



## A promise to live by

All political parties must be mindful of the core values that invigorate Indian democracy

As the countdown for elections to the 17th Lok Sabha begins, the world's largest democracy has a chance to re-imagine itself. Over the last 16 general elections and numerous elections at lower levels, the resolute trust that the founding fathers of the Republic put in the parliamentary democratic system has been substantially proven wise. India did make some dangerous turns and show signs of fragility, especially during the Emergency in the 1970s, but in the long term it expanded the scope of its democracy through widening representation, devolution of power and redistribution of resources. This is not to overlook the various maladies that have afflicted the country's democracy, such as disinformation campaigns, corruption, disenfranchisement of the weaker sections of the society, the corroding influence of money and muscle power in elections, and divisive majoritarian tendencies. While the representative character of institutions has in general improved, women and religious minorities are alarmingly underrepresented. The exercise of elections itself is a matter of great pride for all Indians. The Election Commission of India has over the decades evolved itself into a fine institution and plays a critical role in the sustenance of democracy. Its efforts to increase voter participation through a series of small steps over the years, including the use of the Electronic Voting Machines, have been praiseworthy.

The vulnerabilities of Indian democracy have been pronounced in the last five years, and some of its long-term gains have been undermined. Therefore, this election is more than an exercise to elect a new government. This should also be an occasion to reiterate and reinforce Indian democracy's core values, its representative character and its promise of a constant rejuvenation of the collective spirit. The ECI has announced a series of fresh measures to strengthen the integrity of the electoral process and curb some rapidly growing hazards such as the spread of falsehoods aimed at creating social polarisation for consolidation of votes. Measures such as better monitoring of social media campaigns, while steps in the right direction, are not in themselves adequate to deal with the challenges of these times. The stakes are high for all contenders this year, and Indian politics has reached a level of competitiveness where ground rules of engagement are routinely disregarded. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who rode to power in 2014 on the agenda of material progress through Hindutva, has to defend his reign to seek a second term. His opponents sense an existential danger from him and are trying to mobilise those left behind or who feel disempowered by his governance. While furthering individual interests, all parties must realise that democracy itself is at stake if the campaign is aimed at communal polarisation. Though the promise of Indian democracy has not been fully realised, voters have remained committed to it. They turn up in large numbers to vote, and consider the very act of voting as empowerment. That trust should be upheld.

## Avoiding a slowdown

Central banks are reversing the direction of their policies in a seemingly coordinated bid

Over the last few days, U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell has been trying to allay fears that it will continue to raise interest rates notwithstanding conditions in the economy. Many, including President Donald Trump, have been quite critical of the Fed raising rates despite a slowing economy and inflation staying well below its official target of 2%. In fact, many have argued that the gradual but persistent raising of rates may be the reason behind the slowdown in U.S. growth and the lacklustre inflation numbers. The American economy created a mere 20,000 jobs in February, the slowest growth in jobs in well over a year, and GDP growth in the coming quarters is expected to slow considerably from the rate of 3.4% in the third quarter last year. On Sunday, however, Mr. Powell termed the current interest rate level as "appropriate", and noted that the Fed does "not feel any hurry" to raise rates further. The Fed Chairman's remarks come around the tenth anniversary of the historic bull market in U.S. stocks, which began in March 2009 after policy rates were cut aggressively in order to fight the recession. This marks a significant change from Mr. Powell's hawkish policy stance since taking over last year.

But right now it is not just the Fed that has put the brakes on the normalisation of monetary policy through a gradual tightening of short-term interest rates. As economic conditions in Europe and Asia begin to deteriorate, central banks have been quick to turn more dovish. European Central Bank President Mario Draghi last week announced that rates in Europe will be kept low until next year and offered to lend cheaply to European banks. The People's Bank of China has promised further monetary stimulus measures to stem the fall in growth, and the Reserve Bank of India has started to cut interest rates as growth has slowed down each successive quarter this fiscal ahead of the general election. It should thus be obvious by now that central banks around the world are reversing the direction of their policies in what seems to be a coordinated effort to avoid a global growth slowdown. The brakes applied to the raising of interest rates by the Fed allows other central banks to lower their own policy rates and boost growth without the fear that disruptive capital flows could wreak havoc on their economies. While such coordinated monetary policy can certainly prevent slowdowns, it also raises the risk of extended periods of low interest rates leading to more destructive bubbles.

# A compromise is still possible

But there is need for clarity on the status of one mediator and the efficacy of mediation on Ayodhya



A. FAIZUR RAHMAN

The Supreme Court's attempt to maintain Hindu-Muslim harmony through a mediated settlement of the long-standing Babri Masjid dispute deserves appreciation. But it has raised a couple of concerns too. One relates to the choice of a mediator, and the other to the efficacy of mediation at this stage.

### Mediator neutrality

By definition, a mediator is a neutral third party who facilitates a negotiated settlement between adversarial contenders. Unfortunately, the neutrality of one of the three court-appointed mediators, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, has come into question as some of his public pronouncements in the recent past appear to negate his supposed disinterestedness.

A year ago, in an open letter to the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB), Sri Sri Ravi Shankar had said: "People from both communities who are adamant on following the court's verdict are also driving the issue to a situation of defeat." The "best solution", therefore, is "an out-of-court settlement in which the Muslim bodies come forward and gift one acre of land to the Hindus who in turn will gift five acres of land nearby to the Muslims, to build a better mosque."

He even told Muslims that giv-

ing up their claim to the disputed property did not amount to "surrendering this land to the people who demolished the Babri Masjid or to a particular organisation. On the contrary, they are gifting it to the people of India".

Apart from the fact that this position betrays Sri Sri Ravi Shankar's bias in favour of disputants belonging to one religion, it is difficult to understand the justifiability of treating a gift to Hindus as a gift to the people of India. Does he regard only Hindus as "the people of India" to the exclusion of other communities?

Nonetheless, it stands to reason that Muslims would be in a position to gift the land only when their ownership of it is confirmed by the Supreme Court. If Muslims lose the case, the entire land would come under the control of Hindus and the question of Muslims giving up their claim would then be rendered redundant.

But the Art of Living founder thinks that even a Hindu victory would not be conducive to peace. It could foster Muslim resentment and may "lead to riots throughout the country", he told the AIMPLB, thereby insinuating that Muslims are violent. He seems to be unaware that Muslims have agreed to abide by the court verdict whichever way it goes. Now that he has been made a mediator, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar must clarify if he still stands by his statements.

### Advisability of mediation

Despite Hindu groups opposing a negotiated settlement, the Supreme Court made it clear that an attempt should be made to settle the dispute by mediation. It over-



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ruled their objections by invoking Section 89 of the Code of Civil Procedure (CPC) which allows the court to refer any dispute to one of the four modes of non-judicial resolution processes: namely, arbitration, conciliation, judicial settlement (including settlement through Lok Adalat), or mediation. In this case, the court opted for mediation.

This was again opposed on the basis of a two-judge Supreme Court judgment in *Afcons Infrastructure and Ors. v. Cheriai Verkey Construction and Ors* (2010). It illustratively explained that mediation cannot be done in a representative suit which involves public interest or the interest of large number of persons who are not represented in the court.

But the five-judge bench led by Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi differed. Citing the provisions of Order 1 rule 8 CPC and Order XXIII rule 3-B, it stated that there was no legal impediment to making a reference to mediation. Whether the said CPC provisions would apply in the event parties arrive at a settlement in the mediation proceedings was left open to be decided later.

Also, what the Supreme Court

had frowned upon in *Afcons* was a civil court exercising power under Section 89 of the Code to refer a suit for "arbitration" without the concurrence of all the parties to the suit. But the court is free, the Supreme Court had said, to consider and decide upon any non-judicial resolution method other than arbitration such as judicial settlement or mediation.

Questions still remain. If the Hindu groups continue to reject mediation, how will this dispute be resolved? And if they agree to negotiate, will the compromise they reach with Muslims be binding on all Hindus in India?

Even Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, who conceded that a negotiated settlement is most 'desirable' in this case, was initially not sure if such a settlement could bind millions of Hindus and Muslims as the issue is not an ordinary dispute between two private parties.

### Win-win situation

If examined closely, it would be seen that the Babri Masjid dispute is not really an explosive issue affecting the religious sentiments of millions of Hindus and Muslims as has been portrayed. This may have been the case in the initial years after the illegal demolition of the Babri Masjid. But today, more than a quarter century later, such a portrayal should be construed as having entered the realm of political mythopoeia where myths of various kinds are created at the hustings for electoral advantage.

The fact is, there is no evidence to show that the handful of parties claiming to represent Hindus and Muslims in this case are fully backed by their respective com-

munities. In other words, the Babri Masjid/Ram Janmabhoomi imbroglio is no longer a life-affirming issue for the Indian masses, who are more concerned about jobs, poverty alleviation and access to affordable housing, health care and education.

That said, both communities cannot afford to let the Ayodhya dispute simmer forever and stall the country's socio-economic growth. The main reason for the unrelenting Muslim attitude is the fear that if they give up their claim on the Babri Masjid, Hindu groups would ask for other "disputed" mosques to be handed over. After all one of the post-demolition kar sevak slogans in 1992 was, "Yeh toh sirf jhanki hai, ab Kashi, Mathura baaki hai" (This is only the trailer, now Kashi and Mathura remain), in which Kashi and Mathura are metonyms for two more disputed places of worship.

### A question of trust

If this Muslim fear is addressed by the Hindu parties to the dispute, and also by influential organisations such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the chances of amicably resolving this seemingly intractable conflict would exponentially increase. A collective assurance from the Hindu side that it would not stake claim to any other "disputed" mosque in India could be the face-saving compromise and win-win situation both sides are looking for.

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# Let them take flight

It is not late to declare the Tejas and Kaveri projects as 'national missions'



ARUN PRAKASH

At the Aero-India 2019 airshow and aviation exhibition, held in Bengaluru last month, there were two developments of significance, for India's national security as well its moribund aeronautical industry. On February 20, the Indian Air Force and the aviation community heaved a collective sigh of relief after the Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas Mark I, received its long-awaited Final Operational Clearance; this means it is combat-ready and can be exploited to the limits of its approved 'envelope'. However, a day later, came a rather unwelcome report: a Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) announcement at the show of its decision to shelve the Kaveri turbo-jet engine project. While one waits for this report to be confirmed or denied, given the criticality of this engine for India's aeronautical industry, the issue deserves a close look.

### Political myopia

Historically, all major aerospace powers have possessed the capability to design airframes as well as power-plants. Until India can design and produce its own aero-en-

gines, the performance and capabilities of any indigenously designed/built aircraft will be seriously limited by the technology that we are permitted to import. India has already had two bitter experiences in this regard. The Hindustan Aeronautics Limited's sleek and elegant HF-24 Marut fighter, of the 1960s and 1970s, failed to achieve its huge potential as a supersonic fighter for want of a suitable engine. Rather than exert itself to seek alternatives, the government of the day, with stunning myopia, closed the programme.

Similarly, many of the problems the Tejas faced emanate from lack of engine thrust. Even as the Kaveri has failed to make an appearance, U.S.-made alternatives such as the General Electric F-404 engine, or even the more powerful F-414, do not deliver adequate thrust for the Tejas Mk I, to meet all its missions. For the Tejas Mk IA, Mk II, the LCA Navy, and other aircraft programmes such as the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft, India will need turbo-jet engines of even greater thrust. Thus, it is vital for India to develop a family of homegrown jet engines to power indigenous combat aircraft as well as re-engine imported ones.

### A pivotal role

In this context, it is necessary to recognise that both the Tejas and Kaveri projects – which have seen more than their share of head-



K. MURALI KUMAR

winds and uncertainty – form key components of India's technological aspirations. Unless carefully guided, protected and nurtured, their failure could spell the end of India's aeronautical industry, or condemn it forever to licensed production. A long production run of, say, 250-300 aircraft for the Tejas and its advanced derivatives is essential if the industry is to hone its design and production skills.

The same holds good for the Kaveri, except that the design and production of a functional turbo-jet engine are even more challenging. The HAL claims to have "manufactured" nearly 5,000 aero-engines of British, French and Russian design, and overhauled 18,000 of them. Since this putative "manufacturing" process involves merely the assembly of imported components, several engine divisions of the HAL have failed to imbibe aspects of design, metallurgy, thermodynamic and aerodynamic engineering as well as the complex tooling and machining process required for the design and manufacture of aero-

engines, over the past 60 years – a sad commentary. In 1986, the DRDO's decades-old Gas Turbine Research Establishment (GTRE) was tasked with developing an indigenous power plant for the LCA, which was to replace the U.S. engines being used for the development phase of the aircraft.

Having developed two experimental engines, the GTRE took up a turbofan design, designated the GTX-35VS "Kaveri", for the LCA. Full-scale development was authorised in 1989 for 17 prototypes at a cost of \$55 million. The first complete prototype Kaveri began tests in 1996, and by 2004 it had flown on a Russian flying test-bed; albeit unsuccessfully. Since then, the Kaveri has made sporadic progress and the GTRE has been struggling with serious design and performance issues which it has been unable to resolve. As the Kaveri missed successive deadlines, the U.S. import option was mindlessly and gleefully resorted to.

### A series of troughs

Given the DRDO's penchant for secrecy and misplaced optimism, the true story of the Kaveri's halting progress has never been revealed to Parliament or the taxpayer. However, two details, available on the Internet, are revelatory of the organisation's 'modus operandi'. It has, at least, on two occasions, approached French and British aero-engine manufacturers for advice and consultancy in operationalising the Kaveri.

Despite reportedly attractive offers of performance-enhancement and technology-transfer, the negotiations stalled reportedly on cost considerations. It is also interesting to note that in 2014, this project – of national importance – was arbitrarily shut down by the DRDO only to be revived subsequently for reasons unknown.

It is obvious that the onus for repeated setbacks in these projects must lie squarely on India's political leadership; for its neglect as well as absence of a vision for the aeronautical industry. There are three more factors: over-estimation by the DRDO of its capabilities compounded by a reluctance to seek advice; inadequate project management and decision-making skills of its scientists; and exclusion of users – the military – from all aspects of the projects.

It is still not too late for the government to declare both these projects as 'national missions' and initiate urgent remedial actions. The success of both the Kaveri and Tejas programmes will transform the aerospace scene, and put India in the front ranks of aeronautical nations, perhaps even ahead of China, if the desired degree of resolve and professional rigour can be brought to the fore. If we miss this opportunity, we will remain abjectly import-dependent forever in this vital area.

Admiral Arun Prakash retired as India's 20th Naval Chief and Chairman Chiefs of Staff in 2006

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

### In seven phases

The decision by the Election Commission to not hold Assembly elections with parliamentary polls in Jammu and Kashmir "owing to the security situation" will deprive the people of the State, who are an integral part of India, of their democratic rights (Page 1, "Lok Sabha polls from April 11 to May 19", March 10). Not holding simultaneous elections will widen the gulf with the rest of India. The Central government has virtually failed to usher in peace and tranquillity in the State. Democracy is the only barometer by which to measure the needs of the people.

S.K. KHOSLA,  
Chandigarh

The national election is an astonishing feat and democracy in action on a striking scale. Proof of this democratic tradition is the flawless way in which our

elections take place and the smooth transition of power to the next government. The only disagreeable note is the increasing level of hostility in campaign speeches. Tolerance and respect for dissent are an important pillar of democracy.

H.N. RAMAKRISHNA,  
Bengaluru

### Pact in Tamil Nadu

The pact between the DMKD and the AIADMK-led alliance for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls may have been sealed, but the people of Tamil Nadu remember that both the PMK and the DMKD had campaigned extensively during the 2016 State Assembly elections on a strong anti-AIADMK plank, severely criticising it on major issues such as huge corruption, TASMAL outlets, agrarian distress and the NEET examination. Sadly, the politics of blatant compromises and opportunism have become the order of the day, with

principles conveniently ignored. Some smaller parties are now facing 'make or break' situations as far as their political survival is concerned, thus forcing them to seek the protective umbrellas of big and 'safer' parties and alliances.

A. MOHAN,  
Chennai

As the deal shows, in politics yesterday's foes can become today's friends; the opposite holds true also. The coming together of parties of various ideologies gives politics a strange look. How can parties with diametrically opposite views work together for the welfare of the people? The way in which parties are vying for seats shows their greed for power. The goings-on are being watched by the public.

### National security

The Pulwama episode has helped to establish new

benchmarks in countering terrorism; in this climate, the public narrative agrees well with military actions and we find ourselves vouching for militaristic autocracy (Editorial page, "Bringing politics back in", March 11). But it must be remembered that violence always gives way to more violence and to uphold the democratic traditions of the nation, we need to find a political solution to problems like terrorism. We cannot always bank on military solutions. Otherwise, we are no better than Pakistan.

KSHITIJ MANI TRIPATHI,  
Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh

### Academic diversity

More than the diversity of backgrounds, we need to lay more emphasis on a diversity of ideas and innovation capacities as far as our universities are concerned (Editorial page, "The flawed unit of academic quotas", March 11). The QS world rankings for academic

institutions show the poor state of even our best universities.

LAKSHMI DEVAMMA SINGIREDDY,  
Koilkuntla, Kurnool, Andhra Pradesh

The idea of using a 'diversity index' as a criterion for grants to universities is based on the flawed notion that diversity in itself is a desirable end. In the West, this idea has generated much controversy. Given India's dismal standing in global academia, we must reject policies that substitute academic output for the cosmetics of communal representation.

ARAVIND S.,  
Thiruvananthapuram

### Down memory lane

In the article, "A daughter on a special father" ("Open Page", March 10), the writer took me back to the late 1960s when her father, C. Rangarajan, was teaching at New York University and I was doing my doctoral thesis at Columbia. He was tired of

working on U.S. data and wanted to return to India and serve the country. Both he and his wife, Haripriya, invited me to dinner. When I met her years later, all she wanted to know was whether her cooking was okay. But I followed her research online. She did work of lasting value on Vaishnavism and on the icons worshipped by Hindus, Jains, and Buddhists.

N. BALASURAMANIAN,  
Bengaluru

### At the fourth ODI

Hitting a mammoth score of 350-plus against Australia in the fourth ODI made the Indian team overconfident. Ashton Turner, who is playing only his second ODI, has shown the world of cricket that nothing is impossible if one is cool-headed and determined. The loss should be a lesson for India.

M. PRADYU,  
Thalikkavu, Kannur, Kerala

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# Too afraid to make a phone call

Let us not give in to terrorism by infecting ordinary families with fear



TABISH KHAIR

This is a tale of three sisters. I know one of them: she is in her seventies and lives alone in a small town in India. Her older sister lives with her sons, who are dedicated government servants, in a bigger city in India. And her eldest sister, who had moved to Pakistan with her husband's family during the post-Partition years, lives with her children in Karachi or Islamabad. I am not sure which city, but it is a Pakistani city. This situation is not unusual for the older generations of middle-class Muslim families, who saw one or more siblings leaving for Pakistan in the 1940s and '50s.



SATVIK GADE

## Only a phone call away

All three sisters are widows. As their children have either moved to other places for work or are busy with their careers, these three sisters, who have not come together for decades, have very little to do except reminisce. Their greatest pleasure is to chat on the phone, a process made easier these days with digital options. After decades of worrying about the cost of phone calls, now they can ring each other up for next to nothing. The eldest sister calls every few days, for some of her happiest memories are of India.

Of course, I did not know all this until I received a call from the youngest sister, who is the only one who knows me, some days ago. After I had recovered from my surprise and we had exchanged the usual greetings, I asked her why she had called. "Is everything OK with you?" I enquired in Urdu.

"What can be wrong with me, beta? Allah looks after me, and my neighbours help out."

I did not ask more, as I knew that she was a childless widow and lived alone. So I asked a direct question: Why have you called me? (I don't think she had ever called me before, not even when I was still working in India.)

I needed to ask you about my sisters, she said. I do not have anyone else to ask, and I know you live abroad, you know officers, you are a journalist.

It was then that she told me about her two sisters, of whom I had not known until then (or had forgotten

about). But I still did not understand her problem. I did not know her well enough for her to call and ask for money, and in any case she belonged to an affluent (though not rich) and proud family, which would never borrow from strangers or even friends. She explained the matter to me.

## Border problems

This was her issue. Her oldest sister, the one in Pakistan, was used to calling her and her other sibling twice a week. But now a problem had cropped up. Neighbours and relatives had told this old woman, living alone with her iPhone, that she should not respond to any call from Pakistan. It might be considered anti-national, they had told her. The other sister had already stopped responding to calls from her Pakistani sibling, because her sons were government servants in India and she did not want to cause them any trouble. The eldest older sister in Pakistan was worried about this sudden lack of response and was now calling even more often.

As I listened to the story, the tragedy of Partition flashed through my mind: all those millions killed and dislocated! And it was a tragedy that never seemed to end. Why was a woman in her late seventies afraid of receiving a phone call from her older sister, now in her late eighties, just because a political border separated the two? Why had another sister stopped taking these calls because she was afraid it would cause pro-

blems for her sons?

This old woman wanted answers from me, because she knew I wrote for newspapers. What could I say to her, except reassure her that at least in India we have politicians, officers and bureaucrats who would not persecute someone like her for talking to her sister in Pakistan? But she was nervous, worried. Neighbours have told me stories; both Hindus and Muslims have advised me not to talk to my sister, she murmured, only half-convinced by my assurances. "I am an old woman," she said. "I do not want to choose between my own welfare and my older sister. And how can I tell her not to call? What do I say to her when she asks why my other sister is not responding to her calls?"

I could not really answer her, because it is not an answer for an individual to give; it craves a collective voice, a collective conscience. It requires a collective voice with a collective conscience, for a collective voice without a conscience can only be the violent baying of a bullying mob.

Let us act decisively against terror of any sort, of course, but let us not divide the hearts of ordinary people. Let us not create an atmosphere of paranoia. We owe Mahatma Gandhi's India – and basic humanity – at least that much. Let us not give in to terrorism by infecting ordinary families with fear.

Tabish Khair is an Indian novelist and academic who works in Denmark

# A case for aggressive diplomacy

Indian state responses cannot be reactive to the agenda of terrorist groups



AMIT BARUAH

Pakistan and India are strange nations. Just as the conflict after India's bombing of the Balakot terror camp was winding down, Pakistan alleged on March 5 that it had thwarted the entry of an Indian submarine into its waters. India responded that Pakistan was indulging in false propaganda. On the same evening, the Pakistani Foreign Ministry issued a statement that its High Commissioner to India, Sohail Mahmood, would be returning to Delhi and talks with India on the Kartarpur Corridor would go ahead. It was a signal that tensions were officially being defused. India confirmed the talks on Kartarpur and also sent back Indian High Commissioner Ajay Bisaria to Islamabad.

The morning and evening's events of March 5 could cause genuine confusion among the public. But it appears as though Pakistan, through its morning assertion, was playing to its domestic audience, while its evening statement was a signal to the international community that it had no further desire to climb the escalation ladder with India.

## Winding down tensions

It was U.S. President Donald Trump who provided the first clear indication of the involvement of major powers in defusing tensions between India and Pakistan. Apart from the Americans, the Chinese and Saudis also seem smack in the middle of the India-Pakistan equation. If the Indian intention post-Pulwama was to isolate Pakistan, that doesn't seem to have happened.

For the two governments, given that the score was level – one had shot down a F-16 and the other had shot down a MiG-21 – they could now respond positively to global concerns. As for Prime Minister Narendra Modi, 'Operation Balakot' had given him ammunition to use in his election rallies.

The Modi government's decision to go ahead with the Kartarpur talks days after tensions were at the peak, and after withdrawing the Most Favoured Nation status to Pakistan, is bizarre, but it serves two purposes. One, it is an effort to win votes in the Punjab. Two, it shows India as being reasonable before



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the international community.

There is little doubt that India got away with its pre-emptive strike in Balakot because Pakistan's denials that it has nothing to do with fostering groups like the Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) carry no credibility, including among thinking members of its own civil society. Further, the JeM even claimed responsibility for the Pulwama terror strike. There's also little doubt that India and Pakistan narrowly escaped a full-fledged conflict, the extent of which can never really be predicted amid social media propaganda, fake videos, domestic pressures and ugly jingoism on both sides.

## The Vajpayee years

The India-Pakistan nuclear 'deterrent' was first put to test by General Pervez Musharraf, who planned the Kargil incursion months after Pakistan went publicly nuclear in response to the Indian nuclear tests of May 11 and 13, 1998.

As India began clearing the Kargil heights of the Pakistani Northern Light Infantry masquerading as 'mujahideen', there was enormous pressure on Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to use the Indian Air Force across the Line of Control after the loss of two MiG aircraft. But Vajpayee held firm against both public and IAF pressure. During the Kargil conflict, Pakistan's then Foreign Secretary Shamshad Ahmed and Minister Raja Zafar-ul-Haq made it clear that its nuclear weapons were not for show, but for use. Pakistan's conduct during Kargil exposed the state as irresponsible and led to numerous international calls for respecting the LoC. Had India retaliated across the LoC then, or hit back against Pakistani retaliation during this year's confrontation, the country's "miltabishment", to borrow Pakistani journalist Najam Sethi's expression, in Rawalpindi may well have been pondering the unthinkable nuclear option.

Pakistan went to great lengths to ob-

tain its nuclear capability to insulate itself against India and no "miltabishment" can survive there if it's unable to even the score with India. The nuclear option is built into the trajectory of its survival as a state.

India can ignore such default Pakistani options at its own – and the region's – peril. Looking strong in an election year might be good for a political party's prospects, but will do nothing to enhance India's credentials as a responsible state that thinks long term.

During the Kargil war in 1999, after the Parliament attack in 2001, and post the Mumbai attack in 2008, two Prime Ministers of India had the option of retaliation, but they did not exercise it. Instead, India's patience projected the responsible nature of the state, which was in stark opposition to Pakistan's tattered credibility.

It is a commentary on the sorry state of India's covert capabilities that key figures in the terror network in Pakistan operate unhindered. A key planner of the 1999 IC-814 hijacking and founder of the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, Fazlur Rehman Khaleel, was recently received at a Pakistani air base in Waziristan. That's the ground reality. Whatever Pakistan is doing to rein in the JeM and LeT is being dictated by the threat of sanctions from the Financial Action Task Force, not by Indian pressure. These actions will vanish if the threat of sanctions dissipates.

## Talks and more talks

A conventional response to terrorist groups can demonstrate intent, but does very little to whittle down their abilities. Covert capabilities coupled with deft and persistent diplomacy is the only way forward in such difficult circumstances.

The Modi government's inability to reach out to Kashmiris and its actions against the Hurriyat leadership at a time when the separatists have lost control of the public mood underline an uncaring attitude. This has also created a fertile ground for Kashmiri youth to join terrorist ranks.

Indian state responses cannot be reactive to the agenda of terrorist groups, however brutal their actions are. A calm, mature, informed and long-term strategy with aggressive diplomacy at its core, one that leverages India's economic strength, remains the country's best bet to deal with the terrorist threat from Pakistani soil.

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## SINGLE FILE

# The Huawei debate

The U.K. and Germany acknowledge potential risks to national security, but differ on how these should be managed

GARIMELLA SUBRAMANIAM



Europe's pushback against banning Chinese telecommunications firm Huawei from the 5G mobile network markets is in stark contrast to the U.S.'s stance. Washington has long suspected the world's largest maker of telecommunications equipment of espionage and cyber sabotage.

These concerns are rooted in the perception that Chinese state-owned entities, recipients of large subsidies, routinely pass on sensitive information to the government. That reading was strengthened when China enacted the National Intelligence Law in 2017 requiring citizens and organisations to cooperate in national intelligence activities. Huawei is a privately listed firm, but there are suspicions that it can still access sensitive data. These suspicions stem from the fact that Huawei's founder used to be in the military.

A 2011 open letter by its deputy chairman was aimed at an image makeover after the company was forced to divest itself of a U.S. tech start-up. But the next year, the House Intelligence Committee recommended that Huawei be blocked from future mergers and acquisitions. In 2014, classified documents showed that the U.S. National Security Agency had been hacking into Huawei to ascertain the latter's links to the People's Liberation Army. Within months of those revelations, the U.S. charged five Chinese army officials of stealing trade secrets from U.S. institutions. The next year, Chinese President Xi Jinping signed an agreement with his U.S. counterpart to cease cyber commercial espionage.

In the ongoing tussle, the Donald Trump administration in the U.S. has banned Huawei's participation in the 5G rollout and canvassed allies in the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing network to follow suit. Meng Wanzhou, Huawei's head of finance, is challenging her detention by the Canadian government and faces extradition to the U.S. for Huawei's alleged Iranian sanctions evasion.

In February, U.S. Vice-President Mike Pence cautioned the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation states in Munich that the security of the West could not be guaranteed by reliance on the East, in an oblique reference to the telecom firm. Authorities in Britain and Germany acknowledge potential risks to national security from Huawei. But their responses diverge in terms of how the threat should be managed, as also factoring in the extensive trade and diplomatic ties with the world's second largest economy.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel has backed the country's cyber security agency. MI6 seems to attach some weight to U.S. caution over Huawei. But Britain's other security services seem opposed to objections merely rooted in the technology supplier's country of origin. Instead they emphasise on evidence-based threat perception and the adoption of tougher cyber security standards. Another recommendation is for mobile service providers to diversify their sourcing of telecom equipment. The debate continues.

The writer is a Deputy Editor at The Hindu in Chennai

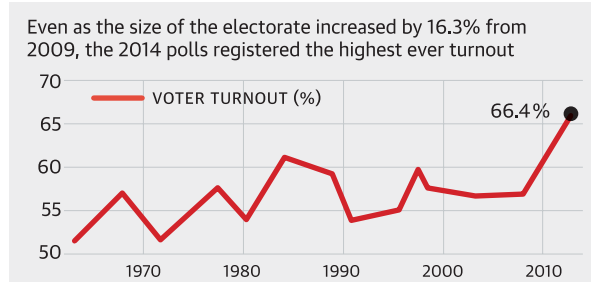
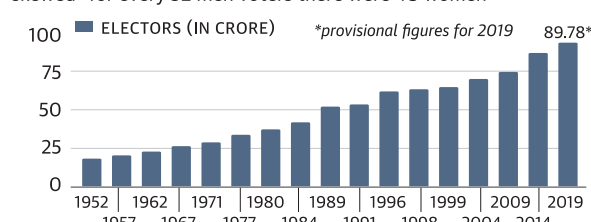


## DATA POINT

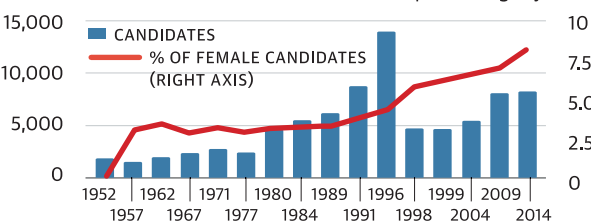
# World within a country

The size of the Indian electorate, which will vote in April and May this year to elect representatives to the Lok Sabha, is as big as the combined electorates of 36 democracies in the world. By Srinivasan Ramani and Vignesh Radhakrishnan

The electorate increased at an average rate of 11.2% every year since 1952. The gender ratio has remained constant but skewed – for every 52 men voters there were 48 women



Even as the size of the electorate increased by 16.3% from 2009, the 2014 polls registered the highest ever turnout



## Testing the biggest democracy

The latest electoral rolls released in January 2019 show that 89.78 crore people are registered to vote in the coming election. The map shows a comparison of State-wise electorates with those of other democracies around the world (in their latest elections). For instance, the size of Tamil Nadu's electorate, which is 5.89 crore, is comparable to that of Turkey's 5.93 crore, while Uttar Pradesh's (14.43 crore) is nearly as big as Brazil's (14.73 crore)



Source: www.idea.int; Election Commission of India; Election Atlas of India: Parliamentary Elections 1952-2014

## FROM THE HINDU ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MARCH 12, 1969

# Chandra Shekhar refuses to express regret

The Executive Committee of the Congress Parliamentary Party to-day [March 11, New Delhi] decided to persuade Mr. Chandra Shekhar, a Congress member of the Rajya Sabha to express regret for some of his remarks against Mr. Morarji Desai during the debate on Birla affairs. But Mr. Chandra Shekhar, who met the Leader of the party, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, later in the evening [March 11], is understood to have refused to do so. According to the decision taken by the Executive Committee, disciplinary action will now be initiated against Mr. Chandra Shekhar. Under the rules – as quoted by Mr. Sonavane at the meeting this morning [March 11] – a show cause notice will have to be issued and the matter should be referred to the General Body which is to decide on two-thirds majority. There is a feeling that reference to the General Body may lead to further complications. The whole episode it is feared may lead to a serious rift within the Party.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MARCH 12, 1919.

# Blind Relief Association.

With a view to starting systematic work for prevention, cure and relief of blindness an association called "The Blind Relief Association" has been inaugurated here [Mumbai] with the Hon'ble Mr. Gokaldas Parekh as its Chairman. It is estimated that blindness is more prevalent in India than in the western countries and its causes to a great extent are preventable. Yet no systematic effort has hitherto been made for prevention, cure or relief of the unfortunate blind. The Association has secured the services of two experienced eye specialists, Drs. Prabhakar and Chatrapati, and has enlisted the co-operation Mr. C.G. Henderson I.C.S., of Nasik, who has been doing a good deal of practical work in this connection. The scheme proposed by the organisers is an ambitious one.

## POLL CALL

# First-past-the-post system

The first-past-the-post (FPTP) system is also known as the simple majority system. In this voting method, the candidate with the highest number of votes in a constituency is declared the winner. This system is used in India in direct elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. While FPTP is relatively simple, it does not always allow for a truly representative mandate, as the candidate could win despite securing less than half the votes in a contest. In 2014, the National Democratic Alliance led by the Bharatiya Janata Party won 336 seats with only 38.5% of the popular vote. Also, smaller parties representing specific groups have a lower chance of being elected in FPTP.

## MORE ON THE WEB

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<http://bit.ly/GuhaandGandhi>