



I AM THE SON OF IMMIGRANTS FROM EGYPT. I'M A FIRST-GENERATION AMERICAN. PART OF MY STORY IS BEING WRITTEN RIGHT NOW. — RAMI MALEK

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Doing good

... undoing bad, and transforming bad into good is real power. India must remember this after Pulwama



RAM MADHAV

INDIA HAS MANY neighbours. But Pakistan is different. It is a neighbour that is singularly focused on harming and harassing India, irrespective of whether it benefits or damages its own interests. One former prime minister of Pakistan had once declared that Pakistanis would eat grass in order to fight with India for a thousand years.

Dealing with such a neighbour is not easy. Not just India, other neighbours, too, realise this. Afghanistan's foreign ministry recently complained to the UN Security Council against Pakistan's direct engagement with the Taliban bypassing the Afghanistan government, saying that it not only undermines ongoing peace efforts but violates Afghanistan's national sovereignty and UNSC Resolution 1988.

In a recent suicide attack, 27 members of Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards were killed. The chief of the Revolutionary Guards, Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari, has accused Pakistan of providing safe havens to the perpetrators. "Why do Pakistan's army and security body give refuge to these anti-revolutionary groups? Pakistan will no doubt pay a high price", warned Jafari.

Pakistan is today like a cantonment or a military barracks, run by its military and ISI leadership. "The military-industrial complex was one of Pakistan's binding forces, alongside Islam, national pride, suspicion of India and America," writes Steve Coll in *Directorate S*. The deadly combination of military, Islamist radicalism and hate for India has wreaked havoc for India over decades. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had talked about bleeding India through a "thousand cuts". Pakistan continues with that policy, irrespective of who occupies political power, a power that is just notional, as the real power is wielded by the army and the ISI.

That Pakistan has emerged as the global epicentre of terrorism is no longer a revelation or a secret. The entire world knows about it. One can see it in the US White House statement after the ghastly attack at Pulwama on the CRPF convoy.

"The United States calls on Pakistan to end immediately the support and safe haven provided to all terrorist groups operating on its soil, whose only goal is to sow chaos, violence and terror in the region," read the statement issued by Trump's press secretary. No ambiguity, no "alleged", but an affirmation about the existence of terrorist groups on "its soil". The UNSC stopped short of naming Pakistan, but it too openly blamed the Jaish-e-Mohammad, an organisation based out of Bahawalpur, Pakistan, for the Pulwama attack.

Pakistan must be made to change. It calls for global consensus. Tragically, we lack global consensus even on the definition of terrorism. Guided by self-interest, the US and China have both ended up patronising the monster in Pakistan, namely the military-ISI establishment. The Pakistan leadership has mastered the art of doublespeak and deception.

Kashmir occupies the centrestage of this conflict as far as India is concerned. Unfortunately, India has a huge problem with the regional narrative in the Kashmir Valley that helps Pakistan enormously. That narrative is one of separatism — soft or hard, depending on the situation — alienation and victimhood. Kashmiri regional satraps are not fully reconciled to the fact, even after 70 years, that they are an integral part of India and are like any other citizen of the country. They consider their relationship with India to be special, in which they had made a huge sacrifice in 1948 by choosing India over Pakistan, and hence the Indian state and people should ever be grateful to them.

Generations of Kashmiris have been fed this fallacy by the Kashmiri regional leadership. That not just J&K, but more than 540 independent kingdoms and princely states had joined India in 1947-48 under the same document called the Instrument of Accession; hence they are an integral part of the country — is not what these eminences in the Valley teach their people. Instead, to showcase their special status, they brandish Article 370 of the Indian Constitution. This Article, inserted as a temporary and transient provision, has lived

far too long. It only helped perpetuate the sense of alienation and separatism in the Valley. Mind you, even though this Article is applicable to the entire state of J&K, one doesn't find alienation or separatism in its other parts, like Jammu and Ladakh. The leadership in these regions has ensured that the people there fully integrate with the rest of India.

The ordinary Kashmiri is like any other citizen, but the leaders are the ones who turn him into a terrorist or a separatist or a stone-pelter. Article 370 can go whenever the government of the day decides. All that is required is a proclamation by the president of India. But of greater importance is to tackle these leaders in the Valley who continue to peddle the separatist narrative.

We have given them too long a rope, in the hope that the greater the engagement, the better the integration process would be. Sadly, while large sections of the Kashmiri people wholeheartedly internalised their Indianness, the regional satraps are busy stoking separatist fires. The time has come to make them irrelevant in the Valley. Just like in the other two regions of the state, the dominant narrative to be encouraged in the Valley should also be one of Indianness.

It puts the onus on the rest of the country — its leadership and people alike. The people of India must remember that when they say "Kashmir is ours", that also means "every Kashmiri is ours". If he is misguided, lead him; if he is mischievous, punish him; if he is treacherous, banish him. But instill India in him. A billion plus population can't be so powerless in tackling a handful of terrorists and their masters; but the real power lies not in hating every one, but bringing them to the right way.

"Kartum akartum anyatha kartum shakyaate" — this is how power is defined in ancient Indian wisdom. "It will do, it will undo, and it will do otherwise". Doing good, undoing bad and transforming bad into good is what is described as real power.

The writer is national general secretary, BJP, and director, India Foundation

ANXIOUS IN ITANAGAR

Row over residency claims is another reminder of need to tread carefully on complex identity question in Northeast

JUST AS THE furore over the Citizenship Amendment Bill ended after the legislation lapsed in Parliament, a new round of protests has rocked Arunachal Pradesh. On Sunday, mobs angry over a Joint High Powered Committee report on the claims of six non-tribal communities to the Permanent Residence Certificate (PRC) attacked the deputy chief minister's house and many public buildings, including the office of the powerful All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU) in Itanagar. Two persons were killed in police firing and scores injured. A rattled state government has withdrawn the JHPC report and has promised protesters that the PRC claims are now a closed chapter. The tense condition in the state capital and three Arunachal districts bordering Assam may have forced the government's response. But the PRC demand is an old one and is likely to surface again.

There is a need to reflect on why matters concerning identity have become increasingly combustible. The PRC is a necessary document for education and employment under the state quota in Arunachal Pradesh and neighbouring states. The six communities which have been excluded from the ambit of the PRC live in districts bordering Assam, possess landholdings etc and claim that they have never been residents of Assam or any other state. In recent times, even groups like the AAPSU had come around to the view that their claims for the PRC need a sympathetic hearing, which may well be the reason why the mob targeted the AAPSU office in Itanagar on Sunday. Clearly, not everyone agrees with this reasonable position. The protests, reportedly, lacked leaders and were more uncontrollable because they were constituted of people who had gathered spontaneously, not under the banner of a party or organisation. The fear of shrinking opportunities and loss of control over resources seems to have fanned the mob violence. This reaction could well be the fallout of the foregrounding of the identity question following the introduction of the Citizenship Amendment Bill. The Bill, and the debate that ensued, has pushed the region backwards, privileging the claims for a less inclusive polity.

Sunday's unrest doesn't augur well for the BJP, which holds office in Itanagar. The party, which won 11 seats in the 60-member assembly in the 2014 assembly election but managed to cobble together a majority by engineering defections from the Congress, is already seeing desertions ahead of the polls. Its push to privilege the claims of non-Muslims for citizenship has turned the region restive again. The BJP needs to acknowledge and respect the fact that the identity question in the Northeast is complex, and calls on it to tread carefully.

PEDAGOGY & POLITICS

HRD ministry's proposal to institutionalise Vedic education invites questions of priority, due process

LAST MONTH, THE Union Ministry of Human Resource Development gave an in-principle approval to a new national board of education, the Bharatiya Shiksha Board (BSB). By all accounts, the ministry envisages the new board as an alternative to the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). It will ensure "standardisation" of "Indian traditional knowledge", draft syllabi, issue certificates and recognise gurukulas, pathshalas and schools that offer "a blend of Vedic and modern schools". The constitution of the BSB acquired further momentum last week: On February 23, a selection panel of the ministry decided that yoga entrepreneur Ramdev's Patanjali Yogpeeth was the best among the three outfits that had placed bids to set up the new institution. Patanjali has reportedly committed Rs 21 crore for the board's development and informed the panel that it has the necessary infrastructure for the purpose. Setting up an alternative pedagogical agency, however, should not be just about funds and physical infrastructure.

From an academic perspective, there should not be any quarrel with a project that focuses on "Indian traditional knowledge". Indeed, aspects of such knowledge are part of the social science and humanities curricula in both schools and universities. History textbooks at all levels, for example, talk about the scholarly debates on the Vedic age. Sanskrit, similarly, is offered in schools and institutions of higher learning. In fact, in 2017, amongst Indian languages, Sanskrit had the third-highest number of post-graduate students. Of course, much more needs to be done. Scholarship around the language's rise and fall, its social and political implications, and its relationship with other languages hasn't gone beyond a few elite universities. But such problems cannot be resolved by compartmentalising "ancient Indian knowledge". Conflating ancient Indian knowledge with the Vedas, shastras and Sanskrit also invites questions.

There is, of course, no getting away from pedagogy's links with politics. Even then, in the current political climate, the HRD ministry's emphasis on Vedas and darsanas could be seen as a project to pursue a majoritarian agenda. Ancient societies in India displayed diversity in culture, religion, language and ethnicity. The new board's objective to "standardise" Vedic texts and its rooting for Sanskrit militates against such plural readings of history. Three years ago, the HRD ministry had rejected Patanjali Yogpeeth's proposal to constitute a "Vedic educational board". The ministry's selection panel should explain the reason for its rethink.

WIN OR LOSE

What mattered was that most of the top films in contention for the Oscars were made richer by their women characters

THE 2019 Oscars had a pretty bad run leading up to the glittery Sunday night, leaving it eventually without a host. In the mostly sedate presentation, no one ruffled any feathers but for Spike Lee, who in his acceptance speech for Best Adapted Screenplay, called to "do the right thing", come the 2020 US presidential election, and made his displeasure over Best Picture winner *Green Book* evident by literally turning his back on it. The biggest buzz was about Lady Gaga and Bradley Cooper's performance to her award-winning song, after their Oscars campaign had fizzled out.

None of that mattered, though. What did was the shutting out of Glenn Close in the Best Actress category, now going seven times win-less after an Oscar nomination. What did was the Academy's failure to acknowledge the significance of the role that got her here. In the rigid ringfencing of #MeToo, where you can only be victim or culprit, and nothing in between, she played *The Wife*, representing the millions who push the envelope bravely and silently and travel miles without leaps. She played the women who don't just wage one battle or three or four, but who know which to fight; who must be something to everyone while being everything to someone. In a film that barely matched her searing performance, Close's wife packed in years of that being, for centuries of those beings.

Most of the top films in contention on Sunday were made richer by their women characters — even those in the background. Singed by an unwinnable race debate, *Green Book* had Tony Lip's wife taking care of the home and hearth but also shining piercing light on his wrongs, *Roma* had the women who bonded, unseen by the men, *The Favourite* had Best Actress winner Olivia Coleman and others running a kingdom, while it took Lady Gaga to lend shine to a new *A Star is Born*.



ELŻBIETA BIENKOWSKA

IN NOVEMBER LAST year, the European Union (EU) adopted a communication that set out the Union's vision for a strategy to strengthen its cooperation and partnership with India. This new strategy, developed in broad consultation with European and Indian stakeholders, shows how significant the EU considers India's role in international and regional matters and how determined the EU is to further develop and realise the full potential of this partnership.

India, as an emerging global power, plays a key role in the current multi-polar world. While there is growing convergence between the EU and India on global and regional issues, we stand to benefit equally from a stronger partnership by addressing together global challenges, promoting economic growth and expanding business opportunities.

There is an increasing recognition and acknowledgment from both sides that there is a huge untapped potential in our partnership: Do not forget that jointly, the EU and India represent close to 2 billion people, who can positively influence not only the economic discourse but also the course of human development. My ongoing India visit is with the purpose to further strengthen policy dialogues and cooperation with India, particularly with regard to small and medium-sized enterprises.

The EU and India have a strong and long-standing economic relationship, with trade and investment representing an important aspect of our strategic partnership. The EU is India's largest trading partner, whilst India is the EU's ninth largest partner. Bilateral trade

LEND A HAND

There is so much more that India and EU can achieve together

in goods and services amounted to over €100 billion in 2017. However, I am convinced that there is scope for much more trade, investment and cooperation between European and Indian companies, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Indeed, SMEs form the backbone for both our economies; both regions have bright and dynamic entrepreneurs, willing to take risks and to launch new initiatives, eager to discover new opportunities and realise their dreams for a better future.

European companies, many of which are start-ups and SMEs, are strong in areas such as technology, environment, communications, energy and infrastructure. This wealth of experience and knowledge means the EU has much to offer to India in its quest to grow and modernise, from technology to know-how sharing.

The EU's Business Support programme aims precisely at tapping into these existing business opportunities and focussing in particular, but not exclusively, on areas such as environment, energy, climate, mobility, urbanisation and ICT, where we already have an advanced cooperation with India. This initiative will bring together European and Indian SMEs through joint action, business to business match-making and exchanges on best practices. The programme will carry out technical market studies, build a database of EU companies that can offer technical solutions and create an online platform to share information on the business opportunities and connect Indian and EU business. Bringing European and Indian business together to complement these key dialogues

with a business angle will not only facilitate business cooperation but would also support the transfer of advanced EU technologies and innovative practices, which can be adapted for the Indian market.

Fostering an environment in which our innovative businesses can flourish and cooperate should be a shared priority for both sides. I am looking forward to discussing these issues with my counterparts in the Indian government, notably ministers Nitin Gadkari and Suresh Prabhu.

Space is another area where I believe we have much to contribute to each other, considering both the EU and India are keenly working towards establishing themselves as leading space powers. Copernicus, the EU's observation programme, that is now the best system of that kind in the world, can provide support to India in tackling many common challenges, from environmental protection, agriculture and climate change monitoring to disaster support and urban development. India and Europe have already initiated cooperation in this area, but we can do much more to develop our space activities, for instance on satellite navigation and space research.

During my visit, I will explore where increased regulatory cooperation can contribute to our shared endeavours. There is so much more we can do together, and we stand ready to play our part.

The time is right to seize the opportunities.

The writer is Commissioner for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs



FEBRUARY 26, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

STATES AGREE ON PLAN A TWO-DAY MEETING of the National Development Council reached an accord on sharing of central plan assistance by the states. Accordingly, the central assistance originally provided in the draft sixth five-year plan for 1978-83 is to be distributed in accordance with the old Gadgil formula, the additional central assistance that has become available after cutting out some of the centrally-sponsored schemes is to be allocated in a more progressive manner after taking into account the population and per capita incomes of different states. The formula accepted is the one proposed by the Planning Commission Deputy Chairman D T

Lakdawala, in his report to the council.

UP CM PROSPECTS THE PROSPECTS OF Banarsi Das, the BLD-supported candidate for UP chief ministership, have improved after a meeting between Charan Singh and Congress for Democracy (CFD) leader H N Bahuguna. This is an unexpected development because the Jana Sangh, the main supporter of Gupta, had been banking on the CFD, which has 45 MLAs.

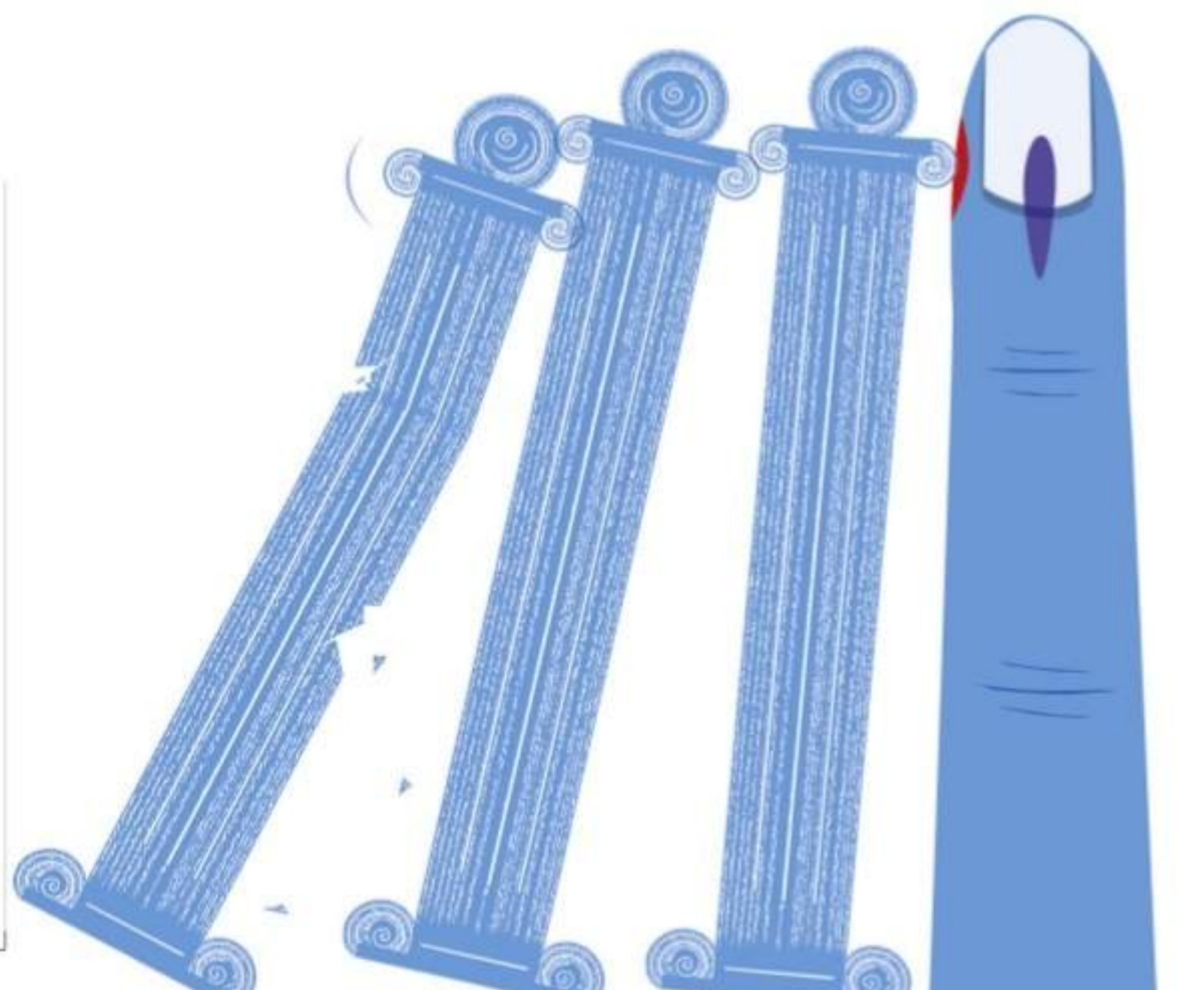
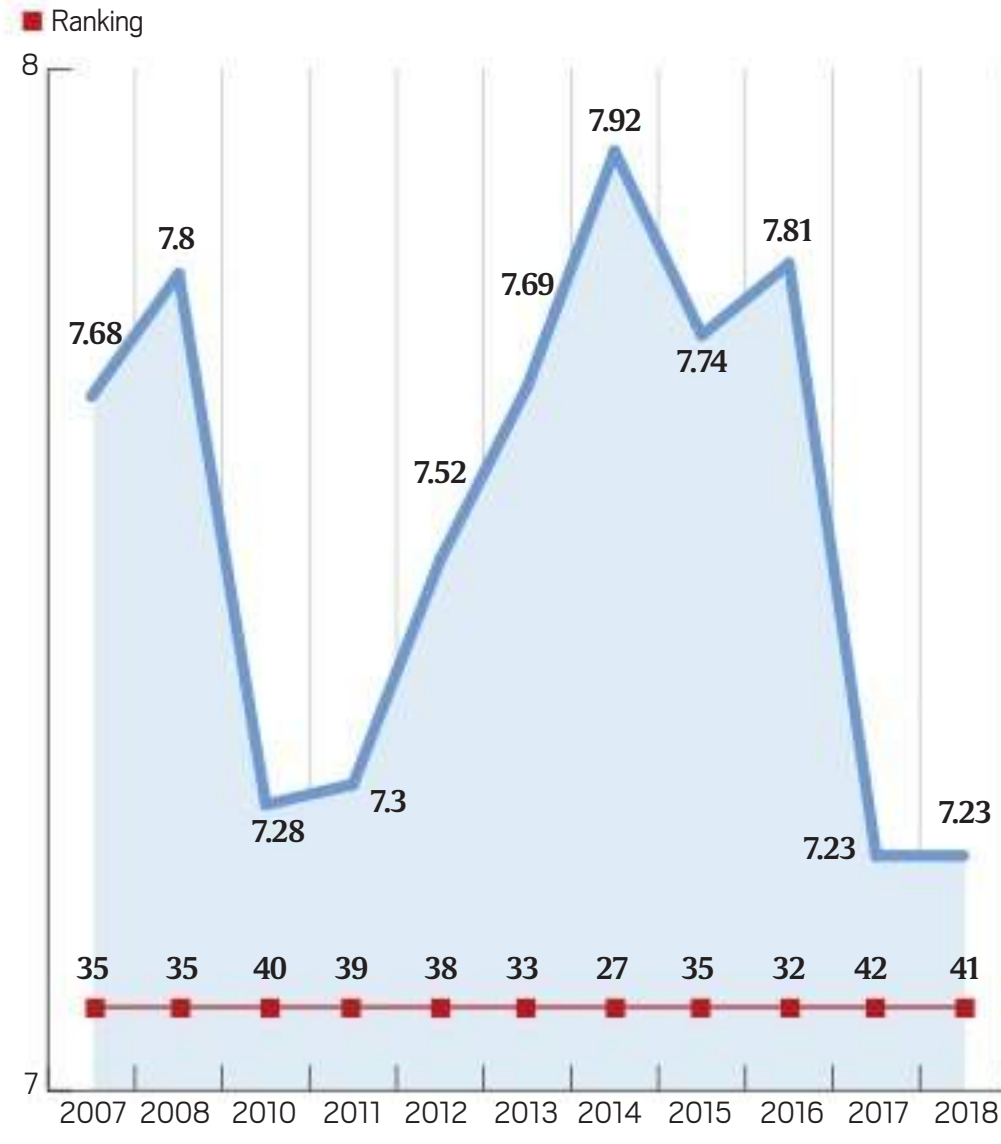
US INDICTS CHINA CHINA IS THE "transgressor" in its fighting inside Vietnam and risks causing a wider war, US Treasury Secretary Michael

Blumenthal said. He delivered a blunt warning to Chinese leaders that further rapid improvements in relations between the US and China could depend on a quick end to the fighting. China's finance minister, Chang Ching-fu, said Chinese troops were fully justified in invading Vietnam.

WAR TOLL IN VIETNAM THE VOICE OF Vietnam, monitored in Bangkok, said the Vietnamese had killed 16,000 Chinese and destroyed 160 tanks in the seven-day war. The casualty claims could not be verified by independent sources and some analysts believed the Vietnamese were exaggerating.

15 THE IDEAS PAGE

INDIA'S PERFORMANCE IN THE EIU INDEX-



C R Sasikumar

Slipping on democracy

A recent Democracy Index confirms the paradox of India being the world's largest electoral wonder, but an increasingly flawed democracy



S Y QURAISHI

THE ECONOMIST INTELLIGENCE Unit recently published its 11th report on the "State of Democracy in the World in 2018" titled "Me Too? Political participation, protest and democracy". The EIU has over seven decades of experience in studying the spectrum of democracies in the world. The index made news last year when India had slipped 10 straight positions, from 32 to 42, ranking below Latvia and South Africa.

The survey ranks 165 independent countries based on five parameters — namely, electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, functioning of the government, political participation and political culture. Based on a comprehensive survey containing 60 questions under five categories, the index classifies countries into four types — Full Democracies, Flawed Democracies, Hybrid Democracies and Authoritarian Regimes.

The countries range from Norway, scoring an almost perfect 9.87 out of 10, to North Korea at 1.08, scoring an abysmal 1.08 out of 10. Only 20 countries (4.5 per cent of the world population) are full democracies, down from around 11 per cent at the start of this decade. Most of the shift has taken place into flawed democracies, which constitute the largest group with 43 per cent of the world's population. A third of the world lives under authoritarian governments, the majority being in China.

Nordic democracies continue to top the rankings year after year, with high political participation, robust welfare state and progressive workers' rights and environmental standards. The top five are Norway, Iceland, Sweden, New Zealand and Denmark, while the bottom five are generally war-ravaged nations with highly authoritarian regimes,

namely Chad, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria and North Korea.

Even though the voters are disillusioned with the political parties and "formal political institutions", voter turnout was on the rise in 2018, in expression of disillusionment. The culture of protest is on the rise, with a number of demonstrations around the world for a plethora of causes. The rise of social media has made public outreach quicker and easier, making lawful assembly an increasing trend. Hence, the report concludes that citizens are "turning anger into action".

Quotas for women candidates have made parliaments more inclusive, pointing to the instrumental importance of positive political discrimination. Japan introduced women's quota legislation in 2018. In the sub-continent, Nepal already tops South Asia in women's representation, with 33 per cent of the seats reserved for women in Parliament and a record 40 per cent of women in local bodies. Bangladesh has 14 per cent reserved seats and Pakistan also reserves 17 per cent and 15 per cent in the Lower and Upper Houses respectively. It is time the Indian Parliament also walks the talk on women's representation. The NDA government, which could pass a constitutional amendment for 10 per cent reservation for the economically weak in three days, could have easily created a women's quota in legislatures if there was political will.

Four out of five attributes of the Democracy Index either showed stagnation or improvement for the whole world, except for "civil liberties", which continues its decline since 2008, coming down from 6.3 to 5.7. "Functioning of the government" remains at the bottom of the score card, with hardly any improvement from a high of 5.0 since 2008.

Another concerning trend is that, as a whole, the score for perception of democracy as a sub-attribute suffered its biggest fall in the index since 2010, indicating that people are losing faith in the capability of democracy to deliver basic goods and utilities.

Among the SAARC countries, India (41) and Sri Lanka (71) are classified as flawed democracies, followed by Bangladesh (88),

What has adversely affected Indian rankings, according to the report last year, is the rise of "conservative religious ideologies". Vigilantism, violence, narrowing scope for dissent, threat to minorities and marginalised groups has affected our ranking. Journalists are increasingly under attack, with murders taking place in several areas. As a result of limited scope for fair reportage, the Indian media is classified as only "partially free", a fact also corroborated by the "Freedom in the World Report, 2018".

Bhutan (94) and Nepal (97) which are hybrid regimes, with Pakistan (112) and Afghanistan (143) being authoritarian. The Maldives is not being ranked on the index. Sri Lanka registered the worst fall among all countries in South Asia, with deteriorating civil liberties and functioning of the government in the wake of a constitutional crisis in October last year.

India, which had reached its highest-ever position of 27 in 2014 (just two ranks away from becoming a full democracy), slipped to 42 last year, registering the second largest fall in ranking after Indonesia, which fell by 20 ranks to 68. Even though India has improved one rank to 41, there has been no improvement in scores, which continued at 7.23 out of 10.

This is the worst ranking ever on the index for India. It is a mid-range country among flawed democracies, with a high score of 9.17 in electoral process and pluralism but moderate record not crossing 7.5 on the rest of the parameters. This confirms the paradox of India as the world's largest electoral wonder, but a flawed democracy.

What has adversely affected Indian rankings, according to the report last year, is the rise of "conservative religious ideologies". Vigilantism, violence, narrowing scope for dissent, threat to minorities and marginalised groups has affected our ranking. Journalists are increasingly under attack, with murders taking place in several areas. As a result of limited scope for fair reportage, the Indian media is classified as only "partially free", a fact also corroborated by the "Freedom in the World Report, 2018".

This year's report maintains those concerns, and also warns of incumbents trying to further consolidate power: "In India, the ruling (NDA) coalition has struggled to maintain its dominance in state elections. To some extent, this is in fact a reflection of the strength of the country's democratic institutions, which has yielded upsets for the government, despite various coercive tactics used by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to consolidate power."

The writer is former Chief Election Commissioner

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

While jingoism on both sides must be responded to by those with an unshakable desire for regional peace, the concerns over the calls for war remain in place.

—DAWN

Hope in Hanoi

This week's US-North Korea summit could be about Trump, Kim and Moon imagining a political rearrangement of the Korean Peninsula



RAJA MANDALA

BY C RAJA MOHAN

VIETNAM'S CAPITAL Hanoi is as improbable a place as Singapore for this week's summit between US President Donald Trump and the North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un. There was a time when the big Asian peace talks were held in European capitals like Geneva. Five decades ago, negotiations to end the American war against Vietnam took place in Paris. Two decades ago, when the Taliban was ousted from Kabul in the wake of the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington, the new framework for governing Afghanistan was hammered out in Bonn, Germany. Now Asian problems are being resolved in Asia itself.

It is no small thing that the US president is traveling to Singapore and Hanoi to sit down with Kim. It is even more significant that Trump is willing to gamble on striking a nuclear deal with Kim and braving the charge of appeasement. Even limited success for Trump could set in motion profound structural changes in East Asia.

For nearly seven decades, Washington's conventional wisdom argued that it is impossible to unfreeze the Korean Peninsula's geopolitics. The end of the Cold War did not change that perception. The addition of the nuclear layer to the conflict — with the Kim family's quest for nuclear weapons in the 1990s — made the Korean problem more salient and intractable at the same time.

Whatever Trump's critics might say, the hopes for peace in the Korean Peninsula have never been as high as they are today. Many in the West had trashed the Singapore summit — the first ever between an American president and a Korean leader — as a failure. Sceptics continue to insist that the Hanoi summit might not be very different; many others fear that Trump might end up making a "bad deal".

Trump has over-ruled his advisers to introduce more flexibility into the US negotiating position. Some Republicans and many Democrats in the US Congress are critical of Trump's engagement with Kim. Speaking to reporters last week, Trump said he is no hurry for the "denuclearisation" of the Korean Peninsula and hinted that he could live with a nuclear freeze for now. As his officials discuss a range of nuclear steps for Kim, Trump is offering possibilities for progress in three other areas.

The first relates to agreeing to what is being called a peace regime in the Korean Peninsula. The Korean War during 1950-53, that followed the partition of the Korean Peninsula at the end of World War II, did not end with a peace accord, but a ceasefire signed by the three main parties, China, North Korea and an international coalition led by the US. Both Kim and the South Korean president want a formal declaration of peace. Trump appears ready.

The second relates to the improvement of US-North Korea bilateral relations. Since the last summit, Kim has stepped up efforts to find and return the remains of some American soldiers killed or unaccounted

for during the Korean War. In return for concrete North Korean steps on denuclearisation, Trump might offer something Kim has long wanted — diplomatic relations with America. There is speculation that the two leaders might agree to set up liaison offices in Washington and Pyongyang.

The third relates to the easing of international economic sanctions that is at the top of Kim's priorities. While Washington is averse to lifting the principal leverage against Pyongyang, Trump may be willing to carve out an exception to South Korea, whose leader, President Moon Jae-in, believes economic incentives are critical for getting Kim to move faster towards denuclearisation.

In moving America from an exclusive focus on "denuclearisation" to a more balanced approach that factors in peace and prosperity, Trump has generated unprecedented optimism about unfreezing the geopolitics of the Korean Peninsula. Until recently, Washington insisted that progress must be "sequential" — denuclearisation must precede any liberalisation of political and economic sanctions against North Korea. Trump is now open to "simultaneous" movement on all tracks.

Trump has also recognised the importance of addressing the Kim family's original rationale for building a nuclear arsenal — the fear of American military presence in the peninsula and Washington's temptations for "regime-change" in the North. Trump's change of approach — founded in part in his own conviction that America must begin to end its "forever wars" around the world — has opened enormous space for diplomacy with Kim.

Trump's new strategy could not have come this far without strong support from Moon, who is determined to explore a historic political reconciliation with the North and more than eager to facilitate the engagement between Washington and Pyongyang. While there is much distance to be covered, Trump, Kim and Moon have demonstrated that it is possible to imagine a political rearrangement of the Korean Peninsula.

Not everyone is taking a benign view of the "ménage et trois" between Trump, Kim and Moon. Some in Beijing worry that Trump's diplomacy is not about "denuclearisation" but prising North Korea away from China. After all, Chinese leaders see the Korean Peninsula as their front yard. They insist Beijing must be the final arbiter of Korean politics. Tokyo is equally worried that Trump is going ahead with Korean peace plans without paying heed to Japan's interests. Tokyo has nightmares about a potential Trump decision to live with North Korean nuclear weapons and its awful security implications for Japan.

Not all Asian countries are unhappy though. The first summit between Trump and Kim enhanced Singapore's reputation as Asia's emerging diplomatic centre. For Hanoi, the second summit is a big opportunity to showcase Vietnam's dramatic economic transformation in recent years. Trump, in turn, hopes that the rise of capitalist Singapore and communist Hanoi might encourage Kim to see the virtues of giving up nukes and opening up to America and the world.

The writer is director, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore and contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express



MALA KAPUR SHANKARDASS

The thing about air

The pollution problem is not merely a technological issue, but a social concern

AIR POLLUTION is a silent killer in India, especially in the country's northern belt. Eighteen per cent of the world's population lives in India, but the country bears 26 per cent of the global disease burden due to air pollution. According to estimates of the India State-Level Disease Burden Initiative — published last year in *Lancet Planetary Health* — over half the 12.4 lakh deaths in India attributed to air pollution in 2017 were of individuals under the age of 70. The average life expectancy in the country could be 1.7 years higher, if air pollution is contained at a level at which human health isn't harmed.

However, policy and civil society responses to air pollution have been limited and delayed. It was only in January that the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change revamped the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) to make it the country's first overarching policy framework on air quality. A few days before the programme's launch, Bloomberg Philanthropies and The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) came forward to provide technical assistance to the government for implementing the NCAP by an emission inventory database. The two institutes would also cooperate with the gov-

ernment in identifying sources of pollution and tracking emissions in order to help it realise the target of reducing particulate matter by 20-30 per cent in the next five years. Time will tell if such techno-centric initiatives bring about ground-level changes — or become interim solutions.

Globally, there have been several technological breakthroughs in evaluating and improving air quality. In India too, researchers, entrepreneurs and environmentalists have voiced the need for devices such as sensor-based monitors, air purifiers and smog towers. The use of mass spectrometers has been advocated to identify volatile substances that pollute air. However, there is a flip side to the use of such gadgets. Their increasing use might improve air quality. But their energy footprint is likely to offset recent gains in energy efficiency.

Air pollution is not a local issue that can be resolved by using household gadgets or placing devices at a few places. It is a nationwide concern that requires systemic measures, long-term planning, stringent action against those violating emission laws and standards. India lacks auditors who can enforce these standards. The country also re-

quires inter-departmental coordination, continuous monitoring, appropriate warning systems and adequate protocols for assessment of air quality.

Seen from such a perspective, the increasing use of gadgets like air purifiers by a certain section of people becomes problematic. These devices consume energy, require constant maintenance and constitute a lopsided and expensive answer to the air pollution problem. Studies have shown that many types of air purifiers used in households, offices and commercial set-ups do not actually improve the air quality in their surrounding environment. For instance, certain types of air purifiers do not remove chemicals or gases. Ionisers have limited utility against harmful particles and activated carbon filters — amongst the most popular air purifying devices — are not effective against particulate matter and allergens. Electrostatic filters are not effective in large rooms and ozone purifiers are known to trigger asthma attacks. Our attempts to control the environment throw up new problems. It is high time we recognise that air pollution will not go away if we continue to see it as a problem of only the affluent sections of society.

It is also high time we recognise that air pollution problem is not merely a technological issue, but a social concern. Besides emphasising on clean energy devices, energy efficiency technologies, dust control mechanisms and clean transport facilities, the government must be alive to the concerns of the people whose livelihoods are affected when polluting industries are banned. The improvement in the quality of lives of the rich and middle classes should not be at the cost of the poor. This perspective now informs the air pollution management programmes of several countries. Some states of the US, Singapore and China, for instance, have come out with citizen-friendly remedies that emphasise dust management, soil conservation and ecological restoration. Long-term solutions to address air pollution require political will. Addressing air pollution is a human concern. Regulation and technological solutions should not lose sight of this perspective.

The writer an associate professor of sociology at Maitreyi College, Delhi University is a health and development social scientist

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DEEP STATE TACTICS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Staring at a stalemate' (IE, February 25). Pakistan's dubious distinction of being an interlocutor for the Taliban and Uyghur nationalists shines a light on its "blackmail diplomacy". The deep state in Pakistan must have figured out that it cannot continue to harbour terrorists without inflicting significant self-causality. Pakistan has been risking political isolation for some time now. It should re-imagine a more progressive agenda of engaging with the international community before it is too late.

Sudip Kumar Dey, Kolkata

WRONG SIGNALS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'The PM's word' (IE, February 25). The PM's assurance comes too late in the day and seems more like an electoral rhetoric. If Kashmiris have to be won back, paramilitary companies should be moving out progressively, not moving in. Of course, this may not happen immediately but right signals have to be given to the local people.

Rahul Gaur, Gurugram

COLLECTIVE FAILURE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Against the mob' (IE, February 23). While diplomatic efforts leading to the UN's condemnation of the Pulwama terrorist at-

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

tack of February 14 gives a sense satisfaction to every Indian, it is unfortunate that the Supreme Court had to step in to secure the safety of Kashmiris residing in 11 states following attacks on them. The latter not only bares the failure of the administrative machinery and the political parties, it also shows a large section of the country's population in poor light.

Krishan Chugh, Delhi