



WORDLY WISE
 AIRLINES ARE INTERESTING. THEY NOT ONLY
 FAVOUR CELEBRITIES, THEY COURT THEM.
 — PHIL DONAHUE

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

UP's new normal



CHRISTOPHE JAFFRELOT AND SYED H A RIZVI

An everyday communalism has settled down. Law is misused to target minorities

FLYING LOW

Troubles in aviation sector send sobering signal, call for greater opening up by government

INDIA HAS BEEN the fastest growing aviation market over the last four years. Along with telecom, the aviation sector has symbolised the successes of liberalisation — with a visible impact in terms of the entry of a number of players and opening up of access to flying, besides ensuring a pan-India telecom coverage. But the recent turbulence in the domestic airline industry — manifest in the troubles of the full service carrier, Jet Airways, which has been forced to ground several of its aircraft due to its inability to pay rentals, and a shortage of pilots in the case of market leader, Indigo — threatens to derail that growth. But unlike the telecom sector, where there has been a consolidation with the merger of Idea with Vodafone, it is disturbing to see the near collapse of a marquee brand like Jet which had introduced service standards alongside Kingfisher, which folded up a few years ago. This is especially so when fuel prices on an average have been relatively low in an industry where, even globally, many big carriers have struggled to remain successful consistently.

It can be argued that, more than the policy environment, the airline has been weighed down by management issues and the seeming reluctance of its promoter, Naresh Goyal, to exit in order to enable either its partner, Etihad, or a potential investor to gain control based on a resolution plan finalised by the SBI-led lenders. It is easy to push a listed airline company such as Jet on to the bankruptcy route — but clearly, a different set of rules applies to this and the telecom sector. For the national carrier, Air India, with a debt burden of Rs 55,000 crore, the government has provided interim support, a sovereign guarantee and loaned funds from the National Small Savings Fund, helping it to keep flying while keeping alive another state-owned entity, BSNL, in the telecom sector. Now, what the government should do is to further open up the sector, considering the huge potential boost to infrastructure and the impact on tourism and the services sector, and its promise as an employment multiplier.

At a time when the biggest challenge is creating jobs, it is bad optics specially in an election season, to let another firm go under in this manner. It is worth reminding the country's mainstream parties that India's most competitive sectors are the ones which have delivered the most to customers and helped fuel growth.

A SOUR TASTE

Unpaid sugarcane dues have to do with government interventions that restrict both farmers and mills

THERE HAVE BEEN widespread protests, and threats by the sugar commissioner of stern action against defaulting mills, and yet cane farmers in Maharashtra are still awaiting full payments for their produce this season. As of March 15, sugar mills in the state have paid only Rs 14,881.01 crore out of the Rs 20,653.02 crore that they owe to farmers against cane purchases from them. The problem of arrears is even worse in Uttar Pradesh, where the unpaid cane dues of mills have crossed Rs 10,000 crore. The intervention of Maharashtra's sugar commissioner's office, which had threatened not just to attach and auction properties of defaulting mills but also register criminal cases against their chairmen and directors, is proof of the pressure from the government to ensure payment. That, and the fact that many mill owners in Maharashtra are politicians themselves, is reason enough to believe that the sugar industry is in no position to pay farmers even with the best of intentions.

The inability to pay has to do with the economics of the industry. If a mill in UP were to buy cane at the state government's "advised" price of Rs 325 per quintal, the bare production cost of sugar at that rate, without factoring in interest outgo and depreciation, will be roughly Rs 34 per kg. As against this, the ex-factory price of sugar is now Rs 31 per kg; many factories are actually selling below even this "minimum" price fixed by the Centre. If the industry is going to lose a minimum of Rs 3 on every kilo of sugar sold, the total loss on 31 million tonnes — the country's likely production in 2018-19 — will be over Rs 9,300 crore. That's clearly not sustainable for mills. Nor is it in the farmers' interest to have factories going belly-up. Governments, both at the Centre and in the states, have only made things worse, whether by fixing cane prices out of sync with sugar realisations or setting monthly sale quotas. For March, mills have been given a target to sell 24.5 lakh tonnes (1t) of sugar, which is way above the 21.09 t and 19.52 t of actual sales undertaken in the same month in 2018 and 2017, respectively. The underlying objective behind forcing mills to sell more sugar — which the market cannot absorb — has been to generate more liquidity to enable them to make cane payments. But that has only ended up depressing prices further.

The solution is simple: Cane prices have to be linked to average realisations of mills, both from sugar and primary by-products (molasses and baggase). Let farmers have the freedom to sell to any mill that may want to pay more. If the government wants cane farmers to be paid more, it should credit that amount directly to their bank accounts and not force losses on the industry.

PATTERNS OF communal violence are changing in Uttar Pradesh. As Sudha Pai and Sajjan Kumar had shown in *Everyday Communalism: Riots in Contemporary Uttar Pradesh* (OUP, 2018) after the 2004 BJP defeat, which former prime minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, partly attributed to the 2002 Gujarat riots, the Hindutva forces have opted for a new modus operandi. Rather than instigating major and violent state-wide riots as in the past, the BJP-RSS have attempted to create and sustain constant, low-key communal tension together with frequent, small, low-intensity incidents out of petty everyday issues that institutionalise communalism at the grass roots, to keep the pot boiling. Vigilante groups such as the Bajrang Dal and the Hindu Yuva Vahini (HYV) of Yogi Adityanath have been instrumental in implementing this technique of polarisation.

Things changed again when the BJP gained office in 2017. While Muslims have remained the main target of Hindu vigilantes, as evident from the series of lynchings, their situation deteriorated also because policemen and vigilantes began to work together. The typical scenario involved provoking communal clashes, something the HYV excelled at, with the aim of destroying Muslim homes and small businesses. When the police intervened, it was more to apprehend the victims than the instigators of the violence.

And when the police arrested them, it often resorted to booking them under laws such as the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and the National Security Act, which are intended for criminals posing a threat to state security and under which individuals can be held without charge for up to 12 months. In 2017, 160 Muslims were arrested under the NSA. A former police officer, S R Darapuri, noted: "For the first time in Indian history, this law is being misused so much. This is part of the BJP policy to rule through terror. They are using the police as their power arm to overawe the Dalits and minorities."

Parallel to that, Yogi Adityanath launched Operation Clean, in the framework of which the police was encouraged

The sense of impunity was reinforced by Yogi Adityanath's decision to withdraw all the complaints that the state had filed against him and his associates since the 1990s. Cases involving Hindu nationalists implicated in the Muzaffarnagar riots (including 13 charges — out of a total of 131 — for murder) were withdrawn. At the request of human rights organisations, the SC, in 2018, asked Yogi Adityanath to explain the rise in the number of victims in police shootouts. The Court also refused to dismiss the 2007 hate-speech case against the chief minister, for which he had been imprisoned briefly.

to open fire on those suspected of a crime. In June 2017, the chief minister announced on television: "Agar apradh karenge, toh thok diye jayenge (If anyone engages in crime, they will be shot)". Soon after, he informed the state assembly that 40 criminals had been killed in police shootouts. There were reportedly over 1,100 shootings of this kind between February 2017 and February 2018, a record.

While the targets were supposed to be hardcore criminals, victims of the shootouts were mainly Muslims, some of whom, according to their families, were killed in cold blood. Prashant Bhushan, after investigating the subject with support from the NGO, Citizens Against Hate, concluded that, "people are being murdered in an organised manner..." with complicity of high-level officials. The National Human Rights Commission launched an inquiry in 17 cases and found that "the police personnel in the state of Uttar Pradesh appears to be feeling free, misusing their powers in the light of an undeclared endorsement given by the higher-ups." The NHRC said: "It further appears that they are using their privileges/legal authority to settle scores with the people which in a civilised society, where rule of law is fundamental... cannot be accepted. The police force is to protect the people and these kind of alleged encounter killings would send a wrong message to the society by creating an atmosphere of fear which is not the correct way to deal with the crime or law and order as the case may be." The NHRC issued a separate notice to the UP government about the killing of a 20-year old Muslim of Muzaffarnagar in November 2018. The Supreme Court also issued a notice to the UP government on a PIL alleging that several fake encounters had taken place in the state.

The sense of impunity was reinforced by Yogi Adityanath's decision to withdraw all the complaints that the state had filed against him and his associates since the 1990s. Cases involving Hindu nationalists implicated in the Muzaffarnagar riots (including 13 charges, out of a total of 131, for murder) were withdrawn. But at the request of human rights organisations, the SC,

in 2018, asked Yogi Adityanath to explain the rise in the number of victims in police shootouts. The Court also refused to dismiss the 2007 hate-speech case against the chief minister, for which he had been imprisoned briefly. Meanwhile, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) special rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, E Tendayi Achiume, reported that "Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party has been linked to incidents of violence against members of Dalit, Muslim, tribal and Christian communities".

After a multi-national company executive, Vivek Tiwari, was shot by a UP constable in Lucknow, the number of encounters diminished, but those arrested under the UAPA, NSA or some other law continue to be in jail, pending trial. Last month, special designated Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act court judge S C Khatti, found that 11 Muslim men who had spent 20 years in jail in a terrorist case were innocent. In 2016, the Bombay High Court acquitted nine Muslims who had been accused of the 2006 Malegaon blast. The judge concluded that the ATS had fabricated evidence against the accused to allow the real culprits escape. In 2014, the Supreme Court acquitted eight Muslims who had been convicted by a POTA court in the 2002 Akshardham case (three of them had been awarded the death penalty). In Delhi, the Jamia Teachers Solidarity Association prepared a list of 24 persons — mostly from Kashmir — who had been arrested by the Delhi Police Special Cell but the association claimed they were innocent. Two of them, from Srinagar, were released in 2017 after 12 years in jail. In UP, human rights activists, including an NGO, Rihai Manch, are fighting the case of 11 young Muslims who are in jail.

Jaffrelot is senior research fellow at CERF-Sciences Po/CNRS, Paris, professor of Indian Politics and Sociology at King's India Institute, London, and non-resident scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Rizvi is a former UP state information commissioner

ALGORITHM AS EDITOR

Google and Facebook have great power, great responsibility



RASMUS KLEIS NIELSEN

ARE GOOGLE AND Facebook the most powerful editors in India? Given that an estimated quarter billion Indians have gone online since the last general election, they just might be.

Whereas the news that people get via television, radio, and print is selected by human editors, on the internet, people increasingly rely on search engines and social media that rely on algorithmic curation.

In a new survey of English-language Indian internet users, we find that a third name search engines as their main source of online news, and a quarter name social media — in each case, overwhelmingly, Google and Facebook respectively. Only 18 per cent claimed going directly to the websites or apps of news publishers as their main source of online news.

Strikingly, not only do our respondents rely on search and social media for news, they also say they trust the news that they get there at least as much as news more broadly. For example, 45 per cent say they trust news in search, and 34 per cent news in social media, compared to just over a third who say they trust news overall.

This is strikingly different from what we have seen in other countries, where people often trust news media more than they trust news found via search engines or social media. In a polarised political environment characterised by general skepticism of many established institutions, news found via search can acquire an attractive veneer of technological objectivity, news accessed via social

media an appealing aura of authenticity.

Worryingly, many Indians do not seem to understand how the platforms they increasingly rely on for news actually operate. When asked how most of the individual decisions about what news stories to show on Facebook were made, only 26 per cent of our respondents correctly identify the algorithms: The automated systems that rank what people see on social media and make decisions about what to display. Many believe human editors and journalists determine what news they see in their newsfeed.

In a sense, of course, they are right. Even though both Google and Facebook rely on algorithmic curation as they serve news every day to millions of Indians, the stories themselves are often written by professional journalists and, thus, ultimately under the editorial responsibility of the top people at the major news organisations with significant reach online.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and a few other major politicians have built significant social media followings that help them circumvent news media and set the agenda, but news media still remains crucial for how most people navigate politics.

In this sense, news editors at other major news media are still the most powerful editors in India, and Google and Facebook have not so much supplanted them as supplemented them. As people increasingly rely on search engines and social media for news, the information that reaches them has passed through two sets of gatekeepers:

First editors, who decide what to publish, then the algorithms that increasingly shape what we see online.

This is an important change from the single set of gatekeepers that characterise offline media, and means Google and Facebook play an increasingly important and often challenging role in the Indian media environment.

If a company sets out, as Google does, "to organise the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful", it will confront the fact that the line between information and misinformation can be hard to draw, and that people sometimes actively seek out disinformation. If a company aims to help people "stay connected with friends and family, to discover what's going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them", as Facebook does, it will have to deal with the fact that not all expression is equally benign, and that people sometimes actively share false and misleading content.

Owning, operating, and profiting from the algorithms that more and more Indians rely on to find news, gives Google and Facebook great power and great responsibilities — like the human editors who came before them. The 2019 elections will be a decisive test of whether they are ready for it.

The writer is director of Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism and professor of political communication, University of Oxford

FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



MARCH 25, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

BHUTTO SENTENCE
 THE DEATH SENTENCE on former prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was reconfirmed when the Pakistan Supreme Court unanimously rejected his petition for a review of the sentence in a murder-conspiracy case. In a 4-3 verdict on February 6, a seven-member bench of the court had confirmed the original sentence passed by the Lahore High Court on March 18 last year. Bhutto then filed a review petition. Radio Pakistan reporting the rejection of the petition, quoted Chief Justice Anwarul Haq as saying "all of us have unanimously decided to reject the petition". However, the judges included a paragraph recommending clemency. Seizing on this

paragraph, Bhutto's lawyer, Yahya Bakhtiar, said: "The death sentence is out. I feel relieved. But I am disappointed in the rest of the judgment. Bhutto should not be hanged after this."

MERCY PETITION
 PAKISTAN PRESIDENT GEN Zia-ul-Haq may not be in a hurry to hang Bhutto. The procedure itself spreads over many days. The Supreme Court will inform the Lahore High Court, which will issue the execution orders to the Rawalpindi jail where Bhutto is detained. Bhutto will be formally informed about the confirmation of the death sentence. Then he, any of his relatives or any cit-

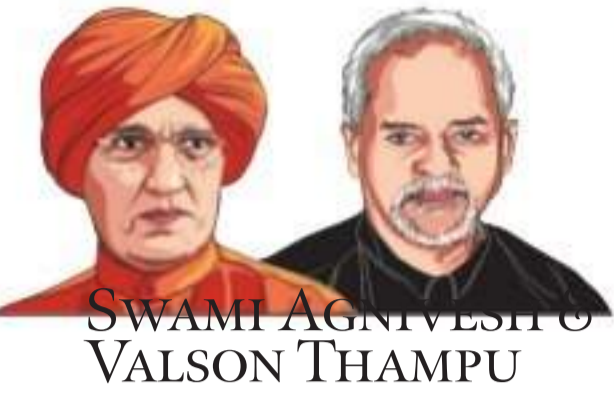
izen of Pakistan, can file a petition of mercy within seven days. This petition, will be sent to the province concerned, Punjab, where the murder of Ahmed Raza Kasuri took place. The provincial government will forward its recommendation to the Ministry of Interior at Islamabad. Later, the law ministry will scrutinise it and then it will reach Zia's desk.

JP'S HEALTH
 JAYAPRAKASH NARAYAN GAVE some anxious moments during the dialysis at Bombay's Jaslok Hospital. But he maintained a slight improvement towards night. The hospital bulletin said: "The condition of JP continues to be the same. His drowsiness is less."

THE IDEAS PAGE

Otherness to togetherness

Mediators in Ayodhya must stand steadfast on spiritual foundation in a charged atmosphere, where religion has been superseded by politics and the dynamic of mediation overshadowed by triumphalism



SWAMI AGNIVESH & VALSON THAMPU

SO LONG AS man is in a mere state of nature, his god is a mere nature-God — a personification of some natural force. Where man inhabits his houses, he also encloses his Gods in temples. The temple is only a manifestation of the value which man attaches to beautiful buildings. Temples in honour of religion are in truth temples in honour of architecture.

— Ludwig Feuerbach in The Essence of Christianity

We begin with a simple truth: We live in a post-religious age. Religion has departed, only the appearance of religion remains. In the spiritual phase of religion, human beings are suffused with the consciousness of the divine, as in the insight that God and human beings are one. In such a state, the external accessories of religion — symbols, rituals, temples, sects, etc. — are superfluous.

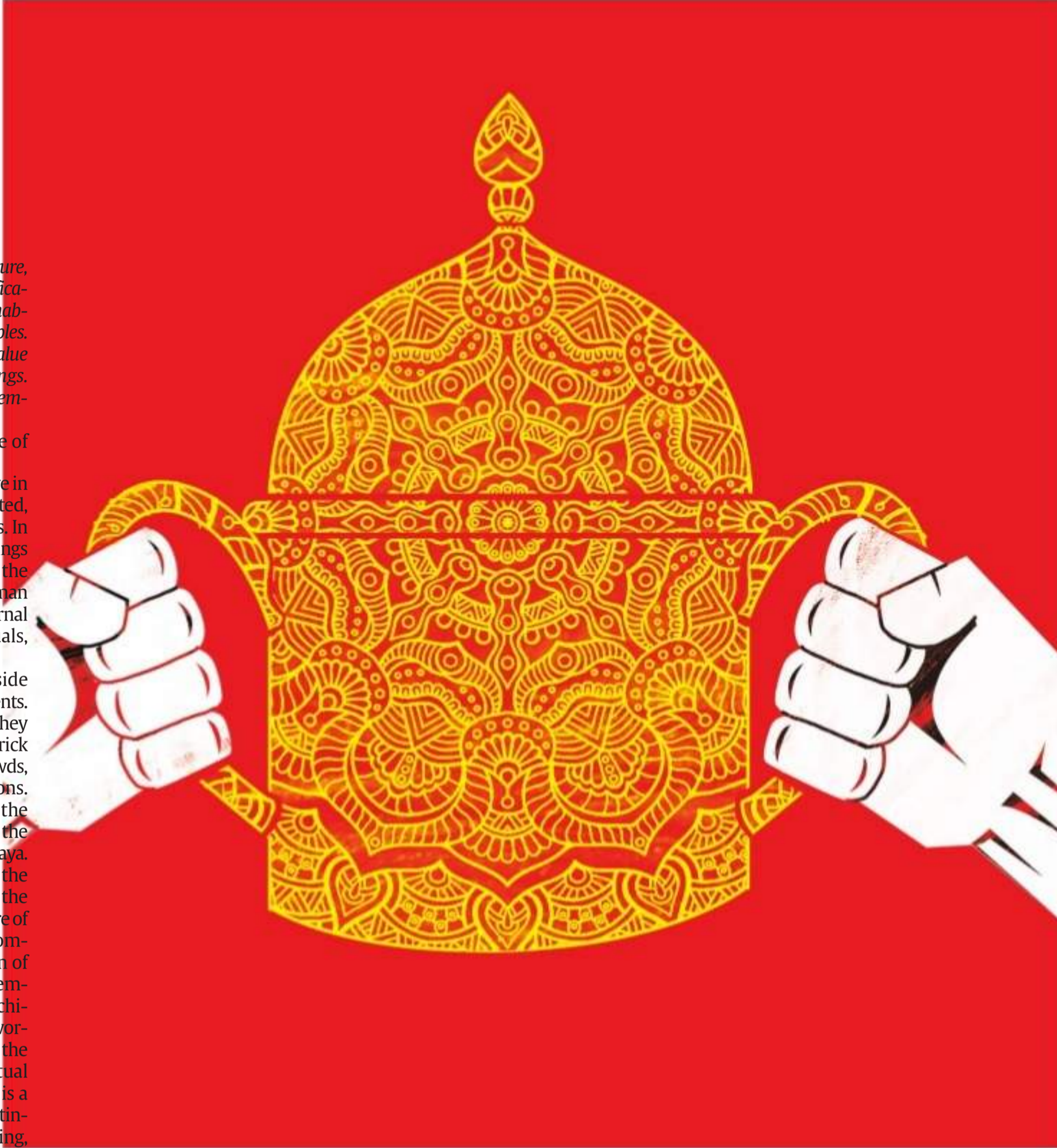
Our seers and savants did not preside over religious structures and establishments. They sought oneness with the divine. They would have been ill-at-home amidst brick and mortar structures, cacophony of crowds, tinkling of coins and cackling of sermons. They dwelt in the abode of silence. In the serenity of their soul, they encountered the Eternal, and peered through the veil of maya.

The modern man prefers the sign to the thing signified, the copy to the original, the appearance to the essence and the fanfare of religiosity to the fidelity of being in communion with God. The temple is a sign of man's longing for the divine. If so, no temple is complete simply because the architect says it is. The paradox of a place of worship is that it is forever being built. After the physical structure is erected, the spiritual task begins, and continues. No temple is a place of worship, if it does not serve continually as a sign and site for man's on-going, never-ending search for God. If and when this inward reality changes, a temple becomes a monument. "Believers" may swell.

Priests may ply rites and rituals. But it's no longer, spiritually, a temple. A community meeting place? An identity marker? A sign of religious splendour and ascendency? Sure, but not, in truth, a place of worship. Impressive cathedrals were built in the past all over Europe. But their architectural splendour had little to do with the spiritual longings of the people. If anything, they signalled cultural pride and presaged spiritual decline. European cathedrals, now seem, in retrospect, ghostly monuments of religious self-assertion overshadowed by spiritual anticlimax.

There is nothing wrong about self-assertion, at the individual or collective level. To live is to assert. Being alive is a good, and merits being celebrated. The all-important question is: How does one assert oneself? Spiritually valid way? The very fact that such a basic question has not been asked over decades in relation to a religious cause like the Ayodhya face-off, points to a decline in spiritual consciousness.

There are two contrary ways in which a religious community may assert itself. The first is the worldly way. It can impose its will on "the other", the designated enemy. In this model, the more belligerently and brutally the community imposes itself on the other, the more triumphant it feels. But the problem here is this sense of fulfillment is, by definition, shallow and short-lived. It turns out,



Suvajit Dey

a pyrrhic victory. That is so for the reason that, once the thunder and lightning of conflict, the belligerent self-assertion over the other, is accomplished, something wakes up from deep within — the realisation that the defeated one is, somehow, a part of one's self. One may suppress this awareness. But the birth of this new consciousness is unquenchable as long as we remain human.

The second mode of self-assertion is the spiritual. This is not achieved through any muscular, or at the expense of anyone else. In this model, assertion is co-extensive with consciousness. I don't assert myself against anyone. I assert and celebrate myself for and on behalf of my species — through the expansion of spiritual consciousness. As a high school student knows, the greatness of a human being is determined by the extent of his or her awareness.

Animals too are aware and imbued with consciousness; but their consciousness is limited kind. An animal is aware of its immediate surroundings and of other animals. For a caterpillar, the leaf it sits on is its world. For a lion, it is the territory it has marked out for itself. Not so, for a human being. Human consciousness can be larger than the universe. It is this that makes us human. Conversely, reduction in the range of our consciousness makes us regress to the animal stage.

Our species did not begin its earthly journey on a high note of awareness. It began, perhaps, like the caterpillar. It was the busi-

IN GOOD FAITH

No temple is a place of worship, if it does not serve continually as a sign and site for man's on-going, never-ending search for God. If and when this inward reality changes, a temple becomes a monument. 'Believers' may swell. Priests may ply rites and rituals. But it's no longer, spiritually, a temple. A community meeting place? An identity marker? A sign of religious splendour and ascendency? Sure; but not, in truth, a place of worship.

ness of spirituality to help humankind to grow in consciousness till it reached the acme of spirituality at which it could be said with ecstasy: "The world is one family." The core function of spirituality is to transform "otherness" into togetherness. Seen in the spiritual light, "enemy" emerges as "neighbour".

It is naïve to assume that mediation in Ayodhya will succeed somehow. A responsible practice of mediation requires that an outlook conducive to a just denouement is created. It is universally true that nothing changes on the ground, until the outlook changes. Mediation, undertaken from a mindset of self-assertion of the martial kind, is anything but mediation.

It could well be that the Supreme Court is mindful of this logic. Perhaps that explains the inclusion of Sri Sri Ravishankar in the panel of mediators. But, for Sri Sri, this could be a double-edged sword. He will realise soon enough how difficult it is to stand steadfast on the spiritual foundation in a charged atmosphere, in which religion has already been superseded by politics and the dynamic of mediation is overshadowed by triumphalism. But, the beauty of spirituality is that it succeeds in its mission, not because the circumstances are propitious, but because destiny wills it.

Swami Agnivesh is a Vedic scholar and social activist and Thampu is former principal, St Stephen's College, Delhi

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

Theresa May's political capital is all spent. She has no allies at home or abroad. — THE GUARDIAN

Loopholes in the Lokpal

The institution is useful but its design is not thought through



RC IYER

THE LOKPAL and Lokayuktas Act 2013 came into existence on January 1, 2014. It extends to the whole of India and applies to "public servants" as defined in the Act, which includes the incumbent prime minister and Union ministers. Past public servants can also be investigated. This "landmark" law followed prolonged public debates on issues related to corruption, and several demonstrations, including by activists such as Anna Hazare. Some politicians like Arvind Kejriwal, who had supported the enactment, later stated that what was actually enacted was a "jokepal Act".

The drama of the years prior to the enactment of the law will be etched in public memory. It became possible because the two lead political parties then — the ruling UPA and the NDA — joined hands in the "war against corruption" thinking that the enactment would yield rich political dividend. The passage of the bill did not, therefore, pose any difficulty: At that point, the code of conduct for the 2014 general election had not come in existence. However, it was enacted in great hurry and contained numerous legal infirmities, which will sooner or later be tested in the appropriate courts of law.

This issue was in the works for nearly half a century after the recommendation for a Lokpal at the Centre was first made by the Administrative Reforms Committee of 1966. It had been the subject of several assurances given by incumbent prime ministers on the floor of Parliament. Given this background, the law should have been better drafted. It should have gone before a select committee of Parliament for scrutiny by all the stakeholders.

Some of the provisions of the Act contain directions, which are not tenable. Section 63 of the Act mandates establishment of the Lokayukta in every state, where it is not established "within a period of one year from the date of commencement of this Act". Many of the states have already enacted and developed Lokayukta institutions much earlier, but this section had little effect on states which had not done so till then. Tamil Nadu, for instance, has enacted the law only now, but Lokayukta appointments are yet to be made — the one-year period is long over. This shows that the section is a dead letter apart from encroaching on the legislative powers of the respective states.

There are many other provisions of doubtful utility. "Competent authorities" are defined in the Act. In section 24, if the findings of the Lokpal disclose any corruption, a copy of the report is to be sent to the "competent authority" while filing a

chargesheet. In the case of the prime minister being the accused, the competent authority mentioned is the House of the People, namely the Lok Sabha. If such "authorities" have no major role in the Act, why call them "competent authorities"? The time limit for "the removal of difficulties" in the Act is already over, unless extended again, by law.

More importantly, what is indeed not adequately appreciated in the fierce anti-corruption debate, which will continue with greater intensity in the election season, is that this Act is only applicable to "public servants" who come within the purview of the Union of India and not the states. The scope for the Lokpal to deal with corruption involving public servants would, therefore, be limited to a narrow band of public servants.

A very large part of the corruption we talk about involves state governments, their agencies and bodies of the local self-government, which would fall entirely outside the purview of the central Lokpal — in varying degrees (depending upon the actual state legislation), these come under the state lokayuktas. A fully empowered lokayukta in Karnataka, enjoying "terms of service" equivalent to the chief justice of India, has hardly failed to contain corruption in that state. There were instances when the institution there itself came under a serious cloud, and when the lokayukta himself had to resign following a controversy involving his own son.

The point here in any case is not the utility of the institution at the Centre. It is the undue haste with which the law itself was earlier enacted and the obvious haste with which the institution is being operationalised five years later, after assuming a sudden urgency — reportedly on account of the Supreme Court's (SC) admonition. The SC had considered the delay several times in the past few years. So what is new now?

A code of conduct prior to the Lok Sabha elections has come into place from March 10. The guidelines contained in the model code of conduct do refer to a ban on appointments or promotions in the government, without prior clearance of the Election Commission (EC). It could be argued that these are not election-related appointments in the government, but the appointment of high functionaries by the President. The note below these instructions in the Model Code of Conduct states that the list of dos and don'ts is only illustrative and cases of doubt should be referred to the EC. In this case, the President of India (read as advised by the Union cabinet comprising members of the party in office) may take the stand that they are acting at the orders of the SC. Opposition parties are unlikely to complain either, since the common plank now is "anti-corruption". And the EC too is likely to look the other way, once the President "swears in" the new appointees.

The writer is former Upalokayukta, Maharashtra

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

CLEARING THE AIR

THIS REFERS TO the article 'Once upon a hijack' (IE, March 22). It is appreciable that the writer helped with clarifications about the sequence of events in the infamous 1999 hijack story. In the era of post-truth, the blatant tweaking of facts and selective usage of information has destabilised societal mentality. That he had to step into the picture is a clear indication of the vicious verbal spat that political parties are engaged in for narrow electoral gains.

Vaibhav Dahiphale, Pune

NEW FRIENDS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'To Male, with Care' (IE, March 21). The incumbent Maldives government has committed to "India first" in all its activities. However, we must not turn a blind eye to Chinese activities in the Indian Ocean. Its technological advancements, booming economy and debt-trap diplomacy has compelled many poor nations to be at its mercy. So, we should increase our aid to Maldives and ensure that it remains within our fold.

Sauro Dasgupta, Kolkata

BLINKERED VIEW

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Islamophobia, theirs and ours', (IE, March 21). The article represents a classic tendency of blindly blaming the majority in this country for all that ails the Muslim world. It is also a case of selectively quoting what is convenient to the author's political worldview. If the Western world is better than Indians in

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

To encourage quality reader intervention, The Indian Express offers the Letter of the Week award. The letter adjudged the best for the week is published every Saturday. Letters may be e-mailed to editpage@expressindia.com or sent to The Indian Express, B-1/B, Sector 10, Noida-UP 201301. Letter writers should mention their postal address and phone number.

THE WINNER RECEIVES SELECT EXPRESS PUBLICATIONS

handling this issue, then can the author explain the banning of burkhas in France? Is he blind to the mindless violence and destruction that has been ravaging the entire Muslim world for which no outsiders can be blamed? Has he forgotten the destruction of Bamiyan Buddhas or the ethnic cleansing of Kashmiri Pandits? Instead of politicising this issue, it's high time the Muslim community and the so-called intellectuals, like this author, who specialise in Hindu bashing, do some introspection. Only such introspection will rid the world of this cult of violence.

HN Bhagwat, Chiplun

VIEW FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD



A weekly look at the public conversations shaping ideas beyond borders — in the Subcontinent. Curated by Asad Ali

OFF THE HOOK

AN EDITORIAL IN Dawn takes a sharp, critical look at India's special National Investigation Agency court which last week acquitted all the accused in the 2007 Samjhauta Express blast. It minces no words as it says that, "The ruling is an insult to the 42 Pakistani victims of the February 18, 2007 bombing of the train that had set off for Lahore, and a sharp reminder of how open to the agents of Subcontinental peace are allowed to get away with the biggest crimes. It is a rebuke to the more than 20 victims of the collision with Indian nationality and it is a snub to the efforts of those investigators of Haryana, where the incident took place, who tracked the suspects in a high-pressure probe."

The editorial recognises the sincerity of purpose of the initial investigators assigned to the case and says, "That police team overcame all kinds of pressure to first reject the opinion that this was an act carried out by a Muslim extremist group, and then to actually announce it was a job carried out by organised Hindu extremists", and, points out the "painful contrast" between them and the NIA's efforts. It states that "true to form" Delhi tried to find shelter behind the usual rhetorical exchanges of the two countries

where "both sides have pointed a finger at the other for not seriously prosecuting terrorist acts inside each other's territory". It calls the Pakistan response "as predictable as it is sharp", and Islamabad's response aptly as "Islamabad's response aptly as it underlines the fact that the terrorists had publicly confessed to their 'odious crimes'". The editorial ends by saying that Pakistan has the opportunity to do better than India by taking the Mumbai terror case to its logical conclusion. This would show the world that it is serious about combating militancy and a befitting response to India that stands poised after the Samjhauta ruling."

RIGHT EDUCATION

THE BANGLADESH GOVERNMENT'S directive last week to not hold any examinations for students of Class I, II, and III has found mention in an editorial in the Dhaka Tribune, which has supported the initiative. The editorial recognises that "exams are not altogether bad", but clarifies, "it is also important to understand that exams, especially at such a young age, can impose unnecessary pressures on children's curious minds, and do little to nurture their growth." It lists the examples of countries like Finland, Australia and India to say that these places have "to a great

extent understood the potential damage of exams at too young an age, and moved towards more effective methods of learning".

It praises the government for taking a step in the right direction by recognising what a lot of research in recent times has been corroborating — "that traditional exams are not capable of measuring intelligence effectively". But it also puts into realistic perspective the many goals that the country needs to still achieve vis-a-vis education: "Unfortunately, the problems with our education sector do not end there — from the quality of teachers and textbooks to the corruption which plagues our educational institutions, there is no denying that the Education Ministry has its work cut out if it wants to bring true improvement. There would be little point to merely removing exams if the education that children received was of an inferior quality to begin with."

UNEQUAL WORLD

A COLUMN BY Amish Raj Mulmi in Kathmandu Post trains the spotlight on gender inequality in the context of Nepal's oft-discussed unequal citizenship laws that are seen as heavily biased towards women — for instance, children of Nepali women who marry foreign men cannot get Nepali citizen-

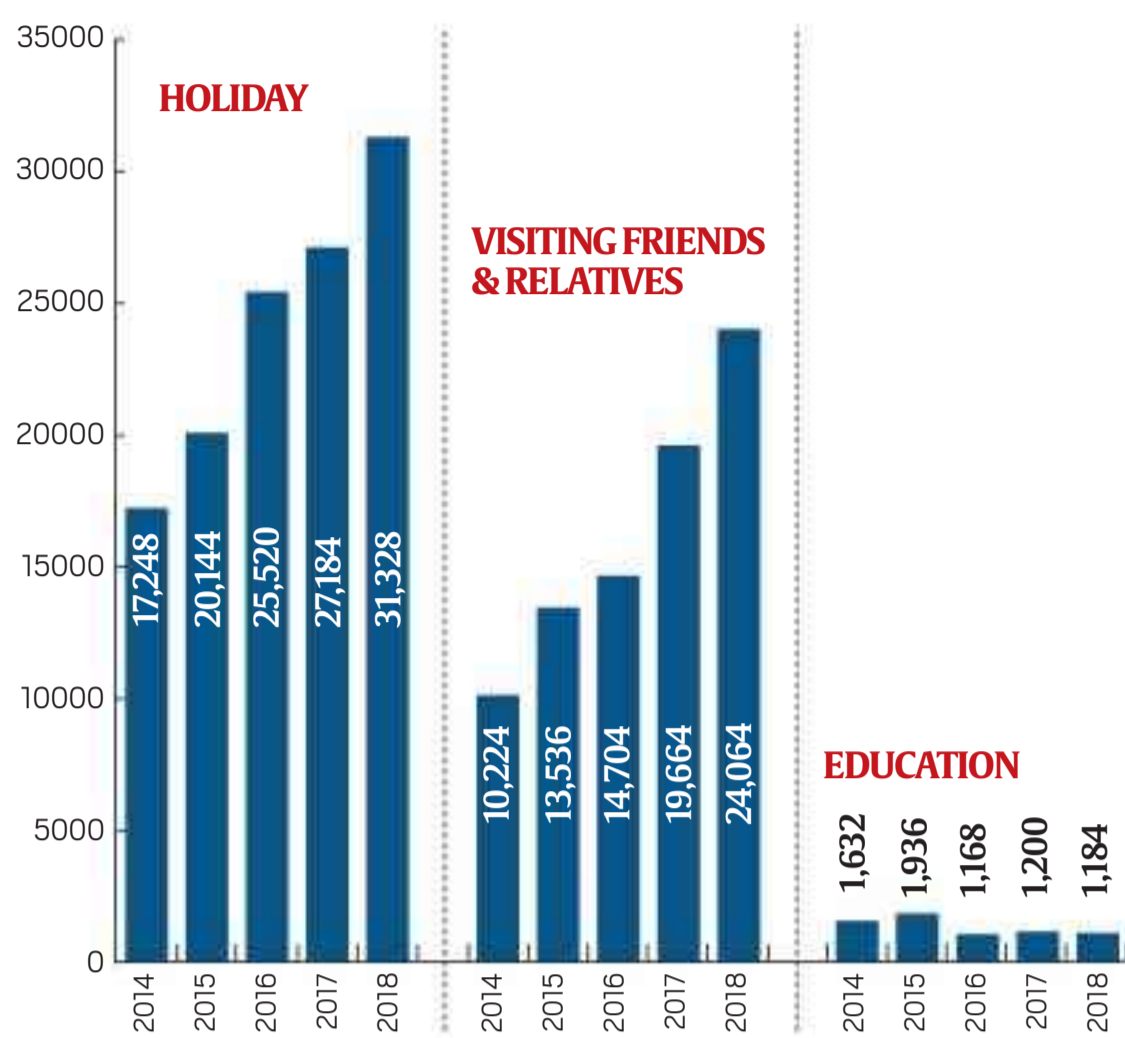
ship by descent. The column comes in the wake of a tweet by a senior male journalist in Nepal: "Consider this tweet made just last week by a senior journalist as the 'debate' around the citizenship bill went on in Parliament: 'Why should those women who cannot reveal the father's name give birth to children? The mother does not give birth to children by themselves, do they? There are several Mary Stopes clinics across Nepal for those women who do not want to reveal their sex partner's name. Why should an infant's destiny be that of a fatherless child?' [translations mine]." Mulmi says that by equating women's citizenship to reproduction, and by insidiously "pointing unwed mothers (or single mothers by choice) towards abortion clinics, the repugnant tweet essentially told us the Nepali man simply considers their woman to be a reproductive vehicle and little else. In his Hindu view of the world, he upholds the idea of the 'virtuous wife', and 'treats women's sexuality as a risk to society at large.'"

Mulmi states that as the law on citizenship stands currently, "what emerges with clarity is the idea that Nepali citizenship rights are based on Brahminical ideas of a pure society," and goes on to conclude that it is "not up to the state to declare men and women are equal in the first place."

TELLING NUMBERS

Indians in NZ: holidaymakers multiply, student count drops

PURPOSE OF VISITS FROM INDIA, YEARS ENDING OCTOBER

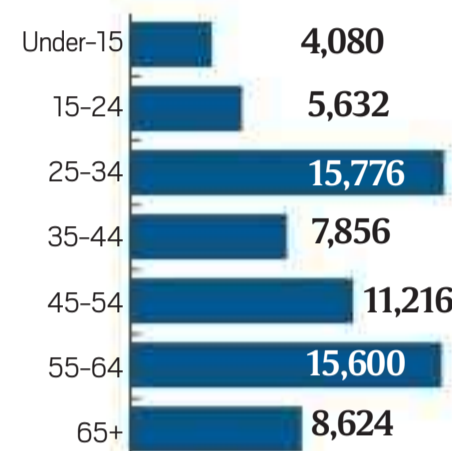


Source for all data: Stats NZ

THE GROWTH of Indian visitors to New Zealand, whose numbers nearly doubled between 2014 and 2018 (*The Indian Express*, March 23), has been driven mostly by tourists, and New Zealanders' Indian relatives or friends. New Zealand government data show that visits by senior citizens (age 55-64) have increased most significantly, multiplying nearly 2½ times between 2014 and 2018.

The number of Indian nationals visiting New Zealand rose from 34,672 in 2014 to 67,072 in 2018 (years ending October). When this is expanded to include all visitors from India to New Zealand, the counts increase to 36,144 in 2014 and 68,784 in 2018. Holidaymakers and visiting friends and relatives make the bulk of the 2018 visitors. Their count doubled from 27,472 (17,248 on holiday and 10,224 visiting friends and relatives) in 2014 to 55,392 (31,328 and 24,064) in 2018. Significantly, the student segment saw

AGE GROUP OF VISITORS, 2018



a drop from 1,632 education-related visits in 2014 to 1,184 in 2018. Business trips rose by half while visits for conferences more than doubled.

In terms of age profile of visitors from India, the largest group remains 25-34 years, with the numbers increasing from 9,248 to 15,776. However, the second largest group (55-64) has seen a much more drastic increase in numbers, from 6,336 to 15,600.

SIMPLY PUT

The cases other than Samjhauta

Aseemanand & others have been acquitted of train blast. A look at where other cases against them stand

DEEPTIMAN TIWARY
NEW DELHI, MARCH 24

LAST WEEK, a trial court in Panchkula acquitted all the accused in the 2007 Samjhauta Express train blast case, for want of evidence. Among the accused was former RSS member Naba Kumar Sarkar aka Aseemanand, said to have been the mastermind and ideological guide behind a number of cases that allegedly involved radical Hindu groups. Among six such cases that investigators had linked to former RSS members, this is the second (after the 2007 blasts at Mecca Masjid of Hyderabad) in which all the accused have been acquitted by trial courts. The NIA has challenged neither any of the acquittals, nor any order granting bail to an accused. A look at how these cases have progressed:

Ajmer Dargah blast

On October 11, 2007 a bomb ripped Ajmer Sharif Dargah in Rajasthan killing three people and injuring 17. The case was investigated by Rajasthan ATS until 2011, then transferred to the National Investigation Agency (NIA). The Rajasthan ATS arrested and chargesheeted three people in 2010. The NIA arrested six. All the accused were either directly connected with the RSS or with organisations linked to the Sangh Parivar. From April 2011 onwards, the NIA filed three chargesheets identifying 13 accused.

THE ACCUSED: These were Aseemanand, Devendra Gupta, Chandrashekhar Leve, Lokesh Sharma, Mukesh Vasani, Bharat Mohan Lal Ratiswar, Sandeep Dange, Ramchandra aka Ramji Kalsangra, Sunil Joshi, Bhavesh Bhai Patel, Suresh Nair, Harshad Solanki and Mehul aka Mafat Bhai aka Maheshbhai Gohil. Nair, Dange and Kalsangra were declared absconding; Joshi is dead.

According to NIA chargesheets, the accused, under the ideological tutelage of Aseemanand and operational leadership of Joshi, decided to avenge attacks on Hindu temples by targeting Muslim-dominated places in bomb attacks. They allegedly chose Delhi's Jama Masjid, Ajmer Dargah, Samjhauta Express train, Malegaon and Mecca Masjid in a meeting held in 2006 in Valsad, Gujarat.

According to the chargesheets, Dange and Kalsangra procured explosives and fabricated two bombs, only one of which exploded; Gupta arranged for SIM cards and mobile phones that were used as timer devices; and Lokesh Sharma ferried the explosives. Leve allegedly played a role in hiding the mobiles



AJMER DARGAH BLAST, 2007: Two convicted



MECCA MASJID BLAST, 2007: All accused acquitted

while Ratiswar gave financial support and provided shelter to the others. The rest were charged with various roles from fabrication of the bombs to their planting.

According to the chargesheet, most of these accused were also involved in the Mecca Masjid blast and the bombs at the two sites were of the same make.

STATUS: This was the first among these cases in which trial was completed. The trial began in June 2014. On March 8, 2017, a special court in Jaipur convicted RSS *pracharaks* Gupta and Patel — the only one among these cases in which the prosecution secured a conviction — and later sentenced them to life imprisonment. The court acquitted Aseemanand as well as Harshad Solanki, Leve, Vasani, Lokesh, Mehul and Ratiswar, giving them the benefit of the doubt. The case saw 26 of 149 witnesses turning hostile. While the trial was on, NIA's special public prosecutor Ashwani Sharma said in an interview that the NIA was not protecting its witnesses the way the CBI does.

Mecca Masjid blasts

On May 18, 2007, during Friday afternoon prayers, a bomb exploded inside the mosque, killing nine people and injuring 58. During the probe, two more bombs, unexploded, were recovered. Initially, Hyderabad police detained several Muslim men on suspicion of a jihadi terror group being involved but did not make any arrests. The case was later handed over to the CBI which, in December 2010, filed a chargesheet against two people

in Nampally court in Hyderabad. In April 2011, the case was handed over to the NIA, which has filed three chargesheets since, identifying 10 accused, including those chargesheeted by the CBI.

THE ACCUSED: These were Aseemanand, Devendra Gupta, Lokesh Sharma, Ratiswar, Dange, Kalsangra, Sunil Joshi, Rajendhar Chowdhary, Tejram Parmar and Amith Chowhan. According to the NIA, during meetings from 1999 to 2006, all the accused had entered into a criminal conspiracy to respond to attacks on Hindu temples. These meetings were allegedly held at Kumbh Mela, Ujjain, in 2004, Shabari Dham during 2005-06 and Takur Garh, Valsad. Aseemanand allegedly instigated that "Bomb kaja jawab bombs se dena hain".

In the meeting at Valsad, Joshi said he had procured SIM cards and mobile phones with the help of Gupta for using them in IEDs as timers and also for using the same for their mutual communication, according to the chargesheet. At the end of 2006, Kalsangra allegedly collected customised shells from a transport office while coming from Bhopal to Dewata. The bombs, allegedly prepared at Manvata Nagar, Indore, were triggered by using mobile phones with SIM cards as timers.

STATUS: On February 13, 2014, the NIA special court in Nampally framed charges against the accused and summons were issued to 72 witnesses. The trial began only in 2016. On April 16, 2018, a special court in Hyderabad acquitted all the accused.

Gupta, who was among those acquitted, had been convicted in the Ajmer case based on the same evidence. He had allegedly bought the SIM cards used in the IEDs; SIM cards from the same set were used in the two blasts.

Of the 266 witnesses listed, 66 did not support the prosecution case. Among them was Lt Col Prasad Purohit, an accused in the 2008 Malegaon blast case and alleged to be part of the group of conspirators in these cases.

The other 3 cases

Of the other three cases allegedly involving radical Hindu groups, the NIA closed the Modasa blast case in May 2015, while trial in the other two — the two Malegaon blast cases — is yet to begin. In both the 2006 and the 2008 Malegaon blast cases, multiple chargesheets have been filed by the Maharashtra ATS, CBI and NIA. The accused include Sadhvi Pragya Singh Thakur, Lt Col Purohit and Aseemanand.

The 2008 blast case hit a controversial note when the NIA exonerated Sadhvi Pragya Singh Thakur of all charges in his chargesheet. This was months after special public prosecutor Rohini Salian told *The Indian Express* in an interview that the NIA had put pressure on her to go slow in the case. The court, however, rejected the NIA's views on Thakur and arraigned her as an accused under Unlawful Activities Prevention Act.

In the 2006 Malegaon blast, where the Maharashtra ATS and CBI chargesheeted nine Muslim men, the NIA blamed a group led by Sunil Joshi as being behind the blast.

TIP FOR READING LIST

BREXIT CHRONICLES: EVENTS, DREAMS

AMID CONTINUING uncertainty over how and when Brexit will eventually take place, two new books look at the inevitability from different perspectives. *A Short History of Brexit: From Brentry to Backstop* is economic historian Kevin O'Rourke's chronicle of the events leading up to Brexit, looking at the evolution of British attitudes to Europe, the EU's politics and economics, and focusing on the question of the Irish border. *Dreams of Leaving and Remaining* is a collection of essays by journalist James Meek, written for the London Review of Books in the years before the UK voted to leave the EU, and annotated with Meek's current reflections. These essays look at the perspectives of various people on both sides of the Brexit divide.

review. It adds, however: "Anyone who has found themselves newly politicised by the convulsions of British politics in general or Brexit in particular will find this a handy primer on the events and undercurrents that led to our present discontent. Anyone who is familiar with that history will find something they knew, but hadn't fully appreciated..."

Reviewing Meek's book in the same article, *The Guardian* calls it a failure when measured on the yardstick that its essays "are supposed to tell us something about our divided nation and where it should go from here". It appreciates the essays themselves: "But it cannot possibly be right to say that this book is a failure when the account of the places Meek visits and the people he meets is so rich and so moving."



THIS WORD MEANS: GOLAN HEIGHTS

Where are they, and why do they matter?

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 24

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP has said "it is time for the US to fully recognize Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights". What is this area, who lives here, and why is it contentious?

The land

The Golan Heights are a fertile plateau of around 1,300 sq km area lying to the north and east of the Sea of Galilee, which Israel seized from Syria during the Six-Day War of 1967, and has occupied ever since. The Golan overlooks both Israel and Syria, and offers a commanding military vantage. Syrian forces made an abortive bid to take it back during the Yom Kippur War of 1973; the 1974 ceasefire agreement, however, left most of the area in Israeli hands. In 1981, Israel passed the Golan Heights Law, which extended Israel's "laws, jurisdiction and administration" to the area, in effect annexing it. A UNSC resolution declaring the imposition of Israel's law "in the occupied Syrian Golan Heights... null and void and without international legal effect" has not changed



the situation on the ground, although the frontier has not seen major hostilities for more than 40 years. In 2000, Israel and Syria made

a failed attempt at negotiating a settlement.

The inhabitants

Around 50,000 people are estimated to live on the Golan, divided almost equally between Israeli Jewish settlers and Arabic-speaking Druze people of Syrian origin, who follow a monotheistic Abrahamic religion related to Ismaili Shia Islam. The Druze have remained loyal to the regimes of Bashar al-Assad and his father Hafez al-Assad over the decades, and refused Israeli citizenship.

Trump's move

Trump's tweet marked a reversal of decades of US policy, which has refused to condone the Israeli occupation of Golan, and urged that the dispute must be resolved diplomatically. The President has earlier recognised the disputed city of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, moved the American Embassy there from Tel Aviv, and stopped aid to Palestinian refugees. Last year, the US voted against a ritual annual UN resolution condemning Israel's continued seizure of the Golan Heights. Because nothing is happening on Golan and nobody expects Israel to pull back in any case, Trump's tweet

does not change anything — what it does, however, is extend legitimacy to Israel's position, and boost Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's hardline agenda as he seeks a fifth term in the April 9 elections.

Strategic theatre

Israel argues that Golan is a security buffer against the war in Syria, and Netanyahu has said that if Israel were to withdraw, it would have "Iran [which backs Syria's Assad and has vowed Israel's destruction] on the shores of the Sea of Galilee". In 2014, rebel forces fighting the Assad regime took control of the Quneitra province on the Syrian side of Golan, but government forces took back the territory last year, and began facilitating the return of UN troops to their positions. The United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) and United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO) have camps and posts in the area. The Israeli and Syrian armies are separated by a 400 sq km demilitarised zone which neither side can enter. There is a solitary crossing, which, before the beginning of the civil war in Syria, was used by UN forces, Druze civilians, and to transport agricultural produce.

In Abel Prize triumph, a statement against gender gap in mathematics

KABIR FIRAUQUE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 24

LAST WEEK, American mathematician Karen Uhlenbeck won the Abel Prize, one of the top international honours in the subject. It is important not only as recognition of her work but also as a statement in a field traditionally been associated with men.

Women in mathematics

History has several examples of outstanding women mathematicians. Hypatia (370-415) of Alexandria remains legendary even though her entire work is lost. So does Emmy Noether of Germany for her work in abstract algebra and physics, while Ada Lovelace is credited with writing the first ever computer program. The Hollywood film *Hidden Figures* (2016) shows the gender and racial struggles of three black women prodigies in NASA of

the 1960s — Katherine Johnson who calculated flight trajectories for NASA missions, mathematician Dorothy Vaughan and engineer Mary Jackson.

Yet the number of women achievers compares poorly with those for men. Before Uhlenbeck, 16 male mathematicians had won the annual Abel Prize. The Fields Medal, awarded once every four years, has had 60 recipients since 1936, and only one of these mathematicians has been a woman. Maryam Mirzakhani of Iran, who won the Medal in 2014, died in 2017. The Chern Medal has been presented to three male mathematicians in 2010, 2014 and 2018.

Women have had a low representation in the science Nobel Prizes too. Of the 607 Nobel Prizes awarded to 604 Laureates in Physics, Chemistry and Medicine, 20 have been won by 19 women. The double Laureate is Marie Curie, the only scientist, male or female, to win in two different sub-

AWARDED IN THE SCIENCES



Karen Uhlenbeck, Abel Prize winner. abelprize.no

Prize	Subject	Winners	Women
Abel Prize	Mathematics	17	1
Fields Medal	Mathematics	60	1
Chern Medal	Mathematics	3	0
Nobel Prize	Physics	209*	3**
Nobel Prize	Chemistry	180*	5**
Nobel Prize	Medicine	216	12

*209 individuals have won 210 Physics Prizes; 180 have won 181 Chemistry Prizes ** Marie Curie won separately in Physics and Chemistry

jects (Physics and Chemistry).

Confidence gap

Various studies have been done on the gender gap in mathematics-oriented fields. An analysis of PISA scores by OECD in 2015

found that the difference in maths scores between high-achieving boys and girls was the equivalent of about half a year at school. But when comparing boys and girls who reported similar levels of self-confidence and anxiety about mathematics, the gender gap in per-

formance disappeared. In other words, when girls were more anxious about maths, they tended to perform poorly.

In 2017, a study published by American sociologists in *Frontiers in Psychology* found that beliefs in mathematical ability also shapes choices in higher education. Although girls are excelling in maths at school, boys still believe they can do better.

In India, the proportion of women in higher education courses in mathematics decreases as the degree pursued gets higher. The latest All India Survey on Higher Education, published last year, shows that women actually outnumbered men in PG courses (92,000 to 63,000) in maths in 2017-18. The gap narrowed in M Phil (2,700 to 2,100) before women were overtaken by men in PhD Courses (1,700 to 2,100).

Uhlenbeck's work

Uhlenbeck, 76, is acclaimed for her work

with partial differential equations, which she has used to solve problems in geometry and topology. Her breakthrough work, with mathematician Jonathan Sacks, was on "minimal surfaces", such as the spherical surface taken by a soap bubble. This becomes complicated when additional dimensions are added, such as soap film forming around a wire; Uhlenbeck's work covered minimisation problems in higher dimensions. Her diverse fields include gauge theory, which has applications in particle physics and general relativity.

The Abel Prize, first awarded in 2003, includes an award of 6 million kroner (about \$700,000). It is named after Swedish mathematician Niels Henrik Abel (1802-29). The International Mathematical Union and the European Mathematical Society nominate members of the Abel Committee, who in turn recommend recipients to The Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters, which awards the Abel Laureate.