

IN THE MAHATMA'S MOULD:
A fasting Anna Hazare became a rallying point for popular sentiment against graft



The year saw erosion in the credibility of the government, ineffectiveness of Parliament and the rise of civil society spearheaded by Team Anna. Hazare's stock rose when after his fast, the Central Government appeared to buckle under

By Kamlendra Kanwar

In many ways, 2011 will be remembered in India as the year of a diminutive, 74-year-old grassroots crusader who channelised the disgust of people at large over rampant corruption in the country into a powerful movement.

Anna Hazare, the never-say-die activist, was a veritable nightmare during the year for the Manmohan Singh government, which was passing through a phase of widespread public disillusionment over corruption scandals.

To an Opposition that was groping and failing to capitalise on the government's misdeeds and misgovernance, Anna showed how people could be mobilised for a cause.

His stock rose manifold when a fasting Anna Hazare was whisked away to Tihar Jail. The government soon realised its folly, but the damage was done. It then capitulated, agreeing to the constitution of a joint committee of government and civil society representatives, which it had been resisting until then.

By the time the year approached its end, however, many began to question Anna's "overkill." Having galvanised the government into action by keeping its date with the Lokpal Bill for which Team Anna had set an ambitious deadline, Team Anna's nitpicking and constant nagging did not go down well with many in the predominantly middle-class movement. This came in the backdrop of a systematic campaign, evidently inspired by the government, which sought to puncture the credibility of vocal members of Team Anna like Prashant Bhushan, Arvind Kejriwal and Kiran Bedi. However, there is no denying that a Bill

that was hibernating for 42 years because successive governments lacked the will and the people, at large, the drive to get it through, now stands on the threshold. There have been some bones of contention like the accountability of the lower bureaucracy to the Lokpal and the Prime Minister's immunity from prosecution on which the government has finally given in, but control over the CBI is a sticking point, which has potential for fresh escalation. While the right of Parliament to legislate is unexceptionable, Team Anna is pressing on, and may still be able to force the government to give in further.

Indeed, there can be little doubt that Team Anna, whatever its vulnerabilities, has shown the power of civil society on issues that agitate the minds of the people. It has also barred the inadequacies of the Opposition, in general, which is devoid of a leader who can capture public imagination.

During 2011, Parliament slipped further in public perception with frequent walkouts, boycotts and adjournments making the august body look so utterly ineffective and devoid of purposefulness. Vital Bills, which should have been debated thoroughly, were either postponed as the Opposition forced adjournments or adopted without adequate debate and application of mind.

As key pillars of democracy, the judiciary and media also had their share of triumphs and tragedies during the year.

The Supreme Court evoked frowns as some judges chose to pass scathing comments on key public figures, including the Prime Minister, in the course of hearings.



MAKING OF A MOVEMENT: People from different walks of life surged to the Ramtila Ground in New Delhi in a rare show of support to Anna

But there was a sense of elation at politicians and senior bureaucrats being called to account for their acts of omission and commission. The likes of former minister A. Raja, Member of Parliament Kanamozhi and sports administrator Suresh Kalmadi were made to cool their heels in jail for months in what seemed a clear departure from the past.

The media got enmeshed in the 'paid news' controversy and the general decline in ethics in the face of rampant sensa-

tionism brought down the prestige of the Fourth Estate. Yet, there were some positives for it during the year, as it was not the Opposition but the media that unmasked several corruption scandals.

Nationally, this was also the year of steep price increases and a perceptible slowdown in the economy.

All in all, 2011 in India was a year of erosion in the credibility of the government, of lost opportunities for the Opposition and of the new-found power of civil activism.

NEWSPICK



Delhi on terror map again

A bomb that may have been hidden in a briefcase killed at least 11 persons and injured 47 in front of New Delhi's High Court, the worst attack in India's capital in three years. The blast was a telling example of the abysmal lack of security.



His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, with Lobsang Sangay (L)

Dalai Lama names successor

In March this year, the Dalai Lama announced his decision to step down as the political head of the Tibetan Government in exile. Although he insisted he was not retiring, the 75-year-old spiritual leader said he was shifting his political power to an elected representative. He wanted to ensure there wasn't a leadership vacuum after his death. Harvard-educated Lobsang Sangay succeeded the Dalai Lama. His election as the Kalon Tripa (Prime Minister) represents many firsts. He was born in Darjeeling and has never visited Tibet. He is also the first secular leader to take over the political leadership of the Tibetan community.

Rise of the flash mob

Shonan Kothari's impromptu dance, a day after the 26/11 anniversary embodied the resilience of the Mumbaiers. The 23-year-old was behind Mumbai's flash mob, a phenomenon in which a group of people assembles suddenly in a public place, performs an unusual act for a brief time, often for entertainment.

HOME IS WHERE THE HURT IS



The Home Minister P Chidambaram has been in the dock almost throughout the year. He was targeted by the Opposition for his alleged role in the 2G Spectrum scam. Controversies overshadowed his successes, including peace in J&K, containing the Telengana agitation and reduced Maoist violence.

NOT AN AUGUST HOUSE



Functioning of Parliament was repeatedly stalled throughout the year. Be it the Lokpal Bill or corruption or FDI in retail, frequent walkouts, boycotts and adjournments made the august body look ineffective and devoid of purpose.

RAJA IN TIHAR



Accused of tweaking rules to favour a few telecom companies at a massive loss to the Exchequer, former Communications Minister A. Raja remained in news this year. Unlike other accused in the case, he didn't apply for bail and is still lodged in Tihar Jail.

HE CAME, HE SAW, HE CHANGED



There was high drama at the Ramtila Ground in New Delhi after a defiant Baba Ramdev refused to call off his fast despite the government's best efforts. He managed to escape the security net, though only for a while, in a woman's attire in the melee following the police crackdown.