

## KEEP THE BALLAST

We need our institutions as much as we need our democracy

**N**ARENDRA MODI'S FIRST TERM in office will be bracketed by malodorous stand-offs with two governors of the Reserve Bank of India. The bad blood between the central bank and the finance ministry is just one of the stains blotting the government's copy-book as it heads into a winter of discontent. It would be tempting to conclude that the last six months of this administration promise to be as unsmooth as the corresponding UPA-II period. But things are not that cut and dried.

Despite the fishy smell around the Rafale deal, the Modi government is nowhere near as venal as the dysfunctional Congress-led coalitions that ran our affairs between 2004 and 2014.

The public airing of dirty laundry by the RBI – most recently in the portentous speech by Deputy Governor Viral Acharya – is just the latest sign of institutional infirmity. Our eyebrows can rise no higher when, day after day, we wake up to the latest disturbance.

Let's take stock. The dust-up between the upstart spokeswoman for the defence ministry and a retired navy chief speaks to the uneasy civilian-military bedfellows who are meant to be protecting our nation's borders. The midnight winking of the two top policemen running the nation's most feared law-enforcement agency speaks to the termite-holes that have bored deep into our woodwork.

Our Supreme Court – where the hopes of every Indian whether indigent or indignant used to reside – is now seen as an impediment by ultra-religionists. Look no further than the hue and cry over the Sabarimala judgment. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh says it respects the judgment but is setting the stage for an alliance of 'spiritual and community leaders' to explore ways to preserve 'tradition and faith'.

The RSS is gradually dialing up the volume of its views on the economy, politics and social issues. Last month the organisation's chief, Mohan Bhagwat, painted a rather ominous picture in his Vijaya Dashami exposition, warning that disgruntled elements with long-standing grievances could be used as 'cannon fodder' in the elections. "The selfish power hungry politics with sheer disre-

spect for the social harmony, legal and Constitutional discipline and with an eye on votes in the upcoming elections have been apparently clear behind these machinations. But this time an atmosphere of divergence, separatism, violence, acerbic hatred and going to the extent of fueling anti-national sentiments is being created by exploiting these grievances," Bhagwat said.

Then came the Supreme Court's postponement of hearings on the Ayodhya dispute to next January, more or less guaranteeing that this deeply

polarising issue is not resolved before national elections thus robbing the Sangh Parivar of a hot-button campaign theme. The RSS said a Ram Mandir must be built immediately in Ayodhya; other affiliates have demanded an executive ordinance or the enactment of new legislation to push the temple construction forcefully through.

This came close on the heels of a robust exhortation from National Security Advisor Ajit Doval. India will need governments which are in power by their own right, he said. "India will need strong, stable and decisive governments for the next ten years to achieve our

national, political, economic and strategic objectives ... Weak coalitions will be bad for India."

These are just squalls. The gale has not even begun to blow. The ship of state needs institutional ballast more than ever. Batten down your hatches. **BW**



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