

THIS WORD MEANS

SATURN'S RINGS

They are billions of years younger than Saturn itself, a new study finds. What else is known about them?



Artist's impression of Cassini crossing Saturn's ring plane. NASA/JPL-Caltech

EVERY ILLUSTRATION of Saturn, starting from school textbooks, shows it encircled by rings. Although the rings were first observed by telescopes centuries ago, knowledge about their formation and composition has been relatively slow coming. Now, a study published in *Science* (*The Indian Express*, January 19) suggests that the rings formed between 100 million and 10 million years ago, and are thus much younger than the 4.5-billion-year-old planet. How did scientists figure that out?

Much of what is known about the rings has come from four robotic spacecraft that have visited Saturn — Pioneer 11, Voyager 1, Voyager 2 and Cassini. The rings consist of a large number of small particles that orbit Saturn. They are about 400,000 km — equivalent to the distance between the Earth and the Moon — but are as little as 100 m thick, according to the NASA website. There are many rings — perhaps 500 to 1,000 — and there are also gaps within them. Particles range in size from “too tiny to see” to “the size of a bus”, NASA says. Scientists believe the particles are icy snowballs or ice covered rocks.

Now, the study has concluded that Saturn hasn't always had rings. The finding comes from Cassini's final trajectory. In September 2017, the NASA spacecraft

made its death plunge into Saturn's atmosphere, and one of its last acts was to coast between the planet and its rings and let them tug it around, the University of California-Berkeley said in a press release. Essentially, Cassini was acting as a gravity probe. From its final trajectory, scientists have made precise measurements leading to the finding about the age of the rings. Based on the strength of their gravitational pull, scientists made the first accurate estimate of the amount of material in Saturn's rings — about 40% of the mass of Saturn's moon Mimas, which itself is 2,000 times smaller than Earth's moon. Calculations based on this led to the conclusion that the rings are relatively recent, having originated less than 100 million years ago and perhaps as recently as 10 million years ago.

Their young age puts to rest a long-running argument among planetary scientists, UC-Berkeley added. Some thought that the rings formed along with the planet itself, 4.5 billion years ago, from icy debris remaining in orbit after the formation of the Solar System. Others thought the rings were very young and that Saturn had, at some point, captured an object from the Kuiper belt or a comet and gradually reduced it to orbiting rubble.

TIP FOR READING LIST

EXTINCTION RISK FOR COFFEE SPECIES

A NEW study has found that 60% all coffee species are at the risk of extinction from disease, climate change, and the loss of suitable space to grow coffee. The study is published in *Science Advances* (<http://advances.sciencemag.org/content/5/1/eaav3473>). The species at risk include Arabica, the most widely consumed coffee variety in the world. There are 124 species of coffee. Researchers at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (UK), assessed all of them according to the standards of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species. This resulted in 75 coffee species (60%) being assessed as threatened with extinction — 13 critically endangered, 40 endangered, 22 vulnerable. Another 35 species were assessed as not threatened

while the remaining 14 species were data-deficient.

Included among the 60% under threat of extinction are those that could be key to the future of coffee production. Arabica alone accounts for 60% of world coffee trade, and Robusta for the remaining 40%. Given the threat, other coffee species are likely to be required for coffee crop plant development, the researchers said.

“There are a number of possible solutions to these problems. Important opportunities are likely to come from the use of wild coffee species, and the incorporation of specific genes from wild plants via breeding,” Aaron Davis, Head of Coffee Research at Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, wrote on the organisation's website.

SHYAMLAL YADAV
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 20

LAST WEEK, the Supreme Court “requested” a search committee to suggest by February-end a panel of names for appointment of the country's first Lokpal, an anti-corruption ombudsman. A look at the long history of India's efforts to appoint a Lokpal:

Background

Amid repeated demands for such an ombudsman, many attempts were made at legislation, with Lokpal Bills introduced in 1971, 1977, 1985, 1989, 1996, 1998, 2001, 2005 and 2008, but none of these was passed. It was four decades after the introduction of the first Bill that the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act was enacted in December 2013. This was the fall-out of a public movement for a Jan Lokpal Bill, initiated by activist Anna Hazare and others such as Kiran Bedi and Arvind Kejriwal. Under pressure at a time when it was facing several allegations of corruption, the then UPA government brought the Bill and it was passed after several hurdles.

Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act

The Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013 was notified on January 1, 2014. It provides for establishing a body to be called the Lokpal and headed by a Chairperson, who is or has been a Chief Justice of India, or is or has been a judge of the Supreme Court, or an eminent person who fulfils eligibility criteria as specified. Of its other members, not exceeding eight, 50% are to be judicial members, provided that not less than 50% of the members belong to the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, OBCs, minorities, and women.

For states, the Act says: “Every State shall establish a body to be known as the Lokayukta for the State, if not so established, constituted or appointed, by a law made by the State Legislature, to deal with complaints relating to corruption against certain public functionaries, within a period of one year from the date of commencement of this Act.”

Lokpal will have an “Inquiry Wing, headed by the Director of Inquiry, for the purpose of conducting preliminary inquiry into any offence alleged to have been committed



Anna Hazare in Ralegan Siddhi in December 2013, after the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Bill was passed. Sandeep Daundkar/Archive

by a public servant punishable under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988. It will also have a “Prosecution Wing headed by the Director of Prosecution for the purpose of prosecution of public servants in relation to any complaint by the Lokpal under this Act”. These are to deal with complaints against public servants; the chairperson and members of the Lokpal too come under the definition of “public servant”.

Jurisdiction of Lokpal

The Lokpal Act covers a wide range of public servants — from the Prime Minister,

ministers and MP, to groups A, B, C and D officers of the central government. “Lokpal shall inquire or cause an inquiry to be conducted into any matter involved in, or arising from, or connected with, any allegation of corruption made in a complaint” in respect of the Prime Minister, the Act says. However, it does not allow a Lokpal inquiry if the allegation against the Prime Minister relates to international relations, external and internal security, public order, atomic energy and space. Also, complaints against the Prime Minister are not to be probed unless the full Lokpal bench considers the initiation of in-

quiry and at least 2/3rds of the members approve it. Such an inquiry against the Prime Minister (if conducted) is to be held in camera and if the Lokpal comes to the conclusion that the complaint deserves to be dismissed, the records of the inquiry are not to be published or made available to anyone.

The search committee

Once the Bill was passed, applications were invited on January 17, 2014 for filling up the post of Chairperson and eight posts of members. The same day, the search committee rules were notified, but appointments to the committee were not made. Lok Sabha elections followed, and a new government was formed in May 2014. The same year, the NGO Common Cause filed a petition in the Supreme Court, and later a contempt petition, over the delay. On September 27, 2018, the search committee was constituted. It is chaired by retired SC Justice Ranjana Desai, and its members are former Allahabad High Court Justice Sakha Ram Singh Yadav, former Solicitor General Ranjit Kumar, former State Bank of India chair Arundhati Bhattacharya, retired IAS officer Lalit K Panwar, former Gujarat Police chief Shabbirhusein S Khandwawala, Prasar Bharati chairperson A Surya Prakash and former ISRO head A S Kiran Kumar. On January 17, 2019, the Supreme Court “requested” the search committee to prepare its panel by the end of the next month and set March 7, 2019 as the next date of hearing.

What next

Once the search committee submits its recommendation for the Lokpal and its members, a selection committee will consider those names and forward them to the President for his consideration. The selection committee is chaired by the Prime Minister, and its members are the Lok Sabha Speaker, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, the Chief Justice of India or a Judge of the Supreme Court nominated by him, and an eminent jurist as nominated by the President. Under the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, a Lokayukta is to be appointed in every state within one year of the passing of the Act, but several states are yet to appoint such an institution.

Kallakurichi, the 33rd district of Tamil Nadu

Govt plans to carve it out of Villupuram, one of many bifurcations over the years, amid demands for more

ARUN JANARDHANAN
CHENNAI, JANUARY 20

EARLIER THIS month, the government of Tamil Nadu announced the creation of the state's 33rd district — Kallakurichi, carved out of Villupuram district, south of Chennai.

WHY ANOTHER: Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami announced the new district in the Assembly on January 8 — the fulfilment, he said, of a longstanding demand by the people. Law Minister C Ve Shanmugam, the MLA from Villupuram, and R Kumaraguru, the MLA from Ulundurpet, had informed him of the people's demand and the difficulty they faced travelling from remote areas to the district headquarters in Villupuram, the CM said.

A top official monitoring the logistics of creating the new district said given the size of Villupuram — at over 7,200 sq km, one of the largest in the state — the decision was

“logically sound”, and was likely to “improve governance and administration”.

The district of Villupuram, of which Kallakurichi has been part, was created in 1993, when the government of Chief Minister Jayalalitha, considering factors such as better accessibility and governance, split the district of South Arcot into Villupuram and Cuddalore. A senior officer who has served in Villupuram said the district headquarters is 70-100 km from several parts of Kallakurichi, and the new district will save people, many of them tribals, a 2-3-hour journey to Villupuram. Traders and others who frequently have work at the Collectorate and revenue and police offices would benefit, the officer said.

WHAT HAPPENS NOW: The Chief Minister in his announcement said an IAS of-

ficer would be appointed to complete the administrative work involved in creating the district. Officials said this special officer would be appointed in 15 days, and that the officer would, in coordination with the commissioner of revenue administration, complete basic procedures and assessments within three months.

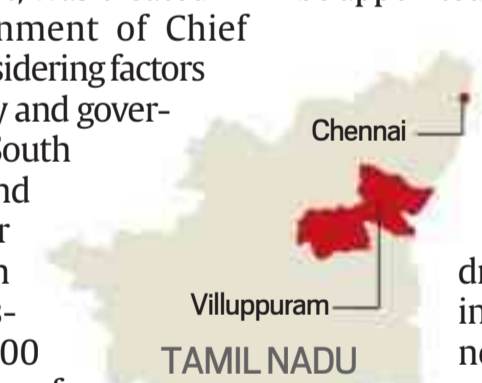
These procedures include drawing boundaries, and deciding the blocks and taluks of the new district. After the government formally accepts the plan, the new district administration, including the revenue and police departments, will be put in place.

EARLIER DISTRICTS: After independence, the districts of the Raj were broken into smaller units, mostly ensuring that the district headquarters was within 100 km from anywhere in the district. The larger districts were divided and subdivided in stages into

smaller districts.

The old Ramanathapuram district was divided into Ramanathapuram, Sivagangai and Virudhunagar districts. Theni was formed after Madurai was bifurcated. Erode and Coimbatore were reorganised to create Tiruppur, and Krishnagiri was carved out of Dharmapuri. Nagapattinam, which was formed by splitting the old Thanjavur district with its rich Chola history, was bifurcated to create Thiruvavur. Salem, once the biggest district in the state, was over time divided into four separate districts. Karur, and the two most backward districts of Ariyalur and Perambalur, were carved out of Trichy district.

OTHER DEMANDS: In Pollachi in Coimbatore district, people have been demanding a separate district, citing various issues related to administration. The people of Sankarankovil, the second largest municipality in Tirunelveli, too have demanded separate district status.



The Bt cotton dispute in Delhi HC and SC: what the latest order means

KAUNAIN SHERIFF M
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 20

ON JANUARY 8, a two-judge Bench of the Supreme Court set aside an order of a Division Bench of the Delhi High Court last year, which had invalidated US-based Monsanto Technology's patent on technology used in Bt Cotton seeds. It concerns two Bt Cotton seed varieties, Bollgard and Bollgard II, genetically modified to resist the bollworm pest.

Why is the matter in court?

The case relates to a dispute between Monsanto and Nuziveedu Seeds Ltd over the technology. Under a 10-year sub-licence agreement between the two companies in 2004, Nuziveedu could develop “Genetically Modified Hybrid Cotton Planting Seeds” with the help of Monsanto technology and commercially exploit it. In return, Nuziveedu had to pay “licence fee/trait value”. Monsanto terminated the agreement in 2015, with disputes having arisen over these payments amid a price control regime introduced by the government.

Monsanto filed a civil suit in Delhi High Court, claiming that Nuziveedu Seeds was

infringing on its patent by using its technology. It also filed an application for injunction to restrain Nuziveedu from using the Monsanto trademark during the pendency of the civil suit. Nuziveedu filed a counter-claim against Monsanto's patent claim.

Is the Supreme Court ruling a victory for Monsanto?

The legal battle is far from over. The Supreme Court has only ruled on Monsanto's injunction plea. Before the Supreme Court heard the matter, Delhi High had passed two separate orders. First, a single judge passed an interim injunction, ruling that during the pendency of the case, both parties would have to abide by obligations under their agreement, and that Nuziveedu Seeds should pay licence fees in accordance with the regulatory requirement. In the second order, the Division Bench not only set aside the single-judge order but also ruled that Monsanto's patent claim was invalidated under Section 3(j) of the Patents Act.

So, what does the SC judgment mean?

The Supreme Court Bench of Justices Rohinton Fali Nariman and Navin Sinha observed the HC Division Bench “ought to have



Case relates to Monsanto's Bollgard and Bollgard II seed varieties. monsanto.com

confined itself to examination of the validity of the order of injunction granted by the learned single judge only”, and that it “ought not to have examined the counter-claim itself usurping the jurisdiction of the Single Judge to decide unpatentability... in the summary manner done”. The judgment reads: “Summary adjudication of a technically complex suit requiring expert evidence also, at the stage of injunction in the manner done, was certainly neither desirable or permissible in the law. The suit involved com-

plicated mixed questions of law and facts with regard to patentability and exclusion of patent which could be examined in the suit on basis of evidence.” The SC ruling restores the single-judge order, with the suit remanded back for disposal “in accordance with law”. This means that the single judge will now hear the matter of patentability.

What has Monsanto's argument been?

In the present suit, there are two sets of patent claims — 1-24 relating to processes,

and 25-27 relating to the chemical product NAS (Nucleic Acid Sequence). Monsanto has claimed that NAS is a man-made DNA construct and not part of a plant existing in nature; the DNA construct is inserted into a plant “which confers the trait of insect tolerance”.

Again, one of the components of the DNA construct is a man-made gene. When it is inserted into the cell of the plant at a particular location, it results in the production of “a fusion protein”. Monsanto's argument is that the production of the fusion protein is critical for the technology to be effected; that it is only its technology that allows a cotton plant to produce it; and that the product is “protected *inter alia* by claims 25-27 of the patented inventions”.

What has Nuziveedu's argument been?

It has argued that its rights are protected under the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act, 2001. It has argued that the patent suit was bad because “claims 1-24 were ‘process claims’ concerning genetic engineering or biotechnology method to insert NAS into a plant cell as in claim 25-27 practiced in laboratory conditions, unlike the complete biological process adopted by the defendants (Nuziveedu)”.

Nuziveedu has said it did not violate patented rights on a number of grounds — it sowed seeds of its own proprietary cotton varieties alongside the Transgenic Bt Cotton seed; the Transgenic Bt Cotton seed and Nuziveedu's varieties seed yielded different plants which were cross-pollinated at the flowering stage; the cotton fruits from Nuziveedu's varieties had cotton seeds carrying the proprietary “Bt cotton hybrids”; Nuziveedu had obtained the approval of the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 for the commercial release of each new Bt cotton hybrid.

What happens now?

The Supreme Court has not dealt with any of these issues; it will be the Delhi HC single judge who will do so. “Though very elaborate submissions have been made with regard to facts and the technical processes involved in the patent in question... in view of nature of the order proposed to be passed, we do not consider it necessary to deal with the same at this stage, and leave open all questions of facts and law to be urged for consideration in appropriate proceedings,” the SC said.

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

PLOUGH'S SHARE

Subsidy for crop insurance is preferable to fertiliser, power or farm credit. But Centre should bear the full cost for the scheme

A WELL-CONCEIVED and pro-farmer crop insurance scheme — the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) — is faced with the prospect of going the fertiliser subsidy way. Just as in the latter's case, the benefits from subsidy on crop premiums, too, seems to be going primarily to the industry rather than the farmers. In the 2016-17 crop year, gross premium collections of insurance companies under PMFBY amounted to Rs 22,345.51 crore, which included Rs 18,129.46 crore of subsidy from the Centre and state governments. As against this, the total claims paid out were only Rs 16,177.72 crore. In the 2017 kharif season also, the industry's premium collections of Rs 19,767.64 crore (inclusive of Rs 16,728.95 crore subsidy) exceeded the claims paid of Rs 17,209.94 crore, with a single state — Madhya Pradesh, where Assembly elections were held recently — accounting for Rs 5,428.31 crore. A report in this newspaper has, moreover, shown that 11 private insurers alone raked in profits of Rs 3,074 crore during the year ended March 31, 2018.

Now, there's nothing wrong per se in insurance firms making money. Also, 2016-17 and 2017-18 being normal monsoon years, one can expect claim payouts to have been low. But the fact that the public sector Agricultural Insurance Company of India lost almost Rs 4,450 crore — even as private insurers profited — and disproportionately high payouts went to one poll-bound state raises serious questions of transparency in implementation. PMFBY's flaw lies in the premium subsidy under the scheme being borne equally by the Centre and the states. The states are slow in not only releasing their subsidy share, but also in conducting the requisite number of crop cutting experiments (CCE) for assessing yield losses and submitting this data to the insurance companies.

The right fix to the above problem is to convert PMFBY into a fully Centre-funded scheme. Once the entire premium subsidy burden is borne by the Centre and its release is linked to the states adhering to prescribed operational schedules — from calling bids for selection of insurance companies well ahead of the sowing season and submitting yield data within a month of harvesting — two things will happen. First, with the assurance of timely payment of subsidy and also of crop-yield data from states, the insurers will have no excuse for delaying claim settlements. Second, the pressure will now be on the states. Relieved of financial burden, they can focus on ground-level implementation and generate reliable yield data based on CCEs as well as automatic weather stations and satellite-based remote sensing technology for "smart sampling" of fields. Subsidy on crop insurance is any day preferable to that on fertiliser, power or farm credit. All the more reason, then, for the Centre to pay 100 per cent of the subsidy on a scheme bearing the prime minister's name.

ANGELS AND DEMONS

Leaning on start-ups to boost tax collections is short-sighted. Government must create the enabling climate for them

LAST WEEK, THE government eased the procedural norms for exemption of tax on start-ups (angel tax) in response to protests from the industry. The new rules provide for a tax-waiver, if the aggregate paid-up share capital and share premium of a start-up after an offering of shares does not exceed Rs10 crore, if the angel investor has filed income tax returns of at least Rs 50 lakh for the year preceding the year in which the investment was made, and if the investor has a net worth of at least Rs 2 crore. The other relief is in the form of the dismantling of the bureaucratic layer, the inter-ministerial board, which used to vet the credentials of these firms. Hereafter, the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion will directly route the applications to the Central Board of Direct Taxes, which will have 45 days to decide if investors in the start-up are eligible for a tax-waiver.

The latest move may at best partly assuage some of the concerns of start-ups and investors. Some entrepreneurs had written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi requesting him to step in and sought a revision of the tax provision — as high as 30 per cent on investments by individuals in unlisted firms, if the price is higher than what is known as fair market value. It is this share premium that has been a major bone of contention between angel investors and the tax department. Entrepreneurs argue, and rightly so, that start-ups need a good amount of capital at the early stage, which angel investors provide at a premium. Indian start-ups had raised over \$38.5 billion in the last four years through more than 39,000 ventures.

It would surely help if Indian policymakers look around and assess what makes a country like Israel — now known as the Start-up Nation — a magnet for investors such as Bill Gates and Warren Buffet. That has a lot to do with the enabling role of the government which has provided not just fiscal incentives as in some other countries, but also ensured a positive investment climate. Leaning on new age entrepreneurs to boost tax collections can at best be a near-term view, but a failure to smoothen the path for start-ups runs the risk of discouraging potential entrepreneurs and their ability to create jobs, boost revenues and innovation in an economy which needs all these in large measure.

FREEZE FRAME

EP UNNY



ASHOK GULATI

What the farmer is owed

Implicitly taxed through restrictive marketing and trade policies, farmers need a stable income policy

THE NARENDRA MODI government is entering its proverbial "last 10 overs". All the stops are being pulled to win over targeted segments of society that could potentially bring the BJP/NDA back to office.

One important segment, perhaps the largest one, is that of farmers. The attempt to woo them by announcing higher minimum support prices (MSPs) based on 50 per cent margin over paid out costs plus imputed value of family labour (cost A2+FL) has fallen flat on its face as market prices of most of those commodities remain 20 to 30 per cent below MSPs. Procurement by government agencies has been limited, as they already have overflowing stocks that they cannot offload without incurring massive losses. The meagre budgetary provisions under the PM's AASHA scheme to lift market prices have, therefore, failed to erase farmers' *nirasha* (gloom). In any case, as highlighted in my last article ('An answer to rural distress', IE, January 7), the MSP policy cannot reach more than 20 per cent of peasantry even with augmented procurement of pulses and oilseeds, and, therefore, cannot be a solution to farmers' distress.

The loan waiver, which the Congress president is promising, will also not benefit more than 30 per cent of the peasantry, who have access to institutional credit. Already, the bill from loan waivers announced by some state governments is touching about Rs 1.8 trillion (lakh crore). The policy of zero-interest on loans too is riddled with loopholes, leading to massive diversion of funds out of agriculture.

So, now, many state governments are trying to innovate with new ways of reaching the largest number of farmers. Telangana's Rythu Bandhu scheme, which gives Rs 4,000/acre to land-owning farmers for two seasons in a year, is costing the state exchequer roughly Rs 12,000 crore per annum. It appears to have reached more than 90 per cent farmers, and yielded political dividends. Many experts have criticised it, saying that

it is pro-big farmers and neglects tenants.

The KALIA (Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income Augmentation) scheme of Odisha attempts to respond to this criticism and accordingly promises to include not only land-owning farmers (up to 5 acres) but also tenants and agri-labourers. While land-owning small and marginal farmers, 30.17 lakh in number, accounting for 92 per cent of farming households in Odisha, will get Rs 5,000/family for five seasons, the tenants and agri-labourers (estimated to be 10 lakh in number) who have no land records will get one-time payment of Rs 12,500/family, and vulnerable families (another 10 lakh) will get one-time payment of Rs 10,000/family. With some support for life insurance and interest-free loans up to Rs 50,000, the scheme is likely to cost about Rs 10,180 crore over three years. There is the major challenge of identifying who is a tenant and who is an agri-labourer, as tenancy is not legally allowed in Odisha. So, no legal records exist. Only time will tell how efficiently this identification is done. But given that it is just a one-time payment for them, it will have only a limited impact. Efforts are on to ensure that first payment is made in January 2019 itself.

It is important to track and evaluate the performance of these two schemes (Rythu Bandhu and KALIA) as they have not only important budgetary implications but are also a pointer towards a new policy innovation. West Bengal and Jharkhand are also moving in this direction, and media reports suggest that Centre too is contemplating a variant of a similar scheme. If it does so, it would indicate a tectonic shift in policy from promising higher MSPs or loan waivers to direct income/investment support to farmers. This shift will be better for the country as it is more predictable and less market distorting.

Macroeconomists and investors, however, are worried about how much this will cost. Will it be fiscally sustainable? What impact will it have on investments in due

course? Will these election time "doles" do more harm in medium to long term? Is India not becoming a welfare state even before generating enough wealth? All these concerns are very legitimate and need some discussion. Let me elaborate.

In several pieces in this newspaper in recent months, I have indicated these are not "doles" but atonement for not reforming agriculture sector, especially its marketing and trade policies, which remain highly distorted, restrictive and pro-consumer, often at the cost of farmers. One of the key findings of a mega ICRIER-OECD study on agricultural policies in India (2018), which I co-lead with Carmel Cahill for more than two years, is that the producer support estimate (PSE) for India was minus (-) 14 per cent of gross farm receipts, on an average for the years 2000-01 to 2016-17. What this implies is that Indian farmers have been "implicitly taxed" through restrictive marketing and trade policies that have an in-built consumer bias of controlling agri-prices.

If one calculates the sum involved in this "implicit taxation", it amounts to Rs 2.65 trillion (lakh crore) per annum, at 2017-18 prices, for 2000-01 to 2016-17. Cumulatively for 17 years, this comes to roughly Rs 45 trillion at 2017-18 prices. No country in the world has taxed its farmers so heavily during this period. This is nothing short of plundering of farmers' incomes. Until India reforms its agri-marketing laws and frees agri-markets, it is time to atone through a structured and stable income policy for farmers for at least the next five years.

It may be worth noting that the PSE methodology is a standard one that OECD adopts for 52 major countries that produce more than three-fourths of the global agri-output. And these numbers have gone through a rigorous review by OECD members and others at a global level and are now in the public domain.

Gulati is Infosys Chair Professor for Agriculture at ICRIER

STRUGGLING TO BE RICH

In spite of my adequate pension, I am poor according to government's new criteria



YOGINDER K ALAGH

MANY DECADES ago, the World Bank declared me "poor". They said that they had done so on the basis of a "poverty line" I had developed. I had protested, then. Now my own country has done the same thing and I don't know what to do. Help me, dear reader. But first my story.

The World Bank's Poverty Line, originally at a \$1 a day at purchasing power parity (PPP) prices was they said, consistent with the then official Indian poverty line in 1975. This was calculated in terms of the money required to sustain consumption levels that provide the required nutrition in terms of calories per person per day in rural and urban areas. But PPP prices, I pointed out, were derived from weights in internationally traded goods. These don't have much to do with the consumption of the poor, I argued.

I pointed out jokingly that since I was an expert on deputation, the Planning Commission was giving me the salary of an additional secretary to the Government of India at a young age, breaking all its rules. But I was still poor, according to the Bank's rule. This led to some debate, much mirth and some improvement in concepts. But the conundrum remained.

Now, as we approach 2020, I get the pension of a university professor. It's not extravagant but is most certainly adequate. It's a mite below the Rs 66,666 per month (Rs 8 lakh, a year) the government has decided we must all get. I have no choice, like in all the

decisions the sarkar has made — these include making me queue up to exchange the notes the lady of the house had saved for a rainy day or for giving a cash deposit to a hospital if either one of us had a heart attack.

But I am now poor. Is this just fun and games? Not really. Because the government has also started many schemes to help poor people. It has abolished Five-Year Plans and begun to work out the planning process, as was being deliberated for some time. But the new planning machinery — the Niti Aayog — can only give advice. It does not have the powers of funding strategic plans that many want it to have.

If the Niti Aayog is to be taken seriously, its agenda has to include demographics, energy, land and water. Like its counterpart in China, the agency should also allocate resources for long-term plans. But the Niti Aayog has decided it would do planning, in spite of planning being abolished. The finance minister is allocating resources amongst the states in the Centre's schemes. The annual budget's aim is to allocate more money than by the UPA government in centrally-sponsored projects. The only difference is that in the Planning Commission earlier, resources were allocated in the Annual Plan according to the Gadgil-Mukherji Formula. But now that allocation is ad hoc or as some states say, arbitrary.

In spite of all this, the Niti Aayog has produced a Three-Year Vision Plan 2018/19-

2021/22. The agency does not have the resource allocation function but the plan has sections called "Objectives", "Expenditure Targets", "Resource Allocation", "Sectoral Plans" and "Special Problems" like documents of the Planning Commission. Resource allocation in India was earlier done by the Planning Commission on the basis of socio-economic criteria. These were based on measurable indicators. In some projects funded by the Government of India, "backwardness" at the district level was also used as a criteria.

But now being rich is a criteria. We are struck by the careful attempt to reconstruct planning. We want the aura of the much-maligned Yojana Bhavan. We want the experts to talk about it and the chief ministers to come there. We want three year-action plans (I suppose as the "Mid-Term Review" of the earlier plans). There is also a long-term vision, which is presented in an attractive chart.

The real issue for the country is to ensure growth across gender, caste or religious lines. For markets cannot function otherwise. Also, the country has to grow fast. The Niti Aayog does say so as well. But it needs to supply more details.

Meanwhile, please make me happy by saying I am rich. Thank you.

The writer, an economist, is a former Union minister

JANUARY 21, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO



NO DOUBLE TAKE
CHARAN SINGH, FORMER Union Home Minister, rejected on January 20 the new formula envisaging posts of deputy prime ministership for him and for the defence minister, Jagjivan Ram, as a solution to the protracted crisis in the Janata Party. Talking to journalists in Jabalpur, he stated that the formula was not acceptable to him "at any cost". He recalled having rejected a similar proposal at the time of the formation of the Janata government in March 1977. When asked about a possible revival of his erstwhile BLD — one of the major constituents of the Janata Party — Singh said he would decide on his future course of action at the

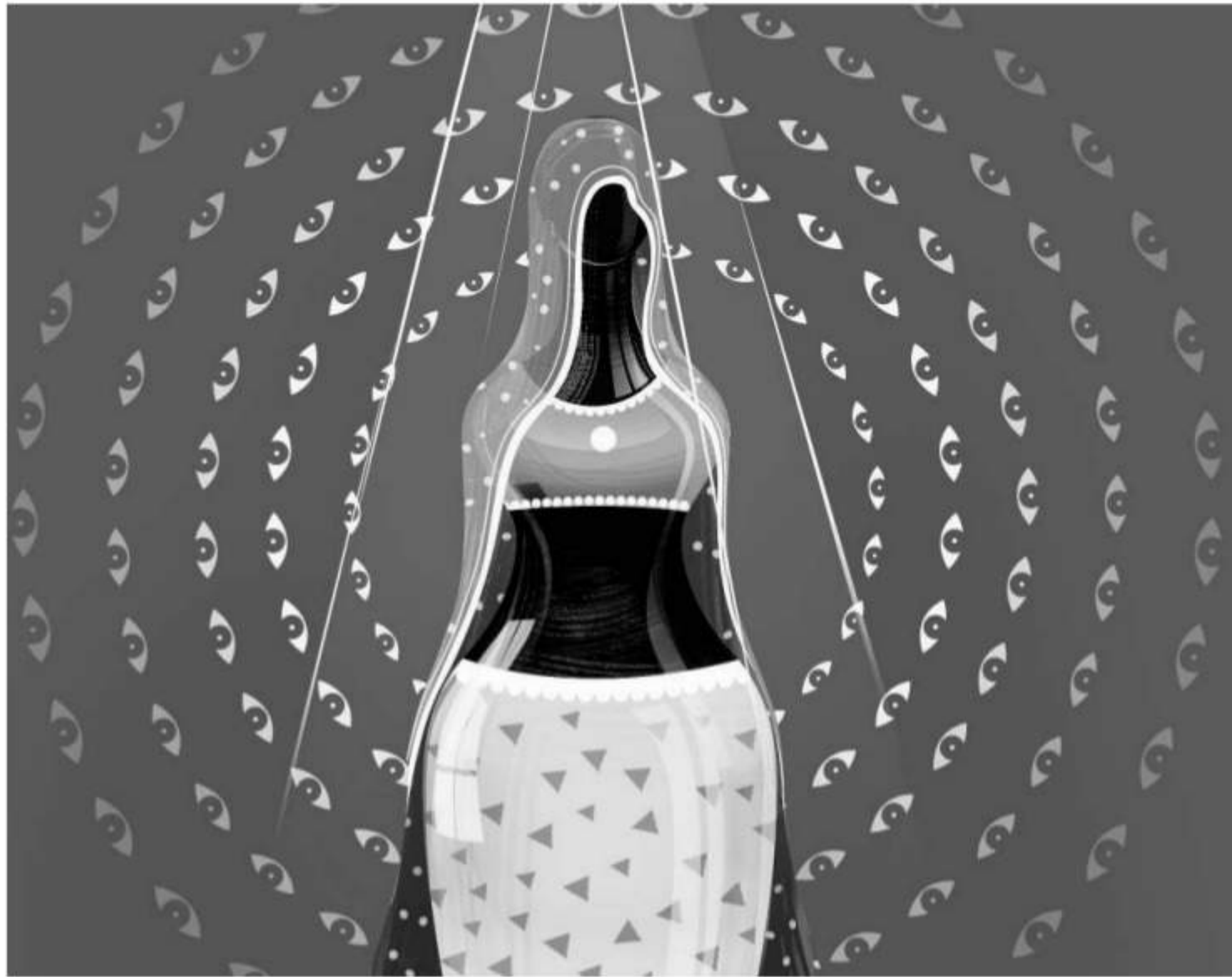
convention of his old BLD colleagues, friends and well-wishers in Delhi on January 28.

UNITY AHEAD
THE CONGRESS-I WORKING committee will concretise the modalities of unity at its next meeting and submit the proposals to Congress leaders. The Congress leaders will then further discuss the proposals, and if these are accepted, the Congress president will call a meeting of the CWC to endorse them. Both sides expect that the issue will be clinched in the next 20 days — before the budget session of Parliament, according to an informed source.

NEW RULES FOR IRAN
TRIUMPHANT ANTI-SHAH ACTIVISTS are starting to take police powers and public services into their own hands in parts of Iran because of a breakdown in government authority, with some benefits for the ordinary man but also the prospect of serious trouble. The new trend towards "people's control" of neighbourhoods has led to the creation of food, clothing and fuel cooperatives providing services that the nation's weak government and strike-bound private enterprise can no longer handle. But in some places, self-appointed vigilantes are using their new powers to violently settle scores with pro-Shah elements and other enemies.

The dancer and the dance

Caste and gender hold the key to understand the politics that unites parties in opposing dance bars in Mumbai



Suvajit Dey

The experience of being entertained by dancing women becomes a matter of consumption; customers invent themselves as kings, compete for the attention of women and the latter earn money directly by providing entertainment. In this sense, the caste boundaries seem to have been transgressed in the dance bar market, making it a showcase of globalisation that offers escapism from traditional structures.

Some sections of the Bhatu caste cluster, especially the Bedias or Rajnats, have been traditionally involved in dancing, musical theatre and even sex work. Bar work could be seen as a likely expansion or continuation of their work in the globalising urban centres. These communities possess the "caste capital" to make the most of opportunities of sexual economies opened up by the globalising markets. They are performing their caste-based occupation in a new setting and marking the new occupation as their own realm. This situation can be seen as a furtherance of the caste patriarchy — as these women remain within their orbit of caste and gender. Yet, it can also be seen as loosening the connection of caste with class as the bargirls enter the middle class. The relationships between the bargirl and the customer, although a transaction between the lower caste/class female performer and the upper caste/class male patron, was governed through the market and not rooted in birthright and obligation. In interviews, bar dancers have spoken about the "freedom" they have experienced because of the bars.

The demand for the ban came disguised as discourses of gender rooted in nationalism, culture and the dignity of women. The state was called upon to protect the family and the good wives, the helpless youth and the Maharashtra legislature, the need for a new law was justified as a need to discourage men from going to the bars and throwing money at "bad women". In this scheme, the upper caste/class men seemed to need the protection of the state from the lower caste/class women. The bargirls became the "bad women" who danced before men and seduced them with obscene attire and gestures. They were accused of avoiding honest labour and earning 'easy money', unlike the toiling, good poor women.

The demand for the ban came disguised as discourses of gender rooted in nationalism, culture and the dignity of women. The state was called upon to protect the family and the good wives, the helpless youth and the Maharashtra legislature, the need for a new law was justified as a need to discourage men from going to the bars and throwing money at 'bad women'. In this scheme, the upper caste/class men seemed to need the protection of the state from the lower caste/class women. The bargirls became the 'bad women' who danced before men and seduced them with obscene attire and gestures. They were accused of avoiding honest labour and earning 'easy money', unlike the toiling, good poor women.

They were accused of avoiding honest labour and earning "easy money", unlike the toiling, good poor women.

Caste system controls the labour of the lower caste in myriad ways. It allows for the extraction of free labour and fixes the value of manual labour at the lowest possible denominator. The dismal pay for manual work and the abysmal treatment of the worker in India are both outcomes of the caste system. In the dance bar debate, the "toiling women" — the domestic worker, the pickle maker etc. — were glorified in comparison with the bargirls. But no one argued that the labour of these women deserved higher wages. Further, the labour of bargirls was not even considered as labour. That these women had overstepped the normative caste boundaries and were earning more money, power and status than what their caste position allowed them also influenced public opinion.

The legal justification for the new legislation concentrated on the alleged illegal activities and crimes due to the dance bars. The existing criminal and civil laws related to the dance bars were sufficient for the government to curb crime and revoke licences of bars involved in misconduct. However, the government preferred a ban on the bars. The law did not ban the bars or even the deployment of women in bars in their varied forms. It just banned dance. By banning the musical power that the performer has over her audience and patrons, the ban closed the space of the erotic to the lower caste women. While banning dance in bars, the state has allowed prostitution to continue, effectively encouraging women to replace dancing with prostitution. In a way, the state action reinforced the traditional caste-based status quo between upper-caste men and lower-caste women.

The Supreme Court's removal of the ban is a pyrrhic victory for the 70,000 bar dancers who lost their livelihood in 2005. There is very little chance that many of them will return to the bars as dancing girls. Besides, the Maharashtra government may still find ways to ban the dance bars rather than regulate them.

Dahwai teaches at the Jindal Global Law School, NCR. Her doctoral work is on bargirls

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"No democrat should seek to sabotage a free and fair plebiscite. The Final Say referendum (on Brexit) is looking inevitable." — THE INDEPENDENT

Let the profanity stream

Online entertainment platforms could lose a massive market — India's youth — if they continue on the path of self-censorship



CHAHAT RANA

"NEEM KE patte karwe sahi, kamsekam khoon to saaf karte hain (Neem leaves might be bitter, but at least they purify blood)," says Nawazuddin Siddiqui as Manto, the eponymous protagonist of a biopic on the writer Saadat Hasan Manto released last year. The film, written and directed by Nandita Das, addresses the theme of freedom of speech and expression. Manto, now a celebrated author, was then criticised and prosecuted for the allegedly "immoral" and "provocative" nature of his stories. It is this allegedly profane content that he refers to as "neem ke patte". In the film, Manto defends his work, stating that what he writes is only a reflection of what he sees around him and that denying this reality does not make us any more humane as a society.

We don't seem to have made a lot of progress since the post-Partition era. Recent reports indicate that popular over the top (OTT) platforms such as Amazon Prime, Netflix and Hotstar have begun self-censoring their content.

When *Sacred Games*, the first Indian series produced by Netflix came out, it was met with critical acclaim — many lauded the show as the *Narcos* of India. Personally, I would hesitate in placing the show at par with *Narcos* and do not believe that it was extraordinary in its storytelling. However, I believe that the show's significance lies in the content that it does out to its viewers. I was grateful for, and pleasantly surprised by, the limits to which the show pushed the envelope with regards to what a conventional Indian show could contain. With its brazen and uncensored content, replete not only with abusive language, violence and nudity — an exciting currency for India's maturing young viewership — but also stark political uprontery, the show marked the advent of a new horizon in Indian television. Soon, Netflix's *Lust Stories* and Amazon Prime's *Mirzapur* followed suit.

This new viewership has since become attuned to content unfettered by the morality imposed by traditional censorship bodies. We, as viewers, now welcome platforms that — by providing myriad choices in consumption — refuse to infantilise us and offer us an alternative to mainstream cinema. The Indian film industry is still limited by the prudish sensibility of the Central Board of Film Certification. Further, OTT platforms have changed the ways in which

we consume films. The shift from big screens to smaller digital screens has led to the private consumption of material, allowing individuals to watch what they want without supervision and the accompanying fear of retribution.

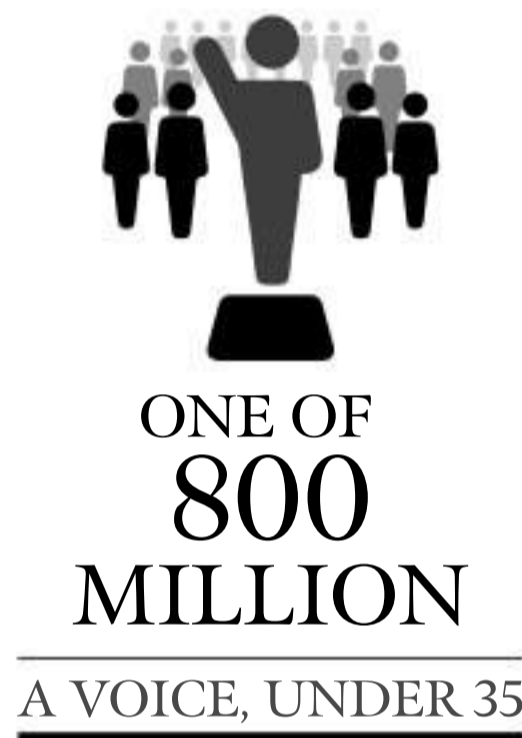
Therefore, these platforms' decision to pre-emptively censor themselves is extremely disheartening, especially given that there exists no comprehensive policy regarding the censorship of online content in India, nor has the government announced any concrete plans to set up a regulatory body for cyber content in the near future. Amazon Prime, it has been reported, has been self-censoring Indian films that contain mature content. Not only are certain dialogues muted in films such as *The Dirty Picture* and *Hunterm*, the duration of the films is much shorter than the version of the films available on rival OTT platform Netflix, making it evident that many scenes deemed inappropriate have been cut out from the films.

It is speculated that this pre-emptive censorship comes as a response to a flurry of recently filed petitions by individuals and NGO's demanding censorship of "profane" online content. In keeping with this, in October of last year, the Nagpur Bench of the Bombay High Court urged the Centre to respond to a similar plea for censorship.

According to a report published in *The Print*, even Netflix has come under scrutiny for censorship. The article claims that Netflix representatives met with members of the Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to discuss self-censorship by the OTT. It also stated that both Netflix and Hotstar have decided to come up with a set of guidelines on content regulation that they shall submit to the ministry. Although Netflix has denied being part of any such meeting, its decision to take down an episode of *The Patriot Act* within Saudi Arabia — which addressed the murder of the Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi allegedly at the behest of the Saudi government — shows the platform's willingness to comply with such demands.

If nothing else, the popularity of the show *Game of Thrones* in India, which is known for its graphically violent and sexually explicit content, and the extent to which it was illegally downloaded before it could be streamed on Hotstar should be a sign of the times for these OTT platforms. It couldn't be made clearer that the Indian audience provides immense market opportunities for platforms which can grant them the "neem ke patte" that have traditionally been censored from Indian films and TV shows.

The writer, 22, is pursuing a degree in English and Media Studies at Ashoka University



SABEENA KHANNA

THE SUPREME COURT has yet again ruled against the Maharashtra government's ban on dance bars in Mumbai. It has said that the government cannot impose its morality on an unwilling society. Time and again, the courts have addressed the legal and political dilemmas around this ban. For example, in October 2015, the Supreme Court stayed the Maharashtra government's 2014 legislation pertaining to dance bars. It stated that the new legislation was not very different from the 2005 version held unconstitutional by the apex court in July 2013. There is apprehension that the government may yet again try to not lift the ban. What explains the agreement among all political parties that dance bars must not be allowed to open?

Caste and gender hold the key to understand the politics that unites parties on the dance bars issue. The emergence as well as the ban of dance bars in Mumbai can be seen as symptoms of globalisation in India. Dance bars emerged as a site of opportunity for customers to flaunt the wealth they had accumulated through their association with a globalised India. For the bar dancers, a majority of who came from the traditional dancing communities of North India, it offered a new employment opportunity. The demand and supply sides of dance bars comprised two distinct classes, which fit uncomfortably into the narrative on globalisation in India. The first class is the vernacular "new rich", linked to the black economy, government contracts, political connections and religious consumerism. This class constitutes the bulk of customers of the dance bars. The second class comprises the lowly-paid irregular workers; a class of people who are not just poor but are surviving with limited means. Bargirls hail from this class. Since the 1980s, these two classes have come together to create the dance bar market, which has upset and irritated both the ruling ideology as well as the popular script of globalisation.

The dance bar market offered its customers song, dance, Bollywood imagery and a pretence of royal mannerisms in the tawaf culture. It enabled customers to escape reality, feel like royalty, and fulfil the need for affirmation of their new status that the seemingly charmless capitalist economy — while providing unprecedented cash — fails to provide.

The dance bars used the power of musical performance in arousing feelings and deployed the established idiom of the Hindi film songs to attract customers to the bar and the bargirls. For customers, the dance bars offered a sense of fantasy, drama, adventure, addiction and competition. Though the dance bars were lucrative, they had remained almost hidden from the mainstream public for nearly two decades.

The bar dancers from traditional dancing communities can be seen as "performing their castes": They were redeploying their caste capital — skills of dancing, entertainment, care, hospitality and the use of sexuality — to occupy the new space created by the globalising dance bar market. However, as their traditional skills gained unprecedented demand and monetary value in the globalising market, the bargirls seemed to occupy a space of high economic gain and challenge the gender, caste, class borders by performing their caste occupation in the global market.

The dance bar reconstitutes the relationship between gender, culture and caste as

VIEW FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD



A weekly look at the public conversations shaping ideas beyond borders — in the Subcontinent. Curated by Aakash Joshi

BEYOND CIVIL-MILITARY

HUSSAIN NADEEM, DIRECTOR of the South Asia Study Group at the University of Sydney, writes that "it is nearly impossible to have any academic debate on democracy in Pakistan that is not reduced to a parochial civil-military angle. Even to critique this trapping without getting labelled is now difficult given the heightened sensitivities around the subject matter." In an article in *The Express Tribune* on January 15, he elaborates on other factors that account for the weakness of Pakistan's democracy and argues that the binary actually restricts an understanding even of civil-military relations: "The idea is not to rob the civil-military issue of its significance in the democracy debate. The idea, in fact, is to examine civil-military issue beyond its binary restraints and go deeper into the subject as one of the many aspects of democratic failure in Pakistan, but not the only one."

According to Nadeem, "the single biggest challenge facing democracy in Pakistan that is seldom raised in the debate is the dysfunctional governance system across every sector." That the "well endowed" Election Commission of Pakistan "is unable to conduct an election every five years without gross neg-

ligence is evidence of how damaging the ineffective governance is to democracy." He then argues that the blame for this weakness must be shared by successive civilian governments that do not "empower institutions". "The problem is that institutional and governance reform is a twin-edged sword for the political elite given the political culture that thrives in the country," argues Nadeem.

This political culture, he says, is "the form of a continuation of colonial patronage structure where both civil and military elite is beyond the discursive binary a single praetorian oligarchy is the second critical challenge to democracy in Pakistan." Because the state and governance is weak, people turn to representatives for basic services, and the "poverty-stricken" public is "deceived" by the machinations and small sops of elites. The article argues that "the civilian political leadership compromises on the reform agenda that allows it to retain control over its patronage structure but is unable to deter the inroads of establishment in politics."

LET MANTO SPEAK

"IN OUR CORNER of the world," begins the

January 17 editorial in *Dawn*, "prejudice and intolerance can sometimes follow a person well beyond his or her lifetime". The editorial takes strong exception to the banning in Pakistan of Nandita Das's *Manto*, a biopic of writer Sadat Hasan Manto, because of its "controversial" content.

But there is a silver lining: "Regarding the ban on the film *Manto*, then, it is encouraging that on Monday, writers, journalists and civil society activists gathered outside the Lahore Press Club to protest, and point out the futility of the move." However, Manto's treatment in Pakistan mirrors what he went through in his lifetime. *Dawn* is quick to point out: "The ill treatment meted out to him in Pakistan during his lifetime was highlighted, including the fact that his work was censored, he was hounded by the state authorities, and even his entry into the building of Radio Pakistan — which was the iconic purveyor of cultural fare in an era when TV had yet to make its debut in the country — was disallowed. Decades have gone by but it is evident that the prejudice against Manto remains," it says.

The editorial ends with a simple exhortation: "The ban must be lifted."

HASINA'S TASKS

THE TASK BEFORE Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina after her re-election is not an easy one. She must be an incumbent, yet transformative leader. Muhammad Nurul Huda, a former Inspector General of Police in Bangladesh, writes in *The Daily Star* January 17 of how "the people are looking forward to a new direction, a new era, a new life". For him, the economy and its growth is key to fulfilling these expectations. He lays out the following objectives for the PM: (i) to increase the gross national product and transmute the people's spirit of enterprise into national wealth;

(ii) to create jobs and enlarge the availability of productive works; (iii) to regulate reasonably the distribution of income; and (iv) to revive public morality and reward integrity and industry.

To achieve these economic ends, Huda believes that "societal cohesiveness is critically important because in a country where all the groups function harmoniously, the results are fantastically gratifying". He cites Germany and Japan as examples of the "synergistic effect" of such "harmonious cooperation".

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

QUOTA QUESTIONS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'A tool for parity' (IE, January 18). The sheer number of politicians expressing their opinion over the 10 per cent reservation for upper castes shows the gravity of the matter. Reservation always sparks a debate about the "reserved" and the "deserved". But those who were once creating an uproar over this system are now under its ambit. It is time we started focussing on skill management and generating jobs.

Varun Tiwari, Etawah

NO ANARCHY

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'The Anand Teltumbhe I know', (IE, January 18). Edith Hamilton, while analysing fall of Greek civilisation, had observed that when the freedom they wished for most was freedom from responsibility, then Athens ceased to be free and was never free again. The Teltumbhes of this world must realise that that their words have consequences and the public position they occupy means that they are responsible for them. If Teltumbhe believes in certain principles and if he has exercised his privilege to air them, then he must have faith in the system.

H N Bhagwat, Ratnagiri

NJAC NEEDED

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'An opaque bench' (IE, January 18). Transparency in

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

To encourage quality reader intervention, The Indian Express offers the Letter of the Week award. The letter adjudged the best for the week is published every Saturday. Letters may be e-mailed to editpage@expressindia.com or sent to The Indian Express, B-1/B, Sector 10, Noida-UP 201301. Letter writers should mention their postal address and phone number.

THE WINNER RECEIVES SELECT EXPRESS PUBLICATIONS

judicial appointments is the essence of an independent judicial system. The collegium system seems to be enhancing the opportunities for the sons and nephews of judges and senior lawyers. This vitiates the judicial environment. The National Judicial Appointment Commission guarantees the independence of the system. It could rebuild public confidence in the judicial system.

Sunil Premi, Greater Noida