Özdoğan, the managing editor of Cumhuriyet, told The Guardian that the proceedings were "not just about press freedom, but also about the government's campaign in the aftermath of the coup". He could well have added that the clampdown on the media has become inextricable from the political witch-hunt that has ensued after the failed coup last year in Turkey.

The country's journalists have not had it easy since Recep Tayyip Erdogan became Turkey's president in 2014. But the crack-down on the media has accelerated since the coup last July with more than 150 journalists behind bars. More than 160 media outlets have been forced to shut down and nearly 2,500 journalists have lost their jobs. Cumhuriyet's employees have been accused of aiding the separatist Kurdistan Workers party (PKK) and the Fethullah Gülen movement. The charges are absurd on more than one count. Cumhuriyet is one of Turkey's most respected media outlets. It has an unimpeachable track record on secularism, and, in fact, was among the few media outlets in Turkey to warn of the dangers of the Fethullah Gülen movement. Besides, the Gülen movement has a history of acrimony with the PKK. But the paper is also one of the last outposts of opposition in Turkey. It has repeatedly criticised Erdogan as authoritarian and advocated negotiations with the Kurdish party, while the Turkish government has focused on a military-oriented approach. Cumhuriyet's former editor, Can Dundar, has been in exile in Germany since last year after being sentenced to five years of imprisonment for "selling state secrets".

Last month, the UN's Human Rights Council described the charges against the Cumhuriyet employees as arbitrary. Such strictures mean little for Erdogan. But the Turkish president has often talked about an independent judiciary. The trials will show if those words mean anything at all.

The communicator

The death of Professor Yash Pal is being mourned not by the scientific community alone, but the loss is being felt by a large cross-section of the citizenry whom he had educated, mentored or otherwise enabled. In the "otherwise" category are the lakhs of people who were saved from being duped by a landmark lawsuit in 2004, Prof Yashpal and Anr vs State of Chhattisgarh and Ors. His victory resulted in the closure of 112 fake private universities, at a time when they were breaking out like an attack of hives, and served as a warning for crooked education entrepreneurs all over the country.

Yash Pal's career began with original research in cosmic rays at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, but in later life, he focused on reform in higher education and the dissemination of science through popular communication. He chaired the steering committee for the development of a national curriculum framework, and his 2009 report on the "Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher Education in India" clearly defined the road ahead in a country which focused on higher education and technology after Independence, but then lost its way. He held key posts in planning, the space mission, education and UN organisations.

But he may be remembered most fondly for his extra-curricular activity, so to speak — the popularisation of science, not by bureaucratic promotion, but by personal engagement. Yash Pal was appreciated for his television appearances and also engaged with readers through newspaper columns. He explained complex scientific concepts in the simplest terms, shorn of the intimidating language which baffles lay readers. At a time when leading scientists are generally happy to leave the explaining to journalists, his voice will be missed by laypersons as much as the millions of people whose lives he changed through educational interventions.

Being deeply loved by someone gives you strength, while loving someone deeply gives you courage.

--Lao Tzu

Dont taint defence forces through isolated incidents

By A Fauji Wife

There has been much mud-slinging after news of a senior army officer's wife humiliating a junior officer's wife in public appeared in a national daily. Like it's the trend these days, this piece of "news" has been dissected to the minutest detail on social media platforms by just about anyone.

Within closed doors of WhatsApp, Facebook and other social media groups only for defence officers' spouses, the response has been mixed. But what has made most of us cringe is the manner in which this isolated incident, by virtue of being thrown in the public arena, has somehow given everyone the right to paint the defence forces in such poor light.

Two wrongs don't make a right. Equating incidents of intolerance or violence in two different places doesn't justify either. So although I can mention countless incidents of subjugation of a junior officer's spouse by the spouse of a senior in the corporate sector and in the private sector, I will not. Simply because two wrongs don't make a right.

Having said that, and coming back to the fauji circle, what affected me and many others like me was the way in which one incident was used as a paintbrush to sweep over the entire community in a negative shade. By community, I specifically mean spouse of defence officers.

Six years back, when I stepped into this world as a newly-wed, I had a stereotypical notion of a fauji wife. One who wears pearl necklaces and chiffon saris and attends parties. A friend even nicknamed me kitty party -- denoting the ladies get-togethers that fauji wives frequently organise.



To put it mildly, it added to my burdening apprehension. I was giving up my life as a full-time journalist in Delhi to be with my husband in a tier-2 city with fewer opportunities. Would I be able to connect with anyone; have a conversation on subjects that fire up my mind and my intellect?

Of course, I did. It was a galaxy of smart, well-qualified women -- there were doctors, engineers, management gurus, architects, psychologists, educationists, you name it. Every lady I met was a power-

house of talent. With more and more IT companies and others offering work-from-home options, a number of women now continue to nurse their career even after giving up a full-time job; some find jobs to suit their qualification and interest in the place they are posted in, while others opt to teach in nearby schools. There are many who are happy to don the cap of a homemaker.

But my real introduction to the bond that these women shared -- and of which I was now a part -- happened when my husband was away on his call-of-duty. It was frequent and would be sudden; we would plan

a movie in the evening and I would get a text message late in the afternoon saying that he would be back in a few days. Far from the nationalism debates on the TV and in the social media, we, ladies, would check on each other as our husbands go about doing their job without a word, sometimes in treacherous situations.

But even as we sit on the edge of our seats, everyday life has to go on -- children have to go to school, supplies have to be bought, the car has to be re-fuelled, the dog has to be walked. I still remember the time when my one-year-old daughter and I fell ill at the same time. My husband was away, and I was in no position to even drive to the doctor. I was on the verge of breaking down when two junior officers rang the bell, picked up my baby and took us to the hospital. Later, my husband's Commanding Officer's wife dropped by with a gift for my baby and to see if I needed any supplies. Other ladies kept visiting me on rotation for the rest of the time to ensure I was looked after till my husband returned.

This is what fauji life is. I wonder if anyone wonders who looks after our soldiers' homes when they are out protecting the rest of the country? The "privileges" come with a price. But we don't complain. In fact, most of the welfare meetings focus on how to make the women more aware and independent -- learn driving, how to apply for online courses, how to take care of one's health.

It's a support system that supports the soldiers to do their job single-mindedly. And isolated incidents can, in no way, taint it in one clean sweep.

(Courtesy: IANS)

How Hindu nationalist agenda is linked to Doklam stand-off

By Arnab N. Sengupta

The depressing drumbeat of bad news from Jammu and Kashmir and Bhutan's Doklam plateau may or may not be a consequence of the policies or actions of Narendra Modi's government.

Yet it should serve as a wake-up call for the governing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which seems blithely oblivious to India's external and internal security vulnerabilities as it single-mindedly pursues its implicit goal of Hindu nationalist domination of the political landscape.

Take the standoff in Doklam. On the face of it, the Chinese decision to build a road through the disputed Bhutan territory -- the "routine affair of a sovereign nation", according to Beijing -- is a challenge India could not have planned for.

While flare-ups along the northeastern border are nothing new, the primary lesson of the 1962 war for India has been to avoid giving China any pretext to inflict yet another defeat.

It is also an indisputable fact that there was no serious Indian provocation in the run-up to the Doklam stand-off, unless its refusal to join China's Belt and Road Initiative or attend the Belt and Road Forum in Beijing in May could be considered one.

The question thus arises as to whether renewed religious and political tensions in India emboldened China to size up its rival on the picturesque meadows of the Sikkim-Bhutan-Tibet tri-junction area.

With the level of violence confronting the army and paramilitary forces rising in Jammu and Kashmir, both along the Line of Control and in the Valley, the temptation for China to stir things up must have been strong, well before Indian troops crossed into Doklam on



June 16 and physically blocked Chinese road-construction activity there.

What possibly added to the temptation was the spectre of ferment conjured up by the rash of attacks on Muslims by cow-protection vigilantes and mobs, events that have projected a picture of instability and lawlessness which in turn has been magnified by social media and the international media. The alarming news headlines would hardly have gone unnoticed in the corridors of power in Beijing, ever watchful of opportunities to pursue the "recovery" of territories it believes China lost to Western or Japanese imperialism.

The government of Xi Jinping is, of course, scarcely a paragon of peaceful accommodation with China's Muslim and Buddhist minorities, respectively, in Xinjiang and Tibet. Even so, the perception that the Modi government is inimical to minority rights serves the interests of China (and ally

Pakistan) by virtue of its potential for exacerbating India's religious and societal cleavages.

Against this background, Bhutan, which acts as a buffer between China and India's Siliguri Corridor, may have provided the perfect location for a major power to wage a phony war on a rising but weaker rival without actually starting a confrontation. Whether or not this was the strategic calculation of the People's Liberation Army is hard to ascertain, but what is clear is that the conditions for a little military experiment were conducive, to say the least.

To its credit, the Modi government has of late taken a number of administrative and legislative steps that are likely to prove economically beneficial in the long term. It is also courting foreign investors and technology companies, encouraging import substitution in the defence sector and promoting skill

development and entrepreneurship to tackle youth unemployment.

Where the government is falling short is in its understanding of the possible strategic repercussions of its narrow Hindu nationalist agenda and its attempts to control the message.

With everyone from regional politicians and police officers to army chiefs and TV news anchors trying to jump onto the bandwagon of hypernationalism, sound judgement and constructive criticism are being drowned out by the din of competitive patriotism on critical issues ranging from Kashmiri youths' alienation to mob lynchings.

Public discourse in India may be inexorably on an insular and inward-looking trajectory but, alas, in the age of Twitter, social videos and Facebook, what happens inside the country does not stay inside the country.

Furthermore, South Asia continues to be a rough neighbourhood where both state and non-state actors are constantly on the lookout for opportunities to stir up trouble.

Going forward, India's political parties, be they ruling or opposition, need to be disabused of the notion that they enjoy unfettered rights but no responsibilities in their pursuit of domestic popularity and power.

For his part, Modi, as the Prime Minister, needs to put -- in words, deeds and tweets -- the national interest ahead of the BJP's interests, regardless of the exigencies of electoral politics.

If the Doklam crisis ultimately succeeds in firing a warning shot across the bows of India's armchair Hindu nationalist warriors, then it will have been a salutary lesson for them: Identity politics and polarising rhetoric may make them feel stronger, but they leave the nation weaker and vulnerable.

(Courtesy: IANS)

Tribute to Late Nar Bahadur Bhandari Sir and the Bhutia Lepcha community



By Kunga Nima Lepcha, Shyari -Gangtok, East Sikkim.

Late Nar Bahadur Bhandari Sir was born as the youngest son of Balam Bhandari and Chandra Maya Bhandari on 5th October 1940 at Malbasey,

Soreng West Sikkim. It was apparent that messiah was born in the Bhandari family to protect the Bhutia and Lepcha Communities from being marginalised at the hence of some vested interests, who always looked at the Constitutional protection provided to these two communities by with jaundiced eyes. Late Bhandari Sir was epitome of communal harmony in Sikkim and never allowed domination of minority communities. His concerns for is evident from the fact that he successfully contested black bill of 1979 which aimed at evoluting the Sanga Seat and reducing Bhutia - Lepcha Seats on the proportioned representation bases. It was solely his commitment which succeeded in retaining the Sanga Seat and 12 BL Seat in Sikkim. As a mark of gratitude an presidential mourners belonging to Bhutia - Lepcha Communities converged both at Mannan Bhawan and Ranipool crematorium.

Late N.B. Bhandari Sir was a staunch devotee of the 16th Karmapa Rangjung

Rigpai Dorjee. During his regime Bhandari Sir extended all possible assistance to Rumtek Dharma Centre. Some of the people from Sikkim who visited Tsorpu Monastery in Tibet mentioned of seeing Late Bhandari Sir's portrait there. His government made all arrangements for the death rites including cremation of H.H.16th Karmapa at Rumtek in 1982. Late Bhandari Sir vehemently advocated for permission to H.H. The 17th Gyalwang Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorjee to visit Sikkim. In this connection he had made several earnest request to the then Congress led UPA Government. He had also called on H.H. and received blessings. Late Bhandari Sir use to say that if he had his government he would have restored the 17th Gyalwang Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorjee to his Seat at Rumtek Dharma Chakra Centre.

Late Bhandari Sir always said that the 12th Chogyal Palden Thandup Namgyal was a benevolent king who was concerned about his subjects. When Chogyal Palden

Thandup Namgyal was under treatment in America for his cancer problem, he got the then center government to meet all expenses for his treatment. Unfortunately Chogyal passed away in 1982. Late Bhandari Sir moved the Government of India to bring his mortal remain to Sikkim with all national respect. To facilitated participation of Late Chogyal's subjects in the funeral all possible arrangements were made.

Late Nar Bahadur Bhandari Sir was a true son of Sikkim, who fought for protection of Article 371F and 8th May Agreement of 1973 till the last day of his life. His famous quote, "ma marepani mero janmabhumi Sikkim bachirahos," will ever be remembered by all Sikkimese. Unprecedented funeral of N.B. Bhandari Sir on 19th July, 2017 is testimony of his popularity amongst not only Sikkimese but also non Sikkimese, who gathered in thousands to pay their last respect to the "Great Son of Sikkim."