

A cloudburst out of thin air

BYLINE



M.J. AKBAR

DELHI Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's outburst against the Union government after the CBI raided the offices of a member of his personal staff can be placed in three categories: cynical, intriguing and revealing. Of the three, cynicism is easiest to understand, for distortion is the only option when facts are running against you.

Rajendra Kumar, the civil servant in question, was appointed to a position of power by Kejriwal despite the fact that he had history. He has, it transpires, used his influence to get contracts for particular companies. Details of his alleged chicanery are in public space, and need not detain. Suffice it to mention that Transparency International, a watchdog body that tracks corruption where it can, had formally warned Kejriwal about Rajendra Kumar. Instead of paying heed, Kejriwal gave

him a coveted job. Without an answer, the Delhi Chief Minister used the oldest tactic in the business: to raise a cloudburst out of thin air in order to camouflage what he had done. His attack took two forms. He used vituperative language against Prime Minister Narendra Modi. And he followed this up by trying to revive some jaded and discredited allegations against Finance Minister Arun Jaitley.

The allegations against Arun Jaitley lost steam more than two years ago, for a good reason. The UPA government of Mrs. Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi exonerated him. This was not any act of charity. UPA would have been delighted to prosecute; and indeed asked the Serious Frauds Investigation Office to investigate. They wanted a verdict quickly, and got it fast. It was just not the verdict they expected. Despite the fact that UPA was in power, the investigators pronounced on March 21, 2013, that there had been no fraud. The story died. Jaitley, with general elections around the corner, withdrew from cricket

administration. It is important to note that Kejriwal, who has created a political career out of a crusade against corruption, never once made an issue of these allegations. Which brings us to the intriguing part: Why has Kejriwal manufactured a false storm in order to defend a

rushed to share the credit. Why is Kejriwal putting so much political capital on the line in order to preserve and protect Rajendra Kumar? We do not have a clear answer yet, but the question raises its own doubts. There is speculation, of course. Memories are stirring about

that gave birth to AAP, men like Shanti Bhushan, Prashant Bhushan and Yogendra Yadav, have broken with Kejriwal because they began to suspect his bona fides.

Sometimes unintended consequences of an episode reveal interesting dimensions of a person's thought process. There is no shortage of hostility in the battles for power. Equally, there is nothing personal in the hostility. MPs, who do as much as they can to provoke one another across the aisle in Parliament, relapse [and relax] into banter when they gather in the Central Hall. Moreover, at all times, the democratic discourse is marked by restraint. Slander never injures the target; it only demeans the accuser.

Kejriwal lost all restraint when he spewed venom against the Prime Minister. When he discovered that the public reaction was negative, he tried to make some amends when talking to the press the same evening. He admitted, with a sort of pity-me look, that he might have misused a word or two, but explained that he had been born in a village in Haryana. In that throwaway remark laid

evidence of an intrinsic contempt for the village; as if it was only to be expected that villagers would be abusive. Astonishing. This is a mindset trapped in prejudice; perhaps unconscious, but still powerful.

Whatever else you may say about Indian democracy, it is certainly never dull. As the drama of power and challenge consumes the second act of a five-act scenario, the characters become true to their basic nature and surprises multiply. A generation is engaged in the wars that always erupt during an age of change. Ambition waits in the wings, waiting for mishaps or mistakes on centre-stage, even as it seeks attention of the audience by any means. There is no need to expose ambition. It always advertises itself. Ambition is not the fatal flaw of only a tragic hero; it can infect a Don Quixote as well.

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bureaucrat? It is not as if he has deep emotional commitments to bureaucracy and will always defend the institution to the death. Just a few days before the Rajendra Kumar incident, the CBI had raided another civil servant in the Delhi government. Instead of defending him, Kejriwal

the mysterious cheques, for instance, worth Rs 2 crore that found their way into the AAP account before the last Delhi Assembly elections. It is pertinent to recall that Kejriwal's closest comrades, those who helped set up AAP and claimed leadership of the moral centre of the movement

Tea Workers' 'No' to Economic Zone on Paddy Land

PHILIP GAIN

IT was a very tense morning for Uday Modi, a tea worker of Chandpore Tea Estate on December 15. In his sixties, Uday wrapped his chest with the Bangladeshi flag and carried an arrow and a couple of bows. He sat stone-faced on the land that he was forced to protect from being taken away by the government.

Uday was not alone. A dozen other men of the tea estate in Habiganj district appeared with bows and arrows to join a massive protest rally against the government's plan to establish an economic zone on vast paddy lands in the northern part of the estate. It was harvest time and the vast field was covered with ripe paddy.

The open-air protest gathering was spontaneous. Hundreds of men and women, holding sticks, axes, placards, and bows and arrows in hand, had assembled at the paddy land owned by the British tea company, Duncan Brothers, while flying the Bangladeshi flag on their heads and wrapping them around their chests. By noon, a disciplined crowd filled the middle of the 511 acres of paddy land that the government transferred to the Bangladesh Economic Zone Authority (BEZA) on November 21, 2015 to establish an economic zone there.

BEZA, operating under the authority of the prime minister's office, has an ambitious plan to establish 100 economic zones throughout the country to speed up economic growth. On December 12, the Chunarughat TNO office announced that government officials would visit the area the next day to demarcate the land for an economic zone. The TNO reportedly asked for help in demarcating the land with pillars. Instead, it was faced with one of the most unprecedented protests ever seen by tea garden workers.

From December 13, the tea workers of Chandpore Tea Estate stopped working in the tea garden and started assembling [from around 10 am till 4 pm] on the cropland, which in the tea garden's terminology is known as *khet* land. Established in 1890, the tea estate is classified as an "A" class garden (to be in category "A" a garden needs to produce 181,000 kgs or more of tea per annum) with three *fari* (subsidiary) gardens — Begum Khan, Jualbhanga, and Ramgonga. The total grant land (public land leased for production of tea) of this garden is: 3,851 acres, of which paddy or *khet* land is 985 acres. Of this *khet* land, 511 acres are situated in the north of the garden, bisected by the old Dhaka-Sylhet highway, has been transferred to BEZA. The garden has 1,955 workers and a populace of 8,833 people.

The tea workers cut the jungle some 150 years ago, cleaned the bushes and needs to make the tea gardens. At the same time, they prepared the land for growing crops. After the partition of India, the entire land for cultivating tea became public land. The tea communities (now with a population of around half a million) could not take advantage of the



Tea workers in an open-air protest rally against economic zone.

PHOTO: PHILIP GAIN

State Acquisition and Tenancy Act that awarded ownership of land to the users. It is because of exceptional land management that the tea workers and their communities cannot own land. But they have cultivated the *khet* land for generations.

Of the 113,663.87 ha grant land of the whole tea industry (except Panchagarh), 12,134.29 ha are paddy land. In official documents, the government has shown that the paddy land of the Chandpore Tea Estate transferred to BEZA is non-agricultural land. This has angered the tea workers.

"We will not give our *khet* land for the economic zone," said Monsuk Urang (52) who we found harvesting his paddy on December 15, before joining the protest rally. "My father and grandfather cultivated this land. They cut the jungle, fought with wild animals and insects. We are ready to die but we will not give up this land."

According to sources of the Chandpore Tea Estate, more than 1,000 families use the 511 acres of paddy land. Many of these families depend solely on this land for subsistence.

All of those who use *khet* land at the Chandpore Tea Estate share Monsuk Urang's sentiments. Each day since December 15, the number of protesters has only been increasing. They begin the peaceful protest rally with the national anthem. They hold the national flag in one hand and placards with slogans such as, "My land, my mother, I will not allow it to be snatched away", or "Resist attempts by those who want to take away the paddy lands."

Officials of Duncan Brothers are con-

cerned, as the tea estate has remained closed since December 13. "It is not yet season for massive production, yet we produce 3,000 kgs of tea per day. However, it is the time to prune the tea plants and perform other jobs to keep the garden in shape," said Shamim Huda, Manager of the Chandpore Tea Estate.

It's even worse for the workers. If they do not go to work, they are not paid for the day. Many have left their ripe paddy fields

in the Liberation War of 1971. They have complete trust in Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

The leaders of the *Bhumi Raksha Committee* are making all arrangements to meet the PM to ensure that she knows that the land transferred to EPZ is actually agricultural land. Even though they complain that the local administration attitude towards them has so far been aggressive and inhospitable, they believe wholeheart-

edly that the Prime Minister will not disappoint them.

Several protesters have even publicly announced that if the PM assures them that justice will be done to them, they will return home. "All we want is an open discussion," they've stressed.

Officials of Duncan Brothers have told this writer that the lease of the Chandpore Tea Estate was last renewed in 2013, and the land now transferred was part of the tea garden. "But the government has neither communicated with us in writing nor called us for any meeting about the transfer of the paddy land to be used as an economic zone," said a senior official of Duncan Brothers. "The government can take land granted for tea production for its use. But we sincerely expected the government to discuss the matter with us."

The tea workers and the owner hold mostly similar views about the issue, even though the owners do not show up at the rally or publicly display support for the protest movement. Nevertheless, neither groups want the government to lie about the condition of the land. They want the PM to be made aware of the truth about the status of the *khet* land and offer a solution after considering the interests of all the parties involved.

Support has been pouring in from people belonging to different quarters for this non-violent protest movement. Everybody wants to see justice being done to these hardworking tea workers.

(Note: The tea workers had organised a protest rally from December 13 till December 18, until writing of this article. They were keen to intensify the protest movement, unless the government listens to their demands).

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SAARC Agriculture Centre (SAC)

BARC Complex, New Airport Road, Farmgate Dhaka 1215, Bangladesh

APPOINTMENT NOTICE

Application is invited from the citizens of Bangladesh for filling up the following positions

Designation, Scale & No. of Post	Qualification, Experience and Age
Senior Finance Officer Scale: US \$ 195-6x5-225 (EB) 9x5-270(EB) US \$280-12x5-340(EB)14x5-410(EB) US \$ 425-16x5-505(EB) 18x5-595 Post : 1 (One)	M Com/MBA/CA with at least 8 years relevant experience or BBA (Finance/Accounts) with at least 12 years experience in line with the job requirements. Competent to handle financial matters independently using computer software, including budgetary control, fund release, desk monitoring and audit. Experience in financial management of foreign / donor agency and large government enterprise will be of added advantage. Good track record of staff supervision, inter personal skill and excellent command over written and spoken English is must. Capable to prepare Annual Budget, claim of contributions from the Member States, preparing the relevant document for presenting to the Governing Board. Capable to provide the relevant financial matters / documents of the Regional Audit Team and reply to the query. Should have good knowledge in foreign currency dealing. Should have proven knowledge and skill in computer use. Must be competent in using Internationally accepted accounting frameworks as well as "Tally" software. Age: Maximum 45 years
Store & Procurement officer Scale: US\$150-6x5-180(EB)7x5-215(EB) US \$ 225-8x5-265(EB)10x5-315(EB) US \$ 330-12x5-390(EB)14x5-460 Post : 1 (One)	MBA/M.Com/ M.A/ M. Sc with at least 10 years experience or BBA (Marketing/Accounting) or B.Com/B.A with at least 12 years experience in reputed organization. Should be competent in computer aided data/stock maintenance, preparation of inventory and reporting. Should be familiar with the SAARC rules and PPR of the GOB, and look after all types of purchase and procurement of goods and services following prevailing rules of the SAARC. Prepare tender documents and arrange enlistment of firms, call tender/quotations etc. abiding by the formalities. Check and receive the materials supplied after full verification, make appropriate entry into the stock and certification. Age: Maximum 35 years

Should be able to work in mixed culture. Preference will be given to persons having work experience in Agricultural Research / Extension System. Must obtain minimum 2nd class/ division in all stages of academic records.

Application in English with complete "Curriculum Vitae" with two copies of recent passport size photographs, attested photocopies of certificates and other documents be submitted to Director, SAARC Agriculture Centre, BARC Campus, Farmgate, Dhaka - 1215 within 31st March 2016.

Selection will be made as per approved criteria by a SAARC level selection committee constituted by the SAARC Secretariat. Interview letters may not be issued to under qualified and inexperienced candidates.

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Dr. S. M. Bokhtiar
Director
SAARC Agriculture Centre

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- Court sport, in slang
 - Breath fresheners
 - Finish
 - Conspicuous
 - Mexican mother
 - Turkey neighbor
 - Bud holder
 - Beagle or boxer
 - King's representatives
 - Lacking color
 - Painter Georges
 - Small porch
 - Un-manned flyer
 - Nosebleed seats
 - Wind pointer
 - Buck Rogers, for one
 - Sleuth Spade
 - Scuff
 - Student of Socrates
 - Fizzy drinks
 - Parting word
 - Vestige
 - Tennis star Rafael
 - English county
- DOWN**
- Skirt edge
 - "Put -- happy face"
 - Peculiar
 - Sellers of goods
 - Javelin
 - Sauntered
 - Vining plant
 - Uncool fellow
 - Duo plus one
 - Antlered animal
 - Sinking signal
 - Expansive
 - Analogy words
 - Pork serving
 - Lang measurers
 - Wander
 - Visitor to Siam
 - New driver, usually
 - High hit behind the plate
 - Simple card game
 - Social group
 - Reach across
 - Alan of "M*A*S*H"
 - Hotel worker
 - Brewed beverage
 - German article
 - High card
 - Gender



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

C L O G S G A S E S
 L E T U P I D E A L
 A S T R O S A N T A
 S L E U T H D I N
 S I R C O S T I N G
 Y E S H O P I N G
 F E D O N
 E L I C I T T O N
 S N O R K E L T O R O
 H A L S I T P A T
 O M I T S G R E T A
 P E T A L H I K E R
 S L A T Y T O A D Y