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OBSERVER

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K O V I E W

## Getting tourism right

As the Valley heads towards spring, there is no indication that the tourism would revive. Ever since centre stripped J&K of its special status under constitution, the tourism is one of the sectors the worst hit by the security lockdown and information blackout that followed. According to one report, Kashmir tourism has dropped 86% since Article 370 was de-operationalized. While in 2018, Kashmir had received 316,434 tourists between August and December, in 2019, this number has fallen to 43,059 for the same period. This has wrought havoc. The loss of jobs has been estimated to be at one and a half lakh so far.

Tourism is one of the pillars of Kashmir economy. Thousands of people are associated with the trade. Looking back, 2019 wasn't good for tourism. Nothing went right for Kashmir tourism last year and in turn for the state's economy. An escalation in India-Pakistan tension following Pulwama bombing sent tourists packing and dissuaded people planning a visit to defer their programme. Although by June, the situation had improved a great deal and the tourists had started returning to the Valley, the revocation of the Article 370 put paid to a promising season. In less than two days, Kashmir was empty of all the visitors. This has hit the traders hard. And if the situation goes on like this for the months to come, it will deal another big blow to Valley's economy after the one inflicted by the unrests of recent years. That is, if it hasn't already.

State Government should know that mere lifting of advisory will not do. It has to be urgently followed by the subsequent steps like withdrawal of communication blockade which has only been partially eased. A 2G mobile service will hardly help. So will not the selective easing of the broadband. But this is something that the government has been shying away from doing. This is unlikely to work.

At the same time, restoring communications needs to be followed up with addressing longstanding structural problems affecting Kashmir tourism. There are some fundamental infrastructural infirmities that undercut all the government efforts to promote tourism. The Valley lacks the basic facilities like uninterrupted power supply, good roads, well-lit streets and safe habitations free of dogs. And in the absence of such facilities, any tourist who visits the state goes back disappointed - finding a wide gap between the Valley's image as the paradise on earth and its decrepit infrastructure. They never return to Valley and second they don't spread good word about the state. So, if the government is really serious about increasing tourist footfalls, it has to not only end the current siege-like environment but also go about addressing the inherent problems hampering the tourism industry in J&K.

OTHER OPINION

## Detention is not the answer

The decision to book former Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) chief ministers Omar Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti under the Public Safety Act (PSA), which allows for detention up to two years, is ethically questionable, legally flawed, and politically counterproductive. The two leaders were booked under PSA soon after completing six months in preventive detention. Omar's father, former CM Farooq Abdullah, is also detained under PSA. Sections of the media have cited a government dossier outlining the charges. If these reports are accurate, Omar Abdullah has been accused of espousing radical ideology, of having the capacity to influence people and encouraging an agitation, and of instigating people against India. Ms Mufti, too, has been reportedly, accused of promoting separatism, and making provocative statements which have led to violence.

The government's approach over the detention of leaders is disconcerting. For one, it violates the spirit of the Constitution. Individual liberty is at the heart of the democratic constitution. The government has shown no tangible evidence which suggests that the Abdullahs or Ms Mufti had done anything to stir violence or seek to break up the Union. Yes, these leaders have been critical of the government's decision to effectively nullify Article 370 in the state and divide it. Yes, they run parties which can organise demonstrations in opposition to these moves. But this is their fundamental right as Indian citizens. If the government truly wants to integrate J&K with the Union, it cannot do so without giving to the citizens in J&K the same rights exercised by Indians elsewhere. It also cannot do so unless democratic activity gets restored, which can truly happen only when these leaders get released.

The move also undermines the Indian State's interests. The Abdullahs and Ms Mufti, in the most difficult of times, when the street mood was laced with resentment against Delhi, and when terror groups from Pakistan wreaked havoc, have stood up for the Union. The current charges against them defy common sense - for it is almost an implicit suggestion that their backing of the Constitution and democracy merits punishment. Will this not strengthen those who are against India? The Centre may want to encourage a new force in Kashmir's polity - but it must not happen by curtailing individual rights. Delhi is weakening its own political and diplomatic case on Kashmir.

Hindustan Times

# Delhi Elections Kejriwal Vs Goliath



C.P. SURENDRAN

The interesting thing to note here is that the much talked about anti-incumbency excuse, which politicians resort to to explain away their defeats, does not really hold if you have done good work in the preceding five years. Kejriwal ran his campaign on the developmental work that his government had done. The BJP only insisted that Kejriwal was anti-Hindu and, therefore, was encouraging anti-national interests.

The BJP has lessons to learn, too. For example, the Hindu majoritarian politics, their formally undisclosed but pet idea, may no longer work in consolidating that community's votes in cosmopolitan cities.

The Delhi assembly election exercise is over. Delhi has 70 legislative seats. Exit polls - such as they are - predict the incumbent party in power, the AAP (Aam Aadmi Party), whose leader is Arvind Kejriwal, will be back - with him as the chief minister. The official results will be announced on February 11.

The main opposition party of the AAP in Delhi is the BJP. In the last fortnight, the two top leaders of that party, Narendra Modi and Amit Shah campaigned hard. The ongoing Shaheen Bagh (a residential area in Delhi) where for weeks there has been a public protest against the discriminatory (pejorative to Muslim interests) Citizenship Amendment Act - and other regressive political and administrative measures - and which precipitated two public shootings (no one was killed) contributed to the organising of the general idea for the progressive elements to decide that Kejriwal is a better bet than the BJP.

The interesting thing to note here is that the much talked about anti-incumbency excuse, which politicians resort to to explain away their defeats, does not really hold if you have done good work in the preceding five years. Kejriwal ran his campaign on the developmental work that his government had done. The BJP only insisted that Kejriwal was anti-Hindu and, therefore, was encouraging anti-national interests.

If a small but central city like Delhi could not be fought for together by self-styled progressive parties like the Congress and the AAP, the bigger battles look fraught in terms of teamwork and priorities.

- C.P. Surendran, journalist

It's true Kejriwal's politics is populist. He has made bus rides in the city transport system free for women. He sought to do the same in the Delhi Metro but failed - for

the moment. He has promised - or threatened, depending on how hard you look at these things - to make electricity and water supply free or heavily subsidised. His government has done much to improve the public education system. And, after the initial couple of years of his reign, he desisted from waging personal campaigns against Narendra Modi.

It speaks for something that Kejriwal's main rival in Delhi is the prime minister himself. This has added to his stature. That he has won the contest even as the Centre was breathing down his back is proof that the BJP can be beaten. At the same time, it gives one pause.

Exit polls favour Kejriwal

The exit polls say Kejriwal will win upward of 50 seats in the assembly. Some predict it could be more than 60. That leaves little for the BJP. It leaves just about nothing for the Congress. The exit polls say the party would be lucky to get 3 seats.

The AAP and the Congress are not on the best of terms. The equations between Rahul Gandhi and Kejriwal have always been tense and unsteady. As the leader of the Congress Party, Rahul Gandhi and his friends had bargained - or at least hoped for - for a bigger, bossier role play at the beginning of their relationship years ago. But, as the Congress' fortunes continued to plummet in a free fall, that sense of entitlement has whittled down. Proportionate to that has been Rahul Gandhi's distancing from a potential alliance with the AAP. Now that Kejriwal has won the polls again, there is little chance he will ever be interested in sharing the stage with the Congress.

This has implications beyond Delhi. As the recent waves of public protest have shown, the AAP has been more adept at both engineering and promoting their self-interests to coincide with the

larger underdog politics. Congress could do with whatever support they could get to bridge their distance with the young and angry section of the population as well as the aggrieved minorities. If a small but central city like Delhi could not be fought for together by self-styled progressive parties like the Congress and the AAP, the bigger battles - and there are many to come - look fraught in terms of teamwork and priorities.

The BJP has lessons to learn, too. For example, the Hindu majoritarian politics, their formally undisclosed but pet idea, may no longer work in consolidating that community's votes in cosmopolitan cities. Delhi is one such city. But across a vaster matrix, on a national scale, it might still deliver. The social costs would be prohibitive though. The Modi government then has to rethink its divisive strategy. If they still stick with it, they will need to deliver on development.

The day belongs to Kejriwal. He has fought the good fight and won. The Delhi citizen must perforce expect more welfare measures. Perhaps Kejriwal will announce free stay in government guesthouses for senior citizens. Or there could be concessions in auto-rickshaw fare for women passengers. The auto-rickshaw drivers incidentally are a key support-base of the AAP. A free public tap - with specific timing, of course, say 7pm to 8? - for those who appreciate beer after a hard day? No, that's being facetious. But India could do with some welfare. There are people who pay tax to the government for upward of 30 years of their life, and when they are out of a job, nothing comes back to them, not even insulin injections. It might be then wise to move to Delhi. With Kejriwal as chief minister, eventually, that free shot looks like a safer bet.

- C.P. Surendran is a senior journalist based in India.

## Let's Behave Like Humans Too

What defines a man is not what he possesses, but how he treats his fellow beings.

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What was more depressing was the way the abuser was discussing - only a moment after the innocent left the place almost crying - with others. It had appeared as 'what is done, is done-who cares!' Forgetting the dreadful influences of those taunts, abuses could have on others; ripping apart their emotional & psychological aspect-the wicked create divisions in our societies, resulting in violence.

What is our worth on this planet, unless we understand that people who live around us, with us, matter. Wherever I look at my society I see different nasty things occurring around me, sending shudders down my spine.

In our part of the globe torturing others, mentally and emotionally, on the basis of their background, has become so rampant, as if we can't live without putting someone else to pain. In a belief that by mistreating others our strength comes to the fore, which in reality exhibits nothing but complete sickness of our minds, we are busy attacking them so relentlessly that it doesn't cross our mind what might be happening to others.

Herein lies the rub! Coming straight to the point, a couple of days back, strolling in the vacant

lots of my area, I stumbled upon some well-off young lads discussing the prevailing situation of Kashmir. The discussion was worth listening to, but the distressing part of it was when this thick bearded man, owing to his inner rush, mocked a soft-looking rural guy that stood in the corner there - "Gamuk, Gruuss, backward certificate." The person used vulgar language to such an extent that the victim's eyes were turning moist and his face scarlet with every passing second. Oh God! I wish I would have been elsewhere that time rather than seeing the heart-rending expressions wearing on the face of the victim. Uttering not even a single word to those reverberating taunts, the innocent ultimately bade adieu to this choking environment; that was probably the sole option left for him.

What was more depressing was the way the abuser was discussing - only a moment after the innocent left the place almost crying - with others. It had appeared as 'what is done, is done-who cares!' Forgetting the dreadful influences of those taunts, abuses could have on others; ripping apart their emotional & psychological aspect-the wicked create divisions in our societies, resulting in violence.

In these times when people are already going through torments incalculable, we need to understand - and understand well - that our lingual and behavioural approaches matter. Thus it should not be torturing in nature. But rather be something imbued with love and care. Something welcoming and encouraging. It's high time we clean our minds - put an end to the nasty stuff which resides within