

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY RAMNATH GOENKA  
BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

A means of re-invention



PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

For anti-BJP coalition to succeed, the Opposition must see it as an idea, not just an adjustment

THE UN TEST

Pakistan's conduct at the Security Council on Masood Azhar will be the test of its stated intentions against terrorism

AFTER THE TIMELY military de-escalation with Pakistan, India has signalled that it intends to shift the action to the United Nations Security Council, where France is spearheading a proposal to list Masood Azhar, the head of Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), under resolution 1267. The matter will be decided on March 13. Efforts are on to ensure that all 15 permanent and non-permanent members back the proposal.

Previous such efforts have come up against a Chinese roadblock. Understandable as China's close relationship with Pakistan is, it is inexplicable why Beijing wants to be seen preventing restraints under the global legal architecture against the leader of a deadly terrorist group. It goes against its stated position on terrorism, and undermines its efforts to protect its own territory from terrorist groups. There is a lesson for the Asian superpower in the experience of another superpower. For years, the US looked the other way as Pakistan trained and armed terrorist groups because they served its purpose in Afghanistan. It realised the harsh consequences of that policy only after 9/11. With its huge investment in Pakistan, China must be mindful that the snakes in Pakistan's backyard could one day turn their attention from India towards it. How China plays it at the Security Council this time will be the test of Pakistan's stated intentions and demonstrations against the JeM and other terror groups.

The diplomatic pressure on Pakistan has borne some results already. The Imran Khan government announced it had taken into "preventive custody for investigation" a brother and a son of Masood Azhar and 42 others. However, this is all too *deja vu*. For years, Pakistan has played fast and loose when it comes to its pledges to end terrorism emanating from its territory. Delhi would be justified in asking how the JeM managed to survive Pakistan's 2002 ban and the 2001 designation under UN Security Council Resolution 1267 to build itself up as one of the deadliest terrorist groups in the region. The same goes for the Lashkar-e-Taiba and its proxies including Jamat-ud-Dawa (JuD). A "crackdown" against LeT/JuD after its November 2008 terrorist attack on Mumbai did not leave any lasting impact. Its leader Hafiz Saeed has flourished, and is now considered a mainstream politician. Though the Pakistan government announced a ban against the LeT proxies, JuD and Falah-i-Insaniyat Foundation, last month, it actually took that step reluctantly and only after being found out earlier this week. Designation under 1267 and sanctions by the Financial Action Task Force provide the hope that Pakistan will do what it takes to dismantle the "infrastructure of terrorism". It is time China persuades it to do so.

THE PUBLIC SPAT between the Congress and Aam Aadmi Party over seat arrangements in Delhi has once again opened up a conversation about the Opposition's ability to coordinate a united front against the BJP. Talks between the Congress and other parties are still on in many states. It is also inevitable that seat adjustment arrangements take into account hard arithmetic realities on the ground: Will a party be able to transfer its core social base to the candidate of another party? Whose votes will a party cut? But in the forthcoming election, the objectives of coalition politics cannot be based merely on a short-term calculus. The purpose of coalition politics has to be to overcome past resentments and the nit picking of mere arithmetic. It has to convey a unity of purpose that transcends a politics where parties cannot see beyond their own noses. Coalition politics has to be an idea, not just an adjustment.

The BJP is the front-runner compared to any other single party. And its return to power with a big majority will put question marks over the survival of a credible Opposition. Given the fluidity of politics, this may be one of those elections where every vote and every seat counts. The BJP's high vote share to seat conversion ratio has, in the past, been facilitated by a lack of Opposition unity. The high stakes should concentrate the Opposition's mind, and push them to strive for something close to the objective of one candidate per constituency, with some tactically-chosen exceptions. But they, and in particular the Congress, also need to think about what projecting the power of coalition means in 2019, as compared to previous occasions.

It will be a mistake for the Opposition to think it can easily make a distinction between local and national politics. The issues that are rebounding in elections, from national security to communalism and from the economy to corruption, are all national issues. And even if it is a local party, people look to see how it handles these issues nationally. A credible coalition politics does many things simultaneously. It projects the idea that any given local party is part of a broader framework of thinking, and

has the right connections to be able to leverage its power for national issues. This is particularly true in an era in which the social bases of voting have become much more fluid. Even in a state like UP, except for core groups like Jatavas and Yadavs, the broader categories of SC/OBC votes can easily be divided across political parties. In short, attracting votes is not just about taking it for granted that one can simply add the social base of one party to another. It is also about a larger narrative on offer, that no party can do on its own.

Second, each of the political parties in the current Opposition has its own past. The biggest disappointment of the last five years is that none of them, from the BSP to the Congress, have done enough to substantially reinvent themselves in their functioning, ideology or imagination. There has been no major churn. But being part of a credible coalition is the only radically new thing they can offer: The idea that the SP and the BSP can overcome their past animosity and the traditional hostility of their social base is itself the new thing, rather than the attributes of each of those parties. Coalition should be taken as the means of reinvention rather than the status quo.

This is particularly true of the Congress, which has the most to gain by a coalitional generosity. The Congress's besetting sin is that it still projects a culture of entitlement. It has not overcome its past as effectively as it should. Even the most ardent Congress supporter, looking at many of Congress' frontline faces, privately goes, "not the same old lot again, the architects of UPA 2's disaster". The worrying thing is that while Rahul Gandhi is projecting a more aggressive and mature face externally, there are still doubts about how much he has managed to get his own party to heel. The drama over chief ministership in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh and the reluctance to sideline the old liabilities of the Congress speak to that weakness. In states like Rajasthan, that is causing more vulnerability than necessary. God knows who took the decision but the Congress not supporting an arrangement with the AAP in a state like Delhi is either an indication of entitlement or weakness of the leader-

ship. It is being penny wise, pound foolish.

Third, nationalism is a big theme in this election. The BJP will not only project that it is the only national party; it has managed to stitch together its allies. It is also going to project the idea that only it represents national interest, over and above sectarian, regional or family interests. The more the Opposition projects the idea that this is not a contest between one cohesive force on the one hand, and a divided Opposition on the other, the better chance it stands. This time the objective has to be not just that a coalition is being crafted, but that an alternative, more diverse basis for national unity is possible. To paraphrase Edmund Burke, large nations and small minds go ill together. The bickering over small coalitions may not look arithmetically significant. But it can be read as a sign of a myopic regard for self-interest.

Finally, the nature of power projection is now different with an adversary like Narendra Modi. His campaign and energy is relentless (just contrast the way in which there was no momentum to follow the announcement of Priyanka Gandhi's entry into politics). The BJP also has a formidable media machine. Whether we like it or not, this is an age where spectacle and narrative domination matter to politics. The only way this can be countered is by the constant projection of a united front. Multiple messengers work at cross purposes. The sheer optics of Opposition leaders constantly appearing together, speaking in the same voice, giving evidence that they can coordinate beyond short-term backroom deals, would change the narrative. It would take the sting out of the BJP's charge that the alternative to its version of unity is a narrow minded disunity. But that charge has to be visibly countered. The political space for taking on the BJP still exists. But it depends on the recognition that a new era demands a new kind of coalition politics: More public, more spectacular, more united, more programmatic and more generous.

The writer is vice-chancellor of Ashoka University. Views are personal

FEEDING THE FARMS

Returns from public investment in agricultural research are far higher than subsidies. Treat it as a strategic sector

THE INDIAN AGRICULTURAL Research Institute (IARI) in New Delhi — which is synonymous with the Green Revolution and has given the country blockbuster varieties such as Kalyansona and HD-2967 wheat, Pusa-1121 basmati paddy, Pusa Bold mustard and Pusa Sawani okra — has been without a full-time head for over three years now. More than 60 out of the 100-plus institutes under the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), including the National Dairy Research Institute in Karnal and the Central Institute of Cotton Research at Nagpur, are functioning with "acting directors". Even at the ICAR headquarters, the current deputy director-generals of the crop science, animal science and natural resource management divisions are holding "additional charge". On top of these, the Agricultural Scientists Recruitment Board itself has just one member, who is also its acting chairman.

The above administrative apathy is unfortunate. The ICAR institutions, unlike most government departments, can be credited with work that has had tangible impact on the ground. Ninety per cent or more of India's basmati rice exports worth \$4.5 billion annually comprise improved varieties bred by IARI. The latter's HD-2967 and HD-3086 varieties cover nearly half of the country's 30 million-odd hectares area under wheat. Uttar Pradesh's average cane yields going up by a third in the last five years, and the state overtaking Maharashtra in sugar production, has happened only because of the high-recovery early-maturing Co-0238 variety developed by the ICAR-Sugarcane Breeding Institute at Coimbatore. Agricultural research is one area — just as rural roads, education, community health and sanitation — where the returns from public investment are far higher than subsidies on fertiliser, electricity, water or farm credit. India will have to sustain and produce more food in the coming years, with less crop area, water and farm labour availability and rising threats from climate change, erratic rainfall and salinity. Meeting these complex challenges and also the goal of doubling farm incomes is not possible without investing more in research, including via public-private partnerships.

It is high time the ICAR itself is restructured by closing down or merging some institutes, giving more money and operational autonomy to the better-performing ones like IARI, and freeing both the apex organisation and its affiliates from the clutches of Krishi Bhawan. The ICAR must, like the Indian Space Research Organisation and Department of Atomic Energy, be brought directly under the Prime Minister's Office. Agricultural research should be viewed as a strategic sector, and too important to be left to the whims of visionless ministers and generalist bureaucrats.

HOT STUFF

China is lighting a devil of a fire, which could bring the Holy Grail of endless fusion energy within its reach

CHINA IS INVESTED deeply in artificiality. It is the global leader in artificial intelligence. It is building artificial islands in the South China Sea, and has kicked up a geopolitical storm by laying a military airstrip on one. Next year, it proposes to illuminate Chengdu with an artificial moon, eight times brighter than the real thing. It will be a satellite bouncing sunlight back to earth at night, to eliminate the need for streetlights and save a packet in power costs. But paradoxically, this very year, China proposes to light up an artificial sun, which would eventually make fusion energy that's cheaper than dirt. It will work like the real sun, but run six times hotter.

Last November, the Hefei Institutes of Physical Science announced that its Experimental Advanced Superconducting Tokamak (EAST) reactor had hit a milestone, with an ion temperature of 100 million degrees Celsius. Simply put, it applied magnetic fields to a plasma — gas ions and a cloud of electrons stripped off them — to replicate the processes at the heart of the sun. If the reaction can be controlled and calibrated, it would deliver the Holy Grail of the energy industry — limitless, cheap fusion power which is completely non-polluting.

For a world that is increasingly energy-hungry and on the brink of an anthropogenic climate crisis, fusion power would be a safety line. It would reverse the trend seen in recent years, with numerous countries withdrawing their commitment to nuclear power. And the technology could eventually give China an edge in the space race. Apart from ion drives, fusion engines offer the best odds for missions into deep space that last for years or decades. Long-haul spacecraft have been the stuff of science fiction for decades but with the Tokamak reactor, the Chinese may have taken a baby step towards building one.



SHAHID JAMEEL

THE LAB-NEWSROOM DISCONNECT

Media has been wanting in building public interest in science

I WAS HOPING to time this with the National Science Day, which is celebrated on February 28 to remember CV Raman's Nobel-winning discovery. But the events since precluded any discussion of science. Even when the prime minister decided to give out the Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar prizes on the day, the news of these most prestigious awards in Indian science barely made it to the front pages of the three newspapers I read.

This should surprise no one. With few exceptions, there is little or poor reporting of science stories in media. The Ramnath Goenka Excellence in Journalism Awards is given out to print and broadcast journalists in 25 categories, but not one is focused on the reporting of science. And this is presented by a media group that does rather well in covering science.

As in previous years, the India Today Annual Policy Conclave 2019 would again bring together thought leaders, all of whom are politicians, business leaders, authors, musicians, sports persons and Bollywood celebrities. This reveals a mindset that expects science and technology to improve lives, while not one scientist in the country is considered worthy of providing a vision to shape the nation's future.

Society demands from science magical solutions to its problems. But, there is very little understanding of the scientific process or recognition of scientists. This is like wanting good music without musicians. This problem is mutual. Scientists who populate many of the country's scientific bodies remain largely oblivious to the need to communicate, participate.

Dorothy Nelkin, the American sociologist best known for her work on science and society wrote that, "for most people, the reality of

science is what they read in the press". Most of us believe what we read about science in the media, which remains an important source of information for the public. Research carried out in laboratories and universities, and reported in scientific journals and conferences, is written about and broadcasted in a form that is easily understood by the public. This reporting informs society and impacts many decisions people make in their daily lives.

With sustained and increasing funding for over two decades, Indian science has grown in both capacity and capability. There is also a surge in science journalism. However, neither has impacted the public understanding of science. Indian science and its academies should be world class, and so should science journalism in India. Unfortunately, just as there is a lot of research that apes the West — the quality of debate in media is low on intellectual thought and analysis.

Scientists are expected to ask good questions, dive deep into the subject and communicate their findings — mainly through research papers. The same is expected of science journalists, except that they communicate the results of research to society. Both need to clearly understand the issues before they can communicate effectively.

India's scientists and journalists both aspire for standards set elsewhere — aiming for quantum leaps instead of incremental changes that make their work better with time. Mathematicians and musicians are good examples to emulate. Both set their own standards and continuously push themselves towards higher goals.

There is also much to learn from successful

science-driven projects in India such as polio eradication and the space programme. Both would not be possible without the tools provided by science — the polio vaccines and diagnostics, the satellites and delivery vehicles. Another key factor was excellent communication that fired people's imagination and secured their participation. For example, the Pulse Polio Programme vaccinates about two million children every six weeks. This would be impossible without clear communication and effective management.

Indians clearly have an appetite for science. A recent report showed that almost 70,000 books on science and technology were borrowed from the Delhi Public Library last year, second only to fiction. Unfortunately, they read more about pseudoscience dished out in the media than about real science that is addressing food shortage, antibiotic resistance, clean energy or climate change.

The theme for this year's National Science Day was "Science for the People, and People for the Science". To benefit people, science and evidence should drive policy. To improve the levels of public trust in science, scientists should engage with people. For that, science should be reported accurately, simply and in an interesting way.

Good stories are important to communicate what scientists do and how their work can change lives. Understanding science empowers the society to question and to make choices. Meaningful dialogue between journalists and scientists can achieve this.

The writer is CEO of The Wellcome Trust/DBT India Alliance, Delhi. Views are personal



MARCH 8, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

UP POLITICAL CRISIS  
UTTAR PRADESH CHIEF Minister Banarasi Das returned to Lucknow after failing to secure the help of central leaders to resolve his ministry-making problem. Janata Party chief, Chandra Shekhar, told Das not to expect central intervention. Chandra Shekhar told Das that it was his responsibility to run the ministry since he had not consulted the high command before selecting his colleagues.

JANATA MANTRIS  
TWO MORE MINISTERS, Satya Prakash Malaviya and Hari Krishna Srivastava, were inducted into the Banarasi Das ministry. Narain Singh of the CTO was also appointed

deputy chief minister, next in rank to Ram Naresh Yadav.

INVITE TO PHIZO  
ATTEMPTS ARE AFOOT in Nagaland to involve A Z Phizo, father of the Naga insurgent movement, in any future negotiations between the Union government and the rebel Naga leaders. Chief Minister Vizol has said his government and his party, the United Democratic Front (UDF), will have no objection whatsoever to Phizo being associated with any future talks. The Nagaland Peace Council, headed by Rev Longri Ao, has also offered its services in getting Phizo back to India for a fresh dialogue. The council has

convened an all-Naga conference on March 28-29 to formally invite Phizo and other underground leaders to participate in future negotiations with the government.

HANOI VS BEIJING  
HANOI HAS GIVEN little credence to Chinese claims that it is withdrawing its troops. Implementation of the government's call for general mobilisation is in full swing. This follows the foreign office advice to the embassies that families should be evacuated, air raid shelters built and essential supplies stocked. Air raid shelters, covered like bad memories since the American withdrawal, are being opened up in the city.



# 15 THE IDEAS PAGE

## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"We can perhaps breathe a sigh of relief. After several days of heightened tension between Pakistan and India following the Pulwama attack in India-held Kashmir, the signs of de-escalation are apparent." —DAWN

## After empowerment, freedom and dignity

The aspirations of women in India have evolved. Policy, public discourse must keep pace



RAM MADHAV

THE PROBLEM WITH some policies is that they are at least a decade behind the thoughts and aspirations of the people. Unless we address this mismatch, seemingly noble policies also fail to do justice to the targeted sections of the population.

Take, for example, the aspirations of sections like SCs, STs and women. Today, the aspiration of the downtrodden is not just about power-sharing but a share in decision-making. Through various policies we have addressed the issue of power-sharing. But did it lead to their reaching decision-making positions?

Similarly about women, the discourse fashionable today is about empowerment. What does empowerment mean? We assume that the aspiration or desire among the women is for positions on par with men. Our policies are structured in that direction. We hardly realise that while it is fashionable to showcase these things as our commitment to women's empowerment, the aspirational discourse has gone much farther.

The urge and aspiration among the women today is for dignity and freedom. Any further talk of empowering women will be seen as condescension because empowerment is today seen as entitlement. We need to rise to the current sentiment — of empowerment with dignity and honour.

Women are in commanding positions in many areas of private and public life in our country. Even in rural India, women are greatly empowered through their presence and positions outside the four walls of their homes. Initially, this change needed support and prodding but now it is on an auto mode.

Yet, the challenge of dignity and freedom remains. The empowerment that we talk about has certainly given them positions, but not necessarily the dignity and freedom that they deserve. Social media is a good test case, since it is a truly democratic media. It reflects human behaviour through an unadulterated, unedited prism. It is here that one comes across extreme forms of deprecating behaviour with respect to women. In varied degrees, this prevails in all walks of life.

Our laws, societal norms and customs need to be looked at from this new reality. There was a time when women needed protection. We built laws and institutions keeping that need in mind. It was felt later that women needed empowerment. We addressed that need too. But today's need is to revisit our polity to accord dignity and freedom to our womenfolk.

Mahatma Gandhi used to say that real independence would be when a woman in this country can walk around on the streets alone at midnight. An easy way to think of this would be from a security perspective. But another interpretation could be about dignity. How does society look at a lone woman roaming the streets at midnight? Just like how it looks at a man in similar circumstances or with suspicion, if not disdain?

Does she enjoy freedom of choice or is she branded promiscuous?

This brings up the crux of the issue. Can a woman be respected just as a woman, without any strings attached? Or she will be respected only when she is a "mother" or "sister"? Is her freedom and self-expression equal to that of a man?

There is an instructive anecdote in the Shanti Parva in Mahabharata. Yudhishtir, having won the war, approaches Bhishma, who is on the bed of arrows awaiting death, seeking advice on statecraft. Draupadi, the feisty princess, was passing by, and laughs out loud. Yudhishtir remonstrates; but Bhishma stops him and submits that Draupadi's laughter was valid. "In a full House, when she was being disrobed, I remained a mute witness. Am I today qualified to teach you Raj Dharma? That is what Draupadi's laughter meant," says Bhishma.

The Indian approach to womanhood is replete with messages that accord dignity and freedom to women, not just a higher pedestal. Manu is criticised for talking about the duty of the society to protect women. But Manu also grants women the right to divorce under four different circumstances.

Women face two extremes in our society. At one end is the vulgarity of objectification. The higher a woman rises the greater the objectification becomes. How they appear, how they dress and how they style their hair or wear their footwear becomes the subject. What follows is violence, both physical and emotional.

But the other extreme is equally demeaning. In the name of security, we deny women their natural choices and freedom. Ideally, we should be allowing greater intermingling of both sexes. But regressive beliefs at one level and questions of safety at another encourage us towards greater segregation. This gender-based segregation starts at the school level itself and continues. This goes to ridiculous extents like every instance of boys and girls coming together being seen as sinful. Within accepted societal norms, allowing greater intermingling of boys and girls will actually help develop a healthy attitude of friendship and mutual respect.

It is time we turned our attention towards this question of dignity and freedom. Laws for women's protection are important, but not enough. We also need to revisit our customs like marriage, family and divorce. What should be the marriageable age, what should be the procedure and what if the marriage doesn't work — all these aspects need a fresh look through the prism of dignity and freedom, not just through an abstract idea of "family honour".

Nobody wants families to collapse or promiscuity to pervade. We have seen the ill-effects of the collapsing family system in Western societies. But smugness shouldn't be our way. Just because the Western models are flawed doesn't automatically mean ours are perfect. A vibrant society should have the courage for continuous reform. Unchanging eternal values, and ever-changing social order is what Indian wisdom stands for.

Remember Tennyson: "The old order changeth yielding place to new; And God fulfils himself in many ways; Lest one good custom should corrupt the world."

The writer is national general secretary, BJP and director, India Foundation



CRSasikumar

## Making the world a meaningful place

For girls and women to enjoy the fruits of good education and satisfying careers, government must reach out to their families, ensure they are on board while formulating state policies



MEERAN CHADHA BORWANKAR

This is the story that we need in India today and we need an abundance of such stories. Where girls not from privileged urban backgrounds, but from rural average households dare to dream and achieve. This needs an enabling environment: Schools in villages, colleges nearby, access to libraries, and parents who are willing to send their daughters out to study, in case schools and colleges are not within the proximate area. Some time back I had visited "Women Help Line" in Lucknow and was told that a large number of distress calls were about harassment — in buses, on roads, in streets, practically everywhere. The police department that is running the helpline was encouraging girls to report such incidents, however, and had adopted various means to trace the errant boys: They are warned, initially, followed by criminal cases if they do not pay heed. This issue is rampant in most of India. No wonder parents have apprehensions about sending their daughters out to study, though enrolment and retention of girls in schools and colleges has improved considerably in the last decade. Providing safe travel and a secure atmosphere to girls for pursuing their education and career is the missing link that the community and government have to work on together. Or, families would continue to deny that very vital permission to their girls.

In the meanwhile, the Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) has been successful in bridging the gap between the rural community and the health system in India. They have reduced infant mortality, child malnutrition and provided pre-school education. A similar bridge specifically for safe girls' education needs to be built. The gram panchayat, especially the village police patil, known by different names and titles across the country, should be made responsible for coordinating the safety of girls' movements. The beat officer of each police station and police outpost can supervise it — his uniform carries tremendous weight and can deter roadside romeos and molesters. Though the police don't always have enough resources, they seem, at least, willing to chip in.

Recently, during a gender sensitisation

training programme of the Goa police, I visited the women's helpline, where the counsellors received about 2,500 distress calls in the last six months. Most of them are about domestic violence, though some cases of harassment too are reported. It was a pleasant surprise to see that all the call takers are post graduates in counselling. Goa 181 is managed by GVK EMRI (Emergency Management and Research Institute), a not-for-profit professional organisation operating in the public-private partnership (PPP) mode. Such helplines definitely create an enabling environment and so do the gender sensitisation programmes being undertaken by each state police.

If we want girls and women to achieve their full potential, we have to double our efforts to reach out to the families. Efforts of the government alone, and even those of NGOs, will not be enough. Gram panchayats, police patils and beat police officers must coordinate with villagers so that girls can move around safely for their education and careers. Schools and libraries in rural areas, encouraging girls to cycle and move freely for their education and the sharing of success stories of educated young girls can be game-changers. Most states have already made girls' education free, but the "permission to travel" out of the village is most often denied by the parents. Girls from Bihar cycling to school had made headlines some years back. We need to replicate the same all over the country through wide publicity in print and electronic media.

I met a young, freshly recruited (woman) police constable in the police lines of Pune city recently. I asked her what prompted her to join the police. She said it was her father, and then added proudly that two of her female cousins too had joined the police force thereafter. These fathers and families have to be on board with us if we want girls to enjoy the fruits of a good education and meaningful careers. Is it expecting too much, this Women's Day?

The writer is a retired IPS officer and has served as Inspector General (Prisons), Maharashtra

If we want girls and women to achieve their full potential, we have to double our efforts to reach out to the families. Gram panchayats, police patils and beat police officers must coordinate with villagers so that girls can move around safely for their education and careers. Schools and libraries in rural areas, encouraging girls to cycle and move freely for their education and the sharing of success stories of educated young girls can be game changers.

## THE Urdu PRESS

### INDIA AND PAKISTAN

VARIOUS ASPECTS OF the India-Pakistan stand-off in the wake of the Pulwama attack — the Indian attack on Jaish-e-Mohammad camp in Balakot, the subsequent Pakistani action, the Indian plane falling over the LoC — were robustly covered by the Urdu Times on March 2, has been editorial titled 'Abhinandan ka abhinandan'. *Rashtriya Sahara* has an editorial titled 'Abhinandan ka matlab' on March 3.

On the same day, *Siasat* writes on an events in an editorial titled 'Pilot Abhinandan ki watan waapsi'. The paper writes that his homecoming is a matter of great delight for the entire country. But in the forth-coming general elections, this incident can be used to raise temperatures. It also notes that "instead of seeing this as a goodwill gesture Imran Khan, the Modi government played it cool and kept a distance." The editorial praises the fortitude and calm of Wing Commander Abhinandan in how he conducted himself when in

not treat him like they would have treated any other person. The paper regrets, though, that it does not provide any specific number of casualties. The point is: "How did media report the huge numbers?" *Hamara Samaj*, on March 5, opines: "Now people think the BJP is politicising terror and air-strikes. Why, that the Opposition is asking for figures, is there a mysterious silence? By withholding information, the BJP is falling in its own trap." *Hind Samachar*, in its March 5 editorial, notes of conflicting claims regarding the toll from the cross-border strikes emanating from different leaders of the BJP, including minister. It writes: "While one BJP minister said the terrorist was killed, BJP president Amit

Shah is saying that 250 terrorists were killed." *Siasat* on March 6 has written scathingly of "politicians trying to milk the air-strikes". It writes that "the awaam, or common people, know that blood is being drawn in an attempt to win votes. but in several elections, people have taught a lesson to those who try this." In an apparent reference to leaders like LK Advani and Murlidhar Manohar Joshi in the Margdarshak Mandal it writes: "Leaders who used phrases like terror, Hindu-Muslim, Rath Yatra and Jihad to improve political prospects are now in the political dustbin. The same fate can befall the current leaders." The paper says its warning is for those who bear the burden of "forty dead CRPF jawans and those who played politics, celebrating thousands of Muslim dead." The paper feels that the recent tensions will further weakened India's borders in the long run. "If the current ruse to politicise by using this works in these elections, then, the security of our borders will come down further, in future."

ON THE ECONOMY  
INQILAB ON MARCH 5 writes on "economic

issues and the changed political narrative". In June 2018, it writes, the GDP growth rate was 8.2 per cent and on this basis, it was said this India is among the fastest-growing economies. Now, the statistics have been questioned and the growth rate has slipped to 7.1 per cent and may fall further to 6 per cent, which, with oil prices set to rise internationally, will prove to be a big blow to India's economy. Etemaad, the mouthpiece of the AIMIM writes, in an editorial on February 25: "The Kisan scheme of the Centre may appear useful but *niyat main khot hai* (the intentions are dubious)." The paper elaborates that if the intention of this government was to be "pro-Kisan", as it keeps proclaiming, why wait till the end of its term to do this? If the government was serious, then why did it not respond when, recently, so many farmers in a massive agitation came to Delhi to protest? If it was serious, the government "would have done this earlier, so many farmers would have benefited and the thousands who committed suicide in that time could have been saved."

Compiled by Seema Chishtii

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### LOSERS, ALL

THIS REFERS TO the article "There are no winners" (IE, March 7, 2019). Relations between India and Pakistan have largely remained brittle. And the recent terror attack in Pulwama followed by air strikes by the Indian Air Force inside Pakistan heightened concerns about war yet again. Javed Miandad has rightly pointed out that sports can help build peace.

Devendra Khurana, Bhopal

### FILE NOT FOUND

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Defending Rafale deal, Government unveils new weapon: official secret act' (IE, March 7, 2019). There may not be any doubt about the quality of the fighter jet, but by ignoring the advice of defence officials and leaving no stone unturned to help Anil Ambani, the central leadership made it clear that in politics, personal equations may be more important than national interest. And instead of accepting its mistake, the government is trying to curb the rights of the press.

Nitesh Jha, New Delhi

### FILMY POLITICS

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Will take fight against terror into its home. I will settle all scores: PM' (IE, March 5). Utterances like "ghar mein ghus ke

### 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](mailto: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.

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mareng" and "chun chun ke hisaab" are suitable for a Bollywood action movie, not for the national political leadership. While the official statement of India to the world is about "preemptive" action, the PM is painting a picture of revenge. The cost of such rhetoric may have to be paid by our men on the borders.

M P Pratima, Gandhinagar





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If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to explained@expressindia.com

TELLING NUMBERS

Income drop: Regional parties down 42%, TDP drop sharpest

REGIONAL PARTIES earned 42% less in 2017-18 than in the previous year, according to an analysis of their income-tax returns by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR). From Rs 409.64 crore in 2016-17, the total income of 34 regional parties dropped to Rs 236.86 crore in 2017-18. India has 48 regional parties, of which 11 have not submitted their returns for 2017-18, and three others did not file for 2016-17. When the last three are counted, the income of 37 parties adds up to Rs 237.27 crore in 2017-18.

Among the five top-earning regional parties, the biggest drop in income was shown by the TDP, whose Rs 19.40 crore in 2017-18 was about one-fourth of its Rs 72.92 crore in 2016-17. The Samajwadi Party, which had the highest income in both years, earned 43% less in 2017-18 than in the previous year. In contrast, the DMK's income multiplied nine times to reach Rs 35.75 crore in 2017-18, second only to SP. The SP (Rs 47.19 crore) and the DMK (Rs 35.75 crore) together earned over one-third of the total income of the 37 parties in 2017-18. They also accounted for over a third of their total expenditure in 2017-18 (Rs 170.45 crore), with the SP spending

TOP 5 EARNERS, AND CHANGE

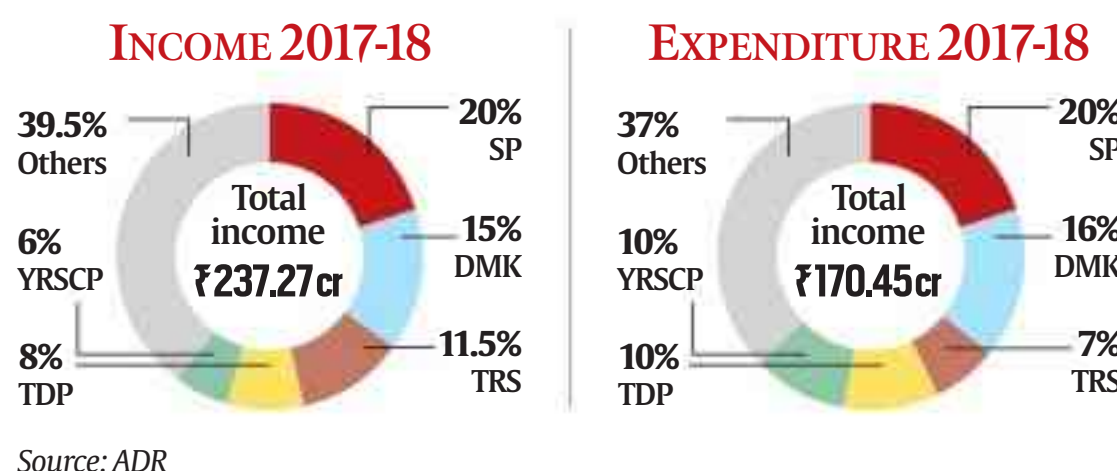
Party	2016-17	2017-18
<b>SAMAJWADI PARTY</b>	Rs 409.64 cr	Rs 236.86 cr
<b>DMK</b>	Rs 3.78 cr	Rs 35.75 cr
<b>TRS</b>	Rs 3.79 cr	Rs 27.27 cr
<b>TDP</b>	Rs 72.92 cr	Rs 19.40 cr
<b>YSRCP</b>	Rs 0.94 cr	Rs 14.24 cr

Source: Association for Democratic Reforms

Rs 34.54 crore and the DMK Rs 27.47 crore.

The largest source of income was membership fees (Rs 86.60 crore or 36.5%) followed by voluntary contributions (Rs 77.30 crore or 32.6%) that included donations and sale of electoral bonds. Bank interest fetched Rs 38.34 crore or 22%.

SP, DMK GOT, SPENT LION'S SHARE



Source: ADR

TIP FOR READING LIST

WHY LEARN NEW LANGUAGES, EVEN TODAY

IN A world where we can use Google Translate for any phrase in an unfamiliar language, does learning new languages remain as useful as it used to be? Polish-born, UK-based science writer Marek Kohn argues that plural language use has become even more important in a divided world — it helps us understand one another better. "Integrating languages within communities or within individual minds is a way to turn competition into co-operation, suspicion into trust," Kohn writes in his new book, *Four Words for Friends: Why Using More Than One Language Matters Now More Than Ever*.



Kohn makes his arguments from perspectives of psychology, evolutionary thought, politics and literature. He explores how people acquire languages; how they lose them; how they can regain them; and how different languages may affect people's relationships with each other. He cites research that suggests

knowing more than one language boosts the part of the brain that directs attention to an ideal focus area and suppresses unwise impulses. "When a brain contains two languages, the executive system must select the appropriate one, and prevent the other from intruding on it," he writes.

In its review, *The Guardian* makes a reference to Brexit, asking whether the British disdain for foreign languages has been partly responsible for this. It cites a study that suggests one factor that worked to Britain's disadvantage in negotiations was "the 27 other nations' fluent grasp of the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Mail*, unmatched by any corresponding British familiarity with the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* or *Bild*". The review adds: "This beautifully written book is, indeed, a defence of cosmopolitanism against Theresa May's nasty jibe: 'If you believe you are a citizen of the world, you are a citizen of nowhere.'"

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

Framing the forest rights debate

As activists on both sides argue their case on the SC order on eviction of encroachers whose claims have been rejected under the FRA, an explanation of key issues: from dwindling forest cover to bogus claims

SHRINKING FORESTS, ENCROACHMENT



GADCHIROLI DISTRICT  
Satellite image from November 2005 (left) shows forested land. The image on the right, taken subsequently, shows the same land cleared of forests.



BAMNI VILLAGE, GADCHIROLI  
Marked: Forested areas claimed on a large scale on the fringes of forests

NANDED  
Marked: Extra uncultivated area claimed

Source: Government of Maharashtra

VIVEK DESHPANDE  
NAGPUR, MARCH 7

ON FEBRUARY 28, the Supreme Court put on hold its February 13 order directing states to evict tribals and other forest-dwellers whose claims over encroached forest land had been rejected under the law that recognises these rights and provides a framework for recording them.

Following protests, the Union Tribal Affairs Ministry and the Gujarat government had sought a modification of the court's February 13 direction. These protests are ongoing — on Tuesday, large demonstrations took place across the country for demands that included promulgation of an ordinance to overturn the Supreme Court's order.

The February 13 order came on a challenge to The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 — commonly known as The Forest Rights Act (FRA) — filed by three wildlife NGOs. The court directed 17 states that had filed affidavits on claims rejected under the Act (adding up to a total of 11,91,327 claims) to ensure that in all cases "where rejection orders have been passed, eviction will be carried out on or before the next date of hearing".

How did the claims process work?

The process of filing claims began in 2008. The FRA recognises both individual forest rights (IFRs) and community forest rights (CFRs), which are claimed by *gram sabhas*. Scrutiny takes place at four levels — *gram sabha*, sub-divisional level committee (SDLC), district-level committee (DLC), and state-level monitoring committee (SLMC). While the SLMC monitors the process, appeals under the law lie up to the DLC, whose decisions on the record of forest rights "shall be final and binding".

Scheduled Tribe (ST) claimants had to furnish two pieces of evidence that they were in possession of the land in question before the cut-off date of December 13, 2005; Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFDs) had to show that they had been residing in the village for 75 years prior to the cut-off date, and were dependent on it for their livelihood.

The disputes are mostly over IFRs. As per a statement issued by the Tribal Affairs Ministry on August 30, 2018, the total number of rejected claims are in the order of 19.34 lakh (of which 18.88 lakh are individual claims) — much more than the cumulative number in the affidavits filed by states in the Supreme Court. Some 18 lakh claims have been accepted.

What is the argument about the order?

It is essentially about whether some claimants are being evicted unfairly. Both groups of activists — those who back the evictions and those who oppose it — have pointed to satellite pictures from before and after the December 13, 2005 cut-off date in support of their arguments. While tribal activists have claimed that pictures from Gujarat establish that most rejected claims were rejected unfairly, forest and wildlife activists have said satellite images prove that a large number of claims in Maharashtra and Gujarat were bogus.

What do forest and wildlife activists say?

According to the three petitioners, Praveen Bhargava of Wildlife First, Kishore Rithe of Nature Conservation Society, and Poonam and Harshavardhan Dhanwatey of Tiger Research and Conservation Trust (TRACT), "Of the over 19 lakh rejected claims, over 14 lakh were rejected at the *gram sabha* level itself. Tribal activists have always insisted that the *gram sabha's* word would be final. So, why are they objecting to the rejections?"

Satellite images of "several bogus claims", the petitioners say, "have proved that they were encroachments after the cut-off date". Claims that the February 13 order would up-

root tribals from their homes were tendentious, they argue: "Almost all those whose claims have been rejected already own legally-held lands. It is just that they have to give up the additional lands that they have encroached upon after the cut-off date."

The forest and wildlife activists argue that over 60% of forest-dwellers are landless, "which means only 40% are trying to control the entire land in contention". This illegally occupied land, they say, can be given to the village community under CFRs instead of IFRs. "It will provide the landless with additional income opportunities from the forest produce that they have traditionally gathered."

What is the argument of tribal activists?

Ambarish Mehta and Trupti Parekh of the tribal NGO ARCH-Vahini cite opposite findings from Dediapada *tehsil* in Gujarat's Narmada district. "Our study of 4,600 cases — 2,000 of them approved and 2,600 unapproved — shows that only 2% of cases were of encroachments after the cut-off date. Our findings were corroborated both by the Gujarat government's forest research institute GEER Foundation and by the High Court, which ordered the grant of approval to the rejected cases. But officials haven't moved on it yet," Mehta told *The Indian Express*.

According to Mehta, in many states, Forest Department beat guards steered the process at the *gram sabha* level. "Our satellite imagery study has also proved that not only were claims wrongly rejected, the area too, was wrongly reduced by an average of about an acre each."

What study are the activists relying on?

The study, which the Supreme Court also considered, was conducted by the Maharashtra government's Tribal Research and Training Institute (TRTI). It considered 40,428 finally approved IFR cases until 2007-08, 35,044 of which, covering an area of 51,600 hectares, were found to be properly measured. 570 ha were changed from forest cover to agriculture, and 641 ha from barren

adequate representation of some sections in the Forest Rights Committees (FRCs) of *gram sabhas* in violation of rules. Claims had been rejected without adequate grounds, certain claimants had been helped with evidence, and some claimants had been summarily evicted without proper verification. There were also cases of forest-cutting after the cut-off date.

The report said that no state other than Maharashtra had used methods like GPS, GIS, and satellite imagery to decide on claims. Maharashtra, ironically, saw two massive *morchas* by farmers, one of whose demands pertained to the non-granting of IFRs despite a better record — over 2 lakh out of over 3 lakh claims — than other states.

What is the area of forests at stake?

Bhargava of Wildlife First gave this estimate: The Tribal Affairs Ministry's September 2018 report says that 18.88 lakh individual claims stand rejected after completion of due process. The total area for which individual titles have been granted is 18.87 lakh ha, or 1.03 ha per claim on average. If this average area per individual claim is applied to the 18.88 lakh rejected claims, the total area of forest land in possession of the claimants would work out to around 19.59 lakh ha.

"We have to also understand the difference between individual and community rights," Bhargava said. "The latter doesn't take away any forests. But by granting ineligible individual rights, we are not undoing the 'historic injustice' (as the FRA set out to do) done to tribals and OTFDs, but in fact doing historic injustice to precious forests that are already under grave threat from fast-accelerating climate change," he said.

The TERI study worked with Cartosat-1 images of areas covered under 40,000 recognised forest rights cases in Jalgaon, Dhule, Nashik, Nandurbar, Gadchiroli, and Thane districts. "At least 8,104 ha, which is 20 per cent of the 40,000 ha average allotment in these cases, of ineligible forest land has been recognised," the study said.

Said Rithe of Nature Conservation Society: "This study is up to 2012. If you consider cases in other parts of the state, and cases after 2012 as well, you can imagine the extent of ineligible allotments and claims."

What is the way forward hereon?

The process in the Supreme Court is ongoing. Mohan Hirabai Hiralal, whose work on forests rights at Gadchiroli's Mendha-Lekha village is reckoned as the harbinger of the CFR movement, said, "It's true that large areas of forests were cleared after 2005, but studies like the one by ARCH-Vahini have proved that a huge number of claims have been wrongly rejected as well. Justice demands that claims are not rejected just because poor people are not able to produce sufficient evidence. Now that we have the technology to check the veracity of claims, why not use it?"

Mehta of ARCH-Vahini said he was open to the idea of revisiting not just the rejected cases but also the approved ones by using satellite imagery. "This will also weed out fraudulently approved cases," he said.

Rithe, however, argued: "In Gujarat, the Bhaskaracharya Institute for Space Applications and Geo-Informatics had proved in 2012 that 80% of claims were bogus."

Say Rithe, Bhargava, and the Dhanwateys: "Three Benches since 2017 have sought to know what action has been initiated against unauthorised possession. They have also sought to know details like areas and numbers of claimants in both the ST and OTFD categories. These orders have come after repeated reminders to the states to file factual affidavits. The latest SC order was based on these affidavits. Also, while everybody seems to be worried about IFR claims, nobody is serious about notifying Critical Wildlife Areas as mandated by the FRA. The logical step ahead is to free illegally occupied forest land from the possession of unauthorised claimants."

Official Secrets Act: what it covers; when it has been used, questioned

KAUNAIN SHERIFF M  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 7

IN THE Supreme Court Tuesday, the government threatened to invoke the Official Secrets Act against two publications that had run reports on the Rafale deal, on the basis of documents which, the government claimed, had been stolen from the Defence Ministry.

What is the Official Secrets Act?

OSA in short, it has its roots in the British colonial era. The original version was The Indian Official Secrets Act (Act XIV), 1889. This was brought in with the main objective of muzzling the voice of a large number of newspapers that had come up in several languages, and were opposing the Raj's policies, building political consciousness and facing police crackdowns and prison terms. It was amended and made more

stringent in the form of The Indian Official Secrets Act, 1904, during Lord Curzon's tenure as Viceroy of India. In 1923, a newer version was notified. The Indian Official Secrets Act (Act No XIX of 1923) was extended to all matters of secrecy and confidentiality in governance in the country.

What comes under its purview?

It broadly deals with two aspects — spying or espionage, covered under Section 3, and disclosure of other secret information of the government, under Section 5. Secret information can be any official code, password, sketch, plan, model, article, note, document or information. Under Section 5, both the person communicating the information, and the person receiving the information, can be punished.

For classifying a document, a government Ministry or Department follows the Manual of Departmental Security

Instructions, 1994, not under OSA. Also, OSA itself does not say what a "secret" document is. It is the government's discretion to decide what falls under the ambit of a "secret" document to be charged under OSA. It has often been argued that the law is in direct conflict with the Right to Information Act, 2005.

Between the RTI Act and OSA, which has primacy?

Section 22 of the RTI Act provides for its primacy vis-à-vis provisions of other laws, including OSA. This gives the RTI Act an overriding effect, notwithstanding anything inconsistent with the provisions of OSA. So if there is any inconsistency in OSA with regard to furnishing of information, it will be superseded by the RTI Act. However, under Sections 8 and 9 of the RTI Act, the government can refuse information. Effectively, if government classifies a document as "secret" under OSA Clause 6, that document

can be kept outside the ambit of the RTI Act, and the government can invoke Sections 8 or 9. Legal experts see this as a loophole.

Has there been any effort to change provisions of OSA?

In 1971, the Law Commission became the first official body to make an observation regarding OSA. In its report on 'Offences Against National Security', it observed that "it agrees with the contention" that "merely because a circular is marked secret or confidential, it should not attract the provisions of the Act, if the publication thereof is in the interest of the public and no question of national emergency and interest of the State as such arises". The Law Commission, however, did not recommend any changes to the Act.

In 2006, the Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) recommended that OSA be repealed, and replaced with a chapter in the National Security Act con-

taining provisions relating to official secrets. Observing that OSA was "incongruous with the regime of transparency in a democratic society", the ARC referred to the 1971 Law Commission report that had called for an "umbrella Act" to be passed to bring together all laws relating to national security.

In 2015, the present government set up a committee to look into provisions of the OSA in light of the RTI Act. It submitted its report to the Cabinet Secretariat on June 16, 2017, recommending that OSA be made more transparent and in line with the RTI Act.

What are the major instances when OSA has been invoked?

One of the oldest and longest criminal trials involving OSA is the 1985 Coomar Narain spy case. Twelve former staff members in the Prime Minister's Office and Rashtrapati Bhavan Secretariat were sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment in 2002. They were

found guilty of entering into a criminal conspiracy with officials of the French, Polish and German embassies, communicating secret official codes, classified documents and information pertaining to defence, shipping, transport, finance, planning, and R&AW and Intelligence Bureau reports.

The other high-profile case was the ISRO spy case targeting scientist S Nambi Narayan. Before his recent acquittal, he had faced a criminal trial under OSA, and was accused of passing on rocket and cryogenic technology to Pakistan for illegal gratification.

The most recent conviction under OSA came in 2018, when a Delhi court sentenced former diplomat Madhuri Gupta, who had served at the Indian High Commission in Islamabad, to three years in jail for passing on sensitive information to the ISI.

In another high-profile case, then *Kashmir Times* journalist Iftikhar Gilani was arrested in 2002 and charged under OSA.