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## TELLING NUMBERS

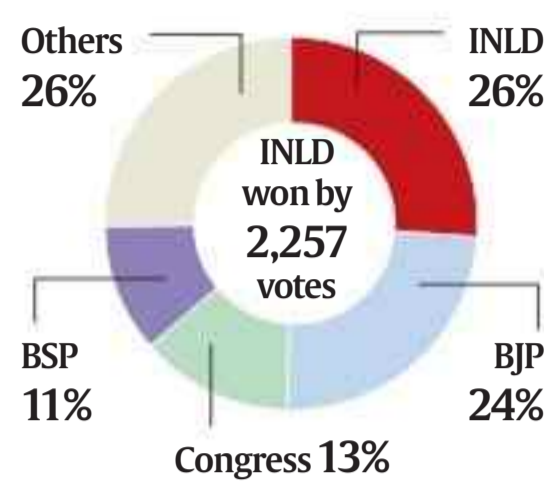
### Jind bypoll: How this Assembly seat voted in previous elections

JIND ASSEMBLY seat in Haryana, which goes to a bypoll Monday, has seen some close contests over the year, with the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) either winning or finishing second in the last four elections since 2000. The INLD was formed in 1996.

The bypoll has grabbed attention for several reasons, including a split in the INLD. The Congress has fielded senior leader Randeep Singh Surjewala. The BJP has fielded Krishan Midha, son of deceased INLD MLA Harichand Midha. Following the split in the INLD, party founder Chaudhary Devi Lal's great grandson Digvijay Chautala is contesting as an independent; he and his brother Dushyant have floated a new party that is yet to be registered. The INLD itself has fielded Umed Singh Redhu, backed by Digvijay's uncle Abhay Chautala.

In 2000 and 2005, the INLD finished second to the Congress, running the winner close in 2000 and losing by a much larger margin in 2005. The late Harichand Midha won the seat for the INLD in the next two elections. In

#### THE 2014 SPLIT



Source: Election Commission data

2009, he defeated his Congress rival by nearly 8,000 votes. In 2014, the contest was between Midha and the BJP, which lost by just over 2,000 votes, while the Congress was relegated to a distant third. The BJP polled 24% of the vote in 2014, behind INLD's 26%. In the previous three polls, the BJP had finished fourth in 2000, fourth in 2005 and seventh in 2009, polling less than 10% each time.

#### PREVIOUS ASSEMBLY POLLS

Poll	Winner	Runner-up	Margin	INLD share
2000	Congress	INLD	4,643	39%
2005	Congress	INLD	17,519	24%
2009	INLD	Congress	7,862	36%

## THIS WORD MEANS

### JAWAHAR NAVODAYA VIDYALAYA

Prestigious group of schools, battling new challenge



Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya in Kalchina village in Ghaziabad. *Cajendra Yadav/Archive*

JAWAHAR NAVODAYA Vidyalayas, or JNVs, were envisaged as pace-setting schools for talented rural children in the National Policy on Education, 1986, and set up immediately after. The Finance Ministry recently cleared a proposal to hire counsellors for JNVs in rural areas in the wake of a number of suicides (*The Indian Express*, January 27).

According to norms, at least 75% of the seats in each JNV are set aside for rural children. Hence, a JNV is never sanctioned for a district with a 100% urban population. That apart, seats are reserved for children from SC and ST communities in proportion to their population in the district where the school is located, but is

not to be less than the national average, which is 15% for SCs and 7.5% for STs.

A Navodaya Vidyalaya starts from Class VI and goes up to XII. Admissions in Class VI are through a merit test, and less than 3% of the candidates every year make the cut. Currently, there are 635 JNVs in the country with 2.8 lakh students, all managed and run by the Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti, which is an autonomous body under the HRD Ministry.

Known for producing the best results in board examinations, these schools have consistently recorded a pass rate over 99% in Class X and over 95% in XII, which is far better than private schools and CBSE's national average.

## SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

# Full Budget, interim Budget

At the end of its term, a government usually presents a vote on account rather than a full Budget. What is the difference? A look at what interim Budgets have covered over the years, or left for the next government



Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha (1998) signs the full Budget (after an interim one); Pranab Mukherjee (2009) and P Chidambaram (2014) sign interim Budgets. *Archive*

#### SHAJI VIKRAMAN

ON FEBRUARY 1, the government is set to present its last Budget ahead of the elections. Conventionally, a government at the end of its term has gone in for a vote on account rather than a full Budget. How are these different?

#### What is a vote on account?

A vote on account, also known as interim Budget, essentially means that the government seeks the approval of Parliament for meeting expenditure for the first four months of the fiscal year (April-March) — paying salaries, ongoing programmes in various sectors etc — with no changes in the taxation structure, until a new government takes over and presents a full Budget that is revised for the full fiscal. Over the years, some governments have made policy announcements or tweaked tax rates in the vote on account. Such practices are now being recalled, amid indications that the government may present more than a vote on account on February 1.

#### Why present a vote on account?

The reasoning is that there is little time to get approvals from Parliament for various grants to ministries and departments, and to debate these as well as any provisions for changes in taxation. More importantly, the reasoning is that it would be the prerogative of the new government to signal its policy direction, which is often reflected in the Budget. So, starting 1948, when Finance Minister R K Shanmukham Chetty presented a vote on account and followed it up with Independent India's first regular budget, most governments have followed this convention.

Many Finance Ministers, including two who went on to become President, R Venkataraman and Pranab Mukherjee, noted in their interim Budgets how constitutional propriety calls for the new government to formulate the tax and expenditure policies for the next fiscal year. But a distinction is sought to be made between a government that is expected to continue in office and a scenario where polls are to follow.

#### How did previous NDA Finance Ministers approach interim Budgets?

**Yashwant Sinha:** He presented interim Budgets for two governments — Chandra Shekhar's in 1991 and Atal Bihari Vajpayee's in 1998 — and reckons that "taking liberties" is kosher when a government is expected to continue, but not when polls are near. In the shadow of India's biggest balance-of-pay-

ments crisis, Sinha was forced to present an interim Budget in March 1991 because the Congress, which had supported the Chandra Shekhar government, declined to back the full Budget. Sinha said in his Budget speech that his government was engaged in the formulation of a comprehensive approach to provide a sustainable solution to problems. "This needs time. I would, therefore, plead with the House to wait until the regular Budget for 1991-92 is presented in May 1991," he told Parliament. That did not happen, with the government collapsing a few days later. Yet in the interim Budget, Sinha announced the country's first policy on disinvestment, saying the government would disinvest up to 20% of its equity in select state-owned firms in favour of mutual funds and financial and investment institutions to raise Rs 2,500 crore in 1991-92. Sinha now says it was a tentative announcement (which was carried forward by Manmohan Singh as Finance Minister in the Budget of July 1991) and not dictated by the International Monetary Fund, with which the government was negotiating for assistance. Venkataraman, too, in his interim Budget of 1980-81, pleaded with the House to wait until a regular Budget to adopt measures to get the country moving again as there was no time to work on estimates and to print the Budget.

**Jaaswant Singh:** In the final year of the Vajpayee-led NDA government, with the economy rebounding after more than three sluggish years, Singh in the interim Budget of February 3, 2004 announced changes in the stamp duty structure, revival packages for the tea and sugar industries and merging of dearness allowance with basic pay. "While changes in the Income-Tax Act are currently not being proposed, it is the conviction of the government and also our commitment that fiscal benefits available to new projects in the power sector should be extended up to 2012," the interim Budget said. Tax benefits in the form of long-term capital gains tax for investing in listed firms, too, were extended for a further three years to provide stability. The baggage allowance of Rs 25,000 that Indians travelling overseas and returning are now allowed was first raised in that interim Budget. The government was criticised for presenting what was termed a mini-budget, especially as this had been preceded, on January 8, 2004, by an announcement of major changes in both direct and indirect tax. The peak rate of customs duty on non-farm goods had been reduced from 25% to 20%, the special additional duty on customs duty of 4% abolished, and customs duty had been lowered on project imports, coal and

the power sector. Sinha, Singh's predecessor as Finance Minister and a Cabinet colleague then, concedes now that a government on its last legs took some liberties, which he does not consider proper.

#### And what was the UPA approach?

**Pranab Mukherjee:** He presented the interim Budget in 2008-09 at the end of the first term of the UPA government. Acknowledging that the term of the government was coming to an end, and citing constitutional propriety, he said extraordinary economic circumstances merit extraordinary measures. "Now is the time for such measures," he said, going on to announce the easing of fiscal targets to provide what he termed a much-needed boost to demand for countering the situation created by the global meltdown. That was when the fiscal deficit target was revised hugely from the budgeted 2.5% to 6% — after Mukherjee had in January announced a major fiscal stimulus marked by tax cuts aggregating Rs 40,000 crore. Many economists and some ministers still view that as the trigger for a downward slide in fiscal correction.

**P Chidambaram:** Having returned to the Finance Ministry after Mukherjee moved to Rashtrapati Bhavan, Chidambaram started his presentation of the interim Budget on February 17, 2014. "As I prepared to write this speech, I found that whether it is a regular Budget for the full year or an interim Budget, some things remain the same." He said that in keeping with convention, he did not propose to make any announcements regarding changes to tax laws. That was followed by: "However, the current situation demands some interventions that cannot wait for the regular Budget. In particular, the manufacturing sector needs an immediate boost." Chidambaram proposed some changes in indirect tax to stimulate growth in capital goods and consumer non-durables with a lowering of excise duty on many goods — with the rider that the rates could be reviewed again at the time of the regular Budget — while reducing excise duty up to June 30, 2014 for small cars, motorcycles, scooters and SUVs besides large and mid-segment cars, and tax relief for mobile handsets.

#### Does the Opposition usually challenge provisions in interim Budgets?

That 2014 interim Budget led to a political slugfest, with Jaaswant Singh calling it more of an election Budget rather than an interim Budget. "The principle of an interim Budget enjoins either withholding policy pronouncements for the post-election successor govern-

ment or doing so only through discussions and consultation," Singh said. Narendra Modi, then Gujarat Chief Minister and the prime ministerial candidate, tweeted that the interim Budget was "UPA's final act of misery after a decade of decay and policy paralysis," and took a dig at the "hard working" Finance Minister. In response, Chidambaram told news agency PTI: "I don't want to take the level of this debate to class 8 schoolboy's debate." He told BBC that "what he (Modi) knows about economics can be written on the back of a postage stamp." Modi hit back after the NDA came to power in May 2014. When a top economic adviser of the UPA made a courtesy call, Modi apparently asked him why the economy had floundered when the UPA has so many economists led by his predecessor Manmohan Singh.

#### Are there any indications what the upcoming Budget will be like?

With the announcement of decisions such as the 10% quota for the economically backward in the run-up to February 1, the government could well be pursuing a scorched-earth policy. This could come with risks such as fiscal imbalances (for the record, it has stuck to targets so far) or inviting the wrath of financial purists. It remains to be seen what the Finance Minister says on February 1 about the state of the economy, or what measures he unveils or policy directions he signals.

As Chidambaram said in 2014, whatever the form of the Budget, "some things remain the same". Nowhere among the other top economies (India now features in the top half-dozen) is there such hype over budgets; they are just statements of expenditure and revenue. With GST in force, decisions on taxing goods and services are now with the GST Council where state governments have an influential voice. With increased devolution or proceeds of taxes, the action has shifted much more to states. Greater integration with the global economy also means that developments in China will have an impact, as will the projected slower pace of global economic growth this year. The point is whether budgets are given far too much importance, and whether any policy changes announced now will be clawed back by another government that believes in a different political and economic philosophy.

As Manmohan Singh told *The Indian Express* in an interview in 2016, "I think in a crisis, we act constructively; when it is over, status quo takes over." Whether that will change is what many will be looking at.

# Citizenship Bill: the concerns behind Mizoram's strong protests

ABHISHEK SAHA  
GUWAHATI, JANUARY 27

AMONG VARIOUS Northeastern states where protests have broken out over the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, Mizoram witnessed massive demonstrations last week. These came into focus particularly because of photos, widely circulated on social media, that showed protesters with posters that proclaimed "Hello China, bye bye India". This protest was organised by the influential Young Mizo Association (YMA), and the slogan was intended to convey that "we are not safe in India", said Lalhmachhuana, general secretary of the central committee of the YMA. "The Government of India did not listen to our repeated requests," he said.

A look at why Mizos are concerned about the Bill:

#### What the Bill says

The Bill amends the Citizenship Act, 1955, relaxing the citizenship eligibility rules for immigrants belonging to six minority (non-Muslim) religions from Afghanistan, Bangladesh or Pakistan. Read with various other provisions, the cutoff for eligibility be-

comes December 2014. Political parties and non-political groups in the Northeast have protested on grounds of its potential impact on the region's demography, and questioned its constitutionality as it grants citizenship on the basis of religion.

For protesters in Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura, the concern is about Hindu immigrants from Bangladesh. The Assam Accord, protely circulated in that state point out, lays down 1971 as the cutoff for acceptance as citizens; the National Register of Citizens is being updated based on this cutoff, which does not differentiate on the basis of religion.

#### Mizoram is different

In Mizoram, the concern is not about Hindu immigrants from Bangladesh but about Chakmas, a tribal and largely Buddhist group. The Chakmas are present in parts of the Northeast, and the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, with which Mizoram shares an international border. While Christians form 87% of Mizoram's 11 lakh population (2011), Chakmas number about 1 lakh. Certain sections in Mizoram blame Chakmas for illegal migration from Bangladesh, which the community denies. The state has seen ethnic violence, with in-



Schoolchildren join a protest against the Bill. *Lafava Photography*

stances of arson, names of Chakmas being struck off voters' lists, and denial of admission to Chakma students in college.

Scholar Joy Pachuau writes in her book *Being Mizo*: "They [Chakmas] are clearly identified as 'non-Mizo' by the Mizos, and 'there is

no attempt at incorporating them as Mizo,' I was told. In fact, the YMA often made calls to expel them from Mizoram as they were considered illegal immigrants, large-scale migrations having taken place in 1964 (caused by inundation of their land due to the damming

of the Karnaphuli river for a hydro-electric project in Bangladesh) and 1980-4 (caused by insurgency in the Chittagong Hill Tracts led by the Hills Peoples' Movement of Bangladesh). Nor did the Chakmas want to identify themselves as Mizo."

#### Data vs data

The apex students' body Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZZP) and the YMA, which are leading the current agitation, have often cited figures they attribute to the Census. "In 1901, there were only 198 Chakmas in Mizoram and by 1991 it was over 80,000. The growth rate is far more than normally possible. It proves that there has been influx from Bangladesh," said MZZP leader Ricky Lalbiakmawia.

Chakma activists cite a 2015 report submitted by the government of Mizoram to the NHRC. "The veracity of the Census figures between 1901 and 1941 cannot be ascertained as the same are not available with the Census Directorate, Mizoram," the then state Deputy Secretary (Home) wrote in the report. The report cites Census data that puts the Chakma population at 15,297 in 1951 and 96,972 in 2011.

"Why will Chakmas migrate to Mizoram when there is so much structural discrimi-

nation against us? In the 1960s, Chakmas had migrated from the Chittagong Hill Tracts, but all of those people were settled in Arunachal Pradesh," said Paritosh Chakma, secretary general of the All India Chakma Social Forum. He cited a 2017 news report in Mizo daily *Vanglaini*, which quoted the then DGP as saying there had been no illegal migration of Chakmas from Bangladesh in the last five years.

#### The Bill and Chakmas

"We have nothing against Chakmas residing legally for decades in Mizoram, but we are against Chakmas who have illegally migrated from Bangladesh. If the Bill is passed, they will become legal Indian citizens and maybe in some time, Mizos will become a minority in our own land. Moreover, the Bill also violates the Constitution of India," said Lalbiakmawia.

The state has a Chakma Autonomous District Council, set up in April 1972. It is part of an Assembly constituency that last elected BD Chakma, the lone BJP MLA in the state. "There are no illegal Chakma people living in Mizoram and if they start migrating after the Bill is passed, I will resign as an MLA," he said.

**The Indian EXPRESS**

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

**No DIVINE RIGHT**

Upholding of bankruptcy law by SC is welcome, will help entrench a key structural reform

ON FRIDAY, the Supreme Court upheld the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), rejecting the challenges mounted by some promoters who had defaulted, saying that the insolvency law was working, with the recovery of bad debt marking what it termed as the end of “defaulters’ paradise”. In the working of the code, the flow of resources to the commercial sector in India has increased exponentially as a result of financial debts being repaid, the Supreme Court said. The endorsement of the law and its provisions by the Supreme Court would come as a boost to the government which pushed for a modern bankruptcy law in the first half of its term and managed to get an exit mechanism which would help the reallocation of capital and ease the huge debt burden of banks in India.

The Modi government is credited with three significant structural reforms — the Goods and Services Tax (GST), the monetary policy framework with an inflation targeting mandate for the central bank and the insolvency law. The fact is that in terms of demonstrable impact, which is reflected in behavioural change among debtors, creditors and other stakeholders, it is the IBC or the insolvency law which has trumped even the GST. The two-year law has been an effective tool for creditors, with a threat to refer a case under the insolvency law helping force many debtors to come to the negotiating table and reinforcing what former RBI Governor, Raghuram Rajan, had famously said about promoters having no divine right. With the challenge to the institutional structure of the IBC and the NCLT having been rejected, the balance has now shifted even more in favour of creditors, compared to the past.

While it is still work in progress, the early evidence shows that of about 1,500 cases admitted until end-December 2018, only 79 ended in an approval of the resolution plans and liquidation in a little over 300 cases. A measure of the success of this law will be a rising graph of cases of corporate debtors being resolved. The major worry, however, is the failure in many cases to stick to the prescribed timeline of 180 to 270 days to firm up a resolution plan with elaborate hearings at NCLT benches. Such delay goes against the very raison d’être of the law which is to ensure a swift resolution or closure and thus lower the risk for banks and the government arising from a rising pile of bad debts and the subsequent need to recapitalise state-owned lenders. It is important that these timelines are adhered to. Over time, the NCLT may be better tuned to these kind of summary proceedings with capacity building and training of professionals. It will help that the Court has directed the government to set up circuit benches within six months. Attempts to game the system and to hold out by some of the bigger corporate defaulters may have been stymied now but the challenge still lies in how quickly some of the dozen large accounts referred to the insolvency court by the RBI, featuring huge outstanding claims, are resolved.

**Whose quota is it anyway?**



AMITABH KUNDU

Eligibility criteria for reservation for economically weaker sections will enable the well-off to corner benefits

UNION LAW MINISTER Ravi Shankar Prasad, while defending the Constitution (124th Amendment) Bill, 2019 that provides 10 per cent reservation in jobs and education to the economically weaker sections (EWS) in the general category, announced on the floor of Parliament that “sixes are hit in the slog overs” of a cricket match. “More sixes will come,” he asserted. Indeed, sixes are, and will be, hit by the batting side, both at the Centre and the states. The governments of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, for example, announced loan waiver schemes within a week of assuming office without analysing how the benefits would reach the vulnerable sections of the farming community or giving a serious thought to the impact these measures would have on agriculture in the long run.

An easy defence of such measures is that non-conventional shots are played in the slog overs as there is no time for rational calculation. The argument could well be, “Let’s first win the battle for Delhi in 2019 and we would then start thinking about goals of efficiency, equity and sustainability for informed policymaking”.

In the context of reservation for EWS, I have always held that the children of the poor from the upper castes — vegetable vendors, construction labourers, challenged individuals, self-employed or unemployed widows — deserve reservation as much as the children from Dalit households, who have enjoyed high economic and social status, say, for two generations. Let us then reserve 10 per cent seats for the poorest 10 per cent of the households, not covered under reservation. I would not be surprised if this principle enjoys some measure of support among a cross-section of the country’s population. However, the question is: Was this principle at work when the ruling party proposed the new quota and its rivals supported

Whenever anyone has shown the benevolence of defining poverty with a high cut-off point, the real motives has been to help the top 10 to 20 per cent among the eligible. It is not a level-playing field. And the poor, as defined by Tendulkar or Rangarajan Committees, stand very little chance of benefiting from the new quota. It is absurd to believe that Muslims would benefit from the quota, simply because they have a higher share among the poor. Very few Muslims would be in the top 20 per cent among those eligible for the EWS quota.

the move — or at best, registered a nominal protest?

Given contemporary realities and institutional infirmities, is it possible to ring fence this 10 per cent quota? The finance minister, while talking about direct tax collection, has often argued that given our democratic structure, it is difficult to work out clear operational criteria to identify the people who must pay taxes. In fact, more than two years after demonetisation, the government has not taken action against the account holders who deposited old currency well above their normal cash balance. Clearly, it fears losing votes.

The dearth of will — and capacity — to target the new quota to the actual poor is evident from the criteria that are likely to be fixed for identifying the potential beneficiaries. Persons from households with annual earning below Rs 8 lakh, possessing agricultural land below 5 acres, a plot less than 100 yards in a notified municipality or below 200 yards in the non-notified municipal area would be eligible for the reservation. The new amendment also allows the states to set income cut-offs to decide who constitutes EWS. They can even exceed the criteria set by the Centre. It also allows the states to notify EWS “from time to time on the basis of family income and other indicators of economic disadvantage” even if they are “adequately represented” in government jobs.

SCs, STs and OBCs account for 70 per cent of the population and are entitled to 49.5 per cent reservation in the government sector. The eligibility issue thus pertains to the remaining 30 per cent or 39 crore people, who fall under the general category. Calculations based on available data suggest that about 95 per cent of the people in the general category will be eligible under the new criteria.

It is not difficult to understand who

would be the real beneficiaries of the rather generous eligibility criteria for determining economic deprivation. It is very likely the middle class, those who work in the private sector — where it is difficult to establish the income-level — and the unscrupulous who can con the system through false declarations, would grab the benefit. The children of street vendors and agricultural labourers have very little chance to benefit from the new quota.

Indeed, whenever anyone has shown the benevolence of defining poverty with a high cut-off point, the real motives has been to help the top 10 to 20 per cent among the eligible. It is not a level-playing field. And the poor, as defined by the Tendulkar or Rangarajan Committees, stand very little chance of benefiting from the new quota. It is absurd to believe that Muslims would benefit from the quota, simply because they have a higher share among the poor. Very few Muslims would be in the top 20 per cent among those eligible for the EWS quota.

The immediate beneficiaries of such measures would clearly be the batting side at the Centre and the states. They are likely to reach out to the common masses with the message that the government really cares for them. Unfortunately, the poor do not constitute a votebank and can be swayed by promises. When they realise who the real beneficiaries are, it is too late.

The above conclusion with regard to loan waivers, reservations in general category and a host of similar decisions is, of course, based on the assumption that the voters do not care for long-term development concerns and can be bribed with short-term or imaginary benefits.

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**NUMBER IN THE SKY**

Indian Air Force faces shortage of fighter aircraft. It must address, and learn lessons from, crisis

CAN A cricket team be expected to win if it plays seven players instead of eleven? The Indian Air Force (IAF) faces a similar question — the number of its fighter squadrons has fallen to 30, and in another couple of years, it will be down to 26, an alarmingly low figure. In comparison, for instance, the Pakistan Air Force will have 25 squadrons of fighter aircraft by 2021 while China can potentially bring up to 42 squadrons upon India in case of a conflict. That this will happen if everything goes according to plan is an indicator of the crisis faced by the IAF, which is authorised 42 squadrons of fighter aircraft, the minimum needed to meet a two-front threat from China and Pakistan.

The IAF last had the full complement of 42 squadrons 17 years ago and the numbers have steadily fallen since. While many Soviet-era aircraft have been phased out, their modern replacements have not found their way into service. There are two major reasons for this: One, the indigenously developed and produced Light Combat Aircraft (LCA), Tejas, has been delayed by almost a decade; and, two, the plans for induction of imported fighter aircraft have not fructified, the major culprit being the 2007 tender for 126 Rafale aircraft in the UPA government which was cancelled by the BJP government in 2015.

The solutions are evident. The indigenously developed and produced LCA Tejas has to provide the bulk of the numbers — the IAF is committed to get six squadrons from HAL, four of them of Tejas Mark 1A version. While HAL hopes to provide 18 aircraft per year, it has not been able to ramp up the capacity to even half that number so far. It is incumbent upon the government to ensure that the public sector HAL delivers the aircraft of appropriate quality and in adequate numbers. Till then, however, the only immediate option is to import more fighter aircraft. The IAF will get two squadrons of Rafale by 2023, and it has plans for six squadrons of another foreign fighter within a decade. But the latter is still a proposal on the planning board and a long way away from seeing the light of day. Considering this situation, the IAF is looking at a scenario where it will have to soon undertake emergency imports — perhaps at an exorbitant cost — to make up the numbers. It is a situation of the government’s own making but if the lessons are learnt to avoid a repetition of these mistakes in the future, the impending crisis would have served its purpose.



VANYA VAIDEHI BHARGAV

**THE INCLUSIVE NATIONALIST**

Sensitive to Hindu interests, Lala Lajpat Rai championed diversity in unity

IN RECENT YEARS, champions of Hindutva have claimed Lala Lajpat Rai as their own. Indisputably, Lajpat Rai was an advocate of an assertive Hindu politics, exemplified by his participation in the Punjab Hindu Sabha in 1909 and Hindu Mahasabha in the mid-1920s. Even then, his vision of Hindu politics was very different from the exclusivist Hindu nationalism that demanded that either India’s religious minorities be forcefully assimilated into Hindu culture or be excluded from the nation.

Here I focus on Lajpat Rai’s attempt to go further and articulate an entirely different vision of nationhood. His birthday today is a good opportunity to remember this vision, articulated exactly a century ago. Having earlier conceived of Hindus and Muslims as separate “religious nationalities”, by 1915, he proclaimed that “religious nationalism” was a “false idea”, embodying a “narrow sectarianism” which could never be “truly national”. “Religion was a matter of individual faith,” he proclaimed, which “must not interfere with the common civil life of the country”. Instead, every person must transcend their religious community to realise their larger common interest as Indians. Lajpat Rai had fulsome praise for the 1915 speech of the Muslim League president, Mazharul Haq, who declared that “when a question concerning the welfare of India and of justice to India arises, I am not only Indian first, but an Indian next, and an Indian to the last”.

What made the diverse people inhabiting India one common nation? Lajpat Rai argued that India’s natural geography brilliantly marked it off from the rest of the world, endowing its people with a common nationhood. At times, he pronounced that Indians — whether Hindu, Muslim, Christian or Parsi —

were a common race. He argued that Indian Muslims were descendants of the Aryan race who had merely converted to Islam — they continued to be influenced by their ancestral Aryan-Hindu culture. However problematic or mythical, his emphasis on the Aryan lineage of Indian Muslims sought to establish their indigeneity to India, challenging those who used the trope of Indian Muslims’ foreign descent to exclude them from definitions of the national community.

At other times, Lajpat Rai did not hesitate to repudiate the idea of the common Aryan race of Hindus and Muslims. He dismissed the idea that nations of the world comprised of single pure races to proudly proclaim that the Hindus, Muslims and Christians of India were a “racial mix-up”. “The Mussulman descendants of Persian, Afghan, Turkaman, Mogul and Arab invaders have a great deal of Aryan blood in their veins and the Hindu descendants of the Aryans have a great deal of Mongolian blood,” he said. But this racial heterogeneity did not disprove Indian nationhood.

He sometimes ceased speaking of a common Hindu culture to talk of a larger distinctive Indian culture that bound India’s diverse peoples, emphasising a notion that would become a standard slogan of the Nehruvian era: “Unity in Diversity”. He also argued that Indians must develop for themselves a pluralist public national culture. This was evident in his claim that since “national festivals are the milestones on the road to national life, Hindus and Muslims would do well to take part in each other’s festivals and religious occasions like Basant Panchami, Baisakhi, Dussehra, Diwali, Muharram and Shab-e-Barat”.

In his 1918 book, *The Problem of National Education*, Lajpat Rai insisted that “we mod-

ern Indians can be as well proud of a Hali, an Iqbal, a Mohani as of Tagore, Roy and Harishchandra. We are proud of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan as of Ram Mohan Roy and Dayanand”. Similarly, he insisted that “the educated Mussulman does not withhold his admiration from the religious, philosophic, and epic literature of India, just as the educated Hindu reckons the Taj and Fatehpur Sikri among the glories, not of Muslim but of Indian architecture”. For the Lajpat Rai of these years, Akbar was a role model whose memory ought to inspire Hindus and Muslims “in building the future national edifice in such a way as to combine not just the best of the two cultures, but also the best of the new one, that has since been born in the West, from which India is drawing copiously”.

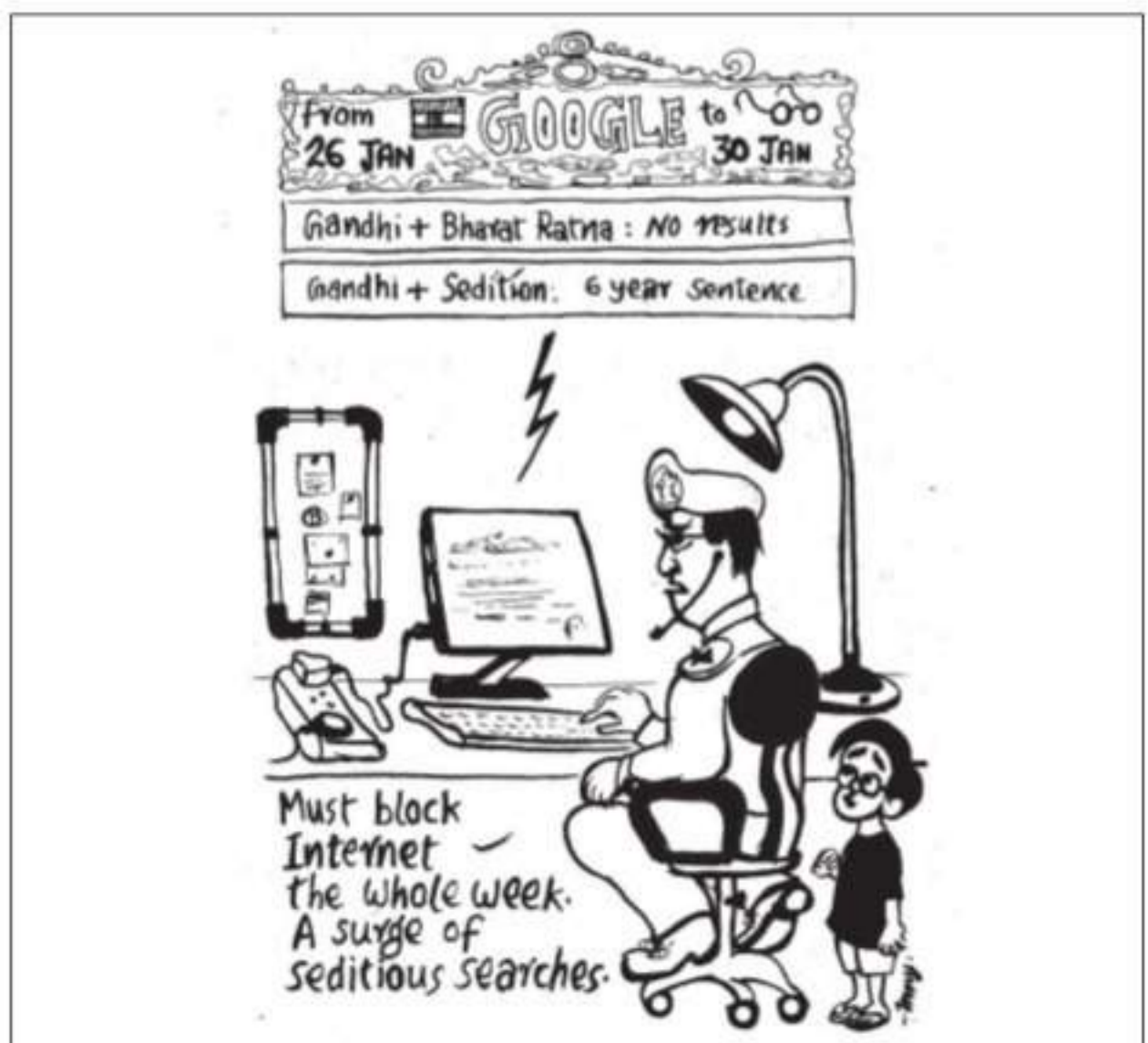
Lajpat Rai’s embrace of diversity as a crucial ingredient of national culture was evident in his strong aversion to the imposition of a homogenous culture on the Indian nation. He declared: “To require India to coalesce into a nation with one religion and one tongue... would revive the medieval idea of one empire, one people, one church.” Even after Lajpat Rai turned to the Hindu Mahasabha for numerous complicated reasons, he never renounced his commitment to India’s religio-cultural diversity. Lajpat Rai shows that a politics sensitive to the interests of Hindus can be free of a “tyrannical” desire to impose religio-cultural homogeneity on the nation.

Since we seem to still be wrestling with these issues, it is not Lajpat Rai’s birthday an apt occasion to contemplate his complex normative vision?

*The writer has a D.Phil in history from Oxford University. Her dissertation was on Lajpat Rai’s nationalist thought*

**FREEZE FRAME**

EP UNNY



**JANUARY 28, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO**

UP POLITICAL CRISIS  
THE POLITICAL CRISIS in Uttar Pradesh deepened with Chief Minister Ram Naresh Yadav forwarding the resignations of all the four ministers whose resignations he had sought to the governor for acceptance. And Governor G D Tapase has accepted the resignations. Yadav elevated the remaining six deputy ministers to the rank of minister of state. The ministers who have been promoted are: Bhagwati Singh, Chhote Lal Yadav, Maqbool Hussain Khan, Deenanath Sewak, Sheo Das Tewari Tej Singh.

IRAN DEVELOPMENT  
IRAN PRIME MINISTER Shahpour Bakhtiar

announced that he would leave for Paris within 48 hours to meet the religious opposition leader, Ayatullah Khomeini. “As a patriotic Iranian who considers himself as a small member of the glorious movement and as a person who believes in the leadership of Khomeini... I have decided to go to Paris within 48 hours to... seek advice on the future of the country,” Bakhtiar said in a special radio address. The surprise announcement came shortly after Bakhtiar said in a radio interview that “agents and enemies” as well as “technical difficulties” at strike-bound Mehrabad international airport had delayed the return of the exiled religious leader whose mass movement forced Shah

Mohammad Reza Pahlavi to leave the country on “vacation”.

WINDIES FOLLOW ON  
TWO PROMISING YOUNGSTERS, Kapil Dev and Karsan Ghavri, displayed in ample measure a killer’s instinct as they raised visions of India coasting to a handsome victory against the West Indies. Kapil Dev, 94 overnight, duly completed his maiden, unbeaten century with a boundary and huge six as Sunil Gavaskar declared India’s innings at 566 for eight wickets. Then Ghavri (3 for 54) disturbed the rhythm and harmony of the West Indies batsmen with his superbly-controlled thunderbolts.

# 13 THE IDEAS PAGE

## The reporter, her story

Women reporters have faced misogyny and sexism, and yet they have travelled a long distance. MeToo provides an acknowledgement of the hurdles in their way, and their resilience



MEENA MENON

THE METOO movement's impact on Indian media led to strong responses from senior women journalists and even controversies. One such was over veteran journalist Tavleen Singh's three articles in the Indian Express ('Stories beyond MeToo', January 1, Fifth Column: 'Why I am not MeToo' October 15, 2018, and 'Can MeToo get beyond me', October 21, 2018). The burden of her song was that women journalists must not become the story themselves by writing about the sexual harassment they face, but focus on the exploited women in the country. In a pithy response, another veteran journalist Pamela Philipose has pointed out fallacies in Singh's argument ('Her blind spots', Indian Express, January 2).

As women journalists who entered English media newsrooms in the mid-1980s as junior reporters, we feel that both Singh and Philipose have, in separate ways, left out some significant aspects. Their stress on investigative stories and exposures etc does not do justice to the long way that women reporters have travelled.

Winning the right to do "hard news" beats, night duty and cover "difficult" beats did not happen overnight. Besides the prominent veterans, there were and are many women reporters who performed a difficult job very well and handled themselves with aplomb in the newsroom. Their number has grown tremendously in the past few decades.

The focus cannot be on whether women journalists should seek to become celebrities or not, should report on other exploited women or not or how many investigative stories they have broken. The point is how far women reporters have traversed in terms of doing "hardcore" reporting and not simply being ghettoised into doing lifestyle features. In fact, Singh is seeking their ghettoisation by arguing that they should report on the exploitation of women and girls in the country. Why cannot male reporters do so? In the newsroom, often women find themselves writing on women because the men simply refuse or are not assigned those stories.

In the mid-1980s when both of us entered journalism, there were very few women but those numbers rose gradually and today they are a critical mass. Yet, most of the stories on women, still considered a soft beat, are still done by women. We still have to see male reporters doing a series on rapes or dowry deaths or prostitution unless there is a perceived hard news angle. Women are yet to break the proverbial glass ceiling in many media houses, but they are doing beats earlier considered male terrain. By writing on gender and violence or "women's issues", they are keeping the flag flying, but that alone cannot change a patriarchal newsroom.

As young reporters, we looked up to women like Singh and Philipose, Coomi Kapoor, Olga Tellis, Usha Rai, Mrinal Pande and so many others. Lata Raj, who was the chief sub editor at Indian Express, was one of the few women in a senior position in the late 1980s, as was Carol Andrade who was the only woman reporter when she joined the Times of India, and went on to become a chief reporter of an evening paper. Women faced undefined and unarticulated but nonetheless gargantuan obstacles to become political and crime reporters.

In the mid-1980s, the issues facing women reporters specifically were about being "allowed" to do night duty, and cover



Suvajit Dey

"dangerous" areas like crime and riots. For instance, the United News of India (UNI) did not allow women on night-shifts which went on till 1 am, till three women — Bharati Sadasivam, Sujata Anandan and Meena Menon — demanded it and were willing to put up with the resistance to the idea.

What needs to be celebrated and written about is that, in twos and threes, and later in larger numbers, women reporters carved out spaces for themselves and for the generations that followed. The issue is not simply that of investigative reporting or exposures. It is doing beats that were different and doing them well.

Even then, in sports and business reporting, women were rarely seen. Female reporters were readily assigned campus reporting or education and lifestyle interviews and so on but political reporting (considered the *crème de la crème*) eluded them as did reporting on sports and business. The arguments against were all couched in "protective" language around their physical safety, commuting late at night, fending off unwanted attention and so forth.

These were the days when the mobile telephone was in the realm of science fiction. All that we had was the MTNL black box that sat on the Chief Reporter's table. No personal calls were allowed to be made or received by young reporters except in cases of dire emergency and it was to be used only to fix appointments or get an urgent deadline-bound quote. You were expected to roam the streets in search of stories and meet your contacts and others face to face. That it did wonders for our contact diaries and our reportage is another story. Covering fires or riots in the night meant we would be exposed to unwanted attention, but many of us realised that the main danger was in the newsroom itself where standing up for women and doing stories on them identified you as a "feminist" or an "activist".

We remember the first smell of newsprint and the mad delight of a "by-line";

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the joy of going out there and getting a story, persuading reluctant bureaucrats or others to talk. It was bliss to know that your story had forced the authorities — municipal, police, corporate — to redress the grievance. Nothing came close to the euphoria of knowing that your report had made a difference.

It is this that must be celebrated whilst talking of women reporters — they have carved out a space despite so many hurdles. In many places, women are not hired since it is too much for the management to provide for their security after night shift. Then, there were other problems: No separate rest rooms, lack of sleeping space after a night shift, male reporters feeling their turf is being challenged, sexism not only in the newspaper but everywhere else.

All this was compensated by the freedom to roam and report, get inside the "news", meet people, stand up for rights and report on what was wrong, and be appreciated for exposing that. Women have covered wars, riots, bombings, politics, crime, the economy and social sectors, exposed and unearthed so many facets of the world that had not figured as news, and are responsible for "mainstreaming" gender in the news.

The fact that women put up with so much harassment which has now been exposed, is a tribute to their spirit. The trauma has stayed with them for so many years, and has only surfaced now. It is something to be acknowledged and addressed, not dismissed. To eradicate patriarchy is a common goal. Sexual harassment has to be addressed and acknowledged as a reality.

Quite simply, if women journalists have been victimised, courage lies in their standing up for themselves.

*Mathias is executive editor, Economic & Political Weekly. Menon is an independent journalist and author of Riots and After in Mumbai, Reporting Pakistan and A Frayed History: The Journey of Cotton in India (co-authored)*

## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

Nicolás Maduro has failed his country. Now the US response has raised the stakes. —THE GUARDIAN

## Faith, science and spectacle

At the Kumbh, they meet and melt into one another



### IN GOOD FAITH

ANANYA AWASTHI

WHAT IS SHRADDHA? Is it analogous to "faith" as defined in the English language? According to the Oxford dictionary, "faith" is a "strong belief in the doctrines of a religion, based on spiritual conviction rather than proof". In this case, spiritual conviction is merely seen and understood through a scientific lens, thus requiring proof for its validation. While in Sanskrit etymology, *shraddha* is made of two words, *srat* which means heart and *dha* that means to place — taken together, they mean to put one's heart to. This stands in direct contradiction to the Western understanding of faith, which seems to signify a blind belief based purely on spiritual conviction.

In this scientific context, it becomes pertinent to question the faith of millions of devotees who assembled at the Kumbh Mela this year. Does their faith contradict science or does *shraddha* have a deeper transcendental meaning beyond the realms of science and proof, though not necessarily unscientific?

Let us first examine the relationship of science with the timeless tradition of Kumbh. The "mela" or festivities typically spin off on the day of Makar Sankranti. This signifies the Uttarayan or the upward movement of the sun in the northern hemisphere, which was scientifically calculated by the sages over a thousand years ago, much before the invention of the telescope. As has been corroborated by advances in science, the Kumbh is accurately designed to fall on the dates marking the sun's transit to Capricorn, thus signifying the end of the winter solstice. Moreover, traditional learning talks about the churning of the sea or the "samudra manthan", where demigods emerged with a "life nectar". This nectar is believed to have been poured over the meeting point or the "sangam" of Ganga, Yamuna and until very recently, the mythical Saraswati river. Recent advances in satellite imagery have indeed traced the underground of the Saraswati in the northern plains, which is further believed to re-emerge at the "sangam" (until the latter is also proved through scientific rigour).

Again, the Kumbh is specifically celebrated every six or 12 years based on precisely calculated solar cycles. Imagine, in a pre-scientific world where one could not have possibly predicted the existence of any planets or calculated their orbits, in India, astrology and astronomy had advanced to a complementary association. Scientific and mathematical calculations confirm that the

Kumbh has indeed been traditionally celebrated to match the entry of Jupiter in Aries or Leo and the entry of the sun and moon in the Capricorn orbit. This planetary alignment is shown to enhance the electro-magnetic field of the earth which in turn affects biological systems. Studies in the area of biomagnetism have shown how human bodies not only emit electromagnetic forces but also respond to charged fields in the environment. Uses of diathermy in pain reduction and low amounts of pulsed electromagnetic field therapy in improving emotional wellbeing and treatment of psychiatric disorders has been widely documented.

This brings us to the second realm of faith, meditation and energies. The Kumbh attracts a diverse set of audiences. These include *sadhus* and *sadhvis* who use this opportunity to practise meditation, a large proportion of the so-called illiterate people who travel by foot, carts or trains to experience this "mela" with an attitude of *bhakti* or reverence towards the gods or city-bred people, who, for the most part, visit the Kumbh to just behold this magnificent spectacle of the largest gathering of human kind — of course, some of us, do have a hidden intention of "washing our sins". Again, our stereotypical and limited understanding of faith will make us believe that all of the above is nothing more than blind faith that seeks an abstract liberation through an endless pursuit of a mythical nectar.

The field of public health has now woken up to the scientific benefits of yoga, meditation, intermittent fasting and emotional regulation through meta-awareness. Mindfulness-based stress reduction or transcendental meditation using mantras has shown clinical evidence for improved patient recovery. Richard Davidson, head of the Centre for Healthy Minds in the University of Wisconsin, in *Altered Traits* describes experiments done using MRI and PET scans conducted over various cohorts of meditators and yoga practitioners, trained in Indic practices. The results have shown improved brain function, concentration, stress reduction, treatment of psychiatric disorders and cultivation of enduring personality traits like equanimity and selflessness — thanks to our knowledge about neuroplasticity. And the Kumbh or a "pot of knowledge" precisely symbolises the very amalgamation of the mental, spiritual and emotional wellbeing, albeit in a "not so cool", traditional format.

Can it be said, then, that faith by itself has been scientifically designed? Traditional knowledge and rituals like the congregation of devotees in Kumbh has over the ages stood its ground on pure *shraddha* and "blind" confidence. The modern scientific community often tends to ignore, belittle or worse, berate our intangible heritage for want of proof. But what happens when scientific research, starts paving the way towards evidence in favour of faith and its useful impact on our health, wellbeing and happiness?

*The writer is assistant director, Harvard India Research Center and writes on health, wellbeing and Indic philosophies*

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### MACHINES DON'T LIE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial 'Let EVM be' (IE, January 25). It is highly unfortunate that every now and then opposition parties start criticising electronic voting machines for their defeats. They allege that the ruling party is involved in rigging the elections through faulty EVMs. If that is the case, the BJP would not have lost Karnataka, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan. By raising questions on EVMs, they are not only blaming BJP, but an institution like the election commission as well.

Bal Govind, Noida

### PRIYANKA IN FOCUS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Politician Priyanka' (IE, January 25). This is certainly a daring move as she has been given the charge of a region that will be under national spotlight. All failures and victories here shall be magnified in front of the nation. She needs to take a strong guard as she will be facing a flurry of questions about her husband's land deals or the scams during under the ten years of UPA rule. Priyanka has always been considered a dead ringer of her grandmother. Hopefully, just like her grandmother, Priyanka will also tackle all adversaries and ride the wave of success.

Prakhar Agarwal, Hyderabad

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Politician Priyanka' (IE, January 25). Priyanka's entry is unsurprising as she led the party campaign before in Raebareli and Amethi for her mother Sonia and brother Rahul respectively. Her new po-

### 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](mailto: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

sition may be seen as a natural culmination of her journey as a campaigner. She has the ability to galvanise people, especially the youth. She looks the mirror image of Indira Gandhi. And Priyanka's past record of public engagement suggests that she does not turn the other cheek. However, a face and a famous surname are not enough to win the upcoming election. Congress's organisational and electoral machineries have to be rebuilt in most part of UP. That is not easy. She has to prove herself even as many difficult challenges lie ahead of her.

MZ Ansari, Kanpur

## VIEW FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD



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

### PAK POLICY 101

"WHEN NATIONAL POLICY is substandard," writes Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, a former Pakistan ambassador to the US, China and India, "it puts a ceiling on the success of foreign policy no matter how good it is". In an article in *Dawn* on January 26, Qazi defends the Pakistan foreign office, arguing that weak governments are risk averse and as a result, make poor policy, including with respect to foreign affairs. Qazi describes this as "the soft state" syndrome, which is often a prelude to "a failing state".

India, Qazi states, wants Pakistan to "end the use of terrorist proxies" while Pakistan desires the "progress towards a Kashmir settlement acceptable to opinion in the Valley and radically improving the horrendous human rights situation there". While this deadlock remains, Islamabad ought to continue with an attempt to keep the conversation going: "Pakistan should continue to extend its hand of cooperation irrespective of a lack of response from India. It should keep the LoC quiet as best it can. It should build on the Kartarpur initiative. It should extend normal trading or MFN rights as promised. This is arguably a WTO obligation also."

He also asks that Pakistan be the more magnanimous party in its relationship with India, not least because it makes strategic sense: "India is justly regarded as a large neighbour with a small heart. Many Afghans see Pakistan similarly despite the massive Afghan goodwill accumulated during the Soviet occupation. Why? Pakistan need not create a two-front situation for itself. Being large-hearted towards a smaller neighbour is actually good strategy. Specific issues are more easily resolved when the fundamentals are okay."

### BIG BROTHER

DESPITE CRITICISM FROM multiple quarters, including and especially sections of the media, the Pakistan government has approved the creation of the Pakistan Media Regulatory Authority. This new body will be able to "enable the government to 'regulate' all media in the country from one platform," according to the January 26 editorial in *Dawn*.

The editorial does acknowledge that there may be need for regulation, it must not be imposed by the government: "Indeed, democratic societies, while they may see the

necessity to have regulations for the 24/7 electronic media, allow news publications to check their own content through a code of ethics — in keeping with the principle of freedom of expression. Unfortunately, the PTI's move to bring all media under state control, smacks of an authoritarian streak that should have no place in a democratically elected setup. Remarks such as those uttered by Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry on Thursday that all bodies representing journalist bodies would be taken 'on board' in formulating rules for the PMRA gloss over the fact that these very bodies i.e., CPNE, the Press Council, APNS and PFUJ, had already opposed the creation of the new regulator."

The editorial argues that the current PTI government has nurtured an adversarial relationship with the media, and party cadres have often "hurled invective" at journalists.

### MYANMAR'S IMPUNITY

THE JANUARY 25 editorial in *The Dhaka Tribune* reiterates a familiar lament, one that large sections of the government and media in Bangladesh have been making for about two years.

The thrust of the editorial is that Bangladesh has borne the brunt of the Rohingya refugee crisis, "been extraordinarily generous", while others have not done their part: "The international community's role is of utmost importance: Not only can they ease the burden on Bangladesh by providing the necessary support, they can also play a part in coming up with a long-term solution to the problem. Unfortunately, this has not always been the case. The fact that, over the last few months, more than 1,300 Rohingya refugees have come into Bangladesh from various places around the world goes to show that the pressure on Bangladesh is constantly increasing."

The editorial also believes that Myanmar has escaped the consequences of its actions: "The initial delay in recognizing the atrocities notwithstanding, the international community must do more to meet the needs of the Rohingya people and ensure that Myanmar does the right thing. Myanmar has continuously evaded their responsibilities and denied the Myanmar army's involvement in the heinous crimes carried out against the Rohingya people. This is where the world must act."