

# An Afghan trifecta

For now, Pakistan's support is the source of optimism about US engagement with the Taliban



C RAJA MOHAN

AT LAST WEEK'S talks with the Taliban in Doha, the US reportedly put the withdrawal of its forces from Afghanistan on the table. America may pull out over an 18-month period after an agreement is signed with the Taliban. In return, the Taliban has apparently assured that Afghanistan will not be used for attacks against America and its allies.

Delhi is certainly not alone in being both sceptical about the prospects for these talks and concerned about their success. For, there are not many who vouch for the Taliban's trustworthiness. And American military presence since 2002 has allowed the construction of a modernising Afghanistan and let India deepen its engagement.

This is not a moment, however, for Delhi to stand by and criticise or call for ideal solutions. It is about preparing for significant change in Afghanistan — for good or bad.

After the Doha talks, the US special representative, Zalmay Khalilzad, tweeted about the "significant progress on vital issues". Khalilzad's optimism was reciprocated by the Taliban officials. Both sides also underlined that there were a number of unresolved issues. Many of these are deal-breakers.

These include the questions of a ceasefire and direct talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government in Kabul to settle the post-conflict political arrangements. The Taliban has been negative on both the issues. Beyond these two, there are other more complex issues like the nature of the post-conflict arrangements in Kabul, potential changes to the Afghan Constitution and, above all, the mechanics for peaceful transition to a new political order.

Khalilzad insisted that American agreement to withdraw from Afghanistan is contingent on agreement on all issues. "Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, and 'everything' must include an intra-Afghan dialogue and comprehensive ceasefire", he tweeted.

Khalilzad and the Taliban team are scheduled to sit down at the end of February for a third round of talks. In what is seen as a signal of seriousness, the Taliban last week ap-

pointed Mullah Baradar Akhund to lead the talks with the US. As one of the top leaders of the Taliban, he is expected to negotiate with some authority.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo welcomed the Doha talks as "encouraging" and summed up the current US objectives in Afghanistan — to bring peace, prevent the nation from re-emerging as a haven for terrorists and bring the American boys back home after 17 long years in Afghanistan. Pompeo added that the US wants to "strengthen Afghan sovereignty, independence and prosperity".

These are not easy objectives to reconcile. An American emphasis on bringing the troops home, for example, might make peace and stability in Afghanistan more elusive. Khalilzad is probably the best negotiator the US could have found to address the difficult diplomatic challenge in Afghanistan.

Few in Washington know Afghanistan as well as he does. A first generation Afghan-American, Khalilzad served as the US ambassador to Kabul during 2003-05, soon after the US forces ousted the Taliban from power at the end of 2002.

Khalilzad has his task cut out. On his return to Afghanistan, a decade and a half later, Khalilzad finds three big problems facing the US. The first is that Donald Trump's patience with America's longest war is wearing thin. He is not alone, for the political weariness with America's longest war has grown steadily. Trump has apparently asked for plans to cut a significant number of troops from the current deployment of about 14,000. But no decision has been formally made or announced. For now, at least, it is contingent on what the Taliban and Pakistan do.

Second, the Taliban is playing hard ball. Just hours before it sat down with Khalilzad and his team in Doha, its insurgents launched a deadly attack in Wardak province that killed more than a hundred Afghan security forces. The Taliban says it will fight Kabul and talk to Washington at the same time.

The Taliban's diplomatic assertiveness is rooted in Afghanistan's changed ground re-

ality. When Khalilzad was the American ambassador in Afghanistan, the Taliban was licking its wounds. Soon after, it regrouped and re-emerged as a force to reckon with in Afghanistan — thanks to support from the deep state in Pakistan.

According to the latest US government reports, the Taliban controls more than 12 per cent of the districts in Afghanistan and contests the government in another 33 per cent. This is probably an under-estimation. The Taliban now makes frequent and intense attacks at will across Afghanistan.

Khalilzad's third challenge is Pakistan. Geography makes Pakistan critical for either war or peace in Afghanistan. Trump's predecessors seemed willing to acquiesce in Pakistan's Afghan double game — hunting with America and running with the Taliban. Trump, however, has taken a different tack and challenged Pakistan's support for terror. He has cut off US military assistance and threatened to put Pakistan under international financial sanctions.

We don't know if Trump's pressure is working or Pakistan has become really interested in Afghan peace. But there is no denying that Pakistan's support is the source of the current optimism about the engagement with the Taliban.

While the terms of engagement between the US and the Taliban are visible to the public, we don't know anything about the price that Rawalpindi has set for its cooperation and what the US is willing to offer. Hopefully, the US will keep its partners informed.

If the US effectively uses its considerable residual leverage in Afghanistan, Pakistan does not try and turn Afghanistan into a weak protectorate, and the Taliban does not overreach inside Afghanistan, there is reason for optimism. But if you are a sceptic, you might argue that an Afghan trifecta is near impossible.

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## MINISTER'S CAUTION

Arun Jaitley does well to question CBI in ICICI case. But questioning of CBI must not stop here

UNION MINISTER ARUN Jaitley makes a valid point in his recent blog post on India's premier investigative agency, the CBI, when he suggests that the agency may be casting its net too wide. There is a fundamental difference, the minister said, between "investigative adventurism" and professional investigation. This strong indictment of the CBI — by a serving Cabinet minister, no less — appears to have been triggered by its decision, while filing a case last week against the former CEO of ICICI Bank, Chanda Kochhar, and her husband, Deepak Kochhar and Videocon group MD, Venugopal Dhoot, to name some high-profile former members of the bank's credit committee, the current CEO of the Bank and individuals who now head other institutions in the financial sector. The agency said that it was probing the role of these bankers, too, in approving a loan to the Videocon group, whose MD along with the former MD of ICICI Bank and her husband has been charged with criminal conspiracy, cheating and abuse of office. If the agency includes the who's who of the banking industry, without adequate evidence, it is bound to hurt an industry which has been showing signs of an upswing, while not serving any purpose, Jaitley cautioned.

Certainly, Jaitley is right in criticising the CBI for naming several bankers without any evidence of complicity. He also does well to remind the nation that a major reason for the agency's poor conviction rates is that "adventurism and megalomania" overtake those probing such cases, resulting in professionalism taking a back seat. However, the questioning of the CBI's credentials by a senior Cabinet minister, welcome as it is, should not be viewed in isolation. It raises fundamental questions about the professional conduct and functioning of the "caged parrot", riven by internal conflicts and the malaise of overreach, not just when it comes to bankers, in the public or private sectors, but also when it is wielded by ruling regimes, irrespective of political colour, against their opponents. It is important for any scrutiny of the agency to go beyond its alleged fishing expedition in the ICICI case.

Over the years, the CBI's functioning has invited criticism from parties of the Opposition and also from the Supreme Court, which has attempted to insulate it from political interference and bolster its independence. Now, with a senior minister of the government also publicly turning a critical eye on the agency, it must be hoped that a turning point has been reached or is within sight. The CBI must know that there will be greater, more unsparing scrutiny of its conduct and actions — in all cases, including and especially those that are, and are seen to be, politically loaded.

## BACK TO SCHOOL

Delhi government's focus on school education holds out hope — of greater policy-political priority to primary education

YEAR AFTER YEAR, the Annual Status Of Education Report (ASER) flags the abysmal learning levels of schoolgoing children, particularly in government schools. In 2018, for example, only half the children in rural India enrolled in class 5 could read a class 3 text. Yet, it is rare that state governments, or even political actors in general, place education policy at political centrestage. On January 28, Delhi's Aam Aadmi Party government live-streamed across social media platforms the inauguration of 11,000 new classrooms by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to address the infrastructure shortfall in the city's government schools. The Delhi government has also vigorously publicised the "mega Parent Teacher Meeting (PTM)" taking place on the same day. While much of this is a media-savvy government showcasing itself, the fact that the spotlight is on the school classroom is heartening.

By focusing on government school education, Delhi government is taking a step towards addressing a lacuna that is particularly glaring in north Indian states. Its move to include parents, particularly from low-income families, in their child's pedagogical development has the potential to create a chain of accountability among teachers and school administrators sorely lacking in the past. By addressing the shortfall in infrastructure in government schools, a beginning can be made towards bridging the vast gap in the quality and standards of learning across income and social groups. Apart from programmes undertaken to improve basic reading and arithmetic among children, directly aimed at improving the deficit in learning levels flagged by ASER, the government's willingness to go beyond the traditional model with experiments like the "happiness curriculum" is also promising.

In India's southern states, a longer and larger focus on schools has borne fruit, leading to a better standard in the quality of government educational institutions. This, in turn, has created a virtuous cycle of expectations from successive governments. Delhi government's focus on education is by no means enough; it is at best a beginning. Far more needs to be done to lay the foundations for a workforce that can compete in a global market with constantly shifting needs, both in terms of skills and aptitude. School education is where the future citizenry of a country is moulded. What the AAP's policies hold out is a hope — that politics and policy can be brought back to school and that state governments can make education a priority.

## EPIC FACEOFF

The Australian Open final was the most flawless Djokovic has ever played

EPIC IS PART of the list of cliches applied to everything and nothing in the post-Twitter world. From a fancy kill in a videogame, a particularly satisfying meal to the umpteenth entry in a superhero film franchise. In tennis, it translates to five-setters, never mind it being a two-giants-trading-aces-for-hours snooze-fest. A recent example that caught my eye was Djokovic's win in a hard-fought five-setter over six hours. When you're talking of epic tennis matches, even excellent four sets don't cut it. Djokovic's 6-3, 6-2, 6-3 masterpiece on Sunday then hardly stands a chance.

The Australian Open final was the most flawless Djokovic has ever played, and he once defeated a player 6-0, 6-0, 6-2. He struck the ball early, hard and deep, to throw Nadal off. These are titans who had clashed with each other 52 times over 13 years. At this stage in the game, for one to devise a plan to effectively shut down the other, takes some derring-do. "Things started so quick," Nadal snapped his fingers to explain his heaviest final defeat.

Oxford defines "epic" as "a long poem... narrating the deeds and adventures of legendary figures..." Two hours and four minutes is not long for what was to be a hard-fought battle between world's top two who had razed through journeymen and wunderkinds. But their journeys to the Sunday final stretch further back. Nadal is in the middle of yet another comeback in an illustrious but injury-riddled career. Djokovic struggled with confidence issues and poor health. The Australian Open thus was the piece de resistance. These aren't the tireless 25-year-olds circa 2006. Their tennis is more cerebral, and on the red clay of France, Nadal can inflict a similar scoreline. "I might have figured him out for the match. But I didn't figure him out for life," assessed Djokovic. The next generation's romantics would have to wait. The modern-day Homer and Virgil aren't done penning their final stanzas. Now, that's epic.



SATYAM VISWANATHAN

IN A WORLD grappling with the demons of parochialism, a new generation of tennis stars is reminding us of the beauty that globalisation has wrought.

Naomi Osaka, half-Japanese, half-Haitian, and completely brilliant, is the world's number one ranked female player. Stefanos Tsitsipas the half-Russian, half-Greek sensation who defeated Roger Federer in the Australian Open last week, is being hailed as the future of the men's game. Frances Tiafoe, the son of refugees from Sierra Leone, whose father found employment as a construction worker at a tennis centre near Washington DC, is the new face of American tennis. Alex de Minaur born to a Spanish mother and Uruguayan father, represents Australia with pride, as does tennis' enfant terrible the half-Greek, half-Malaysian Nick Kyrgios.

These rising stars are doing more than just adding a multi-cultural flavour to the tennis world. They are forcing the countries they represent to confront issues of national identity and race, and showing the world what hungry immigrants (and their children) can achieve. Osaka is changing the discourse in Japan, a country that has deeply embedded notions of racial purity. Australia's politicians might be turning away boats full of desperate refugees, but its sports-loving citizens adore the children of immigrants who shine on the field.

From Jesse Owens to Martina Navratilova to the Williams sisters, minorities and immigrants have used sporting excellence to hold a mirror to racism, authoritarianism, and hyper-nationalism. Now, children born from the

## IMPORTANCE OF NAOMI OSAKA

She is part of a new generation of multi-ethnic, multi-cultural sports icons

From Jesse Owens to Martina Navratilova to the Williams sisters, minorities and immigrants have long used sporting excellence to hold a mirror to the racism, authoritarianism, and hyper-nationalism that has been the scourge of human societies everywhere in the last century. Now, children born from the cross-cultural currents enabled by the globalisation of the 20th century are making their mark in a world turning increasingly insular.

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These stars have come to showcase, inadvertently, the strange quirks of fate in a multi-racial, multi-cultural world. Osaka's blood is as Haitian (of African origin) as it is Japanese, and the country that has had the biggest role in her development is the US where her parents, inspired by the story of the Williams sisters, moved her to at the age of three. Osaka grew up hearing Creole, Japanese and English at home. Today Japanese fans claim her as their own, but it is debatable if she would have been accepted as easily had her Haitian-African genes dominated her facial features, or if she had retained her father's last name instead of her mother's (a call her parents took, to make it less difficult for Naomi to be accepted in Japan, where she was born). To call Osaka the first "Asian" world number one, is perhaps as accurate as it is to call Barack Obama America's first "black" president. Obama, the product of a Kenyan father and white mother, belongs as much to African-American culture as he does to white America.

Yet we embrace these children of destiny who, with a fortuitous combination of the "right" name and "right" dominant racial gene, have honed their rare talents. "Fortuitous" is probably not the adjective they would choose, given the struggles that Obama as a visibly black man in America and Osaka as a visibly biracial woman in Japan, had to endure. But in a world where the politics of hate and mistrust is being used to exploit the worst human

instincts, stoking fear of the outsider and the Other, these new age multi-ethnic, multi-cultural stars are a priceless gift.

Today cutting-edge genomic technology is demonstrating how almost all modern human beings are effectively mixed race. DNA testing services accessible to the general public, such as The Genographic Project (a multi-year, non-profit, research initiative led by National Geographic) and AncestryDNA, reveal the percentage of your genome that is affiliated with specific regions and ethnic groups across the world. A few years ago, the journal *Nature* reported findings from three separate teams of geneticists who surveyed DNA collected from cultures around the globe, and arrived at the same conclusion — that all non-Africans today trace their ancestry to a single population of early humans emerging from Africa between 50,000 and 80,000 years ago.

National and ethnic allegiances are exposed for the bizarre, artificial constructs that they are, when DNA tests reveal how diverse the genetic composition of each human being is. Yet racial and communal prejudice is as rife as ever in today's world with temples, mosques, walls, and identity cards forming the basis for electoral battles in supposedly evolved democratic societies.

Naomi Osaka and her beautifully hybrid peers offer a much-needed counter balance to the nastiness of a world gone mad. May their tribe increase.

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## JANUARY 29, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

CHINA'S GREAT SHIFT THE PEOPLE'S DAILY in Peking declared that the philosophy that guided China for more than a decade "that political preaching would make people work hard" is "absurd". "High-sounding words and empty talk about revolution that do not take the well-being of the masses into consideration have nothing radical," it said. It said: "The peasants can be encouraged to work hard only to achieve increasing prosperity. Lin Piao and the gang of four preached that the more impoverished the peasants, the more revolutionary they would become. This is sheer nonsense." The daily referred to the late Defence Minister Lin Piao, accused of plotting against the late

Chairman Mao Zedong, and four radical leaders headed by Mao's wife, Chiang Ching. After imposing their views on China for more than a decade, they were purged in 1976 on charges of trying to cause chaos and seize power. added: "The peasants' socialist consciousness stems from the real political and material benefits that have derived from socialism. It does not stem from any political preaching". The editorial added that China's peasants had to be self-reliant because China was poor and "it was impossible for the State to provide them with everything".

DENG IN THE US DENG XIAOPING, THE driving force in China's

outward reach to the West, came to the United States for talks with President Jimmy Carter and a coast-to-coast tour that will draw the most advanced and most populous nations of the world closer together.

RIOTS IN TEHERAN THE WORST ANTI-GOVERNMENT rioting in Teheran in months erupted after Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini said he would refuse to receive Shahpour Bakhtiar in his capacity as prime minister. Agencies put the death toll at 27. Official reports said 18 were killed and 200 wounded. Riot troops opened fire as thousands of demonstrators took to the streets to chant "death to Bakhtiar".



# 15 THE IDEAS PAGE

## The suitable leader

The Central Armed Police Forces are primarily a reserve resource for supporting state police. They should continue to be headed by IPS officials



SUDHANSHU SARANGI AND ABHINAV KUMAR

THE INDIAN POLICE Service (IPS) continues to evoke mixed sentiments amongst all those it is meant to serve and lead. While it retains its prestige and allure amongst young aspirants, high-profile events such as the ugly mess in the CBI continue to dent the service. More fundamentally, every routine problem relating to the police in India is blamed on the service. Against this backdrop, the leadership provided by the IPS to five of the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF), namely BSF, ITBP, SSB, CISF and CRPF, is now being questioned. Beside legal challenges by CAPF cadre officers seeking parity with the IPS, a Rajya Sabha committee has also recommended that leadership positions currently reserved for the IPS in the CAPFs may be abolished outright, or at least severely curtailed.

Perhaps a section of our elected representatives and our civil society sincerely feel that the IPS has outlived its utility, and must be given a quiet burial. Even if that may be the case, we believe this issue requires a wider public debate before a final view is taken. Given the constitutional status of the All India Services (AIS), an amendment to the Constitution and the relevant acts and rules would also be required.

The two AIS, the IAS and IPS, were created as a huge leap of faith in administrative continuity by the founders of our republic. Despite their colonial origin and distinctly elitist flavour, they were given a constitutional status and the broadest of mandates in manning existing instruments of governance, and in creating new ones. Seven decades is a long enough time span to do some honest stock-taking and, if necessary, carry out radical overhaul.

The current structure of recruitment to both the IAS and IPS provides that 40 per cent of a state's cadre strength is for central deputation posts, which means about 1,100 IPS officers have been recruited to man central government positions. It is another matter that currently there are about only 550 posts for the IPS in the central government. The idea that they are interlopers is patently absurd because they have been recruited to be posted to leadership positions in the central government. In fact, the states are always reluctant to spare IPS officers for central deputation. The second issue that merits attention is that police is in the state list of the Constitution. In peacetime, the CAPFs are primarily a reserve resource for supporting the state police forces. It is, therefore, necessary that their leadership is in complete synergy in understanding the challenges of policing at the state and central level.

Do we want the CAPFs to acquire a more military character? Or do we want them to strengthen our policing capacities? How will abolition of the IPS from the CAPFs affect their prominent role in aid of civil authorities in our districts and states? Do their respective primary mandates, namely border guarding for the BSF, ITBP & SSB, industrial security for the CISF, and internal security for the CRPF, make a compelling case for complete autonomy for their respective cadres? Or are these primary mandates themselves a subset of policing in peacetime? And last but not least, we need to take an honest look at the role played by the



C R Sasikumar

IPS in creating and growing these organisations in the past before we can determine that in future, the IPS has no meaningful role left to play in these organisations. And if that be the case, is it time to abolish the IPS altogether?

The country could do away with the AIS completely, but that would mean the CAPFs would be led by officers who have never managed police stations or understand policing. As things stand today, IAS and IPS officers get exposure to both issues at the grassroots and the challenges of policy making at the Centre. Both these experiences are rich and useful in the making of the civil/police leadership.

In the last four decades, India's police forces have undergone a remarkable transformation. The separatist movements in Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, and the Northeast, the left-wing rebellion in the states of central and south India, and terror strikes elsewhere, have dominated our internal security discourse. Among the CAPFs, the Assam Rifles has a purely military character both in terms of organisation and mandate, while the RPF is under the Railway Ministry with a token IPS presence and a very limited mandate. The debate is primarily about the five CAPFs that are under the MHA with IPS leadership in key positions, namely the CRPF, BSF, CISF, SSB and ITBP. Of these five, the CRPF was created during British rule, whereas the remaining four have been created post Independence, and nurtured and led by the IPS from their inception.

Criticism of continued IPS presence in these CAPFs is based on three arguments. First, that IPS officers have no experience of cutting-edge leadership in these organisations at the company and battalion level. Second, the cadres of these CAPFs are now capable of leading them on their own. Third, these organisations have a primarily military character and, therefore, a civil service like the IPS has no useful role to play in them.

The first argument is demonstrably false. The various state police forces between them have a few hundred battalions of armed police and India Reserve Battalions that have IPS commandants. Most IPS officers do a stint or two in these posts. Earlier, IPS officers used to command CAPF battalions too. But the rapid growth of the CAPFs since the 1980s, combined with recruitment to the IPS that has fluctuated around the 100 mark for the last three decades, has meant enough IPS officers were simply not available to man these positions at the CO level. This is mischievously projected as some kind of reluctance by IPS officers to come to these organisations.

How will abolition of the IPS from the CAPFs affect their prominent role in aid of civil authorities in our districts and states? Do their respective primary mandates, namely border guarding for the BSF, ITBP & SSB, industrial security for the CISF, and internal security for the CRPF, make a compelling case for complete autonomy for their respective cadres? Or are these primary mandates themselves a subset of policing in peacetime? And last but not least, we need to take an honest look at the role played by the IPS in creating and growing these organisations in the past before we can determine that in future, the IPS has no meaningful role left to play in these organisations. And if that be the case, is it time to abolish the IPS altogether?

The writers are serving IPS officers. Views are personal

## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The international community should encourage forces of Venezuela to peacefully solve the issue within the framework of dialogue. Picking sides will not be conducive to the solution." — GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA

## Next step to clean fuel

More information on health hazards of traditional cooking fuels can make rural poor more inclined towards LPG



PURNAMITA DASGUPTA, AND KATHARINA MICHAELOWA

RECENTLY, THERE HAS been a considerable reduction in the prices of non-subsidised LPG cylinders. Unless LPG subsidies suffer from extreme mis-targeting, it should rather be the price on the subsidised market that matters for the poor. This price has hardly changed. If the main objective is to help the poor to switch from cooking with cow dung and firewood to the more healthy alternative of LPG, other factors are also relevant. Research suggests that simply informing people about the deadly effects of smoke from the chulha may significantly influence their behaviour.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) attributes about one million deaths (annually) to the use of solid cooking fuels in India. The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) seeks to promote the use of LPG as a clean alternative. Launched in 2016, the programme claims success in providing LPG connections to over 60 million poor households. This is an important first step towards the switch to clean cooking fuels. However, substantial numbers of rural households with LPG connections continue to rely on solid biomass for cooking as a primary fuel. Understandably, the concern now is to enhance consumption of LPG in such homes.

Our study carried out in the framework of the Indo-Swiss Joint Research Programme in the Social Sciences sheds light on promising pathways to support the fuel switch. It focused on the impact of providing information on the health-related ill-effects of cooking with solid biomass fuels on LPG consumption. The findings offer new insights that could encourage a more regular use of LPG among poor rural households. We sampled 550 PMUY households across rural Bikaner — NSS data indicates that the pattern of fuel consumption in Bikaner district is fairly representative of rural areas of north Indian states.

Only 13 per cent of our respondents considered that serious health hazards do exist; 27 per cent perceived no health problems and 60 per cent believed that health consequences were limited to temporary irritations such as coughing or watering of eyes. Clearly, poor rural households are unaware how severely indoor air pollution from solid biomass use can affect their health, and thereby lack the basic knowledge that would enable them to take an informed decision about fuel consumption.

The study adopted a unique approach based on tenets of behavioural economics. In an experimental set up, our enumerators — mostly postgraduate students at the agricultural university — presented basic information to half the respondents. They explained the serious health effects such as chronic lung diseases, childhood pneumonia, cardiovascular disease and cataract to them. This brief exercise led to a statistically significant improvement in health knowledge,

an increased willingness to pay (WTP) for the next LPG refill, and a substantial increase in the actual use of LPG.

Households stated their willingness to pay in the framework of a well-established demand-revealing mechanism. They obtained a discount voucher (facilitated by the research team in partnership with local LPG distributors) if their stated WTP was at least as high as the offer price that they themselves subsequently drew at random from a given price range. The maximum price was Rs 480, the prevailing (subsidised) price for a refill (14.5 kg cylinder). The voucher had limited validity such that it could be used only if the household used up the LPG remaining in the currently consumed cylinder twice as quickly as it would have done under normal circumstances. This date was determined on the basis of prior questions on normal consumption along with cross-checking of the entries in the consumer's gas book. Thus, we assessed the WTP for a refill under the constraint of more regular consumption than the prevailing pattern.

Under this condition, with no additional information, the average household was ready to spend Rs 352, considerably less than the prevailing subsidised price. Put in perspective, at current prices and awareness levels, rural households appeared unlikely to substantially enhance their consumption of LPG. However, the provision of health information leads households to take a more informed decision, which in turn increases their WTP. Our brief intervention led to a relatively small though statistically significant difference in the WTP — from Rs 352 to Rs 362. Use of vouchers was 36 per cent higher among households that received health information.

It is reasonable to expect that a broader intervention embedded in the general LPG campaigns or within health and nutrition programmes administered to women and children in other contexts will translate into even stronger and more sustained effects. However, this requires the delivery of messages on specific effects rather than just talking about "clean" fuels, which can refer to a variety of things, including the possibility to keep the kitchen looking nice and white.

In contrast to what is commonly believed, our findings suggest that both men and women need to be convinced to achieve the desired impact. Targeting health-related information only towards women may not make a significant difference since the final decision about the purchase of a relatively expensive good such as an LPG refill is often taken by men or at best, jointly.

Complementary measures that address the problem of financial and liquidity constraints as well as the regularity and ease of access to supplies will also continue to be relevant in determining consumption. Some ongoing measures by oil marketing companies that point in the right direction to tackle these are the option to use smaller cylinders, parallel connections and decoupling of loan repayments for the stove and the first cylinder from subsequent LPG consumption.

Our evidence strongly suggests a need for refocusing the ongoing campaigns on information about the important health benefits of cooking with LPG, alongside these other complementary activities.

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## Rule-taker to rule-maker

India must build the capacity to make its G20 presidency in the future a success



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IN 2022, INDIA will be host to the G20, or Group of 20 nations, the world's most influential economic multilateral forum. It is the agenda-setting forum that develops and guides rules of global economic governance. The G20 leaders-level dialogue came into being during the western financial crisis of 2008, when the large developing economies including India and China, helped fund the G8 countries out of the crisis.

The G20 is unique. Here, developing countries can display their political, economic and intellectual leadership on a par with the most powerful countries. The G20's rotating presidency ensures that no one country dominates the agenda. Instead, the G20 host sets an annual agenda, wielding vast direct and indirect influence on nations' economies.

Is India ready for this leadership? Does it have a clear global financial agenda? Does the country have the capacity to lead the G20 year intellectually, financially, managerially and administratively? At some levels, India is ready. Indian business and industry is becoming a noteworthy competitor globally. The country's domestic economy is starting to pick up, thanks to structural economic reforms. The central government is economically stronger, and the states are starting to learn about economic independence, making them

more aligned with their global counterparts.

Geopolitically, India is more internationally engaged but less so geoeconomically. Its narrow focus is on the World Bank, IMF, WTO and foreign investment issues. But India has much to contribute on issues like reconfiguration of global financial regulations, design of a new framework for trade in services and the digital economy and establishing better cross-border standards for transparency in financial flows. To make its G20 year a success, India has to address organisational challenges, where the country has an infrastructure, management and intellectual gap.

First, a G20 presidency brings together several global leaders, their attending delegations, and independent experts. Unlike the Olympics and more like Davos, this effort is focused on a small but powerful group which expects good airports, accommodation, conference facilities, and communications infrastructure all year round.

Second, the president of the G20 is tasked with leading and managing the global economic agenda for the year. This is typically undertaken by the finance and foreign ministry and a special appointee as G20 sherpa, which together act as the secretariat to the G20 presidency. In India, the ministries have fine officers with this knowledge, but they are over-

worked and limited by their short tenures.

Global economic governance is no single ministry's mandate. For example, the ministries of commerce, energy, agriculture have deep stakes in the emerging global economic architecture. The RBI and SEBI play a crucial role in contributing to the formulation of global financial regulations. They all have to work as one.

Third, the logistical exercise is monumental, and unprecedented for India. While India has organised annual conferences like Vibrant Gujarat, the G20's all-year requirements are more intense and sophisticated. It needs an energetic secretariat to organise over 150 high-level ministerial, sub-ministerial and sub-forum meetings through the year; at least 50 task forces lead scores of meetings including those by sub-forums for think tanks and business. Then there is content management, negotiation and feedback processes and developing and executing the year-long agenda. India's closest experience was in 2016 when as chair of the five BRICS countries, the government led over 100 meetings but with uneven success in the presidency year.

Fourth, intellectually, India is constrained on capacity. There is limited expertise within think tanks or academia on this subject. It requires deep inter-disciplinary research on the

international monetary system, global financial architecture, global trading system, and global climate, energy and sustainability issues. This restricts India to being a passive rule-taker, not rule-maker or designer of global economic rules. Consequential economic decisions are then driven by the West, and increasingly by China — neither of which are suitable for an India that should be a leading thinker of the new global economic era.

Hosting a successful G20 presidency in 2022 then, is a welcome challenge. Preparations must begin now. Like other countries, the government will have to work together with its think tanks, businesses and civil society to develop a working mechanism and an agenda for 2022.

India is a growing, emerging economy but leads no global economic forums. As former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan said at the inauguration of India's first official G20 sub-forum, the Think20 meeting, led by Gateway House in 2015, "those who hold the pen, write the rules". The time has come for India to both hold the pen and write the rules for a more equitable global economics and governance.

The writer is director, research, Gateway House: Indian Council on Global Relations, Mumbai

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### BAD PRECEDENT

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'No divine right' (IE, January 28). The implementation of the IBC has helped Indian banks significantly in cleaning up their balance sheet besides leading to a notable behavioural change among borrowers. However, waiver of agricultural loans can set a dangerous precedent, affecting the credit behaviour of the rural population adversely. The government must ensure that such doles are discouraged.

Ketan Kishan, Gurgaon

### CATALYSING HATE

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'UP govt direct officials to withdraw 18 cases' (IE, January 28). The Uttar Pradesh government's decision is worrying. It will encourage hate-mongers, paving the way for more communal strife. The withdrawal of riot cases will have the domino effect. Hopefully the concerned courts will look into these aspects.

SS Paul, Nadia

### BAD ECONOMICS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Whose quota is it anyway?' (IE, January 28). The new quota will not deliver the benefits it intends to provide. That a country which uses consumption expenditure

### 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.

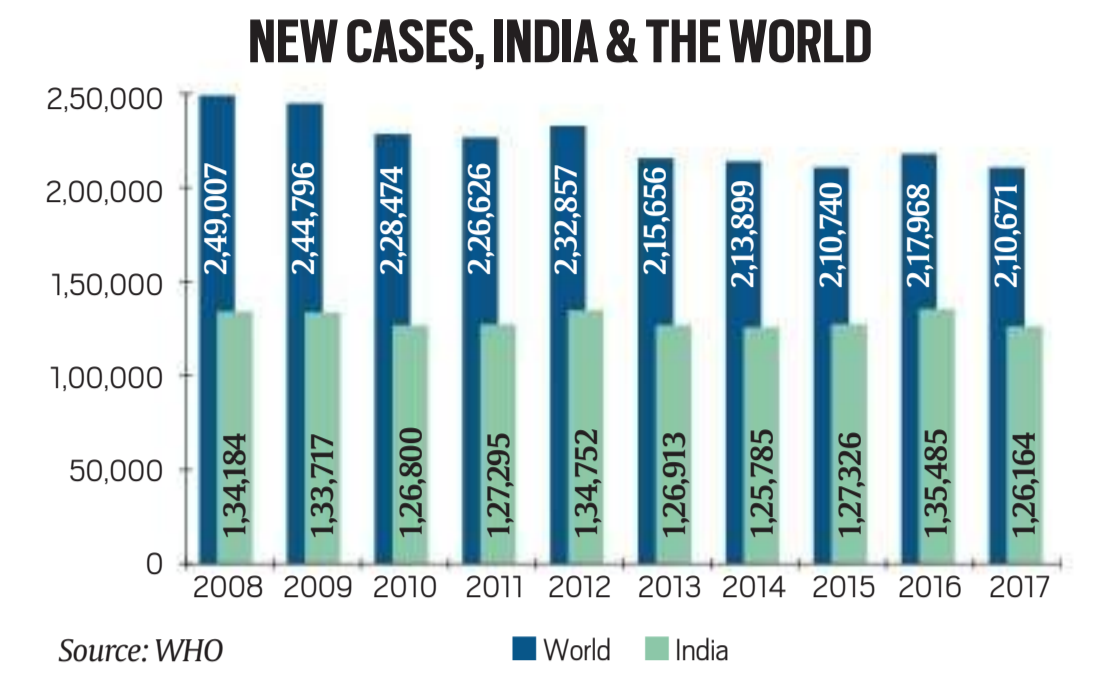
THE WINNER RECEIVES SELECT EXPRESS PUBLICATIONS

as a proxy for income to calculate the poverty line is now using an arbitrary income threshold to disburse the benefits of the new quota is appalling. Politically, this might work due to the myopic Indian electorate but it is bad economic policy.

Anish Manchanda, via email



**TELLING NUMBERS**  
World Leprosy Day: over half of new cases are detected in India



EVERY YEAR, over 2 lakh new leprosy cases are detected around the world, with India accounting for more than half of these. World Leprosy Day, which focuses on the target of zero cases of leprosy-related disabilities in children, was observed globally on January 27 (the last Sunday of January) and will be observed in India on January 30 (MK Gandhi's death anniversary). A look at the trends of the disease in the world and India, from data collated from the websites of the World Health Organization (WHO) and India's National Leprosy Eradication Programme (NLEP):

- India accounts for 60% of new cases detected in 2017 — 1.26 lakh out of 2.10 lakh. The country's numbers have consistently been more than half the world figures since 2008.
- New cases have declined gradually since 2008. However, they hit a sudden spike in 2012 and 2016. This was the trend for both India and globally.
- As of March 2018, Bihar had 14,338 cases of leprosy, followed by India's most populous state, Uttar Pradesh, with 12,583 cases. Next were Maharashtra (9,836) and West Bengal (9,175).
- In terms of prevalence, the Union Territory of Dadra & Nagar Haveli topped the count, with its 202 cases (March 2018) representing 4.85 cases per 1 lakh population. Among the states, Chhattisgarh had the highest prevalence (2.25).

TOP 5 INDIAN STATES, BY NUMBER OF CASES	PREVALENCE (EXCLUDING UTs) PER LAKH POPULATION
Bihar 14,338	Chhattisgarh 2.25
Uttar Pradesh 12,583	Odisha 1.38
Maharashtra 9,836	Bihar 1.18
West Bengal 9,175	Jharkhand 1.05
Chhattisgarh 6,499	West Bengal 0.92

Source: National Leprosy Eradication Programme; figures as of March 2018

**DECISION 2019**  
THE QUESTIONS THAT MATTER

**Maharashtra: why are BJP, Sena still together?**

GIRISH KUBER  
MUMBAI, JANUARY 28

**Why is the BJP keen on an alliance with the Shiv Sena despite being repeatedly humiliated by it?**  
No option, is the obvious answer. With the situation in Uttar Pradesh rapidly changing with the coming together of the SP and BSP, the BJP desperately needs a state that can help it retain power at the Centre. If UP, with 80 seats in Lok Sabha, is the most important state for any dispensation, Maharashtra, with 48 seats, follows right behind. For the BJP, Maharashtra is all the more crucial because in UP, the party can only go downhill. Having pocketed 73 out of 80 seats (with its ally Apna Dal) in 2014, it is almost impossible for the BJP to better its performance in the state. (The NDA now has 70 seats in UP, having lost the Lok Sabha byelections in Kairana, Phulpur and Gorakhpur.)  
The reality of hard numbers has compelled the BJP to stick with the Sena, one of its oldest partners. In 2014, the saffron combine won as many as 41 seats out of 48, with the Sena bagging 18. More importantly, the Sena won 20.82% of the vote, against the BJP's 27%. If the allies were to contest separately, the Sena would undoubtedly be a major loser — but it will also hurt the BJP. At a time when the Congress (18.29% in 2014) and the NCP (16.12%) have already formed a united front, this is a blow the BJP cannot afford. (See projections in maps on the right)

**Does this mean a powerful national party has surrendered before a minor regional player?**

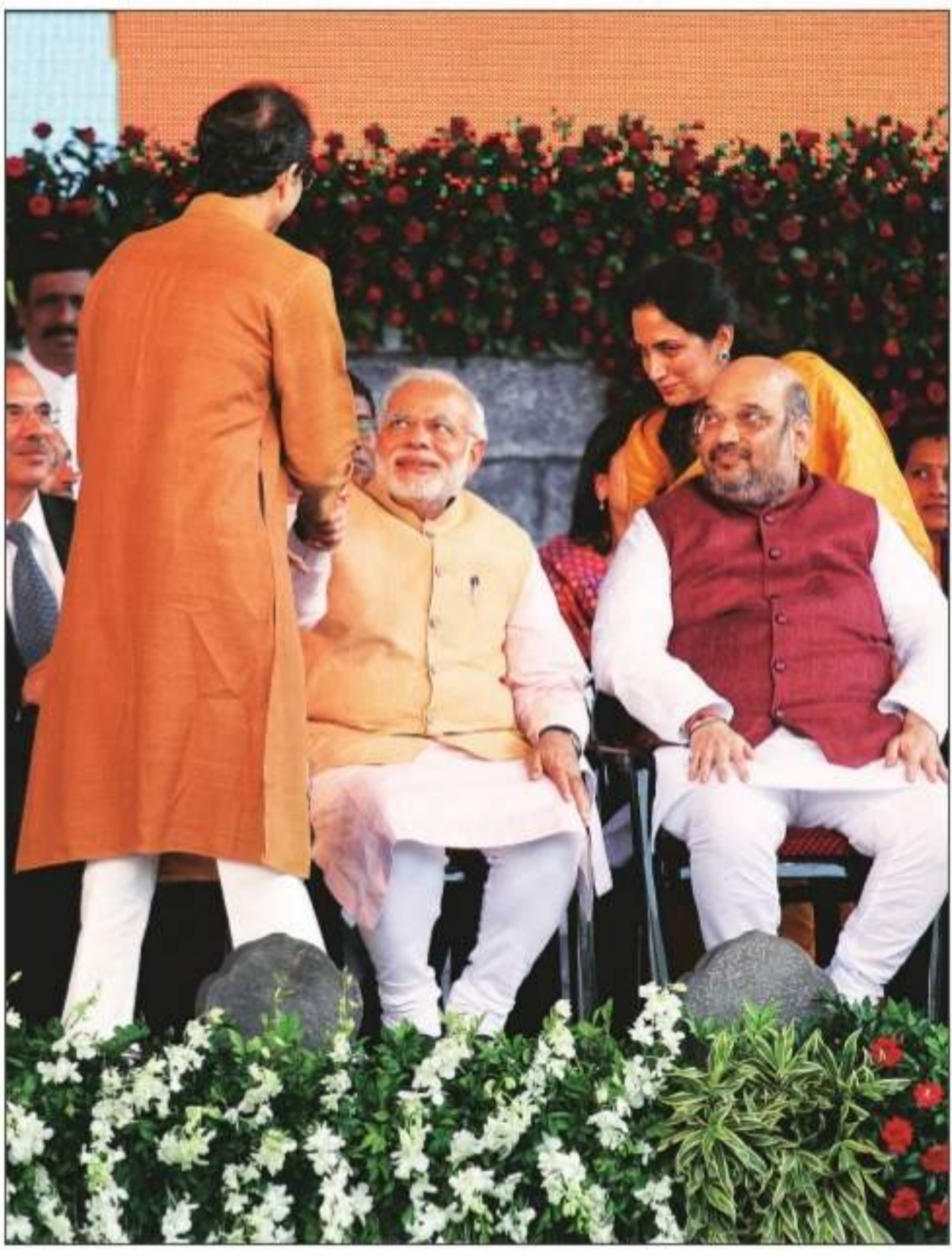
While it may seem this way, it isn't really so. To those who are familiar with the Sena's swing politics, the mending of fences with the BJP comes as no surprise. The break-up of the alliance, despite having seemed imminent on several occasions, was never really on the cards. The BJP leadership, from Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis to party chief Amit Shah, was fully aware of the Sena's limited options and did not, therefore, pay heed to its criticism and complaints, or make an effort to dispel its apprehensions. The BJP knows that the predicament of the Sena is bigger than the BJP's. Their alliance is a perfect marriage of (in)convenience, in which both partners prefer the pain of staying together to going their separate ways, which would be even more painful.

**But why has the Sena lost so much ground in Maharashtra?**

The answer lies in the rapidly changing political situation in Maharashtra, in which the Sena is trying hard to stay relevant. The Sena was born with a call to save the Marathi Manoos from the incessant onslaught of migrants who were hogging jobs in Mumbai. This message worked as long as it retained resonance, and the Sena was honest in its mission. Its arm Sthaniya Lokadhikar Samiti shepherded jobless Marathi youth to multinational corporations, big industrial houses, and even PSUs, and was extremely popular in Marathi households. In the sixties and seventies, Marathi youth flocked to the Sena.  
Things changed after the mills strike in Mumbai in 1982. Mill owners, mainly Gujaratis and Marwaris, used Sena supremo Bal Thackeray to neutralise the appeal of the firebrand labour leader Datta Samant. The strike changed both Mumbai's complexion and the Sena's political character. Mumbai witnessed the mass exodus of out-of-work Maharashtrian mill workers to their homes

**Saffron allies can't live with, leave each other**

For the BJP, being with the Shiv Sena is critical to holding off the Congress-NCP alliance. For the Shiv Sena, breaking away from BJP poses an existential threat



Uddhav Thackeray with Narendra Modi and Amit Shah at the swearing-in of Devendra Fadnavis in Mumbai in 2014. Pradip Das/Express Archive

elsewhere in the state. And there was a massive influx of cheap labour into the city, mainly from North India, to cater to the demands of the rising real estate sector. Over time, the Sena lost a chunk of its appeal for the Marathi population, which itself declined significantly in Mumbai.

**How did the Shiv Sena respond to this situation?**

It jumped on to the Hindutva bandwagon. In the eighties, as the BJP inaugurated Hindutva politics on the national stage, it looked for a regional partner — and guided by a skilful matchmaker like Pramod Mahajan, it found an ideal ally in the Sena. The Sena asserted its Hindutva agenda by openly supporting the Ramjanmabhoomi agitation, and took credit for the destruction of the Babri Masjid. In the 1995 Assembly elections, their alliance dethroned the Congress for the first time in Maharashtra, and remained in power until 1999, with first Manohar Joshi and then Narayan Rane of the Sena as Chief Minister. In 1999, when state elections were held along with Lok Sabha polls, the allies decided that the Sena would contest 171 seats in the Assembly, leaving 117 for the BJP — while at the Centre, the BJP would be the senior partner. The alliance lost, but the allies stayed together — mainly because Atal Bihari Vajpayee, L K Advani, and most importantly, Mahajan, shared a great rapport with Bal Thackeray. They fought the 2004 polls too, on the 171-117 formula — but lost again. And at the Centre, the NDA too, was defeated.

**Why and when did their relationship deteriorate?**

The rise of Narendra Modi made the real difference. Until the advent of Modi, the saffron camp had only one "Hindu Hriday Samrat" — Thackeray. In 2012, the ailing Sena supremo passed away, and as the BJP expanded, it cut into the Sena's space. The new BJP leadership made it clear that it did not believe in sharing and cooperating — its slogan "Shat Pratishat BJP (100% BJP)" has rattled the Sena, which has seen the BJP growing at its expense. The Sena's insecurity has manifested itself in continuous sabre-rattling.

**But what stops the Sena from cutting ties and walking away from the BJP?**

It is likely to face a two-way split if it chooses that option. One section of the Sena will be absorbed in the BJP, while the Congress and NCP will target the rump aggressively. The Sena's anti-migrant stand makes it untouchable for the Congress and NCP. The Sena has little choice — its alliance with the BJP will, therefore, stay. At least until it is overwhelmed by the law of diminishing returns.

Girish Kuber is Editor, LokSatta

**NEXT #2** Why has the Congress chosen Eastern UP for Priyanka Gandhi's debut?

**IF 2014 ASSEMBLY ELECTION RESULTS ARE PROJECTED ON TO LS CONSTITUENCIES**

BJP and Sena fought 2014 Assembly polls separately. This is how the map changes colour if they fight 2019 Lok Sabha elections separately (Figure I) and if they have an alliance (Figure II). Total seats: 48



Note: These are only projections, and indicate a broad trend. In reality, every election is different, and results of one cannot be used to predict another.

**ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS 2014 PERFORMANCE OF PARTIES**

PARTY	WINNER	2ND PLACE
BJP	122	60
Shiv Sena	63	69
Cong	42	71
NCP	41	56
BVA	3	-
PWPI	3	3
AIMIM	2	3
BBM	1	4
CPI(M)	1	1
MNS	1	6
RSP	1	2
SP	1	-
BSP	-	4
JSS	-	1
RPI	-	1
SWP	-	1
Independents	7	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>288</b>	<b>288</b>

**2ND PLACE IN BJP'S 122 SEATS**

Cong	45	CPI(M)	1
Shiv Sena	32	MNS	1
NCP	31	PWPI	1
BBM	4	RPI	1
BSP	4	Independents	1
AIMIM	1	<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>

**TIP FOR READING LIST**

**THE HISTORY OF HUMAN BEINGS, AS SHAPED BY PLANET EARTH**

WHENEVER they have explored human history, most authors and researchers have taken a similar approach — what have human beings done on Earth over the centuries, and what have they done to the planet? Dr Lewis Dartnell, a London-based astrophysics researcher and author, looks at this from the opposite viewpoint: how has the Earth itself shaped human history?  
*Origins: How the Earth Made Us* looks at how the human species was shaped by the environment. The book describes how geological forces drove humans' evolution in East Africa, and how mountainous terrain led to the development of democracy in Greece. Along the way, Dartnell addresses various questions — for example, how are the Himalayas linked to the orbit of the Earth, and to the formation of the British Isles? — as he explores how the planet has affected the species through its long evolution.  
"All this began, Dartnell argues, with the tectonic processes that created the East African Rift — the area that today runs from Somalia and Ethiopia down to the coast of Mozambique. The uplift of

mountains here caused a rain shadow that dried and warmed East Africa, turned jungle into a park-like savannah, and enticed early hominins to leave the trees and become game hunters, runners, thinkers, cooks and, eventually, empire builders," *Nature* magazine says in an article on the book.  
As for democracy in Greece, the mountainous terrain in the country demanded that foot soldiers fight battles there, "each of whom had a say in events, helping to create democracy", *The Guardian* explains in its review of the book. "A fascinating chapter explains trade winds, the age of exploration, colonisation and the 'subsequent history of our world,'" the review in *The Guardian* adds, describing Dartnell as an "eloquent, conversational guide to these daunting aeons of time".  
*The Nature* article too showers praise on the author: "His infectious curiosity and enthusiasm tug the reader from page to page, synthesizing geology, oceanography, climatology, meteorology, geography, palaeontology, archaeology and political history..."



**US-Taliban talks: what's on table, why it is being greeted with caution**

NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN  
CHENNAI, JANUARY 28

AFGHANISTAN HAS known so many false starts that when US Special Envoy to Kabul Zalmay Khalilzad declared Sunday that a six-day round of direct talks between the US and Taliban in Doha has led to a "framework" for a peace agreement, there was more caution than optimism all around.  
As reported by *The New York Times* based on an interview with Khalilzad and unnamed US officials, the broad contours of the framework are: a commitment by the Taliban not to allow terrorists (read IS, an addition to the existing mix) to use Afghan territory to mount attacks on the US and its allies; an agreement by the US to pull out troops, but contingent on what remains a stumbling block — a Taliban agreement to talk with the Afghan government, and to a permanent ceasefire.  
**Limited optimism**  
Khalilzad himself struck a note of caution by underlining that the "framework" had to be fleshed out in the coming rounds.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, who addressed the nation Monday after being briefed by Khalilzad, cautioned against rushing into a deal. The Afghan government has so far been kept out of the US-Taliban talks. "We want peace quickly, we want it soon, but we want it with prudence. Prudence is important so we do not repeat past mistakes," Ghani said. He asked the Taliban to engage with the Afghan government directly.  
Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid has said that without the withdrawal of international troops, there could be no progress on other issues.  
The next round of talks will reportedly take place on February 25. During the Doha talks, the Taliban appointed Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, an old Taliban warhorse, as their chief negotiator. Baradar did not participate in last week's negotiations but is expected to be on board for the following rounds. He was arrested in February 2010 in Karachi in a joint Pakistan-US intelligence operation, and released by Pakistan only in October 2018. At the time of his arrest, he was said to be holding direct talks with then President Hamid Karzai. Karzai accused the

US and Pakistan of scuttling the talks. Baradar's appointment to the talks is being seen as an indication of Taliban seriousness.

**The US push**

For its part, the Trump Administration has smelt a rabbit in the hat. The decision to talk to the Taliban was taken during the Obama presidency when the Americans concluded there was simply no way they could win the Afghan war, and began looking for face-savers with what Hillary Clinton called the "good Taliban". The Doha office of the Taliban was established, but the start-stop negotiations at the time went nowhere.  
A quick pullout from Afghanistan has been on President Donald Trump's mind from the time he took office. In August 2017, he seemed to be signalling the opposite when he said "conditions on the ground", and not "arbitrary timetables" would guide US military strategy in Afghanistan. But by the middle of 2018, it was clear that the White House was pushing for direct talks with the Taliban urgently. By then, Robin Raphel, the former US diplomat, who was also in the AIP team of Richard Holbrooke, the Obama

Administration's Special Representative, had already opened a back channel to the Taliban. The stage for the talks was set then. Including last week's, there have been four rounds over the last year. With the announcement of a near agreement, the US has also outrun Moscow, which had begun its own process, including regional players Iran, China and several Central Asian states — India sent a "non-official" delegation to these talks — to find a resolution in Afghanistan.  
**Pakistan & Taliban**  
The Imran Khan-led Pakistan government has claimed credit for getting the Taliban to talk to the US, and for organising the UAE round of talks last December. "Pakistan has helped in the dialogue between Taliban and the US in Abu Dhabi. Let us pray that this leads to peace and ends almost three decades of suffering of the brave Afghan people," Khan said then. Khalilzad met with Pakistan Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa last year after the UAE talks. In an interview to *Arab News*, Pakistan military spokesman Major-General Asif Ghafoor said: "We are a facilitator. We have done our job of bringing them to the ne-

gotiating table. What is discussed and how the process moves forward will depend on progress during every meeting."

While it appears that Baradar's release contributed to pushing the talks along, it is also true that the Taliban were none too pleased at his long incarceration. Pakistan's influence over the Taliban is not as complete as it used to be. The Taliban rebuffed Pakistan's efforts to host a round of talks in Islamabad, prompting the military spokesman to deny to *Arab News* that the Taliban were excluding Pakistan from the peace process.

**What next?**

If the endgame is indeed playing out, what might a final agreement look like? The news outlet Pajhwok Afghan News recently reported that the Rand Corporation, a US-based security think tank, had drawn up a peace agreement whose main elements are: an 18-month transitional government that will oversee power sharing between the Taliban and other sections of the Afghan polity; extension of US assistance to Afghanistan; the creation of a high Ulema council which, along with the in-

terim government, will discuss changes to the Constitution; amnesty; Taliban's renunciation of links with terrorist organisations; release of prisoners and formation of an impartial team to implement the draft deal.

However, the US State Department has denied any plans for an interim government in Kabul. The presidential elections are due in July; it is unclear how the talks might impact this process, how much power sharing the Taliban are ready for, and with whom.  
India, which emphasises its age-old ties with Afghanistan, has watched the endgame unfold with no role to play in it. New Delhi's Chabahar project to bypass Pakistan and access Afghan markets through the Iranian port may well amount to nothing in a fast-changing Afghanistan. India enjoys tremendous goodwill in Afghanistan, something that Pakistan does not have, despite President Trump's derisive put-down of India's \$3 billion development aid to Afghanistan. But Army chief General Bipin Rawat presaged a question that may soon get louder: can India remain relevant in Afghanistan without getting on the "the bandwagon", as he put it, of talks with the Taliban?