

security cooperation among various security agencies and NSG & its French counterpart. As many as

model being adopted by India to stop radicalisation among youths. While France is said to have the largest Muslim population in Europe, India

grow a huge to haters who can turn into potential recruits for future wars in their countries," the online document reads.

in New Delhi on Wednesday.

Thapa had met PM and Sushma Swaraj.

-OPB

# Climate Change in Delhi: The Limits of Modi's Warming

## The Needle's Eye



CHAITANYA KALBAG

The only climate change most of us saw in India this week was a kinder? gentler? Narendra Modi reaching out to his opponents

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is at his best when he is talking. He has been in office for 555 days and I wager that he has made at least three times that number of speeches, give or take the time that he spends travelling on Air India One. Modi's personal website and that of the Prime Minister's Office are much of a muchness: both are busy, busy, busy like the man himself, a workaholic who takes no vacations or days off. When I clicked on 'Speeches' today, first up was a video of the PM's plane returning from the Paris climate summit.

On Sunday, just before he flew to Paris, Modi touched twice on climate change in his monthly radio talk 'Mann Ki Baat'. He urged farmers

in Punjab and Haryana to not burn their crop stubble and send toxic smoke towards New Delhi, where it hangs heavy as a shroud. He spoke of the dangers of global warming. Modi has stressed 'climate justice' for quite a while now and made clear that developed countries cannot expect India, where 300 million people live without access to electricity, to put its aspirations on the back burner.

"The prosperous still have a strong carbon footprint. And, the world's billions at the bottom of the development ladder are seeking space to grow," he said in Paris. He called on richer countries to stump up their contributions to a global green fund, and for clean and renewable energy technology to be shared without an eye to profiteering, "driven by public purpose, not just market incentives".

Even if Paris yields a sustainable emissions agreement – and here the fear is that India will be labelled the spoiler by developed countries for pledging to cut its own carbon emissions by between 33 and 35 per cent by 2030 while continuing to burn vast quantities of fossil fuels like coal to power its growth – the rich are making the right noises. A Mission Innovation has been launched by 21 governments to foster faster research in clean energy, and a group of billionaires like Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, Jeff Bezos and Richard Branson announced the Breakthrough Energy Coalition to invest in early-stage clean energy companies (this was before the Facebook founder and his wife pledged 99 per cent of their shares for charity after the birth of their daughter).

Modi has pushed the adoption of energy-saving LED bulbs nationwide. A few months ago, I watched Modi at an interesting and extended encounter with hundreds of schoolchildren on the eve of Teacher's Day. Asked about climate change, he said in India's towns, old people say the winters are getting colder. "Actually, it hasn't got colder," he said. "They are getting older and their ability to withstand the cold has gone down."

You could say it is a slightly facile way to explain climate change, but Modi is a felicitous tale teller. To his radio audience at home, Modi related the story of a woman called Noor Jehan in Kanpur who runs a small business recharging solar lanterns for about 500 poor households. He reminded his listeners that December 14 is National Energy Conservation Day and urged them to switch off their streetlights on the next full-moon day (which falls this month on New Year's Eve and is unlikely to slow the partying in our cities) and 'bathe in the moonlight'.

There is very little moonlight visible these days in New Delhi, where the noxious air has now gone off the charts of the US Embassy's monitoring devices and where the sun is a sickly yellow lozenge that the gasping citizens look in vain for. Climate change has also struck in Puranic ways, like the rain and floods in Chennai, the worst in a century – verily, the 'pralaya' or cataclysmic flooding we read about in our scriptures.

Social media lit up with thousands of people posting pictures of submerged Chennai streets, offers of accommodation and free



ARINDAM

## AMBEDKAR LOVE

Modi's BJP has passionately embraced a man who repudiated Hinduism for its caste and class biases

food from good samaritans. There was no room for humour, unlike in Beijing where coal braziers warding off freezing cold weather combine with car exhaust to create China's own version of Apocalypse Now. I read about a Chinese artist who vacuumed up Beijing's smog for 100 days and made a brick, and a Chinese journalist who ap-

proaches an old woman on the street to ask about the impact of the pollution. "The impact is huge," the interviewee replies. "First of all, I'm your uncle."

The only climate change most of us saw in India this week was a kinder? gentler? Narendra Modi reaching out to his opponents, starting with tea with his predecessor Manmohan Singh and Congress president Sonia Gandhi. His government dearly wants to get the Goods and Services Tax on to the statute books, and he is willing to compromise. The tireless Modi swung back from Paris straight into Parliament, where he delivered a long peroration on the country's constitution. It is interesting that, leading up to the 125th birth anniversary next April of B.R. Ambedkar, who headed the drafters of the Indian constitution, Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party has passionately embraced a man who repudiated Hinduism for its caste and class biases. Various officials from the BJP-ruled Maharashtra have travelled to London to seal a \$5 million purchase of a modest house where Ambedkar spent a year as a student nearly a century ago – all this at taxpayer expense in a state ravaged by two successive years of drought.

But the debate on the constitution, and another on the rising tide of intolerance, at least inspired several good speeches in Parliament. Particularly riveting was one by the historian Sugata Bose, who belongs to the Trinamool Congress from West Bengal which goes to the polls in fewer than six months. Taking a learned swipe at the Modi government's an-

tipathy towards criticism, Bose invoked Ambedkar's citation of George Grote, the historian of ancient Greece, on constitutional morality as "a paramount reverence for the forms of the Constitution enforcing obedience to the authorities acting under and within those forms, yet combined with the habit of open speech, of action subject only to definite legal control, and unrestrained censure of those very authorities as to all their public acts".

It was left to Supriya Sule of the Nationalist Congress Party to put it bluntly. She disliked the word 'tolerance'. Why do we have to tolerate each other, she asked. "So, some play good cop and some play bad cop. So, what is really the clean agenda of this government?"

Unconsciously, Sule was describing 'good cop' Modi and 'bad cop' Home Minister Rajnath Singh, who delivered the government's response to the charges of intolerance with a muscular speech tearing into the Congress party for India's sorry history of sectarian bloodshed. He said the BJP and Modi were themselves victims of intolerance. He ended on a milder note, saying he was ready to talk with the writers, artists and intellectuals who have been returning state honours in droves. But as many opposition politicians stormed out, Singh did not name, or reprimand, hardliners in his own party or its affiliates who had raised sectarian temperatures over the past few months. Barely had his speech ended when Modi tweeted praise for Singh's 'phenomenal speech'. Had the iron fist merely pulled on a velvet glove?

