



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

ELECTION OMISSION

EC must ask itself why its censure is weak, why it is losing its power to chasten. Its diminishing stature is worrying

AMID THE DIN and excitement of the campaign for the general election, is a dull echo of an institution once known for its vigour and vibrancy. The Election Commission of India, once a formidable force during elections as a poll monitor, is now being heard less and less, or only for its feeble interventions. The election process has only just begun but there is already a long list of interventions by the players that have seemed to challenge, if not outrightly flout, the Model Code of Conduct, and get away with it. UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath called the Indian army "Modi ji ki sena (Modi's army)", and despite the EC's direction to parties, post-Pulwama, to desist from political propaganda involving the armed forces, earned only a tepid warning. The undeterred UP CM went on to call the IUML in Kerala a "virus", blame it for Partition, and suggest there was something sinister in its green flag. The Niti Aayog chairperson spoke publicly against the Congress's Nyay scheme. Rajasthan Governor Kalyan Singh also crossed the lines of his institutional role and shared his fervent faith in the leadership of Narendra Modi ahead of polls. The EC has handed the Kalyan Singh matter to the President who has forwarded it to the Home Ministry.

The list goes on, and it includes the hagiographic Modi bio-pic seeking release days ahead of polling, and the income tax raids that seem to target leaders of the Opposition parties across the country. Last but certainly not least, it includes speeches by the Prime Minister himself that are communally charged and appeal to "Hindu" voters and hold up the figure of the soldier, and on the other side of the fence, speeches of Opposition leaders like Mayawati, who has appealed to "Muslim" voters not to divide their vote. In all these matters, the EC has been muted, when it has not been silent. Of course, this is not to say that the EC, mostly, can go far beyond the slap on the wrist anyway — it has resorted only in extraordinary situations to its stronger powers under Article 324 of the Constitution. The Model Code of Conduct, which is routinely invoked, is more spirit, less letter — primarily, a moral and ethical restraint on parties in the poll fray. Yet, it is also true that the EC has, in the past, used its subtle powers to greater effect. It has amplified its influence by its vigilance and impartiality. As a result, the EC's censure was deemed to be embarrassing to the censured, it was a rebuke that mattered.

By all indications, the EC's reprimand is losing its power to chasten. It is also evident that this is not just because of a larger coarsening of the political discourse, but more specifically, due to the EC's own unwillingness or inability, or both, to push back at a time when the political executive is strong and overweening. This depletion of the EC's stature is troubling and must be reversed — much depends on it in an exuberant and boisterous democracy.

A DOUBLE BLESSING

But Delhi must not be lulled by big win for Nasheed's party in Maldives. It must build on synergies, engage all players

THE LANDSLIDE VICTORY in Saturday's elections for the ruling party in the People's Majlis of Maldives is being viewed in Delhi as a double blessing — consolidation of democratic forces as well as a deeper alignment with India. The Maldivian Democratic Party, headed by the charismatic former president, Mohamed Nasheed, has won more than two-thirds of the 87 seats of the Majlis. The victory follows the triumph of MDP's Ibrahim Mohamed Solih in last September's presidential elections. Solih's win ended five years of autocratic rule by Abdulla Yameen, who subverted the constitution, undermined democratic institutions and jailed his opponents, including Nasheed. Yameen was convinced that his unambiguous political tilt towards China would insulate him from internal and external pressures for moderation and balance.

There is little reason for Delhi, however, to be carried away by this political moment in Maldives. The gains of the ruling Maldivian Democratic Party are vulnerable to the shifting sands of its domestic politics. The first big problem for Solih and Nasheed is to preserve the coalition that helped oust Yameen. A key member of the coalition, the Jumhooree Party, broke away from the MDP to contest seats for the Majlis. Although it won only in a handful, the Jumhooree Party had campaigned along with Yameen's Progressive Party of the Maldives on religious and nationalist grounds. In the outgoing Majlis, Solih's efforts at ending corruption and misappropriation of national resources were frustrated by the Jumhooree Party. Solih and Nasheed now have the majority in the assembly to undertake sweeping reforms, but will have to be mindful of going too fast and too far.

Amidst this sensitive dynamic in the Maldives, the last thing Delhi needs is a categorisation of political forces there as "pro-Indian" and "anti-Indian". With an electorate of barely 2,50,000, the Maldives is a tiny republic. But its ruling elite is fractious. The deepening internal contestation for power intersects with the growing importance of the Maldives as a critical geopolitical location in the Indo-Pacific. Competing factions at home are quite willing to mobilise external support for their immediate goals. Meanwhile, external players like China have invested too much capital to simply walk away in the face of an electoral setback. Solih and Nasheed don't have easy answers to the problem of overcoming the economic bondage to China. They already have trouble coping with the campaign against closer ties with India. Instead of buying into the thesis of a "pro-India turn" in Male, Delhi must purposefully build on the natural synergies between the two countries and patiently engage all political formations in the island republic.

11 SECONDS

Discovery of previously unseen footage of the Beatles is a significant moment

IN ALL, THE Beatles toured for just about six years and the Fab Four created arguably the most influential canon in modern music in just a decade, before they broke up. The band, of course, is all about the music — how the lyrics evolved from happy and trite, to crooning about Lucy and life. But almost as important is how John, Paul, George and Ringo presaged the explosive age of media and celebrity of today, where nearly every act, thought and attempt at communication is catalogued, to be brought up at will, in a near infinite array of zeroes and ones. The Beatles were watched and followed in a way, organically, that most Instagram-obsessed popstars pay teams of professionals to orchestrate artificially. So, the discovery of the footage, an 11-second-clip, of a live performance from 1966, has the millions suffering from incurable Beatle-mania excited.

The clip is of a rare live performance on *Top of the Pops*, a BBC show that featured musical guests. It is significant for many reasons and has academics studying The Beatles particularly excited. For one, the *Top of the Pops* performance was one of the last ones of the band together. And since The Beatles swept the world in a blitzkrieg, watching them perform *Paperback Writer* live is an opportunity not to be missed.

For those who haven't lived through the era when The Beatles were first popular, it might be difficult to imagine the fuss over a 50-year-old, grainy, 11-second video clip. The Beatles, more than any other musical act in the 20th century, typified their age. They reflected first hope and consumerism, then disillusionment and experimentation. If 11 seconds can bring back those memories, it's worth the fuss.

'Anti-national' thoughts

Whichever party wins the election, the real long-term challenge is to stem the rot of institutional foundations



PRANAB BARDHAN

THE HEADLINES SAY that the ruling party manifesto emphasises nationalism ("nation first"), and, on the economic front, it will aspire to make India the third-largest economy in the world by the end of the next decade, to make it reach the list of top 50 countries in the ranking of Ease of Doing Business, and repeats the old promise of doubling farmers' income by 2022.

In the West, there is an old saying that "patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel". But what do foreigners know about the glories of Hindu nationalism? Gandhiji called armed nationalism a "curse". Tagore wrote in 1908: "Patriotism cannot be our final spiritual shelter; my refuge is humanity. I'll not buy glass for the price of diamonds, and I'll never allow patriotism to triumph over humanity as long as I live". But both Gandhiji and Tagore are long dead.

On the economic front, while most economists believe that, whichever party is in power, unless there is some disaster, India will be the third-largest economy in the world by the end of the next decade, there is hardly any respectable economist who believes that as things have been going, farmers' income can be doubled by 2022 — it's just a "jumla".

The current government puts a lot of value on India's place in the World Bank's ranking on Ease of Doing Business, and took a victory lap when it improved significantly in recent years. (It is not particularly hard to "game" the system, as we know it is based on selective data collected from only two cities, Mumbai and Delhi. The Chinese are even better than us in gaming it, they had an even larger increase in the ranks in the same years). Nevertheless, an improvement in those ranks is a good sign.

But around the same time when the World Bank came out with the Ease of Doing Business rankings, another part of the same Bank came out with rankings of Human Capital Index, evaluating performance on health and education. In this, India not only has a very low rank, it is even lower than that of two of our poorer neighbours, Nepal and Bangladesh. When these rankings hit the press, one central minister in Delhi told a journalist, "we do not accept the data". Of course, we accept data only when they go in our favour! There have been more recent ex-

amples of this. On the social front, recently Amnesty International came out with the data that Uttar Pradesh now tops in the number of hate crimes in India, but then who does not know that Amnesty International is an infamous agency whose main goal is to malign us!

Unfortunately, international organisations keep churning out data of a similar kind: In the Social Hostilities Index, brought out by the Pew Research Center for 198 countries, at the end of 2016 India was among the eight worst countries. In the World Press Freedom Index, brought out by Reporters without Borders, in 2017-18 India's rank among 180 countries was low, at 138. In the Rule of Law Index brought out by the World Justice Project for 113 countries, in 2017-18 India's rank was 62. In the Report of the Economist Intelligence Unit on the State of Democracy in the World for 2018, India is in the category of "flawed", not full, democracy; out of 167 countries, India's rank is 41, worse than Latvia, Taiwan or Botswana — the rank for India having sharply declined compared to 2014.

The current government has no doubt had some laudable economic achievements in providing some measure of financial inclusion, roads, housing, sanitation, gas for cooking fuel, etc. for the poor, and streamlining GST (though clumsily implemented) and insolvency procedures for business. But actual progress in much of these has not matched the constant barrage of official hype, and the Indian economy, particularly in the vast informal sector, has barely recovered from the whimsical onslaught of demonetisation in November 2016 thought up by an ignorant but arrogant leadership and carried out by a confused and unprepared banking bureaucracy.

The general expectation, however, is that supercharged jingoism will see the ruling party through. Whichever party wins the election, the real long-term challenge is to stem the rot of institutional foundations. The institutional decay following out the shell of democracy started a few decades back, but it has accelerated. The executive overreach and abuse has dissipated the independence of police and bureaucracy, with tax and investigative agencies blithely used for personal vendetta of leaders and for cynical stir-

ring, or keeping on slow boil, of the anti-corruption investigations for continual smearing of Opposition politicians, while cases against the ruling party politicians (or any new allies who are lured to their fold) are quietly dropped.

Attempts to enfeeble the independence of regulatory bodies are common — even apex bodies like the Reserve Bank of India, the Supreme Court or the Election Commission have come under pressure. The centralisation of all power in the PMO, apart from making a mockery of the oft-repeated rhetoric of "cooperative federalism", has rendered the cabinet system of government largely ineffective. The legislature is used mainly for acclamation and hurried passing, without much discussion, of complex bills. The joint parliamentary committees that raise questions are starved of information and/or ignored.

Dissent is often branded as sedition and as "anti-national" — even though it is arguable that judged by the frequent violations of the Constitution in letter and spirit and of the civic nationalism that is based on constitutional values it is the ruling party and its affiliate organisations that are in some sense deeply anti-national. The Prime Minister, who is quite effusive on all manner of things in his one-way tweets and radio chats, falls eerily silent when inconvenient truths or atrocities by his party affiliates hit the news. While never hesitating in stressing his own muscular brand of leadership, he is strangely afraid to meet the press or any searching questions from journalists and legislators. He is open only to the part of the media that is fawning and to adulatory crowds. The cloak of "national security" is routinely used to hide away from the legitimate need for public information on even the simplest national defence issues.

National security is also the excuse for the ongoing suppression of human rights in Kashmir valley, the North-east and the jungles of central India — the areas of age-old local rebellions — as the rest of democratic India looks away. But then it is "anti-national" to even mention these things.

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I DREAM OF CHANGE

Living the agony of India today, and hoping for a new country



ROHINI SALIAN

BEING AN INDEPENDENT citizen of India and an advocate by profession, it is my duty to uphold the Constitution of India, bow before the judiciary, salute our armed forces and respect all our countrymen, irrespective of their diversity or difference of opinions on national issues. We, the countrymen and women, have a responsibility to build a strong nation with peace, prosperity, harmony, equality and dignity.

After all, we choose and elect our representatives every five years: With a faith that they would save the nation and people. So, if they do not perform, we should be held up for their non-performance.

To express my view on the current situation of my country and the ensuing frenzy of elections, besides other glaring issues, I thought it fit to introspect. I sat myself down some days back, uttered "Om" and, eventually, slipped into a trance.

As my eyes closed, I experienced the horror of reality: Suddenly, too many images started bombarding my psyche like jagged-edged war debris. The images flew thick and fast, like rockets blinding the night sky. There were people crying, shouting, arguing with-

out listening to one another, debating non-issues which they themselves didn't understand. There was news, fake news, twisted news — it was all madness. I was totally disoriented. Words like truth, justice, unemployment, hatred, religion, race, creed, war, bombs, police, CBI, RBI, NIA, courts, witnesses, convictions and acquittals, media, social media... all collided and turned into a chaotic collage of visual memories.

I saw the deaths of our army men, the deaths of our country's farmers and ordinary people standing in queues in front of banks. Then, suddenly, the judges came out from the honourable courts, journalists shouted "sedition", "demonetisation", "GST", etc. I could not bear to see anymore.

Just as suddenly, I started yelling, "Where are you, god? What are you doing inside the temples, mosques, churches and places of worship?" I was angry, I had prayed to all gods of all colours and faiths to save us from our plight. I kept yelling, "We have shed so much of blood in your name thinking that you will protect us from pain and suffering. We have used weapons and bombs to protect you, and you are also giving security cover

by us. Are you scared to come out and save us now? You had promised us that you will be born again and again to establish Dharma when circumstances in the world demand it. You vowed to protect humankind. For our part, we painted you with holy colours: Green, saffron, blue, black, white... So why are you silent?"

Out of the blue, as I exhausted myself of all the rage burning within me, from somewhere, I heard a voice, commanding, "Wake up from your slumber, and stop yelling. Start thinking for yourself and analysing carefully. Be honest, seek the truth with persistence despite hurdles in the way, and keep your chin up in the face of adversity: Go out and vote for the nation, uphold the democracy you hold so dear to your heart, protect your Constitution and help, thus, in the making of a new India. I have given you intellect enough, use it. Stop googling. Vote for a new India".

Jai Hind.

The writer is former public prosecutor for Maharashtra and the National Investigation Agency

APRIL 10, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

PRIVATE VS PUBLIC

THE JANATA PARTY'S committee on nationalisation and control of large industrial houses meeting in Delhi tomorrow is expected to disfavour further nationalisation. Instead of more takeovers of industries currently under private management, the committee may suggest increasing "socialisation" of industries by giving workers a share of the equity investment. It is likely to recommend the retention of the present ratio of 60:40 between the state and private investment. But the committee may call for greater restraints on the growth of large industrial houses. It is likely to favour denial of new industrial licences to companies with corporate assets

of more than Rs 100 crore. Such companies are also unlikely to be permitted to expand their existing production capacities.

DUAL MEMBERSHIP

NANAJI DESHMUKH, GENERAL secretary of the Janata Party, and nine prominent leaders of the Jana Sangh group, said that the question of Jana Sangh members' dual membership — with the Janata and RSS — was no longer an issue. Addressing a news conference, Deshmukh pointed out that it was only some individuals who were consistently campaigning against the RSS. "The controversy was started by some individuals and I would not like to blame either the BLD group

or the socialists for this," he said. The question of dual membership, Deshmukh said, had figured at the group of 24 meeting as well as the recent National Executive and Parliamentary Board meetings of the party.

PRISON REFORM

CHIEF SECRETARIES OF states and union territories broadly agreed on a 10-point programme aimed at improving prison conditions and reducing congestion. A full-fledged review at district and state levels of the condition of all undertrials and a time-bound revision of the outdated jail manuals are among the highlights of the administrative measures to be taken by the states.



13 THE IDEAS PAGE

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"It is time for India to follow the Pakistani government's goodwill gesture and release Pakistani fishermen with dignity — alive — on humanitarian grounds, if nothing else."
— DAWN

Gamification of Indian politics

The lotus has grown a thousand brand extensions while the EC is busy looking for old-school posters, cutouts, leaflets and hoardings



ALI KHAN MAHMUDABAD

THE BJP IS deceiving India with a PUBG meets Fortnite meets a cartoon NaMo election campaign. They are constantly adding game-like or, indeed, virtual elements to everyday life, so that people start mistaking propaganda for objectivity and retweets for real accomplishments. Memes, created by paid-for operatives, are spread across WhatsApp groups set up by "volunteers". And who can forget the NaMo app contest where people could land a meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi if more than 100 people used the referral code generated by their token donation to the party's coffers. The gamification of Indian politics is, of course, inevitable, given the rapidly increasing penetration of the internet and social media. But when unchecked, it is also liable to manipulation through money and political power.

Popular politics is to be welcomed, when it's based on facts and perspectives that are anchored in reality. An election should be a popular celebration. However, propaganda packaged as truth and delivered as entertainment — where there is a game to be won and villains to be killed — is fatal for democracy.

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CR Sasikumar

A PM for the people

Dignity has been the running theme of all of PM Modi's programmes



RAM MADHAV

the decisive point. There is no higher and simpler law of strategy than that of keeping one's forces concentrated. In short, the first principle is: act with utmost concentration".

Unlike the leadership on the opposite side, Modi's messaging is focused and unambiguous. His "chowkidar" campaign is the latest example of his unique leadership style. For critics, it may seem melodramatic and theatrical. But for Modi, it has a mission and purpose. Modi doesn't invoke Mahatma Gandhi without reason. Gandhi too found unique ways to achieve his goals. His loincloth, his satyagraha, his non-violent resistance and his Harijan campaign pushed the mighty British empire into submission. Modi too takes a leaf or two out of Gandhi's life.

The most significant and profound theme of Modi's campaigns — as had been Gandhi's — is about according dignity to the last man. Marx and Mao dreamt of a socialist society where all citizens will be equal. They couldn't succeed because these leaders came to be associated with campaigns for equal status. But Modi has presented his vision differently.

He has presented the chowkidar campaign as one for "equal spirit". By presenting himself as the chowkidar and by associating it with "spirit", Modi has achieved two objectives. His unique campaign, a la Caesar's, has made him invincible to his adversaries. Second, by making doctors, engineers, government servants and businessmen call themselves, "chowkidar", the prime minister, in a subtle manner, has brought dignity to a lower-rung profession. Today, no small-time worker — be they a chowkidar or someone from the service class — will be looked down upon.

Dignity of the ordinary citizens has been the running theme of Modi's governance in the last five years. From the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana to Swachh Bharat, his schemes have an underlying theme of human dignity and honour. Long after Independence, we have left almost a quarter of our population out of the formal economy. The government benefits meant for them had to be passed on as cash doles. It bred corruption and political hegemony. The poor were perpetually at the mercy of bureaucrats and politicians. Jan Dhan, Aadhaar, Mobile — the

Long after Independence, we have left almost a quarter of our population out of the formal economy. The government benefits meant for them had to be passed on as cash doles. It bred corruption and political hegemony. The poor were perpetually at the mercy of bureaucrats and politicians. Jan Dhan, Aadhaar, Mobile — the

JAM trinity — has changed all that. The new economic identity through JAM has not only empowered the poor economically, but also enhanced their dignity.

It is the same case with the Swachh Bharat campaign. It was estimated that in rural India, over 60 per cent households did not have access to clean toilets before Modi assumed office. Rural women were the real victims. They were subjected to violence, afflicted with diseases and even lost educational opportunities just because they didn't have access to toilets at homes and in schools. Things have changed with Swachh Bharat. Toilets have become symbols of not only cleanliness but according dignity to women as well.

Critics say that Modi's superior communication skills give him an advantage. What they forget is that mere communication skills, without actual good work, would never win anyone the hearts of people. The Indian electorate is mature at one level and ruthless at another. It has seen through many a campaign in the past and shown leaders their place.

In Modi's case, it is the delivery on promises along with his communication skills that makes him the darling of the masses. Ideally, the election should revolve around real issues, like Modi's fight against corruption, thrust on development and his endeavours to improve the living standards of ordinary citizens. Modi's, "Sab ka Saath, Sab ka Vikas" is not merely a slogan — he meant it, and delivered on his promises to 1.3 billion Indians whom he calls his family.

It is a trap to allow the electoral discourse to swing in any other direction — religion or otherwise. There is no reason to believe that minorities en masse hate Modi. Beneficiaries of his agenda in the last five years also include the minorities, in large numbers.

Modi has brought about a huge transformation of the country, and of his self-image, in the last few years. A strong leader with a holistic development agenda, rooted firmly in the culture of his country, is how the world sees Modi. That has won him hearts at home, and laurels globally. And that is what would eventually win him this election.

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

JULIUS CAESAR, THE great Roman ruler, is remembered for his last words to his old friend Brutus, as recorded by the Roman historian Suetonius: "You too, my child?". His victory in the Roman Civil War leading to the capture of Rome and ascension to the throne is remembered for the "Crossing the Rubicon" call. What actually distinguished Caesar's life was his gusto. Much before he crossed the Rubicon river and defeated his rival Pompey, Caesar displayed leadership skills that made him stand out. He made his entry into public life in a dramatic way and made a mark very early in life. As a junior official in the public games and grain distribution departments, he would organise huge spectacles — wild-animal huntings, extravagant gladiator shows, for example. Gradually, he built an image of a great leader of a different kind in the eyes of the Roman public.

Caesar was a skilled warrior and would love to outdo his own soldiers in pseudo-competitions. In battles, he would always be seen atop a mount in order to be visible to his army, or at the centre of the battlefield, leading and setting an example for his soldiers. No wonder his soldiers always identified with him and his mission. He was a cult figure for them.

A leader is not one who will subject himself to an image created by the society — a true leader creates his own image through mastery over his own self and unique actions. That was Caesar then, that is Narendra Modi now.

Modi's greatest strength is his focus and concentration. He singularly focuses on victory. Nothing can distract him. His focus, coupled with his larger-than-life image, is an invincible combination. Carl Von Clausewitz, the great Prussian general and military theorist, had once said: "The best strategy is always to be very strong; first in general, then at

Dear Home Minister

These elections offer an opportunity to craft a more conciliatory policy towards the people of J&K

WE, A GROUP of former government servants, academics, analysts and civil society, many of whom have been associated with Jammu and Kashmir in our individual or official capacities, write to express our deep distress at the continuing and, indeed, intensifying alienation of Kashmiris from the rest of India. The decision to close the highway to civilian traffic twice a week, and to let it be used only by the forces until the election is concluded, undercuts our democratic credentials and attracts the charge of military rule. It is, moreover, only the most recent of a series of actions that add to disaffection in the Valley. Others include banning the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) and the Jamaat-e-Islami, imprisoning their leaders as well as those of the Hurriyat, and denying security to members of political parties.

In these conditions, what kind of a turnout can we expect in the Valley? Taken together, the policy of President's rule, counter-insurgency and arrests, combined with threats to roll back Articles 370 and 35A and alterations to the administrative structure of the state,

provide formidable disincentives to vote.

Yet the people of Jammu and Kashmir desperately need to vote — and vote convincingly — for the Valley to emerge from its current state of confrontation and siege. Kashmir needs a government that can hold out hope instead of hatred, one that will work to re-establish peace on the ground. These steps will only be taken by an elected government, as the harsh measures that have been taken under President's Rule indicate.

Even at this late stage, your ministry can minimise the disincentives for Kashmiris to vote. The first step would be to rescind orders for closure of the highway, followed by release of those arrested (unless there is substantive evidence of their being involved in recent terrorist attacks such as on the CRPF at Pulwama), restoration of security to political leaders and return to a policy of defence against attack rather than preemptive action. If your government could initiate a Ramzan ceasefire, then why not one for elections?

It took 15 years of hard work for Jammu and Kashmir to emerge from the dark days of

the 1990s. As the sharp fall in violence between 2005-2012 showed, the most hopeful period for Jammu and Kashmir was when there was a peace process in the state, starting in 2000. Though terrorists made strenuous efforts to disrupt it with high-profile attacks, including on Hurriyat members, to which the Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh administrations responded both militarily and diplomatically, neither allowed terrorists to bring the peace process to a grinding halt.

In the past four years, most of the hard work of the previous 15 years has been undone, for reasons that remain unknown because no reasoned explanation has been offered. These elections offer an opportunity to craft a more conciliatory policy towards the people of the state, including dissidents who have engaged in peace initiatives, such as the Hurriyat (M), who have once again held out an offer of talks.

Judging by its election manifesto, the BJP is opposed to conciliation in Jammu and Kashmir. Nevertheless, whether your party

wishes to avail of this opportunity or not, surely you would recognise that governance is larger than party interest and a change of course is required, lest the situation in the state worsens to a point of no return. We urge you, even at this late stage, to take the steps mentioned above. Jammu and Kashmir will only then be able to have a free and fair election.

Salahuddin Ahmed, former Chief Secretary of Rajasthan, Madhu Bhandari, former Ambassador of India to Belarus, Lithuania and Portugal, Sundar Burra, former Secretary to the Government of Maharashtra, MG Devasahayam, IAS (retd.), Gourisankar Ghosh, former Executive Director, UNWSSCC, Geneva, Kapil Kak, former Air Vice-Marshal of India, Radha Kumar, former member, GOI's Group of Interlocutors for Jammu and Kashmir, Badri Raina, author and columnist, Hindal Tyabji, former Chief Secretary of Jammu and Kashmir, Ravi Vira, former Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank of India and others

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DOMESTIC FIRST

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Diplomacy by stealth' (IE, April 9) The absence of a major foreign policy vision in the recently released manifestos of both the Bharatiya Janata and the Congress was conspicuous. The two biggest parties in the country do talk of cooperation in the international arena, but they do not outline the contours of such cooperation. A major reason for this can be the great amount of volatility attached in international relations. The lack of importance international affairs garner in local electoral constituencies could be another reason. But it's high time that foreign relations become poll issues.
Anirudh Parashar, Solan

RIGHT ASSERTION

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'The people's road' (IE, April 9). The bi-weekly closure of the J&K national highway is a step in the right direction, in the present scenario. It was warranted for three main reasons. One, to ensure security of our troops and convoys in view of increasing terrorist attacks. Two, to send a message to the separatist leaders that they can not take the Centre for granted. Three, establish the will of the government that J&K is an integral part of India. The government will also do well to scrap Article 370. Once things are back to normal in the state, the restrictions can be removed.
RD Singh, Ambala

GIMMICKS GALORE

THIS REFERS TO article, 'For meaningful manifestos' (IE, April 9). As the general election approaches, political parties unveil their manifestos and come out with promises and assurances, many of

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

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

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which are gimmicks. Some of these promises cannot even pass the test of Parliament. The people need to be wary of such gimmicks.
Ajay Corriea, Vasai

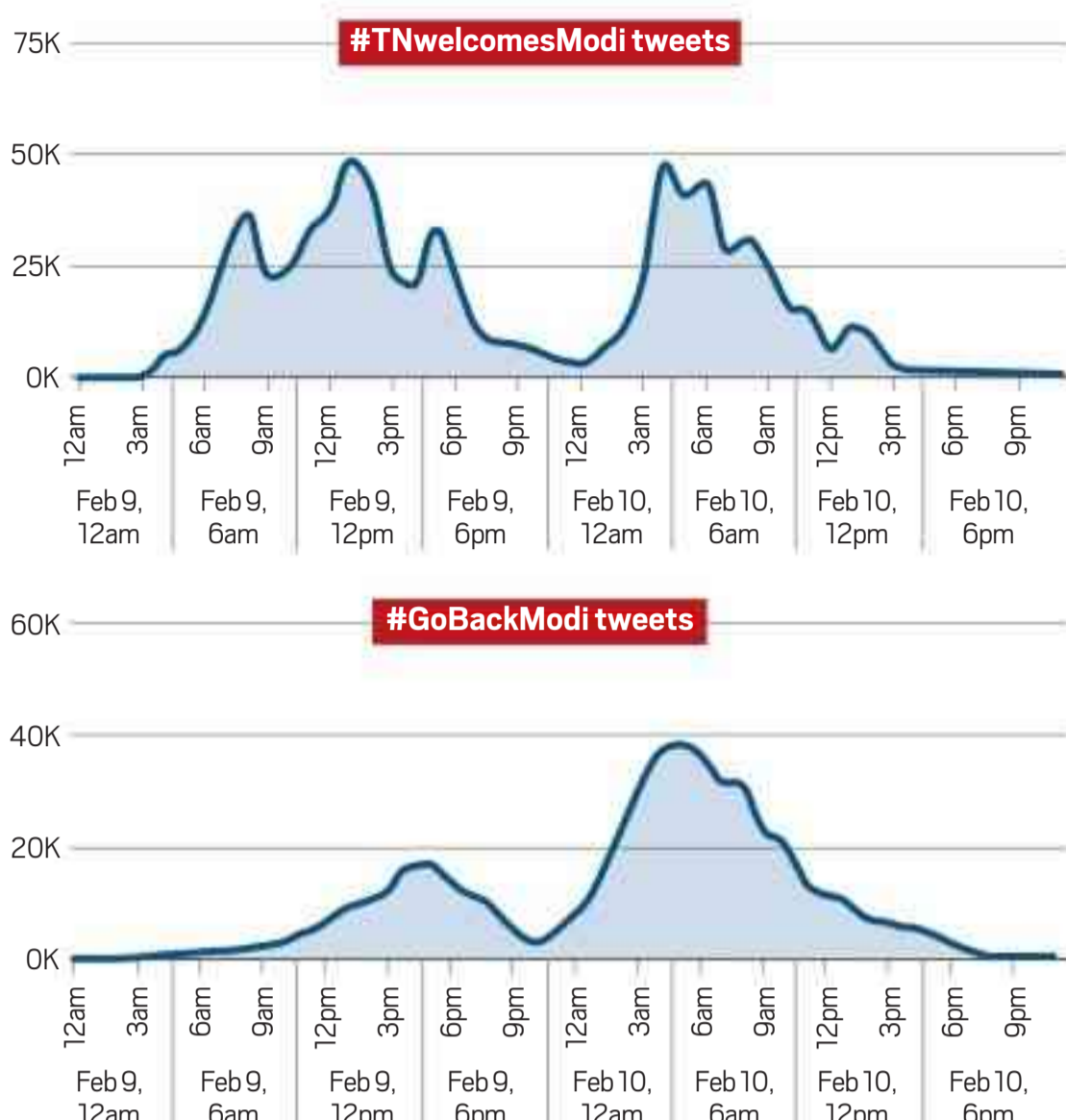
BEIJING CALLING

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'The Pune plan for China' (IE, April 9). In order to build a more meaningful relationship with China, New Delhi needs to engage with Beijing in several sectors. Informal summits like that one in Wuhan last year and the export of sports power to China, Bollywood and soft power, for example, could be part of such a strategy.
Nirmal D Kapadia, Gandhinagar

TELLING NUMBERS

Scan looks at how Twitter bots tried to boost LS poll traffic

ACTIVITY ON FEBRUARY 9-10, 2019



AUTOMATED BOT accounts made a massive attempt to boost Twitter traffic in India in February, during the run-up to the Lok Sabha polls, according to a study by US-based analysts. The think-tank Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab (DFRLab) found that these bots, which were domestic, were deployed on a massive scale on February 9-10 and boosted hashtags both in support of and in opposition to Prime Minister Narendra Modi (it said pro-Modi traffic was far more heavily manipulated than anti-Modi traffic). However, it added that the impact was rather muted.

#TNwelcomesModi scan

The hashtag #TNwelcomesModi was mentioned over 777,000 times on February 9 and 10. The analysis used a measure called the Coefficient of Traffic Manipulation (CTM) — in earlier studies, non-manipulated traffic typically scored a CTM of 12 or lower, while manipulated traffic boosted by bots and coordinated human users scored up to 60. For #TNwelcomesModi, DFRLab analysed the first 49,727 tweets in a scan that covered 7 hours 48 minutes. These scored a CTM of 123.98, the highest DFRLab has ever recorded. An "eye-ball test" of the accounts that posted the hashtag most often indicated that these accounts were bots, DFRLab said. They have since been suspended. The account @SasiMaha6 (now suspended) posted #TNwelcomesModi tweets 1,803 times during the scan while @priyamanaval6 (suspended) posted the hashtag 1,677 times, or

roughly one tweet every 17 seconds for over seven hours. DFRLab concluded that these sustained rates are far too high for human posting.

#GoBackModi scan

On February 10, the hashtag #GoBackModi trended, pushing messages that supported the Congress. This hashtag racked up 49,538 tweets in just over three hours in the early morning. It peaked at a lower rate, generating 447,000 posts on February 9-10. When DFRLab scanned the 49,538 posts in three hours, the CTM score was 46.81. While this was far above the usual range for organic traffic, it paled in comparison to the pro-Modi effort. DFRLab noted, #GoBackModi too was heavily pushed by a small number of high-volume accounts that posted hundreds of times an hour. DFRLab said in a statement that these accounts were still not suspended at the time of drafting the report. *The Indian Express* found that the top accounts mentioned — @PhillyTdp and @nritdpsa — had both been suspended. @PhillyTdp posted on #GoBackModi 2,179 times as the hashtag took off — one tweet every 5.3 seconds for over three hours — while @nritdpsa posted 1,899 times, or roughly one tweet every 6 seconds. The nearly 50,000 tweets in the #GoBackModi scan were posted by just 891 accounts, while the nearly 50,000 tweets in the #TNwelcomesModi scan were posted by 7,394 accounts, DFRLab said.

Text and graphs adapted from DFRLab

SIMPLY PUT

A new high in Maldives

The huge victory for Nasheed-Solih increases India's leverage with the Indian Ocean island nation. There is new warmth and a powerful impetus to bilateral ties. But the Chinese shadow still looms.

SHUBHAJIT ROY
 NEW DELHI, APRIL 9

"THE MALDIVES is about to welcome a new dawn, a golden yellow dawn," former Maldives President Mohamed Nasheed told supporters in Malé Saturday as preliminary results indicated a huge majority for his party. The colour of Nasheed's Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) is a bright yellow.

The MDP, led by one of Nasheed's closest associates and now President, Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, has won 65 seats in the 87-member People's Majlis. Nasheed became the first former President of the Maldives to have won the parliamentary elections, and the MDP the first party to win a two-thirds majority since multi-party elections were introduced with the country's 2008 Constitution.

The MDP had won 26 seats each in the 2009 and 2014 elections. In 2009, it formed the government with the help of coalition partners. In 2014, the Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM) of former President Abdulla Yameen won 33 seats, and reached a majority after several MPs joined the party.

Constitutional change

The scale of the victory has put Nasheed-Solih in a position to drive decisive change in the Maldives. On top of Nasheed's agenda is converting the Presidential form of government into a Parliamentary one — he is among many who feel that an executive Presidency is unsuitable for a small country with deeply polarised and fractious politics. Nasheed has often spoken about moving to a Parliamentary system, and its parliamentary supermajority will allow the MDP to push through the required amendment in the Constitution.

Yameen, who had used the President's executive powers to shackle the judiciary, impose an emergency, and muzzle the media, did not appear in public after being released from pre-trial detention a week before the



Prime Minister Modi greets Maldivian President Solih in Delhi in December. *Archive*

election. He also did not cast his vote Saturday.

MDP's Agenda 19

The MDP campaigned for its "Agenda 19" — with Solih telling rallies that to implement Agenda 19, which detailed the party's pledges, it was essential to have MPs who would support the government and accept Agenda 19. The Agenda consists of 19 concept papers that will form the basis of the MDP's legislative agenda — including Bills to introduce a minimum wage, unemployment benefits, and a personal income-tax. Among the MDP's other priorities are strengthening the asset disclosure regime, pursuing transitional justice, and reforming the judiciary.

India and China

After the unfriendly Yameen regime, India came back in the strategic game with Solih's victory last year. Prime Minister Narendra Modi travelled to the Maldives for his inauguration in November last year, and the President visited India the following month. In March, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj travelled to the Maldives and signalled New Delhi's

commitment to strengthening the relationship between the two countries irrespective of the outcome of the Lok Sabha elections.

India had announced financial assistance of \$1.4 billion for the island nation in December. Chinese loans for projects account for around 70% of the Maldives' national debt, and New Delhi's economic help outreach is key to helping Male break free of Beijing's "debt-for-leverage" model of diplomacy.

China's infrastructure projects in the Maldives included a bridge linking Malé and the airport, and construction of housing units. The Chinese debt is estimated to be between \$1.5 billion and \$3 billion, and the Solih government is still trying to figure out the contours of the country's "dire economic situation".

Indian Ocean allies

Mindful of Chinese assertiveness, and their interlinked security interests in the Indian Ocean Region, New Delhi and Malé have agreed on the importance of maintaining peace and stability in the region. They will enhance maritime security in the region through "coordinated patrolling and aerial

surveillance, exchange of information and capacity building".

The two sides have also expressed their "unwavering commitment and support" for increased cooperation in combating terrorism in all its forms and manifestations both within the region and elsewhere. This is an important commitment, since Maldives has seen the rise of Islamist fundamentalism over the last few years, and it is said to have sent 50-200 fighters to the Islamic State — among the world's biggest per-capita suppliers of foreign fighters to the terrorist group. Civil society has witnessed the rise of religious intolerance and violent extremism.

A new agreement on visa facilitation is aimed at addressing common concerns and ensuring that people-to-people contacts are enhanced. The Maldives is one of the very few countries with which India has a visa-free travel arrangement. The recently signed pact will allow many Maldivians who send their children to school in India, to accompany them, and will facilitate easier travel for Maldivians to India for medical treatment.

The movement of people had become restricted after the Yameen government tightened the visa regime for Indian workers and professionals. In March, Maldives Foreign Minister Abdulla Shahid told Swaraj in Hindi during a beach dinner: "These waves, every single one of them, that reach our beaches, also wash up on your shores. Every wave that washes up on your shore carries with it the love, the compassion, the respect, of Maldivians for the Indian people."

And yet, the Chinese shadow persists. Former Indian diplomat Rajiv Bhatia wrote at Mumbai-based think tank Gateway House, "After the India visit, Maldives is bound to shift attention to refashioning its partnership with China... Hence, it will be some time before the contours of Maldives' rebalancing becomes clear. Meanwhile, New Delhi is fully conscious of the need to leverage a small, but potentially important, window of opportunity."

Deadly drug-resistant fungus' India connection

CANDIDA AURIS CASES WORLDWIDE



ABANTIKA GHOSH
 NEW DELHI, APRIL 9

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA has been abuzz this week with reports of a mystery infection so tenacious that, *The New York Times* reported, a top American hospital had to rip out ceiling and floor tiles to get rid of the infestation in the room of a patient after his death. The killer germ, a fungus called *Candida auris*, has showed up in countries as far apart as Australia and Canada, Venezuela and Japan, over the past few years. It has set alarm bells ringing because it is often resistant to multiple anti-fungal drugs.

Candida auris

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) describes *Candida auris* as "an emerging fungus that presents a serious global health threat", and has sent severely ill patients to hospital in countries including Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Israel, Japan, Kenya, Kuwait, Oman, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Venezuela, the UK, and the US. "Patients can remain colonised with *C. auris* for a long time and *C. auris* can persist on surfaces in healthcare environments. This can result in spread of *C. auris* between patients in healthcare facilities."

That *C. auris* is difficult to identify with stan-

dard lab methods may have had a role to play in the development of its resistance. Healthcare personnel oblivious to it for long continue to prescribe antibiotics — giving the organism time to acclimatise to the medication. *C. auris* is known to cause outbreaks in hospitals, where it finds vulnerable individuals.

Not quite new

The current panic notwithstanding, the fungus has been around for at least a decade. It

was identified in 2009 from yeast isolates from the ear of a Japanese patient, and described as a new species after RNA sequencing. In 2013, a team of Indian scientists led by those from the Vallabhbhai Patel Chest Institute, Delhi, documented in *Emerging Infectious Diseases* "the emergence of a new clonal strain of *C. auris* as an etiologic agent of candidemia in India".

In 2017, the same team of researchers predicted that going by the behaviour of other similar organisms that have developed

resistance, a *Candida* outbreak might be on the cards. "What we do know is that environmental factors probably play a role in outbreaks in healthcare settings that include prolonged survival in healthcare environments, probably due to skin colonization of patients and asymptomatic carriers... A further spread of *C. auris* in healthcare settings on a worldwide scale is expected," the researchers, led by Dr Anuradha Chowdhary of the Department of Medical Mycology, Vallabhbhai Patel Chest Institute, wrote in *PLOS Pathogens*.

Precautions, treatment

The key is to prevent the fungus from spreading, so the management of the infection is hinged on isolation of the patient, ideally in a single room, with strict hand hygiene. CDC recommends that everyone who has come in contact with a patient should be screened for the fungus, and all equipment used for the care of the patient should be cleaned every day in accordance with clinical care recommendations.

Guidelines for treatment say that only when there are symptoms of an infection should the patient be given anti-fungals such as Caspofungin and Micafungin. CDC does not recommend treatment of *Candida* identified from noninvasive sites (such as respiratory tract, urine, and skin colonisation) when there is no evidence of infection.

How Gujarat fishermen won US top court ruling against global funding agency

GOPAL KATESHIYA & AVINASH NAIR
 RAJKOT, AHMEDABAD, APRIL 9

ON FEBRUARY 27, the US Supreme Court ruled in favour of a group of fishermen and a Gujarat village panchayat in a suit against the US-headquartered International Finance Corporation (IFC). The case, which now goes back to a US district court, relates to alleged pollution caused by a Gujarat-based power plant partly funded by IFC.

The project

The coal-fired power plant, near Mundra port in Gujarat's Kutch district and with a capacity of 4,150 MW, is the country's first to deploy energy-efficient supercritical technology (which results in energy efficiency 40.5% higher compared to other coal-based power technologies). Initially conceived by Power Finance Corporation Limited, it was awarded in 2007 to Coastal Gujarat Power Limited, a subsidiary of Tata Power. It reached full generation capacity in March 2013, and has since been selling power to utilities in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Haryana, Punjab and Rajasthan.

Of the estimated project cost of \$4.14 bil-

lion, \$450 million was funded in 2008 by IFC, which finances private-sector development projects in poor and developing countries. Asian Development Bank advanced \$450 million as loan, Export Credit Agency of Korea extended another \$800 million as loan, and CGPL raised around Rs 1.5 billion from Indian banks through debt.

The fishermen

The plant is located near Tragadi village in Mandvi taluka, and Navinal village in neighbouring Mundra taluka. Tragadi has a colony of fishermen in an area known as Tragadi-Nal while Navinal is rich in agriculture and horticulture. Navinal sarpanch Gajendrasinh Jadeja says the village has a population of 3,100. Tragadi has 1,238, while activists estimate that 110 families (675 people) live in Tragadi-Nal and another 50 fishermen families operate boats from nearby Kotadi harbour.

In 2010, fishermen of Tragadi and residents of Navinal came together under the aegis of fishermen's organisation Machimar Adhikhar Sangharsh Sanghathan (MASS) and complained to the company about damage to the environment.

Their concerns

According to National Fish Worker's

Forum, a nationwide federation of fishermen organisations, the plant operates a cooling technology that requires much more water than the system it got clearance for. The water is eventually discharged into the sea, and the complainants have alleged that it has affected marine life.

"The company had first got clearance for a closed-cycle cooling system in the Mundra plant. But it got government clearances modified and installed boilers with an open cooling system [which requires three times as much water] and then discharges water into the sea. We demanded that they switch to the closed-cycle cooling system, but the company refused," said Forum secretary Usmangani Sherasiya.

MASS general secretary Bharat Patel said the outfall canal of the plant discharges hot and saline water at a rate of 600 million litres/hr. "It is affecting marine life as well as groundwater sources," he said. Budha Jam, leader of the fishermen community of Tragadi-Nal, says: "With marine life near the coast affected, we are forced to sail farther in search of fish. They also dredged the coast and seafloor for their outfall channel and deposited sand near a well, which was a source of drinking water. Water in the well has turned saline since." Complainants add that



The power plant in Kutch. *Express*

coal dust and fly-ash from the plant are damaging date palms and chikoo trees in Navinal.

In 2010, fishermen, farmers and the Navinal panchayat, with the help of Delhi-based NGO Centre for Financial

Accountability, moved the Complaints Adviser Ombudsman, an accountability mechanism for IFC, as well as the compliance review panel of ADB. The ombudsman conducted an internal audit and submitted its report in 2012, and CRP submitted its report in 2015, but Patel of MASS said these did not change anything on the ground.

In US courts

In 2015, Jam, Patel and sarpanch Jadeja filed a suit, through EarthRights International, against IFC in the Federal District Court for the District of Columbia. They contended that the funding agency should be held responsible for air, land and water pollution caused by the plant. Arguing that the IFC internal audit had found environmental violations, they sought damages and injunctive relief. IFC claimed absolute immunity from such litigation under the US International Organisation Immunities Act (IOIA), 1945. The district court ruled in IFC's favour. In 2017, the petitioners moved the Court of Appeals for the district, which upheld the verdict. The petitioners then moved the US Supreme Court.

In a 7:1 verdict, the Supreme Court reversed the Appeals Court judgment. It ruled IFC enjoys only "restrictive immunity" in ac-

tivities abroad, and remanded the matter back to the lower court for adjudication on damages. "Petitioners argued that the IFC was entitled under the IOIA only to the limited or 'restrictive' immunity that foreign governments currently enjoy. We agree," it said.

Company's stand

In response to an emailed questionnaire, Tata Power said there is "no truth in this allegation as the Company has not only complied to all the Environmental and Pollution norms of the Country but has also met the stringent recommendations of IFC and other Lenders so as to comply to International guidelines too". It added that since its inception, CGPL has fully complied with all environmental and social norms and this has been endorsed by the Environment Ministry, Gujarat Pollution Control Board and other statutory and independent bodies. "The company has also got several internationally reputed third parties and experts to review the compliance aspects, who all have also found it fully in compliance & beyond. The Company is also conscious of the natural resources in the vicinity of the plant and has taken appropriate steps to not just preserve them, but to also improve the flora and fauna in and around the project area," it said.