

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Attack on press freedom

Using OSA to fight the Rafale battle in court

THE Attorney General of India's submission to the Supreme Court, later retracted, that the Government was considering action against *The Hindu* under the undemocratic and draconian Official Secrets Act (OSA) was unwarranted and awkward. Casting the legals aside, the Government was seeking to shoot the messenger for publishing secret documents that questioned the Rafale deal. The AG could have sounded more credible if he had argued that the secret documents revealed by the media house were incorrect or irrelevant to the case. If these documents were not edited to tamper with the context or to further political or corporate interests, they remain valid.

Instead of arguing on the validity of the information put out in the public domain, the Government has given the impression of threatening journalists for raising uncomfortable or inconvenient questions. The Editors' Guild has rightly noted that any attempt to wield the Official Secrets Act against journalists is as 'reprehensible' as asking journalists to disclose their sources. If the aim was to stop the courts from looking at those documents merely because they were suspected to be purloined, the ploy failed. Journalists have every right to obtain documents and publish them for greater public good. A journalist's public-spirited attempt to bring out the truth should go beyond handout journalism and it can never be termed a breach of national security. The court has rightly turned down the AG's plea not to look at evidence just because it was obtained through leaks. All great stories have been leaked out by some public-spirited official or the other.

Unless the Government proves that these documents have been planted on the newspaper for partisan reasons, the consequences of the documents being declared genuine are indeed far-reaching. For they seem to hint at an attempt to compromise the Defence Ministry's negotiating position due to the interference of the Prime Minister's Office as well as suppression of facts from the Supreme Court. More reprehensible is the threat to force journalists to reveal their sources. It is universally recognised that the relationship between the media and the State ought to be adversarial, with the media playing an Oppositional role. It should remain so for our democracy to remain vibrant and viable.

City not so Beautiful

Waste segregation holds key to cleanliness

IN a major embarrassment, Chandigarh, which proudly carries the tag of City Beautiful, has got a blot on its clean image. From its third spot in the Swachh Survekshan ranking last year, the city has slid to the 20th place in the 2019 list delineating the cleanest cities of the country. Earlier, Chandigarh had slipped from the second rank in 2016 to land in the 11th position in 2017 before regaining its glory when it bagged the third place in 2018. The alternating rise and fall in its performance levels is reflective of the resolve of the citizens as well as the civic body to plug the gaps revealed by the survey.

The poor score in the field of waste management in 2018 was the main hurdle for the city to overcome and achieve its goal of scoring the top position in 2019. Putting in place an effective waste segregation mechanism at source and in every household and its adequate disposal would have prevented its downfall. The Chandigarh Municipal Corporation did attempt to take over the garbage collection job from the private door-to-door collectors, but it was thwarted by a section of the councillors. However, the promised streamlining of the wet and dry filth remains unfulfilled, costing the city its ranking. The garbage processing and compost plants in Dadu Majra village also must pass muster. Only then will the UT's clean-up act give competition to Indore, which has in an exemplary manner retained its top rank for the third consecutive year even though it is much bigger than Chandigarh.

In fact, the cause for the poor rankings of most cities of Punjab and Haryana is the same: laxity in waste management. They need to take a leaf out of Rajkot which has jumped from the 35th place to ninth. Its campaign to sensitise the residents about separating waste has paid off. Cleanliness is crucial to health. We Indians need to shed our dirty habit of littering, spitting and urinating in public. Let us keep our surroundings as hygienic as we do our homes, irrespective of any cleanliness surveys.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth. — Henry David Thoreau

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, SATURDAY, MARCH 8, 1919

The "Englishman" and Mr. Gandhi

WE have now before us the text of the article in which the *Englishman* refers to the passive resistance movement. The journal is obviously in despair, because Mr. Gandhi has been invited to Delhi. "After the fiasco attending Mr. Gandhi's operations in Champaran," it writes, "we should have thought that the Government of India would have paid less attention to this gentlemen's capers. But he no sooner threatens a passive resistance movement in opposition to the Rowlatt Bills than he is sent for by the Viceroy for a private interview." May it not be that the Viceroy knows Mr. Gandhi a little better than the *Englishman* does and that his conception of the Government's duty in regard to such a man is, as we said the other day, a trifle different from that of the extremist Anglo-Indian Press?

Education in U.P.

OUR congratulations to the United Provinces Government on the practical manifestation of its sympathy with the cause of education in the Provinces. In the budget for the ensuing year provision is made for a sum of Rs. 1,06,08,000 being spent on education, of which Rs. 11,51,000 go to primary education, another Rs. 21 lakhs being given as grants to district boards for primary school buildings. Considering the leeway which the United Provinces have to make up in this matter, no expenditure on education could be said to err on the side of extravagance; and the present increase from Rs. 74 lakhs in a year of war to a crore in the year after the cessation of hostilities is, after all, nothing else than modest. Yet we don't have even these small mercies too often to pass any of them without a word of approbation.

Feeding the falsehoods

India may have lost the battle of perceptions in international sphere



AJAI SAHNI

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, INSTITUTE FOR CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

IF you question the manifestly false information put out by the government and the ruling party, you are insulting the Indian armed forces; if you ask for evidence, you are anti-national and a traitor!

But what were they thinking? That no one in the world would document 'a thousand kilograms' of explosives delivered in an aerial attack involving 12 aircraft, in the heart of one of the most troubled and surveilled territories of the world, targeting a well-documented Islamist terrorist training camp? That they could simply 'manage' the cowed or bought-over media and their cheerleaders among 'security experts', drum up war hysteria and reduce Rawalpindi to a mass of trembling jelly, to ride to glorious electoral victory? Trot out a few phrases such as 'non-military pre-emptive strike' in ill-managed press conferences and swagger around boasting about operational achievements without proof, even as the adversary displayed evidence of his success?

Even as the air strike altered India's strategic stance dramatically, it is clear that the regime's clumsy deceptions, its falsehoods and bragging have eroded India's credibility. Whatever be the eventual outcome of the current confrontation (indications are that we have already regressed to default setting), it is clear that New Delhi lost the battle of perceptions in the international sphere, even as Pakistan's posturing won supporters, despite the near blanket condemnation of the country's role in the Pulwama attack just weeks ago.

What is lost in all this sorry noise and incompetence is, first, the fact that the



HALF-TRUTHS: Sceptics are not anti-national; those putting out false information are.

Even as the air strike altered India's strategic stance, the regime's clumsy deceptions have eroded its credibility.

present leadership took an audacious decision to redraw long-established (and ill-conceived) lines that dictated that India would not breach Pakistani airspace, even in the face of the gravest of provocation — a principle that was followed even during Kargil; and, second, that the IAF penetrated deep into Pakistan, and not just in a quick sortie across the LoC into PoK. These actions should have sufficed to deliver the message of political will and determination, that Raisina Hill would respond at new levels to Pakistan-backed terrorist misadventures.

It is a basic principal of strategic communication that the state's agencies speak with restraint and authority, after verification of facts, and give out nothing that is falsifiable, though they may withhold the entire truth. Instead, the continuing bragging of the government and the ruling party is making a laughing stock of India. The IAF has refused to confirm quasi-official claims on fatalities in the Balakot operations, or to play any part in the persistent political deception. The statements emanating from the Air Force have been circumspect, confirming only that the attack took place and that the 'targets given' were hit.

International sources have now, on the basis of satellite imagery, confirmed that the terrorist training camp at Jaba Top in Balakot — initially confirmed as the target by India's Foreign Secretary — has not been significantly damaged, but that three points have been hit on the hillside at distances between 150 to 200 metres from the periphery of the camp. With mounting evidence to this effect, we find a process of backpedalling and bullying intensifying. Even as the purported number of fatalities and the damage remain a core element of the BJP's poll campaign, party president Amit Shah reiterating the figure of 250 killed, the government's cheerleaders have started shifting the goalposts, arguing, 'the main thing was that we went deep into their territory'.

If this was the 'main thing', why didn't the government say so at the outset?

There have also been fantastical claims regarding the impact on the Pakistani psyche and strategy: that Pakistan has been brought to its knees, and has been forced to sue for peace in fear. This is specious. It is useful to note that Pakistan's mastery of deception remains unparal-

leled, even as does the clumsiness of India's alternately boastful posturing. A country that has consistently thwarted US intent in Afghanistan, despite its dependency and the possibility of overwhelming penalties, and despite numberless strikes against terrorist targets on Pakistani soil, Pakistan never abandoned its malign strategy in Afghanistan.

This pattern of persistence and deception is already visible in Pakistan's responses over the past week. Much has been said about PM Imran Khan's 'statesmanlike' responses after the aerial skirmishes, his emphasis on the 'miscalculations' that could lead to war, and the offer for talks. This came only after Pakistan had scored an apparent 'victory'. In the immediate wake of the strikes, he threatened retaliation — threats that were carried out. Crucially, moreover, there has been a significant escalation of cross-border firing, and no evidence to suggest that the peace overtures are in good faith, and not just posturing for the international community. As regards action against terror outfits operating from Pakistan, apart from a pro forma commitment to seize assets of UN-banned groups and a few 'preventive detentions', nothing should be expected. These commitments are balanced out with assertions that India needs to provide evidence of the involvement of Pakistan-based terrorists in Pulwama and other operations on Indian soil. The dance simply goes on.

But to return to the original issue of 'dishonouring our armed forces', it is people who are putting out false information, attributing exaggerated operational claims to the IAF, who bring the forces to disrepute; these are the people who are anti-national. Not the ones asking questions. This includes TV anchors strutting about in military fatigues, acting like Generals preparing campaigns; these are people who do not have the courage to tell the truth. Instead, they have done everything in their power to feed jingoistic hysteria.

You cannot construct a strong nation on a foundation of falsehoods.

Women cricketers, what a league!

SUDHIRENDAR SHARMA

AFTER almost a lifetime of following cricket, first on radio and later on television, I have switched on to watching women's cricket. While I have started skipping a few of the men's matches, I try not to miss any international match that features our young girls. While my friends and family wonder at my newfound obsession, I have compelling reason for shifting my allegiance.

Asked by a reporter who her favourite male cricketer was, the world's leading run scorer and India's captain, Mithali Raj, had responded, 'Do you ask a male cricketer who his favourite female crick-

eter is?' Emphatic! Confident! Bravo! It not only signalled the coming of age of women's cricket in India, but also the sheer confidence with which the words were uttered. Nothing more was needed for me to back our girls.

Mithali, Harmanpreet, Smriti and Jhulan are household names. Their batting and bowling is doing most of the talking! Mithali has the world's highest 6,700 runs in one-day games; Jhulan's 271 wickets are the most in the same format; Harmanpreet is the first woman to score a century in T20 cricket; and Smriti was ICC Cricketer of the Year for 2018.

For those who still imagine that women's cricket isn't as exciting

should consider this: Harmanpreet's 171 not out against Australia in the ICC Women's World Cup in 2017 will remain etched in cricket history, like Kapil Dev's 175 not out against Zimbabwe during the 1983 World Cup. Kapil Dev had hit 16 fours and six sixes in his 138-ball innings. Harmanpreet's 171 runs off 115 balls were studded with 20 fours and seven sixes. No comparison, but it was power hitting at its best!

Women's cricket should not be compared to men's cricket. I agree with Mithali. It is evolving and building a fan base. Hailing from humble non-cricketing backgrounds, the girls are doing well to breach the male bastion. With live

telecast of most matches now available, they are not only being watched, but also are attracting revenue from sponsors. With the women's cricket league, on the IPL format, in the offing, the game will open a new avenue for talented girls to make it a career option.

Women may have been cheerleaders for men's cricket, it is now time for men to cheer women cricketers. The scream for a leg-before; the call for a quick single, the holler for a catch, and the boisterous victory hugs add to the missing glamour quotient. There are any number of reasons for cricket fans to switch to the feminine version of the game. Don't miss out!

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Ugly shoe fight

BJP MP Sharad Tripathi thrashing BJP MLA Rakesh Baghel with a shoe during a public meeting has lowered their dignity and that of their party ('Shoe shock for BJP legislator', March 7). Such uncivilised MPs and MLAs should be removed for using abusive language and acting violently. Such an act by these leaders is disgraceful. They are not fit to be our representatives.

MEHAK TANEJA, CHANDIGARH

Matter of disgrace

BJP lawmakers thrashing each other in a fight for credit is disgusting. How disgraceful it is to watch the two elected representatives fighting like this. This is not about any particular party, it is about an individual's behaviour, which should be strongly condemned. Please do not bring petty party politics everywhere.

MEHAK CHATURVEDI, MOHALI

Not credit-worthy

It is shocking that our politicians will fight like this only for a simple credit on a development project ('Shoe shock for BJP legislator', March 7). If these people will behave like this, what message are they sending to the

people? They only want their name on the foundation stone and don't want to do anything for the country. They just want to take credit.

JAPNEET WALLA, AMBALA CITY

City slips on cleanliness

Reference to 'Indore cleanest city for 3rd year in row' (March 7); the recent Swachh Survekshan survey has put the City Beautiful, Chandigarh, very low on the list of the cleanest cities of the nation. Its position has changed from third in 2018 to 20th in 2019. The MC should work very hard to not lose the title and the way the city is recognised. Chandigarh is one of the well-known UTs and a tourist attraction. Its position should not have slipped the way it has.

MANPREET SINGH, MOHALI

Doubting Thomases

Asking proof for the air strike is unwarranted. Political parties seeking proof for the strike by the IAF is completely unjustified. Unwarranted utterances by political parties and journalists put a direct question mark on the reliability and efficiency of our forces. Such questions arise only if we have no faith in our forces. We should believe in India's

narrative as one. Such irrelevant utterances will only help terror outfits promoted by Pakistan and will lower the morale of the forces. Individuals and organisations asking for proof are prima facie representing their prejudice and malice against India and its forces.

KARAN SINGH VINAYAK, CHANDIGARH

Leave forces alone

It is very unfortunate that the armed forces are being dragged into politics. It was unheard of before, in the history of Independent India, that an IAF Chief answers the questions raised by the Opposition. We have doubted the integrity of our forces and the IAF Chief had to clarify by saying that they only count targets, not casualties. It is unfortunate that it has happened just before the Lok Sabha elections. Whatever the motive of the ruling party as well as the Opposition may be, the armed forces should not be dragged into murky politics.

FAQIR SINGH, DASUYA

Pakistan's trickery

Refer to the editorial 'Pak crack-down on terror' (March 7); it is an open secret that the Pakistan army

and the ISI are behind Kashmir terrorism and continuously attacking our Army and its establishments under the cover of JeM and LeT. Masood Azhar and Hafiz Saeed are small stooges limited to poster icons. From planning, training and logical support, the involvement of Pakistan's army and the ISI are ostensibly visible. It is impossible to carry out such activities with precision and impunity without support. Present actions against these outfits are an eyewash and pretensions to seek goodwill of the international community. The Indian Government, instead of wasting energy on political gains, should think of a long-term strategy to counter Pakistan and reach out to the Kashmiris.

DEEPAK MEHRA, BY MAIL

Data comes cheap

Apropos 'India has cheapest mobile data in world, says study' (March 7), India is the second largest smartphone user due to Mukesh Ambani's Jio. India is getting cheap data services at Rs 18.5 per 1GB. This will boost the Indian economy. Youth will get more and more knowledge and intelligence levels will increase. It will help in the development of the country.

SOURAV GARG, MUKTSAR

Women's safety still a distant dream



RAJESH GILL
PROFESSOR, PANJAB UNIVERSITY

WE have miserably failed to provide the most basic right to women and girls — the right to live in a safe environment. Gangrapes are reported day in, day out. Physical mobility is the primary and first capability that enables an individual to avail opportunities, enhancing his/her chances of moving ahead in life. Studies have confirmed that in comparison to boys, our girls have extremely low access to these opportunities, be it in education, technology, employment or life skills.

Even if all the perpetrators of crimes against women are caught and imprisoned, how does that relieve the victim, who has suffered not merely physical and sexual violence, but much more importantly, the grave injuries on her psyche, mind and soul, which she has to learn to live with? I have come across a number of girls who after being sexually violated by their close relatives or strangers failed to lead a 'normal' life, both sexual and social. Such is the damage caused by these heinous acts that it is often irreparable, leaving the victim mentally paralysed for life. Not only the poor victim, but also her parents and siblings get labelled and stigmatised by the community at large for generations to come.

The prevalence of such incidents affirms that the deterrents against rape are not sufficiently frightening for those who, at the very sight of a girl, feel too tempted to resist lust and decide to 'enjoy' on the spur of the moment, along with friends, amidst the shrieks of the girl, whose pleadings for mercy go unheard. This story is repeated within homes as well as outside, while not every story is reported in the media or to the police, for obvious reasons. The moment a



CAUSE FOR CONCERN: We must admit that our legal deterrents have failed to scare away the rapists.

girl is sexually violated, the process of 'shaming' her and her family begins, making it often unbearable for them, too intimidating to fight the case. Ironically, the victims or their relatives commit suicide, while it is the rapists who should be killing themselves. Isn't it a mockery of the system? It indicates that masculinity continues to draw its meaning from holding power over the female body, either within the home or outside.

I find a parallel between these rapes and the terrorist killings of innocent people and our brave soldiers, mostly young and lone bread-winners, in which the most naked forms of heartlessness, brutality and violence are

exhibited. We have had too many rounds of seminars and lectures on gender equality and empowerment, without any corresponding signs of improvement. The Criminal Amendment Act of 2013 has failed to make people realise that 'staring' and 'stalking' a girl amount to threatening her, which is a criminal offence. A rape trial happens to be more traumatic for the victim and her family than for the offender and his kin. How long shall we go on crying ourselves hoarse over the mind-set and cultural norms? How can a country which makes claims of treating women as goddesses and *devis* afford to have such a life-threatening environment for its women? Stringent laws

against gangrape seem to have had little effect; many of these incidents, in all probability, go unreported. We must admit that our legal deterrents have failed to scare away the rapists.

Immediately after such an incident, the public discourse often begins, frequently using the 'blame the victim' approach, finding fault with the girl — why she had gone out with a boy; why was she out in the dark; why was she wearing a short dress, and so on. This is sheer hypocrisy of a community that swears by human rights of prisoners and even murderers in the name of reformation. Then how can the same community forget about the human rights of women, and how can one justify vio-

lation of their bodies and souls, on any grounds whatsoever?

During extensive fieldwork conducted by our team for a UGC project on gender violence in rural Punjab and Haryana, we noticed a perpetual fear among parents of young daughters, who were pursuing higher studies. It is a nightmare for these girls to commute to a school outside the village because of the unruly and obscene behaviour of the boys.

Society has to show zero tolerance to such acts, the genesis of which lies in the small mundane incidents of eve-teasing and sexually coloured gestures owing to gender insensitivity, with the cumulative effect of emboldening prospective rapists to commit subsequent acts. These violators need to be hanged, without any loss of time, so that justice is shown to be done. There has been enough of the 'sensitisation' lectures. Let us now focus on boys and men, who continue to live with a feudal mindset, with the rotten ideas of masculinity and femininity, which have become obsolete. A society that tolerates persistent sexual violation of its daughters can certainly not be called developed, nor can it claim to be a great society with a rich cultural heritage. We have terribly failed in providing a safe environment to our girls and women, and that is a reality which negates all the tall claims of gender equality in education, employment and politics. Why would parents have daughters when they know they can be sexually assaulted or raped anytime, anywhere? Why would parents send their daughters to distantly located schools and colleges when they know how vulnerable they continue to be? These are some of the difficult questions which need to be answered — the sooner the better, since these involve half of our population.



WOMEN'S DAY



ROMI SINGLA
PULMONARY PHYSICIAN

Let's help female TB patients overcome barriers

GLOBALLY, 7 lakh women die of tuberculosis (TB) every year, nearly one-third of them in India. This disease kills more women than do all causes of maternal mortality. The death rate seems to be higher for women with TB than for men, and women are more often diagnosed with non-lung TB. However, in most low-income countries, twice as many men are diagnosed with tuberculosis as women.

This difference might indicate under-reporting, because access barriers are higher for women due to socio-cultural disempowerment, stigma, different patterns of healthcare use, or lack of financial resources.

The prevalence of TB is similar in males and females till adolescence, when it increases for the former. In high-prevalence countries, however, women of reproductive age have higher rates of progression to the disease than men in this age group.

Women wait up to twice as long to seek treatment as men experiencing the same symptoms. This may be because they have to stay at home looking after children, or are reluctant to use scarce family resources.

Women may need a chaperone when going for an appointment or may have to explain where they are going. So, the stigma around TB can make them reluctant to seek help, leading to delay in reaching the diagnosis stage. The whole family suffers when a mother/wife becomes sick or dies of TB. TB in women has an adverse effect



ALARMING: Tuberculosis during pregnancy has been associated with a six-fold increase in prenatal deaths.

on child survival and family welfare.

The greatest burden of tuberculosis is during the childbearing years. Tuberculosis during pregnancy has been associated with a six-fold increase in prenatal deaths and a two-fold risk of premature birth and low birth weight. Maternal tuberculosis is also an important risk factor for tuberculosis and mortality in infants, particularly in babies born to HIV-infected women.

A mother's well-being is intimately linked to that of her children. TB may spread from mother to child during the latter's development. Children may have to stay at home to care for their sick mother, while the father (if pres-

ent) earns income for the family.

Genital TB, which is challenging to diagnose, has been identified as an important cause of infertility in high TB-incidence settings. Females with genital tuberculosis may suffer from infertility, menstrual disorders and chronic lower abdomen or back pain.

The socio-economic consequences of TB for women are exacerbated by later presentation, which leads to a poor prognosis. The stigma associated with TB causes women to be divorced or unlikely to get married. A study in India found that male TB patients expected their wives to care for them, but infected wives rarely received care. Thus,

married women may try to hide their symptoms instead of seeking help.

Socio-economic factors also have an impact on TB control efforts, especially for women who grapple with poverty, low social status, lesser education (which impedes seeking diagnosis) and barriers to healthcare.

Female employees form a large percentage of the workforce, particularly in certain industries. If TB remains unaddressed, these industries and others could suffer from absenteeism, high medical costs, lost productivity, and other negative consequences of having sick employees. Women may find it more difficult to comply with treatment once symptoms subside.

The HIV epidemic is also increasing the burden of TB for women, who seem to have a higher risk of developing TB during their reproductive years than that faced by men. Malnutrition and food insecurity can increase the risk of TB; other threats such as rising tobacco use and diabetes and stress among women also play a role.

TB treatment is safe during pregnancy and advanced diagnostics with latest treatment regimens are absolutely free in government hospitals/institutes. The need of the hour is to maximise the referral of TB suspects or their samples for testing to government institutes.

It is also important to keep government specialist doctors motivated enough through adequate remuneration of their services. Companies/NGOs can demonstrate leadership by formulating and

supporting gender-sensitive workplace and community TB programmes.

To reduce delay in care-seeking among women, workplace programmes should emphasise education on TB symptoms and facilitate access to diagnostic services as soon as the symptoms manifest, paired with anti-stigma campaigns which encourage open dialogue.

Workplace policies guaranteeing that employees diagnosed with TB won't be dismissed are an essential protection. Access to treatment should be supplemented by paid time off during the period of infection; ideally, workers should be permitted to obtain directly observed treatment during working hours.

Many companies offer worksite clinics for reproductive healthcare; these firms should make sure that these clinics include TB treatment as well as screening. Similarly, companies can integrate TB into existing workplace HIV/AIDS programmes, taking special note of TB's impact on women with HIV.

Women have unique susceptibilities and might encounter barriers to access appropriate care. Subgroups that require particular consideration include HIV-infected pregnant women, socially or culturally marginalised individuals, underweight and undernourished woman caretakers of TB patients, elderly and destitute women.

Those who focus their advocacy efforts on this important challenge would be seen as real leaders and champions not only of public health, but also of human rights and gender equity.

Socio-economic factors have an impact on tuberculosis control efforts, especially for women who grapple with poverty, low social status, lesser education and inadequate healthcare.

QUICK CROSSWORD

ACROSS
1 Close together (4,2,4)
6 Incentive (4)
10 Great enjoyment (5)
11 Shame (9)
12 First night of film (8)
13 A criminal (5)
15 Abominable (7)
17 Metal wind instrument (7)
19 Deep purplish red (7)
21 Apparent (7)
22 Violent weather (5)
24 Appeased (8)
27 Insulting (9)
28 Clumsy (5)
29 An accepted standard (4)
30 Bavarian leather shorts (10)

DOWN
1 Profoundly wise person (4)
2 Worthy (9)
3 Flower (5)
4 Sorrow (7)
5 Ancestry (7)
7 Wander stealthily (5)
8 Urgently enthusiastic (6,2,2)
9 Hair style (8)
14 Gesture of disapproval (6,4)
16 Decorative object (8)
18 Invaluable (9)
20 Inform (7)
21 To hide (7)
23 Express willingness (5)
25 Confidence (5)
26 Knock unconscious (4)

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION
Across: 1 Contact, 5 Fight, 8 Dalmatian, 9 Emu, 10 Rock, 12 Polished, 14 Primer, 15 Jujube, 17 Souvenir, 18 Edge, 21 Ash, 22 Retriever, 24 Erase, 25 Mastery.
Down: 1 Cedar, 2 Nil, 3 Away, 4 Tripod, 5 Fanciful, 6 Greyhound, 7 Trundle, 11 Chihuahua, 13 Rehearse, 14 Passage, 16 Victim, 19 Early, 20 Bias, 23 Vie.

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HARD

CALENDAR

MARCH 8, 2019 FRIDAY

- Vikrami Samvat 2075
- Shaka Samvat 1940
- Phalgun Shaka 17
- Phalgun Parvishite 24
- Hijari 1440
- Shukla Paksh Tithi 2, up to 1:35 am
- Shubh Yoga up to 4:28 pm
- Ultrabhadrapad Nakshatra up to 11:17 pm
- Moon in Pisces sign
- Gandmool starts 11:17 pm

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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| 7 | 6 | 3 | 8 | 9 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| 2 | 5 | 8 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 7 | 9 | 6 |
| 4 | 9 | 1 | 6 | 7 | 2 | 5 | 8 | 3 |
| 8 | 4 | 7 | 9 | 1 | 6 | 3 | 5 | 2 |
| 5 | 1 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 8 | 9 | 4 | 7 |
| 9 | 3 | 2 | 7 | 5 | 4 | 1 | 6 | 8 |

FORECAST

SUNSET: **FRIDAY** 18:25 HRS
SUNRISE: **SATURDAY** 06:40 HRS

Sunny Partly Cloudy Cloudy Rainy Foggy

| CITY | MAX | MIN |
|------------|-----|-----|
| Chandigarh | 24 | 11 |
| New Delhi | 26 | 10 |

PUNJAB

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|-----------|----|----|
| Amritsar | 24 | 09 |
| Bathinda | 24 | 09 |
| Jalandhar | 24 | 09 |
| Ludhiana | 25 | 10 |

HARYANA

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| Bhiwani | 26 | 12 |
| Hisar | 26 | 10 |
| Sirsa | 25 | 11 |

HIMACHAL PRADESH

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| Dharamsala | 16 | 06 |
| Manali | 10 | -01 |
| Shimla | 13 | 05 |

JAMMU & KASHMIR

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|----------|----|-----|
| Jammu | 21 | 13 |
| Leh | 03 | -06 |
| Srinagar | 13 | 04 |

UTTARAKHAND

| | | |
|-----------|----|----|
| Dehradun | 25 | 10 |
| Mussoorie | 13 | 04 |

TEMPERATURE IN °C



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

OUTSIDE THE COURT

SC-mandated mediation in the Ayodhya dispute is a welcome innovation, but must not be seen as a substitute for due process

A FIVE-MEMBER SUPREME Court bench has proposed that a "permanent solution" be found to the Ayodhya dispute through mediation. The Court has sanctioned this innovative approach since, as one of the judges said, the intent is also to "heal relations" between two communities caught in a politically-fraught case. The principle and intent behind the proposal is laudable, since it may help lift the steam off the topic and, hopefully, facilitate a reasonable conversation around it.

Though the Court has named three mediators, the judges have given them the option to co-opt more members. It has said the mediation process will be held in-camera, its details kept confidential, and media barred from reporting the deliberations. Given that the conflict lies at the heart of the social and political faultlines of the nation, transparency about the process is paramount — the citizen has a right to know the give and the take. The Court's decision to set an eight-week time-frame for the mediators to arrive at a settlement also raises questions. The Court, surely, is aware of the sensitivities in the dispute and its complex legal history. The mediation panel now appears set to conclude its sittings in the midst of the general election campaign: The outcome of mediation is most likely to have a bearing on the campaign and voting behaviour. The Ram temple is high on the BJP's poll agenda and its leaders have demanded that the judicial process be skirted and permission given to build the temple at the disputed site through an ordinance. Clearly, the mediation process cannot be seen in isolation of the bitter and the polarised politics in the run-up to the election. Given this background, the panel ought not be asked to complete its work under such a tight deadline. It must be given time to engage with all the concerned parties and hear them out. In any case, the first step is for the panel to convince the litigants to join the mediation process. As of now, only the Nirmohi Akhara and some Muslim groups including the Sunni Waqf Board have expressed willingness to be a part of the negotiations; others insist that building the Ram Temple at the site where the 16th century Babri Masjid stood until its demolition on December 6, 1992 by a mob led by Hindutva groups, is a matter of faith, not a property dispute, and hence, non-negotiable.

The mediation process, of course, is not a substitute for due process. The Court is still to settle the plea regarding the title deeds concerning 2.77 acres of land at the Babri site. However, the Court can issue a decree if the contesting parties agree on a settlement during the mediation and make it binding on all sections involved in the dispute. It may be premature to predict how the mediation will unfold. But it will be a tall order and the process will be watched closely and tested for fairness.



FAIZAN MUSTAFA

A FIVE-JUDGE BENCH of the Supreme Court (SC), led by the Chief Justice of India (CJI), has passed the first major order in the sensitive matter of the ownership of the disputed site of the Babri mosque. It has referred the matter to a three-member mediation panel led by former SC judge F M I Kalifulla. The other members are controversial Art of Living founder and spiritual guru, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar and Madras High Court senior lawyer, Sriram Panchu. All the three members are Tamil-speakers. Faizabad, which is in the Hindi heartland and can be easily polarised in election season, will be the venue of mediation but its proceedings will be kept secret. The CJI and other judges wanted to make yet another sincere effort in finding an amicable and inclusive solution to the historical dispute. Therefore, in their order, they have said that "notwithstanding lack of consensus between the parties, we are of the view that an attempt be made to settle the dispute by mediation".

A constitutional court in our legal system has to play a counter-majoritarian role. It is duty bound to protect the rights of even one individual. Public sentiments are thus irrelevant.

Unlike adjudication, mediation is not an adversarial process. While in judicial adjudication one party wins and another loses, at the end of mediation both the parties must feel fully satisfied with the compromise. Mediation should never be an alternative because one party refuses to accept a court verdict. Even the moderate Atal Bihari Vajpayee had said two years prior to the demolition of the mosque in 1992 that "no court can give a clear verdict on the issue and even if verdict was forthcoming, no government can implement it".

While it is true that the legal issue is nothing more than a property dispute, the SC is right in saying that the case involves the sentiments of millions of Indians. If it is a question of "faith" for Hindus in terms of the site being the birthplace of Lord Ram, for Muslims, the central issue is about their "faith" in the Constitution and a fair and impartial judicial adjudication by the highest court of the land. Those who demolished not just a mosque but

the only surviving piece of Sharqi architecture have not been punished in 27 years. The SC has not even stayed the recent ordinance giving the disputed land to one of the parties even though the ordinance is in violation of its own orders.

There are six major concerns with respect to the mediation order: First, mediation has been imposed by the Court on the parties which opposed it during arguments and have made similar statements after the order was passed. Second, the choice of mediators, particularly Sri Sri Ravi Shankar who is on record asking Muslims to give up their claim as a "goodwill gesture" and had even doubted the highest court's competence in adjudicating this matter. In fact, he said in explicit terms that if the SC decided this matter, the losing party will have no option but to turn to extremism. Since the Court preferred to term the dispute a religious matter potentially impacting our politics, ideally a religious figure should have been kept away from the mediation process. Similarly, the mediation panel should not have been headed by a Muslim. It would have been better if an atheist, naturalist or follower of a third religion led the mediation process.

Third, though the Court has said that there is no legal impediment in referring this matter to mediation, it left the matter open. The parties opposing mediation did argue that as per the Supreme Court's judgment in *Afcons Infrastructure Ltd (2010)*, mediation cannot be done in a representative suit which involves public interest or the interest of large number of persons who are not represented in the court. Fourth, whether mediation can be done on behalf of deity is a grey area. The SC in the *Afcons* judgment said that matters involving rights of deities, minors and the mentally challenged should not be referred to mediation.

Fifth, some parties have outright rejected any compromise. The Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha in their written arguments said so in a many words: "...the land in question [has been] a place of worship for Hindus for lakhs of years... It is a question of do or die for Hindus for the sake protection of the Deity's property." It went on to assert that "the

Hindus have religious faith, deep religious faith [associated] with the birthplace of Lord Ram and they are not ready for any compromise."

Sixth, the timeframe given for the mediation process is too short. The Court has asked mediators to start their work within a week and give it a progress report within four weeks and complete the work within eight weeks. Though as a general rule it is not necessary that all documents in the Court be sent to the mediation panel but in a matter of this magnitude, it will be too much to expect from the mediators to start their work without examining the huge volumes of documents. Though many would like to see one party simply giving up their claim, mediators cannot and should not do suggest giving up the title claim without first satisfying themselves that their suggestion will not cause any injustice to the rightful owner/s under law. It would be more appropriate for the mediators to first acknowledge, on the basis of documentary evidence, the rightful legal owner of the site where once Babri Masjid stood and then convince this party to give up its claim.

Generally, mediation proceedings start with an opening statement by the mediators and opening statements by the parties to the dispute. This is followed by mediators having separate sessions with the individual parties to understand their perspective on the dispute and possible solutions. Subsequently, joint sessions are held with all the parties so that a consensus is reached on the contentious issues. Mediation is an informal process and the rules of evidence are not used. Finally, a compromise is drafted. In this case, the compromise will eventually be recorded by the Supreme Court in its order.

Miracles do happen and bitter enemies do become friends. That's why the CJI preferred mediation even though chances of its success are slim. Let us welcome this initiative of the Court and hope that mediation panel and parties will be able to demonstrate spirit of accommodation and large-hearted tolerance.

The writer is vice-chancellor of NALSAR University of Law, Hyderabad. Views are personal

THE DELTA 32 EFFECT

It offers pathways to eliminate HIV, though there is sometime before we have a complete cure at hand

IN 2016, A HIV patient from London, who also suffered from cancer, underwent a bone marrow stem-cell transplant to treat his malignant cells. Eighteen months later, he has not only been cured of the cancer but has also shown no signs of HIV. Doctors are hopeful that he has been cured of the dreaded virus, though they point out it's a little too early to say so conclusively. Their optimism has something to do with a genetic mutation that hampers HIV's entry into certain blood cells. A study published this week in *Nature* points out that the London Patient received the bone marrow donation from a person who was born with such a rare mutation, Delta 32. The transplant wiped out the immune cells vulnerable to HIV and replaced them with cells that are resistant to the virus.

The London Patient is the second HIV-infected to experience a long-term remission from the virus. About 12 years ago, an American living in Germany — the Berlin Patient — also received a Delta 32 transplant and has remained free of the virus, ever since. However, attempts to replicate the procedures undergone by the Berlin Patient in other HIV-infected people proved unsuccessful. The virus returned as soon as they stopped the standard medications. Moreover, there are other reasons that the hopes of a total victory against HIV that have arisen after this week's *Nature* study be tempered with realism. Bone-marrow stem transplants are risky — they make a patient vulnerable to life-threatening diseases like acute anaemia — and are expensive procedures. They are not likely to be the treatment option for a vast majority of the 37 million HIV-infected; it's hard enough to find tissue-matched donors for so many people, let alone locate one that also has the Delta 32 mutation.

There is good reason, however, to believe that the London Patient's recovery offers a viable pathway to combat HIV. The *Nature* study demonstrates the potency of gene-editing as therapy for those infected with the virus, similar to the treatment for sickle-cell disease, haemophilia and certain types of cancer. Researchers in different parts of the world are working on procedures to edit people's immune cells to make them HIV resistant — they would mimic Delta 32. They are also trying to develop reverse vaccination — much like for small pox — where an immune response is engineered to target the virus. Currently, those affected by HIV can have near normal lifespans. However, the cocktail of drugs needed to keep the virus at bay are expensive, and have serious side effects. The London Patient's recovery portends that cure from HIV is not far away.

WELCOME TO MALGUDI

The proposal to name a Karnataka station after the fictional town is a tribute to R K Narayan and the idea of train travel

IN HIS INTRODUCTION to *Malgudi Days* (1942), R K Narayan shied away from pinpointing its location on a map of India. "If I explain that Malgudi is a small town in South India, I shall only be expressing half-truth, for the characteristics of Malgudi seem to be universal," he wrote. Shivamogga MP B Y Raghavendra, however, has pitched a proposal to localise that universality by renaming Arasalu station on the Shivamogga-Talaguppa railway line as Malgudi. Arasalu happens to be the place where the Kannada director Shankar Nag shot scenes for his delightful television adaptation of Narayan's classic.

This, of course, is not the first time that an attempt has been made to give stations and trains a literary makeover. As recently as 2017, the Railway Ministry had begun work on a proposal to showcase India's cultural diversity by naming trains after celebrated works of regional literature. In May 2017, the Dadar-Sawantwadi Road-Dadar Express was re-named as Tutari Express as a tribute to Marathi poet Krishnaji Keshav Damle's revolutionary poem, *Tutari*. Earlier still, in 2011, the Yeshwantpur-Mysuru Express between Bengaluru and Mysuru was christened Malgudi Express.

In a country like India, stratified as it is along economic, religious and cultural lines, the railways have played the role of a great leveller, taking the urban to the beating heart of the country and vice versa. With their glass-and-chrome buildings and sterile tribute to politicians of various shades through their names, airports, and, by extension, air travel, offer a rarefied view of the world. Train travel opens up the country for its passengers. Like literature, it offers them a chance to look at themselves and at each other in wonder, sometimes, with incomprehension, and, often, in recognition. In that context, Raghavendra's proposal, if passed, will not just be an apt tribute to the universality Narayan sought for his Malgudi but also to the spirit of the intrepid Indian traveller.



JULIO RIBEIRO

I WAS TAKEN aback, a few days ago, when the staff in my office showed me a WhatsApp forward or "post" written by "Julius Reibeiro", chiding Mr Modi very gently for repeatedly saying that for 60 years the Congress party and the Gandhi family had done nothing for the country, and, it was the BJP and Narendra Modi, in particular, that had achieved all that the people aspired for!

Besides my name being misspelt, the post had described me as the retired director general of police, Maharashtra. I was commissioner of police, Mumbai, and DGP Gujarat for four months. I was also DGP Punjab for two years, but not DGP Maharashtra. The post seemed to have been widely shared, including with my daughters who were not amused by the grammatical errors written in my name. Despite this, however, the writer, whoever he is, made many people believe that it was Julio Ribeiro who had written the post.

In fact, I was amazed at the number of people who met me in the last three days to congratulate me on speaking out for what was they believed was right and correct. They were a trifle disappointed to learn that I was not the author of the post. Regardless, I assured them that I largely agreed with the contents of the post.

In fact, I thought that the writer had comprehensively rebutted Modi's oft-repeated insinuations that the Congress and the Gandhis were not at all interested in the development of the country but were only inter-

A slim chance

Can the parties in Ayodhya dispute display the spirit of accommodation needed to make mediation a success?

Unlike adjudication, mediation is not an adversarial process. While in judicial adjudication one party wins and another loses, at the end of mediation both the parties must feel fully satisfied with the compromise. Mediation should never be an alternative because one party refuses to accept a court verdict. Even the moderate Atal Bihari Vajpayee had said two years prior to the demolition of mosque in 1992 that 'no court can give a clear verdict on the issue and even if verdict was forthcoming, no government can implement it'.

THE FAKE NEWS IS CORRECT

Constant tall claims by BJP detract from the positives of the government

So I became in a manner of speaking, the victim of "fake news", which was factually correct. The writer's opinion was shared by me and many other right-thinking people. When India gained Independence in 1947, I was in college, and I have seen the country progress since then. Modi's assertion that there was no progress in 60 years is simply not true.

Modi is right when he says that all villages in India have been successfully electrified under his reign, but he has forgotten to tell the people that the work to that effect had started much earlier — that 85 per cent or more was completed before he took over and that the remaining 15 per cent was done during his time, in the course of natural progression. Modi boasts about the provision of toilets in each village of the country but open defecation continues because of the acute scarcity of water to flush the toilets.

I am the chairman of an NGO which has taken on the task of improving the quality of life of the people living around Rajgurunagar in Khed taluka of Pune district. Electricity is available for not more than two hours a day, prompting my NGO to provide inverters and

solar panels to the 150-odd schools in the taluka so that e-learning — which depends on computers — is not suddenly interrupted. And, toilet blocks are being used by individual houses to store excess baggage for the simple reason that they cannot be used without water.

These are practical difficulties for which Modi cannot be blamed. His intentions are good and he certainly is working overtime to see a better India emerge. I also admire the fact that there are many senior leaders in his party who are similarly fired with true nationalist fervour to ensure that their work benefits the people. But their constant chest thumping and exaggerations are becoming embarrassments. They are taking the form of "fake news" which is something that people are beginning to see through.

For instance, the Balakot attack was one bold decision taken by a bold leader to cross the LoC and strike at the terror camps. It would have reaped electoral dividends for the BJP. But the unnecessary exaggerations regarding the number of people killed and the bringing down of an F-16, which has not been really proved, has greatly detracted from the good professional work done by the Indian Air Force. In my opinion, therefore, it is becoming counter-productive.

The writer, a retired IPS officer, was Mumbai police commissioner, DGP Gujarat and DGP Punjab



MARCH 9, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

PAKISTAN'S N-GAME THE PRIME MINISTER has written to General Zia-ul-Haq, the Pakistan president, expressing concern over Islamabad's reported preparations to develop the nuclear bomb. India has been collecting information on the equipment, material and know-how that Pakistan has been trying to obtain from various sources to put up nuclear installations. Hoping that such reports are not correct, Morarji Desai has pointed out to Zia the repercussions that the production of nuclear weapons can have in the region. He has reportedly highlighted the efforts that India has made for peaceful use of nuclear energy.

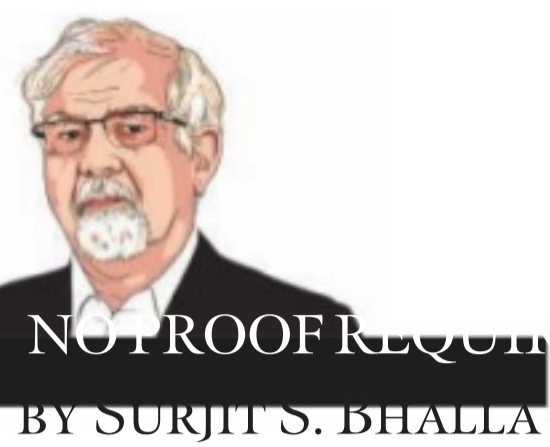
CABINET WOES A NEW DIMENSION has been added to the ongoing Uttar Pradesh ministry-making tangle by an associate of Charan Singh openly attacking the manner in which the chief minister, Banarasi Das, has constituted his ministry. Nar Singh, leader of the erstwhile BLD and minister of state for petroleum and chemicals, in a statement released to the public criticised Chief Minister Das for excluding the Jana Sangh and other sections of the party from his ministry. Singh is one of the four central ministers of state who had resigned last year in protest against the ouster of Charan Singh as home minister at the instance of the prime minister, Morarji

Desai. EXAMS SCRAPPED GOADED BY THE outcry raised by the public and the press, the Examination Committee of Meerut University has cancelled the examinations of 13 colleges where there was mass copying. Included among them is Meerut college, the largest affiliated to the varsity. This follows a resolution by the university's committee on March 6 that in the places principals have reported mass copying, the examinations need to be cancelled. The vice-chancellor, D C Sharma, has now sent a circular to principals, asking them to send in reports about the examinations by March 16.

15 THE IDEAS PAGE

Misuse of economic data

Since the overwhelming Congress loss in the 2014 election, the misuse of statistics appears to be politically motivated



NOT ROOF REQUIRED
BY SURJIT S. BHALLA

I HAVE OFTEN wondered as to how much the debate in India would have been different if the Congress had not lost the 2014 election so overwhelmingly. A decline of 162 seats — from 206 to 44 — was the second-largest in Indian history. The largest Congress defeat was a decline of 218 seats in 1989, after an assassination-boostered 1984 victory, and 2014 is tied with the Emergency decline of 163 seats.

But 2014 was especially devastating — it reduced the Congress to 11 seats short of even being called a major opposition party. The intended consequence of this defeat — all data began to be questioned. It was as early as January 2015, less than eight months after the installation of the new regime, when the revised GDP data were released. Senior and seasoned commentators and experts began to question the "rightness" of the data. They began to question the downgrading of GDP growth for the last three years of the UPA-II regime — that gap of 238 seats between 282 for BJP and real terms GDP growth 44 for INC. Average absolute gap between the UPA years was lowered by a cumulative two parties in the eight elections between 1989 and 2014 — 86 seats.

Think about it — the Congress is the oldest, and most successful political party in India. Founded almost 150 years ago, it was the lead party in the battle for Independence, and had ruled India for all but 12 years at the time of its ignominious humiliation in 2014. And that too at the hands of a chaiwallah. As is well known, there is an inverse correspondence between real growth and inflation estimates. So, the error being questioned by the Congress is of lower order of magnitude than that by the Modi government on any issue, even before the issue had arisen. Political question- ing of the GDP data in early 2015 was just the opening salvo.

At the outset, let me emphasise that there is only one rule for the political opposition in India — embarrass the ruling party. Unfortunately, for the BJP, it has not under- mined, or mishandled the optics on several of these "embarrassments". The latest opinion polls show that the number one concern of the youth is jobs. And well, it might be. If the government were to release the latest NSSO data, we would be able to infer that there are too few jobs in the economy, as we must because the unemployment rate, according to the leaked NSSO report, has shot up to a year high of 6.1 per cent. This must be purpose. As some readers may have pointed out by Mahesh Vyas of CMIE. His data Required, and has been titled as such for more than a decade now. As and for good reason. Indian "experts" are generally experts at half-baked ideologies, rather than seeking "truth". I am not being presumptuous but the purpose is to decline to seek the truth, even though truth itself might be elusive.

So, what is new or different about the debate over the last few years? The fact that the discussion about the quality of GDP data has become openly political, that is, it is being deliberately misused by experts. The politicians wouldn't expect any different and quite honestly, it is part of their job. But what is new is that so-called "experts" are daily loaning their misuse "analysis" to a disturbing.

It is my tentative hypothesis — and one is free to criticise or agree — that this misuse is related to the magnitude of the Congress defeat in 2014. What I want to pose is the following counter-factual. As economists know, they only think in counter-factuals. Think what the debate on data would have been if the Congress had won 140 seats in 2014 as they did in 1996, 1998, and 2004. Indeed, in five elections, 1996-2009, the Congress averaged 149 seats; the average during these five elections — 156 seats. Hence, 2014 was a deep structural break from the past —

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KHALED AHMED

ON JANUARY 3, the Indian Express wrote in



CR Sasikumar

Think about it — the Congress is the oldest, and most successful political party in India. Founded almost 150 years ago, it was the lead party in the battle for Independence, and had ruled India for all but 12 years at the time of its ignominious humiliation in 2014. And that too at the hands of a chaiwallah. Such an abrupt end would break most mortals, forms and organisations, but the Congress is obviously made of sterner stuff (I am just being truthful). It decided to fight back by employing the tactic of discrediting the Modi government on any issue, even before the issue had arisen. Political questioning of the GDP data in early 2015 was just the opening salvo.

ments but real investments. In 2013-2014, the year just preceding UPA defeat, nominal investment was 31.3 per cent of nominal GDP. The highest ever for this ratio was 39.6 per cent in 2011-12. The latest data for 2017-2018 shows that this share has declined to 28.6 per cent — a 11 percentage point decline from the peak and providing fuel to the Congress fire that investment, growth and jobs are way below the 2011-12 levels.

However, unlike politicians and armchair economists, economists like to use data on real investments adjusted for inflation. We don't use nominal GDP growth, we use real GDP growth. Why should investments, one of the main contributors to growth, be in nominal terms? Prices of investment goods move differently than prices of GDP. Hence, using the share of nominal investments to GDP, while infinitely better than using investment approvals (honestly, I don't know what good that data is good for) is still not as kosher as using the share of real investments in real GDP. The peak of this series was 35.6 per cent in the growth boom year of 2007-08. In 2013-14, the year before the installation of the Modi government (what the government inherited) the real investment to real GDP ratio was 31.1 per cent; in 2017-18, the real ratio was 30 basis points higher at 31.4 per cent of GDP. And only 400 basis points away from the all-time peak, not 1,100 basis points away as indicated by nominal investment/GDP ratio. Thus, a very different picture is painted by real investment rather than the flawed nominal share of investments. Yet it is the nominal investment share that is being used to show that GDP growth cannot be 7 per cent plus as stated by the CSO, but is likely to be lower; and that unemployment rate is, naturally, zooming up.

Over the next few weeks, several other misuse data flaws will be pointed out. And hopefully, the government would have released the PLFS employment-unemployment data for 2017-18.

The writer is contributing editor, The Indian Express and consultant, Network 18. Views are personal

The looming threat

Many Pakistanis believe that return of Taliban to Afghanistan will hurt the country

India should read what three high commissioners of Pakistan to India thought of Pakistan's India policy in the Institute of Regional Studies Islamabad publication *Indian Grand Strategy: Machiavellian or Kautilyan?* Riaz Khokhar's (1992-1997) advice: "There is a need for us to put a dampener on our proactivity about Kashmir, because our moment of action would inevitably come at some point in time. We should maintain our cool in the present crisis as the basis of reciprocity. We should not activate the LoC and should restrict our rhetoric internally." Ashraf Jahangir Qazi (1997-2002) says: "We need to resolve the relatively easily resolvable disputes with India and move towards normal trading relations with it for the economic prosperity of our country and well-being of our people. Pakistan's response will have to be much more calculated than it has been in the past." Aziz Ahmed Khan (2003-2006) posted the following insights: "from being a foolish person, Prime Minister Modi of India is a very accomplished politician and administrator. He places a lot of emphasis on efficiency of bureaucracy. When he was Chief Minister in Gujarat he used to rely more on a coterie of efficient bureaucrats rather than his ministers. We should focus inwards... Pakistan will have to take stronger action against the likes of Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi and Hafiz Saeed."

pedal the issue till after the election. India's presence in Afghanistan can be beneficial for the region if it normalises relations with Pakistan. A majority of foreign policy experts advise free trade and free movement of people under SAARC.

Most objective Pakistani observers think that the return of the Taliban in Afghanistan will endanger Pakistan because the new conflict between the bearded warriors and a "liberal" Afghanistan plus the non-Pashtuns of the north will spill over into Pakistan. The Pashtun of the tribal areas are alienated too after remaining backward for 70 years in a "tribal museum" under state policy, forcing them to migrate inland and to the Gulf states.

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The writer is consulting editor, Newsweek Pakistan

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"As the world's second largest economy and a rising power, China is apparently facing a growing challenge as to how to steer the ship of diplomacy."

—GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA

The road to a closure

Supreme Court's order asking for a panel to mediate the Ayodhya dispute could be the harbinger of a win-win situation for both sides



SANJAY HEGDE

AYODHYA LITERALLY MEANS a land without war. Ironically the Ayodhya dispute, over building a temple or reconstructing a mosque on a piece of land claimed by both sides, has caused many a violent act over the Subcontinent's length and breadth. From the violence during L.K Advani's Rath Yatra in 1989, to the riots in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh when the Babri Mosque was brought down in 1992, to the Bombay riots of 1993 and the Gujarat riots of 2002, the toll on human life and property has been colossal. And yet the problem seems to persist, with the matter meandering through the legal system. In 2010, the Allahabad High Court, decided the suits between the parties by partitioning the land into three portions.

The solution satisfied no one and all parties appealed to the Supreme Court. The judgment of the Allahabad High Court ran into a few thousand pages, but the exhibits and record ran into several thousand more. To tie down three or more judges of the Supreme Court, to hear an appeal for months together is not a feasible proposition, in a court with a high attrition rate among judges. It is against this backdrop that we must evaluate the recent Supreme Court order, asking a panel of mediators to mediate the dispute, within a period of eight weeks.

The mediators are men of eminence. The chairman, Justice F M I Kalifulla has served with distinction on the Supreme Court. Sriram Panchu is a senior advocate, who has pioneered mediation as an alternative dispute resolution mechanism in this country. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar has come a long way from his initial days with Mahesh Yogi. However, one possible criticism of the panel's composition is the lack of a woman on it. The panel has to hold sittings in Faizabad and submit a status report within four weeks and try to resolve the issue within eight weeks.

To the untrained mind, mediation is simply a judgeless negotiation. To many minds, the problem in Ayodhya cannot be negotiated. On the Hindu side, some feel that while representing the infant deity, Ram Lalla, they lack authority to abandon any claim on his behalf. On the Muslim side, there are those who say that the land on which the mosque stood was dedicated to Allah in perpetuity and no human can willfully sign away anything that is owned by

Allah almighty. Some of us refuse to believe that divinity is enhanced or diminished by a possessory title over a parcel of land. The country, however, is tired of a never-ending internal conflict, which no amount of goodwill appears to resolve.

This is where professional, active mediation comes in. Though Sreeram Panchu is the one with expertise as a mediator, it is hoped that the others on the panel allow a professional mediation process to play out. A trained mediator knows how to focus on interests and not on positions.

Human needs and emotions are at the heart of interests. Mediation in this case needs to identify, express and discuss those needs and emotions which lie at the heart of the dispute. The Hindu side needs an acknowledgment that India is a state with a Hindu majority, whose religious hurt needs redressal. The Muslim side needs reassurance that they live as equal citizens of India, with constitutional guarantees of protection of their lives, property and places of worship. Both sides need a win-win situation where they can step away from conflict, without a loss of face. A focus on facilitating honest, heart-to-heart dialogue, instead of focusing on mediating a settlement, may yet yield results. Settlements often emerge without struggle, when underlying emotions are assuaged.

Nearly 25 years ago, the Supreme Court hearing the previous round of the Ayodhya case wrote: "The hearing left us wondering why the dispute cannot be resolved in the same manner and in the same spirit in which the matter was argued, particularly when some of the participants are common and are in a position to negotiate and resolve the dispute. We do hope this hearing has been commencement of that process which will ensure an amicable resolution of the dispute and it will not end with the hearing of this matter. This is a matter suited essentially to resolution by negotiations which does not end in a winner and a loser while adjudication leads to that end. It is in the national interest that there is no loser at the end of the process adopted for resolution of the dispute so that the final outcome does not leave behind any rancour in anyone. This can be achieved by a negotiated solution on the basis of which a decree can be obtained in terms of such solution in these suits. Unless a solution is found which leaves everyone happy, that cannot be the beginning for continued harmony between 'we the people of India'."

Professional mediation on this dispute is, perhaps an idea, whose time has come around at long last. Here's hoping for resolution devoutly to be prayed for.

The writer is a senior advocate in the Supreme Court

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SCIENCE AND MEDIA

THIS REFERS TO the article "The lab-newsroom disconnect" (IE, March 8). The writer underlines the need for science and evidence to drive policy. To bring science out of the confines of the laboratory and take it to people in an engaging manner, media and the science fraternity need to interact. At present, both are working in silos. There is a need to create an understanding that science is not just about complicated derivations and diagrams. It is intertwined with human life.

Rishi Kaushik, Jamshedpur

NEW COALITIONS

THIS REFERS TO the article 'A means of re-invention' (IE March, 08). It is easier said than done to re-invent the coalition. The past is the proof. The different coalitions, formed just before or after elections, were short-lived. The reason being the ambitions, whims and egos of various stalwarts among them. And so it is now.

R C Goyal, Ambala Cantt

THIS REFERS TO the article 'A means of re-invention' (IE March, 08). It was inevitable that both the prime minister and the ruling party would run away with the nationalist agenda, post the Balakot strike. In an election year, if you give your opponent an inch, it will take a metre. But having said that, in Indian politics even a fortnight is a long period, so all isn't lost yet for the Opposition: They need to come out with a clear alternative narrative for the larger interests of the country.

Bal Govind, Noida

TESTING PAK

THIS REFERS TO the editorial 'The UN test' (IE, March 8). For Pakistan, it's not

LETTER OF THE WEEK

WAR AND PEACE

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'As we celebrate the brave' (IE, March 5). Those who celebrate war, never participate in it and those who participate in it, never celebrate it. It is heartening that Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman is back home but those who speak of war should be told to go and fight it. Courage consists not in blindly overlooking danger but in seeing and conquering it.

Tarsem Bumrah, via email

a new thing that the UN is considering another of their "props" an international terrorist. After the UN declared Hafiz Saeed a terrorist, it was business as usual. To give Pakistan a rap on the knuckles, India must inflict upon them financial blows. India must send a strong message to China as well for scuttling any UN drive this time, because they have much more financial wherewithal with India than with Pakistan.

Ashok Goswami, Mumbai

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'The UN test' (IE, March 8). The Pakistan army's denial of the Pulwama attack suggests that it will, once again, try to use the China card to veto any move to get JeM chief Masood Azhar listed as a global terrorist under UN's 1267 resolution. Both the JeM and LeT help China by keeping India destabilised. China's sphinx-like silence till date indicates that it is in no mood to change its stance.

SS Paul, Nadia

Opinion

SATURDAY, MARCH 9, 2019

Towards a sustainable cure for HIV/AIDS

We now have the second case of an individual showing no traces of the virus after stem cell treatment

THE WORLD IS inching closer towards a breakthrough on HIV/AIDS—no trace of the virus replicating was detected in a HIV+ person (identity not disclosed) who received a stem cell transplant that replaced her/his white blood cells with HIV-resistant variants. This is the second time such a line of treatment has thrown up results that fuel optimism in the search for a cure for HIV. The first time was in 2008, when Timothy Ray Brown (who disclosed his identity in 2010) was reported to show no trace of HIV replication in his body following a stem cell transplant. Both Brown and the person in the present instance were suffering from cancer that did not respond to chemotherapy. In both cases, a bone marrow transplant—marrow is where haematopoietic stem cells that can differentiate into any kind of blood cells (RBCs, WBCs, platelets) are formed—was the only cure; this involved killing off the recipient's own marrow and blood cells, which would then be replaced by the donor's. In the present instance, a team of doctors/medical researchers, led by Ravindra Gupta, an infectious disease physician at the University of Cambridge, selected a donor who had a homozygous (trait inherited from both maternal and paternal gene) mutation in the CCR5 gene that makes people resistant to HIV, instead of choosing any suitable donor. This was also done in Brown's case. The CCR5 gene codes for a receptor protein on the surface of WBCs to which HIV binds and attacks the cells. A deletion in the gene interferes with receptors' functioning and prevents HIV binding. While Brown has shown no trace of the virus so far after stopping anti-retroviral drugs—the mainstay of HIV/AIDS management—the new subject stopped her/his anti-retroviral treatment 18 months earlier (16 months after the transplant) and is still HIV-free. *Nature* reports that 1% of people of European descent exhibit a homozygous anti-HIV CCR5 mutation, and are thus resistant to HIV.

While Gupta and others are choosing to be cautious about declaring the patient cured, the latest case shows that Brown's successful treatment can be replicated. Between Brown's treatment and the second case, many aspects of the entire course of treatment have become less aggressive and, therefore, more patient-friendly. There are, of course, some factors to consider before this can be celebrated as the HIV-cure the world has been waiting for. First, this line of treatment is prescribed for certain cancers, and not for HIV or any other related complications—which means, considering the risks of fatal complications in the procedure, it may not be ethical to advise this to get rid of HIV. The costs attached are another hurdle—while governments have focused on anti-retrovirals as the main weapon in public health's anti-HIV/AIDS arsenal, and have managed to keep the costs low, until the CCR5 treatment line becomes more driven by market than research, costs of stem cell therapy to fight HIV/AIDS are unlikely to fall.

Against the backdrop of Chinese researcher He Jiankui's violation of gene-editing ethics involving the CCR5 mutation, the world must still navigate regulatory grey areas. However, given Sustainable Development Goal 3.3 calls for fighting, amongst other diseases, HIV/AIDS, the latest development is a seminal one. It lays the path for further research and policy deliberations. How important this is can be gleaned from the fact that, as per UNAIDS, of the 36.9 million worldwide living with HIV/AIDS in 2017, only 21.7 million were able to access anti-retroviral therapy and 1.8 million had been newly infected (infection detected that year). India, in 2016, reported 80,000 new infections amongst a population of 2.1 billion living with HIV/AIDS—of the overall figure, just under half were accessing anti-retroviral therapy.

Need to discipline the states

Perhaps RBI shouldn't backstop loans beyond the FRBM limits

IT IS CLEAR now that the finances of both the Centre and the states are quite stretched. The Centre had surpassed its fiscal deficit target for 2018-19 at the end of January, while the aggregate fiscal deficit of 19 states had touched 62.5% of the budget estimate in the nine months to December 2018. The consolidated fiscal deficit is close to 6.5% of GDP and, if one includes the large off-balance-sheet borrowings that the Centre has resorted to—of close to ₹2 lakh crore—this would be closer to 8.5% of GDP. The primary reason for the high deficits is the shortfall in tax collections and, in a couple of years, the shortfall from non-tax receipts, whether from disinvestment or telecom.

Should tax collections be buoyant from here on, a distinct possibility given that the GST has helped formalise the economy, and that the economy should start looking up post the elections, both the states and the Centre can continue to help boost growth with capex spends. However, if tax revenues aren't in line with estimates, they will need to cut back on expenditure, and the axe will fall on capex. That is a big concern at a time when the economy is slowing down. Perhaps those states that have seriously mismanaged their finances—like Bihar, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh—need to be taken to task? Right now, with an RBI backstop for all states, markets don't really distinguish between state government bonds and even the profligate borrow at rates similar to the more disciplined states. While RBI can't possibly not guarantee state borrowings in a federal structure, one possibility is that RBI guarantees be limited to state loans that fall within the FRBM limit; at least some element of market-pricing will then be introduced.

The Centre's elevated extra-budgetary borrowings have already spooked the market; the benchmark yield remains elevated despite open market operations and the premium between the repo rate and the yield on the 10-year benchmark is near historical highs, as are the spreads between the benchmark and corporate bonds. To be sure, there is no guaranteeing that the private sector will start investing once interest rates are lower; in fact, it is highly unlikely given how leveraged promoters are. However, an entire universe of companies will benefit since their interest costs will fall. One could argue that, in some senses, the spends by the government are helping the economy; capex by the states, for instance, has increased by a healthy 23% year-on-year in 2018-19 so far, aided by a very favourable base. But loan waivers, while they do put more money in the pockets of consumers, are detrimental to the system. These need to be stopped. In the last two years, the finances of the states—in aggregate terms—have taken a turn for the worse and some remedial measures are needed.

Incentivising Research

Govt focuses on making science more accessible to people, but to become an R&D giant, India needs to do much more

BETWEEN 2003 AND 2016, India's article count in Scopus, the world's largest catalogue of abstracts and citations, increased from 27,000 to 110,000. Over that period, China's went up from 87,000 to 426,000, a meteoric rise that helped it dislodge the US as the largest single-country producer of science and engineering research. India's research output jump is no small feat, viewed against chronic problems of higher education. However, for better output and impact, India must not only fix these problems at the earliest, but also drastically increase R&D expenditure as well as reform policy in key research areas. In an effort to do this, the Principal Scientific Adviser to the government of India, KVijay Raghavan, shared details of nine new science and technology missions that aim to promote research for the benefit of the society. The nine national missions include 'Natural Language Translation', 'Artificial Intelligence', 'National Biodiversity Mission', and 'Waste to Wealth'.

The net impact of these measures would be to make the usually academically complex discipline of science accessible to the masses by overcoming the language barrier and disseminating research and findings in the vernacular tongues—thereby providing teaching and learning material to teachers and students. There will also be focus on sustainable and ecological management and development of biodiversity- and development-related issues, with the same ensuring the sustainable soundness of science. Efforts will also be geared towards the development and use of artificial intelligence, quantum computing, connected mobility solutions and other technologies to address frontier scientific questions. These reforms are not enough though, and emulating China will require a lot more to be done, namely higher education reforms in the form of provision of autonomy to these institutes of eminence and sectoral reforms like the safeguarding of patented research output, amongst others. Till then, this is a good start.

THERE IS A CHANGE IN THE USE OF ECONOMIC DATA SINCE THE 2014 ELECTION. UNLIKE BEFORE, MISUSE OF ECONOMIC DATA APPEARS TO BE POLITICALLY MOTIVATED

Misuse of economic data

● NO PROOF REQUIRED

HAVE OFTEN wondered as to how much the debate in India would have been different if the Congress had not lost the 2014 election so overwhelmingly. A decline of 162 seats from 206 to 44 was the second largest in Indian history. The largest Congress defeat was a decline of 218 seats in 1989, after an assassination boosted 1984 victory; and 2014 is tied with the Emergency decline of 163 seats.

But 2014 was especially devastating—it reduced the Congress to 11 seats short of even being called a major opposition party! The "intended consequence" of this defeat? All data began to be questioned. It was as early as January 2015, less than eight months after the installation of the new regime, when the revised GDP data were released. Senior and seasoned commentators and experts began to question the "rightness" of the data.

They began to question the downgrading of GDP growth for the last three years of the UPA-2 regime i.e., that in real terms, GDP growth for the UPA years was lowered by a cumulative 2 percentage points (ppts). That is 0.7 ppts a year. Greater than this magnitude of error has been serially (continuously) committed by experts at RBI/MPC in their three-month ahead inflation forecasts (*bit.ly/2EIQqMj*). As is well known, there is an inverse one-to-one correspondence between real growth and inflation estimates. So, the error being questioned by the CSO is of a lower order of magnitude than that by the experts at RBI (which, incidentally, also questioned the GDP growth data when they were first released!)

Forgotten in the din of complaints was the fact that nominal GDP was equal in the revised and old estimates for 2012-13!! That double exclamation mark is not a typo and is meant to doubly emphasise—hope the editors don't take it out. But the complaints continued. Such complaints are age-old and justified. It is not data quality that I want to discuss today, but rather the deliberate misuse of data. Let me repeat: deliberate, means knowingly, and misuse means not for good purpose! As some readers may have noted, my column is titled *No Proof Required*,

and has been titled as such for more than a decade, and for good reason. Indian "experts" are generally experts at half-baked ideologies, rather than seeking "truth".

I am not being presumptuous but the purpose is to at least strive to seek the truth, even though truth itself might be elusive. So, what is new or different about the debate over the last few years? The fact that the discussion about the quality of data has become openly *political*, i.e., it is being deliberately misused by experts. The politicians always misuse—wouldn't expect any different and quite honestly, it is part of their job. But what is new is that so-called experts are readily loaning their misuse "analysis" to the politicians. This is disturbing.

It is my tentative hypothesis—and one is free to criticise or agree—that this misuse is related to the magnitude of the Congress defeat in 2014. What I want to pose is the following counterfactual. As economists know, they only think in counterfactuals. Think what the debate on data would have been if the Congress had won 140-ish seats in 2014, as they did in 1996, 1998, and 2004. Indeed, in five elections, 1996-2009, the Congress averaged 149 seats; the BJP average during these five elections—156 seats. Hence, 2014 was a deep structural break from the past—a gap of 238 seats between 282 for BJP and 44 for INC. Average absolute gap between the two parties in the eight elections between 1989-2014—86 seats.

Think about it—the Congress is the oldest, and most successful political party in India. Founded almost 150 years ago, it was the lead party in the battle for independence, and had

ruled India for all but 12 years at the time of its ignominious humiliation in 2014. And that too at the hands of a *chaitwallah*. Such an abrupt end would break most mortals, forms, and organisations, but the Congress is obviously made of sterner stuff (I am just being truthful).

It decided to fight back by employing the tactic of discrediting the Modi government on any issue, even before the issue had arisen. Political questioning of the GDP data in early 2015 was just the opening salvo. At the outset, let me emphasise that there is only one rule for political opposition to do worldwide—embarrass the ruling party. Unfortunately, for the BJP, it has not understood, or mishandled, the optics on several of these "embarrassments".

Latest opinion polls show that the number one concern of the youth is jobs. And well it might be; if the government were to release the latest NSSO data, we would be wiser. At the present, we have to infer that there are too few jobs in the economy, as we must because the unemployment rate, according to the leaked NSSO report, has shot up to a 45-year high of 6.1%. This must be "true" because it is also supported by the data put out by Mahesh Vyas of the CMIE. His data now shows that the unemployment rate is now a high and higher 7.2%. As Mohandas Pai documents (*bit.ly/2UpBFEE*), Mahesh Vyas, CEO of CMIE and author of its reports/articles on employment, links the decline in GDP growth to decline in investment proposals, and this decline to an increase in unemployment. The circle is complete. Logical? Not really.

There are so many flaws in the cir-

A very different picture is painted by real investments rather than the nominal share of investments

There are so many flaws in the cir-

There are so many flaws in the cir-

PE has trillions. Women get little

Shaded questions and hostility come despite the fact that gender-balanced leadership show a 25% greater increase in valuations compared with those that have imbalanced teams

ANJANI TRIVEDI

Bloomberg

THE PRIVATE EQUITY and venture capital industries have piled up trillions of dollars in assets, yet little finds its way to female-led businesses.

The dry powder from both sectors has hit record levels—with around \$3 trillion in global assets under management. In emerging markets, just 7% of private equity and venture capital is invested in portfolio companies run by women, according to an International Finance Corporation (IFC) study on gender balance released Thursday.

Equally distressing, the median woman-led business received only 65% of the funding secured by the male-led one. That is largely because more women get backing for their start-ups early, at the accelerator and incubator stages, when funding sizes are small compared with later rounds.

There are plenty of headlines and statistics about the lack of women at the top of Fortune 500 companies, on Wall Street and on boards. But the IFC's report brings to light a deeper problem: investors' subconscious biases.

Anecdotal, female start-up founders have disguised early pregnancies and taken off wedding bands when they go into fundraising meetings. Investors hesitate when they see women with competing priorities, or so the thinking goes. During due diligence, women founders are asked about risk management and the potential for losses; their male counterparts are asked about their lofty visions,

growth and expansion.

These shaded questions come despite the fact that gender-balanced teams and businesses have proven they can deliver, says Heather Kipnis, one of the report's authors. Companies with balanced leadership show a 25% greater increase in valuations compared with those that have imbalanced teams. Such firms also outperformed peers, increasing their valuation by 5.5 percentage points per year.

With funding restricted, a big drop in female leadership usually follows, Kipnis notes. Almost a third of businesses with female CEOs eventually switched to a man at the top, while only 2% of male-led businesses changed to a woman.

Another problem is that male investors often undervalue women-led businesses catering to female interests because they may not appreciate the nuances of such sectors. That can affect subsequent funding rounds. Stitch Fix Inc., an online service that curates clothing and brings it to customers' doorsteps, is one such example. By sheer grit, the founder built a company that now brings in more than \$1 billion of revenue and actually turns a profit, an anomaly in Silicon Valley. Unfortunately, such perseverance and confidence is uncommon among female founders.

Meanwhile, the top ranks of private equity are male-heavy, with just 11% female representation. That is about 17

percentage points lower than their businesses.

Men and women have widely diverging views on why that is the case. Most men attribute it to factors such as female interest in the field or a limited talent pool; women think it has more to do with internal issues at companies, including retention, recruiting and hiring biases. Research suggests it is firm-level issues that exacerbate the differences. Ultimately, this creates a self-reinforcing cycle.

So how do we break it? Taking ownership of the issue; making senior leaders accountable; and training managers on subconscious biases—as Kipnis says, "You don't know what you don't know". It is also important to collect data to know where you stand and ensure policies are in place to promote retention before and after family leave. More effort should be made to bring women into deeply entrenched and hard-to-break networks of male executives.

Several general partners at private equity firms say these are amongst their priorities, but only 3% have strategies to alter the equation. That has a trickle-down effect on portfolio companies.

Little steps can go a long way, so it may be worth putting a few extra million dollars to work—and getting a valuation bump while you're at it.

This column does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the editorial board or Bloomberg LP and its owners.

● STRIVING FOR EQUALITY

Rahul Gandhi, president of Congress

While saluting the undaunted, fighting spirit of women, I would also like us to recommit ourselves to breaking the barriers that continue to hinder their path to freedom & equality. In doing so, a better, brighter, braver world awaits us

cle that it looks more like a zigzag convoluted Z. First, GDP growth is not a function of approvals but rather of actual investment. Second, GDP growth is not a function of nominal investments but real investments. In 2013-2014, the year just preceding the UPA defeat, nominal investment was 31.3% of nominal GDP. The highest ever for this ratio was 39.6% in 2011-12. The latest data for 2017-2018 shows that this share has declined to 28.6%—a 11 ppt decline from the peak and providing fuel to the Congress fire that investment, and growth, and jobs, are way below the 2011-12 levels.

However, unlike politicians and armchair economists, economists like to use data on real investments i.e., adjusted for inflation. We don't use nominal GDP growth, we use real GDP growth. Why should investments, one of the main contributors to growth, be in nominal terms? Prices of investment goods move differently than prices of GDP. Hence, using the share of nominal investments to GDP, while infinitely better than using investment approvals (honestly, I don't know what good is that data good for), is still not as kosher as using the share of real investments in real GDP. The peak of this series was 35.6% in the growth boom year of 2007-08.

In 2013-14, the year before installation of the Modi government (what the government inherited), the real investment to real GDP ratio was 31.1%; in 2017-18, the real ratio was 30 basis points higher at 31.4% of GDP. And only 400 basis points away from the all-time peak, not 1100 basis points away as indicated by nominal investment/GDP ratio. Thus, a very different picture is painted by real investment rather than the flawed nominal share of investments—yet it is nominal investment share that is being used to show that GDP growth cannot be 7% as stated by the CSO, but is likely to be lower; and that unemployment rate is, naturally, zooming up.

Over the next few weeks, several other data flaws will be pointed out. And, hopefully, the government would have released the PLFS employment-unemployment data for 2017-18.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Death stalks the valley

Death continued to stalk the valley with one teenager killed and 32 others injured in a grenade attack by a Hizbul Mujahideen operative in the heart of Jammu. This is the third grenade attack by terrorists on the Jammu bus stand since last May and comes just three weeks after the Pulwama suicide bomb attack that killed 40 CRPF jawans. The authorities would do well to beef up security at all crowded places and also ensure that the state machinery is on its toes — Ravi Chander, Bengaluru

Scrap OSA

The Official Secrets Act (OSA) in its current form, much of which is against the spirit of the Right to Information (RTI), has become obsolete. It has to go in tune with the times. A law that allows the government or the political executive to keep information which it may have reason to regard as 'sensitive' away from the public does not quite fit in with the true inclusiveness spirit of democracy. To put it plainly, 'national security' cannot be invoked as a pretext for keeping a lid on bribery and corruption. The fact that the Supreme Court has deemed it appropriate and necessary to reopen the Rafale case and review its earlier judgment leaves it that much more difficult for BJP to claim a 'clean chit' with any degree of finality. The threat of proceeding against a newspaper for empowering the citizenry with information is not worthy of a democratic government — G David Milton, Maruthancode

● Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com

Fiscal Yin, monetary Yang



MARGINAL UTILITY

TCA SRINIVASA RAGHAVAN

Earlier this week I wrote an article saying the next government's biggest problem is going to be money. In that context, here's a question that India's economists need to answer: How is it that in an era of utter fiscal dominance, India has more monetary policy experts than fiscal policy ones? Why has public finance been relegated to the backbench?

One answer, of course, is that monetary policy is more "sexy". Another is that a really thorough analysis of public finances of the Indian union, of the sort the Finance Commissions do, requires more work. A third is that our US-trained economists follow the American intellectual fashion, which is obsessed with the bond markets.

These explanations are not mutually exclusive. But their effect is the same — a paucity of public finance experts, especially theorists.

The result is that our economists have no answer — beyond the usual off-the-shelf ones — to a question that has haunted all democratic countries after 1945: How will governments meet their ever-increasing expenditures?

I have trawled through a lot of what has been published on Indian public finances. Amongst the star Indian economists, Partho Shome tried his hardest and best.

But in the end even he wasn't able to square the politics-economics circle. His analysis is technically perfect but doesn't factor in either politics or politicians or voters. It is like Wall Street without the bond market, or making sambhar without tamarind.

The National Institute of Public Finance and Policy does a lot of trends research. But it yields little by way of new and practicable ideas and the analysis is mostly lacking in any theoretical background and often no more than a description of the tables.

The Reserve Bank of India also makes an attempt. But it doesn't have an A-team for public finance. Understandably its focus is on the impact of fiscal policy on monetary policy.

The 14th Finance Commission did try to push the envelope a little. But it was constrained by the orthodoxy of its staff. So it stuck to the reduction of subsidies, salaries, pensions and interest payments format.

But howsoever desirable, this isn't going to happen. Instead we will see the opposite in the coming years.

Much of the rest of the meagre literature comprises mind-numbing analysis of revenue and expenditure trends. It gets us no closer to a practical solution.

In sum, at least in my not-so-humble opinion, all the analyses establish just one thing: We simply have no idea what we are going to do in the next decade and more. An era of fiscal pessimism is setting in, which, if not countered intellectually, is going to have the same effect as export pessimism has had.

We may simply end up letting the government forage for revenue as best as it can.

Yin and Yang

Fiscal policy serves voters while monetary policy serves the bond markets. The overlap is minuscule.

Monetary policy attempts to rein in governments so that the bond markets can bloom, at the cost of the voter. Fiscal policy seeks to do the opposite, which is why, in spite of all the exhortations, a long-term bond market refuses to be born in India.

I believe that the game has been set up wrongly so that the emphasis is on the zero-sum, non-cooperative aspects of it. Economists now need to devise a new, cooperative model in which the complementary aspects of Yin and Yang two are emphasised.

The first move in this direction has to be a purely intellectual one, in the way Keynes' was. He proposed a specific solution to a specific problem but dressed it in theory's plumage.

But it also contained the seeds of the current zero-sum problem. That is why, after 1945, politicians the world over generalised it so easily.

But alas the clock cannot be turned back very easily now. It is impossible to revert to a pre-1945, non-interventionist state.

The irony is that India had pretty much solved the problem as far back as 1955 when B K Nehru persuaded C D Deshmukh's RBI to give the government weekly overdrafts via the much-reviled ad hoc treasury bills. This system worked perfectly well till Rajiv Gandhi misread L K Jha's prescription for higher budget deficits and made a massive fiscal mess, which led to the crisis of 1991, which led to the abolition of the ad hoc.

It was, in my view, a self-goal. Now the time has come either to revive them in some limited way or to replace them with an equivalent. The first step in this direction has to be a new theory.

Conversations with friends

If the mood in the BJP before Pulwama was not particularly cheerful, now party leaders say all losses have been offset



PLAIN POLITICS

ADITI PHADNIS

A chance meeting with a friend in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led to valuable insights into what the party is thinking and how it is preparing for the election now that the war with Pakistan has been won and is (more or less) over, notwithstanding Prime Minister Narendra Modi's assertion that "ek ek ko maroonga; ghar mein ghus ke maroonga" a la George Bush ("we'll smoke them out").

The mood in the BJP before Pulwama was not particularly cheerful. The party had lost

assembly elections and more important, incumbent governments. True, the Congress victory was wafer thin (except in Chhattisgarh), but two governments had just slipped away from BJP hands. At several fora, including in Parliament lobbies, junior ministers were spotted muttering: "haareng, haareng" (we're going to lose) and even trusted alliance partners could be heard mocking the idea of a 'new' India outlined in the government-scripted President's address.

Worse, an internal survey by a section of the BJP had thrown up extremely dismaying conclusions: The BJP would get around 164 seats out of 545, the Congress would end up at around 120 and the party would face an existential crisis. The calculation was that the BJP would have to compromise by going easy on Jaganmohan Reddy of the YSR Congress, Naveen Patnaik of the Biju Janata Dal (offering a Padma Shri to his sister Gita Mehta was part of that plan; she turned it down) and K Chandrashekar Rao of the Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS). Around 45 seats netted from the eventual support of these regional parties would come to the BJP's aid. Overall, it wasn't looking too good.

In moments of candour, Modi is said to

have told colleagues: "Mujhe ishwareya varda milta hua hai" (I am blessed by His grace). The fact that Pulwama happened was one such divine intervention, party leaders say. Now, they say, the situation has been completely reversed. The country believes it is in safe hands, losses and deaths have been avenged and if necessary, India can do it again.

Armed with this discourse, vastly relieved party workers are glossing over what are clear and structural weaknesses: The party's loss of credibility in Delhi (seven Lok Sabha seats) for instance or its inability to expand the party's appeal in both Andhra Pradesh and Telangana (42 seats together). In the Telangana assembly election, for instance, the BJP's strength came down from five seats to one. In compromising with Naveen Patnaik, it would have had to put the brakes on its own growth in Odisha, a state which it believes is ripe for the picking. It would have done so, but in bad grace.

Now, all that has changed. With serene confidence, leaders say all losses have been offset. "I can't put a figure to the seats BJP will get because I don't know where the number will stop", stated one, matter of fact, without a trace of bravado.

So, if the BJP is so sure it is return to pow-

LUNCH WITH BS ► PARESH MAITY | ARTIST

Tamluk to T-3

Maity tells Pavan Lall that his journey from small town Bengal to the homes of the rich and famous took a regimen that included painting something every single day of his life

It was actually *samosas*," artist Paresch Maity tells me in a soft, Bengali-accented tone, recalling his motivation to attend a sit-and-draw painting contest at a local municipal hall when he was still in seventh grade at Hamilton High School. It wasn't cash or honours, it was the free snacks that got the attention of a hungry boy. But the thing was, he had competition. Because 199 other students also threw their hats in the ring and when their work went on display, Maity flatly says, he was shocked. "My painting was the worst of them all." He became a laughing stock among friends. "It was a turning point, and I decided I would be the best when I paint the next time," he says. Between then and college, he ran away from home, went to Delhi for a couple months, hit the hippie trail, lived with craftsmen on what was almost skid row before returning to Kolkata.

Later, he went on to study art at the Government College of Art & Craft in Kolkata honing his skills on what he had seen during his childhood: serene rivers, lush green fields, boatmen and skies set ablaze with the sun and its reflection. Forty years later, Maity is one of the best-known modern artists nationwide with works featured across most major landmarks and part of the collections of the rich and famous.

We've settled in at Thai Pavilion, Taj Vivanta, a downtown favourite among lawyers, corporates and everyone who lives in south Mumbai, to find out how that journey progressed.

Maity, a shy, spectacled middle-aged man, is wearing a beret, electric blue pants and a navy jacket. Over his T-shirt he's draped a signature silver necklace, a crudely fashioned medallion with a lion engraved on it, picked up off the street. As one of six children of a government clerk, Maity neither

had a parental role model nor inspiration for his chosen vocation. On the contrary, it was rebellion against a paternal push to become an engineer or a doctor that led him to flee home to follow his heart — to create images nurtured while watching idol-makers in Tamluk at work during festive seasons.

Our waiter arrives and we pick vegetarian pad Thai noodles along with stir fried Thai vegetables and a red Thai chicken curry that Maity selects after quizzing the waiter on whether it's more fiery than the green version. He is told green is spicier. At weddings he is asked to pose for selfies and in Kolkata, real estate companies feature billboards and hoardings with him. Does Maity, whose father wouldn't let him step out of the house after 5 pm, ever wonder how he made the leap to fame and fortune?

The truth is, Maity says, he doesn't think about it but that the early years were so harsh he can't escape their influence. He actually forged his father's signature to fill out an admission form to go to art college, and when he was accepted he travelled some 200 km every day to the campus and back. "Eight hours on the road every day was like living theatre, and in six years, I was never absent for a single day." When in college often ate *jhaal moori* or puffed rice with condiments for lunch.

While his prowess as a water colourist speaks for itself, some events fell in place to catapult him to fame. The first one was before solo auctions, when he stayed as a paying guest (for ₹800 a month) in the corridor of a Parsi home belonging to two sisters in Kolkata's Bow Bazaar area. He learned discipline as well as speaking a little Parsi and became friends with journalist CR Irani, who later became editor of *The Statesman* and would also camp there from time to time. In 1982 he sold three water colours — 20 inches

by 30 inches — to a gallery opposite the Park Hotel in Kolkata for ₹75 each. Then in the late 80's, journalist Pritish Nandy did a cover story for the *Illustrated Weekly*, which featured him sitting on a boat in a river. "That did a lot for me and the whole art scene," Maity says.

After that, Tina Ambani's Harmony Art Foundation which created a platform for artists and organised exhibitions frequently also gave Maity a platform that allowed him to showcase his works before an audience with deep pockets. Today, Maity's water colours, 20 inches by 30 inches, go for ₹7-8 lakh each.

He's even displayed at public landmarks: an 800-foot painting at the T-3 terminal at New Delhi Airport, a nine-foot water colour at St. Regis Hotel in Mumbai, another at the Taj Santa Cruz, more in Cecil hotel in Simla, the Oberoi Hotel in Bengaluru, the Oberoi Raj Vilas in Jaipur, and several more across the Leela hotels in Chennai, New Delhi and Bengaluru. Visit any prominent business leader's home and there's a Maity on display. In part that's because his work is easy to find. The second is that his themes are safe, generally understood by most, which means it's easier to appreciate.

The perception then would be that Maity is also an unabashed marketing machine. "I'm no fancy showman. In fact, I'm happy sitting on the floor and eating, and am very conscious that I am from a very poor and underprivileged background, and I am okay to be that way until the end," he says. He's not lying. He had no electricity at home till he was 19. Which is why the kerosene lantern features in so many of his works. "I owned one pair of trousers, and would wash them when I returned at night and dried them and wore them again the next morning." Be that as it may, Maity knows

er, what are the changes we should expect to see?

The answers were interesting. If in the last round of government formation it was Finance Minister Arun Jaitley's influence that was palpable and visible, this time, it will be Amit Shah whose voice will count the most in deciding who should be minister. "Some ministers who are judged to have performed well will be repeated. You will most certainly find Piyush Goyal in the government. But there will be a large number of new faces — people you haven't even heard of", my friend said. The model will be the appointments in Haryana and Maharashtra: M L Khattar hadn't ever been an MLA and he was made chief minister of Haryana; and Devendra Fadnavis was not the first name that came to mind in BJP politics in Maharashtra but he was given the top job in the state. In other words, people who will take a long, long time to become political stalwarts (and threats).

What about existing political stalwarts? Party President Amit Shah might find himself in government and two names are being considered as his replacement: Roads minister Nitin Gadkari; and former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan. My friend was quick to introduce the inevitable caveat: that in this regime, barring two people, nobody really knows anything.

But what about the problems India was facing: farm distress, lack of jobs, artificial and uneven growth? His response was an evocative gesture. He shrugged.

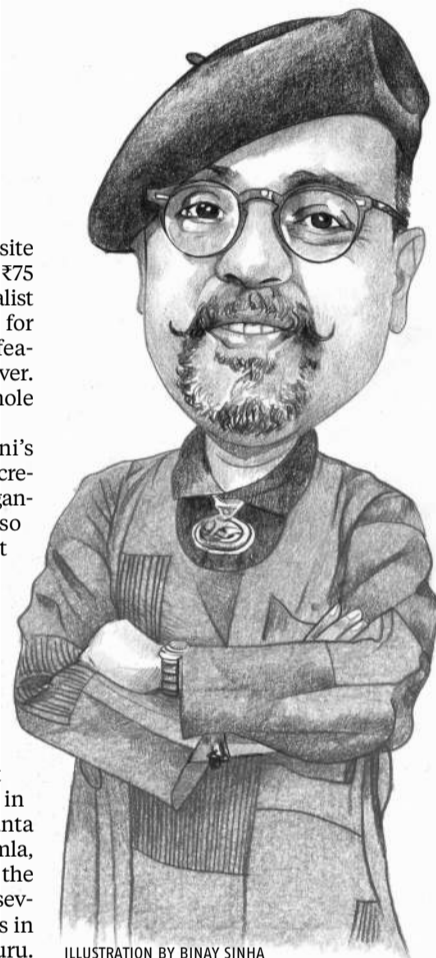


ILLUSTRATION BY BINAY SINHA

Indian Art Gallery in Mumbai.

Some critics say Maity's work is limited to two broad styles that range between tranquil but lavish landscapes and cubist images of men and women almost always in opulent reds, yellows and blues, and is devoid of other styles that include, pointillism, impressionism, or figures. "To that Maity says his style "is what it is". By his own admission, his major influences have been the colours of Rajasthan, Picasso's cubism, and English painters JMW Turner and John Constable's landscapes. He acknowledges his Indian brethren referring to the "deeply respected Paritosh Sen", and the "brilliant abstract minimalism of Jagdish Swaminathan". However, one may say he's still on his way to joining that hallowed trio of Indian art rock stars: MF Husain, VS Gaitonde and SH Raza. Of course, they're also all dead and Maity is still relatively young, with at least a decade or two of work still left in him. He's already toyed with different styles — work in monochrome, a rendition of Gandhi's Salt March and so on. Water colours are no easy medium either, there's no second chance with fixed areas if you go wrong, which is less true of oils or pastels. Even so, Maity tells me, he's looking at producing an entirely different collection.

Our plates are empty and we've both done justice to our meal. Is there room for dessert, a waiter asks. Maity says he would like to try the water chestnuts in coconut milk only if there is no sugar in it but it is premixed so we skip it.

In September last year he went to Gullin in southern China, where he spent a few weeks in the countryside, watching ducks in rivers and absorbing the "mystical quality of that part of the world". The works from that trip will be minimalist and it is clearly a leap he knows he has to make. As when Raza found expression in the cosmic Bindu, he simply stopped doing the expressionist landscapes that he had done for years. Or when Husain moved on from horses to other subjects. Like the exact moment a stock market shifts, it's not a time one can predict but knows when it's happening. Until then, Maity says, "I will remain unhappy inside because of a constant quest to create something I haven't been able to do yet". That may well be the driving force that has, and will keep him going.

Stragglers in Swachh Bharat



PEOPLE LIKE THEM

GEETANJALI KRISHNA

As we wait for the dates of the Lok Sabha election to be announced, it's increasingly becoming harder to separate fact from fiction; truth from exaggeration. Take the findings of the recently-out second edition of National Annual Rural Sanitation Survey (NARSS) 2018-19. It has found that 93.1 per cent of rural Indian households now have access to toilets — and 96.5 per cent of these are in constant use. My experiences in the field tell me otherwise: You can give a person a toilet, but getting him/her to use it is another matter. Which is why in the frenetic race to declare the entire country "open defecation-free", I find the stories of the stragglers and the false starters

instructive. For they tell us that instead of declaring the *Swachh Bharat Abhiyan* an unmitigated success, the focus should be on what more needs to be done.

In mid-February, I visited Barabanki near Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. None of the villagers I met who had toilets, used them regularly. This column had elaborated the reasons people gave for not using them — ranging from not wanting their septic tanks to fill up too fast (which was absurd as most toilets I saw were the twin-pit composting type) to enjoying the answering of nature's calls in the lap of nature.

A week later, a similar picture presented itself to me in Bhadrak, Odisha. Almost every household I visited had a toilet, or access to one. To say that none of them was being used at all would be incorrect. I met 27-year-old Sukumari Behera in Gobindpur village whose husband had built a toilet for her as a wedding gift. It had turned out to be, she said, a godsend, especially as local tradition dictates that young women should not step out of their houses for at least two years after marriage. Also, after years of the daily ignominy of walking one to two kilometers in the fields to defecate, the toilet transformed her life.

To say, however, that every member of every household who had a toilet, was

exclusively using that would be equally incorrect. Her neighbour septuagenarian Hemalata Behera had a toilet for three years — but had never used it. "I'm scared to use it as it is very dark," she said. It turned out that most toilets in the village had no electricity. Toddlers, I saw, rarely wore any lower garments here. "This way, little children can relieve themselves whenever they like, wherever they are," said Savitri Malahik, a mother. So other than young women who routinely used the toilet for reasons of modesty, or the elderly, who weren't able to walk far into the fields, I found most others rarely used toilets.

These field findings match the 2018 study by Research Institute for Compassionate Economics and Centre for Policy Research, which found that across rural Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, 23 per cent of people who have a toilet continue to defecate in the open.

Maybe we need better-designed and more conveniently located toilets. Maybe we need to ensure that at least all children learn to use toilets exclusively. Whatever we do, we can't keep building toilets all over the countryside without understanding why they're not being used.

When will Spring be over?



PEOPLE LIKE US

KISHORE SINGH

Delhi's brief flirtation with spring is underway. Pink frangipanis are in blossom, and gardens are a riotous spill of daisies, poppies, pansies and phlox, blooming under the watchful gaze of hollyhocks and sweet peas. Prize dahlias are brazening out their weight with the support of helpful sticks provided by vigilant gardeners. The chrysanthemums haven't yet withered away, while velvety coxcombs are holding their own amidst a blaze of hydrangeas. The flame-of-the-forest is basking in its unabashed glory on trees shorn of all leaves, flowering ahead of Holi. The air is lightly perfumed, the sun is out, the temperature is mild, recalling to mind

Nancy Sinatra's *Summer Wine*.

This is perfect all fresco weather, a brief month when the weather is ideal for sitting out amidst garden bowers with a glass of bubbly and something to nibble alongside. The few Delhi restaurants or cocktail lounges that have outdoor seating are making the most of it — and well they might, if those AWOL from offices are anything to go by. Absenteeism has shot up manifold because of mysterious illnesses that seem to ebb and flow by the day, coinciding with a spurt in the F&B business. Coincidence? Go figure.

If Delhi parties have shifted gear from late-night revels to afternoon soirees, this is the perfect time for leisurely days spent in the company of friends over lazy brunches that begin well past lunchtime and turn into sundowners before you know it. Most end with dinner — as early or as late as you choose to make it. It taxes the host to plan a menu that's suitable for any time of the day, or night — but given sufficient liquid inducements, even the most sophisticated Dilliwallah will settle for *anda-paratha* sans any snobbery. The rest is mere window dressing.

Gin is back — after decades — as the spirit most popular with the millennials. Served with a dash of tonic, a slice of cucumber, or any of several ingenious

ways devised by bar curators, it's replaced vodka, white rum and other spirits that commanded the cocktail circuit till some while ago. Robust looking men think little of nursing their G&Ts in full view, having improved its image from effeminate to swinging in just one short season. Punch is enjoying a rerun too. But don't waste your time on wine unless it's the best your money can buy. And chances are, as the sun begins its peekaboo beyond the horizon, someone will order a round of shots, and another, and another.

With the weather colouring one's mood, can love be far behind, even for the jaded? Public displays of affection — a Western malaise, surely? — are proving a tad embarrassing for observers (the observed are oblivious). The malls are full of people walking hand in hand. The shops are populated by people for no reason other than they are happy. Those fortunate to own sports cars have been spotted driving with their tops down (alas, the traffic is a killjoy). It would be better, of course, if all this romancing was not at someone else's expense. The driver's taken the day off, the cleaning lady appears distracted, the cook's mooning about on the terrace instead of laying food on the table, making me wish selfishly for spring to be done and dusted — so my life, at least, can return to normal.

Campaign silences

Earlier this week, Rahul Gandhi, accompanied by his mother and Manmohan Singh, met the ambassadors of the G20 countries over lunch. The ambassadors cannot be blamed for having expected a formal statement by Mr Gandhi on his approach to foreign policy. All they got was polite chitchat as the Congress president circulated from one table to the next. Waste of time, said one diplomat present. Missed opportunity, said another.

If, by general consent, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has regained lost ground since the Bharatiya Janata Party's poor showing in the state elections of November-December, one reason has to be the failure of the opposition to say what they stand for, even as Mr Modi's government has ramped up its flow of full-page advertisements listing sundry achievements (the Aam Aadmi Party has been doing the same in Delhi to mark its fourth anniversary in office). Mr Modi has also got away, unchallenged, when he has claimed repeatedly that nothing happened before his government took charge. Indeed, the Congress has been a bystander while the BJP has appropriated Congress stalwarts from the past like Subhas Chandra Bose and Vallabhbhai Patel, even Mahatma Gandhi.

What Mr Gandhi has done so far is to attack Mr Modi on a variety of issues, but his barbs have not been even remotely as effective as the old retort about a "suit-boot sarkar". The Rafale accusations have been blunted by the report of the Comptroller and Auditor General, which conveniently failed to include in its calculations the cost of the sovereign guarantee foregone. The business of Mr Modi being a *chor* or thief cuts no ice because (unlike Bofors) there is not even a hint of a money trail. Worse, any fool would know that tackling Mr Modi on a national security platform, in the wake of Pulwama-Balakot, is like playing Rafael Nadal on clay. Wisdom would have suggested getting back as quickly as possible to the farmer distress-lack of jobs platform that had Mr Modi on the defensive.

The fact is that, for all its failures (for which it got voted out), the Manmohan Singh government had significant achievements to show. In the wake of the BJP campaign that the impossible has been made possible (*Namumkin ab mumkin hai*), it would have been an obvious gambit for Mr Gandhi to remind voters that the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance delivered in the past, and to assert that it can deliver again. In case he needs reminding, the UPA's achievements included a dramatic drop in poverty at an unprecedented rate, doubling investment in infrastructure (as a percentage of GDP), new airports in all the major cities, enough power capacity for the first time to put an end to power shortages, a sharp decline in left-wing extremism by the end of UPA rule and a notably quieter Kashmir, record agricultural growth plus crop diversification, the Aadhaar initiative, empowering citizens through the law on the right to information, the rural employment guarantee programme, giving two million forest-dwellers their land rights under a new law, successfully tackling AIDS, and so on. Would reminding people of these achievements have helped the Congress to rebut that it is not just Mr Modi who delivers? If yes, why is Mr Gandhi as reticent on this as he was at the meeting with G20 ambassadors?

By general consensus, Mr Gandhi has emerged as a more serious politician after his initial, wrong-footing forays. Certainly, it took him a while to get serious about politics (having entered Parliament 15 years ago). For the last six years, he has been either vice-president or president of the Congress. But he has manifestly failed to re-build the party at the grassroots during this period, or throw up new leaders. Still, the Congress has begun to fare better in elections — state as well as by-elections — while the BJP's record in by-elections is just five of 13 seats that it originally held. But Mr Gandhi looks in danger of frittering away the momentum gifted to him by the government's mis-steps. That risk is compounded by critical failures in alliance formation, in both Delhi and the all-important Uttar Pradesh.

Long march to peace with Pakistan

India needs to invest in its military to scare Pakistan to peace and at the same time get Indians to understand the realities of war

ILLUSTRATION BY BINAY SINHA



Kitney aadmi thehey (how many enemies were there), asked Gabbar Singh, the most feared yet adored villain of Hindi cinema, mocking his punch-drunk hitmen just back from a skirmish in Ramesh Sippy's 1975 classic *Sholay*.

Now, why am I using this in the context of last week's 90-hour India-Pakistan "war", or describing the nuttiness into which we have descended post-27 February, as 'Gabbarisation' of our politico-strategic discourse.

It is as if only three questions now remain: Did the bombs/missiles hit the Jaish facility or not? If they did, how many did they kill (hence, *kitney aadmi thehey*)? And the third: Did the IAF shoot down a PAF F-16 or not? These entirely miss the nub of the issue.

We had written two weeks back that revenge was an unwise strategic impulse. That revenge was for idiots, while the wise prefer dissuasion and deterrence. These three questions reflect a revenge mindset, unfortunate for a nation of our size, power and pretensions. It's the reason we call it "Gabbarised".

The prime minister himself has given fuel to it by thumping his chest and saying to cheering crowds that his nature (*fitrat*) is such that he cannot wait long to take revenge. It is a dangerous politicisation of strategic response. Our military wants surprise to be on its side, not predictability that the adversary can easily "game".

And second, it could be an admission that you do not think what you've done is enough to deter Pakistan. I may be over-interpreting campaign rhetoric. But rhetoric can also limit your options.

On the other hand, if the prime minister feels that these audacious strikes haven't produced deterrence, the new normal the subcontinent must prepare for is different from what is best for India. A cycle of terror-retribution-escalation-de-escalation is just two steps higher but no different than the completely wasteful blood-letting that's been going on across the Line of Control. The only difference is that instead of small arms, mortars, sniper rifles and commando-knives, fighter planes and smart munitions will be used. This is ready for defence nerds and teenagers. Unfortunately, it is also a strategic compromise if not defeat, as Lt. Gen. H.S. Panag (ret'd) argued in his very wise and brave article earlier this week.

Let's list the positives first. For the first time since this cycle of Pakistani-controlled terror-subversion began in Punjab (1981) and Kashmir (1989), India drew a line on its tolerance levels. In the past, provoc-

ations much graver than Pulwama, such as the Parliament attack and 26/11, had passed without retaliation. The Indian response had become predictable and the world was getting bored.

Direct retaliation now was the logical option. Pakistan has, therefore, been given three important messages at Balakot:

- That there is a threshold of tolerance beyond which India will strike deep inside the Pakistani mainland, unmindful of escalation. To that extent, Pakistan's post-1990 nuclear bluff has been dented. It isn't over, but Pakistan now has to factor in this new reality.
- That India has the muscle to

carry out such reprisals and the ability to maintain operational secrecy.

■ And third, that the key powers of the world now accept India's right to retaliate. It follows that India is subsequently expected to behave responsibly and, point made, should avoid getting caught in a retaliatory cycle.

This is how the game played out this time. But we should also count the negatives. So here again, the rule of three examples:

- The strikes, counter-strikes and Indian response exposed the inadequacy of conventional asymmetry between India and Pakistan. In terms of technology, weaponry and capability, the two sides are about evenly matched if the engagements are episodic. In a longer war of attrition, India will outlast Pakistan. In short, India has conventional superiority to ultimately prevail over Pakistan, but not for punitive domination.
- A fast-developing situation like this needs great



NATIONAL INTEREST

SHEKHAR GUPTA

The nationalist bandwagon



AL FRESCO

SUNIL SETHI

The fraught fortnight of February that raised India-Pakistan hostilities to fever pitch may have subsided but their effects won't easily go away. They are now the central focus of Narendra Modi's election campaign as he galvanises nationalist fervour during breathless nationwide tours. Gone is the development-for-all promise of "*Sabka saath, sabka vikas*" underpinned by a plea to voters of "*Ab ki baar, Modi sarkar*" that swept the Bharatiya Janata Party to power in 2014 with an unprecedented mandate. In an avalanche of advertising aimed at winning hearts and minds the new slogan is "*Namumkin ab mumkin hai*" (The impossible is now possible) — a line as vague as its dream of la-la land.

What happened to the all-consuming issues of spiralling joblessness, farmers' distress, the lingering pain of demonetisation

and the Goods and Services Tax, and the alleged corruption in the Rafale aircraft deal? They are off the BJP's radar; as to the persisting thorn in its flesh of the Rafale deal, the government's overbearing response has been to try suppressing *The Hindu's* investigations under the Official Secrets Act.

Between Pulwama and the heralded return of fighter pilot Abhinandan Varthaman, came the Balakot air strikes, an event now obscured in a miasma of lies or half-truths. Only future historians will tell us how many died in the Jaish-e-Muhammad terrorist camps — "a very large number," as the foreign secretary said, or 250 as BJP president Amit Shah claims, or 300 as some of the clairvoyant media — firmly aboard the nationalist bandwagon — repeatedly announced. Swathes of the media, cocooned by the anonymity of unnamed sources, have had a field day. Balakot remains, in Churchill's wartime phrase, "a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma."

Whatever the amount of ammunition India dropped inside the LoC, it spent a great deal of ballast in mustering international support to blackball Pakistan's furtive provocations in Kashmir. Whereas much of the democratic world unanimously condemned Pakistan as the home base of jihadi terrorism, the glow of India's "guest of honour" invitation to the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation's summit in Abu Dhabi — and Pakistan's ensuing protest — was dulled by its insistence on drumming up Kashmir and Indian atrocities in the Valley.

The OIC is a 57-member oil-rich club with each country holding the right of veto; not much gets done without its call to Muslim brethren and distributing largesse among the faithful. A few days after Pulwama, Saudi Arabia's sinister strongman Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman landed in Pakistan with a no-strings-attached gift of \$20 billion, the first, he said, of a package that will "grow each month and every year". Imran Khan drove him personally to his official residence. Oil-dependent India, with nearly three times as many Indian workers in Saudi as Pakistan, also welcomed "MBS" warmly.

But if OIC leaders equivocate with cash injections to pep up Pakistan's failed economy, China, its other patron and exacting money-lender, has impassively sat on the fence during the Pulwama-Balakot face-off.

The inescapable fact is that, like Lady Macbeth's "damned spot", the blood stains in Kashmir show no sign of vanishing. According to Ajai Shukla in *Business Standard*, 45 military personnel, including the 40 in Pulwama, have already died in the first two months of 2019—that is already half the number of 90 in all of 2018. The number of terrorists "neutralised" may have doubled since 2014—the year the BJP came to power—but civilian deaths have tripled — from 28 in 2014 to 86 in 2018.

In the surge of election rhetoric, however, the Balakot narrative is being projected by Mr Modi as not only a triumphant vindication of

Pulwama but as the successful taming of Pakistan. As the post-Pulwama backlash against Kashmiris grew his words of balm were: "Children of Kashmir are suffering because of terrorists...They are standing with us to eliminate [terrorists] and we need them." Some of his utterances have been off-colour — terming the captured wing commander "a pilot project" or distinctly off the mark — the claim that India would have been more effective if we had the Rafale aircraft.

Will this have a cumulative influence on more than 800 million voters in a few weeks' time? The election story is bound to change; the question how much? Prior to Pulwama the BJP appeared to be on the defensive, uncertain of its stop-and-go development programmes, fearful of growing discontent among agriculturists and unemployed youth, and nervous of gathering steam among Opposition parties across regional and caste alliances.

On a packed Jaipur-Delhi flight some days before Pulwama, I happened to sit next to Haryana chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar (in a back seat and mildly surprised that he refused to occupy Row A). Although he defended his party's proficiency in conducting door-to-door campaigns he was silent when a woman passenger sharply asked, "Chief Minister sahib, what was the need to change Gurgaon's name to Gurugram?"

Today, he would be aggressively cock-a-hoop as the BJP leadership goes into battle to reap the benefits of Pulwama-Balakot and woo the electorate to jump on the nationalist bandwagon. *Sab kuch mumkin hai* (Everything is possible).

an enemy of India.

The prime minister's 'enemies within' dog whistle — said at a media conclave — is echoed by people like 'Sadhguru' Jaggi Vasudev. Mr Modi's dramatic "*ghar mein ghush ghush kar maarengae*" (we will enter each of their homes and kill them) was about terrorists, but after five years of hate speech, it's barely any distance at all between that and what the BJP's Ram Madhav suggested in an op-ed — that bringing traitors to justice is a public duty. Madhav wrote that it was "up to the rest of the country — its leadership and people alike" to change the narrative — if a Kashmiri "is misguided, lead him; if he is mischievous, punish him; if he is treacherous, banish him. But instill India in him."

Five years of hate speech empowers BJP MLA Kapil Mishra to put out a video calling for people to drag 'traitors' out of their homes and causes the violent persecution of Kashmiri students, the assault of Kashmiri street sellers in Lucknow, and the thrashing of a Muslim student who questioned the government's claims.

So five years down the line, the BJP-RSS has at least partly achieved what it really wants to achieve: To infect the public and the public discourse with an inchoate sense that Muslims are terrorists and traitors, and that Hindus who oppose a Hindu Rashtira too are suspect.

Do you recognise your country? We got to this point by incrementally letting the crazy become the norm. The BJP's 2019 election slogan "*Namumkin ab mumkin hai*" — "The impossible is now possible" — is perfect like that, horribly so.

Natural selection in verbs

EYE CULTURE

KUMAR ABISHEK

Recently at a friend's place, I encountered *Beowulf*, an Old English epic poem written probably between the 8th century and the 11th century. Understanding it was tough, even with translations — and tougher for someone like me who would rather read a graphic novel (and I do not mean children comics) than diving into classic or modern literature.

I failed miserably, but the arduous 20-minute journey into *Beowulf* sparked a curiosity: Why words either evolve or get lost? Why words like "swele (also)" and "findan (to find)" don't exist anymore? Well, that research is still on (much simpler I am bored and taken over by another idea). Why verbs get lost/evolve? Why it's "helped" and not "holp", as in ancient times?

By the way, did you know English alphabets had way more than 26 letters and "W" wasn't one of them, and that "&" is not a symbol but an ancient alphabet like "ʒ" (not the number but which stood for "gh")? Or that "hallux" is the anatomical name for the toe? I knew the latter, I forgot and I re-discovered — the first two steps of the process are fairly common with verbs, though the last is an exception, not a rule.

To understand why we lost certain verbs or words, a guide into Zipf's law, proposed by linguist George K Zipf, would be necessary. He states that given a large sample of words, the frequency of any word is inversely proportional to its rank on the frequency table (a word "x" will have a frequency proportional to 1/x). Or, the most frequent word will occur about twice as often as the second most popular word, and so on.

For example, according to a study of the *Brown Corpus*, or the *Brown University Standard Corpus of Present-Day American English*, which has slightly over a million words, "the" was the most frequent, nearly 7 per cent of all word occurrences (69,971 times), followed by "of" 3.5 per cent (36,411 times). Only 135 vocabulary items were needed to account for half the *Brown Corpus*. And this shows that not all words are created equal; some are often used and many aren't.

Pretty much everything in languages follows Zipf's law, but irregular verbs. The most common verbs in English language are "be",

"have", "do", "say", "get", "make", "go", "know", "take", "see", "come" and "think" — all irregular (just a Google search is enough; almost all replies have the same pattern).

There are only 200 irregular verbs in English in a vast world of regular verbs, but hardly any of these is uncommon. Had irregular verbs followed Zipf's law, only a few would have been common and the rest rarely used.

So why is this anomaly? Or, is it? It appears that irregular verbs are ancient ones, belonging to an around 5,000-year-old language called Proto Indo European, the forefather of both English and Hindi, and many other languages. In this language, the tense of a verb could have been changed by an alternation in the vowels of related word form (ablaut), like sing, sang, sung. But later, the speakers of Proto-Germanic, which evolved from Proto Indo European, started adding verbs, not following ablauts but by simply adding "t" or "ed". Actually, verbs like "sent" or "crashed" must have been actually irregular back then.

More and more verbs were added to the English language and generally, all of them changed tense using "t" and "ed". Also, many older verbs switched over to the new pattern like "slew" became "slayed". Since the *Beowulf*-era, three of every four verbs have been regularised. Though a few verbs went in reverse, like "haved" became "had" and "maked" transformed into "made".

Still, we have irregular verbs. Why? Researchers tracked down 177 irregular verbs since *Beowulf* was written, and found that 79 of them were regularised in Modern English. This study also suggested that most frequently used verbs usually stayed irregular and the rarely used became regular — natural selection after all.

So, irregular verbs are not exceptions to Zipf's law. Researchers have predicted that no-so-often used verb "sting" (used 10 times for every 100,000 verbs) would regularise in 700 years, and a verb like "drink" would take 5,000 years for such a process. They claim "wed", an irregular verb, is already in the process of becoming "wedded".

Oh! I completely forgot to end my nerdy monologue, which after adding a few words may become another source material for a study on Zipf's law. Thanks, *Beowulf*. And remember, "if we don't use it, we may lose it (courtesy, a science show on YouTube)".

Impossible is now horribly possible



INTER ALIA

MITALI SARAN

Language matters; it shapes thought. In 2014, the BJP-RSS combine's political language focused on allaying fears that it would be antagonistic towards minorities. Despite its unshakable commitment to creating a supremacist Hindu Rashtira, millions of Indians chose to believe the government when it said that it was all about "*Sabka saath, sabka vikas*" and "*achhe din*". Perhaps they desperately wanted it to be true.

However, the Modi *sarkar* swiftly reverted to type, wrapping bigotry and chauvinism in hyper-nationalism. When JNU students were branded 'anti-national', the whole country was suddenly using the term as if it is perfectly normal to accuse people of such a thing. The Radio Rwanda-style television channel Republic made "*Tukde tukde gang*" household slang for dissenters, and the BJP IT Cell ampli-

fied slurs, calling uncooperative media 'dalals', 'news traders' (credit to the Prime Minister) and 'presstitutes' (credit to General V K Singh) and dissenting intellectuals 'irrelevant' or 'intellectually corrupt'. Social media was awash with terms like 'jihadi', 'dynasty slave', 'bootlicker', 'looter', and 'burnol'.

This language normalises the idea that criticism is not — cannot be — independent-minded, but only ever motivated by some imaginary vileness, be it slavish devotion to the opposition, or disgruntlement about lost privilege, or sedition designed to 'break India'.

When people objected to cattle-related lynchings and anti-minority violence, they were called 'Hindu-hating' and 'anti-Hindu'. That language feeds nicely into the RSS's emotional foundation of Hindu victimhood and grievance, which the BJP leadership's constant talk of '1.25 crore Indians' seeks to project on to all Indians (read: Hindus), be it about the Ram temple or support of the armed forces.

This is the rhetorical foundation of majoritarianism: If you talk about the place as a monolithic Hindu supremacist country for long enough, it will eventually become one. Because language matters.

Today, with widespread dissatisfaction over the jobs crisis, agricultural distress, an economic slowdown, crony capitalism and lousy law and order, 'nationalist' language has become even more fervid and purple,