



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

NOT SO BASIC

Inequality deepens faultlines, but a handout, framed as rich versus poor, is hardly the answer

FIRST, IT WAS the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana targeted at small and marginal farmers by the outgoing NDA government just two months before Lok Sabha elections, with a commitment to pay Rs 6,000 annually. Now it is the Congress that has announced a minimum income guarantee scheme — the Nyuntam Aay Yojana, which promises to provide Rs 6,000 a month or Rs 72,000 annually to 20 per cent of the poorest households in the country. Apart from these, some states, too, have already unveiled similar schemes. There are two features in the schemes announced by the two parties, one of which is that both are clearly driven by electoral opportunism. The other notable fact is that both are silent on what they plan to do with existing welfare schemes. There is no doubt and, as many economists have acknowledged, that cash transfer, especially when it is unconditional, is the way forward. It is seen as less patronising, in step with the market economy and providing the poor a choice. But what is unfortunate is the manner in which Rahul Gandhi frames what he calls a “ground breaking idea.” He says if Narendra Modi can give money to the richest, the Congress can give it to the poorest. In juxtaposing the two, he reinforces the demonisation of capital and fails to acknowledge what industry does best — create wealth, jobs and growth for the economy.

The issue is not really about finding additional resources — estimated to be Rs 3.6 lakh crore — for such a scheme. What presents a real political economy challenge is eliminating or phasing out some of the welfare schemes, including inefficient subsidies such as that on urea. Instead, governments find it politically expedient to raise fresh revenues by taxing the rich, which only serves to disincentivise the job creators, rising entrepreneurs and innovators. Economic reforms in India have been slow and it's only over the last two decades that the 7-7.5 per cent growth rate has become the new norm. Poverty levels have been falling but because of poor skills, agrarian distress and glaring gaps in the health-education ecosystem, millions of young men and women are in despair when it comes to earning enough to meet their rising aspirations. This explains why there is a felt need to address the problem of endemic poverty through a Basic Income scheme with experiments underway in many countries to counter the backlash arising from rising inequality.

In a country with a large number of poor, the only antidote to poverty is sustained double-digit growth over the next 20-30 years. This alone will create jobs, helping India reap its demographic dividend, and, in the process, lift millions out of poverty. This will require governments to simultaneously create an enabling environment for the young and for reviving the animal spirits of entrepreneurs and businessmen and women. A handout may be good politics but it's a leg-up that's both good politics and economics.

LIKE COPENHAGEN

The city's journey to becoming carbon neutral could offer lessons to civic authorities around the world

LAST YEAR, IN the run-up to the UNFCCC's summit at Katowice, 18 climate scientists released a report targeted at urban policymakers. The 30-page document was a follow-up to the IPCC's seminal report, which had stressed on the urgency of keeping global warming to less than 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. Cities, noted the scientists, hold the key — nearly 75 per cent of the global carbon footprint is due to urban activities. Mayors of several cities promised to act on the report's recommendations. And on Monday, Copenhagen became the first city to present a plan to cancel out its carbon footprint by 2025.

The Danish capital has already reduced its GHG emissions by more than 40 per cent compared to 2005. Nearly 45 per cent of people who live in and around Copenhagen use bicycles to commute. The city also has specially-designated roads for cyclists and uses waste to generate electricity. For every unit of fossil fuel it consumes, Copenhagen plans to sell commensurate amounts of renewable energy. By the end of this year, everyone living in the Danish capital will be half-a-mile from a subway station. “Cities can change the way we behave, the way we are living, and go more green. Mayors, more than national politicians, feel the pressure to take action. We are directly responsible for our cities and our citizens, and they expect us to act,” Copenhagen's mayor Frank Jensen has said.

Well-connected and pedestrian-friendly cities have a relatively low carbon footprint. The report of the climate scientists, released before the Katowice summit, recommends the use of “information and communication technologies to optimise public transportation efficiency, and enable vehicle sharing”. It also advocates the use of “energy-efficient buildings and infrastructure that have low or near zero-emissions”. The scientists surmise that all this will require cooperation between local, provincial and national governments. That remains the Achilles heel for cities in most parts of the world. Delhi's never-ending pollution crisis, for example, has produced unsavoury bouts of bickering between the Centre, the city's government, its municipality and other environmental agencies. And Copenhagen's mayor has failed to persuade Denmark's government to impose restrictions on diesel-guzzling vehicles in the city. But it is also becoming increasingly clear that mayors, town planners and other local authorities hold the key to the success of national commitments to mitigate global warming. The Danish capital's experience could hold lessons for civic authorities around the world.

AYA RAM, SUKH RAM

Former telecom minister returns to Congress. His journey is remarkable and telling

IT WAS PAST midnight when the tellers called in by the CBI to count the cash stacked in bags and suitcases in Sukh Ram's palatial bungalow in Mandi completed their task. Rs 3.66 crore, they pencilled in the amount. The CBI claimed that Sukh Ram, a Cabinet minister in the P V Narasimha Rao government, had been paid off for a telecom contract. That day in August 1996, for many, corruption ceased to be an abstract idea, acquired a new face. However, it appears that the taint has not taken the sheen off Sukh Ram, who continues to be courted by the BJP and the Congress. On Monday, the 91-year-old politician rejoined the Congress, his grandson in tow.

Evidently, the weight of corruption allegations didn't sink Sukh Ram's political career. Soon after the CBI raid, the Congress, which Sukh Ram represented as MLA and MP many times since winning his first election from Mandi in 1962, expelled him. Unfazed, he formed the Himachal Vikas Congress and won the Mandi assembly seat in the 1998 assembly election. The HVC, with five MLAs, supported the BJP government. Ahead of the 2004 general election, Sukh Ram wrapped up his outfit and rejoined the Congress. Two years ago, he left the Congress to join the BJP; his son, Anil Sharma, is currently a minister in the Jairam Thakur ministry.

The world of telecom has changed beyond recognition since Sukh Ram left the ministry. So, too, has the idea of public corruption. A successor of Sukh Ram in the ministry, Andimuthu Raja, was accused of presiding over a scam estimated at Rs 1.76 lakh crore. The 2G cost the UPA the 2014 election, but Raja's name has since been cleared. While Sukh Ram eyes another battle in Himachal, Raja has hit the campaign trail in the Nilgiri hills. Meanwhile, corruption has taken the name of an aircraft and become a slogan on T-shirts.

If you want to help the poor

There is a way to deliver a minimum income guarantee to India's citizens — but Congress hasn't found it



JAYATI GHOSH

THE CONGRESS PARTY'S recent declaration that, if voted to power, it will seek to ensure a minimum income to 20 per cent of the poorest households in the country, is laudable in intent. It also brings back policy attention to the penury and insecurity that continue to plague much of India's population, and particularly the most destitute. But, as presented, it is completely unworkable — and if the Congress is really serious about the goal of eliminating poverty, it will have to think of a different way of reaching it.

Consider the broad outlines of the scheme that was announced. The proposed minimum income has been set at Rs 12,000 per month. This is a remarkably high level, given that minimum wages in most states are well below this and even the remuneration by the central government to anganwadi workers and ASHAs is less than one-third this amount. The bottom 20 per cent of households are to be provided a cash transfer directly into their bank accounts, of a maximum of Rs 6,000 per month (or Rs 72,000 per year) which presumably will bring them up to this level. Around 50 million households are expected to benefit from this.

The fiscal costs of this are not as much as might be imagined. At Rs 3,60,000 crore, the maximum anticipated expenditure amounts to just under 2 per cent of GDP. This is only one-third of the amount that is regularly given away as tax concessions to corporates and rich individuals, and there are many ways of raising such an amount that are available to a committed government. Of course, if this is to replace any other government spending then the matter becomes more problematic, because other welfare schemes (like maternity benefits, scholarships, etc) have different and very specific purposes. That is why the statement of a Congress spokesperson that other schemes will be “rationalised”, raises major concerns.

The criticisms of this scheme are not about cost. Rather, they are about its workability and the possibility of other and better ways of using fiscal resources. The identification of households is just the first problem. Contrary to what is being claimed, the Socio-Economic and Caste Census conducted in 2011-12 did not even attempt to measure the incomes of households. Instead, it used a variety of other metrics to estimate multidimensional poverty, which, in turn, became the basis for identifying possible beneficiaries of schemes intended for the poor.

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Incomes are notoriously hard to measure or estimate: The few surveys (such as the India Human Development Surveys) that have tried to measure income have done so for a much smaller sample (not a full census of all households) and on the basis of a long, time-consuming questionnaire that requires additional estimations by investigators. In any case, incomes change over time. Those who were classified as poor in 2011-12 may not be so today, while others may have become poor in the meantime.

Trying to measure incomes today would obviously face the problem of respondents wanting to game the system by reporting incomes lower than those they actually receive. With self-employed workers — currently around half of the workforce — such measurement becomes even more difficult if not impossible. Even regular and casual paid workers in informal work often have incomes that vary by week and month. To establish the bottom 20 per cent would require estimating the incomes of everyone — a logistical nightmare, and an administratively expensive and oppressive process.

Then the process of delivery of these cash incomes to the identified poor would pose another set of massive problems. The poorest and most destitute people in the country tend to live in far flung and more backward regions, with poor access to basic banking and other infrastructure. Those fondly believing that the JAM trinity — Jan Dhan, Aadhaar and mobile telephony — would somehow provide a technological fix to this problem, have clearly refused to look at and learn from the massive exclusions and other problems created by Aadhaar in other public service delivery, including cash transfers.

Instead of embarking on a massive administrative exercise with uncertain benefits, it is possible to think of another combination of public interventions that would actually ensure minimum income to a much larger proportion of the population.

This is another trinity, and arguably, a more desirable one: Universal basic services, universal employment guarantee and universal pensions. In other words, provide good quality public services, including in health

and education, for all, including through a significant expansion of regular public employment in these services; provide 100 days of work at the minimum wage to all adults (not per household, but to every adult man or woman) in both urban and rural areas and include some skilled work and training elements in such employment; and provide universal non-contributory pension at half the minimum wage to the elderly and those who cannot work because of disability.

This combination would actually be much more effective in ensuring a minimum income guarantee to all adults — and therefore to households as well. It would be more democratic because it would be universal in scope, with self-selection in work driving the employment in public works programmes. It would enable more extensive and better quality delivery of public services, which in turn would generate a better quality of life for the entire population, and create a healthier and more educated population. It would be less unequal in scope and not create divisions between people and disaffection because of unwarranted inclusion or unjustified exclusion of some in an income transfer scheme. It would ensure social security and dignity to those who cannot work any more because of old age or disability.

All this would create significant multiplier effects that would lead to major secondary increases in economic activity. So there would be a major positive impact on employment, both directly and indirectly, and this would encompass skilled work as well. So job creation — such a major concern in today's economy — would also be galvanised.

The total costs of such a combination are only about three times the proposed income guarantee scheme for the poorest, but it would affect the bulk of the population, ensure better health and education access and create the grounds for a more equal society. Because of multiplier effects on income, the government would get more tax revenues that would make the net costs much lower.

If the Congress — or indeed, any party — is serious about eliminating poverty, then this combination is more feasible, more effective, and a more just solution.

The writer is professor of economics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi

AN ACT OF REALISM

Why Modi government was right to boycott Pakistan Day celebration in Delhi



K P NAYAR

THE PAKISTAN National Day reception at their High Commission in New Delhi had been an irritant in bilateral relations for so long that it is best the Narendra Modi government finally drew the curtains on Indian participation in the celebration last week. For decades, so much thought has been wasted within the Indian government on this one event and successive ministers, foreign secretaries, joint secretaries in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and personnel of intelligence agencies have lost sleep over how to handle this reception year after year.

Twenty-four years ago, while working for this newspaper, I became a collateral casualty of the diplomatic attrition between India and Pakistan at the national day reception hosted by then High Commissioner Riaz Khokhar, who was a notoriously effective India-baiter. A week before the reception, after much thought, the Pakistan division of MEA proposed the name of R L Bhatia, then Minister of State for External Affairs, as the chief guest for the event. Bhatia was actually chosen as an insult to the Pakistanis. In those days, unlike now, the Vice President used to grace the national day receptions of most major countries, certainly of friendly neighbours like Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Bangladesh. Bhatia was only a minister of state. Despite his stellar record in winning successive Lok Sabha elections from Amritsar, it was widely known that he was a non-entity in the P V Narasimha Rao government. By sending

Bhatia as the chief guest, Rao's intention was to convey to Pakistan that his government would not waste any of its better talent to rub shoulders with Pakistanis. The previous year, then foreign secretary, J N Dixit, had got Rao's approval to send A K Antony, the cabinet minister for civil supplies, consumer affairs and public distribution, as the chief guest. The arguments in favour of Antony were somewhat similar to those that favoured Bhatia in 1995. Antony was not yet a heavyweight in the Union Cabinet. Besides, he did not speak Hindi or Punjabi, his conversational English was then not very strong. Most of all, in his trademark Kerala mundu and white khadi slack shirt, he would stick out like a sore thumb among the sherwanis and other customary attire that Pakistanis wear to ceremonial functions. The message that Antony's presence was meant to convey was that “we are different from you”. By the time Bhatia arrived at the High Commission, Khokhar had seated a group of Hurriyat Conference leaders in the space reserved for the chief guest from the Indian government. The Indian minister was made to stand on the lawns. Bhatia kept his dignity and left soon after the national anthems of both countries had been played. New Delhi's English media had then been heavily influenced by senior journalists who were born on the other side before Partition. Some of them were also regulars at the Wagah border carrying candles on August 14 every year.

This episode was underplayed by most of the national media. But this newspaper carried my story about the insult to the Indian chief guest by his Pakistani host. After Parliament was in tumult over the incident, Salman Haidar, who had not even completed a month as foreign secretary, was forced to summon Khokhar to MEA for an explanation.

The catch was that I was not present when Bhatia was treated shabbily. Khokhar knew it because he had sent a wreath to the cremation of my mother who died two days earlier. So, instead of being pulled up by the foreign secretary, it was Khokhar who gave Haidar a dressing down. This journalist who wrote a “sensational” story did not even come for my reception, the high commissioner told Haidar. Such stories are being leaked to the media by your officers, Khokhar alleged. Officers in MEA are out of control and you — the foreign secretary — cannot discipline them, he thundered. How do I know this? The note-taker wrote a factual account of the meeting, which I got to see.

Were such contretemps worth the time, energy and resources of the government? Pakistan's national day receptions held in a hostile environment have not promoted bilateral relations with India. The Modi government has shown realism in calling this spade a spade.

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The writer is a former diplomatic editor of The Indian Express



MARCH 27, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

IDI FIGHTS TANZANIA
THE UGANDAN PRESIDENT, Idi Amin, said he was surrounded by Tanzanian tanks but was prepared to fight his way out, using only 20 loyal men against 20,000 enemy troops. “I'm looking forward to having breakfast with the enemy,” said Amin through a presidential aide who telephoned reporters in Nairobi. The Uganda radio, monitored in Nairobi, carried a similar report after Amin personally telephoned the newsroom. According to Amin, he could see 12 Tanzanian tanks from the window of his official residence. Amin said the armour had arrived during the night and had cut off his residence in Entebbe from Kampala, the capital 32 km away. The report, if true,

would signify a major blow to Amin's military supply routes. Most of the weapons and soldiers reportedly supplied by Libya this month were flown into Entebbe.

ISRAEL-EGYPT PEACE
PRESIDENT ANWAR SADAT OF Egypt and Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel today signed a peace treaty at the White House at a moving ceremony presided over by President Carter. In the next few months Israel will quit all occupied Egyptian territory under arrangements worked out at Camp David, and initiate a process which could lead to Palestinian autonomy and later independence or result in more war.

ARAB VS ISRAEL-EGYPT
ARAB FOES OF the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty protested the pact with bombs, demonstrations, strikes and raging threats on Monday. Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat vowed to “chop off the hands” of US president Jimmy Carter. Egypt leader Anwar Sadat and Israel PM Menachem Begin, a threat that sent excited guerrillas into Beirut's streets firing their weapons into the air. Caution over the start of an uncertain peace dampened any prepeace euphoria in Egypt and Israel. Arab governments prepared to mount economic sanctions against Egypt. In Teheran, protesters took over the Egyptian embassy.



CR Sasikumar

Tolerating the corrupt

Definition of corruption is constantly being overtaken as new ways of being corrupt are invented. The need of the hour is great men and women



PALI NARKMAN

HAS THE CAMPAIGN against corruption succeeded? I am not at all sure it has. Let me tell you why.

When talking of corruption, we always make a common mistake — to use the number of laws enacted or convictions obtained as an index of the fight against corruption. Wrong. The only real index is the visible degradation of tolerance of corruption amongst people who individually abhor it — or at least that they abhor it.

Over the years, it seems to me we have come to tolerate it more and more — not just in the country, major or minor, national or regional, has raised the issue of corruption in public life in a big way.

In our part of the world, people's expectations were and unfortunately still are: Whatever be the form of government, it is sure that corruption will ultimately corrode it.

An Australian author has criticised a general election made last year by the then Australian government in establishing what was then called the Commonwealth Integrity Commission and he quotes one appellate judge as saying: "This kind of integrity commission is one you would have when you don't want to have an integrity commission, it creates a wall behind which corrupt public officials can hide. (It was and is) like a colander — it would be really good to make rich people's government service decades ago and has it, it's got so many holes."

The same goes for our vigilance commissions, the CBI and the lot. They are all colanders (with too many holes in them) to

Recent events, too close, too embarrassing to recall, have proved it.

I have a book in my library — a fat book of about 800 pages and it is called 'Bribes: The intellectual history of a moral idea', by John T Noonan Jr. Noonan believes that the fight against corruption will succeed ultimately because, as he puts it: "The nature of bribes is antithetical to the nature of human power in its full development". And the author ventures a prediction. It reads as follows: "Just as slavery was once a way of life and now has become obsolete and incomprehensible, so the practice of bribery in the form of exchange of payment for official action will become obsolete."

But then, let me be the Devil's Advocate and tell you that "slavery" did "become obsolete" in the USA by the passing of the 13th amendment (to the US Constitution) — but it was by Abraham Lincoln buying over a couple of Congressmen to make up the two-thirds majority required for passing the 13th amendment to the US Constitution!

The anti-corruption laws that have been part of the statute book in India have so far exhibited a marked tendency to grind slowly: Too slowly for the likes of that great one-time doer: Central Vigilance Commissioner N Vittal (1998-2002). Which can he forget him?

When in office, he had publicly "named" 94 civil servants who were under investigation (that is, who were accused of corruption on the basis of documentary evidence, but not yet charged in any court of law). It was on his instructions that their names were posted on the Internet.

"Sue me if you dare", Vittal appeared to say, but no one sued him. His bravado had struck a sympathetic chord amongst many people — myself included! Vittal retired from government service decades ago and has been succeeded by CVCs who have not been as effective as he was. They say that corruption in politics is as old as the hills. But never forget that in India it is older!

In the Arthashastra (4th century BC), it is

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written: Just as it is impossible not to taste honey or the poison that one may find at the tip of one's tongue, so it is impossible for one dealing with government funds not to taste a little bit of the king's revenue. Just as it is impossible to know whether a fish moving in the water is drinking it, so it is impossible to find out when government servants employed in government work are taking money for themselves. Beautiful imagery!

"Corruption" is also one of the most elastic of words in the English language. To every individual, it is something of which he or she disapproves.

Some years ago, at a seminar of the International Bar Association held in Berlin, Jeremy Pope (of Transparency International) gave what then struck me as the most comprehensive, and yet the most concise definition. He said: "Corruption is the misuse of public power for private profit." But subsequent events have shown that his definition was not all-embracing, because there are simply no limits to where, when or how corruption rears its ugly head.

Cricketers, footballers, cyclists do not hold any public office, and yet they exercise moral power — the power to instil idealism among millions of sport-loving fans. Such fans feel cheated when a player, due to corrupt motives, plays badly or does not play well. Pope's definition needs restructuring.

The definition of corruption keeps on requiring restructuring as time passes, as more ways to be corrupt are invented, but meanwhile I have a suggestion.

There are two types of people in this world — those who want to be somebody and those who want to do something. As the great book says: "Whatsoever a great man doeth, that other men also do; the standard he setteth up, by that the people go."

The need of the hour, then, is great men (and women). And quite frankly they are, as yet, in extremely short supply.

The writer is a constitutional jurist and a senior Supreme Court advocate

Forecasters of fantasy

RSS must rein in such people in their midst



SUDHEENDRA KULKARNI

RASHTRIYA SWAYAMSEVAK SANGH (RSS), the ideological mother of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and other Sangh Parivar organisations, has two conceptual and psychological fixities when it comes to the past and future of India. One, it believes that India is a Hindu Rashtra *de facto*, and should become so *de jure*. Two, India was Akhand Bharat yesterday, is not so today because of Partition in 1947, but should become one again tomorrow.

Many great Indians in the pre-1947 era who were opposed to the RSS ideology, were also against India's Partition. Mahatma Gandhi, for example, passionately wanted India to remain united. There was, however, a fundamental difference between the Gandhian and RSS approach to unity which remains even today. Gandhi wanted India to remain one not as a Hindu Rashtra but on the basis of the lofty principle of Hindu-Muslim unity. His "weapon" for achieving this goal was mutual love, fraternity and respect for democratic aspirations. In contrast, the RSS believes in Hindu supremacy and the power of military superiority.

In recent years, the RSS does not advocate "Akhand Bharat" as openly and frequently as it used to do in the past. Because, curiously, a growing section of the support base of the BJP-RSS has come to believe that Partition was actually good for India because it got rid of a large population of Muslims, who, had they remained in united India, would have reduced the Hindus' numerical majority. The creation of Pakistan and Bangladesh as separate nations, they reckon, has made it easier for the post-1947 truncated India to pursue the goal of "Hindu Rashtra". However, even as the Sangh wrestles with its own fixity about Akhand Bharat, some of its leaders, often, become such over-enthusiastic warriors for their cause that they throw all rationality to the wind.

One of them is Indresh Kumar, a senior RSS leader who was deputed by the organisation to establish the Muslim Rashtriya Manch (MRM) in 2002. Consider, for example, a report in this newspaper 'Pakistan to be part of India after 2025: RSS leader Indresh Kumar' (IE, March 17). Speaking at a function in Mumbai, he outlandishly prophesied: "You can take it down that five-seven years later, you will get a chance to buy a house or do business somewhere in Karachi, Lahore, Rawalpindi and Sialkot." The basis of his *bhavishya vani* (forecast)? "A Bharatiya Union of Akhand Bharat on the lines of European Union can take shape." And why does he think this can happen? "The Indian government has taken a tough line on the Kashmir issue for the first time. This is because the Army acts on political willpower, and now, the political willpower has changed."

Some people in the Sangh seem to have been so carried away by Prime Minister

Narendra Modi's "muscular" response to Pulwama that their extrapolation of the future political consequences of IAF's attack on Balakot has reached extreme limits. Kumar's utterances lend themselves to only two interpretations, both of which are irrational. One, Modi, after he returns to power (this unstated part of the forecast is, presumably, not open to question), will show such heightened political willpower that the Indian Armed Forces will strike Pakistan relentlessly for the next five-six years until our western neighbour meekly surrenders, and becomes a part of the Bharatiya Union. Alternatively, Pakistan will be so overjoyed with Modi's return to power that they will immediately offer talks with him on becoming a part of said Bharatiya Union.

Would Bangladesh also willingly come forward to join the Bharatiya Union? Kumar has no doubts because: "We have ensured a government in Dhaka of our liking." He, of course, believes that patriotic Bangladeshis have no reason to be livid at this admission of Indian interference in the elections in their country. Now, look at Kumar's further extrapolation about the military conquest of China. "We will not be needing permission from China to go to Mansarovar." Why? Because even China is now scared of India. "We removed China from Doklam. We defeated it."

After Doklam and Balakot, India does not have to worry about Pakistan, Bangladesh or even mighty China. According to Kumar, India's real "enemies" are inside. Now, how are they to be dealt with? His prescription: India needs new "laws against traitors" so that there is no Naseeruddin Shah, Hamid Ansari or Navjot Sidhu.

Kumar has created a bit of problem here by including former vice president Hamid Ansari in the list of "traitors". He has tarred the reputation of a fellow luminary of the Sangh Parivar, finance minister Arun Jaitley, with the brush of dishonesty. Recall how Jaitley came to the rescue of PM Modi when the latter had egregiously alleged, in a public meeting before the 2017 assembly elections in Gujarat, that both Ansari and Manmohan Singh had held a secret meeting with Pakistanis at Mani Shankar Aiyar's residence in New Delhi. To end the uproar in Parliament, Jaitley had to say in Parliament: "Any such perception [that PM Modi's speech questioned Ansari's and Singh's commitment to India] is erroneous. We hold these leaders in high esteem, as well as their commitment to India." The inference is obvious. Since both Kumar and Jaitley cannot be right about Ansari, the latter has been adjudged as untruthful by the RSS leader.

Albert Einstein was right: "Only two things are infinite, the universe and human stupidity, and I'm not sure about the former." But, in this case, stupidity can also be scary. One hopes the saner elements in the RSS will rein in such forecasters of fantasy in its midst. As for the rest of us, we must fearlessly continue to strive to build a Bharat — and also achieve Bharat-Pakistan-Bangladesh-China co-existence — based on the Gandhian tenets of love, non-violence, equality and friendly cooperation.

The writer was an aide to India's former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

EXERCISE CAUTION

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'The fall of IS' (IE, March 26). After the military defeat of the ISIS in Syria, there is reason to be relieved, but no reason for complacency. Because the ISIS has just been militarily defeated and not ideologically. Now, it may not assert its existence in a consolidated way as it used to, yet it remains spread across the globe in a few pockets like the IS of Khorasan in Afghanistan. The danger of online mentoring, radicalising the youth and asserting identities individually and violently, looms over the world still.

Nirmal D Kapadia, Gandhinagar

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'The fall of IS' (IE, March 26). The ISIS' control over territory in Syria has ended but jihadist fighters are still active in the region. Like the al-Qaeda, IS' tentacles extend far and wide. They are highly radicalised and battle-hardened and can even be expected to introduce new complexities to the Kashmir militancy. India must be on guard in this regard.

SS Paul, Nadia

LOTUS IN BENGAL

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Among the believers in Bengal' (IE, March 26). Not only a Bengali, even if one hails from Bengal in general, people say, "you must be a communist". The piece rightly says there is cultural and religious osmosis which is reflected in a changing Bengali culture. However, in a globalised world, this is inevitable.

H Upadhyay, via email

Dead end on the left

Political parties must understand why people are turning towards RSS, BJP



ANAND VAIDYA

A YOUNG GIRL I met at the Jaipur Literature Festival (JLF) this year mentioned that the left was not at all surprising that two years ago, when the organisers of the JLF invited RSS speakers for the first time ever, the Left was censured. Senior communists leaders like Prasad Yechury boycotted the festival. The Left is a grass roots organisation which exists in spite of serious opposition from the establishment, only because it enjoys the support of the people of India. Thanks to the common people of Bharat, standing solidly behind the Sangh, its strength and influence has only increased over time. The Left, on the other hand, has consistently lost popular support. Today, the Left's political dominance is restricted to the state in the south.

Now, it is the prerogative of the organisers to decide whom to invite. Two years ago, the Left festival organisers decided not to retract their invitations sent out to Dattatreya Hosabale and me despite opposition to us speaking at JLF. Filmmaker and author Vivek Agnihotri this year invited Ramesh Patange, who shares his experiences with this illiberal Left. I consider a positive step. In fact, this year he also invited Prasoos Joshi but he could not make it due to ill-health. The observation of the young girl about the "left activists" in 2016. The activists wanted to stop was in the same context.

It is worth highlighting the hypocrisy of the Left. On the one hand, they are self-proclaimed warriors of free speech, considering it even genuine criticism as an assault on their freedom of expression, and, on the other, they do not shy away from forcefully suppressing any viewpoint that is not to their liking. Hence, when to Joshi's lyrics in *Manikamika*, the team leader's main problem was with the song

"Main rahoon ya na rahoon, Bharat rehna chahiye" (I may or may not live, but Bharat must live on). One cannot help but wonder what possible objection anyone could have to lyrics as benign and as moving as this. Not unlike the Semitic religions, the Left, too, insists on only one version of the truth. No other narrative can be allowed to exist. If one chooses to differ, she loses the right to freedom of expression, rather even the right to live. Leftist ideology has been responsible for some of the worst political crimes in the history of the world. In Bharat too, the left bastions (Kerala and West Bengal) have a reputation of carrying out political murders. Such intolerance is against the spirit of Bharat and of Hindu dharma. Spiritual uplift forms the cornerstone of Bharatiya society and hence inclusiveness, freedom of thought and expression are inherent in the Hindu thought. It is this nature of the Hindu dharma that has allowed people of various social, religious and political strands to coexist peacefully in Bharat since time immemorial.

I am reminded of this story of Swami Vivekananda. Having introduced the rich cultural heritage of Bharat and Hindu dharma to the West, Swami Vivekananda was getting ready to depart from London for Bharat. The year was 1897. One of his British friends asked him, "Swamiji, how do you like

your motherland now after four years' experience of the luxurious, glorious, powerful West?" Swamiji replied: "India I loved before I came away. Now the very dust of Bharat has become holy to me, the very air is now to me holy; it is now the holy land, the place of pilgrimage, the tirtha."

As his ship approached the shores of Bharat, Swamiji was overcome with emotion. He stood there with hands folded and eyes moist, gazing at the shoreline as if Bharat Mata had literally appeared before him. As soon as the ship pulled up in the harbour, Swami Vivekananda got off the deck and kneeled on the ground, and said, "All my worries have dissolved in the lap of my mother".

How have we come to this point where those born on this land, nurtured by its food, water and air, and, educated by the money of its tax payers, are somehow okay with Bharat tere tukde honge (India, you will be broken into pieces)? Political parties who nurture this mindset for their narrow vested interests or outsource their intellectual outreach to leftist groups, need to introspect about the fraudulence of their ideological premise. If not, the patriotic citizens of this country will be forced to act.

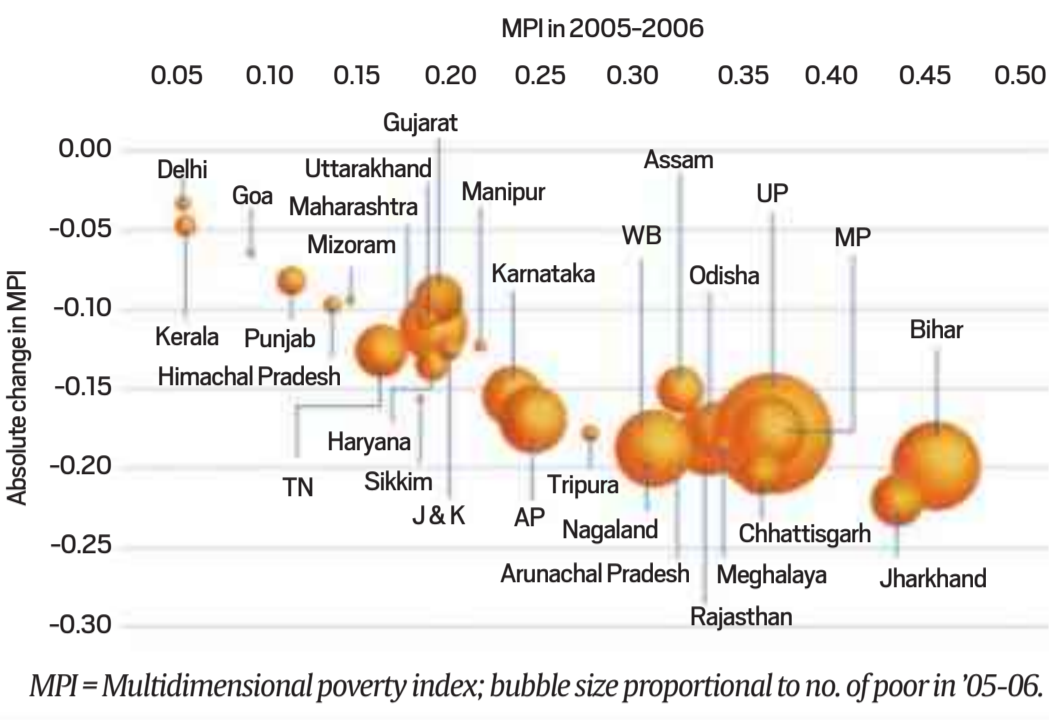
The writer is joint general secretary of the RSS

The current political problem in Bengal is the two extremes: Muslim vote-bank of Mamata Banerjee and the right-wing Hindutva of the BJP. The Bengali Muslims are among the most backward sections of Muslim population in the country. They need substantive governmental support and empowerment, which have to go beyond symbolic electoral sops. The alternative to TMC's Muslim appeasement should not be the BJP's Hindutva. There is a need to traverse a middle path, that is, religion-neutral development for all.

TELLING NUMBERS

27 cr Indians move out of poverty in 10 years, yet country still has highest number of poor: report

ABSOLUTE CHANGE IN MPI, 2005-06 TO 2015-16



MPI = Multidimensional poverty index; bubble size proportional to no. of poor in '05-06.

INDIA HAS reduced its poverty rate drastically from 55% to 28% in 10 years, with 271 million people moving out of poverty between 2005-06 and 2015-16, according to the Global MPI 2018 Report prepared by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative. The report, covering 105 countries, dedicates a chapter to India because of this remarkable progress. However, India still had 364 million poor in 2015-16, the largest for any country, although it is down from 635 million in 2005-06.

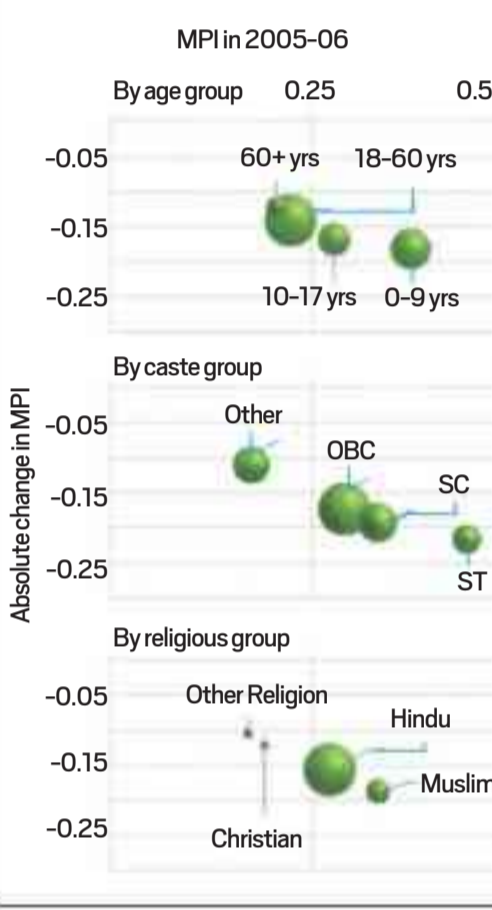
The report measures MPI, or multidimensional poverty index, which it says can be broken down to show "who is poor" and "how they are poor". This factors in two measures, poverty rate as a percentage of the population, and intensity as the average share of deprivations that poor people experience. The product of these two is MPI. If someone is deprived in a third or more of 10 weighted indicators, the global index identifies them as "MPI poor".

In India, poverty reduction among children, the poorest states, Scheduled Tribes, and Muslims was fastest, the report says. Of the 364 million people who were MPI poor in 2015-16, 156 million (42.6%) were children. In 2005-06 there were 292 million poor children in India, so the latest figures represent a 47% decrease or 136 million fewer children growing up in multidimensional poverty.

Although Muslims and STs reduced poverty the most over the 10 years, these two groups still had the highest rates of poverty. While 80% of ST members had been poor in 2005-06, 50% of them were still poor in 2015-16. And while 60% of Muslims had been poor in 2005-06, 31% of them were still poor in 2015-16.

Bihar was the poorest state in 2015-16, with more than half its population in poverty. The four poorest states — Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh — were still home to 196 million MPI poor people, which was over half of all the MPI poor people in India. Jharkhand had the greatest improvement, followed by Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, and Nagaland. At the other end, Kerala, one of the least poor regions in 2006, reduced its MPI by around 92%.

ABSOLUTE RISE IN MPI, BY AGE & COMMUNITY



Global findings

Worldwide, the report found, 1.3 billion people live in multidimensional poverty in the 105 developing countries it covered. This represents 23%, or nearly a quarter, of the population of these countries. These people are deprived in at least one-third of overlapping indicators in health, education, and living standards, it says. While the study found multidimensional poverty in all developing regions of the world, it was seen to be particularly acute in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. These two regions account together for 83% (more than 1.1 billion) of all multidimensionally poor people in the world.

Additionally, two-thirds of all multidimensionally poor people live in middle-income countries, with 889 million people in these countries experiencing deprivations in nutrition, schooling, and sanitation, just like those in low-income countries.

The report describes the level of global child poverty as staggering, with children accounting for virtually half (49.9%) of the world's poor. Worldwide, over 665 million children live in multidimensional poverty. In 35 countries, at least half of all children are MPI poor. In South Sudan and Niger, some 93% of all children are MPI poor.

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

Mueller report: between the lines

Special Counsel has submitted report after probing alleged Russian interference in US presidential poll. What were these allegations, what else emerged, what does the report mean to Trump, his aides, rivals?

ON SUNDAY, US Attorney General William Barr wrote to lawmakers stating that an investigation conducted by Special Counsel Robert Mueller, who had submitted his investigation report Friday, has not found that President Donald Trump's campaign had conspired with Russia to influence the 2016 presidential election. A look at the events leading to the investigation, how much of its findings are now known and what they mean, and what could happen from here:

How is Russia supposed to have influenced a US presidential election?

Ahead of the election in 2016, reports emerged that Russian military intelligence officers, working for an agency known as GRU, hacked into the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and the Gmail account of John Podesta, Hillary Clinton's campaign manager. Later, WikiLeaks released thousands of emails that Russian operatives had allegedly hacked from the DNC. This led to intelligence agencies probing Russian interference.

According to an indictment cited by *The New York Times*, operatives at Russian private firm Internet Research Agency, which allegedly has Kremlin ties, posed as Americans on Facebook and Twitter to mock Clinton and promote Trump. US intelligence agencies concluded that Russian President Vladimir Putin had ordered these influence campaigns even before Trump announced his run. Putin is seen as anti-Clinton, and is said to have been later drawn to Trump's Russia-friendly stances.

Why were President Trump's stances seen as Russia-friendly?

Trump has repeatedly praised Putin, feeding into speculation about his relationship with Russia. In July 2016, the FBI opened a probe into connections between Trump associates and Russia. It probed one of Trump's campaign advisers, George Papadopoulos — who, the FBI later said, knew in advance about Russia's plans — as well as Trump associates Paul Manafort, Michael Flynn and Carter Page.

Flynn became national security adviser in January 2017. After Trump's victory, Flynn discussed with the Russian ambassador the sanctions that President Barack Obama had imposed on Russia over its alleged election interference, according to *The NYT*, which added that Flynn lied about the conversations to White House officials as well as federal investigators. He was eventually dismissed and criminal charges were pressed.

In March 2017, FBI director James B. Comey testified before a House committee that the FBI was probing possible links between the Trump campaign and the alleged



With the White House in the background, Special Counsel Robert Mueller walks to church on Sunday, the day a summary of his findings was released. AP

Russian effort. In May, agitated with the FBI's decision to go ahead with the probe, Trump fired Comey.

Days later, the Justice Department appointed Mueller as Special Counsel.

What aspects did Mueller probe?

Mueller's appointment followed demands by Democratic lawmakers after Trump had dismissed Comey. Mueller's brief included investigating the extent of Russian interference, including possible involvement of Trump's associates and Trump himself, and whether Trump had obstructed justice by firing Comey.

Trump was frequently dismissive of the investigation, at times describing it as a "witch hunt". A month after Mueller's appointment, *The NYT* reported that Trump told his White House counsel, Don McGahn, to fire Mueller, but McGahn refused. In a later report, *The NYT* said that McGahn had talked extensively to Mueller's team. Later that year, McGahn stepped down.

How did the investigation progress?

Mueller's investigation indicted many in Trump's inner circle. Manafort and another senior campaign official, Rick Gates, were indicted on charges of financial crimes related to their work as consultants for a pro-Russian leader of Ukraine. *The NYT*, citing court papers, reported that Papadopoulos had pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI about his contacts with Russian intermediaries

during the campaign. Later, Flynn also pleaded guilty to lying about his contacts with the Russians and agreed to cooperate with prosecutors.

Referring to court papers in 2018, *The NYT* said Mueller charged 13 Russians and three Russian companies with mounting the fraudulent social media campaign. A second indictment named the Russian military intelligence officers who had hacked and leaked Democratic emails during the campaign.

Did the probe not lead on to issues beyond the alleged Russian interference?

Yes, Mueller's team unearthed possible corruption relating to Trump in other matters. In Manhattan, prosecutors raided the residences and office of Trump's longtime lawyer, Michael Cohen, in connection with a probe into potential violations of campaign finance laws. This eventually threw the spotlight on Trump's alleged sexual encounters. In August 2018, Cohen pleaded guilty to paying off two women in 2016 to silence them about such encounters with Trump. While the President himself has denied the affairs, Cohen testified that Trump had directed him to arrange the payments.

On matters relating to Russia, Cohen pleaded guilty to the charge that he had lied to Congress about how long Trump had pursued a real-estate project in Russia during 2016. According to Cohen, Trump had continued to negotiate, deep into the presiden-

tial campaign in 2016, over a proposed Trump Tower Moscow.

In February 2019, appearing before a House committee, Cohen made various other allegations against Trump. Displaying a cheque signed by Trump, Cohen said it was to reimburse him for hush money payments. In another allegation, he said Trump had tweaked the value of his assets to get loans or reduce taxes. He also claimed Trump had hinted that he should lie to Congress.

So, what's in the Mueller report?

According to a count by *The NYT*, Mueller charged 34 people with 199 counts leading to the submission of his report. With full details about its contents not made public, the news website Vox assessed what to make of the summary written by Attorney General Barr.

Mueller's report did conclude that the Russians tried to interfere in the campaign. However, it said (as quoted by Barr): "The investigation did not establish that members of the Trump Campaign conspired or coordinated with the Russian government in its election interference activities." That means Mueller at least could not prove Russian government officials worked with the Trump campaign, Vox explained.

On the charge of obstruction of justice, the report was quoted as saying: "While this report does not conclude that the President committed a crime, it also does not exonerate him." Vox notes how Barr and Deputy Attorney General R.J. Rosenstein interpreted this: "In cataloguing the President's actions, much of which took place in public view, the report identifies no actions that, in our judgment, constitute obstructive conduct, had a nexus to a pending or contemplated proceeding, and were done with corrupt intent."

Does that mean the matter is closed?

As Barr noted, Mueller has "referred several matters to other offices for further action". Among these, Vox said, are an investigation into Manafort's lobbying associates, while National Public Radio cited matters such as the potential financial fraud as testified by Cohen, besides the alleged tinkering of the value of Trump's assets.

With members of Congress from both camps demanding the full report, and with Barr indicating he would release more details, further revelations could emerge in connection with the alleged Russian effort, including the troll campaign and the hacking.

Bloomberg said "there is likely to be an epic political fight over whether anything from the inquiry directly or indirectly implicates... Trump in wrongdoing that may merit his impeachment, as some Democrats say, or whether it clears him".

What next in Nirav Modi extradition effort

RAHUL TRIPATHI
 NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

ON FRIDAY, arrested jeweller Nirav Modi will appear in court in London. His counsel is likely to seek his release on bail, while the UK authorities will present India's case against him and the Interpol warrant based on which he was arrested, as a key accused in the Rs 13,500 crore PNB scam case.

The arrest by Scotland Yard officially sets the stage for the beginning of extradition proceedings, although it remains to be seen when and how fast New Delhi will be able to bring him back, if at all.

India, UK & extradition

India and the UK have an Extradition Treaty, signed in 1992 and in force since November 1993. To get Nirav Modi sent back to the country, Indian agencies will have to send an extradition request through diplomatic channels, besides sending a team of probe officials to assist the Crown Prosecution. Interpol had issued a red corner notice on the request of Enforcement Directorate.



Appearing in court Friday. PTI/file

Recently, British journalist Mick Brown of *The Daily Telegraph* tracked him on the streets of London. The arrest followed days later.

Extradition treaties are bilateral in character. Most of them, however, appear to follow a traditional set of principles, going by many judicial pronouncements. First, extradition applies only with respect to offences clearly stipulated as such in the treaty, and the accused is proceeded against only in connection with the offence for which his

extradition was requested. Second, the offence for which extradition is sought should be an offence under the national laws of the requesting country as well as of the requested country. In the current context, Article 2 of the India-UK Extradition Treaty states that an extradition offence is one which, under the laws of each contracting state, is punishable by imprisonment for at least one year. Among the charges pressed in India against Nirav Modi, the CBI FIR includes IPC section 409 for criminal breach of trust, under which the maximum punishment is life imprisonment.

Previous extradition requests

India has not yet managed to secure any extradition from the UK under the treaty. The most recent request is for extradition of Vijay Mallya. Eight other requests are pending. These are for Rajesh Kapoor (2011) for forgery and fraud; Tiger Hanif (2004) for alleged involvement in terrorism; Atul Singh (2012) in connection with sex crimes; Raj Kumar Patel (2009) for forgery, Jatinder Kumar Angurala and Asha Rani Angurala (2014) for bank fraud and cheating; Sanjeev Kumar

Chawla (2004) for cricket betting; and Shaik Sadiq (2004) for conspiracy and theft.

In addition, the UK has rejected extradition requests for Raymond Varley, Ravi Shankaran, Velu Boopalan, Ajay Prasad Khaitan, Virendra Kumar Rastogi and Anand Kumar Jain. Varley, wanted for sex crimes, claimed that he was suffering from dementia and he was not the man wanted in India. The UK court rejected India's request on the basis of his claim of dementia. The request for extradition of Shankaran, accused in the Navy war room leak, was rejected by the British court for lack of evidence. The requests for extradition of Boopalan, Khaitan, Rastogi and Jain, too, were rejected by the UK court on grounds of insufficient evidence.

On the other hand, Bangladeshi national Mohammad Abdul Shakur, wanted in the UK on murder charges, was extradited from India recently under the treaty.

A list of 60 fugitives who are wanted by India, and are reportedly hiding in Britain, has been shared between the two countries. The UK, for its part, has provided a list of 17 people whose custody it has sought under the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty.

How researchers used science to show Bengal famine was man-made

RITU SHARMA
 AHMEDABAD, MARCH 26

RESEARCHERS HAVE used old weather data and modern simulation methods to reach a conclusion long acknowledged by historians — the Bengal famine of 1943-44 was not caused by an agricultural drought but was man-made. The new study, led by Prof Vimal Mishra of IIT Gandhinagar's civil engineering department, has been published in *Geophysical Research Letters*.

Soil moisture & famine

Using observations from weather stations and simulations with a hydrological model that estimated soil moisture content, the research reconstructed agricultural

droughts and established a link between famines and agricultural droughts in India in the half-century between 1870-2016.

While precipitation data from 1901 onwards was available from the India Meteorology Department, the scientists developed a compatible product for 1870-1900, using observations from 1,690 stations spread across India. They estimated a measure called soil moisture percentile, or SMP. When the SMP was less than 20, it was categorised as drought.

Odd one out

The simulations showed that a majority of famines were caused by large-scale and severe soil moisture droughts that hampered food production. Out of six major famines during the period (1873-74,



A family in Calcutta during the Bengal famine of 1943. Wikipedia/public domain

1876, 1877, 1896-97, 1899, 1943), the researchers concluded that the first five were linked to soil moisture. The Bengal famine was completely due to the failure of policy during the British era, Prof Mishra said, describing the research as "part history and part science".

All but two of the famines were found consistent with the drought periods identified by the analysis. The exceptions were 1873-1874 and 1943-1944. The paper says there could be two reasons why the analysis did not identify these as drought periods — they were too localised, or the famine was caused by factors other than soil moisture deficits. For the 1873-1874 famine, which was localised to Bihar and Bengal, the paper concludes that it was the first of these two reasons. "Since the soil moisture

drought in 1873 was centered on a relatively small domain, it was not identified by the... analysis," it says.

On the other hand, Mishra said: "The 1943 Bengal famine was not caused by drought but rather was a result of a complete policy failure during the British era."

Known & reinforced

Between 2 and 3 million are estimated to have died in the Bengal famine of 1943. Previous historical research and literature, as well as Satyajit Ray's *Ashani Sanket* (1973), have described how the Bengal famine was a result of British policy. During World War II, market supplies and transport systems were disrupted. This is attributed to British policies, and prioritisation of distribution of supplies to the military and other select groups.

The new study identified 1937-1945 as a "period under drought based on severity, area, and duration". "We find the drought was most widespread during August and December 1941 — prior to the famine. This was the only famine that does not appear to be linked directly to soil moisture drought and crop failures," Mishra said.

He cited British policies: "We find that the Bengal famine was likely caused by other factors related at least in part to the ongoing Asian threat of World War II including malaria, starvation, and malnutrition. In early 1943, military and political events adversely affected Bengal's economy, which was exacerbated by refugees from Burma. Additionally, wartime grain import restrictions imposed by the British government played a major role in the famine."