

Speaking to the father, Sartaj, said: "A traitor cannot be my son, straight and simple." Sartaj refused to take Saifullah's body, saying, "A traitor

he had even "an iota of inkling" about his activities. The encounter came as UP and Madhya Pradesh police teams car-

and... ISIS ideology. They were using their own properties and other sources to fund their activities," he said.

"Religion always wins. The victory of Hindutva. The theory of Hindutva terror floated by the

flat on its race

explosion on the Samjhauta Express.

be taxed at 12%.—PTI

How to Win (And Whip Up a Few Crowds Along the Way)

The Needle's Eye



CHAITANYA KALBAG

As our all-too-brief winter slips into a warm spring, we are headed - once again - for another Judgement Day in our interminable elections. But, just as we start to weary of the burdens of democracy, it is useful to remember the meaning of that word: "power of the people". Time and again we are reminded of the power of our people. That power can be healing, as at a prayer meeting. It can be uplifting, as at a good concert. It can be transformational, if you are the winner in an election. It can be a lot else, too. It can be seductive. It is easy to succumb to the allure of instant nationalism. It requires little effort to join your shout to a mob's roar. It can be beguiling. The spirit of the crowd is irresistible. Otherwise rational people are swept up by the tide of dislike and faux disgust. They are only too ready to pick up a stone and fling it at the crowd's target. Time was when it used to be real stones flung at

a hapless wretch who might have been accused of being a pick-pocket on a busy street. Now it is abuse, obscenities, and threats spat out in globs of social media. It can be warm and enveloping to swim in the amniotic fluid of instant patriotism. It is also deceptive to believe that you are in an overwhelming majority even if you are on the fringe. If you look over your shoulder you will notice that you are marching at the head of a ghost army. One of these days you could have that army coming at you. It can be comforting to be part of a cyber mob. It took just over a week of unrelenting hatred for Gurmehar Kaur to flee Delhi. Sports heroes and heroic politicians, each powerful and influential, set their baleful sights on her. Our finance minister lectured on the need for a debate on free speech at the London School of Economics, forgetting that his right to free speech 40 years ago as a leader of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad in Delhi University launched him on his own political career. Arun Jaitley did not call for a ban on political parties incubating talent on college campuses: where would the BJP's educated cadres come from? Similarly, the communist parties, on their back feet across most of India, also need the new blood of student apparatchiks. Significantly, the Congress's student wing is now a pale shadow of its virility in the 1970s and 1980s; that is a good explanation for the

party's inexorable marginalisation. Kaur did not utter or tweet a single incendiary or insurrectional word: one placard she held up, out of 36 in a Facebook slideshow posted a year ago to chronicle her journey from a child hater to an adult peacenik, was juxtaposed with Dawood Ibrahim, Adolf Hitler and Osama bin Laden. It was open season on WhatsApp - even the death of Kaur's soldier-father in Kashmir was denigrated; everything from her nationality to her morals was avidly shared and shredded. It was too much for her. The power of the crowd is frightening, and it takes extraordinary courage to stand up to an advancing mob. George Orwell, in his 1936 essay "Shooting an Elephant", described that implacable force: "But at that moment I glanced round at the [Burmese] crowd that had followed me. It was an immense crowd, two thousand at the least and growing every minute. It blocked the road for a long distance on either side. I looked at the sea of yellow faces above the garish clothes - faces all happy and excited over this bit of fun, all certain that the elephant was going to be shot. They were watching me as they would watch a conjurer about to perform a trick. They did not like me, but with the magical rifle in my hands I was momentarily worth watching. And suddenly I realized that I should have to shoot the elephant after all. The people

expected it of me and I had got to do it; I could feel their two thousand wills pressing me forward, irresistibly." President Pranab Mukherjee, in the final months of his term, is starting to take a wistful look at democracy, nation-building, respect for women and freedom of speech. Speaking in Kochi

MISPLACED IDEA

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ANIRBAN BORA

on March 2, he said: "There should be no room in India for the intolerant Indian. India has been since ancient times a bastion of free thought, speech and expression. Our society has always been characterized by the open contestation of diverse schools of thought and debate as well as discussion. Freedom of speech and expression is one of the most important fundamental rights guaranteed by our Constitution. There must be space for legitimate criticism and dissent." Good, statesmanlike words. Sadly, we did not get much of that from PM Narendra Modi, who turned on the full force of his personality in the dying days of the Uttar Pradesh election campaign, rousing crowd after crowd

as he trashed all of independent India's governments before his and accused the state's ruling Samajwadi Party of a catalogue of crimes.

HERE IS SOME PERSPECTIVE:

- In a state where one in five citizens is a Muslim, the BJP did not field a single Muslim candidate because not one passed its 'winnability' test.
- 18% of the 4,823 candidates in the UP election have criminal cases pending against them (this data is from the Association for Democratic Reforms)
- You can call it a level playing field: 36% of BJP candidates, 38% of Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) candidates, 37% of SP candidates and 32% of Congress candidates have criminal cases pending against them.
- 58% of the candidates have not disclosed their income-tax details. The heat and dust whipped up by Modi and his chief rivals, the SP's Akhilesh Yadav, the BSP's Mayawati, and Congress's Rahul Gandhi rose to typhoon strength. More and more dramatic language was flung about. Modi pulled out all the stops: no fewer than 19 central ministers campaigned, some for weeks. Modi has been the MP for Varanasi for nearly three years. He complained that his development plans had been stymied by the state government. As prime minister, however, he is not exactly powerless: the Varanasi mayor, Ram Gopal Mohale, and all three state legislators from the city are from BJP.

Every Banarasi I spoke with said corruption, sloth, inefficiency and turf battles between Mohale and the MLAs had hobbled projects. I asked how Modi's done on his pledges: cleaning up the ghats on the Ganga (so-so); putting all hanging electric cables underground (work under way); building a ring road (land acquisition going on); 24-hour electricity (has improved to about 22 hours but is it thanks to Modi or Akhilesh?). Nothing daunted, Modi led an hour-long cavalcade on a road-show through the dingy lanes of Kashi, the ancient name for Varanasi, to pray at the Kashi Vishwanath temple. He also made sure to pay homage to Kaal Bhairav, the most fearsome incarnation of Lord Shiva, who is known as the Kotwal (sheriff) of Kashi. Forty constituencies voted on Wednesday in the seventh and final phase of the UP election. The bomb blast on a train in Madhya Pradesh on Tuesday, and the gun-battle death of a terrorist in Lucknow, were sober punctuation marks hours before the poll booths opened. Nearly everybody I spoke with said the hawa (wind) was blowing the BJP's way, and the party would win big in Poorvanchal (the eastern part of the state). One of the first things a new BJP administration will do, if the party returns to power, is to throw open a huge Trade Facilitation Centre and Crafts Museum at Varanasi that Modi pledged in 2014. That will likely not be the only edifice to be built: don't forget the Ram temple in Ayodhya.