

The digital divide

The questions publishers tackle online and their responses are the same anywhere in the world



MEDIASCOPE

VANITA KOHLI-KHANEKAR

Exercise make us happier than money," says the headline. It was one of the half a dozen stories on the Stylist website this Monday. The magazine that sells 403,000 copies is doing well in its digital avatar says Ella Dolphin, CEO, The Stylist Group. The thing that worked was "voice and pur-

pose," which Dolphin spoke about at length at Campaign's Digital Media Strategies 2019 in London last week. It was the specificity of what Stylist offers, a clear, no-nonsense voice on feminism with a twist, which appealed to almost all of us sitting in the room.

The Guardian's Chief Customer Officer Anna Bateson talked at length about its campaign to raise money from reader donations. More than a million readers had contributed to this independent, liberal brand, ensuring that it was out of the woods. A bulk of its donations is coming from the US followed by the UK, among many other countries. As an aside — most British news brands, BBC and The Guardian in particular, are having an exceptionally good time in the US. The rise of Donald Trump, polarisation and the questions on the credibility of mainstream media means that British brands are seen as neutral and trustworthy.

Stylist and The Guardian were among the 30 odd media brands that talked about their digital journeys at the Digital Media Strategies 2019 event. What hit me, again and again, was that the examples might be different but the questions that publishers were tackling while moving online and the answers they were getting were the same everywhere in the world.

And India, where publishing is still going through its online tutorial, is no different. Publishers have to be clear about what they want to do online, they have to tackle cultural challenges that going online involves and tech is a big spooky thing that most hate dealing with. All this talk of "productising the content" baffles them. And then there are revenues. The gap between what a brand gets for an online reader/viewer is usually a tenth or less than offline.

Some of the most successful online

publishers in India — Times Internet, The Express Group, Vikatan — have tackled these questions for years before hitting the right notes. Times Internet, the digital arm of one of India's largest media groups, has chosen to become this wide arching firm that facilitates transactions online (through ET Money or Dineout among other brands), bought a video player and made it a streaming brand (MX Player) and has worked hard at putting data science and tech at the centre of its universe. The group has been at the internet since 1995 but hit the big numbers only when a member of the promoter family, Satyan Gajwani, took charge in 2011 and brought in among other people Gautam Sinha, a data scientist who is now CEO of the firm. Times Internet at a claimed 400 million unique users globally and over ₹1,300 crore in online revenues, is by far one of the largest digital publishers.

The Indian Express is about a tenth of The Times of India on readership and one of the smaller publishers. However, it is now India's second largest online publisher after Times Internet at a claimed 138 million unique users across its group properties. What worked is focus says Anant Goenka, executive

director, The Express Group, who took over in 2012. "Brand is equal to credibility, that clarity helped me with decision making while fighting in a commoditised market. A lot of people were throwing lot of things on the wall and seeing what sticks, we throw fewer things. The other clarity was thinking of us as business-to-consumer not a business-to-business," says he. The ₹30,550 crore publishing industry's abject dependence on advertising has over the decades warped the business that is focussed on advertisers not readers. In the last few years, across media segments, the firms that have done well online have had a BtoC focus — from Netflix to Financial Times that just crossed a million paying readers.

Just like their developed market counterparts, many digital publishers in India are trying to make revenue through subscriptions (The Ken, Rocket Post, Caravan, Vikatan) or donations (The Wire). Of course, it will be many years before Indian publishers hit the cliff that the ones in the UK or the US did. But it is good to know that the paths they have chosen are well-trodden.

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CHINESE WHISPERS

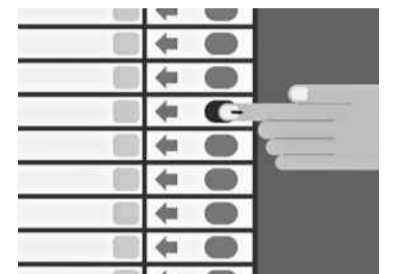
Language of ambition



The Trinamool thinks of itself as a national party, which is strong in one region. It also believes it would be one of the top three parties in the next Lok Sabha and a key player in the

next government. On Tuesday, party leader Derek O'Brien (pictured) addressed a press conference in New Delhi, his first this election season in the capital. O'Brien, who is more fluent in English and Bengali, addressed the press conference almost entirely in Hindi to underscore his party's ambition to play a more central role in national politics in the months to come. He said he would hold more press conferences in the next few weeks and speak increasingly in Hindi.

Ranking NOTA



The Trinamool is set to approach the Election Commission (EC) with a rare request. Usually, each EVM, or electronic voting machine, has space for 16 buttons, with the bottom most being "none of the above", or NOTA. However, in the Darjeeling Lok Sabha constituency, the NOTA is the 17th button, that is, the topmost button on the second EVM machine in a booth. The Trinamool argues this would confuse voters as there is nothing above the "none of the above" button (and nothing below it as the constituency has 16 candidates) and wants the EC to make it the last button on the second machine.

Opposition renamed

TV Dhinakaran, who has been ousted from the AIADMK and is V K Sasikala's nephew, has a sharp tongue. The saving grace is when he criticises his opponents in election rallies he doesn't refer to them by their names but uses pseudonyms. He addresses Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami as 'Tyagi' (sacrificer) and his faction of the AIADMK as Tyagi & Company. Palaniswami's deputy, O Panneerselvam, is 'Mr Dharma Yuddham'; minister Rajendra Balaji is 'Manthiravadhi' (black magic specialist); the DMK treasurer and Vijaykanth's wife is named after a recent Rajinikanth horror movie Chandramukhi; and BJP leader and Union Minister of State for Finance and Shipping Pon Radhakrishnan is referred to as 'Bavilvan' (wrestler). State ministers Velumani and Thangamani, who are close aides of Palaniswami, are referred to as "tender" ministers.

Hydropower gets a late booster

The policy, announced just before the election dates were declared, offers hope for this neglected sector

JYOTI MUKUL

Six days before the dates for the general elections were announced, the government announced a hydropower policy that had gone through years of debate. The last-minute passage of the policy together with approvals for four power projects worth ₹31,000 crore could be seen as an effort to revive the power sector and help India meet its climate change targets, since hydropower will be counted as renewable energy.

India currently has 45,400 Mw of installed hydropower capacity, 13 per cent of the country's power generation capacity. Compare it with the government-owned NTPC's 41,580 Mw of coal-based power generation, and it becomes clear why there was a need for a focused hydro-power policy in the first place.

"It's better late than never. In fact, the policy is opportune and is likely to infuse life into some of the projects that were on the back burner due to commercial viability issues. The measures are a fallout of the required grid stability because of the intermittent nature of solar and wind power. It shows the government's concern to address the issue in advance," says Balraj Joshi, chairman and managing director, National Hydroelectric Power Corporation. The public sector undertaking operates 6,971 MW or 15 per cent of the total hydropower capacity.

According to the government, India has hydropower potential of 1,45,320 Mw but in the past 10 years only about 10,000 Mw has been added. The share of hydropower in total capacity has declined from 50.36 per cent in the

1960s to around 13 per cent in 2018-19. "Just as solar and wind, a similar push is required for hydropower because it is a capital-intensive sector," says Prashant Jain, chief executive officer, JSW Energy.

Hydro-power's status as renewable energy allows for a hydropower purchase obligation (HPO) on the power distribution companies, which will have to meet a fixed percentage of their power demand from hydropower. The HPO guidelines will need to ensure that it does not come at the cost of wind power since it will be part of the non-solar renewable purchase obligation. "This is critical. Distribution companies

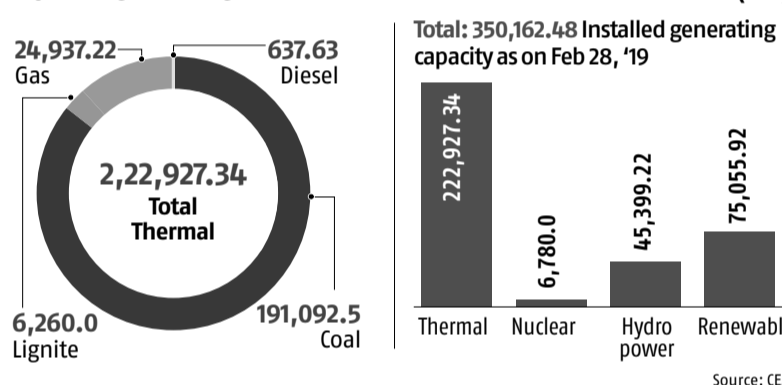
will be obliged to buy and more power purchase agreements (PPAs) will take place. This will also help in financial closures," says Jain.

Besides HPO, the new policy provides for direct budgetary support for infrastructure creation and flood control. Enabling infrastructure — such as roads and bridges — will get funds up to ₹1.5 crore a Mw for up to 200Mw projects and ₹1 a Mw for above 200-Mw projects. "The budgetary support for flood control and connecting infrastructure will reduce the capital requirement and make it easier to finance the projects," says Kameswara Rao, partner, PricewaterhouseCoopers.

The policy also provides for tariff rationalisation measures including providing flexibility to developers to determine tariff by back loading it after increasing the project life to 40 years, increasing the debt repayment period to 18 years and introducing escalating tariff of 2 per cent. Joshi says this will bring more projects in the "commercially viable" bracket and they will now be taken up.



POWER SHARING



JSW, for instance, is hoping that its 240Mw Kutehr project on the Ravi in Himachal Pradesh is able to benefit from the tariff rationalisation measures.

For NHPC, Joshi says these measures will boost its portfolio besides helping other developers, especially its new projects in the north-east will benefit from the assistance for infrastructure and flood moderation where these aspects form a sizeable part of

hydropower projects and the requirements of meticulous planning in dealing with these aspects to deliver the projects. "It is for the developers to address the issues of all stakeholders in terms of the guidelines. More often than not, it is the lack of will to address these issues that leads to public resentment and consequent effect on the project. The developers have to define and adopt R&R strategies in all honesty and in a spirit of sharing," he says. Jain, however, says the social and environmental issues are mostly state-level challenges and need to be addressed on case-to-case basis.

From a private developer point of view, one crucial incentive missing from the policy is interest subvention. Jain says construction cost is heavy and it takes six to seven years to build a project. If the interest cost during construction comes down, then the cost of power comes down substantially. "PPAs and HPOs are the keys for financial closures to happen but if there is some degree of interest subvention during the construction phase, the cost will come down and distribution companies will buy power. This will be a big boost for the hydropower sector in future," he says. The private sector accounts for 3,394 MW of hydropower capacity, just 7 per cent of the total of 45,400Mw.

In the absence of storage and hybrid technology finding wide application, hydropower and gas based generation are needed for tackling the intermittency of renewable power that is expected to touch 170Gw by 2022. The policy marks an attempt to lower costs and incentivise distribution companies to buy hydropower. Much, however, will depend on the policy details. This, after all, could be the last chance for hydropower to grow after years of flat or no growth.

the project cost.

Private sector interest, however, may not be easy to come, especially since hydropower projects face huge resettlement and rehabilitation issues besides protest on environmental grounds. The policy is silent on these issues.

According to Joshi, it will take some time for the private developers to come to terms with the uncertainties and difficulties associated with

INSIGHT

Why growth is a worry



SONAL VARMA & AURODEEP NANDI

The growth of an economy consists of a trend (potential), and cycles around this trend. In India's case, there are reasons to worry about both. India's potential growth rate has moderated over the last decade. Various techniques — from statistical filters to production function estimates — suggest India's potential GDP growth rate has moderated from around 8 per cent in 2003-08 to around 7 per cent currently, and this decline can be traced to a slower pace of investment (capital accumulation) and lower (total factor) productivity growth.

A significant build-up of core inflationary pressures has typically coincided with periods of GDP growth exceeding 7 per cent, another sign of where trend growth lies. This (slowing trend) is a longer-term worry, which we discuss later.

In the near term, concerns are centered on the cycle itself. India has experienced two full cycles since the 2008 global financial crisis: A V-shaped 2009 recovery followed by a prolonged slowdown over 2011-12, and a recovery starting in 2014 that petered off in 2016 due to weak global demand, fading effects from lower oil prices and the (transitory) hit from demonetisation.

The economy embarked on a third up cycle in mid-2017, aided by a rebound in global growth and remonetisation, but recent data suggests this cycle has also peaked. We see two factors behind our view that a cyclical slowdown is underway. First, the fading impact of US fiscal stimulus, lagged effects from tighter US monetary policy and China's deleveraging campaign, the US-China trade tensions and a weak tech cycle are driving a synchronised global growth slowdown. We expect weak global demand to mainly hurt India's export-oriented and manufacturing sectors, reducing GDP growth by around 0.2-0.3 percentage points (pp) in FY20. Second, the full effects of tight domestic financial conditions (of 2018) have yet to play out. While the non-banking finance company (NBFC) crisis appears contained on its surface, sub-surface cracks have formed.

Banks have stepped up credit expansion, but much of this was either re-directed towards retail lending or pumped back into better-rated NBFCs (and not as growth capital). Segments perceived as higher risk and inherently more dependent on NBFCs for funding remain credit constrained. We would classify commercial real estate and small and medium enterprises in this segment. Thus, there is a growing divergence between the haves and the have-nots.

For the haves (with lower perceived risk), costs have risen but funding is available. For the have-nots (with higher perceived risk), funding availability itself is a challenge. If working capital remains constrained, we would expect production declines and investment

delays for under-construction real estate projects. We estimate tighter financial conditions will reduce GDP growth by another 0.2-0.3pp in FY20.

All is not doom and gloom. We need to consider the possible supports from easier fiscal policy, accommodative monetary policy and the global policy pivot (US/China). How much offset can these factors provide?

For both monetary and fiscal policies, there are transmission leakages and lags. The government announced an income support scheme for marginal farmers, but not all states have digital land records that are linked to bank accounts, which will lead to spending undershoot. Weak nominal GDP growth is also a negative for tax revenues and, if revenues disappoint, the higher spend on consumption will come at the cost of lower public capital expenditure. Thus the aggregate fiscal impulse will not be large.

Monetary policy is likely to remain growth supportive but with transmission lags. Elevated credit-deposit ratios and high government borrowing suggests the transmission to lower deposit and lending rates will be slow. For 'have-nots', transmission is not just about cost or availability of capital; it is a confidence issue. For confidence to return, an asset quality review of NBFCs may be necessary, albeit at the right time. Together, we expect accommodative monetary and fiscal policies to add around 0.4pp to FY20 growth.

Globally, the policy pivot has perhaps removed the tail risk of a sharp global growth collapse, but China stim-

ulus remains in its early stages and each incremental easing of credit is proving to be less growth effective. Thus, global growth may remain weak in the coming months, but a stabilisation is likely later in 2019.

In sum, we see four clear implications. First, India's economy is currently being hit by both global and domestic shocks, which will likely slow growth to 6.2-6.3 per cent y-o-y in H1 2019 (January-June) from 6.5-7.0 per cent in H2 2018. Second, given policy transmission lags — both global and domestic — any cyclical recovery will likely be backend weighted and visible only in H2 FY20 (October-March). Third, given monetary easing is being transmitted by banks to retail consumers and fiscal spending is geared towards revenue expenditure, the cyclical recovery should be driven by consumption again. And fourth, given the weak starting point, GDP growth in FY20 is unlikely to be higher than in FY19 (7.0 per cent).

Coming back to the medium-term priority of resuscitating trend, larger questions remain: How do we increase domestic investment without support from global growth? If government spending is increasingly geared towards consumption, how do we create space for public capex? Finally, what other reforms should be implemented to increase productivity?

Overall, as cyclical growth turns down and domestic policies become more accommodative, growth will pick up cyclically, albeit with a lag, but a more active dialogue on ways to lift the trend itself is necessary. Otherwise, the economy will continue cycling up and down around a downturn.

Varma is Chief India economist; Nandi is India economist, Nomura

LETTERS

Look for genuine buyers Old wine in new bottle

Apropos your front page lead report, "TPG Capital, Etihad, NIF likely to bid for cash-strapped Jet Airways" (April 9); it is good news that several entities are likely to bid for the ailing airline. But let's make no mistake, TPG and Etihad will both bid really low prices — on which they hope to acquire a viable asset. The fact that Etihad earlier wanted to sell its stake, and is now expected to bid, clearly shows they are hoping for a bargain purchase. I don't blame them. Why should they pay a rupee more than what is the real worth of the company — and they have the advantage of knowing that inside out.

The only aberration may arise from the National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIIF) submitting a higher bid in a misconceived "altruistic and national interest". Such a step would be disastrous. NIIIF has no expertise in running an airline. Like the State Bank of India (SBI) they will also be a temporary parking slot; having paid high they will not want to sell low. Meanwhile, the airline will continue to become less and less valuable and eventually may have to be literally gifted back to the original promoters or someone else — even the terminally sick Air India. That could be a great comedy of errors. The banks, led by the SBI, should be only sell to a genuine buyer, for however low the price offered by it.

Krishan Kalra Gurugram

The Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) manifesto *Sankalp Patra* is similar to the manifesto issued by the party five years ago containing several promises including abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution, implementation of uniform civil code, construction of Ram temple. The nation had heard that the farmers would be stopped from committing suicides, but the number of suicides have increased manifold. The youth of the country were promised 10 crore jobs in the 2014 manifesto; instead the unemployment rate has become the highest in the last 45 years. The *Sankalp Patra* is completely silent on the draconian measure of demonetisation that took the lives of more than 100 innocent people.

The people in the Valley have been alienated and terrorism, which the party had promised to root out, has increased not only in J&K, but in Chhattisgarh and the Northeast of the country. Briefly, while not enough has been promised for the next five years, there certainly is an attempt to sharpen communal polarisation in the country..

S K Khosla Chandigarh

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HAMBONE



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A gush of money

Question marks over sustainability of FPI flows

The net foreign portfolio investment of ₹33,116 crore in March 2019 is nothing short of spectacular in a market in which key indices have been propped up by a few stocks, with a large proportion of listed companies witnessing a bear phase compared to their highs of 2018. Last month's inflow came after a substantial ₹15,328 crore in February, and is the highest in India's history since the ₹33,782 crore in March 2017. It is also a large multiple of the mean and median monthly net investments of ₹2,000-odd crore a month in the past three financial years.

Year 2018 was not good for the Indian markets in terms of foreign portfolio investment with net outflows of ₹34,163 crore, the second-highest since 2008, the year of the global financial crisis. The reasons for the decline are not surprising — valuations had turned expensive in the first quarter of 2018, and the US Federal Reserve was taking a hawkish stand and was on a rate hike cycle till January 2019. In March, it turned decisively dovish ending three years of tight money policy as US economic growth was slowing. Since then the rupee has gained and emerging markets, including India, which had seen money being pulled out, have seen a reversal. India has become the largest recipient of FPI flows in emerging markets since February 2019 with net equity investment of \$8.3 billion, which coincides with the change in the Fed stance.

After nearly a year of see-saw, the Indian markets may not be looking as expensive as they did in early 2018 and hence global portfolio investors are turning aggressive. Expectations of better macros, corporate earnings growth and the domestic consumption story have put India on the FPIs' buy list once again. A stable rupee and benign inflation are also positives. However, the concern in the minds of domestic players is that the flows so far are more due to a risk-on trade driven by liquidity after the Fed's brake on rates, which will be followed by a similar action by other global central banks, or whether it is due to fundamentals. The spread between India's earnings yield and the US 10-year bond yield, which has typically averaged 3.9 per cent, is still below 2.9 per cent. A higher spread would make a foreign investor more comfortable in terms of valuation.

The Sensex has gained 7.4 per cent since February, given the gush of money that has come in. The question is whether the FII flows will sustain, given the fact that they have cooled off a bit over the last week. There are reasons for this concern: The market appears expensive at current levels given that earnings growth has been disappointing in the past few years; moreover, a below normal monsoon forecast does not augur well. Any negative surprise in March quarter results or crude oil prices could lead to a correction. Besides these, foreign money flows will also depend a lot on the new government's policies. More reforms are needed in land and labour, and investors will be watching how the new government, which will take office in May, steps up economic growth and revives business confidence. While capacity utilisation in manufacturing is at a multi-year high, businesses will need more confidence before putting up plants, which is necessary to revive the capital expenditure cycle. The return of foreign investors is obviously a good sign for the Indian economy, but policymakers must be careful not to take them for granted.

The cash-in-elections scourge

Address systemic problems underlying election spending

Nationwide raids have revealed the degree to which election campaigns in India are dependent upon large amounts of — possibly illegal — money. The Election Commission's (EC's) special team has so far seized cash, alcohol and drugs from across the country, the value of which could total ₹1,800 crore. This is clearly not just a major problem but also one that is growing. Polling is not yet properly underway and yet already it seems that the cash seizures during the 2014 election, of ₹300 crore, have been dwarfed. Of the total haul, ₹473 crore has already been seized in cash, and ₹410 crore in gold — ₹220 crore of the latter from Tamil Nadu alone. That state also led in terms of the cash seized, at ₹154 crore. Meanwhile, Punjab and Gujarat had the dubious distinction of having the most drugs seized — ₹500 crore worth from just Gujarat. The EC's seizures are in addition to huge cash confiscations by several government agencies including the Income-Tax Department. There were over 60 such raids in the recent past. The Centre for Media Studies estimates these elections will see an expenditure of ₹50,000 crore, far more than what was spent in the 2016 US presidential election.

It is worth noting that the EC's directive capping the amount of cash each candidate can spend on a campaign is well known to be flouted at every opportunity. The EC allows candidates to spend up to ₹50 lakh or up to ₹70 lakh, depending on the constituency. In any case this cap is meaningless, given party expenditures at the state or national level can help their candidates without breaching the cap. Some opposition parties, including the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in Tamil Nadu, have claimed that specific raids are politically motivated. While it may be possible to countermand specific polls or register individual cases, there is a systemic problem that must be addressed. In a volume — *Costs of Democracy: Political Finance in India*, published last year — a group of political scientists led by Devesh Kapur and Milan Vaishnav investigated the problem of electoral financing in India and came to some disturbing conclusions. The rise of candidates who finance their own election campaigns has meant that the composition of the Lok Sabha has now skewed towards the rich — 82 per cent of the 2014 Lok Sabha members, for example, have assets of over ₹1 crore. Over the last three Lok Sabha elections, the wealthiest 20 per cent of candidates were victorious more than 20 times as often as the poorest 20 per cent. The political scientists also found that thinking of this expenditure as merely "cash-for-votes" is simplistic, as it is more like "gift-giving", as well as required spending on the basic electoral machinery.

What is necessary is to control expenditure and cash-raising at the party level, while allowing parties to fund their candidates more transparently. This would reduce the reliance on self-funding candidates. The current government's system of anonymous electoral bonds does not aid in this endeavour. Prof Kapur and Dr Vaishnav suggest a "grand bargain" is necessary, in which all money-raising is accounted for, and ideally raised digitally. Parties submit to third-party audits. In return, limits are loosened to reflect the real cost of elections and state funding of elections be introduced.

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



Modi's foreign policy report card

The minuses of his government exceed its pluses

India is in the midst of a frenzied electoral exercise but foreign policy rarely excites the voters' imagination. There may be an exception when it comes to relations with Pakistan but in the past it has not proved possible to sustain the related national security argument as a vote-catching issue. The same appears to be happening with the Balakot adventure where the effort to project the ruling party in tough nationalist colours is fading rapidly. This election, like several others before it, will be determined primarily by domestic issues even though foreign policy is also a point of contention. The rhetoric of parties on foreign policy issues may be divergent, the leadership style may be different and some departures from the past may be evident but the broad contours of India's external relations have not changed much in the past five years of the Modi government. They are unlikely to change irrespective of the political colour of an incoming government.

So how should one read the Modi government's record on foreign policy? There are four distinguishing features which spring to mind.

One, Modi has displayed strong belief in the value of personal diplomacy and the efficacy of leader to leader engagement in resolving outstanding issues. There is no doubt that his relationship with former US President Obama played an important role in consolidating and expanding Indo-US relations. The obvious and positive chemistry that exists between him and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has helped bring relations between the two countries to an unprecedented high level. But one may argue that

Modi was leveraging the very substantive drivers that were already bringing the US and Japan closer to India, the challenge of a rising China being a key factor. Modi has not had much success with Trump in the White House nor has China's Xi Jinping been ready to go beyond optics, such as the Wuhan summit in June last year, to address India's real concerns. Personal diplomacy can be an additionality when substantive factors are already driving relations in a positive direction. They are less efficacious when

there are strong adversarial elements at work in the relationship. Positive vibes generated in a leadership level engagement may fall flat if there is weak follow up. This continues to be a persistent shortcoming on our side.

Two, Modi has enhanced the profile of the Indian diaspora in Indian foreign policy going beyond the initiatives taken by previous governments. He has reached out to overseas Indian communities in several countries and they in turn have enhanced his domestic and international profile. This may have paid dividends in terms of political funding for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and helped in image building but there has been little impact in terms of the Indian diaspora contributing to India's development in the manner that the Chinese diaspora has done for their mother country. From a national perspective one should ask whether the investment made in terms of time and energy, particularly of our overstretched diplomats, has been worthwhile.

Three, Modi is the first prime minister in recent years to welcome foreign investment unreservedly.



SHYAM SARAN

Why manifestos lose credibility

The divorce between fiscal prudence and manifestos released by national political parties is complete. The Indian National Congress, in its bid to return to power, released its manifesto on April 2 and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which is seeking another five-year term in office, announced on April 8 what its goals would be if it were voted back to power. Many of the key economic promises in both the manifestos are not only fiscally imprudent, but they also reveal how unrealistic our political parties can become while making economic policy promises.

A lot has been written about the NYAY agenda of the Congress. It promises up to ₹6,000 per month to the bottom 20 per cent of the poor families. There is a phased roll-out schedule and the cost is expected to be shared with the states. In spite of that, the total cost, when fully implemented, will be huge — estimated at about 1.9 per cent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). This is bound to raise questions on how the required resources would be mobilised.

Will they come from more taxes or reduced outlays on subsidies and other poverty alleviation schemes? More disturbing than the lack of clarity on such issues is the thought that the scheme's implementation will be fraught with challenges. The scheme will be crucially dependent on identifying the poor households on the basis of income — a task that will be extremely onerous and prone to wrong targeting of beneficiaries, particularly in the absence of any credible up-to-date data on family incomes.

Take another promise made by the Congress on the Goods and Services Tax or GST. The manifesto promises a simplified single-rate GST. This appears to be a big promise. But dig deeper into the document and you will see that the manifesto actually promises as many as three rates. This is certainly better than the existing regime. But then why promise a single-rate GST?

The promised abolition of the e-way bill system, a transparent online instrument of preventing evasion of taxes, will only pose newer challenges for those

who administer the GST. The promise is also puzzling as the e-way bill scheme has been implemented largely without any protest or complication. Why change it then? It will of course please traders and small businesses, which do not generally enjoy the idea of increased tax compliance. But will it lead to a more effective GST?

The Congress manifesto's promise on a new package for the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) is equally flawed. It comes up with what seems to be a crazy idea of redefining MSMEs on the basis of the number of people employed, at a time when automation and technology have reduced the need for employing more workers. If any unit employs between 101 and 500 workers, then it would classify as a medium enterprise and not qualify for benefits such as exemption from all laws except those for minimum wages and taxation. The exemption will be enjoyed by only the micro and small units employing less than 101 workers. Thus, there will be a perverse incentive among small units to employ less than 101 workers to enjoy the benefits for at least three years.

The economic promises of the BJP manifesto are no less problematic. The additional financial impact of fulfilling the promise of extending the coverage of the Prime Minister Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana to include all farmers, irrespective of their land holdings, is not significantly huge. The government has budgeted for an annual expenditure of ₹75,000 crore for paying out ₹6,000 a year to each of the 125 million farm holdings of less than two hectares.

Now that all operational land holdings would be covered under this scheme, the remaining 21 million farm holdings of more than two hectares would also be eligible and the total annual cost would be about ₹87,600 crore. The increase is not substantial on a Budget size of ₹27 trillion, but unfortunately the principle of benefitting the needier segment of small and marginal farmers has been diluted.

The idea of extending loans of ₹1 lakh to farmers without any interest is even more fiscally irresponsibly

He has sought foreign capital on all his major visits abroad. He deserves credit for this. It is another matter that the Indian market continues to be challenging for a prospective foreign investor and the fact that Indian investors have been reluctant to invest in their own country is not a very encouraging sign to their foreign counterparts. There are regulatory and tax related issues and, more importantly, policy unpredictability and a positive message from the prime minister has been unable to dispel concerns over them. Economic diplomacy has been a priority for this government but results are sub-optimal. This points to the urgent need to address structural and governance related issues which have long plagued the conduct of foreign policy.

Four, success has been achieved in managing a very complex and rapidly evolving situation in the Gulf and West Asia. The Modi government has been able to upgrade its relations simultaneously with Saudi Arabia and the UAE on the one hand and Iran on the other. It has brought the critical relations with Israel out in the open. In doing so, it has safeguarded India's energy security, found key allies in its fight against terrorism and deflected pressures from the US to alter policy towards Iran and Syria. These have been the objectives of previous governments, too, but the diplomatic deftness evident here has been missing in the past.

It is Modi's Pakistan policy which has left India more vulnerable internationally despite claims to the contrary. The temptation to make Pakistan a domestic political issue has been damaging in foreign policy terms and is sharpening the communal divide in our society. We are unable to deal with Pakistan as yet another state because foreign policy calculations are coloured by domestic political compulsions. Pakistan occupies so much of our mental space that little attention is directed to our other critically important neighbours. China has taken advantage of our distraction to penetrate our neighbourhood. Furthermore, the public escalation of hostility towards Pakistan and rising tensions make India vulnerable to international intervention, thereby bringing back hyphenation with that country. The mis-handling of Jammu and Kashmir, the allegation of pro-Pakistani sympathies among ordinary Kashmiris, all these have brought relations with Pakistan into a dangerous stalemate. A bold regional and global posture lacks credibility if the country remains tied so firmly to the sub-continent.

India over the past 70 years has accumulated invaluable international political capital as a vibrant democracy which has successfully held together a very diverse population professing different creeds and faiths and celebrating dissent and debate. The holding of yet another general election is a reaffirmation of democracy but the political discourse accompanying it is not. We are in danger of diminishing what makes India unique as a country, held up as a model of plural and secular democracy. On this count, the minuses of the Modi government exceed its pluses.

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NEW DELHI DIARY

A K BHATTACHARYA

Mother Teresa or Dr Faustus?



BOOK REVIEW

SHREEKANT SAMBRANI

"If Mother Teresa were charged with bank robbery, the jury would still have to determine whether or not she committed a bank robbery." That quip by Federal Judge Jed Rakoff at the 2012 trial of Rajat Gupta, a former managing director of the global consulting gold standard McKinsey and Company for insider trading, is an accurate summary of what Mr Gupta says in his defence in the new book.

Warren Buffett agreed to invest \$5 billion in Goldman Sachs on September 23, 2008 at the height of the subprime crisis. Mr Gupta, then on the Goldman Board,

learnt of this through a conference call. Minutes afterwards, he telephoned Raj Rajaratnam, the prime mover of Galleon, a hedge fund, who bought 350,000 Goldman shares just before the market closed. Galleon gained handsomely when the news broke the next day.

Mr Rajaratnam was convicted of insider trading in 2011. Mr Gupta's links with Mr Rajaratnam were also under surveillance. Although the above call appeared on the list, there was no transcript. In May 2012, Preet K Bharara, then the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, charged Mr Gupta with passing privileged inside information that led to the criminal trial. Mr Gupta was convicted and served a two-year prison term. His last appeal was turned down in January 2019.

Mr Gupta's book is in place of the testimony he wanted to offer in the trial, but did not, on the advice of his legal team. He and Mr Rajaratnam had a venture cap-

ital fund going. He says that this deal duped him out of \$10 million. His used to call Mr Rajaratnam to recover this money. He claims that there was no quid in the form of financial gain for the quo of supplying inside information. He admits to "judgmental errors" that allowed things to reach the tipping point: trusting Anil Kumar, a protégé in McKinsey who was in cahoots with Mr Rajaratnam, Mr Rajaratnam himself, Ravi Trehan, a friend who was also involved with the venture capital fund and tipped Mr Gupta off about Mr Rajaratnam's underhand ways (but did not come to Mr Gupta's defence in the trial), among many others. The only ones Mr Gupta trusts are his wife and his four daughters.

Mr Gupta says his fateful September call to Mr Rajaratnam, which was in a gap in a busy schedule, was about the money he was owed. Why would he tip off someone with whom he had an ongoing dispute? All the other evidence the prose-

cution offered was circumstantial. There was no money trail.

Finally, the Mother Teresa defence. Mr Gupta's exceptional career, his leadership of McKinsey, his network of associates which was virtually a Who's Who of global business and, above all, his mass charity and community initiatives, are all part of his case.

How does this all add up? Not to a hill of beans, to this reviewer. First, the key call. Immediately after you hear of what is absolute bombshell news, do you call about your long-running dispute? Are you not inclined to use this as leverage to extract your payment? If we accept his claim of lapses of personal judgment, we must wonder how he rose to the top of the consulting ladder. Mr Gupta's insinuation that the US Justice Department and the SEC wanted a headline-snaring case also sounds thin. Mr Bharara, despite his penchant for grandstanding, was not under any extraordinary pressure in 2012, four years after the event, to snare a big fish.

That leaves us with Mother Teresa, the whole point of this manipulative book. No heartstring is too delicate to pluck. We

are treated to his history — early deaths of his parents, his indomitable spirit, his hard work, his achievements, his popularity among the high and mighty, sometimes even repeatedly. He refers to the *Bhagwad Gita* as the source of his solace, expecting the reader to think of him as the *sthitapragnya* (the ultimate stoic) the scripture defines.

So the enigma persists: As Judge Rakoff asked in sentencing order, "Why did Mr Gupta do it?" Was it simply a case of feeling "frustrated at not finding new worlds to conquer?"

Mr Gupta was an outsider to the power elite, a welcome one, but an outsider nonetheless. People listened to him politely and often with interest, but he had no way of knowing whether they would follow up on what he said. One way of ensuring that was to back up his advice with resources that would lead to actions.

This is where Mr Rajaratnam, enters the picture. Galleon was a large hedge fund and Mr Rajaratnam was already influential because of the money he controlled. That was the hook for Mr Gupta.

In 2008, there was a very real possibility that Mr Gupta would be the chairman of Galleon International and enter India with a \$10 billion corpus in 2010. He would have been a real builder, with a life-membership in the club he probably desired most.

This power motive is possibly what Judge Rakoff meant when he said that "Gupta, though not immediately profiting from tipping Rajaratnam, viewed it as an avenue for future benefits, opportunities and even excitement." The last word is the crucial one.

"As a rule, I have found that the greater brain a man has, and the better he is educated, the easier it has been to mystify him," Harry Houdini once said to Arthur Conan Doyle. They don't come brainier and better educated than Rajat Gupta!

A longer version of this review appears on the website

MIND WITHOUT FEAR

Rajat Gupta
Juggernaut Books; 342 pages, ₹699

Opinion

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 10, 2019



IRAN-US HOSTILITY

Hassan Rouhani, Iranian president

Who are you [US] to label revolutionary institutions as terrorists? You want to use terrorist groups as tools against the nations of the region... you are the leader of world terrorism

Social media has to answer some tough questions

India isn't alone, the UK is the latest country to take aim at social media, to hold it accountable for what's posted on it

IN THE PAST, when Indian politicians have tried to hold a Twitter or a WhatsApp accountable for what is posted or circulated through them, the normal reply has been that they are just platforms and that, in the case of WhatsApp, they cannot even read the messages that are posted; giving in to the government's demand of helping trace messages, WhatsApp has said, violates privacy concerns. That view has, however, taken a beating recently with both Australia and now the UK deciding to hold social media bosses responsible if offensive content on these platforms is not removed at the earliest. While this is not an outright assault on social media—social media will get a certain time to remove posts which will be identified by the government/authorities—this is likely to be the first step. Indeed, newspaper reports suggest the UK regulations were drawn up after consultations with social media entrepreneurs like Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg. Interestingly, some weeks ago, Zuckerberg surprised many when he explicitly called for government regulation on content; while this could be a tactic to ensure the government uses light regulation on social media, it is nonetheless a change in Facebook's stance so far.

Indeed, with Facebook pulling down pages associated with the Congress before the Indian elections, and with Twitter blocking accounts, this is a clear acknowledgment that they are not just platforms or the public square, so to speak, where anyone is free to say what they want. Indeed, while WhatsApp continues to resist the suggestion that it help the government trace certain posts—after there are court-issued orders—it has already made some moves to take care of these concerns. In the first step, it limited the number of persons to whom a message could be forwarded and, now, it is working on a solution that will allow group administrators to simply block messages that are 'frequently forwarded'; this will probably prevent a lot of jokes from being circulated, but it will also stop fake news from being circulated. To be sure, a user can download the message and, once that is done, it is no longer 'frequently forwarded', and so can be circulated. What such moves do, though, is slow the pace/frequency of forwarding messages.

It can be argued that the government is treading into areas like privacy, but such is the speed at which social media circulates news/views, the government needs to take some action—within a day of the New Zealand white supremacist attack on a mosque that left over 50 dead, users had uploaded the video 1.5 million times and Facebook's automatic detection blocked 1.2 million. Interestingly, in the context of governments trying to hold social media accountable for what is carried on them, and the attack on them for promoting fake news, Zuckerberg is now talking of partnering with traditional media for giving users high quality news. In an interview posted on his Facebook page, Zuckerberg said he was exploring paying publishers for their content; while it is not clear how the payment would be made, it is a big change for Facebook whose model was essentially supplanting traditional media as a source of news. A few days ago, interestingly, some of India's leading newspapers published an advertisement slamming social media for its sensationalisation—"if we don't have the facts", it said, "we don't print the news". Where this is all headed is unclear, but when social media has the kind of power that it has, it has to demonstrate that it has the power to control it; in the euphoria over what social media promised, few dared to ask questions, but that power shift has taken place. And if social media doesn't fix the problems associated with it, as politicians across the world have made clear, they will have no option but to step in and do the needful.

Using Coal India to fix SEBs

Lower coal prices could help SEBs whose losses keep soaring

VIRTUALLY EVERY VILLAGE in the country today is electrified but the irony of the situation is there isn't enough affordable power to go round. The amount of power consumed in 2018-19 is estimated at just roughly 4% more than that in 2017-18. Plagued by losses, the distribution companies (discoms) are unable to procure enough power even as a clutch of private sector generating companies (gencos), that are unregulated, struggle to stay afloat in the absence of adequate coal or gas. A good many have become stressed assets for their lenders; the Samadhan scheme has had very limited success in finding buyers for these. The supply of coal to power plants by Coal India, in the eleven months to February, was about 9.4% higher than in the corresponding period of 2017-18 but that was still lower than the allotted quantity. The quantity of gas made available was barely 29-31% of the allocation promised.

The root of the problem remains the discoms that, over the years, have run up large losses. While their operational and financial data is not available beyond 2015-16, their dues to gencos are believed to have increased sharply over the last few months. On average, according to Kotak Institutional Equities, their payables to generators are overdue by about four months. State Electricity Boards are tipped to make losses of over ₹1 lakh crore in 2018-19 and also in 2019-20.

While the UDAY scheme could have made things better, it hasn't helped as much as hoped. The key to a more robust performance was lower AT&C losses but these are now at close to 20% as compared to the targeted 15%; in some states, the level is closer to 25%. Also, the progress of smart metering of lines—aimed at improving efficiencies—has been tardy and at 5.34 lakh, it is still less than 2.2% of the targeted 24.1 million metres.

Discoms are unlikely to fall in line unless their borrowing limits are curbed. Also, as Kotak suggests, the government might want to re-look the economics of the power sector by reining in the profits of Coal India, and limiting its dividend payouts, for a temporary period. Cheaper coal could improve the finances of gencos and, in turn, those of the discoms. To be sure, the Centre has little incentive to do this because it uses the dividends from Coal India to boost non-tax revenues. However, there is a case for foregoing these receipts to make the power sector a little more solvent; some relief to power producers would help the state-owned banks. Already, state-owned gencos such as NTPC have been pampered by the government which has partisan pricing policies; NTPC, too, should participate in the competitive bidding process.

CloseAI

China's use of AI to bar "unruly visitors" could have a more sinister purpose

CHINA WILL SOON be using artificial intelligence (AI) to bar unruly or "uncivilised visitors" from entering public spaces, such as parks, in Beijing. Using AI and facial recognition technology, the country plans to identify those who have previously engaged in misdemeanours. According to news reports, a list of such individuals will allow the Beijing Municipal Administration Center of Parks to curb bad tourist behaviour during events such as the three-day holidays around Tomb Sweeping Day, locally known as the Qingming Festival. During the recent celebrations, tourists were seen climbing trees, picking flowers and damaging plants, while some people reportedly went fishing in Beijing's lakes where the activity is regulated and others were seen hawking illegally in the parks. On the surface, Beijing's goal seems to be in the spirit of preventing unruly behaviour by citizens. But, given the country's record on curbing the many freedoms available to citizens in other countries, it is likely that "unruly" behaviour could just be the front. If defacing public property, climbing to a better vantage point, hawking/distributing, etc, gets "unruly visitors" barred from public areas, these can just as easily be extended to bar protests and protestors. Barring the offenders from public areas means ensuring that the options to congregate dwindle.

China is known to have strict surveillance and censorship. Its extensive surveillance of Xinjiang, a remote region in the west of the country, home to an ethnic minority population that is largely Muslim, is proof of how much control the government can have over the lives of its citizens. The February Xinjiang surveillance data reveal shone light on what data points are recorded by the Chinese government—alongside people's names, dates of birth, places of employment, sex, home address, official identification card number, etc, there were notes on the places that they had most recently visited. AI-enabled policing may just mean further curbs on the civil freedoms the Chinese enjoy.

THE REAL MAINSTREAM

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES ARE A NON-ISSUE IN THIS ELECTION LARGELY BECAUSE CIVIL SOCIETY HAS FAILED TO INFORM AND ENGAGE CITIZENS ON THIS EXISTENTIAL CRISIS

Why environmental issues are non-existent in this election

IN THE LAST few days, I have been bombarded with queries from journalists about the importance of environmental issues in the 2019 elections and whether political parties are giving them due importance in their manifestos. Frankly, I have struggled to answer their questions simply because there is very little to comment on. The gap between the environmental challenges facing the country and promises being made by political parties is too great to warrant any serious comment. Let me explain.

India is today facing an environmental crisis of unprecedented proportions. Never have our air and water been as foul as they are today. Air quality has worsened to such an extent that it now kills people on a large scale. Of all the countries, India has the highest child mortality rate due to toxic air. In 2017, at least one in eight deaths in the country were attributed to air pollution. Similarly, polluted water is still the largest killer of babies in the country. And our water pollution is increasing by the day.

In 2018, the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) identified a total of 351 polluted river stretches—an increase from 302 stretches identified just three years ago. Not just the Ganga is polluted—all the major and minor rivers are falling prey to pollution because of unsustainable withdrawal of water and untreated disposal of waste.

The crisis is even more acute in case of groundwater. Groundwater accounts for over 80% of our drinking-water supply and we have a groundwater pollution crisis of unprecedented scale. Of 640 districts of the country, the groundwater in 276 districts is polluted due to fluoride, in 387 districts due to nitrate, in 113 districts due to various heavy metals, and in 61 districts due to uranium.



CHANDRA BHUSHAN

Deputy director general of Centre of Science and Environment. Twitter: Bh_Chandra

Our forests, wildlife and biodiversity have regressed. Over the last three decades, we have increasingly replaced natural forests with plantations. Man-animal conflict has increased and desertification is now affecting our productive agricultural land.

Additionally, we now have climate change that is threatening the lives and livelihoods of people. Extreme weather events like extreme rainfall, cyclones, floods and drought now regularly devastate one part or another of the country—in 2013 it was the Uttarakhand floods; in 2014 the Jammu and Kashmir floods; in 2015 the Chennai floods and in 2018 the Kerala floods. These extreme events killed hundreds of people and the economic losses were in thousands of crores of rupees. The effects of climate change are going to get even worse as global warming pushes from the current 1.0°C towards 1.5°C in the near future. The most damning figure is this: more Indians die due to pollution than to cancer, TB, AIDS and diabetes put together.

In such a dire situation, one would have expected political parties to come forth with serious ideas to balance the imperatives of growth and development with environmental protection and climate change. But, alas, the two big political parties—the Congress and



BJP—have repackaged old ideas and relegated the environment in their manifestos to a peripheral subject rather than a core issue that is impinging on the lives and livelihoods of people.

Take the case of air pollution. Both parties have promised to reduce air pollution by strengthening the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP). While the Congress has called air pollution a 'national public health emergency' and promised to target all major sources of emission, the BJP has promised to convert the NCAP into a Mission and reduce the level of pollution by at least 35% over the next five years. But both of them have failed to link air pollution to the growth paradigm that they have promised a few pages earlier in their respective manifestos. They want business-as-usual growth and, yet, hope to solve the air pollution problem.

To address the water crisis, both the BJP and the Congress have promised to create a new Ministry of Water. While the BJP has vowed to achieve the goal of a clean Ganga by 2022, the Congress has promised to double the budget allocation for cleaning rivers, including the Ganga. Both have completely failed to address the issue of groundwater contamination, apart from promising programmes for groundwater recharge. If new ministries and more

money would have worked, then we would have solved all our problems long ago.

On climate change, the Congress has used all the right words and promised an action agenda to combat global warming. The BJP, on the other hand, is largely silent on the issue of climate change apart from the promise of achieving the goal of 175 GW renewable energy by 2022.

The one major difference between the Congress and the BJP is in the area of forest management. While the Congress has laid down a comprehensive framework to involve local communities in the forest management, the BJP is completely silent on issues of tribals and forests including the implementation of the Forest Rights Act.

The bottom line is that the Congress manifesto is all about the right words and the BJP's is all about numbers and targets. And, both are utterly insufficient to tackle the environmental challenge facing the country. The fact is if there is a time to make environment a political issue, it is today. Yet, the discourse on environment or the lack of it in this election is truly shocking. Apart from a tweet here and there, the environment is not in the utterances of our political bigwigs. Why is this so? Why is environment not as important an issue in the elections?

I do not blame political parties for this. Political parties reflect the priorities of their constituents. And, the environment is not a priority of the majority of voters. It is not that the people are not suffering because of environmental pollution and destruction. They are. But they have not been sufficiently informed and engaged to make this an important election issue. And this is the failure of civil society. We, in the civil society, have failed to take our message to the grassroots to make environment a political issue. It is time we recognised this failure.

Understanding Indian voters and elections

Socio-political factors like population size, age, educational attainment, political interest and economic backwardness play a major role and, over the years, have been the major driving factors behind voter turnout rates

SOUMYA KANTI GHOSH

Group chief economic advisor, State Bank of India. Views are personal



THE WORLD'S LARGEST democracy with a 90 crore electorate (more than the combined population of Europe) is set to elect its 543 members for the 17th Lok Sabha in 7 phases from April 11 to May 19. The Indian elections have always posed great challenges for anyone decoding the factors impacting voting patterns. Against such a background, it will be interesting to link India's elections with social and economic aspects.

Firstly, how does India stack up in comparison to voting patterns around the world? Voter turnout data published by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) indicates that, as per the most recent national parliamentary elections for major countries, France recorded the lowest turnout percentage (43%) while Germany has the highest (76%). On this parameter, India is also doing well as voter turnout rate has improved significantly to 66.4% in 2014, as compared to 58.2% in 2009. The 2014 voting percentage was the highest since 1984.

As per male and female voter turnout rates, the gap has declined significantly in 2014 and has been declining from 1991, when the gap was more than 10%. Extrapolating Assembly election voting patterns in states post 2014, we believe such high female turnout in elections might continue in 2019.

For example, one proxy for increasing women empowerment is the number of accounts that have been opened through the Jan Dhan and Mudra schemes. There is now increasing evidence that Jan Dhan accounts are acting as a vehicle for remittances, resulting in more and more women taking independent decisions. We estimated the state-wise women PMJDY & Mudra accounts by taking the national percentage share, which is 73.6% for MUDRA and 53% for PMJDY. The results show that in all the ten states, the turnout rate for women in the subsequent Assembly elections post 2014 has improved significantly (by an average of

10%) as compared to the 2014 Lok Sabha general elections. States like Madhya Pradesh, where both Mudra & Jan Dhan accounts have been opened in very large numbers, have seen an increase in the women turnout rate by 18%.

However, there is a point of concern. Comparing Census and Election Commission data, we estimated that there might have been 1.24 crore missing women at the time of 2014 elections in 10 states only. We define missing women as the ones who are eligible to vote but have not yet registered themselves as voters. This is alarming since it means that approximately 1.24 crore women may not have exercised their constitutional right to vote in their state of domicile. So, to improve the women turnout rate in India, all stakeholders, starting from the Central government to the media as well as the civic society, should encourage, facilitate and promote women to get themselves registered as voters.

Of equal importance and hitherto unexplored in Indian elections are the socio-political factors like population size, age, educational attainment, political interest and economic backwardness. We believe that these factors play a major role and, over the years, have been the major driving factors behind voter turnout rates. The Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index (MPI) by Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative assigns values to Indian states based on the deprivations that each person faces with respect to education, health and living standards. The states were ranked based on MPI and were compared with the rank assigned to states based on voter turnout rates. Interesting patterns emerged. Certain northern states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand, with higher MPI, have lower voter turnout. Interestingly, these states have low literacy (women) and per capita incomes. Further, most of the North-East and Eastern states have

higher turnout rates and varied levels of poverty. However, states including Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Tamil Nadu, Haryana and Punjab have a high voter turnout rate and lower level of deprivation. These states have higher per capita incomes than the national average and a higher literacy (though Andhra Pradesh and Haryana have lower women literacy). Thus, voting patterns might be literacy agnostic.

In addition to this, another important aspect that leads to a low turnout is interstate and intra-state migration of both males and females. Over the years, mostly males have been migrating from one state to another due to various reasons. Estimates of net migration, once mapped with the percentage of voter turnout amongst major states, show states like UP, Bihar, Odisha, Rajasthan and J&K have net "out migration" and, consequently, low voter turnout rates. Steps might be initiated to bring this growing chunk of electorate back into the voting process by making suitable changes in the existing electoral regulations. We believe this can be made effective by rigorously linking the Aadhaar Card with the Voter Identity Card and introducing a system of absentee voting procedure, like in the US.

Finally, a food for thought. Since only 543 Lok Sabha constituencies represent 130 crore people in the country, is it worthwhile to look at the legal provisions on delimitation of parliamentary constituencies? This is crucial to rationalise population on a per-seat basis (to properly cater to the needs of people and constituency), which is currently at 15.6 lakh per Lok Sabha constituency. Even in the smaller countries like UK, Germany, Italy, France, etc, the number of elected representatives is higher than the strength of the Lok Sabha in India! But can India afford such in terms of fiscal implications in an era of cooperative federalism where states also have large elected representatives? Let this debate begin!

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

An efficient option?

Recent proposals in the F&O segment to prevent the build-up of unaffordable positions, restrict speculative trading, check excessive intraday price movements, curtail volatility by applying circuit thresholds and cap the maximum daily upside/downside deviation from average prices can safeguard retail-investor interests. Limited and relevant participation in derivatives can promote the idea of product suitability and curb malpractices of price manipulation. Further, phased physical settlement in derivatives can largely discourage arbitrage. That said, there is an inherent risk of increased retail exposure on account of the new holdings generated in the underlying and diminished application of the instrument for risk-hedging of existing positions. Further, the MTM settlement norms imposed on debt funds, mandating a daily settlement, can affect the overall liquidity and promote investments in arbitrage funds, leading to high-volume trading in F&Os and redundant buying and selling over bourses. Increased overlap with the world markets call for a robust and intelligent surveillance/security framework to boost efficient market activity and efficient pricing

— Girish Lalwani, Delhi

Promising the moon

The contesting political parties are falling head over heels to entice voters with sops galore if they are voted to power. Close on the heels of Rahul Gandhi's ₹72,000 per annum promise to the poor, the BJP, in its manifesto, committed itself to revising tax slabs, extending the contentious exercise of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) across India, pensions for small farmers and investments of ₹126 lakh crore in sectors like infrastructure. In the past, both the Congress and the BJP have gone back on their promises and don't be surprised if they repeat the feat again

— Ravi Chander, Bengaluru

Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com



ILLUSTRATION: ROHNIT PHORE

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Reshaping social protection in a changing India

India's social protection needs to be reshaped to address increased poverty vulnerability and increased uneven playing field. The declining share of labour in total income and accumulation of capital wealth in the hands of a few have raised concern

INDIA, ONE OF THE fastest growing economies in the world, has a social protection system that may be outdated. Its social protection was founded in the 1970s, when half of the population was chronically poor, and most of them lived in rural areas. India's economy has undergone a sea change during the last three decades. Increased investments in physical and human infrastructure, rapid urbanisation, young demographics and productivity-enhancing reforms have increased the pace of economic growth. India is urbanising at 100 times the pace at which the UK had urbanised, and the country's urban population will soon reach 600 million people, twice the size of America's.

Although economic growth has reduced poverty rate, the pace of poverty reduction has slowed down, and poverty vulnerability also has increased. India still has the largest number of people on

earth living in near poverty, and even though they may not be currently poor, they are highly vulnerable to falling back into extreme poverty. Nearly 80% of jobs in India are created in the small informal enterprises, and these come without a social protection. Social protection systems in rich countries were developed at a time of "jobs for life," and such traditional social protection systems were seldom adopted in India.

The coverage of formal social insurance in India remains in single digits, with virtually no increase detected over the past decade. Disruptions brought about by the introduction of the goods & services tax (GST) and demonetisation may have come with heightened risks to the poorest households, due to the increased burden of compliance on small and informal firms. India's current social protection system is not well developed to deal with contingency risks.

Future growth may also become less inclusive and less distribution neutral. The Fourth Industrial Revolution and technological innovation have increased productivity growth, but also slowed down the pace of job creation globally, especially in the manufacturing sector. Capital is increasingly substituting for labour, and the share of labour in value-added is declining. A rising tide is no longer lifting all the boats. Improving social protection against increased contingency risks and poverty vulnerability requires second generation challenges of expanding social protection instruments to deal with new risks.

The traditional approach to social protection was based on the view that there is a clear trade-off between growth versus equity, and increased social protection will create moral hazard problems, and compromise growth. However, empirical evidence has shown that social protection also provides dynamic efficiency gains to the economy through positive impacts on productivity. Increased social protection contributes to a faster pace of economic growth by allowing individuals to better manage risk/return choices.

Over-reliance on the traditional mode of providing social protection, through government and publicly-financed programmes, restricts the potential for scaling up social protection, due to fiscal constraints. There is a huge potential for maximising finance for social protection through increased public and private partnerships (PPPs), as it broadens the pool of potential financing to maximise social protection. The PPP model, which is well developed in building physical infrastructure in India, is still in its infancy in the development of social infrastructure. Given the growing demand for social services, operator-led PPPs provide an opportunity for innovative and collaborative service delivery in scaling up social infrastructure in India.

Targeted credit, livelihood interventions, crop insurance, new healthcare facilities, education, and low-income targeted public housing are examples where social protection can be scaled up through increased PPP. The PPP model transfers operational risks from the state body to the private partner and forces the private sector to take a long-term social view of the project. Social protection could be scaled up to help informal sector workers. Once basic protections are in place, people could keep upgrading their security with various progressively-subsidised schemes. Social protection can also help take pressure out of minimum wages when these are set too high.

In addition, there is a huge potential for scaling up the participation of com-

munities as a vehicle for delivering social protection. For example, lagging educational enrolments. These can be traced to low community participation in education service delivery, especially for girls. This requires placing investment funds at the local community level and giving the local communities a stronger voice in the allocation of these funds. Given a history of inefficient central planning, and the shift towards competitive federalism, it open new doors for increased local community participation as a tool for a more effective social protection system.

Women shoulder a disproportionate share of unpaid work, and gender imbalances in the distribution of family care work constitute a root cause of women's economic and social disempowerment. While the role of gender in social protection is complex, increased focus on the types of risks tackled by women need attention. Far more can be done in terms of integrating gender into the design and implementation of social protection, including policies that enable women to better balance family and job agenda.

India's declining return on public spending on poverty programmes is an

emerging challenge. The current social protection programme has not responded well to the growing spatial diversity in living standard and poverty rate within India. A key reason for this is that while poverty is getting increasingly concentrated in the lagging regions, the absorptive capacity for social protection in lagging regions is also much weaker, due to institutional weaknesses, and often handicapped by misidentification of beneficiaries. This reduces the poverty reduction impact

of social programmes. A combination of government, private sector and local community participation could address institutional deficiencies, and increase return on investments in social protection and poverty reduction. Outdated information on poverty and employment indicators needs to be updated.

India's social protection needs to be reshaped to address increased poverty vulnerability and increased uneven playing field. The declining share of labour in total income and accumulation of capital wealth in the hands of a few have raised concern. We need new ways of scaling up social protection for 80% of the population in India who have no or little access to social protection. There are many options available for maximising financing for social protection, including scaling up partnerships between public, private sector and local communities, and increasing progressivity in tax base that complements labour income taxation with the taxation of capital, in a country where the richest 1% hold more than 50% of the country's wealth.

There is a huge potential for maximising finance for social protection through increased PPPs, as it broadens the pool of potential financing to maximise social protection

India has a very low tax-to-GDP ratio; if higher tax revenue targets are fixed, they must be achieved by bringing more taxpayers into the tax net

● DIRECT TAX COLLECTIONS

Can we have a fair assessment?

DINESH KANABAR

The author is CEO, Dhruva Advisors



THE FISCAL YEAR HAS just ended, and like every other year, there is a review of tax collections at the Centre, both direct and indirect taxes. It has become a norm to measure the efficiency of the tax office by taking into account the taxes collected vis-à-vis the target. Early reports seem to suggest that the direct tax collection will be about 15% short of the ₹12 lakh crore target. The target this year had been considerably enhanced to take into account new taxpayers and the increased income in the formal sector as a result of demonetisation. What does this shortfall indicate?

As a start, we need to appreciate that the government measures its revenues on a cash basis, i.e. the ₹12 lakh crore target represents the direct taxes actually collected by the government net of the refunds issued. It is common knowledge that, virtually from the month of October, the top of large refunds is closed, and refunds determined thereafter are paid over only in the beginning of the next fiscal year.

In order to address the concerns of the taxpayer on high-pitched assessments and recoveries made with respect to demands arising as a result thereof, the law was amended to provide that if a taxpayer paid 20% of the tax demanded, the balance demand would be stayed till the disposal of the first appeal. This 20% payment can be contested if demands arise as a consequence of additions made for which there are favourable court orders. In practice, high-pitch assessments are now raised and assessed called upon to make payment of 20% of the tax demanded without even waiting for the mandatory 30-day period provided in the law. What was meant to be an assessee-friendly provision has now become a revenue-raising provision.

It is also quite routine for the tax office to ask taxpayers to make payment of tax deducted at source (TDS) due in April, before March 31 itself, and enhancing collections for the fiscal year. Obviously, this collection gets set-off in the succeeding years!

As such, while we compare the collections vis-à-vis the targets, it is pertinent to note several short-term measures that have been undertaken to bump up tax collections for the year. Towards this, we've had some interesting developments this year. First, there has been a fervent demand by the revenue to collect taxes where stay of demand is granted by the tax tribunal in accordance with the provisions of law. A litigation is already afoot on this subject.

Second, the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) called upon appellate commissioners to pass "good" appellate orders as would result in enhancement of assessments. This has also come up before a judicial challenge. Finally, the CBDT has written to the commissioners asking them to take "all possible actions" to recover taxes. Without doubt, it is the duty of the revenue to collect taxes that are due by an assessee. The unfortunate part is that the use of the words "all possible actions" is prone to be interpreted by many at the ground level to taking coercive steps and forcing assesses to pay taxes that may not necessarily be due.

I may hasten to add that this is a recurring saga and, to that extent, there is a window dressing that happens in all the budgets.

To my mind, increase in collection of revenues is a direct factor of increase in the taxable income of assesses and the increased compliance on account of widening of the tax base. To have a target for collection of revenues using any other barometer would mean passing of assessment orders that are high-pitched and that seek to tax income not earned by the assessee. We have witnessed examples of how high-pitched transfer pricing orders were passed or how infusion of capital was treated as revenue. The only other measurement is the expansion of the taxpayer base. India has one of the lowest tax-to-GDP ratios and it's important that if higher tax revenue targets are fixed, they are achieved by bringing those taxpayers into the tax net who have consistently remained outside of it. Creating high-pitched assessments that cannot be sustained in appeals only clogs up the judicial system. The current approaches to augment tax collections may not resonate well with India Inc, and do not further the objective of the government that wants to see India among the top-50 countries in the Ease of Doing Business index.

Judging a country's development status

Special and differential treatment still holds the key for developing countries

ANIL K KANUNGO

The author is professor, LBSIM, and former senior faculty, IIFT, Delhi



(UR) to the establishment of the WTO in 1995, S&D provisions have undergone dramatic changes. Prior to the UR, the focus of S&D treatment was to recognise the special problem of development faced by developing countries and offer necessary flexibilities to pursue policy options appropriate for industrialisation and economic development, whereas in the UR it was geared towards recognising the special problems that developing countries may face in the implementation and signing the agreement as a single undertaking. Such a shift in focus tends to provide limited policy flexibilities for developing and least developed countries (LDCs) to negotiate on crucial issues such as agriculture, NAMA and services.

During the Doha Round of negotiations, the issue of S&D gained prominence as it had a direct bearing on the overall development dimension of developing countries. It was realised that to empower developing countries, it is important to strengthen S&D provisions. Member countries in the Doha Declaration agreed that all S&D treatment provisions should be reviewed with a view to strengthening them and making them more precise, effective and operational.

However, negotiations on S&D provisions for so many decades have led to serious differentiation between developed and developing countries, as it has become difficult to identify and assess countries with 'developing-developed' status as S&D



provisions were primarily meant only for developing countries. According to these, it is only the developing countries that need to be benefiting from the system.

Currently, the US, under the leadership of Donald Trump, are taking the advantage of the provisions and the system because the way they have declared themselves as developing countries under self-declaration and self-selection is not correct, rather it's mischievous or misleading. Trump is of the view that some developing countries have become major players in global markets in their own right. Their exports have grown to equate almost half of total world exports, with a group of largest developing countries accounting for some

three-quarters of that share. Thus, the US believes such developing countries should be declared as 'developed countries' instead of them being called 'developing'.

The US, in an attempt to redefine S&D provisions, has proposed to limit WTO's practice of allowing countries to self-declare their developing status in order to receive special treatment. The US expects all large players—advanced or emerging—to play by the same rules. China, India and others have reiterated that their self-declaration is appropriate in the WTO context, highlighting the importance of S&D treatment for development. They argue that holding a high share in world trade doesn't necessarily make a country 'developed'. China, India and others rebut that per

capita indicators have priority when assessing development levels, and it's not the share in global trade beyond certain percentage points that can disqualify them to be termed as 'self-selection or self-declaration developing country'.

Yet, in practice, the issue of heterogeneity across developing member countries and differentiation is seen. Implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) has witnessed significant differentiation as countries self-determine their need for transition periods and technical assistance. Nine developing members have notified their readiness to immediately implement all of their obligations, and 30 others—including Brazil and China—immediately implemented more than 75% of their commitments. T&D has also recently decided to give up S&D provisions.

This possibly convinces the US to take a fresh look at revisiting the terms and conditions of S&D provisions. To bridge the developed-developing country dichotomy among WTO members, a combination of actions may be considered. Countries can follow Taiwan's example—and now Brazil's—and not claim differentiated treatment, without the need to first declare themselves as 'developed'. However, developing member countries argue technical assistance and capacity-building support for development and reform in developing economies is essential for success, and is in the interest of both the recipients and providers of assistance.



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.

The writer is professor of graduate school at the department of economics, University of California, Berkeley

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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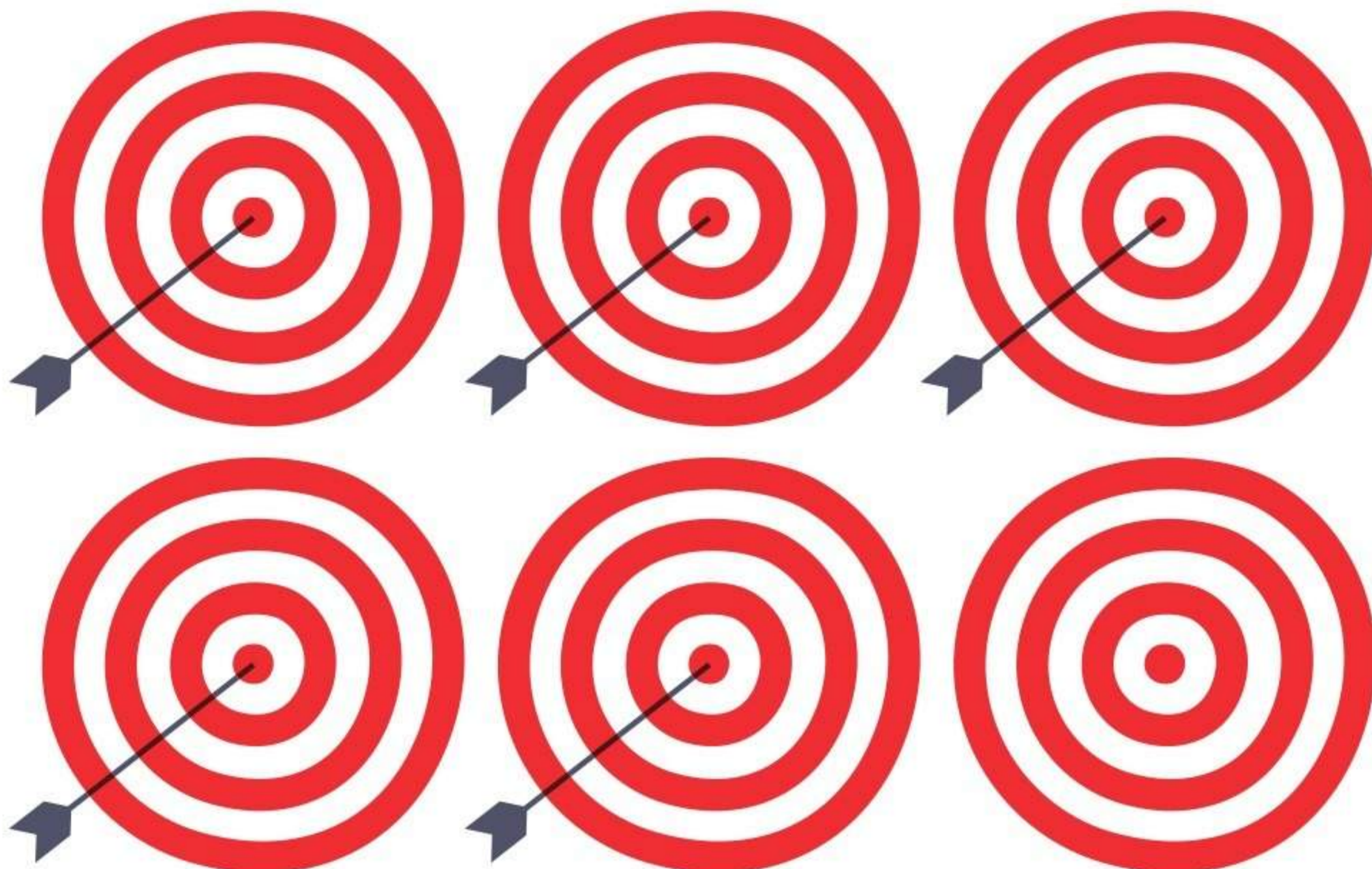
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CR Sasikumar

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

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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

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, UN WSSCC, 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

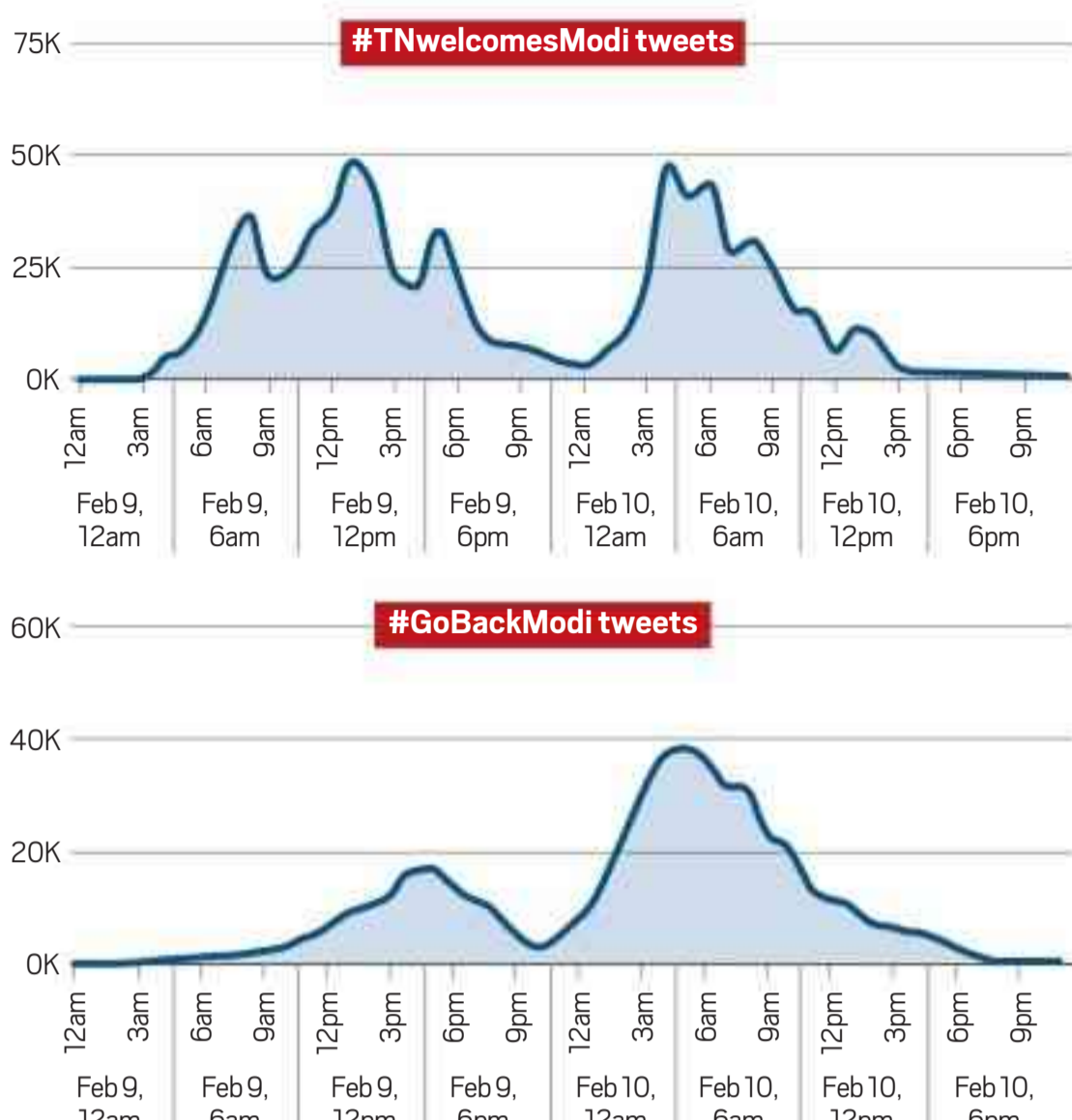
THIS REFERS TO the article, 'The Pune plan for China' (IE, April 9). In order to build a more meaningful relationship with China, New Delhi needs to engage with Beijing in several sectors. Informal summits like that one in Wuhan last year and the export of sports power to China, Bollywood and soft power,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



ward 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

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 billion, \$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.



Blinkers on

The BJP's manifesto is unabashed about its narrowly nationalist agenda

The Bharatiya Janata Party's election manifesto offers glimpses of its understanding of India and its vision for India. It is a reiteration of the party's three-point agenda of nationalism, welfare of the poor and good governance. Prepared after consultation with a wide range of people and released days before the polls start, the manifesto is to that extent a welcome contrast with 2014, when the BJP did not release it until the first phase of polling was under way. A manifesto is important not for being a catalogue of vote-catching, tall promises, but as a document that explains the direction that a party proposes for the country. The BJP manifesto needs scrutiny for more reasons. It must be judged against its performance in government for five years and also in comparison with the manifestos of other parties, particularly the Congress. In promising welfare for the people, economic growth and material development, the BJP manifesto is not drastically different from the others. But its clarity on what makes the party distinct is remarkable. The BJP's deep yearning for the reshaping of India into a cultural monolith, which it projects as essential for progress, is clear.

Unlike in 2009 and 2014, this manifesto is not expansive on the party's cultural agenda, but its stated resolve to "mainstream" the people of the Northeast, its hardline approach on Jammu and Kashmir, and the recurring theme of an unforgiving state as the hallmark of a 'new India' all point towards a hardened nationalist course for the party were to retain power. While the BJP has its alliances, it is also emphatic in its pursuit of a majority of its own. The manifesto promises a Ram temple in Ayodhya, a national registry of citizens for the entire country, and citizenship to Hindus, Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs fleeing persecution in neighbouring countries. The BJP government has taken significant measures during the last five years to advance this Hindutva agenda. The emphasis on Narendra Modi is also unmistakable – his name figures 32 times, while 'BJP' figures 20 times. The manifesto is boastful of the government's performance on the national security front, and runs down all previous governments to the extent that it would appear that India assumed superpower status and made strides in sectors ranging from space technology to higher education almost exclusively on Mr. Modi's watch. Yet, the BJP manifesto does not dwell too much on Mr. Modi's single most momentous decision: demonetisation. The document claims to be an account of the current challenges, and an ambitious vision to be realised before 2047, the 100th anniversary of India's independence. Yet, it does not mention religious harmony. As a vision statement, the BJP's manifesto is limited in its understanding, and blinkered in its vision.

Closure on cynicism

Supreme Court's solution of increased VVPAT verification should reassure the EVM sceptics

By ordering an increase of the existing Voter-Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) verification rate from one to five random Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) per Assembly constituency or segment, the Supreme Court has sought to reassure those sceptical about the integrity of counting by means of EVMs. By limiting the verification to five machines instead of the 125-odd machines per constituency that the Opposition's demand for a 50% VVPAT count would have amounted to, the apex court has enabled the Election Commission of India to declare the results on the counting day itself. The higher figure, which will increase the overall number of EVMs to be counted to close to 20,000 machines, should reasonably address the very remote possibility of 'insider fraud'. It will also verify a higher sample of EVMs in the smaller States and bring the sample within reasonable confidence levels to discount chances of EVM-tampering. In any case, the VVPAT slip verification is more of a reassurance to voters that the EVM is indeed foolproof, over and above the technical and administrative safeguards that are already in place to prevent any tampering. This should effectively blunt criticism that has, unnecessarily, brought the electoral process into doubt. The fact that some of the Opposition parties moved away from their untenable demand for a return to paper ballots in their petition to a plea for a higher VVPAT count has also helped yield this reasoned proposition from the Supreme Court.

For the ECI, the key technical issue with EVMs and VVPATs is not really in regard to tampering but to machine glitches. While the parliamentary by-elections in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and the Assembly election in Karnataka last year had registered significant machine replacement rates (20% and 4%, respectively), these were brought down to less than 2% in later elections held in the winter months. The ECI made technical fixes to the VVPAT to make them more resilient during use across the country, and it should be well-prepared to handle any glitches during the seven-phase Lok Sabha election. The availability of replacement machines and the ability to deploy them quickly in case of a failure of VVPATs are essential to avoid disruptions. In the past couple of years, the doubts raised about EVMs by parties and the new constraints encountered in the electoral process due to hastened VVPAT implementation have bogged down the ECI and narrowed the discourse regarding electoral reforms. Now that the Supreme Court has brought a closure of sorts to the issue, it is time for the ECI to focus on the hassle-free conduct of polls to the Lok Sabha and to four State Assemblies, and later consider other important issues – increasing voter enrolment, effective regulation of campaign financing and implementation of the model code of conduct.

Technology and the unhurried mind

The saga of the EVMs has started looking tedious to many people – abundant caution would help



KRISHNA KUMAR

Visiting the present office of the *Economic and Political Weekly (EPW)* felt like a pilgrimage. The new office is in the lower Parel area of Mumbai. It is an old industrial area, with multi-floor offices and workshops huddled together. Many of the lifts are old – with a grill door and an operator sitting on a stool – going up and down all day with visitors. He manages the heavy grill, stretching its hard metal to close it for movement, then pulling it back to let the visitor out. In the lift I took, the grill puller was an old man. He told me that if I want to, I could take one of the new lifts. I decided to stick to him for my short journey to the third floor. While inside, I recalled my first visit to the *EPW's* legendary editor, Krishna Raj in the early 1980s. The magazine's office at that time was in the Fort area. Krishna Raj sat in his small room with a manual typewriter. The short letters he wrote, indicating a topic on which he wanted an article, were full of grace and humility. Receiving it was a short step before obedience to a moral authority that the *EPW* was. It had become a symbol of the status of debate in democratic governance.

Out of a time capsule

After an hour-long visit, I got into a taxi with a driver from eastern Uttar Pradesh. I felt I had been into a time machine adjusted to both the

old and the new worlds of democratic India. My driver told me that his vote is in Mumbai, but he is in close touch with his village in Jaunpur. There are 14 castes, he said, in his village, and all are going to vote for the Bahujan Samaj Party candidate. As far as he was concerned, U.P. had only two worthwhile leaders, Mayawati and Akhilesh Yadav. Ms. Mayawati, he said, showed what it means to control, and Mr. Yadav showed the meaning of development. Then why did he lose so badly, I asked. The answer, my taxi driver said, lay in EVMs, or electronic voting machines. Then he added, "People are more vigilant now." A minute later he said, "But you never know what all can happen." His voice carried a healthy mix of hope and resignation.

The saga of the EVM has started looking a bit tedious to many people. The Election Commission of India (ECI) itself seems frustrated with the continued suspicion of political parties in the integrity of the EVM system. As a citizen and voter, I often wonder why the EVM story has dragged on for so long. The system that the EVM has replaced was vulnerable in many ways, such as by booth capturing. Recently, when a public commentator used the term 'election capture', I was reminded of the days when incidents of booth capturing were common. In the era of EVMs, booth capturing has lost its value, not just its possibility. Another constraint of the pre-EVM era was the high proportion of invalid votes. Many people found it difficult to put the stamp in the allocated space. In the new set-up, the difficulty they might face in locating and pressing the right button



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will never be known. The EVM voter is presumed to have good sight and a dexterous finger. And if he does not fulfil these assumptions, no one will ever find out. The EVM has deleted the risk of invalidity.

The linking of EVMs with a Voter-Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) is a fine mechanical response to the suspicion that EVMs can be manipulated. This doubt-removal machine offers a seven-second long image of the symbol and name chosen by the voter. One can say that a country of millions of smartphone users can be confident that its voters will look at the VVPAT screen during the given time-slot to satisfy themselves that their choice has been correctly recorded. I hope it is all right to wonder whether using a smartphone is as consequential as casting a vigilant glance at the VVPAT while waiting for the beep that announces the completion of the voting process. What the glance reveals and what can be done in case one is not satisfied are matters that can only disturb further the chain of faith that snugly surrounds the EVM system.

Democracy is a modern faith.

Brexit and the fragility of the U.K.

The muddle over how to leave the EU is threatening London's sway over Scotland and Northern Ireland



PRIYANJALI MALIK

The continuing impasse over Brexit has brought an entire continent to a standstill. It has also strained the very unity of the United Kingdom. Nothing illustrated this more clearly than the pro-Brexit demonstrations on March 29, the original departure date. Protesters, waving the English flag of St. George, denounced the delay as 'a betrayal of England'. Note this was not considered a betrayal of the U.K.: in this fight, England has gone its own way. In any case, Scotland and Northern Ireland voted to remain in the European Union (EU).

The narrowness of the Leave win (52% to 48%) has of course divided communities over positions on Europe. But it has also highlighted divisions between the constituent nations of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, to use the formal name of the British state. The U.K. is not one nation but four: Wales was brought under English rule in the 13th century; Ireland was incorporated by a combination of military force and political persuasion in 1801; Scotland, though never militarily defeated, was persuaded to join the Union in 1707.

Until they joined the U.K., Scotland and Ireland were governed by

their own parliaments. These were dissolved and power transferred to Westminster. This transfer of power to London did not go unchallenged locally, and the embers of resistance were never quite stamped out. The Republic of Ireland eventually gained independence for most of the island, barring the Protestant majority north, in 1922. Scottish nationalism remained subsumed under the promise of Empire: Scotland had gained power and wealth from the colonial enterprise, which tempered the loss of sovereignty to Westminster.

View from Scotland

Indeed, part of the reason that Scotland joined the Union in 1707 was because it was broke: the kingdom had suffered heavy financial losses from a disastrous expedition to secure a trading base in the late 17th century. The failure of the Darien Scheme, as it was known, was caused in no small part by resistance from Scotland's southern neighbours who were protecting the trading rights of the East India Company. Once within the Union, the colonial enterprise and then Empire offered not just wealth but all the trappings of great power. The end of the Empire signalled Britain's departure from the global stage. The Suez crisis of 1956 confirmed its diminished status. And Brexit, Britain's retreat from its own continent, has completed the project. Little England has withdrawn into itself to protect mythical ideas of Englishness against the supposed onslaught of waves of fo-



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reign immigration and EU rule.

The Scots are only too aware of this. Scottish nationalism has been simmering for years now, only partly placated by the devolution of some domestic powers to a Scottish Parliament under the Scotland Act of 1998. A referendum on Scottish independence in 2014 ended up being a closer call than had been anticipated (55% vs 45%), though it was clear even then that part of the reason for remaining was that the U.K. offered membership of the EU (which was not automatically on offer for an independent Scotland). Now, with Brexit looming, Scottish demands for independence resurface regularly.

A fragile peace

The Northern Ireland question is even more intractable. Brexit threatens the fragile peace imposed by the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, which formally ended the Troubles, or decades of bitter sectarian violence. Between 1968 and 1998, the mainly Protestant Unionists were pitted against

its disruption must not be entertained, even as a passing thought. This is perhaps yet another demand that modernity is making on our old nation. Never mind that nations more advanced than us on the industrial path have not agreed to use EVMs for their elections. If we emulated their caution, there are many other encounters with modern science and technology we would have avoided. They have so far worked out for us, helping us to move forward. The EVM is one more step. Having taken that step, we can afford to forget our reality and the problems it presents.

The new ethos

Mystery is inbuilt into it. So is distance between what you want and what will happen. I have used the EVM just once, and I came back from the booth feeling unsure whether I had performed my civic duty properly. The long row of buttons on the body of the machine looked menacing. It demanded both clarity of vision and precision in the finger. I had neither, yet I acted and pressed the button representing my preference. There was no VVPAT at that time. A longish beep filled the room, indicating that my vote had been cast. I came away wondering whether I had pressed the right button and whether the button I had pressed had recorded my preference honestly. Ever since that day, I have read numerous articles and news items covering the debate over EVMs. Many articles discussed the rejection of EVMs in other democracies. They are technologically more advanced than India, then why did they reject EVMs? That train of thought

would lead to doubt over my commitment to the nation and its progress. It is no longer a case of choice of machine or material for nation-building. The new nationalist ethos has no room for debate over anything, let alone the path of progress for the nation. One must pass an ideological fitness test before seeking the right to be given attention. In the context of technology, the digital kind has swept other choices aside. The philosopher of technology, the late Ursula Franklin, defined technology as 'the way we do things here'. In our case, we have settled our mind over a narrower definition that accepts only digital machines as acceptable technology. The qualities they possess are accredited as the highest. Entertaining any doubt about their integrity is a waste of time. That, indeed, it is, considering that the decision has been taken, in every case.

Now the ECI has said that if the proportion of EVMs whose vote count will be verified with the help of a VVPAT is increased substantially, the declaration of results will be delayed by up to six days. This should be quite acceptable. An election season that covers the whole of early summer can surely be allowed to take an extra week. The benefit of such an extension clearly outweighs the strain on public patience it might cause. The collective mind is in any case deeply stressed by the ethos that political life has created. To characterise it as the bustle of a healthy, relaxed democracy would stretch our caution against cynicism too far.

Krishna Kumar is a former director of the NCERT

er a customs union or staying within the single market. Tellingly, Northern Ireland found only passing mention in her letter of March 29, 2017 to the President of the European Council invoking the Article 50 process and starting the countdown towards leaving. It was disposed of in a sentence expressing a wish 'to avoid a return to a hard border between [the] two countries'.

And yet, peace in Northern Ireland is still in its infancy. The EU will not imperil this process by allowing a border to come up between Northern Ireland and Ireland. Hence the provision for a backstop in the transition deal that Ms. May negotiated with the EU, which would keep the U.K. in a customs union and Northern Ireland in the customs union and parts of the single market should the two entities fail to arrive at a permanent free trade agreement that continues to negate the need for border infrastructure within the island. The different status for Northern Ireland would effectively raise a border between the island of Ireland and the rest of Great Britain, something that is unacceptable to the Unionists and Ms. May.

The hard core of Brexiters, however, are willing to gamble with the unity of Britain – willing indeed, to risk losing Scotland and Northern Ireland – in their quest to be 'rid' of Europe once and for all.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Rafale deal

The mystery over the bona fides of the Rafale fighter aircraft deal is getting murkier by the day, compounded further by the reluctance of the NDA government to subject itself to scrutiny and come out clean (Page 1, 'Exclusive', 'Rafale: Modi govt. gave unprecedented waivers in offset agreements', April 9). Even if, for the sake of argument, no *quid pro quo* for monetary gain was involved, it is necessary that unfair, unprecedented waivers and concessions offered be probed in terms of procedural lapses and financial losses. Is it proper for an elected government to dismiss all the evidence so far as a figment of the imagination when the revelations are based on extracted documents from no less than the Union

Defence Ministry? Maybe the government is emboldened by the fact that the layman hardly understands the intricacies of a complex defence deal, a belief corroborated by the findings of a major election survey that the Rafale issue is not so serious an electoral issue in 2019. But an elected government owing allegiance to the Constitution is duty bound to ensure that the interests of national security are not compromised in any way.

I am unable to fathom what *The Hindu* is trying to convey with its 'exposés'. From all that has been published so far, I only find that the Prime Minister has acted as the highest decision-maker should. He appears to have allowed all the procedures to be followed

and also intervened whenever impediments were found. One cannot fault him for making a decision to hasten the process of acquisition. The United Progressive Alliance had a full 10-year term to ensure the fighters arrived, but, alas, it was not to be. The 'exposés' only seem to have strengthened decision-making at the highest levels by keeping the best interests of the country in mind and without worrying about criticism – probably factored in when such decisions are made.

T.N. VAIDYANATHAPURA, Maddur, Mandya, Karnataka

BJP manifesto

Even as it has stuck to its narrative of strident and combative nationalism in its manifesto, the Bharatiya Janata Party has tried to embellish it with a heavy dose of welfarism by

attempting to address many of the socio-economic issues that have come to dominate the political discourse. In all, it is unpretentious and is a people's manifesto (Page 1, "BJP manifesto keeps focus on national security, farm support", April 9).

C.K. SUBRAMANIAM, Mumbai

The BJP has, once again, started brooding over the issue of the Ram Mandir at Ayodhya. This is nothing less than an undesirable tactic to reap more votes. It also indicates that in case the party wins in 2019, as quite a few surveys and polls seem to point towards (Page 1, "Advantage NDA, but it may fall short of majority", April 9), it is all set to vitiate the social and political spheres. It is unpalatable that a political party which is contesting elections in a secular and democratic

republic is using religion as a key means to achieve success. Voters must be wary of falling for such baits keeping in mind that secularism is the bedrock of the Indian Republic. Any attempt to weaken this foundation is bound to invite catastrophe.

SHIVAM AGGARWAL, Ludhiana, Punjab

Salem corridor

The Madras High Court judgment quashing a notification issued last year to acquire land for the ₹10,000 crore Salem-Chennai expressway proves yet again that development is inevitable but not at the cost of the poorest sections. The fact of losing invaluable agricultural land reiterates the need for a more transparent system of referendum in such a land acquisition process. Else such projects will only

compound an already severe agrarian crisis.

N. VIJAI, Coimbatore

Renamed

A place name is a place name. To rename Chennai Central station as "Puratchi Thalaivar Dr. MGR Central station" is like stripping Chennai city of its name. No doubt great leaders must be honoured; indeed, MGR has been honoured duly by attaching his revered initials to many institutions such as universities in Tamil Nadu but this tendency to rename institutions so ubiquitously after a single person reveals a paucity of imagination and thought. The timing of the decision on the name-change is also unfortunate, and has a political angle to it.

C.G. RISHIKESH, Chennai

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Using artefacts to tell stories

How India's ossified art museums can reorganise their galleries



NACHIKET CHANCHANI

Walking along a corridor in Berlin's Pergamon Museum lined by tiles from the city walls of ancient Babylon, I recently found myself in the company of visitors from all over the world. Street smart people threaded through crowds and reached the Ishar Gate, the museum's crown jewel. As one less skilled in this enterprise, I found my movement temporarily obstructed by a humped bull encased in glass. As my gaze came to rest upon its form, I realised that the bull was no ordinary bovine: it was a caparisoned wooden sculpture of Nandi from south India. I asked myself, 'Is this Nandi's home? Doesn't Nandi largely divide his time between Kailash's slopes and the pillared halls of Shiva's palatial residences in the country? And doesn't Nandi mostly venture out on festival days when he conveys Shiva in grand processions?'

The place of cultural property

In Berlin, Nandi is hardly out of place. Across the Berlin State Museums, there are dozens of temporary displays featuring artefacts set in astonishing configurations. The immediate purpose of these displays is to alert visitors to the Humboldt Forum's opening later this year. This new museum devoted to world cultures will be housed in a reconstructed palace in the city centre. Equally, these displays are nudging visitors to rethink the place of cultural property and inspiring them to reconceptualise their own sense of self and national identity as new immigrants settle into life in Germany, the European Union's boundaries change, and the Asian century gets underway.

Berlin's curators are hardly alone in stimulating these negotiations. A high-level commission recently recommended to French President Emmanuel Macron that all artefacts separated without consensus from sub-Saharan Africa and sent to France be returned if countries of origin ask for them. Experts in Paris are now struggling to identify the provenance of thousands of objects, even as a montage of voices in Africa



"At Amritsar's Partition Museum, through the juxtaposition of refugee artefacts, archival materials and oral histories, staff are concurrently preserving the memories of those who lived through the days that followed Independence and nurturing the formation of fresh perspectives on the period." ■ NYT

have begun to assert their claims as rightful owners. New disputes on the role of art museums in shaping memory are unfolding across the continent, where many institutions already bear the scars of earlier struggles. Following the signing of the Franco-German Treaty of Cooperation and Integration in January, central Europeans are inquiring whether Mr. Macron's gesture will reverse France's waning influence in sub-Saharan Africa and trying to gauge directions their own careers will take as the world order shifts.

Except for sporadic calls for the Kohinoor's return, in India, national and State art museums are undisturbed by these developments. Geographical distance is hardly a plausible reason for their stasis. Perhaps the real reason is that the curatorial tactics of our government-run museums are more or less ossified, even if physical infrastructure, visitor amenities, and staffing levels have improved since the unflattering reports of vigilant journalists and the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Emblematic of the stasis is a presentation of culture as internally consistent, ethnically bound, and contained within a territorial frame. At the Indian Museum in Kolkata, a constricted vision of colonial administrators who classified objects to suit their needs has mostly been retained. In the National Museum in New Delhi, no clear approach is apparent. For instance, on the second floor, objects are somewhat arbitrarily dispersed in galleries bearing the

following names: 'Costumes and Textiles', 'Pre-Columbian and Western Art', 'Copper Plates', 'Tribal Lifestyle', 'Musical Instruments', 'Wood Carving', and 'Arms and Armour'. At Sarnath, the Archaeological Survey of India's flagship museum, staffers have installed baggage scanners and air-conditioners but missed the spirit of exhibition guidelines collaboratively developed in 2013 by some of the agency's far-sighted officers and international experts. At State museums too, the status of objects either as artworks or ethnographic objects, sacred or profane, remains indisputable. Where radical individuals challenged epistemologies and nomenclatures by establishing their own organisations – as Dinkar Kelkar did in Pune – the Maharashtra government, its current custodian, has left certain objects in configurations in which he placed them.

Reorganising galleries

Sheldon Pollock, a scholar of Sanskrit, has observed that culture is "something always in process and not a thing with an essence." His insight has implications for how our art museums might reorganise their galleries. Instead of casting objects as the nation's peerless accomplishments, our museums might begin to tell stories of how objects are about resistance and creativity. Like bullocks and vahanas, objects have wandered in different directions. Well before the dawn of electronic commerce and communication, they have goaded inventions, conveyed

messages, and changed lives. In addition to using objects to tell such narratives, our public art museums can begin to become more vibrant spaces if they acknowledge their location in particular landscapes. For example, before installing new shows, curators might gauge public interest in particular objects through focus-group testing, revise groupings based on feedback received from stakeholders, and develop appropriate interpretative materials.

Many of India's museums that are run by non-profit institutions can also serve as models for museum practice and stratagem for government-run establishments. With its self-conscious reconstructions of vernacular homes and imaginative placement of artefacts and poems within them, Dakshinachitra in Chennai is simultaneously inviting visitors to see art as a flow rather than a product. Special exhibitions, dance performances, and lectures at Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya are highlighting our subcontinent's historical ties with other regions and how these associations have promoted the exchange of ideas. Temporary exhibition spaces at this institution are offering schoolchildren and seasoned connoisseurs with opportunities to share their creations and collections with the public. These spaces are catalysing new conversations on ways of seeing. At Mehrangarh Fort, curators are exhibiting cradles, chandeliers, paintings, and palanquins to tell fascinating stories of how Jodhpur's residents and rulers turned their desert town into a cosmopolitan city by amalgamating beliefs and revelling in hybrid beauty. At Amritsar's Partition Museum, through the juxtaposition of refugee artefacts, archival materials and oral histories, staff are concurrently preserving the memories of those who lived through the tumultuous days that followed Independence and nurturing the formation of fresh perspectives on the period.

When our public art museums begin to re-engage our pasts, bring together diverse cultures, eras, and perspectives to offer new insights on current issues, then we might also be able to find a new home for Nandi in a new India.

Nachiket Chanchani is Associate Professor at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and a Fellow at the Forum Transregionale Studien, Berlin

Is there a problem with the 10% quota?

Data show that economically weaker sections in the general category are already well-represented in higher education



SUNNY JOSE & BHEEMESHWAR REDDY A.

In January, the Rajya Sabha passed the Constitution Amendment Bill guaranteeing 10% quota in education and employment to economically weaker sections in the general category. Families that earn an annual income of less than ₹8 lakh and do not possess agricultural land of five acres or above are eligible for the quota. This includes 95% of Indian households. Isn't it strange that in a country which claims to have lifted millions out of poverty, so many households fall in this category? What is more is that these households require reservation, nothing else, to enable them to be socio-economically better off. The Bill has served an unintended purpose, though: Reservation is no more the preserve of the so-called merit-less. The proposed quota has transformed cynics of the reservation policy into champions of it.

Examining two aspects

We examine here the empirical foundation of two aspects which are central to the policy but are absent from discussions on it. The first is the rationale underlying the policy that economically weaker sections from the general category remain "excluded from attending the higher education institutions" in India "due to their financial incapacity". Is that really the case? The second is the fact that the Bill also brings private educational institutions under its ambit. What is the representation of reserved category students in private educational institutions?

We try to answer these two questions by analysing data from the National Institute Ranking Framework (NIRF). The Ministry of Human Resource Development introduced a ranking of higher education institutions in India in 2016. A total of 445 institutions were ranked under the NIRF in 2018. The NIRF data provide the composition of 'economically backward class' (EBC) students and 'socially challenged category' (Scheduled Castes/ Scheduled Tribes/Other Backward Classes) students. The data reveal that of the 16.09 lakh students enrolled in the 445 top institutions in 2016-17, about 28% (4.55 lakh) belonged to the EBC. The share of EBC students was about 30% in private educational institutions. If we consider institutions as the basis of analysis, the facts are self-explanatory.

About 66% of the 445 NIRF-ranked higher education institutions had more than 10% of students from the EBC. Interestingly, 68% of private educational institutions also had more than 10% of EBC students. EBC students had already secured about three times the proposed quota of 10% without any reservation in top higher education institutions. This is despite the fact that the income criteria used by most of these institutions vary from ₹2 lakh to ₹5.5 lakh annually, which is far less than the proposed eligibility criterion for the reservation quota, which is ₹8 lakh.

Under-representation of SCs/STs/OBCs

The share of 'socially challenged category' (SCs/ STs/ OBCs) students in these 445 institutions was 38%, only 10 percentage points more than the share of EBC students. Surprisingly, the share of SC/ST/OBC students stood at only 44% in public institutions, which are mandated to implement 49.5% reservation. In private educational institutions ranked by the NIRF, their share was as low as 30%, which was similar to the share of EBC students. Here too, only 19% of private higher educational institutions ranked by the NIRF had more than 49.5% of SC/ST/OBC students. Thus, SC/ST/OBC students remained greatly under-represented, especially in premier private educational institutions. This is despite the fact that the SC/ST/OBC population constitutes about 70% of the total population of India (NSSO, 2011-12).

Our analysis is confined only to the top 445 higher education institutions. However, if the share of EBC students was as high as 28% in these premier institutes, their share would have likely been larger in other higher education institutions which were not ranked by the NIRF. This could be due to a number of reasons, including lower fees. The EBC students have already secured more than 10% share in these institutions without any reservation. Hence, the proposed policy seems to be empirically unfounded. By contrast, what emerges from the NIRF data is the under-representation of the 'socially challenged category' in premier education institutions.

It appears that the government is going to extend reservation for SC/ST/OBC students to private higher education institutions. This would certainly bring the much-needed diversity in premier private higher education institutions in India.

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SINGLE FILE

The right to criticise

The Manipur High Court's seditious judgment on Kishorechandra Wangkhem sets an example

MARKANDEY KATJU



In its judgment dated April 8, the Manipur High Court ordered the release of journalist Kishorechandra Wangkhem, who was charged with sedition under the National Security Act for criticising the Chief Minister. Though the petition was allowed only on the technical ground that certain material mentioned in the detention order was not supplied to the petitioner, it could have also succeeded on the ground that in a democracy people have a right to criticise the government. Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution was upheld by the Supreme Court in *Romesh Thapar v. The State of Madras* (1950).

Whereas in a monarchy the king is supreme and the people are his subjects, in a democracy this relationship is reversed: the people are supreme, and state authorities are servants of the people. In *Kedar Nath Singh v. State of Bihar* (1962), the Supreme Court held that mere criticism of the government is not sedition unless it is an incitement to violence or breach of public order.

The U.S. Supreme Court, in *Brandenburg v. Ohio* (1969), laid down the 'imminent lawless action' test, which says that free speech is protected by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution unless it incites imminent (not remote) lawless action. This judgment was followed by the Indian Supreme Court in *Arup Bhuyan v. State of Assam* (2011) and in *Sri Indra Das v. State of Assam* (2011), and hence it is the law of the land in India too. Surely Mr. Kishorechandra's statements would not have provoked an immediate violent uprising against the government and hence they were protected by Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution.

Unfortunately, what has been often witnessed in India is that political functionaries get incensed and cannot tolerate criticism. Then they slap sedition charges or preventive detention laws against their critics, as the Maharashtra government did in the case of the cartoonist Aseem Trivedi, or the West Bengal government did in the case of Professor Ambikesh Mahapatra of Jadavpur University, or the Tamil Nadu government in the case of the folk singer Kovan. To speak for the poor or marginalised sections of society has become particularly dangerous, as was seen in the cases of those accused of inciting violence in Bhima Koregaon.

By enacting the Fundamental Rights of the people in Part III of the Constitution, and by making the courts the guardians of the rights of the people, a solemn duty has been cast on the judiciary to uphold democratic principles. The Manipur High Court therefore deserves to be commended in this connection (though one wishes its judgment had come earlier and saved the petitioner four months of jail time). It is hoped that other courts in India, too, will follow its example.

The writer is a former judge of the Supreme Court



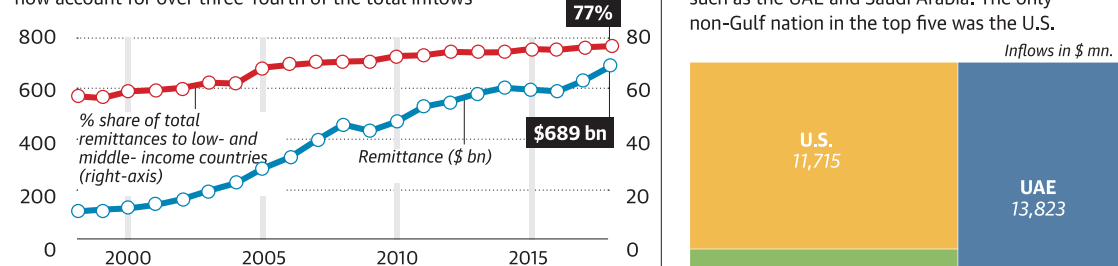
DATA POINT

Flow of money

Remittances to low- and middle-income countries reached a record high in 2018 (9% growth compared to 2017). India, China and Mexico received the highest share of remittances among such countries. While for India, remittances contributed about 3% to the GDP, for some other countries the share was much higher. By Varun B. Krishnan

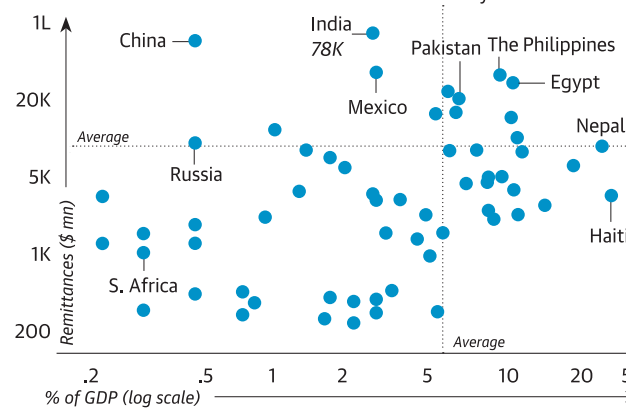
Earning big abroad

Low- and middle-income countries' share of the total remittance inflows have increased over the years. In 1998, they constituted about 57%, but now account for over three-fourth of the total inflows



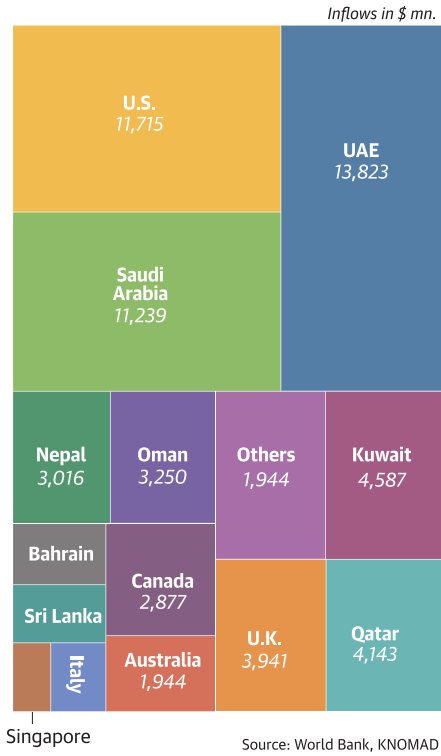
GDP factor

In Nepal and the Philippines, the inflows constituted a higher % of GDP than the average. In India and China, though the inflows were high, the contribution of these remittances to GDP was relatively low



Gulf goldmine

According to the latest available data (2017), India received its highest remittances from Gulf nations such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia. The only non-Gulf nation in the top five was the U.S.



FROM The Hindu ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO APRIL 10, 1969

Opposition leaders not for separate Telangana

The Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi to-day [April 9, New Delhi] told the leaders of Opposition parties that there was no question of partitioning Andhra Pradesh to create a separate Telangana State. The Government was against the arrangement now contemplated for the Hill Districts of Assam being extended to any other State. Leaders of all Opposition parties except Swatantra, were not in favour of splitting the State. Mr. N.G. Ranga, (Swat.), spoke in favour of a separate Telangana. Mr. T. Viswanatham (Ind.) suggested the appointment of a high-power committee, preferably of judges, to determine the extent of revenue surplus of Telangana spent in the rest of Andhra Pradesh and the unemployment situation.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO APRIL 10, 1919.

Mr. Gandhi's Arrest.

(From an Editorial)

The arrest of Mahatma Gandhi on his way to Delhi and the feverish haste with which he has been hurried away by special train to Bombay marks a significant stage in the agitation against what has been universally condemned in this country as a most iniquitous piece of executive legislation. No true Satyagrahi will complain or ought to complain against any sufferings which he has of his own accord brought on himself by his determination to stand by the principles which the country has pronounced to be right as well as lofty and Mr. Gandhi – and, with him, his active followers – will be the last person to complain of the action that has now been taken against him. The issue, then, so far as the Satyagrahis are concerned, is a simple one; their task is solely to do their duty which their conscience – and with it the conscience of the bulk of their countrymen – has marked out for them, irrespective of the sufferings which its discharge might involve.

POLL CALL

Voter turnout

Voter turnout refers to the number or percentage of eligible voters who cast their ballots. A high turnout is indicative of the vitality of democracy, while a low turnout is associated with voter apathy and mistrust of the political process. Since the 1980s, voter turnout has come down across the world, especially in Europe, though it has been more or less stable in Asia and the U.S. India has seen voter turnouts increasing in both Lok Sabha and Assembly elections, largely due to the Election Commission's efforts to enhance voter participation in the country. In 2014, the country recorded the highest voter turnout in a general election since Independence (66.38%).

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Podcast | Kanhaiya Kumar and the "Leningrad" of Bihar

<http://bit.ly/KanhaiyaPodcast>

