

O HERALDO

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Fracturing India's social fabric

The passage of the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2025, by the BJP-led government at the Centre has unleashed a storm of controversy, exposing deep fault lines in India's pluralistic society. While the government claims the legislation aims to modernise Waqf administration and enhance transparency, critics—including opposition parties, Muslim organisations, and constitutional scholars—see it as an assault on religious autonomy and minority rights. The recent violence in West Bengal, where three people died during protests in Murshidabad, underlines the perils of pushing through such contentious legislation without broad-based consensus. In its haste, the BJP risks disrupting the delicate fabric that binds India's diverse communities.

The Bill, which amends the Waqf Act of 1995, brings in sweeping changes: non-Muslim representation on Waqf boards, enhanced government oversight, and stricter measures against encroachments. Supporters argue that these reforms will bolster accountability and protect minority interests. Yet, critics point out that the Bill may undermine constitutional protection under Articles 14, 25, 26, and 29. Concerns have been raised that the changes could dilute the Constitution and disenfranchise religious minorities by giving the state excessive control over religious institutions. The proposal to appoint non-Muslim members to Waqf boards has been seen as disregarding Islamic tenets, while the vague requirement of being a "practising Muslim" for board membership has only deepened confusion and mistrust.

Waqf properties, endowed for religious, educational, or charitable purposes, play a vital role in supporting social welfare among Muslims. They fund mosques, madrasas, graveyards and orphanages. Mismanagement and encroachments have plagued Waqf boards for years—problems acknowledged even by Muslim leaders. However, reforms must be inclusive and rooted in dialogue. Unilateral changes risk being seen as administrative corrections rather than ideological impositions.

There is also a broader legal and historical context to consider. Earlier efforts to bring greater transparency to Waqf management—such as through expert committee recommendations—emphasised the need for professional audits and capacity building, not abrupt reengineering of its religious character. Those calling for reform have long argued that systemic inefficiencies, not religious dogma, are the real barriers. The current Bill, critics say, conflates the two.

The violent clashes in Murshidabad, which resulted in three deaths and over a hundred arrests, are a grim reminder of the stakes involved. The Calcutta High Court's directive to deploy Central Forces and the Union Home Secretary's direct oversight reflect a crisis that could have been averted with greater foresight. This episode evokes memories of past upheavals—the post-Indira Gandhi assassination riots, the Mandal Commission fallout, the violence after the Babri Masjid demolition, and the protests that followed the Supreme Court's Shah Bano ruling in 1985. That verdict, which granted maintenance to a divorced Muslim woman, triggered nationwide protests, seen by many as interference in personal laws. The subsequent legislation, passed to appease protesters, only widened communal rifts.

History teaches us that when laws are perceived to violate religious or cultural identities, societies can edge dangerously close to rupture. The Shah Bano controversy is a cautionary tale of how quickly trust can dissolve into unrest. At a time when global conflicts—from Russia and Ukraine to Israel and Palestine—rage on, India remains a rare example of coexistence. Seventy-five years after independence, our unity amidst diversity is both remarkable and fragile. Democracy may run on majority rule, but it thrives on consensus and inclusion. No political mandate should come at the cost of alienating communities that are integral to the Indian mosaic.

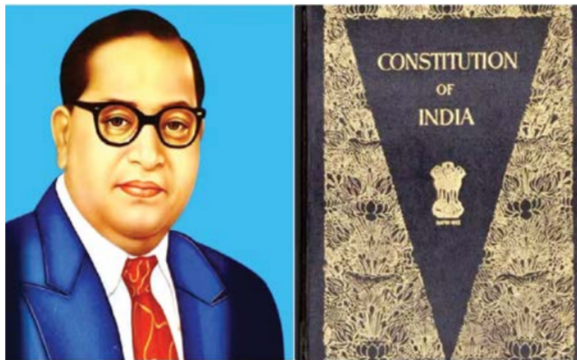
There is also the matter of India's international standing. Laws that appear to target specific communities can deepen the perception of a shrinking civic space for minorities. India has long prided itself on being a democratic counterpoint to theocratic regimes; it must not allow that image to fade.

The Bill's referral to a Joint Parliamentary Committee had offered a glimmer of hope for dialogue, but retaining the most contentious provisions suggests that opportunity has been squandered. With protests intensifying and legal challenges mounting in the Supreme Court, the government must step back and reconsider. Transparency in Waqf management is essential, but not at the expense of constitutional principles or social harmony. The BJP must commit to meaningful consultation and respond to legitimate concerns in a way that reassures all communities. If it fails to do so, the cost will not just be measured in court verdicts or political fallout, but in the erosion of trust that underpins the Indian republic.

India deserves legislation that unites—not one that divides.



Personality cults and personality driven politics is now the order of the day. It appears that even 76 years ago, Babasaheb saw it coming. He reminded us of what John Steward Mill said never to trust anyone with the powers to subvert the institutions if one wanted to maintain democracy



Bombay HC, it is only obvious that the governance is rotten both at the Centre and in our State. Bad governance cannot only emanate from a good lot.

Justice Oka led SC bench, while dealing with a poem of an MP questioned whether after 75 years into our republic we can be seen to be so shaky, that mere recital of a poem or for that matter stand-up comedy can be alleged to trigger enmity or hatred amongst different communities". The right

India still struggles with Babasaheb's anxieties!

This month, the Supreme Court stood up to the powerful executive on free speech, governors as centre's agents and on bulldozer justice. Though the highest court has not acted with the alacrity the situation warranted, in difficult times such restatement of democratic values provide a sense of hope. The parliament also rammed the Waqf bill 2024 amidst the strong push back by a weak opposition.

Today, it is the birth anniversary of one of the founder pillars of the Constitution, Babasaheb Ambedkar in his last speech to the constituent assembly said "...however good a constitution may be, it is sure to turn out bad because those who are called to work it, happen to be a bad lot. However bad a Constitution may be, it may turn out to be good if those who are called to work it, happen to be a good lot".

After 75 years of working of the Constitution, it is of course time to find out whether we got a bad lot or a good lot to work the Constitution. If we look at some of the judgements coming from the Apex Court and some path breaking judgements of the Goa bench of the

of free speech was placed on a very high pedestal of a fundamental right by the constituent assembly.

The Waqf bill 2024 is looked at as an attack on the economic wherewithal of the minority community. On 2nd December 1948, addressing certain reservations by the Muslim members of the constituent assembly on the Uniform Civil Code, Babasaheb cautioned 'no government can exercise its power in such a manner as to provoke the Muslim community to rise in rebellion and then he went on 'it would be a mad government if it did so'. Even before the partition, speaking on the objective resolution on December 17, 1946, he warned "... If there is anybody who has in his mind the project of solving the Hindu-Muslim problem by force, which is another name of solving it by war ... in order that the Muslims may be subjugated...(T) his country would be involved in perpetually conquering them.' Ambedkar's words in 1946 deserve to be recalled as the passage of the Waqf bill 2024 spells the very antithesis of hope for the Muslims pushed to the corner by bulldozers, mob lynchers and those advocating boycott of Muslim traders in different parts of the country. The country is divided on religious intolerance and communal hatred. Babasaheb, it appears had premonition of the shape of things to come. As Telumdu tells us that Dr Ambedkar had said that Hindu raj would be the biggest calamity to India. His bringing in the concept of 'fraternity' along with liberty and equality was bring in a sense of solidarity and clearly a thinking against rule of majority over the minority. The principle of fraternity ought to look practices of other faiths not through the principle of tolerance but through the prism of respect.

In a path breaking judgement, the highest court dealt with the mischief of governors acting as agents of the central ruling party by setting a timeline for passing of bills. The constituent assembly and its members were wary of the future. In the constituent assembly debates when the power of the governors

was discussed Babasaheb was clear – That the Governor was bound to act as per the wishes of the cabinet. When H V Kamat another member questioned 'won't he be able to delay or obstruct...?' Kamat's apprehensions lingered on until a Supreme Court bench decided to intervene.

Mrs. Gandhi imposed emergency when democracy evaporated into a thin air. Ours is a land of elections and we boast ours to be mother of democracy. Currently our country is dumped as an elected autocracy or a flawed democracy. The institutions meant to keep the democracy in place are made to collapse as state agencies close in on political opponents of the regime. Babasaheb, it appears knew what would come when those kindled with autocratic instincts take over. On 4th November 1948, he told the constituent assembly that it was possible to pervert the Constitution without changing its form, by merely changing the form of administration and to make it inconsistent and opposed to the spirit of the Constitution. We see that happening under the very Constitution which he piloted.

Personality cults and personality driven politics is now the order of the day. It appears that even 76 years ago, Babasaheb saw it coming. He reminded us of what John Steward Mill said never to trust anyone with the powers to subvert the institutions if one wanted to maintain democracy. Ambedkar was against personality cults. He was opposed to Bhakti which he claimed that was part of devotion of hero worship. There was clarity that bhakti in religion may be road to salvation of the soul but bhakti in politics is a sure road to degradation and to eventual dictatorship. He was so prophetic! He is not only a Dalit icon but a rare jewel of our times. His world view and understanding of our country gives him a place in history which very few can reach.

(The writer is a practising Advocate & political thinker who taught Constitutional laws for over three decades)

letterstotheeditor

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been more than just a game. It has been a source of joy, a spark of laughter, and a glue that bound communities together. In every spirited cry of "Jaldi five", "Eyes down for Full house!" echoed the warmth of togetherness and the celebration of life's simple pleasures.

This cherished tradition brought smiles to young and old alike, its charm lighting up church gatherings and social festivities. It was never about money or gambling; it was about connection, unity, and a shared joy that could be found in no other pastime.

Now, with the South Goa District Magistrate's sweeping ban under the Goa Public Gambling Act, that joy is under threat. Housie—a game so innocent and filled with love—has been caught in a web of legal restrictions. This decision cuts deep, leaving religious institutions and their treasured celebrations in a void that no substitute can fill. How can we let something so pure, so deeply rooted in our hearts, vanish in the blink of an eye?

What makes this ban even more painful is the stark contradiction it exposes. While casinos, where fortunes are lost and families are torn apart, continue to flourish, and matka gambling operates freely on every street corner, the very fabric of wholesome community traditions like Housie is being unravelled. It feels like a profound injustice—a misplaced judgment on what truly constitutes harm. This is more than a legal decree; it's a heartbreak. It's a call to defend our cultural roots, to protect a tradition that has touched countless lives with its simplicity and joy. It is a plea to rekindle the spirit of Housie, to rally as a community and en-

sure that this beloved tradition is not lost to the sands of time. Let us not let the lights of Housie dim without a fight. Let us stand together, as we always have, and bring back the smiles, the laughter, and the cries of "Full house!" that once filled our hearts and brought us closer.

Everette Assis Telles, Margao

Recent hike in prices of LPG cylinder

The government does not seem to know what it is doing. Recently it hiked the domestic LPG cylinder prices by Rs 50 but just about 10 days ago, it had reduced the prices of the larger LPG cylinder used in hotels and restaurants by the same amount. Therefore the commodity of LPG being the same there seems to be no logic to hike the domestic LPG cylinder prices by Rs 50 now. However, strange are the workings of this government since in the recent past when international prices of oil and gas were falling, we were seeing an increase in fuel prices domestically.

Srinivas Kamat, Mysore

A cruel decision

Despite the continuous reduction in the price of oil in the international arena, the BJP government's decision to increase the price of LPG cylinders is nothing but day light robbery. Ever since the saffron government came to power, it had only been interested in fleecing the consumers instead of asking on the benefit of reduction in the international price of oil. They have surreptitiously reduced the subsidy on cylinders from Rs 499.52

in 2014 to a pittance Rs 24.95. The irony is that the subsidy remains the same but the cost of the cylinder has been raised multifold and it costs Rs 868.50 today and the latest increase of Rs 50 per cylinder is exactly twice the subsidy of Rs 24.95!

This government is not ready to reduce the cost of the gas cylinders, a day to day requirement of the middle and low income group of people but it had the big heart to write off amounts to the tune of Rs 16.35 lakh crores as Non Reforming Assets of crony capitalists and wilful defaulters most of whom are alleged to be close to the ruling dispensation, in public sector banks during their 10 year rule.

Why else can we expect from a cruel government which appears to be in existence only for the rich and other crony capitalists, read crooks?

Tharcius S. Fernando, Chennai

Fire incidents in summer have to be controlled

Other than the heavy toll on the body and psyche, a surge in fire incidents is a dangerous repercussion of the intense heat all over the country. Over stressed electrical system at homes is one of the principal causes of increasing fire mishaps. Prudent electricity consumption by residents can prevent short circuits.

Parched weather and inflammable waste products too contribute to fire incidents. Accumulated garbage dumps are major sites for fire; chemicals stored in godowns can also lead to catastrophic fire accidents.

Biodegradable materials of garbage quickly decompose to

people's *edit*

CALL OF CREATOR

JOSEPH LEWIS D'SILVA

Every individual is sure to die; when it will happen depends on the call of the Creator. As age advances and years pass by, we notice that fewer and fewer neighbours and friends, survive. As Time slips away, and with advancing years, thoughts of death become more frequent.

Most of us worry about death; whether it will be painful? Will it come sudden; peaceful or violent or after a long illness in a hospital bed? What will happen to our near and dear ones once we leave this Earth? What if, we become completely dependent on our children or other, care takers, for simplest daily tasks?

On our death day, the sexton tells the passing knell! And community becomes aware that someone has expired. For relatives and friends, emotions, frustrations and grief may become overwhelming. But God heals their wounds of the heart and gives them the strength to face the loss; and what will happen to the eternal soul in the eternal world, depends on the actions it had taken during the temporary stay on Earth using free will.

The funeral cortege, gives back the body to the Earth from where it came from; and the spirit returns to God, who gave it; for Him to judge. The soul is the energy of life, it can neither be created nor destroyed. It is indestructible. So, it lives eternally as per the sentence it receives from its Creator.

On the last march of the corpse, only relatives, neighbours and friends can accompany our body up to the burial ground. But only our good deeds go with our soul and speak for us before the Creator. As Joseph Hartz mentions in his Daily Prayer Book, this truth has been shared here in brief, and in my own words.

For a few days after the funeral, people visit the mourning family's house for prayers. After the devotion, they often share memories of the departed soul. A garland photo of the deceased hangs on the wall, watching silently over the gathering, as if lost in thought.

Musing old folks wonder, if life will ever be the same for the ones left behind. Yes, the living must go on. The laws of nature continue to govern the universe. Friends and strangers restart their routines, and move on in their own circles; working, running and exercising --- life does not pause.

We all know that 'Death' is undeniable fact of life, which makes no exceptions. It comes for kings and beggars, saints and sinners. But some are obsessed to prolong one's lifespan. This is because "God has planted eternity in the human heart." (Eccl.3:11). Although, our physical body is mortal, and subject to decay and disease; yet we cling to it very much; we cannot overcome the fear of losing it. But life is much more than that. It is beyond the body; it is the spirit.

Death, though feared and sorrowful, it is not the end but a passage into the eternal kingdom. It reminds us to live meaningfully, with love and with acts of kindness; as this life is a preparation for the eternal life. While our bodies return to the earth, our deeds follow us into eternity. Let us therefore, live in a way that, when the Creator calls, we are ready --- at peace with ourselves, with others and with the Divine.

augment the temperature of the landfill, and when combined with inflammable materials like plastics and clothes, are ready to cause a major fire.

Timely garbage clearance and upkeep of storage areas of inflammable materials cannot be over stated in large cities especially near residential localities and industrial areas. Furthermore, dead and dying plants, standing dead trees and fallen leaves and twigs rapidly ignite wildfire.

Therefore, both the citizens and the governments have a task on their hands: preventing fires and protecting lives.

Ganapathi Bhat, Akola

Unauthorised structures shouldn't be regularised

The government should stop the practice of regularising unauthorised structures as a routine. And such a lenient and casual approach towards regularisation of unauthorised houses, emboldens the non law-abiding individuals to intentionally deviate the rule. Illegal constructions not only cause environmental damages but also pose a threat to the safety and security of neighbours. Road-users too suffer on account of such illegal constructions. Regularisation is not a license for illegal constructions. The government is not expected to be a mute spectator in respect of illegal constructions, which cause great inconvenience to people residing in a locality.

If the construction contravenes of the rules, it would be construed as illegal and needs to be demolished. In Goa, there is widespread belief that unauthorised constructions can be regularised later. Moreover, the government's regularisation scheme will be abused by developers.

K G Vilop, Chorao