is the BJP having a rethink on the Madhav Sedani Mandal, the obscurity to which it had banished senior statesmen L.K. Advani and Murali Manohar Joshi? Given the electoral setbacks ahead of the forthcoming Lok Sabha election, word is the party is wheeling out veterans into the fray—Joshi, 85, from Kanpur; Advani, 91, from Gandhinagar; and O. Rajagopal, 89, from Thrissurvanchuram. Kalraj Mishra, 77, who was dropped from the Union cabinet in 2017 after he crossed the unofficial retirement age of 75, is likely to recontest his Deoria seat. Interestingly, none of these veterans had been seen as a seat hopeful for the election. Ally Shromoni Akali Dal, meanwhile, is contemplating fielding Parkash Singh Badal, 91, from Amritsar (by swapping Ludhiana with the BJP).

THACKERAYNAMA

Shiv Sainiks were left red-faced at a recent promotional event in Mumbai for the biopic on the late Bal Thackeray. The event, which was attended by Shiv Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray, party MP Sanjay Raut, Maharashtra chief minister Devendra Fadnavis and Nationalist Congress Party chief Ashish Misra, Kiran D. Tare and Divyesh Singh Sandeep Unnithan with Anilesh Mahajan, Maharashtra's excise minister, had stand-up comedian Raju Srivastav sharing an anecdote about the vice-like grip Thackeray Sr had on his party. Srivastav said that Bal Thackeray, whom he went to meet, asked Sena veteran and former chief minister Manohar Joshi to serve their guest a drink. Raut, asked Sena veteran and former chief minister said that Bal Thackeray, whom he went to meet, like grip Thackeray Sr had on his party. Srivastav Sharad Pawar Party chief, had stand-up comedian and Nationalist Congress Devendra Fadnavis party MP Sanjay Raut, Maharashtra chief minister attended by Shiv Sena chief, on the late Bal Thackeray. The event, which was show it is the only constituency in Uttar Pradesh to receive MPs' local area development funds from seven parliamentarians, besides Sonia herself—Congress MPs Kapil Mishra, 77, who was dropped from the Union cabinet in 2017 after he crossed the unofficial retirement age of 75, is likely to recontest his Deoria seat. Interestingly, none of these veterans had been seen as a seat hopeful for the election. Ally Shromoni Akali Dal, meanwhile, is contemplating fielding Parkash Singh Badal, 91, from Amritsar (by swapping Ludhiana with the BJP).

THackerayNama

It seems a mini-gathbandhan of sorts at work to nurture Sonia Gandhi’s constituency Raebareli. District records show it is the only constituency in Uttar Pradesh to receive MPs’ local area development funds from seven parliamentarians, besides Sonia herself—Congress MPs Kapil Mishra, 77, who was dropped from the Union cabinet in 2017 after he crossed the unofficial retirement age of 75, is likely to recontest his Deoria seat. Interestingly, none of these veterans had been seen as a seat hopeful for the election. Ally Shromoni Akali Dal, meanwhile, is contemplating fielding Parkash Singh Badal, 91, from Amritsar (by swapping Ludhiana with the BJP).

Raebareli ki Barfi

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A NEW BAR CODE

Maharashtra’s excise minister, Chandrashekhar Bawankule, may finally be giving in to requests that flood his office: to allow the buying of liquor from bars instead of liquor shops. Reason? Bars outnumber liquor shops in the state and liquor is cheaper in bars as it doesn’t attract service tax. With the Lok Sabha election approaching and dance bars set to reopen, this could well turn out to be a populist move.

UPFRONT

India, in its latest submission to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), has claimed that the rate of carbon sequestration in its forests and croplands jumped by 50 per cent between 2010 and 2014. With dismal stories of rampant deforestation being more common, the news of carbon being sequestered and its rate increasing seemed too good to be true. And, indeed, the UNFCCC has asked India to re-check its submission on forest carbon and forest cover and share more details regarding the sources. What gives?

The government defines forests as simply an area with more than 10 per cent tree canopy cover, whether in its internal biennial State of Forest reports, or in its report to the UNFCCC. Their estimate of ‘forest cover’ includes horticultural plantations of coffee, tea, rubber, cashew, coconut, or areca nut, and farm forestry plantations of eucalyptus, casuarina and poplar, along with single-species plantations of teak, pine or eucalyptus present on public lands.

Environmentalists have long complained about this. We monitor forests because we want to conserve them, not just for the carbon they sequester, but also for the biodiversity they offer, their hydrological benefits and the multiple products (firewood, fodder, medicinal plants, bamboo) they provide to local communities. These benefits are generally far lower in horticultural or silvicultural plantations than in natural or semi-natural, multi-species forest. Only carbon sequestration rates and timber productivity are possibly higher in plantations.

Mapping and tracking the area of natural forests separately can prevent countries from meeting their carbon sequestration targets at the cost of these benefits. This was agreed upon in the United Nations Climate Change Conference in 2010 in Cancun. India’s claim that this separation is difficult is simply untenable in today’s age of multi-season, high-resolution satellite imagery. The forest departments prefer this lumping together for the sake of convenience. The whole system is manned by policy-makers blinded by this supposed market for forest carbon offsets, and forest departments are happy to tag along for the funds it might bring in. But, forests are not meant to serve some singular national goal. They provide diverse benefits to multiple stakeholders, like the 50 million forest-dependent people of India. These communities are slowly asserting their historic rights, using the Forest Rights Act, 2006. A carbon-centric forest policy will hurt these communities, as well as the biodiversity. Recognising multiple stakes and stakeholders will enable us to devise multi-dimensional and robust systems of monitoring and reporting all forest benefits in ways that will have both international credibility as well as local legitimacy. Enabling local communities to decide priorities in areas they use, and supporting them with carbon and other funds, will ensure that these multiple benefits are sequestered for the long run.

POINT OF VIEW

The Wood for the Trees...

By Sharachchandra Lele

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