

PM Modi delivers

■ Calamity Country

India’s Governance Crisis

The India–US trade deal is more than a reduction in tariffs. It is a statement of India’s growing confidence, capability, and standing in the world. When the United States agreed to bring down reciprocal tariffs on Indian goods from 25 per cent to 18 per cent, it signalled not just economic accommodation, but strategic recognition. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi rightly observed, when two large economies and the world’s largest democracies work together, it benefits the people and unlocks immense opportunities for mutually beneficial cooperation. This agreement did not emerge overnight. It is the product of nearly eight months of quiet calm, restrained, and resolute diplomacy. At every stage of negotiations, India chose patience over provocation. There was no public posturing, no anger, and no histrionics. Instead, New Delhi stayed focused on outcomes. In an era where global diplomacy is often driven by loud headlines and instant reactions, India’s composed approach stands out. It shows maturity, confidence, and strategic depth. What makes this deal truly historic is that India locked horns with the United States and still ensured a favourable outcome. At a time when many countries quietly absorbed higher American tariffs, India held its ground. It did not crack under pressure. It negotiated from a position of self-belief and clarity about national interest. This alone reinforces the idea that India today is a force to reckon with, economically and diplomatically. The credit for this achievement goes squarely to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. His determination to protect India’s interests, while keeping long-term partnerships intact, has defined this engagement. Under his leadership, India has conducted itself in a statesman-like manner, firm but fair, open but not submissive. This balance is not easy to achieve, especially when dealing with a global power like the United States, yet India managed it with confidence. The immediate economic response to the deal underlines its significance. With the clouds of uncertainty lifted, the markets have responded with enthusiasm. Investors’ wealth surged by an astounding Rs 12.10 lakh crore in a single session. The Indian rupee emerged as the best-performing Asian currency, registering a record gain of 117 paise in one day. These are not symbolic numbers. They reflect renewed investor trust, improved sentiment, and global confidence in India’s economic direction. Beyond this agreement, there is a larger story. Under Prime Minister Modi’s leadership, India has concluded nine trade deals covering 39 countries, most of them developed economies. This is historic. It shows consistency, vision, and an understanding that India’s growth is deeply linked to global integration on fair terms. The India–US trade deal, therefore, is not just about tariffs. It is about India’s place in the world. It is about confidence replacing hesitation, diplomacy replacing noise, and leadership replacing uncertainty. Above all, it is about a self-assured India shaping its future on its own terms.

■ POONAM I KAUSHISH

As the Budget rolled out and Government patted itself on 7.5 GDP, a key question remained unanswered: Have we become the calamity country of the world? It seems so as we lurch from one catastrophe to another, whereby the death toll from disasters keeps rising, but alarm bells are seldom triggered loud enough for our ‘deaf’ authorities to take timely and preventive actions. Take the devastating fire that ripped through two adjoining warehouses on Kolkata’s outskirts leaving 29 dead and counting. Instead of finding out who was negligent or bribed, BJP-TMC buried answerability by playing gulli-danda. Accused Union Home Minister, “Whose money is it? Why no arrestes? Replied TMC, “Not possible to check private warehouses.” Understandable, as high stakes State elections is round the corner and raj gaddi is up for grabs. Or, the horrific fire at a Goa nightclub which left 25 dead December. Turns out it was built illegally on salt pan and operated without licence. A magisterial inquiry noted serious lapses and collusion at multiple official levels but no one was held accountable, only owners were arrested. Earlier, over 89 patients died in a Kolkata hospital. Predictably, the hospital’s licence was cancelled and Chief Minister vowed “harshesht punishment” for those found responsible, read owners arrest. But was mum on mandatory fire checks? The NCRB data shows over 1.5 lakh fire incidents annually, resulting in above 27,000 deaths, the most vulnerable victims being children. The frightening part? More than 57% deaths occur in residential settings, with most occurring at night when occupants are asleep and reaction time is slow. Less said the better of lakhs of lives lost annually due to faulty infrastructural planning. Consider road accidents which are overwhelming. India recorded 4.73 lakh road accidents resulting in around 1.70 lakh deaths or 11% even as we have only one per cent vehicles last year. Sic. An example: Last month a Delhi couple bled to death after remaining trapped for 8 hours inside their mangled WagonR which was hit by an unidentified heavy vehicle on the Delhi-Mumbai expressway. Cars whizzed past but no one stopped to help. By the time they were taken to hospital they were dead from blood loss, which could have been prevented had they been taken to hospital on time. Shockingly, despite the psychological trauma victims and their families suffer, Government has yet to come up with a single sustained campaign on the pressing need for road safety. Ditto vis-à-vis deaths from fire, where we have no pan-India safety campaign to help prevent accidents. Pertinently, the chronology of these tragedies follows a familiar pattern. Rather than focus on strictness of daily governance, priority is given to optics of political grandstanding, of Viksit Bharat by 2047. Indore, celebrated as India’s cleanest city faced a deplorable public health emergency last month as contaminated drinking water caused by sewage leakage triggered diarrhoea

and vomiting outbreak. Multiple lives were lost and hundreds took ill. But other than talk of taking action against civic authorities passing-the-file from one department to another played out as State protocols for water safety monitoring were washed out. Besides, Government sorely lacks crowd management skills. Police were completely overwhelmed at actor-politician Vijay rally in Tamil Nadu September which left 45 dead and dozens injured, underscoring public safety is given least priority. Again jubilation turned to horror in Bengaluru as a massive crowd gathered at a stadium to celebrate Royal Challenger’s first IPL title killing many. Remember, media blitz of Maha Kumbh

the rule. Which translates into grease my palms else I will read you the riot act and how! Add to this, States are notorious for having a “committed bureaucracy” or being aligned to Parties, resulting in a spate of transfers and hounding out following a political change. Every change of guard leads to ad nauseum transfers resulting in most officials taking no initiative. Indeed, the political identification of officials is becoming so marked that even bureaucrats are able to predict who will occupy which top post, if ‘X’, ‘Y’ or ‘Z’ Party or individual comes to power! Confessed a former Cabinet Secretary, “the problem is endemic in States like UP, Bihar and Tamil Nadu, where

mum knowledge necessary for discharge of functions. Even late Prime Minister Manmohan Singh confessed: “I am disgusted with the system”, when he discovered even Cabinet decisions remained where they were taken --- on paper. Perhaps, file-pushers had to apply their heads to arrive at an agreed conclusion as to who should push the file. And on who’s orders? Cabinet, Minister or political mai baap? Undeniably, we are in the throes of governance crisis. Primarily, as our bureaucracy is designed for stability and control, not citizen-driven accountability. Two, due to job security without performance pressure, pe-

Its open secret those in positions of power, specially the powerful bureaucracy lobby are the first to shrug off their responsibility. An obscurantist force often rivaling politicians with its fair share of crooks, criminals and cheats. A majority of who work on the dictum, show me the face I will show you the rule. Which translates into grease my palms else I will read you the riot act and how! Add to this, States are notorious for having a “committed bureaucracy” or being aligned to Parties, resulting in a spate of transfers and hounding out following a political change. Every change of guard leads to ad nauseum transfers resulting in most officials taking no initiative. Indeed, the political identification of officials is becoming so marked that even bureaucrats are able to predict who will occupy which top post, if ‘X’, ‘Y’ or ‘Z’ Party or individual comes to power! Confessed a former Cabinet Secretary, “the problem is endemic in States like UP, Bihar and Tamil Nadu, where Chief Ministers have failed to draw a distinction between “political direction and political interference.” Chimed in another, “Bureaucrats were to be checks in the system. The checks have turned into cheques while the balance is out of the window! The civil service has become an elite self perpetuating club which protects its perks, turf and corners all top jobs. Adeptly they have created jobs like regulators and committees, cornered by them alongside misusing their office to benefit a Party or cultivate certain constituencies while in office.”



Mela Prayagraj last year. Of 50 million pilgrims, but Administration shrouded 200 dead and scores injured. A month later, overcrowding erupted in stampede at New Delhi Railway Station, killing 40 and injuring many. Both underplayed. If chaos is made light of how can corrective measures be taken? Be it road, rail or air accidents or a stampede. Each time it’s a classic case of too little too late. Why? Who will be held accountable? Questionably, will babus have courage to correct themselves? Can competence and integrity, not allegiance become criteria for selection? Its open secret those in positions of power, specially the powerful bureaucracy lobby are the first to shrug off their responsibility. An obscurantist force often rivaling politicians with its fair share of crooks, criminals and cheats. A majority of who work on the dictum, show me the face I will show you

Chief Ministers have failed to draw a distinction between “political direction and political interference.” Chimed in another, “Bureaucrats were to be checks in the system. The checks have turned into cheques while the balance is out of the window! The civil service has become an elite self perpetuating club which protects its perks, turf and corners all top jobs. Adeptly they have created jobs like regulators and committees, cornered by them alongside misusing their office to benefit a Party or cultivate certain constituencies while in office.” Worse, instead of putting the right man in the right job, netas invariably end up choosing a wrong man for the right job for the wrong reasons. Brining matters to such a pass that caste, corruption, pliability and political connections alone count when it comes to promotions. Thus, administration become increasingly weak and arbitrary since there is no time to acquire even mini-

nalzing an officer is extremely difficult and slow. Three, departmental enquiries takes years between vigilance bodies, courts so the time action happens the officer may have retired. Four, weak performance metrics whereby promotions are seniority-based rather than result oriented. The writing is on the wall. Babudom must give serious thought to determining what action needs to be taken collectively to remove administrative deficiencies, expose political malfunctioning and restore the system. One way is to internalize US’s zero tolerance principle and the “sunset principle.” Under this method, justification for any Governmental activity is all time under scrutiny that no acts of misdemeanour take place. If our bureaucrats don’t change, a time will come when they will become increasingly irrelevant. Will Babudom rise to the occasion? Or will they allow the steel frame to rot and rust as they revel in non-governance and zero accountability? --- INFA

National Security & Parliamentary Responsibility of Rahul Gandhi

■ LALIT GARGG

Policy-making, national security, and parliamentary discourse are the backbone of any democracy. Parliament is not merely an arena for confrontation between the ruling party and the opposition; it is the highest forum for national unity, collective wisdom, and responsible expression. Therefore, when discussions are underway on a constitutional and dignified occasion such as the President’s Address, it is only natural to expect every leader to exercise extra caution with words, references, and timing. In the recent episode, the statement made in the Lok Sabha by the Leader of the Opposition, Rahul Gandhi—citing certain excerpts from the unpublished book of former Army Chief General M. M. Naravane to allege Chinese incursions—raised serious questions about this expectation. The government alleged that the statement attempted to mislead the House, while the opposition countered by accusing the government of suppressing the truth. The outcome was predictable: parliamentary proceedings were disrupted, sharp exchanges led to the adjournment of the entire day’s session, and the focus of national discourse shifted from substantive issues to mutual accusations and counter-accusations. This is not merely about a single statement; it is about political maturity, responsibility, and an understanding of national interest. Matters related to national security demand exceptional sensitivity in public statements. Border-related facts, military deployments, and strategic assessments are areas where partial contexts or selective quotations can create unnecessary confusion. This is precisely why Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Home Minister Amit Shah described the episode as a violation of parliamentary norms and a reckless gamble with national security. When, despite the Speaker’s ruling, a leader insists on standing by a state-

ment to the extent that proceedings come to a halt, it raises a fundamental question: was the intent to reveal the truth, or to secure political mileage? Holding the government accountable is the opposition’s duty—it is the lifeblood of democracy. Yet the language of questioning, the forum, and the timing are all bound by democratic propriety. The discussion on the President’s Address is meant for a comprehensive debate on the government’s policies, achievements, and future direction. Turning selective excerpts from military memoirs into political weapons during such a discussion, without due context or institutional process, is bound to generate controversy. The opposition’s claim that the government seeks to suppress uncomfortable questions is a familiar and often hollow political refrain; equally weighty, however, is the government’s argument that politicizing national security is inappropriate. Balance between the two is possible only where facts, procedure, and timing are respected. Controversy over referencing an unpublished “memoir” within Parliament is hardly surprising. Parliamentary traditions and established rules do not permit members to cite material from any published or unpublished book, article, or journal as evidence unless it has been formally laid on the Table of the House. Especially in the case of excerpts from books or articles that have neither undergone parliamentary verification nor been officially recorded with the House’s consent, treating them as factual proof violates parliamentary decorum. From this perspective, Rahul Gandhi’s direct citation of excerpts from an unpublished book and presenting them as definitive truths on matters of policy and national importance amounts not only to a breach of parliamentary rules but also undermines the dignity and credibility of the House. Rahul Gandhi is not merely a Congress leader; he is the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha. At the very least, on matters of national security, he is expected to stand with the narrative of India’s armed forces. Unfortunately, he often does not. He seeks to corner the

Modi government on China and Pakistan, yet overlooks the fact that incursions into Indian territory by these two countries occurred when the Congress was in power. In the case of the bloody clash with the Chinese army in Galwan, it was inevitable that his reference to alleged excerpts from the then Army Chief’s unpublished book would provoke an uproar. After all, how can one cite a book that has not even been published? Rahul Gandhi’s charge that the Modi government failed to show resolve in the face of Chinese aggression is baseless and misleading. This is not the first time he has attempted to portray Prime Minister Modi as hesitant to confront China. To project the government as weak, he has repeatedly claimed that China has occupied Indian territory. He has even gone so far as to say that Chinese soldiers beat Indian troops—remarks for which he was reprimanded by the Supreme Court. Yet he seems unwilling to accept that national security should not be politicized on the basis of superficial allegations. The truth, widely acknowledged, is that in Galwan the Chinese army received a strong response, which compelled it to come to the negotiating table and helped restore the status quo in several areas of Ladakh. The Congress party, too, must engage in serious introspection. Once a party that provided leadership to the nation, it now appears repeatedly entangled in controversies where rhetoric overshadows substance. Rahul Gandhi is an effective speaker, capable of touching public sentiment and engaging with the youth. Precisely for this reason, greater responsibility is expected of him. Persistently raising issues that the ruling party portrays as harmful to national unity only reinforces the image of the Congress as an irresponsible opposition. Whether this perception is entirely fair or not, in politics perception can be as powerful as fact. A comparative look at mature democracies shows that debates on national security are often conducted through specialized parliamentary committees, closed-door sessions, and institutional processes. Public statements by leaders are usually confined to broad signals

and policy questions, avoiding detailed military disclosures. India, too, must cultivate such a tradition—one where the opposition demands accountability from the government without turning the credibility of the armed forces and security institutions into an arena for political combat. This balance is what strengthens democracy. Yet Rahul Gandhi has, on previous occasions as well, not only endangered security through his military-related statements but also hurt the morale of our soldiers. At the same time, it is equally true that the government should not fear transparency. If the opposition cites a book, report, or statement, it deserves an institutional and fact-based response. Ending debate merely by invoking rule violations is not a healthy democratic practice. Complete silence in the name of national security is also contrary to democratic accountability. Both sides must recognize their respective limits. Ultimately, the question is also one of Rahul Gandhi’s maturity. Maturity does not mean silence; it means understanding which question should be raised, when, where, and how. A national leader is expected to act with strategic wisdom rather than emotional impulse. Similarly, it is the collective responsibility of the opposition to make Parliament a forum for effective debate rather than repeated disruptions. The adjournment of Parliament is no one’s victory; it is a defeat for democracy. This entire episode once again underscores how powerful words are in a diverse and sensitive democracy like India. National unity is safeguarded not only by protecting borders, but also by practicing responsible politics. The Congress must reflect on whether short-term political gains are more important than long-term credibility. Rahul Gandhi must introspect whether leadership is built merely by raising questions, or also by exercising restraint and timely judgment. And the government must remember that a strong nation is strengthened not by avoiding questions, but by answering them. Only if this balance is achieved will every session of Parliament truly serve the national interest.

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Published at: 106, New Rehari, Jammu

Printed at: JK Printing and Publications, Near Matador Stand, Sunjwan, Jammu.

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