

The Needle's Eye



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While waiting for the 10,400 policemen who were deployed this week to guard Ivanka Trump in Hyderabad to go back to their regular duties of guarding lesser VIPs, I pondered over the eternal "Where are we in history?" question.

Ms Trump's speechwriters were savvy enough to avoid comment on the hordes of beggars who had been forcibly cleared from Hyderabad's streets for the Global Entrepreneurship Summit (GES). She noted in her speech at the GES (theme 'Women First, Prosperity For All') that the city of pearls would soon see its innovation outstrip its famous biryani.

That reminded me of a clip in which a poor little kid is repeatedly asked the question 'Who is the chief minister of Kerala?' perhaps in preparation for school entrance. The toddler keeps tripping on 'Pinarayi Vijayan', and can only manage 'Biryani Teacher'. Take that as a comment on our politics or our education system, I leave it to your taste...

The Ivanka Trump collection ("founded by women for women") of

shoes, handbags, jewellery, and other fashions, has not yet swept India's stores, but it will. Her clothing line has been criticised for buying all its inventory from factories in China, India, Vietnam, and Bangladesh that exploit women and use dodgy labour practices. In China, where Yi Wan Ka is adored as a demi-goddess for her take-it-all lifestyle, labour activists investigating her sweatshop suppliers were

KEY STATE POLLS

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detained earlier this year by police. And when department store chain Nordstrom said it would take Ivanka's shoes off its shelves in early 2017, it came in for blistering criticism from President Trump.

That is how dynasties work—they look after their own. The First Daughter must have felt at home at dinner at the Falaknuma Palace, once home to the Nizams, where she was paid court by some of our business dynasts as well as Telangana chief min-

ister K Chandrasekhar Rao, whose family has spread its tentacles in government and commerce. In marked contrast, none of the top four Indian politicians at the conference—Narendra Modi, Sushma Swaraj, Nirmala Sitharaman and Suresh Prabhu—carry any dynastic baggage.

Prime Minister Modi, speaking at the GES, stuck to a spirited account of

Modi must also have in his sights the 3.5 million young Gujaratis between 18 and 25 who are eligible to vote in the first phase of the Gujarat elections on December 9. Distractions like the GES have not deflected his determination to wrest a fifth consecutive term for the Bharatiya Janata Party. The BJP has lost ground in Gujarat since 2012. The elections have given Modi a

agency armed with page-wise voter lists? The BJP hopes not—and if you were to believe the worst rumours, is serving up other inducements to tempt voters.

Despite reports of electronic voting machines 'malfunctioning' in Uttar Pradesh municipal elections earlier in November, the Election Commission insists EVMs are tamper-proof. But

zard of big projects until October 25 when the EC finally announced the Gujarat dates.

Here's a back-of-the-envelope list of project announcements (there may be a few misses):

- Bhavnagar to Bharuch roll-on roll-off ferry ₹615 crore;
- Multiple projects in Vadodara ₹1,447 crore;
- Dwarka four-lane cable bridge ₹1,140 crore;
- Ahmedabad-Rajkot national highway ₹2,500 crore;
- Greenfield airport at Rajkot ₹1,400 crore;
- Bhadbhut Barrage ₹4,337 crore;
- A maritime university on the Gulf of Cambay ₹800 crore;
- A city command and control centre at Vadodara ₹100 crore;
- Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Yojana ₹2,351 crore;
- Saurashtra Narmada Avataram Irrigation Yojana (first phase of ₹12,000 crore project).

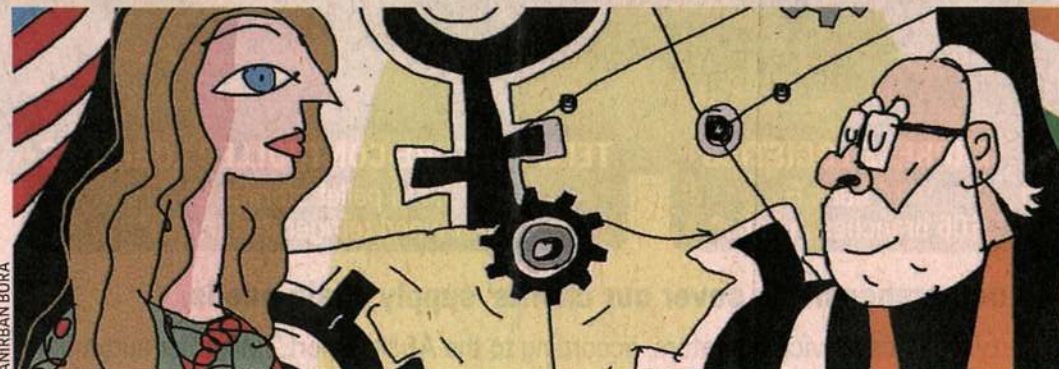
All these projects will certainly affect voter sentiment. But think about it: the prime minister, who again argued last weekend for simultaneous elections to Parliament and state assemblies in order to reduce political

corruption, would be hard put, even with his boundless energy, to fly around the country announcing sops in 29 states. If the BJP retains Gujarat, and wins Karnataka next year, it will have nearly obliterated Congress from the electoral map.

Scorn and abuse at the hustings will probably segue into a stormy and all-too-brief winter session of Parliament, which is set to start a day after the last Gujarat vote is cast on December 15.

But that should not detract from my history question at the start of this column. You have just lived through a momentous period, and I'm not referring only to the Goods and Services Tax, the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business uptick, and the Moody's upgrade. Hours after you read this on Thursday, gross domestic product growth figures for the July-September quarter will be announced. The pundits predict that it will come in around 6.4 percent, ending a five-quarter slide. That should be another shot in the BJP's arm before the Gujarat election.

This year also happens to be the centenary of the Russian revolution, and the United States entering World War I by declaring war on Germany, and its purchase of the Virgin Islands from Denmark for \$25 million. That should give pause to the Trumps as they survey their real-estate collaborations in India.



ANIRBAN BORA

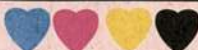
how India has empowered its women in politics, science and business. With one eye on the string of elections over the next year and a half, he noted that young Indians born at the dawn of the 21st century who turn 18 next year would be eligible to vote from New Year's Day. He also saw India's 800 million youth as "potential entrepreneurs who can work towards making the world a better place".

fresh opportunity to heap derision on Rahul Gandhi, who we hear will finally ascend to the Congress throne a few days before the Gujarat polls open.

The Congress party has struck a Faustian deal with Hardik Patel in a desperate bid to gain Patidar votes. Will it cause serious damage to the machinations of BJP president Amit Shah, whose armies of karyakartas have carpet-bombed every constitu-

the EC did not win brownie points with a two-week gap between the announcements of election dates for Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat.

From September 14, when he launched the Ahmedabad-Mumbai bullet train project with Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe at a glitzy ceremony in Gandhinagar, Modi made repeated trips to his former bailiwick to launch or inaugurate a bliz-



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