# EDITORIAI



## A murder most foul

The farmers' movement must not let their platform to be used by sectarian outfits

The brutal murder of a Dalit Sikh man by a group of Nihangs – a religious sect that has also participated in the protests against the farm laws - at the site of the farm protests at the Singhu border in Haryana has brought the farmers' agitation into the spotlight for all the wrong reasons. The Nihang activists who are responsible for the murder must be apprehended immediately and tried for the horrific crime. Their blatant disregard for the rule of law is evident in the manner in which they have justified their crime and in their nonchalance in accepting responsibility for it citing their religious sect's traditional practices. The Haryana government must spare no effort in bringing the culprits to justice, should appeal for the strictest punishment and a message must be sent that the claims of religious sanction for violence are illegal and are punishable. While the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM), which includes various farmer groups and has led the protests, has rightly distanced itself from the Nihangs and their actions and asked that the perpetrators be brought to book, it remains a question as to why groups which base themselves on religious traditions have been allowed to be a part of protests that are based on economic demands in the first place. In its loose nature of agglomeration, the SKM has sought to articulate the concerns by subsuming the interests of several sections of those involved in the farm sector. But it is clear that the nature of the protests - as demonstrations and protests by non-political party groups - has allowed it to be utilised by sectarian outfits for their ends.

The SKM has been a non-political party movement in order to articulate demands related solely to the farm laws and to direct the protests at the Union government. But in doing so, it has unwittingly allowed sectarian groups, whose motives are suspect, to share space with them. By and large, the farm agitations have been peaceful, even if their leaders have refused to give up on their position of repealing the laws passed in Parliament, but the incidence of violence such as those seen on Republic Day featuring a set of the agitators, besides the murder at Singhu suggest that the loose nature of the campaign is allowing such incidents to recur. Detractors of the farmers' movement have sought to denigrate it by reducing it to Sikh separatist and sectarian movements. A political attempt is being made to drive a wedge between the different communities that are a part of the protests, as seen in the reactions in the Lakhimpur Kheri incident in Uttar Pradesh as well. The farm protests cannot be wished away with such a reductive approach. Even as strict actions are taken against violent activists, the atmosphere of distrust that persists between the Government and the farm unions can only be reversed with further talks to address the latter's concerns with the laws.

# Top league

## The IPL reaffirmed the value of experience

# State elections, limits of caste-based strategies

Caste demographics do not have the deterministic effect on electoral outcomes that is often assumed



tics of each seat.

As a political variable

These caste-based strategies also

include larger-scale equations, in

which parties target their dis-

course towards specific segments

of the electorate, again defined

along caste lines. In recent

months, we have seen the Bahujan

Samaj Party (BSP) and the Samaj-

wadi Party (SP) amplifying ges-

tures towards Brahmin communi-

ties, hoping to bank on the

resentment generated by an overt-

Both practices - micro- and ma-

cro-caste targeting - have been

used in Indian politics, and in Ut-

tar Pradesh in particular, for a long

time. The incentives for parties

and candidates to look at the elec-

torate through the lens of caste are

clear: caste makes a complex so-

cial and political scene readable. It

simplifies things. It spares parties

from having to address what indi-

viduals want, by clubbing indivi-

dual aspirations into collective

ones, based on their ascriptive

identities.

ly pro-Rajput administration.

fications and misconceptions about the ways caste operates as a political variable. For instance, much is made

But reading politics or the elec-

torate exclusively through the lens

of caste leads to many over-simpli-

about caste voting and caste and party alignments. Pre-poll and s a new round of State elecpost-poll surveys seek to investitions approaches in India, gate the electoral behaviour of political parties are crafting large groups taken as a whole. In their electoral strategies. A large reality, most voters in Uttar Pradesh do not belong to groups that part of this exercise consists of constituency mapping, or gatherare associated in any stable way ing data about caste and communwith any party. Caste politics is the ity demographics, information game of a few and not of many. about the local balance of power Most castes are too small or too gebetween groups, and the identifiographically scattered, or too cation of local caste leaders, with poor, to constitute a core support the aim of matching candidates' base for any party or candidate, selection with a particular reading even locally. of the socio-political characteris-

#### Findings of a survey

As a result, only a few groups vote cohesively for specific parties, such as the Jatavs for the BSP, the Yadavs for the SP, upper castes with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BIP) and so on. And even then, the extent of cohesiveness in these groups' support to the parties that seek to represent them greatly varies through time. According to a Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS)/Lokniti survey data, since 2007, the support of Jatavs and Yadavs for the BSP and SP has eroded. The same survey data reveal a growing rift among Yadavs along class lines, richer Yadavs being more likely to vote for the BJP. Over the past 30 years, uppercaste voters have not always supported the BJP cohesively and neither have the large number of small, non-dominant Other Backward Classes and Dalit groups that today constitute the other core of its electoral base in Uttar Pradesh.

The data available on how people vote suggest an absence of caste-based block voting and show instead caste-party alignments



that are loose, and fluctuate over time

#### Micro-targeting strategy

Since 2014, the BJP has successfully developed a strategy based on the micro-targeting of small groups. To achieve this, it has used a combination of approaches or registers of mobilisation that include caste appeal, through the organisation of small caste melas, the induction of non-dominant OBC leaders within the party, the sponsoring of small caste/community events, and so forth. It also uses the rhetoric of inclusion and justice by claiming to be non-discriminatory in the distribution and provision of public goods and welfare benefits. In the process, they depict their adversaries as elitist political parties that treat their core support base preferentially. Lastly, they also use religion and nationalism as mobilisation tools that are meant to bind together segments of the electorate that have otherwise little interest in common, including the upper castes. This is how the BJP has succeeded in building a social coalition of groups that include both traditional upper-caste elites and non-dominant backward groups.

Caste in this context does not lose its salience but is merely part of a strategy that uses a variety of discourses to mobilise voters. Caste arithmetic matters, but is insufficient in and of itself to win an

election. For instance, caste considerations will still largely determine the distribution of tickets, which, in turn, will shape the representation of various groups in the State Assembly. But it does not account for the complexity of voters' electoral behaviour, nor for overall party appeal or campaign effects.

#### Strongholds and seats

Another indicator of the fluctuating association between caste and politics is the relatively small number of caste strongholds, defined as seats that regularly return MLAs who may belong to different parties but belong to the same caste. In 2017, 319 seats changed hands in terms of party, owing to the strong performance of the BJP, which won 272 of these seats (it re-

tained 40 of the 47 seats it won in 2012). Of these 319 seats, only 74 elected an MLA from the same caste as in 2012. Overall, the caste retention of seats in an Assembly of 403 was 34% (139 MLAs), which includes re-elected MLAs and new MLAs from the same or from different parties.

Even before the 2007 delimitation, the number of caste strongholds was quite limited. Between 1996 and 2007, voters elected MLAs who belong to the same caste consecutively in only 94 seats (28 of which were won by the same party in the three elections). This fact alone, combined with an overall high electoral volatility, indicates that caste demographics do not have the deterministic effect on electoral outcomes that is often assumed. Caste-based strategies are also

more likely to be effective when the electorate and the party system are highly fragmented. Parties can seek to build minimal caste coalitions at the constituency level to get the minimum number of votes required to garner seats. Before 2017, the average vote share of winners, or winning thresholds, hovered at around 35%

This played to the advantage of regional parties, who could combine the strength of their core support base with the votes that candidates belonging to other castes could bring on their own. This was known as the transferability of vote bank.

#### Uttar Pradesh, post-2012

But after 2012, the rise of the BIP reduced the fragmentation of the party system, which meant the winning threshold was pushed higher. In 2017, the average vote share of winners was 43%, against 35% in 2012. In such a context, strategies that rely mostly on caste arithmetic become insufficient, since it is much harder to mobilise many castes at the same time in fragmented constituencies.

This explains why the BJP holds considerable advantage against its adversaries. Beyond the question of resources and organisational strength, the BJP has developed the ability to reach out to a wide array of groups by using multiple registers of mobilisation, including caste, religion, nationalism, welfare, and an anti-elite discourse targeting its opponents.

In contrast, the BSP and the SP seem to rely on the strategies that helped them win majorities in 2007 and 2012, but that have proved ineffective to counter the BIP's dominance over the past three elections (2014, 2017 and 2019). The future will tell if these parties can reinvent their electoral strategies. The one thing that is certain for them at this point is that time is running short.

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# A Turkish foreign policy treading on Ottoman footprints

Ankara could soon realise that domestic divisions and economic fragility are what will determine its regional influence

portant relationships.

pendence.

In Iraq, Turkey regularly pounds the Turkish Kurds who have taken sanctuary in the Iraqi mountains, with its air force and carries out targeted killings of local commanders with its lethal drones. In Syria, the contiguity of



suspicious of a possible U.S. role in the attempted coup in July 2016 to overthrow Mr. Erdoğan. Violating its status as a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member, Turkey purchased the Russian S-400 missile defence system in 2017. The U.S. then expelled Turkev from the development of America's F-35 jet fighter project and imposed some sanctions.

While Mr. Erdoğan's personal relations with Russian President viadimir Putin nave flourisned, there have been regular downturns as well. Turkey and Russia are on opposite sides in Syria, Libva. Ukraine and in the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict, but have somehow ensured that these differences do not reach breakingpoint. Mr. Putin prioritises detaching Turkev from NATO and has adopted 'strategic patience' in dealing with the prickly Turkish leader.

plomatic ties and addressing their bilateral and regional concerns.

Turkey has reached out to both Egypt and Saudi Arabia to improve their relations; the latter are holding back to see evidence of real change on the Turkish side - particularly in regard to its support for the Muslim Brotherhood. Turkey has also signalled a new approach in Libya that would accommodate its rivals - Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Russia. Here, Turkish priority is to detach Egypt from its ties with Greece, Cyprus and Israel, and make it its own ally in the ongoing competition in the Mediterranean. With Iran, Turkey is pursuing a dual-track approach – confronting it in the Caucasus, while building substantial bilateral energy and economic ties. It is also keeping open the option of closer strategic relations in case Egypt and Saudi Arabia remain lukewarm to Turkey's overtures. The outlook for Turkey's ties with the big powers - the U.S. and Russia - remains uncertain. Turkey insists on asserting its strategic autonomy and independence of action, and enjoys sitting at the global high table, its counsel being respectfully solicited by both powers – as it was in the heyday of the Ottoman empire. But what Turkey could soon discover is that the era of the sultans is over and its domestic divisions and economic fragility - unemployment, inflation, currency collapse, and capital flight – will finallv determine its regional influence. And here, it will be found seriously wanting – as the Ottomans were in the late 19th century.

### Turkey's military forays into Syria and Iraq have a contemporary urgency - the aspirations of the Kurds for autonomy, if not inde-

TALMIZ AHMAD

ll across the former Otto-

man realm, there is today a

Turkish presence – diplo-

matic, economic and even military

while showcasing new talent

The dust has finally settled on a long-winding tournament which also had a pandemic-induced interval. The 14th edition of the Indian Premier League (IPL) that commenced on April 9 in India, drew to a halt on May 2 following COVID-19's debilitating second wave. After a break, the league found its concluding phase in the desert sands with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) hosting the remaining matches from September 19 to October 15. The context, venues and timelines changed, but for the IPL some truths seemed eternal. Chennai Super Kings (CSK) may not have as many titles as Mumbai Indians (MI) but when it comes to consistency, no other outfit can challenge M.S. Dhoni's men dressed in the yellow shade. CSK emerged champion with a swagger while ignoring the sarcasm around it being a 'Dad's Army' considering the veterans in its ranks starting with Dhoni at 40. Having finished seventh in the previous edition in the UAE, the Chennai unit had the odds stacked against it while defending champion MI with five titles, seemed poised to extend its legacy. But when the cricket caravan moved from India to the UAE, CSK remained the team to beat while MI failed to qualify for the play-offs. CSK claimed its fourth title and is just behind MI in the trophy sweepstakes.

In the final against Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR), CSK held the momentum and the rival fell short by 27 runs. But, as Dhoni mentioned, it is tough to stay in the bottom half for a large part of the tournament and then qualify for the summit clash. KKR precisely did that under Eoin Morgan before stumbling in the climax. CSK's overwhelming experience as reflected in Dhoni, Dwayne Bravo, Faf du Plessis, Moeen Ali, Suresh Raina, Robin Uthappa and Ambati Rayudu, allied with youngsters like Ruturaj Gaikwad, proved to be a combination that kept its calm despite Twenty20's frenzied rush. With Shardul Thakur, Bravo, Deepak Chahar and Ravindra Jadeja chipping in as bowlers, CSK covered all bases. While KKR was the surprise packet, Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) and Delhi Capitals failed to break their trophy drought despite making it to the last four. The IPL's penchant to highlight fresh talent was evident too as Ruturaj, KKR's Venkatesh Iyer, RCB's Harshal Patel or Sunrisers Hyderabad speedster Umran Malik, to name a few, drew attention. While the league prospered, it is sobering to reflect upon bubble fatigue, a grim reality these days, which forced Chris Gayle to skip mid-way. Financially sound, the IPL however is at an emotional tipping point as the addition of two new franchises for the 2022 season would mean that the next player-auction can alter team-compositions and test fan loyalties.

**CM** YK

as the Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, seeks to reshape his modern nation with the imprint of its earlier Islamic and military glory. Turkish troops have penetrated deep into Iraq and Syria. Turkish officers are advising the Islamist faction in Libya and supporting it with mercenaries from Svrian militia. Turkev's navv has become an aggressive presence in the East Mediterranean and is asserting control over gas reserves that Greece and Cyprus claim as their own.

#### Military, diplomatic moves

Turkey is also a military player in the south Caucasus; last year, it supported Azerbaijan against its arch-rival, Armenia, and secured a victory for its protégé that gave it a large part of the territory it claimed from its neighbour. And, as the modern-day sultan claims the Islamic heritage of the Ottomans, he has been confronting till recently the opponents of political Islam in the region - Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates.

These robust initiatives have created concerns among regional players - the Ottomans' traditional rivals, Iran and Russia, and the contemporary superpower, the United States. With them, Turkey is engaged in complex brinkmanship, in turn confrontationist and accommodative, that imparts tension and uncertainty to these im-

territories under Kurdish control has been broken by Turkey's three military incursions since 2016 and most of the Syrian-Turkish border is now under Turkish control.

Turkey is also involved in a complex charade at Idlib, the last bastion in Svria in rebel hands. Here, it is trying to get the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the former al Qaeda-affiliated Jabhat Nusra, to merge with the Syrian National Army, a coalition of rebel forces it has put together. Turkey believes that, with the formidable HTS on its side, it will be able to contain Kurdish aspirations in northern Syria with local militia.

Beyond West Asia, two hotspots have emerged - again in old Ottoman territory. Having obtained control over the Nakhchivan enclave in the west of Armenia, Azerbaijan now demands control over the passageway, called the Zangezur corridor, that would link Azerbaijan with the enclave. This corridor, if conceded, would cut off Iran's direct link with Armenia, which is Iran's sole land route to the northern Caucasus, while giving Turkey a direct route to Azerbaijan and the Central Asian republics, bypassing Iran.

This issue has divided the region – Turkey has put together a tripartite security alliance of itself, Georgia and Azerbaijan, while Iran has affirmed its ties with Armenia and has carried out military exercises at the Azerbaijan border.



Again, Turkey is highlighting its ties with Georgia and Ukraine, rejecting Russia's "illegal occupation" of the Crimea and providing Ukraine with military drones. From June this year, it has begun the construction of "Canal Istanbul", a new link from the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara, raising concerns in Russia that Turkey might someday restrict free movement between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. In the Mediterranean, Greece

and Cyprus have been central to France's outreach to Africa. This is now challenged by Turkey's robust outreach to African countries and its plans to obtain a naval presence on the Libyan coast and in the Red Sea. Now, following the AUKUS humiliation - the trilateral security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States – France has concluded a new defence agreement with Greece to upgrade the Greek navy to challenge Turkey in the Mediterranean; it is also supplying fighter jets to the air force, but this deal was signed earlier in January 2021.

Turkey versus the U.S., Russia Both Russia and the U.S. have been watching Turkey's regional shenanigans with grim concern. Turkey has been alarmed by the U.S.'s backing for the Syrian Kurds and is

Recently, in an attempt to ingratiate himself with U.S. President Joe Biden, Mr. Erdoğan has quite unexpectedly asked the U.S. to supply 40 F-16 fighter jets and 80 modernisation kits for its existing aircraft. But observers believe this could be Mr. Erdoğan's "last test of confidence" for the Biden administration. Knowing well the hostility directed at Turkey in the U.S. Congress, the expected rejection of this request will enable Mr. Erdoğan to shift irrevocably to Russia – Mr. Putin has already promised him Russia's fifth-generation Sukhoi Su-57 aircraft in place of the F-35 jet and even a second battery of the S-400 defence system.

#### **Resetting relationships**

As the U.S. disengages from the region, West Asia is experiencing a churn. Saudi Arabia and Iran, whose rivalry has defined regional politics for over a decade, are now talking about re-establishing di-

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## At the CWC meeting

It is surprising that Mrs Sonia Gandhi, as "a full-time and hands-on Congress President", has not utilised the occasion of the Congress Working Committee (CWC) meeting to carry along with her the leaders, including the G-23 members (Page 1, "Congress announces organisational polls", October 17). A deep introspection of why some leaders had to vent their

leadership and the cadre. The Congress needs to attract talent and ensure that leaders, veterans and voungsters, are not alienated. It is not clear as to what the five-hour long CWC meeting has achieved except announcing an organisational poll schedule which will result in "electing" a new President after one year! One year is a very long

been beneficial to the top

concerns openly could have period in politics. It is evident that the ground is being prepared for Rahul Gandhi, who is still at a "will consider it" stage, to take over as the President. It is no secret that Mr. Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra are running the show. KOSARAJU CHANDRAMOULI, Hyderabad

> CSK's win The victory of Chennai Super Kings in the Indian

Premier League 2021 is much deserved. The team's adherence to experience paid off through Mahendra Singh Dhoni's brilliant captaincy. As Ian Bishop said, "CSK's performance is consistent throughout the IPL and is what makes them a classic team." RINS PADAMATTUMMAL S.J., Thiruvananthapuram

Capturing MDT23 It is a great relief that the Mudumalai tiger, 'MDT23',

....

has been captured successfully. The Tamil Nadu Forest Department's efforts to

resolve this episode of man-animal conflict peacefully is praiseworthy. Animal lovers also thank the Chief Justice of the Madras High Court who quashed the order to kill the tiger. We need to understand the problems of wild animals as

'MDT23' was old and

injured and, going by his

God's beauty and tigers are magnificent and majestic. No doubt, two lives have been lost, allegedly because of this tiger. But it is we humans who have occupied or encroached into habitats. T. ANAND RAJ, Chennai

Every creature reflects

