



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

TERROR, LIVE

Massacre in Christchurch was formatted for viral internet distribution, intended to polarise communities everywhere

MASS SHOOTINGS HAVE in the past been intended to draw attention to a "cause", but the attack on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, seemed differently focused. It was done to create a "point of view" video that, in the terrible aftermath, gamers would instantly recognise, with a weapon held angled at the bottom of a field of view that is striding jerkily forward. This is what one sees when one plays a "first person shooter", a popular category of violent video games. It was live-streamed on a Facebook page, and a post by the first perpetrator to be identified, Brenton Tarrant, on the notorious American message board 8chan, connected the video to a 73-page "manifesto", setting out his motives and politics. He explicitly discounted gaming as his inspiration, but he used every trick in the social media marketing box to push out his message. And indeed, the video and "manifesto" moved faster than the internet's gatekeepers possibly could, and has been shared on an unprecedented scale. In the past, after mass killings, content was generally limited to officers of the law and investigators, while citizens received a filtered account through the media. But this was murder designed to spread virally, in all its raw horror, and its social and political impact worldwide remains to be gauged.

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has lost no time in distancing New Zealanders from the shooter, and powerfully indicated her nation's support for immigrants: "They have chosen to make this their home. They are us. The person who perpetrated this is not us." Tarrant was born in neighbouring Australia, which in 2009 witnessed a wave of attacks and robberies targeting Indian students, which were described as racially motivated. The Australian Federation of Islamic Councils has labelled the Christchurch shootings a terrorist attack, and Australia's first Muslim woman senator, the Lahore-born Mehreen Faruqi, has warned against the enabling environment that far-right politicians like Pauline Hanson and Fraser Anning contribute to. The latter is currently under fire for linking Muslims and immigration with violence. Their rhetoric is all too familiar, promoting Islamophobia, nebulous anxieties about the other, and the bogey of a majority threatened by a minority.

Tarrant's "manifesto", too brutishly elementary to deserve that classification, is nevertheless a carefully crafted document which references well-known white supremacist themes, slogans and conspiracy theories. The rifle magazines and other equipment visible in the video were inscribed with the names of victims of terrorist crimes in the West. These are meant to be attention-grabbers, recalling the SEO stratagems used to seduce search engines into giving better rankings. In the case of this murder made for social media, they will keep the horrific story in circulation and ensure that it travels widely, seeking new audiences.

THE SAME TRAGEDY

A footbridge collapse draws attention once again to the criminal band-aid approach to basic infrastructure in Mumbai

MUMBAI'S "LIFELINE", THE suburban railway system and its attendant infrastructure of bridges and footbridges, once again proved to be a death trap. This time, six lives were lost when a footbridge leading into and out of the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus collapsed in the evening rush hour. The repetitive nature of Mumbai's urban tragedies rankles sharply, for not even a year has passed since another footbridge, in suburban Andheri, collapsed on a rainy morning in July 2018, claiming two lives. In the immediate aftermath of that tragedy, a handful of bridges across Mumbai were shut for a few days as structural audits were hastily conducted. Incredibly, the CSMT bridge that collapsed on Thursday evening was among those audited, and deemed safe for use.

The real urban tragedy in Mumbai is not just these incidents, but also their sameness. The Andheri bridge that collapsed last year had been due for repairs for over two years. The Elphinstone Road railway footbridge stampede in 2017 that claimed 22 lives came after repeated warnings by passengers that the crush-packed bridge could witness exactly such a calamity. At present, at least two key road bridges are shut for reconstruction, but others needing repairs continue to be open. Meanwhile, each time, the task of fixing accountability is not completed to any degree of satisfaction. Perhaps more sensitive in election time to popular anger, the Mumbai Police were directed to file a case of culpable homicide in the CSMT bridge collapse case, but in every previous case ranging from the stampede to the Kamala Mills fire, top officials have remained out of the ambit of investigations amid the blur of buck-passing and blame-games. Municipal officials indicted in the roads scam and drain desilting scam were recently promoted. The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation raised its budgetary allocation for repairs to, and reconstruction of, bridges to a little over Rs 600 crore in 2019-20. But only minor repairs were scheduled for the bridge that collapsed, a clear indication of unscientific structural audits and also symptomatic of the band-aid approach to basic infrastructure in Mumbai. It is a tale of two cities, one that discusses the bullet train and an international financial services centre and another that attracts talent and labour but fails to build robust systems to upgrade its colonial era infrastructure.

The much-vaunted coastal road, sea links and Shivaji statue, their multi-crore price-tags jarring amid absent basic infrastructure for millions of middle class Mumbaiers, will not stanch the casualties. To be a more inclusive city, Mumbai needs to realign its planning priorities.

TOO HOT TO HANDLE

A Swedish schoolgirl and the global movement she triggered against climate change

AROUND LATE AUGUST in 2018, Greta Thunberg, aged 15 then, was seen outside the Swedish Parliament in Stockholm, silently handing out leaflets: "I am doing this because you adults are s****ing on my future." Another hand-painted sign read, "skolstrejk för klimatet (school strike for climate change)". She was on strike, refusing to attend school until Sweden's authorities recognised the predicament the country faced because of climate change. Subsequently, Thunberg would skip school every Friday to protest against the lackadaisical attitude of policy makers.

On March 14, Thunberg was nominated for the Nobel peace prize. But perhaps a truer recognition of her efforts came in the spirited protests on March 15, when school children across countries organised strikes against climate inaction. One of Thunberg's primary objectives was to steer the Swedish government's attention towards policies that could help the country stay on course with the Paris climate targets — to keep global temperature rise below 2°C above pre-industrial levels. This was also when Sweden was getting assailed by heatwaves, wildfires and drought in what became the hottest summer the country had seen in more than 260 years.

Crucially, those who are part of the movement recognise that the young are the ones most at risk in a world that can heat up to more than 4°C its current temperature. The escalation it would cause on ecosystems globally is a terrifying spectre — for adults. But, for the school children striking on the streets, it will be a torrid reality to contend with. It is the ominous possibility of a world wrecked by climate devastation that has resonated with school children in India, too, as they stand in solidarity with Thunberg.



AMARTYA LAHIRI

THE RECENT DECISION of the US to give notice of its intention to rescind India's export privileges under the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) has refocused attention on the state of Indian exports. Under the GSP programme, the US provides duty-free access to 4,800 different goods from 129 designated countries. The immediate loss for India is preferential access at zero or minimal tariffs to the US market for around 1,900 products, which is over half of all Indian products.

The ministry of commerce has reacted to the news by asserting that the losses from the GSP withdrawal are going to be minimal. This assertion is based on the fact that the actual tariff advantage that India was getting from the programme was a meagre USD 190 million, which is just 0.4 per cent of the USD 50 billion over all Indian exports to the US.

The government's argument unfortunately misses the point that India is competing for market share in the US with a host of other low income countries, including Mexico. In industries where margins are small, a very small increase in the market price can cause a large fall in the quantity exported. A potential fall in quantity exported will, of course, imply a much larger cost of losing GSP access. If exporters absorb the tariff increase, then their profit margins will fall, potentially inducing some of them to exit this market completely. The tariff benefit that India currently enjoys is low simply because average tariffs in the US are low. It cannot be used as an indicator of the potential cost to India of losing its GSP privilege.

The GSP development, though, provides a good opportunity for India to introspect on the general state of Indian exports. The raw fact of the matter is that India's share of world exports has been stuck at around 2 per cent for some time now. Essentially, our exports have been growing at the same rate as the rest of the world. For a country that has consistently been one of the fastest growing

At a standstill

US move to withdraw privileges provides opportunity for India to introspect on the general state of its exports

Despite the overwhelming attention that Indian service sector exports receive, around 63 per cent of total Indian exports are still of goods. It is true that the Indian service sector's share of world services exports rose sharply from 0.5 per cent in 1990 to 3.7 per cent in 2017. But this performance is hardly earth shattering. The much less discussed Chinese service sector's share of world service sector exports more than tripled from 0.9 per cent in 1992 to 3.8 per cent in 2017. The big disparity between China and India is goods exports.

economies in the world, India's exports should be growing much faster. This is what one saw with China and the other East Asian economies over the last 30 years, and with Japan earlier. Clearly, something isn't working in India.

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The big disparity between China and India is goods exports. India's share of world goods exports rose from 0.5 per cent in 1990 to 1.7 per cent in 2017 while China's rose from 1.8 per cent to 12.8 per cent during the same period. Indeed, this has been one of the key vehicles for the rapid Chinese growth take-off. Rapid growth of the large-scale, low-tech, labour intensive merchandise goods export sector created a simultaneous increase in demand for relatively unskilled Chinese labour as well as an increase in demand for the rapid infrastructure rollout that China invested in. The labour demand soaked up the labour being released from agriculture while the infrastructure demand implied that the infrastructure investment was cost effective.

The Indian export portrait, however, looks very different from the Chinese export landscape. Merchandise exports in India are concentrated in eight industries which collectively account for 85 per cent of India's merchandise exports. Amongst these top-8 industries are textiles, chemicals, machinery, vehicles and parts etc. Factories in these industries are mostly small, employing 100 or fewer workers. The productivity levels in these manufacturing establishments are also

low. Though exporters tend to be larger and more productive than non-exporters, these are low by international standards.

The problem with the Indian export sector appears to be two-fold. The first is the general malaise afflicting the manufacturing sector. Existing labour and land laws make growing in scale a difficult proposition for firms. In addition, the infrastructure support that is needed to sustain production and distribution at scale is often missing. These include transport connectivity and reliable power supply. Firms find it optimal to stay small and operate with old technologies. Fixing this requires concerted action on multiple fronts. Addressing just a subset of these constraints is unlikely to work.

The second important issue is the trade regime. India has to send out unequivocal signals that it is a reliable trade partner that wants to become part of the global supply chain. To achieve this, India has to avoid falling back on discredited policies such as raising import tariffs under various guises like furthering the Make in India initiative or addressing current account imbalances. The withdrawal of GPS by the US is partly a response to these kinds of protectionist moves that have begun to again rear their heads over the last few years. Bad ideas, like bad smells, tend to hang around long enough to drive away customers. They need to be strenuously kept away from the policy levers.

Lastly, the EU is a bigger entity than even the US. Negotiations on a free trade agreement with the EU have been ongoing since 2007. The textile industry in Bangladesh has benefited at India's expense over the last decade due to the absence of such a trade agreement. It is high time we conclude an agreement with the EU.

The writer is Director, Centre for Advanced Financial Research and Learning, Mumbai and Professor of Economics at the University of British Columbia. Views are personal



KHALED AHMED

PAKISTAN, PREDICTABLY, BANNED Nandita Das's film "Manto" last year because "it does not subscribe to the correct version of the Partition". Filmgoers were outraged in Lahore, Manto's city, and even the Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Fawad Chaudhry, was forced to make a somewhat inane defence of the film, saying, "I am trying to persuade importers to bring this movie to Pakistan." The Censor Board repeated its determination to not let the film be shown in Pakistan.

Historian Ayesha Jalal — Manto's grand-niece, whose version of Pakistan's history is equally indigestible to the state — gave her own take on Manto's worldview in "The Pity of Partition: Manto's Life, Times, and Work across the India-Pakistan Divide" (2013), and spoke at a literary festival in Lahore soon after the ban, condemning Pakistan's ingrained inferiority complex vis-à-vis India and said, "Whatever decision Manto made at Partition, he reconciled with it, but his status in his new country was never clarified."

Jalal added pointedly: "One day he was called the best short story writer in the country and the next day asked to abandon the only flat he had been given to live in. That's what Nandita has tried to convey, but since it's an Indian film made by an Indian filmmaker, I think that's the objection: How dare an Indian tell us that a Pakistani man who moved to Pakistan was unhappy?"

Manto had himself tried to understand what had happened. He was hauled up before the courts for "obscenity"; but the British Raj courts didn't accept that his work was not literature and let him walk. After 1947, how-

THE PERSISTENT GHOST OF MANTO

He described Partition's 'morning after'. Pakistan still doesn't understand

ever, his cases came up in courts "transformed" by "new identity" and convicted him with fines. As he records, one judge in Karachi actually met him a day before the hearing and called him the greatest living writer in Urdu only to convict him the following day.

Strangely, a sketch he had produced in an Urdu journal described the "morning after" feeling of a Pakistani man walking the street in Lahore. As the citizen of a new "ideological" utopia, the man felt too judgmental to forgive the streets' follies he had been forced to ignore during the days of "slavery". He disliked what he had liked before because it was not in accordance with the precepts of the new state; and objected even to the way people dressed.

Manto's sketch about wall-chalking inside a public latrine in Lahore during the riots explained his "neutral" dislike of the brawling communities. Pakistan will never understand his "non-alignment" with, rather than "rejection" of, what was going on: The latrine scrawls had two communalists cursing each other while a "third person" in his comment applied their curses back on them. He wrote fiction to express his alienation from the violence — expressed through rape ("Thanda Goshit") and sheer mental collapse ("Toba Tek Singh"), yet another comparison with a "madhouse" — by writing short stories that offended the communalists from both sides of the divide. Faiz Ahmed Faiz stood on the other side of the ideological divide from Manto, but his own "morning after" poem about the false or "mottled dawn" of Pakistan actually expressed Manto's disappointment.

pressed Manto's disappointment. Prophetically, the utopia came apart in 1971.

Nandita Das's film is made with a deep understanding of what was happening inside Manto. The film "Manto", earlier made in Pakistan by Sarmad Khoosat, was courageous but had relied more on the externals, thus avoiding the ideological censor brought on by Das's version containing the hidden rebuke that it was made in "hostile" India.

Ayesha Jalal said Nandita's film was more historically accurate but was banned "though still available online", "which made no sense". She thought social critique had been interpreted as criticism of Partition: "If you don't have the capacity to bear the critique then the problem is not with Manto but your own self. As a historian, I see these attempts to control the media as a sign of failure. The more desperate we get, the crazier our laws are getting." Nandita's reaction was: "Pakistanis defending a film from India shows that we are united in our pursuit of peace and justice."

In Pakistan, late Khalid Hasan translated Manto and "globalised" him. In his account, "Mottled Dawn: Fifty Sketches and Stories of Partition by Saadat Hasan Manto", he tells us that Manto did not want to return to Lahore. He went to Delhi to work for the radio for a time only to return to Bombay. Then riots overtook Bombay and broke his heart. His wife told Khalid that he was asked by actor Ashok Kumar's film company to leave after it received communalist threats.

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MARCH 16, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

WITH VIETNAM INDIA AND THE Soviet Union today demanded "an immediate, unconditional and total withdrawal of Chinese troops from the territory of Vietnam." A joint communique issued at the end of the Soviet Premier, Alexie Kosygin's six-day official visit, also stressed that the "two sides considered it necessary to exert further efforts in the interest of strengthening peace in the Asian continent, of developing cooperation among all Asian countries on the principles of sovereign equality and independence, non-use of force, inviolability of frontiers, territorial integrity of states, no interference into internal affairs and on other generally recognised principles

of inter-state relations". The two sides also favoured a "comprehensive and just settlement of the West Asian problem on the basis of the complete withdrawal of Israeli troops from all Arab territories occupied in 1967, the securing of the legitimate rights of the Arab people of Palestine, including their right to establish their own state as well as the ensuring for all states in the area the right of independent existence and development".

CHINESE OCCUPATION CHINESE OFFICIALS WERE quoted as saying that their troops would remain "several kilometres" inside Vietnam in some areas. Vietnam charged that Peking's soldiers had

left a swath of destruction along the frontier and were moving boundary markers deep into its territory. Vietnam's latest battle report said Chinese forces had shelled areas south of Cao Bang, 190 km north of Hanoi.

MEERUT COPYING A DELEGATION of Meerut citizens called on Prime Minister Morarji Desai and apprised him of the facts about the reported mass copying by students. The six-member delegation was led by Meerut Sarvodaya worker, Master Sunder Lal. The prime minister, it is understood, assured the deputation that stern action would be taken against the institutions allowing copying.

15 THE IDEAS PAGE

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“The Christchurch attack marks a grim new age of social media-fueled terrorism.” —NEW YORK TIMES

Holding up the Fourth Branch

The Opposition should put its money where its mouth is. An Independent Institutions Bill should feature in their manifestoes



TARUNABH KHAITAN

THE INDEPENDENCE AND credibility of our (admittedly imperfect) state institutions have never been so thoroughly in doubt since the Emergency. Characterised as the fourth branch of the state — because of their distinctiveness from the executive, legislature and judiciary — these institutions are tasked with the protection of key constitutional values such as democracy, legality, impartiality, probity, human rights and price stability. While Chapter Nine of the South African Constitution explicitly guarantees independence to the fourth branch of the state, the Indian Constitution does so implicitly by expecting Parliament to enact a law prescribing detailed mechanisms for appointments to and functioning of such institutions — for example, through Articles 280(2) and 324(2). However, an Independent Institutions Bill remains a long-unrealised constitutional aspiration.

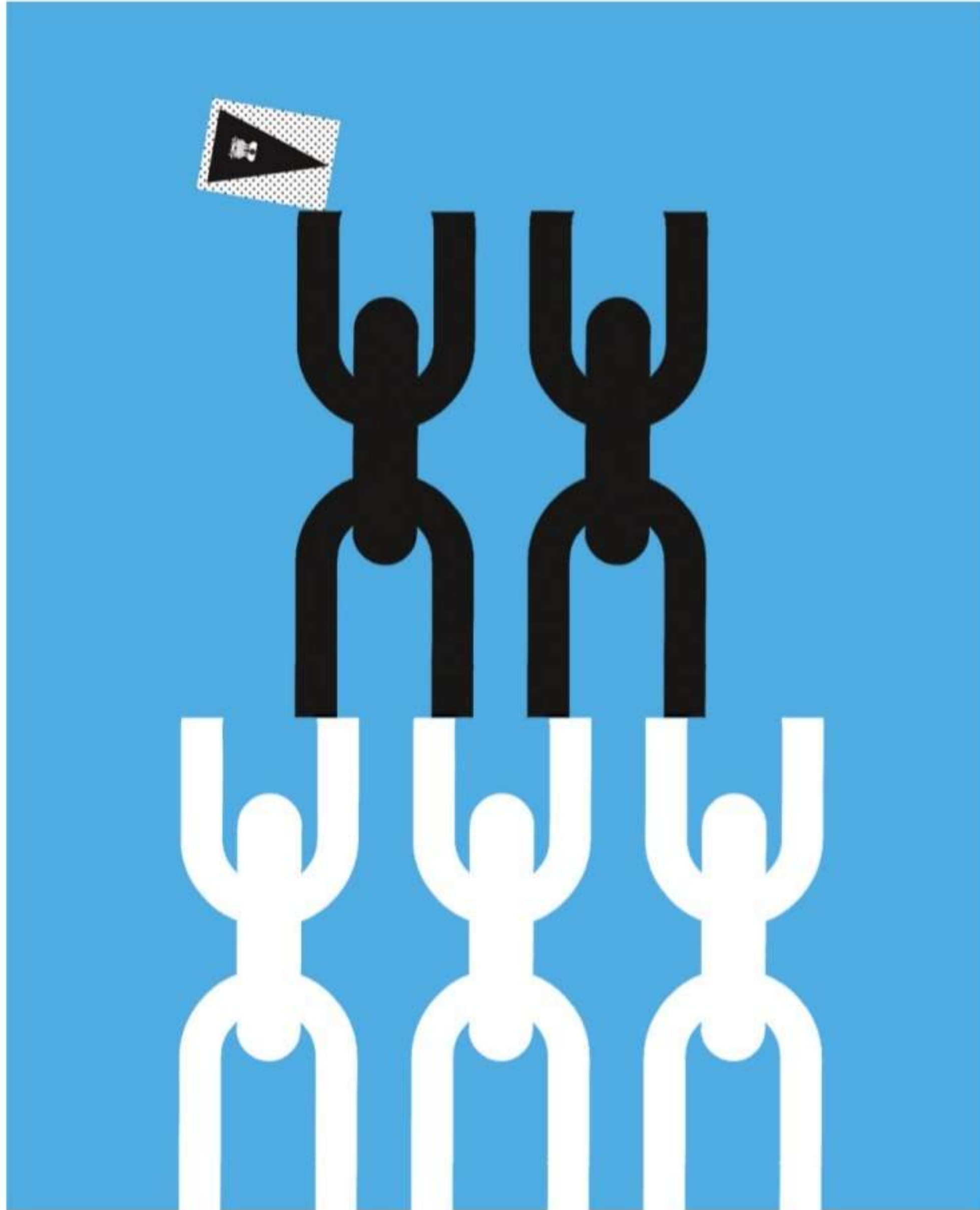
In the Indian context, institutions of the fourth branch include the Election Commission, Lokpal, Central Bureau of Investigation, Reserve Bank, National Statistics Commission, National Human Rights Commission, Information Commission, commissions for various marginalised groups, Central Vigilance Commission, Comptroller & Auditor General, Attorney General, Public Service Commission, University Grants Commission, Finance Commission, Niti Aayog, media regulators and many others. Some of these institutions are constitutional; others have quasi-constitutional status.

An Independent Institutions Bill should seek the following objectives: One, multi-partisan appointments, two, operational independence and impartiality, and three, accountability to the legislature rather than the executive. The contours of this bill are outlined below.

Key to achieving these purposes is to put multi-partisan legislative committees — called Independent Institutions Committees (IICs) — in the driving seat. Parliamentary IICs could include two nominees of the ruling party/alliance (including any party providing support from the outside) and a nominee each from the three largest Opposition parties in each House. The vidhan sabha IICs could have one governmental nominee and one each from the two largest Opposition parties. These details can be fine-tuned, but a united Opposition should be able to defeat the government, forcing it to compromise with at least one key Opposition party. Thus designed, the IICs will include the voice of the powerful regional parties of the day, and not just the two national parties. The IICs should be guaranteed adequate staff and resources to permit the proper discharge of their functions.

The Rajya Sabha's IIC should issue a public advertisement at least three months before a post in an institution is due to become vacant. Based on applications and consultations with relevant stakeholders (including existing members of that institution, MPs from the relevant state for state-level appointments, area experts and activists), the IIC should draw up a shortlist of at least two — and no more than five — names to fill up the posts.

From this shortlist, the final selection should be made by the Lok Sabha's IIC for central institutions, and the relevant vidhan sabha's IIC for state institutions. Apart from



CR Sasikumar

fourth-branch institutions, parliamentary IICs could also deal with the appointments of governors while the state-level mechanism (involving the Rajya Sabha and vidhan sabha IICs) could be used to appoint police chiefs. All shortlisting and decisions on appointments must be made by a single-transferable vote. Appointment decisions should ideally be made before the post falls vacant — responsibility should be fixed for the failure to do so within three months of the vacancy arising.

Judicial independence demands that judges stay out of politically-salient appointments completely (except to the judiciary and to administrative tribunals) — that is the key lesson one can learn from the controversy linking Justice A K Sikri's role in Alok Verma's removal to his post-retirement benefit as well as the multiple judicial recusals in the case challenging the appointment of the CBI's interim director.

The appointments should be for a fixed term. Removal from office should require at least four votes in the Rajya Sabha IIC, after a specially-instituted independent inquiry finds a breach of a statutorily specified offence. All institutional decisions should be made by a

An independent institutions bill should seek the following objectives: One, multi-partisan appointments, two, operational independence and impartiality, and three, accountability to the legislature rather than the executive.

governing committee rather than the chief officer acting on her own. Except promotions within the institution, appointees should not be eligible for any public office after stepping down. Salaries, perks and staff provisions should be statutorily protected. Transfers and interim appointments may be made only by a majority vote in the Rajya Sabha IIC. A robust guarantee of non-interference by the executive should be anxiously policed by the courts.

The Bill should require fourth branch institutions to regularly publish reports about their functioning. Based on these public reports, the Lok Sabha or vidhan sabha IIC, as the case may be, should question their senior staff in annual, televised, hearings. The Rajya Sabha IIC may, by a majority vote, decide to summon them at any time for questioning on particular matters.

Yes, we must “Save the Constitution”. But a slogan is not enough. The current Opposition should put its money where its mouth is, and make a manifesto commitment to enact the Independent Institutions Bill.

The author is an associate professor in law at the universities of Oxford and Melbourne

A stunting reality

New report gives constituency-wise data for malnutrition. High-profile MPs have not paid attention to a grave issue in their backyard



NEERJA CHOWDHURY

AS THINGS STAND, 2019 is likely to be an election driven by emotion. As Narendra Modi hit out at the Opposition that they were trying to “finish Modi” while he wanted to finish “terrorism, poverty and malnutrition”, it is probably the first time that a prime minister had put combating malnutrition amongst his top three priorities, and that too as an election promise.

As poll talk generates heat, a report has put out cold figures about child malnutrition in India's 543 Lok Sabha constituencies. This is the first time that constituency-wise data has been released by a Harvard professor, SV Subramanian, and his team, including researchers from the Indian Institute of Economic Growth, and supported by Tata Trust. The report ranks every constituency by five indicators on stunting, wasting, underweight, low birth weight and anaemia amongst children.

Most surprising, India's women and child development minister, who is supposed to ensure that no child in the country remains stunted and the scourge of anaemia is removed, is virtually at the bottom of the heap as far as her own constituency, Pilibhit, goes. Maneka Gandhi ranks 14 th from the bottom in anaemia. This when the government has brought huge energy into its social sector programming, particularly the Poshan Abhiyan to eliminate malnutrition, which was launched last year by the prime minister in Jhunjhunu.

It would be unfair to single out Maneka Gandhi. For the story of all the big daddies and equally powerful mummies of Indian politics is an eye opener. It may surprise the PM to know that his own constituency of Varanasi is somewhere in the middle, at 250, (543 being the best and 1 being the worst), as far as anaemia goes (59.5 per cent). But it ranks 124 for child stunting at 43 per cent, 5 per cent more than the national average. In India, three out of five children are still anaemic, and 38 per cent are stunted. “Stunting” can cause irreversible damage to a child unless treated early.

Rahul Gandhi fares worse. Amethi has 65 per cent anaemia, and ranks 161. It is 113 in stunting (44 per cent). Mulayam Singh Yadav's constituency Azamgarh has 63 per cent anaemia and 40 per cent stunting. Home Minister Rajnath Singh also does not come out smelling of roses. Lucknow is way down, 58 from the bottom, with almost three out of four children in his constituency being anaemic. Amongst the 20 worst constituencies for child stunting, 11 are from UP, eight from Bihar and one from Jharkhand.

Equally surprising is the record of well-known women MPs. Sushma Swaraj gave a matchless performance at the recent meeting of the OIC (Organisation of Islamic Countries). But her constituency of Vidisha in Madhya Pradesh has 67 per cent anaemia. Sumitra Mahajan has presided over the Lok Sabha for five years, not an easy task, but

Indore, which she has represented for years, has 73.5 per cent anaemia and is 42 from the bottom. Kirron Kher has swayed millions with her incredible film performances, but her constituency of Chandigarh also has more than 71 per cent anaemia. Uma Bharti was chief minister of Madhya Pradesh but has not been able to tackle 75.7 per cent anaemia in Jhansi. Neither can Sonia Gandhi, with 61.7 per cent anaemia in Rae Bareilly and a 220 ranking.

It is interesting that some younger MPs who have raised the issue of child malnutrition from time to time in the last few years, have fared better, possibly because of a sensitivity to the issue. Jay Panda, who recently joined the BJP, ranked 525 (for tackling anaemia), in other words in the top 20. Supriya Sule, Poonam Mahajan, Sushmita Dev, Gaurav Gogoi, Anurag Thakur are among those who have done better than many of their counterparts.

Interestingly enough, Asaduddin Owaisi's constituency of Hyderabad ranks 21 for having only 21 per cent levels of stunting. It made me recall a conversation in the constituency during the recent assembly elections in the state. When asked what was her dream for her granddaughters, I was stunned when an old woman — she said she was 100 — said she wanted “taleem” for them, and “for them to be able to stand on their own feet”.

It is the constituency of Kollam which is the top of the pops, and its MP, N K Premachandran of the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP), is the hero of this story. His is the best constituency (rank 543) both in terms of tackling anaemia (down to less than 18 per cent) and stunting (15 per cent).

And it is Kerala which has emerged as the best-performing state. Surprisingly, and contrary to popular perception, it is not Tamil Nadu, which has over the years been known for its mid-day meals and social welfare programmes. Amongst the best 20 constituencies in the country which deserve a medal for having tackled the difficult problem of stunting amongst children, 15 are from Kerala and Shashi Tharoor's constituency of Thiruvananthapuram has been ranked as the 10th best. This may be because Kerala is known for its almost cent percent literacy and a high status for women, and child malnutrition has everything to do with women's health, education and well-being.

The moral of the story, then, is that men and women who formulate policy in Parliament, have not paid enough attention to those very issues in their own backyards. For accountability, there is a need now to consider manifestos for individual Lok Sabha constituencies. And a report card at the end of five years, by credible agencies, to enable the voters to make up their minds.

Polis will come and go. But the harsh figures about our children will continue to rankle. They are a reminder that the future of India depends not so much on political rhetoric but on how quickly we can eliminate problems like stunting and anaemia, which affect a child's cognitive and brain development, and her productivity and potential. But for that to happen, our parliamentarians will also have to make an inviolable commitment to the children in their constituencies.

The writer is a senior journalist

FOR THE RECORD



JACINDA ARDERN

‘Because we represent diversity’

The values New Zealand stands for will not be shaken by the Christchurch attack

IT IS WITH extreme sadness that I tell you that as at 7pm tonight (March 15, New Zealand time), we believe that 40 people have lost their lives in this act of extreme violence. There are also more than 20 seriously injured who are currently in Christchurch A&E.

It is clear that this can only be described as a terrorist attack. From what we know, it does appear to have been well planned. Two explosive devices attached to suspects' vehicles have been found and they have been disarmed.

There are currently four individuals who have been apprehended, but three are connected to this attack and are currently in custody, one of whom has publicly stated that they were Australian born. These are people who I would describe as having extremist views that have absolutely no place in New Zealand and in fact have no place in the world.

While we do not have any reason to be-

lieve at this stage that there are other suspects, we are not assuming that at this stage. The joint intelligence group has been deployed and police are putting all of their resources into this situation. The defence force are currently transporting additional police staff to the region. Our national security threat level has been lifted from low, to high. This I want to assure people is to ensure that all our agencies are responding in the most appropriate way. That includes at our borders.

Air New Zealand has cancelled all turbo prop flights out of Christchurch tonight and will review the situation in the morning. Jet services both domestically and internationally are continuing to operate.

There is heightened security, so we can assure people of their safety and the police are working hard to ensure people are able to move around their city safely.

I have spoken this evening to the mayor of Christchurch and I intend to speak this evening to the Imam, but I also want to send

a message to those directly affected.

In fact, I am sure right now New Zealand would like me to share a message on their behalf too.

Our thoughts and our prayers are with those who have been impacted today. Christchurch was their home. For many, this may not have been the place they were born, in fact for many, New Zealand was their choice. The place they actively came to, and committed to. The place they were raising their families. Where they were parts of communities that they loved and who loved them in return. It was a place that many came to for its safety. A place where they were free to practice their culture and their religion.

For those of you who are watching at home tonight, and questioning how this could have happened here. We, New Zealand, were not a target because we are a safe harbour for those who hate.

We were not chosen for this act of violence because we condone racism, because

we are an enclave for extremism. We were chosen for the very fact that we are none of those things. Because we represent diversity, kindness, compassion. A home for those who share our values. Refuge for those who need it. And those values will not and cannot be shaken by this attack.

We are a proud nation of more than 200 ethnicities, 160 languages. And amongst that diversity we share common values. And the one that we place the currency on right now is our compassion and support for the community of those directly affected by this tragedy.

And secondly, the strongest possible condemnation of the ideology of the people who did this.

You may have chosen us — we utterly reject and condemn you.

Jacinda Ardern is the prime minister of New Zealand. This was her message after the Christchurch terror attack

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

VICTORY IN DISGUISE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘After China's veto’ (IE, March 15). The editorial notes that China's veto at the UNSC on declaring Masood Azhar as a global terrorist is a defeat for Indian diplomacy. It's actually a victory in disguise. All other UNSC members voted in favour of India's resolution. This exposes China. This matters much in times of soft power-based diplomacy.

Suchak D Patel, Ahmedabad

GESTURE OF RESPECT

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘Cap doesn't fit’ (IE, March 14). Have you noticed the South African team wearing pink jersey? Yes, many of us have noticed the gesture of the Proteas to raise awareness about breast cancer. Wearing combat caps by the Indian team was just a way to express respect to soldiers. Players wearing pink jerseys, black bands or combat caps during a match draw the viewer's attention.

Sanidhya Jain, Ujjain

UNIFORM NEGLECT

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘Why education doesn't become a poll issue’ (IE, March 15). For the electorate, the manifestos of political parties are not gospel truth and it is not a matter of significance to them whether they talk about education. Government-run schools and colleges are on the brink throughout India except in Delhi. It is an open secret that right from the kindergarten to professional colleges, a

LETTER OF THE WEEK

BEYOND POLITICS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘A time for her story’ (IE, March 12). There are many untold stories of women who have done amazing work but we forget the hurdles they faced. Why was there no female Buddha who left her house, her husband and children in the search of knowledge? We talk about political and economic empowerment. But women also require emotional empowerment.

Jaimini Patel, via e-mail

large number of educational institutions enjoy the patronage of politicians. One cannot expect government schools and colleges to be a big draw.

Deepak Singhal, Noida

A SIMPLE MESSAGE

This refers to the editorial, ‘An unsecular secularism’ (IE, March 14). The message that the detergent commercial was trying to give has been misinterpreted. It showcases two children, untouched by bigoted realities and standing by the idiom, “a friend in need is a friend indeed”. Why can't the advertisement be perceived as just that?

Harasahej Mann, via e-mail