



A lot to lose

Tamil Nadu's regional players are locked in a national battle

The electoral scene in Tamil Nadu presents a picture dramatically different from what it was five years ago. The most obvious difference is the absence of the two towering figures of the State's recent political history, M. Karunanidhi of the DMK, and Jayalalitha of the AIADMK. Both parties will miss the distinctive vote-catching capabilities of these leaders. The second is the return of national parties as key players in the Lok Sabha elections. The 2014 election took place when the two regional parties felt that an alliance with a national party would be a liability. The DMK, a partner in the UPA regimes of 2004 and 2009, walked out of the government in 2013, blaming the Congress for the dilution of a UN Human Rights Council resolution against Sri Lanka. It formed an alliance with minor parties, while the AIADMK, despite the personal rapport between the BJP's then-prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi and Jayalalitha, chose to go it alone. With the BJP winning a majority in the Lok Sabha, it required no help from Tamil Nadu to form the government. Though regional parties from the State played key roles in coalitions at the Centre since 1996, the 2014-19 period was a relatively weak phase for them. But now the 2019 contest for the 39 seats in Tamil Nadu will be a regional variant of the national battle between Prime Minister Modi and Congress president Rahul Gandhi, as the AIADMK is in the BJP fold and the DMK has tied up with the Congress. The outcome will reinforce the view that regional parties hold sway in Tamil Nadu, but it can potentially reveal the electorate's national preference.

DMK leader M.K. Stalin was the first ally to endorse Mr. Gandhi's claim to be the alternative to Mr. Modi, indicating a marked shift from five years ago. The AIADMK faces a double anti-incumbency factor. As the ruling party in the post-Jayalalitha era, it is fighting off the impression of being a supplicant before the BJP. And issues on which the Modi regime suffers from a negative perception, such as NEET and demonetisation, may rub off on the regional ally too. Crucially, as many as 18 by-elections to the State Assembly are taking place alongside the Lok Sabha polls. Their outcome may have a bearing on the majority enjoyed by Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami. The AIADMK is pinning its hopes on its traditional vote base holding firm. It appears to be strong on its own in the western region, and has tied up with the Pattali Makkal Katchi to improve its prospects in the northern districts. The AIADMK also faces a possible threat to its traditional vote base from T.T.V. Dhinakaran, who heads a splinter group. Mr. Dhinakaran and actor Kamal Haasan's fledgling parties are separately in the fray, and whatever they garner will have to be at the expense of the two main parties. By all accounts, this may be the DMK's election to lose.

Useful tool

The dollar-rupee swap allows the RBI to directly influence rupee value and liquidity

The Reserve Bank of India's decision last week to resort to a dollar-rupee swap, instead of the traditional open-market purchase of bonds, to infuse liquidity into the economy marks a significant shift in the central bank's liquidity management policy. Under the three-year currency swap scheme, which is scheduled to open on Tuesday next week, the RBI will purchase \$5 billion from banks in exchange for rupees. The central bank will infuse as much as ₹35,000 crore into the system in one shot at a time when liquidity generally tends to be squeezed. For the banks, it is a way to earn some interest out of the forex reserves lying idle in their kitty. Apart from injecting fresh liquidity into the economy, the move will have implications for the currency market even as it helps shore up the RBI's dollar reserves. Bond yields rose on the day following the announcement of the swap scheme last week, reflecting the prevailing opinion among traders that the RBI may gradually reduce its dependence on the regular bond purchase scheme to manage liquidity within the economy. While traditional open market operations distort the bond market, the new forex swap scheme will introduce new distortions in the currency market. The rupee's recent rally against the dollar has been halted by the RBI's decision to infuse rupees and suck out dollars through the swap scheme. Even so, it is worth noting that the rupee has appreciated significantly in value terms against the dollar since the low reached in October as foreign investors have begun to pour money into the Indian economy.

Overall, the dollar-rupee swap is a useful addition to the RBI's policy toolkit as it offers the central bank a chance to directly influence both the value of the rupee and the amount of liquidity in the economy at the same time using a single tool. In the aftermath of the liquidity crisis in the non-banking financial sector, it can be an effective way to lower private borrowing costs as well. The coming elections, which can lead to an increase in cash withdrawals from banks, may have also played a role in the RBI's larger decision to boost liquidity in the system. The way banks respond after receiving fresh liquidity from the RBI, however, will determine the success of the new liquidity scheme to a large extent. Businesses could benefit from the greater availability of liquidity, but only if banks aggressively pass on the benefit of lower rates to their borrowers. If banks choose to deposit the fresh RBI money in safe government securities at low yields, as they have done in the past, the *de facto* cap on the government's borrowing costs will remain intact. But if banks manage to find alternative ways to deploy their money, the RBI's new liquidity scheme could end up raising borrowing costs for the government, punishing it for fiscal indiscretion.

A short history of data

Why the recent undermining of the credibility of India's statistical output is especially regrettable



NIKHIL MENON

Over the past two months, Indian national statistics and the organisations that administer them have faced a volley of criticism. In January two independent members of the National Statistical Commission resigned in protest, over alleged suppression of economic data by the government. More recently, amidst growing scepticism regarding India's official statistics, more than a hundred scholars comprising economists and social scientists released a statement decrying the fall in standards of institutional independence, suggesting political interference as the cause. Kaushik Basu, a former chief economist of the World Bank, also recently bemoaned the declining credibility of India's official statistics.

Pioneering history

While declining data quality has been an issue for a while, concern over institutional independence is new. What several of these criticisms reference is the fact that India's national statistics were once internationally renowned among economists and policy professionals for their reliability. In the decades following World War II, India had reason to be proud not only of the institutional independence of national statistical bodies but also – uniquely among developing countries – of a pioneering history of independent data collection and publication. But what

exactly was that history?

The growth of India's vast national statistical infrastructure dates back to its first decade as an independent country. The birth of a new nation led to an explosion of national statistics, based on the need to plan the economy through Five Year Plans. These years would see the establishment of the office of the Statistical Adviser to the Government, bi-annual National Sample Surveys (NSS), the Central Statistical Organisation (CSO), and National Income Committees (that made the estimates similar to GDP measurements). The moving spirit behind these developments was Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis, whom Jawaharlal Nehru described as the "presiding genius of statistics in India," and the institute that he had founded in Calcutta in 1931, the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI).

While the British colonial government had made efforts to collect statistics on the subcontinent from the early 19th century, these were provincially organised and geared towards trade and administration. On the eve of World War II, it had become apparent, both to the colonial government and the Indian National Congress, that any concerted postwar developmental effort would require fine-grained statistical information on the national economy. Nehru, Chairman of the Congress's National Planning Committee, called attention in 1938 to the "fact of the absence of accurate data and statistics". Even a decade later, he would admit, "we have no data," as a result of which, "we function largely in the dark."

It was this need that would elevate the profile of the Indian Statistical Institute and Mahalanobis, both internationally feted in the 1940s for their scholarly contribu-



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tions to theoretical and applied statistics. "The Professor", as Mahalanobis was known to associates, was involved in the discussions that led to establishment of the UN Statistical Commission in New York (a body that he would be voted Chairperson of several times during the 1950s). As a pioneer in the emerging field of large-scale sample surveys, he would also be the force behind creating the UN Sub-Commission on Statistical Sampling in 1947, co-authoring the textbook on the subject in 1950.

Launching sample surveys

By the middle of the twentieth century, the Indian Statistical Institute was globally recognised as a leader in the field of sample surveys. It would soon even begin training statisticians from other developing countries. The famed English statistician R.A. Fisher observed that its achievements "brought India not far from the centre of statistical map of the world." The Institute's fingerprints were readily apparent in the creation of India's National Income Committee, the Central Statistical Organisation, the International Statistical Education Centre in Calcutta, and the National Sample Survey – all created around the mid-century mark.

The inaugural National Sample

Survey was, as the *Hindustan Times* reported in 1953, "the biggest and most comprehensive sampling inquiry ever undertaken in any country in the world." These were, as Nobel Prize-winning economist Angus Deaton put it, the "world's first system of household surveys to apply the principles of random sampling." The sheer scale seemed foolhardy, even to sympathetic statisticians. As the American statistician W. Edwards Deming recalled: "We in this country [U.S.], though accustomed to large scale sample surveys, were aghast at Mahalanobis' plans for the national sample surveys of India. Their complexity and scope seemed beyond the bounds of possibility." The first survey, performed by hundreds of dedicated staff, involved manifold challenges according to reports: in Odisha's forested areas investigators had to be accompanied by armed guards; in the Himalayas they waited for the snows to melt in the passes; in Assam they encountered "naked tribes" who did "not know what money means"; and elsewhere they waded through "deep jungles infested with wild-beasts and man eaters."

High-definition snapshots

The results of the National Sample Survey offered high-definition snapshots of the country's material life – casting light on cost of living, crop estimates, household consumption, industry, trade, and land holding patterns. Twenty years later, the once sceptical Edwards Deming was now a convert: "No country, developed, underdeveloped or over-developed, has such a wealth of information about its people as India." The contemporary Singaporean statistician Y.P. Seng observed that by

comparison that China had "no genuine statistics" and so India's example of using surveys would "serve as a guide and an example worthy of imitating".

The Planning Commission, beginning in 1962, used the data the National Sample Survey generated by its household surveys to craft the country's poverty line. India was a frontrunner in this regard: the United States developed its own poverty line three years later. With their combined influence on the UN Statistical Commission and the UN Sub-Commission on Statistical Sampling, the Indian Statistical Institute and the National Sample Survey continue to have a lasting impact on estimating poverty across the developing world. Methods pioneered by the National Sample Survey have become the norm for household surveys across the globe. For example, the Living Standard Measurement Study surveys conducted in several countries by the World Bank can trace their lineage back to the work of Indian statisticians associated with the Indian Statistical Institute and the National Sample Survey.

An anomaly?

This distinguished history, which India can claim with pride, makes the recent undermining of the credibility of our statistical output especially regrettable. We can, however, ensure that when we look back on this several years from now, it represents an anomaly rather than a lasting, irreparable loss of institutional credibility.

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Reality of impunity, rhetoric of human rights

Isolated innovations are not enough to stop cases of custodial torture



MAJA DARUWALA & DEVIKA PRASAD

In May 2017, addressing representatives from countries at the UN's Human Rights Council, the then Attorney General of India said, "The concept of torture is completely alien to our culture and it has no place in the governance of the nation."

Last week in Sitamarhi district, Bihar, two families received the bodies of their two sons from the police. The two men were questioned at the Dumra police station for a case of theft and murder in the area. Instead, they came back dead. The ritual bathing revealed torture – tell-tale marks of nails hammered into their thighs and wrists.

A common story in India

Between the rhetoric of Geneva and the reality at Dumra lies the all too frequent story, in India, of police torture. We are rightly cautioned to call it "alleged murder" until proven in court. But the story we come across is too common for us to suspend belief.

More than a week has passed. The motions of taking action have begun but there are clear signs of

routine impunity. Top police officials in Bihar have recognised that the custodial deaths were "unacceptable". There were some transfers and the policemen who were implicated were suspended and had a criminal case filed against them. A First Information Report has been registered. But in the first instance, the policemen who were implicated were not named. They were arrested and taken into custody but escaped, allegedly with the help of local police. They remain untraceable.

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) is content giving the Bihar Police six weeks to explain its conduct. A plea from several concerned civil society representatives urging the immediate despatch of an NHRC team to Sitamarhi has been turned down. For now, it's wait and watch.

What statistics show

That torture is 'endemic' across police stations in India is well known. Official statistics show that last year there were 144 deaths in police custody. About 40% of complaints received every year by the NHRC are against the police – mainly for custodial violence.

Though forbidden by law, the system perpetuates and incentivises torture. Top police officials tolerate it, turn a blind eye to it, citing it as a 'practical tool', or go easy on the perpetrators; Bihar will be a space to watch. Those in the lower judiciary, which is the first point of



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check against custodial violence, are frequently not vigilant in checking if arrested persons are secure in custody, have a lawyer assigned, or have the means to speak out.

Often, pliant doctors further weaken protections to those in custody by willingly minimising or not disclosing the nature of the harm or injuries they have sustained. Oversight bodies like police complaints authorities and human rights commissions are comfortable with the slow pace of accountability from state actors and do no doggedly pursue outcomes.

The brazenness is strengthened when legal precedents towards torture prevention are not paid heed to. South Asia is among the last regions where the political executive must grant permission before public servants can be prosecuted for acts done in the course of their work. Courts have repeatedly said that torture is no part of policing and so there is no question of waiting for permission for

prosecution. Yet, the executive is still asked, decisions are delayed, and trials cannot proceed.

According to judicial precedent, recovery of evidence made as a result of torture cannot be used in court, but without proactive lawyers and magistrates, these important details are overlooked in the early stages of the legal process. For victims of torture, this means a harder fight in courts.

Besides being illegal and immoral, torture is not even a useful tool to stop crime. Eliciting unreliable confessions – the bedrock of the use of torture – destroys the process of deciding through evidence-based means whether the accused is the real perpetrator or not. Moreover, whenever it goes unpunished, torture actually supports more crime by creating a class of criminals within law enforcement. You cannot have a cohort of torturers masquerading as officers of the law while they destroy it.

Feeble course correction

There have been attempts to restrain the use of torture. The Kerala Police Act puts the onus on all police officers to report any physical torture they know of. Prisons in Telangana refuse to admit people brought into judicial custody if they appear injured; such persons are sent back to hospitals, forcing their injuries to be properly recorded.

But isolated innovations are not enough to stop this horror that has

embedded itself in the subculture of policing. A comprehensive solution would be to ensure that disincentives are put in place and that there is proper accountability. But there is a lack of political will.

India signed the UN Convention against Torture in 1997, but despite repeated domestic and international recommendations to ratify it, there has been no attempt to create a specific and comprehensive torture prevention law. This is in sharp contrast with Bangladesh, which passed a strong law in 2013. Until we have such a law, Indians must accept that the active tolerance of torture puts punishment before the crime and judgment in the hands of the wrong agency. This violates the rule of law in every way.

For those who now plead on behalf of the police personnel of Sitamarhi and say "let the law take its course", this is absolutely right. Let the effort to establish guilt or innocence be thorough and speedy. Sadly, for Mohammad Gufran, 30, and Mohammad Taslim, 35, their guilt or innocence will never be known after their death that day in Dumra police station. It is all so very far from the resplendent halls of the UN in Geneva and the averments of India's highest law officer.

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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 neutral gear

The Congress, as a party, can be trusted but not its current leader whose incompatibility with the post he occupies as well as his lack of strategic ingenuity that is needed in order to strike alliances with regional parties are the main reasons why the grand old party is floundering (Page 1, "With LS poll just 3 weeks away, Congress yet to seal alliances", March 20).

N. VISVESWARAN,
Chennai

■ I am at a loss to understand why there should be alliances in the first place? Each political party should fight the election on its own strengths and achievements. How many of the alliances last anyway? After elections, the partners try to find some excuse to break away and it is us who get taken for a ride. The

Congress party would be better off fighting it alone.

T. ANAND RAJ,
Chennai

■ The party's deep slumber will cause incalculable harm to its electoral prospects. Already the divisions in Uttar Pradesh have given a lifeline to the BJP. The Congress needs to shed its ego and sort out the issue quickly. Congress president Rahul Gandhi should emulate the example of UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi, when, in 2004, she single-handedly cobbled together alliances at the national and regional levels.

J. ANANTHA PADMANABHAN,
Tiruchi

■ For a party whose organisational strength has considerably weakened after its crippling loss in the 2014 general election and subsequent electoral debacles, the inability of the

Congress to stitch alliances appears to stem from misplaced over-confidence following its State Assembly electoral victories in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. It can also be attributed to the over-reliance of the party on dynastic politics to revive its electoral fortunes, which conclusively goes to prove that the Congress adamantly refuses to learn from history. It is a reality that coalition politics has always been an anathema to the party. The Congress party looks to be nowhere in the fray, in sharp contrast to the BJP which appears to have a well-oiled election machinery. However, rather than looking for short-term electoral adjustments/alliances and methods for its revival, it needs to undertake a major ideological and organisational revamp. A left-of-centre programme can help it reconnect with the

masses; this must be done alongwith weeding out sycophants and power-brokers.

B. SURESH KUMAR,
Coimbatore

■ The BJP's long-term plan is for a theocratic state. Those who are secular-minded should realise this potential danger and strengthen the hands of the Congress in its fight for a stable democracy, an independent media, a fearless judiciary and strong constitutional bodies.

N.C. SREEDHARAN,
Kannur, Kerala

Exclusive interview

The interview with Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath (OpEd page, "U.P.'s law and order has become a model for the country", March 19) was not only a beating about the bush but he also blew his own trumpet. The fact of the matter is that other States in

India can emulate Uttar Pradesh in law and order at their own peril. It is high time Mr. Adityanath focussed on being the Chief Minister for his entire State and all its people. When he says that the Mughals are not a part of our heritage, it is a case of living in denial.

C.G. KURIKOSSE,
Kothamangalam, Kerala

■ The media has reported quite a few cases of sexual violence, lynchings and gruesome murders, one of which involved a police inspector. There are many more unreported cases. It is for the electorate to utilise the golden opportunity that has come their way in the form of the general election to prove that the Gujarat and U.P. models of governance have no place in a secular democracy.

G.B. SIVANANDAM,
Coimbatore

Learning outcomes

It is a fact that our education system is hobbled by many non-performing actors (Editorial page, "On the learning curve", March 20). The way forward may not be to find an approach that works from upper to lower stakeholder. Instead, we need to tackle the issue from the grass-root level. The problem of education cannot be solved centrally. A regional and local approach may yield positive results. It is time to revive district boards of education and empower them so that they can help identify local problems and resolve them at the ground level. The stakeholders of such boards should be trained centrally to ensure uniformity/standards of education at the national level.

PRAFULLA KUMAR RAI,
Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh

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The case of the missing election in J&K

The failure to hold Assembly polls shows up problems in the working of the Election Commission



A.G. NOORANI

On December 28, 2018, Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh confidently told the Lok Sabha that the government was prepared for an election in Jammu and Kashmir any time. As Home Minister he knew the security situation in the State. He explicitly added that if the Election Commission decided to hold the elections, the Home Ministry would provide the security requisite for the conduct of a free and fair poll.

From December 20, President's rule was imposed in the State with dubious constitutional validity. When the Rajya Sabha debated its ratification on January 3, Mr. Singh repeated his assurance in these unqualified terms: "We are willing to provide whatever security force Election Commission wants for holding elections there." Responding to Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad's question on why elections were not held after the BJP pulled out of the State government, Mr. Singh said, "If the Election Commission wants, our government will have no objection."

Implication of assurances

The implication of both assurances in identically explicit terms to each House of Parliament on separate occasions was clear. Mr. Singh was cognisant of the security situation and was confident that a simultaneous poll was possible. But on March 10, Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora announced that while Assembly polls will be held simultaneously with the Lok Sabha polls in Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha and Sikkim, they would not be held likewise in Jammu and Kashmir.

He asserted, ahead of the reactions in Kashmir, that "the Election Commission will not capitulate to anyone". The feeble reasons he gave, despite the Home Minister's assurances, confirm the impression of a 'fixed matter'. He argued, "The Election Commission recently visited Jammu and Kashmir, met political parties and government officials. Due to constraints in the number of



"The Union Home Minister is better informed of the security situation in J&K than the Election Commission." CRPF personnel at a polling station during the urban local bodies election in Srinagar in 2018. *NISSAR AHMAD

security forces and recent violent incidents in Jammu and Kashmir, there will be no Assembly elections in the State."

There are three obvious flaws in this laboured defence. The Union Home Minister is better informed of the political and security situation in Jammu and Kashmir than the Election Commission can be after its brief visit. He has inputs from the Central and State intelligence besides other sources. He was surely well aware of the "constraints in the number of security forces" when he repeatedly offered his categorical assurances. And when was Kashmir free from "violent incidents" ever since 1996, when elections began to be held after the outbreak of militancy there in 1989?

Suggestions and amendments

Mr. Arora was appointed as the Chief Election Commissioner without consultation with the Opposition. So were his two colleagues as Election Commissioners. The recent case draws attention to a grave lacuna in our constitutional system which its architect, B.R. Ambedkar, frankly admitted in the Constituent Assembly, on June 16, 1949: "My provision, I

must admit, does not contain anything to provide against nomination of an unfit person to the post of the Chief Election Commissioner or the other Election Commissioners. I do want to confess that this is a very important question and it has given me a great deal of headache."

In 1974, a Committee on Electoral Reforms, appointed by Jayaprakash Narayan, suggested that the members of the Election Commission should be appointed by the President on the advice of a committee consisting of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition (or a Member of Parliament elected by the Opposition) in the Lok Sabha, and the Chief Justice of India. In May 1990, an All-Party Committee on Electoral Reforms recommended consultation with the Chief Justice of India and the Leader of the Opposition. This was modified in the Constitution (70th Amendment) Bill which the then Union Law Minister, Dinesh Goswami, who had chaired the Committee, moved in the Rajya Sabha on May 30, 1990.

Article 324(2) was to be amended to enjoin consultation with the presiding officers of both Houses of Par-

liament and the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha. The Chief Justice of India was dropped from this panel. In appointing the other Election Commissioners, the Chief Election Commissioner was also to be consulted. The Bill lapsed on the dissolution of the Lok Sabha. Consultation with the two political figures who preside over the House of Parliament is surely a far weaker check than one with the Chief Justice of India.

Instances of partisanship

On October 23, 2018, the Supreme Court referred to a five-judge Bench a PIL seeking a collegium-like system for the selection of the Chief Election Commissioner and the Election Commissioners. It was opposed by Attorney General K.K. Venugopal contending that persons of unblemished virtue had held the post of Chief Election Commissioner. This is untrue. Successive Chief Election Commissioners have been criticised for partisanship. S.P. Sen Verma's report on the Fifth General Elections in India 1971-72 contains blatantly political remarks reflective of a clear bias in favour of the Congress. The CPI(M) held him responsible for rigging the elections to the West Bengal Legislative Assembly. Jayaprakash Narayan thought of appointing a non-official inquiry committee. S.L. Shakhder was rightly criticised for delaying by-elections arbitrarily. R.K. Trivedi was criticised for adopting double standards in holding elections in Assam despite the clear certainty that a free and fair poll was simply not possible in the State. A bloodbath followed. On Kashmir he rejected the State government's views on the dates for spurious reasons. Who held those rigged polls in Jammu and Kashmir but the Chief Election Commissioner?

T.N. Seshan changed the trend. He and his successors like J.M. Lyngdoh won public confidence. Mr. Arora's appointment as Chief Election Commissioner raised eyebrows. Recently, laws setting up institutions like the Lokpal invariably prescribe a wide consultative mechanism. The time has come to fill the lacuna which Dr. Ambedkar himself pointed out. It brooks no delay.

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Hold them responsible

The fight against terrorism can never succeed without holding people to account for costly lapses



DUSHYANT DAVE

Terrorism has no place in a civilised world and is completely contrary to all religious tenets. Thousands of civilians have died in India in terrorist strikes. Hundreds from the armed forces, paramilitary forces and the police have laid down their lives while fighting against terrorism and protecting citizens and our democracy. No amount of gratitude is enough to acknowledge their sacrifices. But is that enough?

No accountability

What we need now is a very serious debate on how to counter terrorism in a manner far more effective than what has been done by governments so far. National security is in the hands of intelligence agencies, the police, the Army, and bureaucrats and politicians who frame and implement policies. But it is time for citizens to question all of them for a number of reasons, the primary being the virtual absence of accountability from them, which has resulted in repeated failures in preventing terrorist attacks.

In its 2014 election manifesto, the BJP had said, "We will generate 'Kartavya Bhawna' among public servants as lives and productivity of people is dependent on the quality and efficiency of public services." The manifesto also said there would be no policy paralysis. It also declared that the "BJP would restore trust and credibility in the government, [and ensure] that a chain of accountability is built into the system." Where is that chain?

By all accounts, the terrorist attack in Pulwama took place despite intelligence input about a possible attack. Jammu and Kashmir Governor Satya Pal Malik himself said, "There was no intelligence failure because we had received inputs [of a possible attack]. But there was surely some kind of negligence. If the terrorist could bring such a big vehicle without being checked, it had to be because of failure on our part." When roads are routinely closed for politicians, causing great inconvenience to lakhs of people, why was the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway not closed for such a massive movement of troops? Someone must be held accountable for such a serious lapse. Politicians, bureaucrats overseeing national security, the Direc-

tor General of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and top officers of the Jammu and Kashmir police must be taken to task. The fight against terrorism can never succeed without holding people responsible for costly lapses. The government must act swiftly and let citizens know that it means business when it says it will fight against terrorism. It is not enough to remember the dead, hold prayer meetings, and compensate families. True homage can only be paid when action is taken against those responsible for failures.

The attacks in Pathankot and Uri in 2016 revealed chinks in India's armour. However, apart from taking action against a few, no large-scale accountability was fixed by the Modi government. No wonder Pulwama was waiting to happen. Pakistan is responsible for the attack and it must be blamed. But again, is that enough?

This example may not be comparable perhaps, but following the Godhra tragedy in 2002, no responsible officer from the civil or police administration in Gujarat was held accountable either, for failing to save the lives of 59 kar sevaks. Even then, I believe, there were intelligence inputs of a possible attack in Godhra.

Turning failures into victories

Regrettably, political leaders are trying to turn such failures into victories by pushing their lapses under the carpet and celebrating post-attack retaliations instead. At this crucial juncture, a question confronting us is whether political parties and politicians should be allowed to ride on failures that have resulted in the deaths of brave soldiers. A debate on nationalism cannot centre around failures. It must emanate from successes in stopping terrorist strikes altogether.

How should citizens view India's 'strong' Prime Minister's handling of such tragedies? Both Godhra and Pulwama resulted in the avoidable deaths of citizens and CRPF personnel, respectively. Yet, those who could have prevented them continue to thrive in power. This is not what Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP promised while repeatedly attacking Manmohan Singh as being a 'weak' Prime Minister. Citizens are not naive. They demand the chain of responsibility and accountability that Mr. Modi and his party promised before they came to power.

Dushyant Dave is a senior advocate and the former President of Supreme Court Bar Association

SINGLE FILE

For a healthy planet

We must think of context-specific solutions for India to play its part in reducing global warming

JOYEETA GUPTA



V. SREENIVASA MURTHY

Last week in Nairobi, governments welcomed the Global Environment Outlook 6: Healthy Planet, Healthy People (GEO-6) report. GEO-6 argues that in a business-as-usual scenario, the world will exhaust its energy-related carbon budget in less than 20 years to keep the global temperature rise to well below 2°C; it will take even less time to exhaust the budget to keep the global temperature rise to below 1.5°C.

India could save \$3.3-8.4 trillion in a 1.5°C world. It is in India's interest to aim for 1.5-2°C. This would mean investing in not new fossil fuels but in renewables and better batteries. Investing in inappropriate infrastructure has costs in terms of climate change and stranded assets – decommissioning oil and gas infrastructure in the Netherlands, a small country, is €6.7-10 billion. If India's universities develop tomorrow's technologies, it could provide cutting-edge and frugal technologies. This could change energy geopolitics and remove the excuse of rich countries of postponing carbon neutrality. Developing countries can change – Costa Rica, for instance, has pledged carbon neutrality by 2021.

GEO-6 shows that the interlocking environmental crises kill millions prematurely and affect and displace billions. Substituting for nature by buying air purifiers, building coastal defence systems to compensate for degrading mangroves, or just cleaning beaches is expensive. Ironically, such costs increase the GDP as currently calculated. As GDP grows at the cost of the environment and does not reflect an increase in everyone's well-being, India should reconsider how it calculates its GDP.

A healthy planet is a public good and governments should take responsibility for it. When they hand responsibility to the private sector, clean air is only available to those who can pay for an air purifier. Poor people cannot afford air purifiers. Investing in water and sanitation will bring returns – a \$1 investment in water and sanitation could bring \$4 in returns; a green investment of 2% of global GDP could lead to similar growth rates by 2050. We must mobilise think tanks to work out context-specific solutions for India.

Investing in education for sustainable development, vertical and compact cities, public transport with cheap parking facilities, renewable energy, removing single-use plastics, and reducing food waste are the way to go to reduce global warming.

Many Indians are vegetarians. Why not promote that lifestyle? Much of India was a circular economy, so why not cherish the re-users and recyclers? India had a judiciary that thought of long-term justice; why not protect that? We must debate where we want to be in 2050 and strive towards that.

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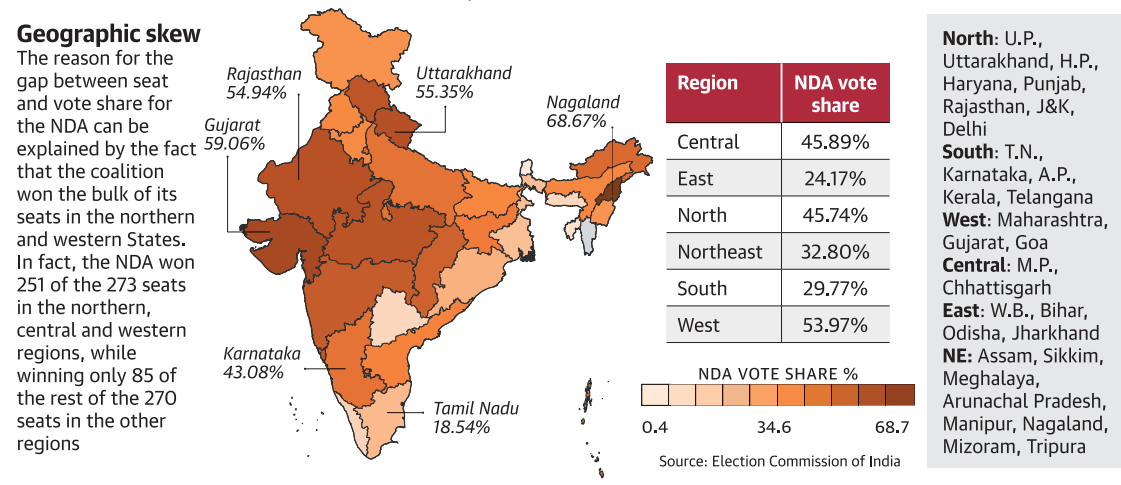
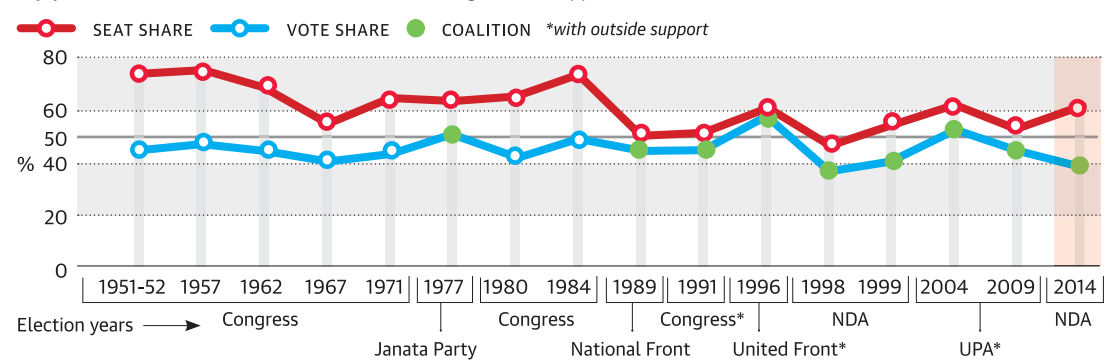


DATA POINT

Asymmetric victory

The BJP-led NDA's overall vote share (38.5%) in the 2014 Lok Sabha election, despite winning 62% of the seats, was the lowest for any coalition (with or without outside support) since the era of alliances began in India in 1989. The NDA's geographically skewed performance explains this gap. By Hari Narayan, Srinivasan Ramani and Varun B. Krishnan

In 2014, the BJP won 282 seats with a 31.3% vote share, the lowest for a party crossing the majority mark. The previous low was in 1967 when the Congress won 283 seats with a 40.8% vote share. Except for the NDA in 2014 (38.5%), all other coalitions enjoyed more than 45% overall vote shares, including outside support



FROM THE HINDU ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MARCH 21, 1969

Manekshaw to succeed

Lt-Gen. S. H. F. J. Manekshaw will succeed General P.P. Kumaramangalam as Chief of the Army Staff. He will assume charge on June 8. An official announcement said "the Government of India has decided to appoint Lt-Gen. Manekshaw now General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Eastern Command, as Chief of the Army Staff in the rank of general on the retirement of General Kumaramangalam on June 8." Lt-Gen. Sam Hormuzji Framji Jamshedji Manekshaw was born on April 3, 1914. He was educated at the Sherwood College, Nainital and the Indian Military Academy, Dehra Dun. He was commissioned in the Army on February 4, 1934.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MARCH 21, 1919.

Influenza in Bengal.

The Sanitary Commissioner of Bengal has written as follows to the Secretary, Bengal Chamber of Commerce, regarding to outbreak of influenza in Bengal: I have the honour to bring to your notice that there is a possibility of a further recrudescence of the disease. This being so I would suggest that on the first sign of the disease reappearing, precautionary measures should be adopted. In this connection I may mention that Sitaram Coal Company, who used oil of Cinnamon in two drop doses three times a day amongst their staff of 282 men during the last epidemic, obtained very satisfactory results, as not a single case of disease occurred among those using the remedy. It may be further pointed out that as influenza is exceedingly contagious, inasmuch as those being brought into near contact with the sputum, nasal discharges or even the breath of those sick of disease, are very liable to contract infection, people should be instructed to segregate patients as far as possible from other members of the family.

CONCEPTUAL

Exit poll

This refers to a poll of voters taken immediately after they cast their votes. Pollsters, usually private companies, journalists and researchers, conduct exit polls to get an early indication of what the election result could be, as results are often revealed only hours or days after voting takes place. Exit polling is a tricky business and may not necessarily reflect the preferences of an entire electorate. While they help analysts figure out why voters vote the way they do, exit polls can be wrong in their predictions because of inadequate demographic data and poor sampling points. In some countries, exit polls have also been criticised for influencing election results as they are conducted before voting closes.

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