Something rotten

Beyond the headlines, Indian society continues to rot, says Shubhashis Gangopadhyay

With the rupee in free fall, life outside the privacy of one's own home has become difficult for an economist. People mob economists once they see them if only to ask "why", "when will it recover" and "what will happen to the economy". And, every day, economists rack their brains to give an answer different from what they gave the previous day — for their last prediction of where the rupee will go has inevitably failed. Indeed, I am reminded of the excellent French satire "Penguin Island" in which penguins behave like humans and, of course, start feuding with each other; and rival groups blow up whatever public property or institution they can lay their hands on. To restore calm the authorities take a number of steps, which the author carefully enumerates. The paragraph ends with: "Next day the bank was blown up." Every time the rupee falls — which is almost every day — relevant authorities take a number of steps and the headline next day is: "The rupee falls to a record low!"

So, I will not write about the rupee. Instead, I want to write about something that I think is a million times more important than the currently falling rupee. And it is also something that most of us will find difficult to explain. It is about the rotten society we also want to live in. Let me explain what I mean. I am going to list a series of events that have been reported in the media the same day. First, some bearded septuagenarian has allegedly raped a minor. So, his son gives a press conference claiming that the minor was mentally unbalanced. The police claim that there is prima facie evidence to formulate charges against the bearded guy according to a section of the law that must lead to an arrest. The police go but are made to wait, because the guy is apparently meditating. Since the police have nothing else to do, they wait for about seven hours. In the meantime, reports come in that the next day, when the police have still not apprehended the bearded guy, he is busy talking to a bunch of blindly faithful followers. What is the topic of the guy’s discourse with his followers? I am sure it was how to abide by God’s law and ignore those made by the society one lives in. Why do I say this? Simply because the guy’s followers blocked off a public road and prevented everyone else from using that road!

Another report said that a Dalit father from Haryana had approached the Supreme Court after his minor daughter was allegedly raped by some upper-class goons, who are highly connected and very powerful. The perpetrators allegedly threatened the family with dire consequences if they reported the incident. The family did not take this seriously and did file a report. The local police station refused to register a complaint, and the mother of the child was shot dead. One still does not know who did what, but the police somehow were unwilling to investigate the veracity of the claims made by the minor and her family. Finally, when the father approached the Supreme Court for protection — in the face of continual threats — the Supreme Court voiced its "disgust" at the events and asked the police to follow them up. While the rupee's free fall is front-page news every day, here is a series of events that came to light many, many months after they started unfolding and only because the Supreme Court stepped in.

In the meantime, when authorities audited the travel claims of some of our parliamentarians, state-level leaders and our hallowed class of bureaucrats, it was observed that these powerful people had the ability to be in motion in two different parts of the world at the same time. Our auditors, unable to comprehend the supernatural powers of our leaders, claimed that they had submitted fake travel bills. None of the party authorities to which our tainted leaders belong have asked them to resign from their elected office even when the law of the land punishes and sends people to jail for fraud and cheating.

The newspapers reported on the same day that an engineer was picked up on suspicion of having committed a theft and then had to be hospitalised for a ruptured rectum allegedly suffered while in police custody. The police claim that it was a stomach infection that resulted in a ruptured intestine; medical experts are studying the possibility of a new infection that leads to such ruptures.

If one is concerned about such events happening all around us, they can rest assured that one thing is certain. Now that the food security Bill has been passed, none of these bullied and tortured people will go to bed hungry. This is in spite of our leaders and bureaucrats continuing to serve in office after they have been observed to stake false claims about their funded travel. Our leaders in government and in opposition will continue to harangue each other for the fall of the rupee, without having any clue as to why it is happening. But each will have its team of well-trained economists convincing us every five years that we will reach 10 per cent or more growth within the next five years. Simultaneously, our parliamentarians will come together to make sure that convicted criminals contest fresh elections and no one will know who pays for the political parties. And we will soon be waddling like penguins.