

# Elections and the affluent Indian

In this election season, is too much being made of the divisions in our polity? Let some recent reports do the talking



## ACROSS THE BOARD

SHAILESH DOBHAL

First the good news. In a recent cross-country comparison on how people feel about political divisions — as positive and healthy for society or as divisive and therefore dangerous — India comes out as a net positive country along with Japan,

Australia and Canada. Over a third of the Indians (37 per cent) polled for the survey believe good comes out of difference in political views, higher than more robust democracies in US (23 per cent), France (24 per cent) and Sweden (35 per cent). Put it down to hope springing eternal in a relatively poor country!

Alas, the good news for India ends there in *A World Apart?*, a recent global report by market research firm Ipsos for the BBC Crossing Divides season. Look deeper and/or elsewhere, and it only gets gloomier. Though a majority (56 per cent) of the Indians in the Ipsos study say it is important to listen to people "different from myself", and a large proportion (42 per cent) feels comfortable to express their political opinions around people who do not necessarily agree with their views, the findings of

another study points to the gulf between talk and walk.

One in two affluent, English-speaking, highly educated Indians is afraid of voicing her political views online for fear of how friends, family, colleagues or acquaintances will view it. Again, over half (55 per cent) avoid sharing their political affiliations on the internet to stay clear of offending any "authority", according to a recent *India Digital News Report* by The Reuters Institute for Study of Journalism.

Before we move ahead, a caveat on both the Ipsos and Reuters reports is in order. The sample for both is skewed towards an English-speaking, male, big city, affluent audience and therefore not representative of the total Indian population.

Are things getting better or worse? A third of the Indians in the Ipsos

report believe that society is in danger because political divisions have gotten sharper in the last 20 years or so. And over half (53 per cent) say they feel more comfortable in groups of people "more similar to me". What's worrying here is that Indians' growing insularity is one of the highest in the world, just lower than one-party systems in China and Russia, or behind two other countries that are hardly the beacon of openness — Turkey and Hungary!

How do Indians view others who hold a different or opposing political view? Sadly, there is little respect for the "other" as a large proportion see people holding views different from theirs as not caring about the country's future (43 per cent) or simply as misled (48 per cent), according to the *A World Apart?* report. Around half say the "other" does not care about them and are inflexible, as they won't change their opinions come what may.

Indian netizens' reluctance to voice their opinion, as brought out by the Reuters report, is also borne out

by the Ipsos study. Almost two-thirds believe social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter are making conversations more divisive than they used to be, even though these platforms are also seen as empowering the voiceless and holding the powerful accountable.

Despite the negativity, another recent Ipsos March study, *What Worries the World*, gives the country some reason for cheer. Almost three-fourths (73 per cent) of the Indians believe the country is going in the right direction, just behind China and Saudi Arabia. In fact, India and Sweden were two countries with the "greatest month-on-month increase in positive sentiment of all 28 countries" surveyed by Ipsos.

And though it may sound counter-intuitive, given the noise around the recent complaint to and about the Election Commission, a Gallup poll shows that confidence in the honesty of India's elections remains high with a two-thirds expressing confidence, the highest that Gallup has recorded in the run-up to Indian elections, and a good 20 percentage points higher than the 2014 elections.

## CHINESE WHISPERS

### GoTbug

You are not the only one to be bitten by the *Game of Thrones* (GoT) bug. The Election Commission (EC) of India and Press Information Bureau (PIB) are piggybacking on the popularity of the HBO series to urge citizens to go out and vote. Around mid-day yesterday (April 15) the EC sent out a tweet "Is Coming" in an apparent reference to GoT's famous "Winter is Coming" tagline. The tweet urged users to don their "creativity caps" and guess what the tweet was about or wait for the reveal at 1 pm. The PIB tweeted three memes at the appointed time — two showcasing popular GoT characters, and a third resembling a poster similar to a GoT spoiler. "A very small man can cast a very large one," read the first message with an image of Tyrion Lannister. The second one with a picture of Hodor said, "Not all heroes hold weapons... some just vote." A third one simply said: "Festival of Democracy: Phase 2 to 7. Coming soon."

### A village called 'Rafel'



Residents of a small hamlet in Chhattisgarh are in a quandary. The village has no direct or indirect connection with the now infamous "Rafale deal" but its inhabitants have become the butt of jokes for people in neighbouring villages and the many visitors. The reason? The name of this village is Rafel and it rhymes with Rafale, the twin-jet fighter aircraft from Dassault Rafale in the middle of a huge controversy this election season. Rafel residents are now demanding the name of the village be changed — some of them even joke that villagers will face an enquiry if the Congress comes to power.

### Maneka's warning

Union minister and Bharatiya Janata Party Lok Sabha member Maneka Gandhi is smarting after her recent speech in Sultanpur — where she told minorities in her constituency that they should not knock on her door seeking help if they don't vote for her — went viral on social media drawing much criticism. On Monday, another clip of hers hit social media in which she can be heard castigating her party's IT cell for not defending her, and even threatening to disband it. In the video clip she points out this is only the beginning of the election campaign and there would be many more occasions when she will become a target of her political rivals. "So if you don't mend your ways, there is no use of an IT cell," Gandhi warned the team.

# India among toughest markets for supercars

Manufacturers target small-town millionaires, evaluate private clubs

PAVAN LALL

On the face of it, sports car sales and growing markets appear as if they ought to go hand in hand when an economy rises. Italian manufacturer Ferrari built its model on a simple equation: Make one car less than the market wants but the industry today is faced with daunting realities such as electrification, automation and shared mobility, which is why Ferrari went public after almost 80 years in 2015. Ferrari which generates \$4 billion in revenue has a market cap of \$26 billion — jaw-dropping for a firm that sells barely 9,000 cars annually. Others in the same league that include Lamborghini and Porsche have also evolved by adding cutting edge tech, branching out into sport utility vehicles and increasing their production numbers.

In the subcontinent, however, it's a different tale. Lamborghini leads sales with 45 cars last year, followed by Ferrari with 22. Those sort of numbers even after both companies have been here for around a decade reflect a micro-fraction of their global sales of 5,800 and 9,000, respectively, making this one of the most challenging markets for sport cars. Even Dubai reports higher sales numbers.

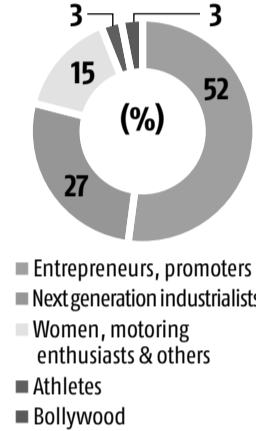
In part, despite its underlying aspirational consumer push, India remains a value conscious society that is uneasy with conspicuous spending. Sharad Agarwal, Lamborghini India's country head, says "Not a single CEO of a large listed company drives a super sports car." That's not because

they can't afford them but high prices are sore point. Mumbai-based Ferrari dealer Sharad Kachalia points to prohibitive duty structures as being half the problem.

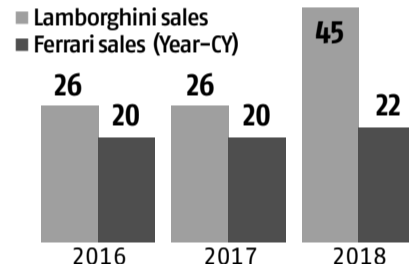
Customs duty for all luxury imports jumped from 193 per cent to 211 per cent in the last two years making cars already more expensive than anywhere else in the world even more so. Sports cars encompass multiple categories but the Italian-origin cars Ferraris, Lamborghinis, Bugattis, typify the top of the heap in terms of positioning, price and performance, boast V8, V10 and V12 engines and are priced between ₹3 crore and ₹5 crore and sometimes more if they are special editions. Price fluctuations irk customer who've paid in advance for a Lamborghini Huracan that costs ₹3.5 crore only to be told a couple months before its scheduled delivery that the price went up by Rs 35 lakh because of

new duties. Agarwal says. True-blue supercars, which include Aston Martin, Lamborghini, Ferrari, and some select models in the Porsche line-up, collectively will account for anywhere between 70 and 100 cars a year, which by all accounts is insignificant. According to Agarwal, the duties are higher in China but so are sales because the auto market there is almost seven times bigger than India's. The question is: Are they profitable? According to Ferdinand Dudenhöffer, professor of automotive economics at the University of Duisberg-Essen, in Germany premium and luxury cars are commonly considered to be profitable. "Big cars,

## DRIVER DEMOGRAPHICS



## SPEED LIMITS



Source: Companies, \*Of the annual sales of the two cars

big profits" was a slogan of the industry 40 years ago but that can also go the other way.

His research indicates that Ferrari, for example, makes 25 per cent, or on average ₹69,000 profit on each car, but Tesla, also a glamorous badge, loses ₹11,000 per electric car. In India, inventory costs, rent of dealerships, staff salaries and tiny volumes would mean pressure on dealers' profit margins.

The solution? Gautam Singhania, Chairman of textile firm Raymond who owns both Ferraris and



## TOP GEAR

States with high sales (%) \*

Karnataka	20
Maharashtra	18
NCR/Delhi	11
Andhra Pradesh	10
Tamil Nadu	9
West Bengal	9

Lamborghinis, encourages fraternities. "Here, there's a need for dedicated sports car clubs for specific brands, and country heads ought to drive more activities and events for their respective brands," he says. He may have a point. There are at least 200 owners of each brand — Ferrari, and Lamborghini, sizeable enough for two separate clubs.

When car prices start at a quarter of a million dollars, the buyers are all millionaires and membership comes with benefits. "Being a member of these clubs gives you exclusive status

## ON THE JOB

# Corporate sector jobs slowdown



MAHESH VYAS

Employment by a big company is, perhaps, the best job a young educated aspirant would look forward to. Government jobs are preferred, in general, to private sector jobs. But the better educated usually prefer jobs in large private companies. Jobs offered by the large private sector companies are always in good demand.

In fact, it matters less whether the company is a public sector undertaking like, say, State Bank of India or Bharat Heavy Electricals or a private sector enterprise like, say, HDFC Bank or Tata Motors. Large companies are usually considered to be the best employers.

We take a look at how good have companies been in increasing their head count in recent years.

All Indian companies are not required to reveal the number of people they employ. Only listed companies are required to disclose this. Even this disclosure was made mandatory only in 2014-15. This is a good beginning and deserves to be extended to be applicable to all companies at the earliest.

A proxy for growth in headcount would be the growth in what the companies spend on compensation to employees. Growth in this would reflect a growth in the headcount and the

growth in wages paid. We find that this growth rate has been falling.

CMIE's Prowess database shows a steady fall in the rate of growth of compensation paid by companies to employees since 2013-14. The Prowess database includes performance information on a large sample of listed and unlisted companies of all sizes and industries.

Compensation to employees grew by 25 per cent in 2013-14. The growth rate halved to 12 per cent in 2014-15 and then fell further to 11 per cent in 2016-17. In 2017-18, the growth rate fell to 8.4 per cent. From this, it wouldn't be entirely wrong to infer that the corporate sector's appetite for new hiring has been declining quite sharply.

2017-18 saw the slowest growth in the past eight years, or since the year after the Lehman crisis of 2008 when the compensation to employees grew by only 7.7 per cent.

The Prowess database also shows that the corporate sector registered a fall in growth in fixed assets to 6.9 per cent in 2017-18. Growth of investments into the job-creating plant and machinery part of fixed assets was even lower at 5.9 per cent. Both were the lowest since 2004-05. Evidently, the two declines in growth rates — plant and machinery and wages go hand-in-hand. The lack of investments into fresh capacities is hurting growth in employment.

We see the same fall in investments in another dataset — capex and the same fall in employment in yet another dataset — the Consumer Pyramids Household Survey.

The evidence of falling growth in investments and employment during the recent past is therefore overwhelming.

Some of the growth in compensation to employees can be explained as a consequence of inflation and given that inflation has been much lower in recent years compared to the past, it would be good to cor-

rect the growth numbers for inflation. We do this using the consumer price index for recent years and the consumer price index for industrial workers for earlier years.

Now we see inflation-adjusted compensation to employees grow by only 4.6 per cent in 2017-18. This is lower than the already-low average growth of 5.5 per cent seen in the preceding three years.

The average real, that is, inflation-adjusted, compensation to employees grew at the rate of 5.3 per cent per annum in the four years between 2014-15 and 2017-18. The industry-wide distribution of this growth in inflation-adjusted compensation to employees show some sharp variations between major sectors.

The services sector has seen a very small growth in compensation to employees in 2017-18. Compared to the overall growth of 4.6 per cent, the services sector saw a growth of only 2.2 per cent. Within services, it was the telecommunications sector that saw a fall, of 3.6 per cent, in real compensation. This was the fifth consecutive year of fall in inflation-adjusted compensation to employees in this industry. Information technology companies saw a less-than 2 per cent growth in real wages. Air transport services was another dampener.

In contrast, financial markets showed a healthy 8.1 per cent growth in inflation-adjusted wages in 2017-18. Banks recorded a growth of 6.5 per cent and most non-banking financial services industries recorded double-digit growth rates. However, we know that the non-banking finance companies fell into problems in 2018-19.

The weak growth in real wages in the IT sector and the apparent implosion in the NBFCs are possibly symptomatic of the despondency over decent jobs in recent times.

The author is the MD & CEO of CMIE

## LETTERS

### Points of disagreement

I refer to the leading editorial "Output vs outcomes" (April 13), written by Mr T N Ninan. The distinction made by him between these two terminologies, output and outcome, is actually pedantic. It is not a philosophy book but a party manifesto. Output leads to outcome inevitably. To use the example of Mr Ninan, once a certain number of railway lines are electrified, automatically there will be impact on speed and volume of railway traffic. It does not have to be stated, nor can it be cardinally quantified in advance. The utilisation coefficient will vary over time. Similarly, the other example is the number of Jan Dhan accounts. He says that it is the output while the number of transactions is the outcome. I do not agree that it is any different. It is not necessary that there should be more transactions. I have made extensive enquiry with the rickshaw-walas in Delhi as I travel by rickshaw for short distances. Having an account is enough for them. They save about ₹1,000 per month and that, they say, they will spend for making a house in future or marry their daughter. Having the saving is enough for them as it is even for the middle class.

Next example is of highway construction. It is the output and the resulting outcome will follow in terms of facilitation of trade and industry automatically. One cannot calculate it. Again, if agriculture has moved from shortage to surplus, as admitted by the author, how can he say that it is a distress story? Food processing and diversification in a capitalistic economy is taken care of by the market forces. Producing surplus is the first step and the utilisation of the surplus is the second step. It will automatically follow, or may be with a helping hand by bank loan. It is certainly not a distress story but a success story.

Sukumar Mukhopadhyay via email

### T N Ninan responds:

Sorry, Mr Mukhopadhyay, output does not lead to outcome "inevitably". Freight traffic has not increased "automatically". The figure for net tonne km has increased at a cumulative rate of less than 1 percentage point per year. Nor have average train speeds increased. Agriculture moving from shortage to surplus is a distress story because supply has overtaken demand, depressing agricultural prices. So increased output has led to lower incomes. Finally, an amateur sample survey of Delhi's rickshaw drivers must yield to the World Bank study which said last year that India leads the world in inactive bank accounts, at 48 per cent — twice the average for developing countries. The reason, said the Bank, is Jan Dhan accounts.

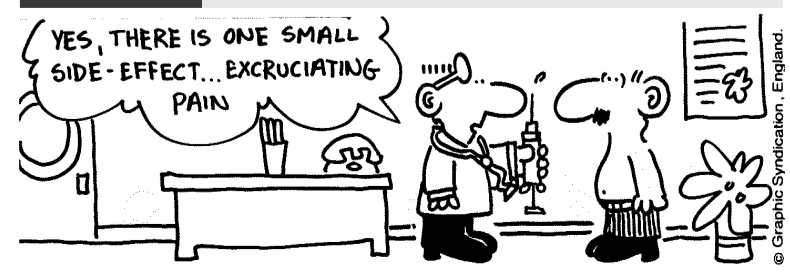
The UN's Sustainable Development Goals are not "a philosophy book" but a global manifesto adopted by the General Assembly. The focus is on outcomes, like No Poverty, Zero Hunger and Quality Education.

Being "pedantic" can be enlightening.

### Make norms realistic

This refers to "Let's find a new way to deal with bad loans" (April 15) by Tamal Bandyopadhyay. The sluggish progress in the resolution of the big-ticket bad loans and the recovery of other medium- and small-sized bad

### HAMBONE



loans need more effective measures to save the rising credit costs as well as to benefit the lenders from the loss arising out of the time value of the money. Reforms in the definitions of the prudential norms on income recognition and asset classification — which should inter alia be based on the capacities and time consumed by the various segments of the economy to generate revenue — are paramount to make the guidelines more realistic and applicable to the dynamic economy. The dependence of the banking sector on other sectors must reflect in the prudential norms.

VSK Pillai Kottayam

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Happy tidings, but...

IMD's track record on monsoon forecast has been patchy

By predicting near-normal rainfall in the coming monsoon season, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has opted to toe a line distinctly different from the other domestic and international weather forecasters, most of which foresee below-normal rainfall this year. The IMD expects the total rainfall in the 2019 monsoon season (June to September) to be 96 per cent of the long-period average. This is in contrast to the prediction of below normal (93 per cent) rainfall by the private weather agency, Skymet, and similar projections made by some foreign weather bureaus. The dissimilarity in outlook is due largely to the difference in the perception of the monsoon-inimical El Nino and its consequences for the south-west monsoon. While most weather watchers believe that this phenomenon, caused by the warming up of the equatorial Pacific Ocean, would last till August, even though it may start waning after May, the IMD feels that it may weaken around June and may not hurt the monsoon from July. However, all weather-gazers concur on the probability of sub-par rainfall in the initial period and, perhaps, even delayed onset of the monsoon due to the El Nino factor.

The truth that cannot be disregarded is that the long-range monsoon predictions, regardless of their source, are not too reliable. In four of the last five years (barring 2017), the preliminary prognoses of both the IMD and Skymet missed the mark. Both failed to foresee the back-to-back drought of 2014 and 2015. The surprising part is that though the IMD's short- to medium-term weather prediction capabilities have considerably improved thanks to the expansion of data-gathering infrastructure and induction of better computation facilities, the same is not true of its long-run monsoon forecasting skills.

Although the IMD has made it a point to assert that monsoon rainfall this year would be well-distributed and that it would be beneficial for the crops in the ensuing kharif season, this claim, too, seems to be premature. It also does not tally with Skymet's prognosis. The IMD normally talks about the spread of the rains over time and space in its updated forecasts issued when the rainy season is well underway. For agriculture, the spacing of rains matters more than the amount of precipitation. However, where the country's overall economy is concerned, the impact of the monsoon seems to be gradually moderating. The reasons for this are several. For one, the farm sector now accounts only for 14 to 15 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP). Even within the broad farm sector, the share of crop farming — which is affected directly by the monsoon's behaviour — is steadily shrinking. The share of agriculture's allied activities in agricultural GDP, especially gross value added (GVA), has outstripped that of crop farming. Besides, inflation, particularly food inflation, too, has been seen to remain stable despite the drought in 2014 and 2015 and below normal rainfall in the subsequent years, expect 2016. This apart, even the equity markets, which normally react sharply to the monsoon forecasts, tend to take it in their stride subsequently. Thus, it is yet premature to read too much into the IMD's monsoon prediction.

Vanishing decorum

Election campaign speeches are hitting a new low

India is bang in the midst of the Lok Sabha elections and the tradition of abusive language with communal overtones during campaigns continues. On Monday, the Election Commission prohibited Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) supremo Mayawati from election campaigning for 72 hours and 48 hours, respectively, for violating the Model Code of Conduct. Referring to Mr Adityanath's comments at a rally that "his Bajrangbali is mightier than Ali", the EC said the speech was "provocative", and the chief minister of a state should bear the responsibility of upholding secularism. Similarly, Ms Mayawati has been pulled up for an appeal she made to Muslim voters only. There are many other violators as well: BJP Member of Parliament Maneka Gandhi threatened Muslims to vote for her, or else they would regret it. Samajwadi Party leader Azam Khan made objectionable remarks against film actor and BJP candidate Jaya Prada, fighting the Lok Sabha polls from Rampur against him. Indeed, even the prime minister has been remiss by talking of "Hindu awakening". He also said that Rahul Gandhi had run away to Wayanad where "the majority is in a minority". At another speech, Mr Modi exhorted first-time voters to dedicate their ballot to those who died in the Pulwama terrorist attack and those who took part in the Balakot offensive against Pakistan.

Politicians across party lines are guilty of using objectionable language with alarming regularity while on the campaign trail. On Monday, the Supreme Court (SC) sought an explanation from Congress President Rahul Gandhi for his alleged contemptuous remarks on the recent Rafale verdict. While filing his nomination papers from the Amethi Lok Sabha constituency, Mr Gandhi had referred to the SC ruling on the Rafale aircraft purchase and said: "Now the SC has made it clear that 'chowkidarji' (watchman/referring to the prime minister) has committed a theft." In response, Bharatiya Janata Party MP Meenakshi Lekhi moved the SC, seeking contempt action against Mr Gandhi for misrepresenting the SC's remarks. On Monday, the SC said the views or representation attributed to the court in the alleged address made by the respondent (Mr Gandhi) to the media and public at large had been incorrectly attributed to the court. The court said it did not make any such comment during the hearing. Of course, misrepresentation is in itself a serious breach. What is equally worrying is the poor choice of words used repeatedly by the Congress president against the prime minister in this regard.

Lok Sabha elections are the time when the whole country expects to hear from its leaders their vision for the nation. It is a great opportunity for those in government to showcase their achievements, and for the Opposition to elaborate on why they might be better suited to come to power. Political leaders are squandering this opportunity and resorting to dog-whistle politics that seeks to appeal to the baser emotions. What is worse is that the EC has fallen short of arresting this trend and admitted before the Supreme Court that it is "toothless". It is sad that the court had to remind the EC that it was duty-bound to take action and cannot "sleep over" such issues. Hopefully, things will change as Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi agreed to examine the poll panel's contention that it has limited legal powers to deal with hate speeches by politicians during electioneering.

ILLUSTRATION: AJAY MOHANTY



Indians and their unhappiness

Indians are deeply unhappy on a global lineup and getting unhappier

Indians have emerged as one of the unhappiest peoples on earth in the UN's 2019 annual Happiness Report. And their unhappiness has been worsening in recent years. This comes on top of the distressing record on poverty and income distribution (my columns dated October 17, 2017, October 16, 2018, November 13, 2018, January 16, 2019, February 20, 2019, among others). Even aspects that as Indians we have had confidence in, such as strong social/family support, come out poorly in the happiness rankings. The Report has to be perused with a fine-toothed comb. Comprising 156 countries, the range of findings is wide and deep, putting together data from 2005. Space allows me to merely take a quick dip with India as the primary focus.

The reader may take umbrage with the happiness concept as I originally did. But I found the wider literature to possess content which held my attention. I shall address that discussion on another occasion and confine myself here to selected quantitative indicators.

A sample of individuals (find sample sizes in Report Chapter 2A, Appendix 1, Table 1) is taken every year in each country and they are asked to score their happiness on a 1-10 scale. The variation in country scores is then attempted to be explained statistically with six variables comprising social support, freedom, absence of corruption, generosity, per-capita GDP and life expectancy. The first four variables are measured through binary (yes/no) responses to questions such as: Do you have relatives you can count on whenever you need them? Are you satisfied with the freedom to

choose what you do with your life? Is corruption widespread in government? And have you donated money last month? Per capita GDP is in PPP \$ terms. Life expectancy weights itself with disability to reflect a "healthy" life picture. Obviously the six variables cannot explain the reported happiness score fully — for surely other aspects of life also affect happiness — but they come close. I shall refrain from further finer details of the estimation process.

Table 1 ranks selected countries pertinent to India for happiness and its underlying factors. Note that the 2019 reported information reflects 2016-18 average data (a procedure common to every annual report). Examining India first, it ranks itself at 140 in happiness out of 156 countries or at the bottom 90th percentile. So India is at the bottom 10 per cent of all countries in unhappiness. In terms of its components, it is even worse for social support, which appears to be the driving force. India is just at the 50 per cent rank for corruption, and at the bottom 58 per cent for generosity. It ranks better for freedom, being within the top 27 per cent. It is not surprising that it is at the bottom 25 per cent for per-capita GDP and longevity.

Second, India's unhappiness is considerably worse in the ranking than other countries of South Asia and China, and South Africa, and far worse than Latin America. A revelation comprises the closest countries to India's unhappiness — slightly happier Zambia and Togo, and slightly unhappier Liberia and Comoros.

Table 2 moves from ranking the countries on their



PARTHASARATHI SHOME

Making China's tax cuts fiscally sustainable

China is about to slash the employer contribution rate to the social-security fund from 18-20 per cent (with some variation across regions) to 16 per cent, and cut the value-added tax (VAT) rate from 16 per cent to 13 per cent (for most enterprises). This is on top of a previously announced reduction in the corporate income tax charged on the first CNY3 million (\$447,000) of taxable income. These policy moves are timely and useful in combating the downward pressure on economic growth, but they also raise the risk of a future debt crisis.

The loss of government revenue will not be entirely proportional to these rate reductions, as the government can also tighten enforcement to reduce tax evasion. Still, the government expects the tax reform package to lead to a substantial reduction in revenue of some CNY2 trillion, or about 2.1 per cent of GDP, this year alone. The policy package would likely raise the central government's fiscal deficit from 2.8 per cent of GDP to about 5 per cent, and increase central-government debt from about 47 per cent of GDP to perhaps 70 per cent over the medium term. Add to that the liabilities implicit in closing the funding gap in the social security system, as well as massive local-government debts, and overall public debt could grow much larger, potentially exceeding 150 per cent of GDP in a few years.

International experience from developing countries shows that large and growing government debt is unsustainable and often leads to a major economic crisis down the road. To avoid such an outcome, China can consider three additional reforms.

First, the authorities should make the VAT reduction temporary, announcing that the 2018 rate will be restored in 2021 (with a possible extension, if the economy is still not meeting its growth potential). A temporary cut would not only put less pressure on the long-run value of government debt; it would actually

boost growth more powerfully than a permanent cut of the same magnitude, because households and firms would have an incentive to spend and invest sooner.

Second, China should replace administrative restrictions on greenhouse-gas emissions and other pollution with new taxes. The scope for doing so is large, given that China is the world's largest polluter and CO2 emitter on an annual basis. (In cumulative emissions, the United States remains in the lead.) And public demand for environmentally friendly policies is growing stronger.

While China has a modest tradable-permit programme for certain pollutants, most of the control takes the form of administrative restrictions targeting certain activities by certain firms. While such restrictions reduce emissions by raising the costs for firms, as a tax would, they generate no revenue for the government. They can also undermine efficiency, by creating disparities in marginal production costs among producers in similar industries.

A better approach would replace most or all administrative restrictions with taxes on emissions and pollution — the two are not the same, as some pollution does not involve greenhouse-gas emissions — and broaden the coverage to other offending activities not currently restricted. This includes ramping up the tradable-permit programme by lowering the threshold beyond which firms have to pay, and eliminating exemptions from permits for firms or industries. Such actions would not only boost fiscal sustainability — the additional revenues could total 2 per cent of GDP — but also improve the efficiency of overall resource allocation.

Finally, China can lower government spending (in the medium term) by streamlining its vast administrative hierarchy. In recent decades, many of the largest global companies have taken advantage of new technologies to reduce the number of employee layers, from top executives to factory workers, thereby reduc-



SHANG-JIN WEI

TABLE 1: RANKING HAPPINESS AND COMPONENTS, 2019

Country*	Happiness	Social support	Freedom	Corruption	Generosity	Longevity	GDP per capita
Finland	1	2	5	4	47	27	22
Brazil	32	43	84	71	108	72	70
China	93	108	31	--	133	34	68
Bhutan	95	68	59	25	13	104	95
Nepal	100	87	67	65	46	95	127
South Africa	106	63	85	102	89	123	77
Bangladesh	125	126	27	36	107	90	119
Sri Lanka	130	80	55	111	35	54	79
India	140	142	41	73	65	105	103

\*Number of countries varies between 155 and 158 over different annual reports. Source: World Happiness Report, 2015 & 2019, United Nations.

TABLE 2: CHANGE IN HAPPINESS

Country	Happiness score (2019)*	Change in happiness score (2015-19)**
Finland	7.77	0.36
Brazil	6.30	-0.68
China	5.19	0.05
Bhutan	5.08	-0.17
Nepal	4.91	0.40
South Africa	4.72	0.08
Bangladesh	4.46	-0.24
Sri Lanka	4.37	0.09
India	4.02	-0.55

\*2019 Report presents happiness score as average over 2016-18. \*\*Each entry shows the difference in average scores reported in 2015 and 2019 reports (that is between 2012-14 and 2016-18 average data).

TABLE 3: INDIA: HAPPINESS RANKINGS AND SCORES, 2013-19

Year of report	Happiness rank	Happiness score (1-10)*
2013	111	4.77
2015	117	4.57
2016	118	4.51
2017	122	4.32
2018	133	4.19
2019	140	4.02

Note: No report was issued in 2014. \*In 2019 report, happiest was Finland at 7.77 and least happy was South Sudan at 2.85.

self-declared scale as described above to ranking their statistically derived happiness scores. Again India comes out at the bottom in South Asia in the 2019 report (average of 2016-18 data). Table 2 also shows change in the happiness score over 2015-19; again, India's score deteriorated the most in South Asia. An examination of Table 3 further reveals there has been a steady deterioration in Indians' happiness scores in recent years.

Over the month, almost a crore of India's population will vote but will their elected representatives alleviate their worsening state of unhappiness?

Mysteries of mystery writing



KITABKHANA T C A SRINIVASA-RAGHAVAN

One of the nicest things that happens in life is the unexpected discovery of a new author who has not been hyped by reviewers and LitFests. It doesn't happen often but enough times to keep one in a state of pleasant anticipation. I have

been lucky in this regard because I have come across one every few years.

I discovered another such writer three weeks ago. Her name is Sujata Massey and I found her book, called *Murder on Malabar Hill*. It was earlier published under a different title.

It had come to my sister, actually. She edits a semi-academic journal called *The Book Review* which doesn't review fiction. I frequently forage there and occasionally strike what Americans call pay dirt.

Ms Massey's book was at the very top of a huge pile of discards. I read the first page and was immediately hooked because, well, if there's one thing I can do quite well by now is to detect classy writing when I see it.

Ms Massey, Google told me, was born

in England and has been living in those parts ever since. But she has written this book about early 20th century Bombay, now Mumbai. It reminds me of Kiran Doshi's *Jinnah Often Came to Our House* another under-rated book by a classy writer.

I had had a similar pleasant experience some years ago when my son introduced me to a writer called Shamini Singh, a woman of Indian, Sikh descent who lives in Singapore or used to. She has created a character called Inspector Singh of the Singapore police. Her sardonic style is superb and the skirmishes between Mrs Singh and her husband genuinely Indian.

Bombay and its minor parts

It's not just about Bombay. The main characters are from two minority com-

munities — Parsis and Muslims. The leading character is a young Parsi woman called Parveen Mistry, India's first female solicitor who starts to solve a murder mystery involving the Muslim family that was a client of her father's law firm.

But the mystery alone is not the chief attraction of the book. It is also the writing, which is calm and unhurried and the attention to details. The story just moves along quietly like a Chinese meal of dozens of courses till you suddenly realise that you have reached the end.

Sometimes, though, you wonder which the main aspect is or should be — the mystery or the description of how Parsis and Muslims lived in Bombay in the first quarter of the 20th century. This is where the little details enrich

the book and make it a marvellous read. So it is good to know that the second Parveen mystery is due in May.

It will be interesting to find out how Ms Massey, who has won many awards, evolved as a writer of crime fiction. She made her name writing a series of mysteries where the detector, if not detective, is a Japanese-American woman called Rei Shimura. I have yet to read those but I shall.

Pale shadows

After reading these two writers it is hard not to wonder about a few other foreigners who have created Indian detectives. The first, at least as far as I know, was HRF Keating with his Inspector Ghote series.

There are two other foreigners whose crime mystery books I have read. Neither is particularly good, possibly

because of the inability to suppress the patronising tone. Keating also had that difficulty.

To these three writers Indians are somehow slightly ludicrous figures who, so to speak, talk in sing-song voices and shake their heads when they want to say yes. So while those books are good for a very quick afternoon or late night read, the quality of writing is just so-so.

For me, that is a major shortcoming in any book. It's like listening to music that isn't done well and therefore lacking.

That said, I am not a great fan of Indians who write crime thrillers. Their numbers are growing. I have done my best to read them but always given up after about 50 pages. Again, the reason is the same — very indifferent writing.

Which brings me to the main question: What do people look for in crime mysteries? A good story, never mind the bad writing? Or good writing, never mind the insipid mystery?

You can take your pick.

# Opinion

TUESDAY, APRIL 16, 2019

## Rethink electoral bonds, secret donations a bad idea

Secrecy helps India Inc donate, but transparency takes a hit since citizens will no longer be able to track *quid pro quo*

**O**N THE FACE of things, the government makes a good point when it argues that until India Inc believes the government will punish it for making political contributions to opposition parties—and today's Opposition can become tomorrow's government—it is unlikely there will be too many donations by cheque. To that extent, the Electoral Bond Scheme was a good idea since, with companies no longer worried that their contributions to various political parties will be made public, they can go ahead and donate liberally. The rise in the amount of money collected through bonds is significantly higher than in the past, and shows the bond is a success.

The problem with the electoral bond, and that is why the Supreme Court said all donor details have to be submitted by political parties to the Election Commission in a sealed envelope—the petition to outlaw the bonds requires more deliberation—is that it has traded one good thing for something worse by hitting at transparency. Getting more donations by cheque instead of in-cash was never meant to be an end in itself, it was part of a larger cleaning up. So, apart from money coming in by cheque, candidates were to be honest about their spending, for instance. This larger cleansing required not paying citizens for their vote, not buying news coverage, not having criminals fighting elections, being upfront in explaining the hike in assets of MPs etc. None of this, however, has happened. The proportion of MPs with criminal charges, for instance, has risen from 12% to 15% to 21% in the last three Lok Sabhas and no political party is agreeing to not allow them to contest; nor is there any serious move to ensure that all cases against politicians are disposed of within a year using special courts. Nor have any political parties, and the Election Commission, come up with more credible spending limits; as a result of this, most election spending tends to be under-the-radar or is made via the party or friends of the candidate where there is no cap on spending. The Election Commission has done well to say parties and candidates have to publicise criminal records, but that means little when all parties have candidates with so many criminal charges. And while asking candidates to file their income tax returns for five years is a good step, why not get the taxman to do a quick investigation into tax returns where candidates show an unusual jump in assets?

The government's argument that, in the absence of bonds, election funding will go back to cash—which is even more anonymous than election bonds where the donor details are with RBI—sounds convincing, but it isn't really so. For one, the amount received through bonds so far is actually quite low compared to the likely spending. But while that can still grow over time, if the government has been able to smash the black economy through demonetisation as it claims, and GST has led to a greater formalisation of the economy, then it is just a matter of time till donations come by cheque since the cash-route will all but have disappeared. Also, to the extent corporates have to declare they have contributed money for a political party, even though the party whom the money has been given to remains secret, each political party knows whether it got the money or not; to that extent, the potential for victimisation remains the same. The most important reason for not keeping the names secret—and this is why the Supreme Court has to declare the scheme illegal—is that, if the public has no idea of which company paid how much to which political party, tracing a *quid pro quo* becomes that much more difficult. At the end of the day, any change in rules for elections—whether in terms of donations or spending—has to be judged in terms of what that does for transparency.

## Finally, some action

From SC on Rahul Gandhi to EC on Mayawati and Adityanath

**A**FTER SEVERAL DAYS of inaction while India's politicians went on a rampage, both the Supreme Court (SC) and the Election Commission (EC) have finally taken some concrete steps. Following up on its orders last week banning the release of the Narendra Modi biopic till after the elections are over and asking for all content on NaMo TV to be pre-certified, the EC banned Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath from campaigning for 72 hours and, in the case of BSP chief Mayawati, the ban is for the next 48 hours. While Mayawati had exhorted Muslims to not vote for the BJP, Adityanath said that while the Opposition believed in Ali, the BJP believed in Bajrang Bali. The next speech on the EC's radar is now that of prime minister Narendra Modi where it has to determine whether or not he was politicising the Balakot strike, something that the EC has banned as part of the Model Code of Conduct. Though, as this newspaper has argued earlier, if a more muscular policy is part of the BJP's appeal to voters, it is not clear how the EC expects the BJP to campaign on Balakot without politicising it.

If the EC's actions were long overdue, the SC also decided to issue a notice to Congress president Rahul Gandhi for stating, after its ruling last week permitting the use of 'stolen' documents in the Rafale case, that the SC had accepted there was corruption in the Rafale deal and that Modi had given ₹30,000 crore to Anil Ambani. While BJP MP Meenakshi Lekhi had filed a petition on this in the SC, the bench headed by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi said the SC had not made any such observation and has asked Gandhi to give an explanation within a week.

It is not clear how much impact the EC has since, apart from the statements made by Samajwadi Party leader Azam Khan, women and child development minister Maneka Gandhi was heard telling Muslim voters that she couldn't guarantee them jobs if they didn't vote for her; at another event, she said villages that voted in higher numbers for the BJP would be the first to get their work done. While the SC came down on the EC for saying it has limited powers to curb those violating the code of conduct, stern action against leaders like Mayawati and Adityanath should act as a deterrent.

## Lateral THINKING

Good move by govt to induct pvt sector talent for govt services laterally, now to make this a permanent feature

**T**HE UPSC HAS inducted nine sectoral experts as joint secretaries in central government departments. Dubbed the "lateral entry initiative" by the mainstream media, the government's move is an attempt to harness expertise and efficiency from outside the UPSC umbrella to give government functioning a fillip. The breadth of talent picked in the first-ever lateral entry and the expertise those selected have demonstrated in their respective careers so far—in the private sector; in multilateral organisations, in PSUs—promises a bounty of talent for the government. For instance, Kakoli Ghosh, an agriculture expert working with the Food and Agriculture Organisation, is set to join the agriculture and farmers' welfare ministry, while Amber Dubey, partner, KPMG in India, will be joining the civil aviation ministry.

Given roping in talent from outside the government is a common feature across many developed nations, India is already late to the game. Though NITI Aayog battled for inducting private sector specialists to improve government functioning only in 2018, it was the first Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC), in 1965, that recognised the need for administrative services personnel to have specialised skills, while the second ARC, in 2005, called for a transparent method to institutionalise induction from outside the UPSC process. Apart from drawing from the private sector talent pool, lateral entry will help alleviate the drought within the government's administrative services. The 2016 BS Baswan committee report pointed out that many large states suffer from a pronounced deficit of IAS officers, leading to their reluctance to depute officers for central posting. So, the government (both the Union and the states) should consider making lateral entry a permanent feature rather than a one-off or episodic initiative.



## PRESIDENTIAL ADVICE

US president Donald Trump

What do I know about branding, maybe nothing (but I did become President!), but if I were Boeing, I would FIX the Boeing 737 MAX, add some additional great features, & REBRAND the plane with a new name.

## POLLS & SENSEX

AT THE MOMENT, CONTINUITY WOULD DEFINITELY RESONATE BETTER FOR THE MARKET THAN ANY CHANGE, BECAUSE THE LATTER WILL FUEL SPECULATION

# How the markets see Indian elections

**T**HE STOCK MARKET is known for its idiosyncratic ways, and, hence, it is hard to predict which way it will go. The indices are driven

by a variety of factors, and most of the effects are for specific sessions, before it is business-as-usual (BAU) again. The monetary policy or Budget can spook the market but, normally, after a couple of sessions, it is mean-reverting. The same holds for corporate results or any major political upheaval or even natural disaster. At times, it is felt that the market movements before a major event like say elections could be indicative of the mood or expectations. In this context, it is interesting to examine the question 'how have markets reacted to elections in the past'. Are there any patterns based on past information?

The BSE Sensex can be tracked for specific months before and after the elections to ascertain any such patterns. The last six elections have been considered here and plotted, where the monthly Sensex values three months prior to the Elections, the period of voting and two subsequent months after a new government came to power are mapped. In case the elections have been conducted in two months, they have been included separately. It must be stated upfront that this is an ex post exercise, and several factors affect the market indices such as FPI flows, monetary policy action, Budgets, currencies, fiscal path, global political and economic developments and so on. Often the final outcome, in terms of movement in indices, could be more due to these factors than elections. But with the benefit of hindsight, it is nonetheless interesting to map these movements with election outcomes and formulate patterns, if any, in market behaviour.

Some of the trends that emerge are very interesting. The first is that till the run up to the elections there is a tendency for the Sensex to show some bit of nervousness when the outcome is uncertain. In 1996 and 1998, the market moved both ways until the elec-

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Chief economist, CARE Ratings.  
Views are personal



tions were conducted. In 1999, it was a direct upward movement which was replicated in 2009 and 2014, when the market looked confident. In 2004, which is when the UPA-1 came in, there was apprehension as the index looked downwards.

The phase of elections lasts for 1-2 months depending on when they commence. Except for the 2009 elections, the markets have tended to be cautious and shown a 'nervous stable' or downwards tendency as they wait to know the outcome. In 1998, there was confidence even though the outcome was, in a way, uncertain, given the factions that existed. In 1999, when the NDA government came to power, it had actually declined for the two months as the same government was not able to hold on to power in the previous elections. The scepticism continued in the 2004 elections when the NDA seemed popular, but ultimately lost to the UPA.

The third aspect is the post-elections scenario, where the market reaction can be gauged based on how they look at the result in terms of expecta-

tions from the new government voted to power. Here, there are some interesting trends based on ex post knowledge of what had transpired after the elections. In 1996 and 1998, there appeared to be a clear thumbs-down for the government, which was fractured as parties with differing ideologies and stances came together to form the government. The markets probably guessed that these governments may not last the complete term. However, when stronger alliances and a leader was chosen which gave a semblance of stability, the stock market reacted positively—the case in the last four elections.

The markets subsequently tend to cruise along the BAU path, where the other factors come back into play. The present trend looks different. Compared with January, the Sensex moved downwards in February and then been resurrected in March though admittedly the strong FPI flows have boosted the market. The FPI action is normally based on extraneous factors, but the expected elections outcome could also

influence them at the margin. It needs to be seen how the market reacts in April and May when the elections are conducted and the final response post the verdict.

The stock indices are considered to be an appropriate barometer of the sentiment in the country which includes the economic, business and political environment. While there is no overt tendency to move up or down on account of the elections, the market is efficient and absorbs the news that provides clues on the final outcome. As the nation, including market participants, forms a view on the outcome, there would be a tendency to react to the evolving scenarios that get sketched along the way. While a strong majority government which could be a single party or an alliance is desirable, the differing ideologies would also be influencing the mood swings.

If the past trends are to be reflective of the future, then the index should remain largely stable in the next two months when the elections would be on. It would be surprising if this does not materialise as the elections outcome is still unclear, given that there are no clear indications of a single party getting absolute majority. Depending on how the final government is formed in terms of alliances, the Sensex could take a specific turn in June and July. Continuity in the regime would definitely resonate well for the market while any change will cause more speculation.

### Sensex levels in the period before, during and after elections

	Lag 3	Lag 2	Lag 1	Elections	Elections	Post 1	Post 2
1996	3,392	3,367	3,826	3,724	3,812	3,536	3,514
1998	3,560	3,658	3,224	3,622	3,892	4,006	3,686
1999	4,140	4,542	4,898	4,764	4,444	4,622	5,005
2004	5,695	5,667	5,590	5,655	4,759	4,795	5,170
2009	8,891	9,708	11,403	14,625		14,493	15,670
2014	20,513	21,120	22,386	22,417	22,217	25,413	25,894

Source: BSE. Lag refers to the months prior to the voting month while Post refers to the months following the voting month when the government is formally formed.

## Why Modi could win

Modi has delivered more than growth and low inflation—no previous government prioritised cleanliness/sanitation or a cleaner alternative to burning coal/wood for cooking that affects women's health

**MEGHNAD DESAI**

Prominent economist & Labour peer



**T**HE RECENT POLL of polls revealed no surprises. It was predictable before Pulwama that BJP would get around 230 and NDA would retain power. It was also likely that Congress would get at most half as many seats as BJP, and perhaps only a third as it has abandoned the Grand Coalition strategy. Actually, Narendra Modi can repeat the feat of Manmohan Singh, and have two full terms, if not three. BJP is about to become the 'natural party' of government.

This journey of the BJP, from being an obscure right-wing "Hindu nationalist" party relying for its support on urban small traders to the leading national party, has been ignored by most analysts. Words like fascism are frequently used for a party which has inched its way vote by vote, seat by seat across India. Still, an air of incredulity hangs among the social scientists. How could a party which can field very few top-class leaders who can boast an Oxbridge education or a decent (foreign-sounding) English accent rise to be the leading party?

And why not? When the BJP became the largest single party in 1996, it was a severe shock. Ricketty coalitions were put together with forgettable faces thrust into prime ministership. It did not help, and in 1998, Vajpayee came back with a coalition. It was robust enough to survive a no-confidence challenge and came back in 1999. The BJP showed that it could rule India with a coalition. It delivered decent growth and infused hope and modernisation in the citizens of India. Vajpayee did not just explode the bomb, he introduced mobile telephony which was the more

revolutionary step for India.

BJP slipped in 2004. Congress came back, but lacked the humility of realising that its seat score was quite modest. It won more seats in 2009, but wasted these in its arrogance. The senior leadership did not credit Manmohan Singh as the agent of the success in winning those extra 60 seats. They treated his second term as an insult, UPA-2 was mired in indecision, corruption, scams and a failure to claim the Rao-Singh reforms of 1992-1996 as a Congress triumph. Instead, the NAC reintroduced a socialist agenda. The high growth of the previous ten years was turned into a bumpy growth and rampant inflation. Congress was punished severely by the voters.

Modi came and resumed the Vajpayee formula of continuity with neoliberal policies which had delivered success. Modi's triumph is indicated by the fact that now, a 7% growth has become the default scenario. Even the *Financial Times* calls the forecast of 6.6% growth as slowing down. It may be the highest growth rate in the world.

Modi has won the political ideological war outright. Congress has abandoned Nehruvian secularism and adopted liberal Hindutva. Rahul Gandhi could have boasted about his rainbow ethnicity—quarter Hindu, quarter Parsi and half Christian. But he chose to be not just a Hindu but a Brahmin. Congress finds Modi difficult to take seriously as he is an OBC. What it has not noticed that its old policy of patronising the lower castes while keeping a Brahmin monopoly of leadership will no longer do.

India has changed. The majority in

Hindu society has always been OBC plus Dalit. This majority is young and capable of holding power. It wants its own place, not just patronage. Modi has grasped this and focuses on Dalit entrepreneurs with his Mudra loan facility. He has also played up his financial support for women entrepreneurs. Congress had patronised the Dalits while keeping power in Brahmin hands. It created elite jobs and called it socialism for decades.

But Modi has delivered more than growth and low inflation. No previous government prioritised cleanliness. No one talked about the health-destroying effects of outdoor defecation. No previous government seriously worried about the deleterious effects women were suffering from cooking with coal or wood fires. Swachh Bharat is perhaps the most radical change India has seen. Now, there is rural electrification close to 100%, toilets almost everywhere, pucca housing in rural areas. While critics go on about demonetisation (at most, a 0.5% drop in growth rate of GDP), or the initial problems with the launch of GST, it is good to contrast the inflation rate during UPA-2 and BJP/NDA-2. If he wins one more term, Modi will become the architect of a new India. Five years of 7% growth plus moderate inflation have not been enjoyed for decades. The economy has been modernised, digitised and the young know of start-ups and unicorns. Thanks to neoliberalism, poverty has been reduced to record low. The young have seen the start-ups and the unicorns. They know that much more is possible. Modi has delivered, but he must continue to deliver.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Black hole picture: Seeing is believing

The image of a black hole was a scientific breakthrough that would widen our understanding of the universe. It is often rightly said that reaching out to the celestial bodies, light and music is good for life on earth. Scientists have made it possible for us to see what was thought to be 'unseeable'. Humans have evolved enough to make a global network of radio telescopes to capture the image of a black hole. Beholding the silhouette of a black hole surrounded by a 'ring of fire' created by the deformation of space-time was quite an experience. The black hole, located in a distant galaxy called Messier 87 or M87 in the Virgo cluster, is nearly 55 million light years away from the earth. Still it is so massive in size (6.5 billion times the mass of the sun) and its 'ring of fire' is so bright that it could be imaged, comparatively easily. Interestingly, it is harder to get an image of the black hole Sagittarius A\* at the core of the Milky Way as it is nearly 1000 times smaller in size than the M87 black hole and the 'ring of fire' around it is dimmer. Greater knowledge of black holes, especially the size and shape of the 'shadow' is consistent with Albert Einstein's general theory of relativity. Nicknamed 'Powehi' (a word from Hawaiian mythology meaning 'embellished dark source of unending creation') and described as a 'monster', 'beast' and 'heavyweight champion of black holes' for its unimaginably humongous size, the jet-spewing 'supermassive' black hole, now imaged, fills us with awe and wonder over the immensity of the observable universe, not to speak of an infinite universe.

— G David Milton, Maruthancode

●Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com



**ANANT RANGASWAMI**

The author writes and comments on advertising, media and marketing. He is the editor of the show MELT on WION

# Of Piyush Pandey, kachoris and shower time

Sharing generously is his extraordinary facet, and he believes it is an essential element in the make-up of any creative person

**YOU MEET PIYUSH PANDEY** for the first time at an event. You hand over your business card and presume he'll give you his card. He doesn't, because he doesn't carry one. Not to worry, he tells you to mail him on piyush.pandey@ogilvy.com and he'll respond immediately. On the way back, you send him an email, wondering whether he'll reply.

The next morning, you're in a meeting and get an alert. You're in a meeting with Piyush, referring to the meeting the previous evening and asking you to stay in touch. The signature has his coordinates.

You're impressed. He's been promoted recently as the global chief creative officer of one of the world's most recognised advertising agencies, Ogilvy; he assured you he'd mail you immediately, and he did.

What you don't know is he didn't 'send' the mail himself.

What you don't know is he doesn't check his email himself.

His mail checking and replying process, which never realises, is long and painful. In fact, Piyush's ever-efficient secretary, Ophelia Gomes, 'operates' his mail. She logs in and waits for the inbox to populate itself.

If her boss is in office, she prints out all new mails and takes it to his room. If he isn't in office, she sends a printout to wherever he is (in town). If he's not in town, she reads what she considers important mails over the phone (he receives printouts of the others when he is back). He either dictates the responses to each mail or writes out the responses in neat and legible longhand, and Ms Gomes will mail the responses.

Piyush is not on any social media platform. He's on WhatsApp, with the primary use being the ability to see creatives when colleagues need his input and the secondary use being the ability to be in the conversation between members of the family.

By and large, he sees social media as a waste of his time.

He prefers the real and physical social

interaction rather than the virtual. He wants to see, feel, touch, hear and smell the world, and not have that experience interrupted by something as stupid and impersonal as a smartphone.

In a nutshell, that's what makes Piyush Pandey what he is.

When he sees, feels, touches, and smells the same things in the same environment as you and I, he sees, feels, touches, hears and smells things that you and I fail to notice. And he does this with all the appetite akin to greed. He does this 'all' the time.

If you reread the last paragraph, you might say, "Yes, they all say that. I've heard it before."

You haven't—but those who know Piyush have experienced this insatiable curiosity.

Like the time when I was with him in Jaipur, staying at his sister's house. We were scheduled to attend his book launch on a Saturday evening and we flew in on Friday evening.

On Saturday morning, as we finished our millionth cup of tea, Piyush was impatiently waiting for his sister's driver to arrive, and no one understood why. Immediately after the driver arrived, Piyush said to me, "Come." We got into the car, drove for 15 minutes and ended up at a market. He walked with great purpose and stopped at a non-descript 'stall'—one selling *kachoris*. The owner, dressed in a white vest and trousers, greeted Piyush with great warmth, and Piyush greeted Koteta—the owner's name—with equal warmth. As the *kachoris* were being cooked, Piyush promised him to come.

The next evening, a transformed Koteta, wearing a shirt, trousers and shoes, walked into the five-star hotel—the venue for the release. Piyush greeted him effusively and had him seated in the second row—immediately behind the chief guest, (then) chief minister of Rajasthan, Vasundhara Raje Scindia.

The launch over, Koteta bought a copy of the book and waited for Piyush Pandey to autograph it.

This is one of the many stories I could narrate, and all those close to him could narrate many stories of their own.

What Piyush does is to 'share' his great experiences, and attempts to share the experience again with you. Sharing generously is his extraordinary facet, and he believes it is an essential element in the make-up of any creative person.

Once I asked him how long he spends on interviews, what he asks candidates and what he wants to learn from the interviews, he answered cryptically, "All

that I want to establish is that the candidate is a 'secure' human being."

Secure? Why is security so important in the advertising business? I've been in the business once upon a time; I've have observed, commented and analysed it for almost two decades and have never heard someone say 'security' was so critical.

In advertising, he explains, it is important to first check that an idea has legs—which you can do only by sharing the idea. That's where the first need for security comes in. The person or people you share the idea with might believe that the idea is not as good as you thought it was—and even believe the idea is useless.

A secure person will accept the opinion and move on. An insecure person would allow the rejection to rankle.

Another scenario, Piyush explains, is when an idea is shared, and the recipients believe that the idea is good.

But... the idea would get better if certain changes were made.

A secure person would allow the idea to be transformed from being 'his' or 'her', to an idea that belongs to a group of people aligned to one objective.

The idea belongs to no one individual. Only a secure person would allow the transfer of the ownership of the idea.

Piyush lives with this sense of security, and encourages others to do so. That's how and why you see, within Ogilvy, so many extraordinarily confident and secure creative personnel, each walking tall and proud—but never forgetting that the team's objectives are always more important than individual's.

While industry leaders spout jargon and metrics, Piyush thinks simple.

At a press conference a few months ago for the launch of a campaign for ITC's Savlon, a journalist asked Piyush what the brief was. He replied there was no brief, as ITC and Savlon owned his 'shower time'.

Shower time? What the hell is that?

Piyush explains, in his patient way, that in cases where the agency and the client have a long-standing, firm and easy relationship, Ogilvy doesn't need specific briefs—it's focused on the brand 365 days a year, 24 hours a day. Even in the shower. There are a number of companies and brands that 'own' Piyush's shower time. And Piyush owns the client's shower time as well.

So it is that many of his clients are used to early morning calls from him—some as early as 6.30 am. It's when Piyush has an idea that he wants to bounce off the client, and his childlike excitement doesn't allow him to wait for a more civilised hour.

And he doesn't care for civilities if they come in the way of potential good ideas.

For a six-month period, as I worked closely with him, helping him write his autobiography 'Pandeyonium', I was woken up every few days as he wanted to correct something in the manuscript, add something to it or suggest some small changes. These calls, as the calls he makes to anyone, are always polite and cheerful.

Always. That's the way he lives his life. He lives life to the full, with lots of laughter and good cheer—with no frills and fancies. There are no trappings of success that he indulges in. He writes with a simple pen (perhaps one he picked up from a hotel room), drives a car that is 7-8 years old, lives in Shivaji Park and not Malabar Hill or Pali Hill, wears no designer brands. And drinks no single malt. He drinks Teacher's, whether he's at home or at an event. Unless, of course, Teacher's is not available.

A couple of years ago, he was at a five-star hotel in Goa as a guest. The waiter took the orders: a single malt for the host, a wine for the hostess and a Teacher's for Piyush. The waiter returned with the single malt and the wine, and apologised that the bar had run out of Teacher's.

Meanwhile, Piyush had run out of patience, so when he said he would have a Chivas Regal, and the waiter asked, "Which year?" the reply was quintessentially Piyush Pandey, "This year, please."

**Only a 'secure' person will allow an idea to be transformed from being his or her, to an idea that belongs to a group of people aligned to one objective**

**VOX POPULI, VOX DEI** is Latin for "the voice of the people is the voice of God"—a basic tenet for liberal democracies, it faces a rare chaotic crisis in the hands of the British Parliament. The bold voice of the British electorate—which approved leaving the European Union (EU) in a 2016 referendum—being ignored at worst or re-examined at best (with the proposal of a second referendum). It is heartening to see the 'Mother of all Parliaments' being reduced to a callous self of her former glory. Its constitutional sovereignty being held hostage to the human emotions of its members. But should we find the core of the Brexit chaos at the doorstep of the British Parliament or do the British people share some of that blame?

After the 2016 referendum, the British, in a 2017 snap-general election, elected a minority conservative government, consisting of a Prime Minister and her Cabinet filled with politicians who had voted to 'remain' at the 2016 referendum, to deliver the Brexit mandate. A textbook case of the inevitable flaw with a Westminster-style indirect democracy. For the system to work, the majority will of a nation must translate into majority in Parliament, with the government tasked to implement the 'majority will' or mandate after balancing it with what is in the best interest of the nation. The glaring forking of democracy's

# India, Empire and post-Brexit lessons

In a post-Brexit world, India can leverage its trading relationship with the EU, and also lead the Commonwealth

**AVIRUP BOSE**

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two conflicting imperatives of combining majority rule with liberal values of universal rights and common good. The Brexit chaos now threatens a break-up of the two national parties of Britain—the Tory and Labour parties. The House of Commons has already seen the emergence of new caucus groups to accommodate disgruntled members of major political parties—Brexit succeeding to create a fractured and divided British Parliament and society.

But what is new to Britain has been rehearsed often in Indian Parliament. For nearly three decades (before the 2014 federal elections), the Lok Sabha experienced coalition governments and a chaotic

regional/language/caste-based governance model. Despite initiating liberalisation reforms in 1991, Harvard University's Center for International Development working paper (in 2002), analysing the first decade of India's liberalisation efforts, concluded that India's reform efforts were an 'unfinished agenda' and that India, during this decade, did little: to reduce fiscal deficit, to reduce government dissaving (mainly explicit and implicit subsidies), to privatise India's non-performing state-owned enterprises, to reduce barrier to FDI (as contrasted to most of the fast-growing Asian economies), besides failing to initiate major labour and land-acquisition

reforms. Six governments were in office during the 1990s—from being in office for 16 days, to two successive minority governments lasting less than a year.

Such Indian coalition governments, scrambling for allies to help form and then retain majority in Parliament, built on compromised self-interest of party politics, did little to further any national cause of economic reform, geopolitical leadership or augment military capabilities. Brexit demonstrates a similar moment for British politics, where factionalised political and party interests have overpowered the cause of the British nation and of its people. Just like the idea of 'Many Indias',

formed by merging autonomous principalities into a unified state, has fractured its Parliament, the reality of 'Many Britons', based on its differing understanding and imagination of its current and future roles within Europe, threatens to break up its Parliament and society. An advance from one Commonwealth nation to another—learn from the lessons of India.

The economic impact of Brexit on India could be substantial—and in a good way. Despite the EU being India's largest trading partner, accounting for 13% of India's total trade in goods in 2017, the EU and India have not been able to secure an FTA, even after 16 rounds of negotiations, from 2003 to 2018. Without Britain, such talks could be more successful. Britain was concerned that a more liberal trade regime—one of India's priorities—would bring a disproportionate amount of Indian workers on its shores. Sunil Prasad, the Secretary-General of the Europe India Chamber of Commerce, said: "Most Indian companies used to go to Britain as their point of entry into Europe." With Britain's India red-line removed, India and the EU should be more comfortable in concluding the FTA after 15 years since the talks began.

'Global Britain' is the catchphrase of the current British government—a governing idea that once Britain manages to finally cast off the EU's yoke, it will be able

to strike its own trade deals with countries. Such a vision inevitably places India high up on Briton's wish list. The first country outside of Europe that PM May visited in November 2016 was India. The jewel in the post-Brexit crown? In a post-Brexit world, India has a unique opportunity of leveraging its trading relationship with the EU and links to the fraternity of the Commonwealth nations to get a better trade deal with both the EU and Britain. It will not be easy, but it will now be possible.

Finally, the cultural lessons of Brexit on India are equally profound. In January 2019, PricewaterhouseCoopers reported India would officially surpass Britain in world's largest economy rankings in 2019. For the first time in more than 200 years, India will economically be more important than its colonial master. A profound landmark of the ensuing Asian century.

Although the Indian economy was originally predicted to overtake the British GDP in 2020, the *surpasso* has been accelerated by nearly a 20% decline in the value of the pound sterling since the Brexit chaos came to order. As the only former British colony to surpass its colonial master on the global economic platform, without gloating, India seems perched to lead the Commonwealth both officially and unofficially, being the chair-in-office of the Commonwealth till the next summit in Rwanda in 2020.

● BIT BY BIT

# The science of falling

**NANDAGOPAL RAJAN**

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Apple Watch can detect falls, it shows how the ability to save lives will become a standard feature in regular gadgets

**C**AN TECHNOLOGY SAVE LIVES? And I ask this question not in the context of technology that we find in hospitals, but in gadgets that most of us use. The answer is slowly but surely moving towards the affirmative. This is because, over the past few years, personal technology has been putting a lot of emphasis on wellness, stress and, of late, more serious stuff like blood pressure monitoring. While Apple showcased ECG functionality with its latest Apple Watch, Samsung's new Galaxy Watch now comes with blood pressure monitoring. Meanwhile, having sold over 90 million devices, a company like Fitbit is sitting on so much user data, which when combined with the best of medical knowledge could help change lives like never before.

Apple seems to be way ahead of others when it comes to adding features that improve accessibility and safety for those wearing its devices. The fall detection feature that went live with the latest Apple Watch Series 4 in one such event though the ability to take an ECG from your wrist captured most of the attention. While fall detection might seem like a relatively easy technology to execute, it is quite a bit of computing that goes into getting this right.

What is fall detection? The Apple Watch can detect a hard fall based on a bunch of algorithms and by analysing wrist trajectory and impact acceleration. If the Watch senses the person has been immobile for 60 seconds after a hard fall was detected, it will automatically call emergency services and send a message along with location to emergency contacts in the language chosen by the user beforehand.

Accurate fall detection has become possible with Watch Series 4, which is capable of measuring up to 32 g-forces, twice that of its predecessor. The accelerometer and gyroscope are up to eight times faster than previous generations of Apple Watches. All of these together help the Watch collect the higher fidelity motion data needed for fall detection.

But creating algorithms needed was not easy either, as fall detection had never been put on a watch and hence the kind of data needed was not available. Apple got this training data over a long-term study working with real people to ensure the participants, "true". With 250,000 days of data from 2,500 participants, Apple's team looked at the most common types of falls—slipping and tripping then bracing, falling off a ladder, tripping on an uneven curb—then hone in on/and recognise the angle/time of impact.

The study taught them that the types of falls for elderly are often different to falls that occur during recreational activity or contact sports. This is significant because a large chunk of older patients fail to tell their caregivers about falls, making it difficult for doctors to understand the origin or underlying causes, such as balance, movement disorders, reduced leg strength, or worsened hand-eye coordination. So, it was critical for falls to be documented so as to provide the patient, caretaker and physician with more insights. Fall detection is hence on by default for users who are above the age of 65. Look at this from the business side, and you understand how big an opportunity it is to cater to the elderly.

From its study of the fall data, Apple learnt about specific motion patterns associated with different types of falls—someone tripping, someone slipping and trying to brace with their hands, or someone slipping naturally swings their arms upwards in a windmill motion. The Apple Watch Series 4 can clearly recognise these fall patterns.

Interestingly, some events like a car crash can lead to the fall detection being triggered and there have been instances where the Watch has alerted emergency service even when it was not a fall per se. The Watch filters out a lot of regular trips and falls, and Apple has data on what these false positives usually are. But when a hard fall is detected, the Watch sends the user an alert and she has the option to either confirm she's fine or to call for emergency services. If the user is immobile for a minute, the Watch will start emergency call automatically. The user can cancel this call, if needed. This also helps prevent the overburdening of emergency services.

But if you thought this technology will get better over time as millions of people use the latest Apple Watch, then you are wrong. Apple does not collect user data from the watches, so the algorithm is based on original dataset only. The new data stays locally on user's watches and hence is not used to change the algorithm itself. However, some local customisations do gradually happen on the Watch itself.

This is what technology is supposed to do—change lives for the better. And this year you can rest assured that across brands there will be a technology that can save more lives.



The Indian EXPRESS

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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

# Level-playing field matters

Why state financing is the only way to ensure fair and transparent poll funding



ASHOK KHEMKA

## BUILDING PEACE

A narrative that helps normalisation of Indo-Pak ties is needed. But it can't be built only on Imran Khan's version of Pakistan

THE OUTGOING PAKISTAN high commissioner, Sohail Mahmood, who is returning to Islamabad to take charge as foreign secretary, has iterated Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan's call for the resumption of dialogue, after the elections. The need for India and Pakistan to resolve their differences by peaceful methods is a no-brainer. Finding a modus vivendi as cordial neighbours, if not as the best of the friends is an imperative, because the alternatives are too dire to contemplate. Implicit in Mahmood's call is the expectation that what happens at the election stays in the election, and that all the grandstanding settles down once victory and defeat have been decided. It usually does. There is much talk of Pakistan and war this election season in India, but the political leadership of this country knows that actual war is a messy business. This is why there is recognition that the two countries must normalise relations. This is why even while the leading lights of the BJP were demanding in Parliament a "befitting" reply for a particularly bad round of ceasefire violations in 2017, the national security advisors of both countries were in secret talks.

So if Pakistan wants peace today, it should not be interpreted by India as a sign of weakness, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in Kathua, nor should India be considered weak for talking to Pakistan rather than sending the Indian Air Force to bomb terrorist targets. But the new "objective narrative" between the two countries that Mahmood talks about cannot be a one-side acquiescence of Khan's version of what Pakistan or the Pakistani state is today. After all, there would have been no Pulwama had Pakistan acted against Masood Azhar after Pathankot, and perhaps no Pathankot had the perpetrators of Mumbai 26/11 been punished. And there would never have been a Balakot had Jaish-e-Mohammed not been headquartered in Pakistan. And there would be no Jaish had it not been nurtured by the Pakistani security establishment. Whatever Khan says, there is no sign that this establishment has changed its colours.

The best phase in India-Pakistan relations lasted the two years from the time the military ruler Pervez Musharraf pledged not to allow Pakistani territory or PoK to be used by terrorists for attacks on India in January 2004. It lasted until the 2006 Mumbai bomb attacks, and officially died in 2008. In this short period, the two countries caught a glimpse of what normal might mean in their relations — two bus services to connect divided J&K, cross LoC trade, both signs of what a Kashmir resolution could look like, relative peace in the Valley, sporting and cultural ties between South Asia's big rivals. That was an attempt at crafting an "objective narrative". A new narrative will certainly require an acknowledgement of what went wrong the last time, if nothing else.

## ABUSING WOMEN

Clearly, Akhilesh who wants to project a more liberal and modern alternative can't rein in his toxic uncle

THE OLD ORDER had reluctantly yielded to the new in the Samajwadi Party. With Akhilesh Yadav at the helm, the party showed nimbleness and humility in sewing up alliances for the Lok Sabha election. The visible presence of Yadav's wife and Kannauj MP, Dimple Yadav, in party fora, too, has been a welcome change from its testosterone-heavy optics. But the musty odour of feudalism still clings on to the party. True to that vein of patriarchal nastiness, party MLA and candidate for Rampur constituency Azam Khan has aimed a volley of sexist abuse at his rival Jaya Prada, a former actor. At a rally in Rampur last week, Khan, in an apparent reference to Jaya Prada's association with the RSS, said: "It took you 17 years to understand her true face. But I realised in 17 days... that she wears khaki underwear."

This is not the first time that Khan — or any other Samajwadi leader — has denigrated Jaya Prada (Khan once called Jaya Prada *naachne gaane wali*; the actor has also alleged that Khan circulated morphed images of her during an election campaign.) As the over-the-top infantilisation of Hema Malini's campaign, or the furore over Trinamool Congress's choice of candidates in Bengal reveal, women actors and performers are subject to the worst of prejudices and barbs when they enter politics. While barriers to women's entry into politics remain extremely high, the ones who find their way in are relentlessly policed and put in place, revealing a larger discomfort with those who seek equal political power. Political leaders across the spectrum, from Mamata Banerjee to Smriti Irani and Mayawati, have been ridiculed in this manner.

But it is not only the SP that must choose between a dark, regressive past and a more equitable impulse. It's a choice thrown up for Indian politics by the larger changes in Indian society — and the countervailing political assertion of women that is pushing back against patriarchal rigidity. While leaders such as the BJP's Naveen Patnaik and Banerjee appear to have recognised and acknowledged that tectonic change, too many parties appear to find comfort in clinging on to a grubby, toxic masculinity. If the SP fails to censure Khan for the rancid political discourse he is guilty of, it will have taken a few steps backward on its rocky path to becoming a modern, more equal political party.

## TIGER'S TRAIL

Tiger Woods' comeback is also a tale of the politics of perception and consumerism

On the face of it, Tiger Woods winning the Masters at Augusta, Georgia, makes for an unlikely underdog tale. After all, as early as 1997, as a 21-year-old with only a year's experience on the professional circuit, young Tiger became the No 1 golfer in the world. In 1997, when he won his first Masters, his father stood beside him. At 43, when he won his fifth after 11 years without a major title, he had his children at his side. But the hurdles that arguably the greatest golfer of the 21st century has had to overcome are not merely physical or even psychological. Woods' there-and-back-again narrative of triumph is also the story of the complexities of celebrity, of the cocktail consumerism and puritanism that have become such a major part of sporting celebrity.

In 2009, Woods took a voluntary sabbatical from professional golf due to injuries. The announcement also came on the heels of revelations about a series of extra-marital affairs and, following that, a tumultuous period in his marriage. For a sporting figure as iconic as Woods, his personal life had a professional — and financial — fallout. The shareholder cost of Woods' personal life has been pegged at over \$5 billion. Woods' injuries may have had a lot to do with the slump in his career. But his extra-marital transgressions are what hurt his image.

The culture of celebrity in contemporary America, and much of the world, including India, seems to revel in hyperbole. Half-black, half-Asian Buddhist Woods was a hero as much for his background as his dazzling play on the course. His fall, too, was not seen as a human failing but an almost professional betrayal, at least going by the sponsors. And now, he is Tiger once again — celebrated by Donald Trump and Barack Obama, Serena Williams and Kobe Bryant. In sports, it seems, as in much of public life, it is the politics of perception that builds people up and brings them down.

IN JUST 28 days since the announcement of the general election, the Election Commission (EC) has seized cash, drugs, alcohol, precious metals and other items worth Rs 1,800 crore. Compare this to the legal upper limit of expenditure per candidate — Rs 70 lakh. Simple arithmetic would show that the seized amount can fully finance up to five candidates from each of the 543 constituencies. The amount seized is just the tip of the iceberg. The expenditure in any election is estimated to be several times the legal upper limit.

Fiscal constraints on electioneering give rise to the problem of unaccounted money. There have been a few solutions. However, all of them are premised on an adverse relationship between accountability and transparency. Alternately, state funding of the recognised political parties and outlawing of corporate funding could be instrumental in making the electoral process fairer and more participatory.

In 1962, the late Atal Bihari Vajpayee moved a Private Member's Bill to prevent electoral donations by corporates. It was argued that since all shareholders need not subscribe to the political endorsement by a corporate, it was immoral to allow donations against their consent. Vajpayee had propositioned that such funding would only serve corporate interests. While all political parties welcomed the bill, the then ruling party did not vote in its favour. Never again was such a bill introduced.

Under Section 29B of the Representation of the People Act 1951, political parties are free to accept donations from any person, except from a foreign source. Two inferences can be drawn from this — first, money wields the ability to disrupt political agenda; second, foreign money dilutes electoral integrity. Both reasons would equally be valid for any person who is alien to the election process — a non-voter. The concerns that arise from foreign-funding are equally applicable to funding from corporates, with the distinction that while the former is a jurisdictional alien; the latter, on account of being a non-participant, is an alien. However, party interests deter further expansion in the law.

The anonymity provision under the electoral bonds scheme is antagonistic to transparency — the bonds merely enable an "on-the-books" secretive transfer. The State Bank as the facilitator would be privy to the details of the depositor and the political party funded, therefore allowing the ruling party to monitor its rivals. What would be unknown to others, will be known by the ruling party.

The finance ministry's electoral bond scheme afforded a way to fund political parties without disclosing the donor's identity. Of the Rs 2,722 crore donated through the scheme in the last 15 months, almost 95 per cent has gone to the ruling party, which enjoys a 31.34 per cent vote share. The remaining contestants with a 68.66 per cent vote share could only garner 5 per cent funding. The anonymity provision under the scheme is antagonistic to transparency — the bonds merely enable an "on-the-books" secretive transfer. The State Bank as the facilitator would be privy to the details of the depositor and the political party funded, therefore allowing the ruling party to monitor its rivals. What would be unknown to others will be known by the ruling party.

Corporates have long defended their political donations on the grounds of freedom of speech. Within American jurisprudence, corporates claim free speech under the First Amendment. Like citizens, they seek to endorse their economic and political views through contributions to campaign finance. However, casting such a wide net of freedom of speech seems misplaced.

Corporates are associations that further economic interests of their members who enjoy a freedom of trade. Therefore, their freedom of speech is based on their exercise of the freedom of trade, which is essentially for a commercial purpose. Citizens, on the other hand, enjoy an unfettered freedom of speech which extends onto the political domain. Since corporates are not participants as voters, they have no claim to freedom of "political" speech and expression. Therefore, while citizen-voters can donate to a political party pursuant to free speech, corporates must refrain from donating to a political party.

In 2015, the Brazilian Supreme Court declared corporate financing of elections to be unconstitutional. The court understood that right to equality was essential to ensuring fairness through the extrinsic (fair options between candidates) and intrinsic (fair options between ideologies) conceptions. Because 95 per cent of all campaign finance came from corporates, the courts felt that disclosure norms could only address the extrinsic aspect.

Corporates would still be able to collectively suppress certain socio-economic ideologies (welfare measures, controlled economy, wage-labour regulations) to their advantage, by inducing political parties and candidates. So, the electoral contest would not allow certain policies to flourish, irrespective of who won. Outlawing corporate funding was important to ensure the right to equality.

In realpolitik terms, there is no incentive for any ruling political party to reform the law as it stands. Even the main Opposition party lives in the hope that it would derive similar advantage when it comes to power. Thus, necessity would dictate that the task of electoral funding be given to the EC under Article 324. A fair and transparent manner to finance the political parties would require a censure of unaccounted money and direct donations by corporates and non-voters to political parties. State funding of recognised political parties is a viable alternative. A state funding scheme would be viable through the levy of an election cess on the direct taxes. A National Election Fund could be maintained by the EC, into which the proceeds from this cess may be deposited. At the current GDP-Direct Tax ratio and voter numbers, a 1 per cent election cess can fund Rs 500 for each vote cast in elections to the Lok Sabha and the state assemblies. The cess being progressive would spare the poorer candidates from the costs of funding elections. Direct donations to political parties may be permitted only from persons who are entitled to vote. Those not entitled to vote may contribute to the neutral National Election Fund.

Donations from corporates into this fund will not distort the election process, but would instead improve the integrity of the peoples' electoral choice. Parties would be inclined to adopt a more inclusive agenda when in government since more votes will translate into more state funding. Parties will also vie for votes in absolute numbers than merely be the first past the post. Democracy will then truly be of the people, for the people and by the people.

The writer is a senior IAS officer. Views are personal



RAJMOHAN GANDHI

## WHAT GANDHI REALLY SAID

He was unconvinced by RSS chief after 1947 meeting, stood against majoritarianism

IN HIS ARTICLE ('The Mahatma and the Sangh', IE, April 12), Manmohan Vaidya, the RSS joint general secretary, recalls an interesting meeting that took place in Delhi in 1947 between Mahatma Gandhi and M S Golwalkar, the RSS chief at that time. Citing Golwalkar's *Complete Works*, Vaidya quotes remarks about the meeting that Golwalkar evidently made 22 years later, in 1969. Vaidya writes:

"On the occasion of the birth centenary of Mahatma Gandhi, a statue of Gandhiji was unveiled by Golwalkar. In his address, he said: 'My last meeting with Mahatma ji was in 1947. At that time riots broke in Delhi. Even those who were non-violent by tradition had become cruel, rogue and heartless. Mahatma Ji said to me: 'See, what is happening?' I said: 'This is our misfortune. British used to say when we leave; you people will slit each other's throats. Today, the same thing is happening. It is bringing disrepute to us in the whole world.' In the prayer meeting of that day, Gandhiji took my name with pride and expressed my thoughts."

While researching my Patel biography (first published in 1990) and my Gandhi biography (which came out in 2006), I too had come across the Gandhi-Golwalkar meeting of September 12, 1947. Apart from Gandhi's journal, *Harijan*, which published his prayer-meeting remarks, and the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, I found references to the meeting in two other places: In Brij Krishna Chandiwala's *Gandhiji ki Dilli Diary* and in a letter that

Nehru wrote to Patel in October 1948, found in *Sardar Patel's Correspondence* (ed. Durga Das), vol. 7, p. 672.

*Harijan* of September 21, 1947, gives Gandhi's account, delivered on September 12 at the end of his prayer-meeting, of his talk with Golwalkar earlier that day: "He had been told (Gandhi said to Golwalkar) that the hands of [RSS] were steeped in blood. The Gurujee assured him that this was untrue. That organisation did not stand for the killing of Muslims. All it wanted to do was to protect Hindustan to the best of its ability. It stood for peace and he had asked Gandhiji to make his views public."

In Delhi in 1947, Krishna Chandiwala was Gandhi's constant companion. He had become Gandhi's aide and associate from 1920, when he left St Stephen's College to join the Non-cooperation Movement. According to Brij Krishna, when Golwalkar assured him that the RSS did not stand for the killing of Muslims, Gandhi asked him to say so publicly. Golwalkar said Gandhi could quote him. This Gandhi did in his prayer talk that evening, but he told Golwalkar that the statement ought to come from him. Afterwards, according to a letter that Nehru wrote to Patel on October 27, 1948, Gandhi told Nehru that he did not find Golwalkar convincing.

Connected to the Gandhi-Golwalkar encounter was Gandhi's conversation four days later (September 16) with RSS workers in New Delhi's Balmiki Colony, which figures in *Harijan*, in *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase*, written by his aide and secretary from 1919,

Pyarelal Nayyar, and in Brij Krishna's diary. Gandhi told the RSS workers that while he had been impressed years earlier by the discipline, simplicity and absence of untouchability he had noticed in an RSS camp, "sacrifice without purity of motive and true knowledge has been known to prove ruinous to society". Their "strength could be used in the interest of India or against it".

When an RSS worker asked Gandhi if Hinduism did not permit killing an evildoer, he answered: "How could a sinner claim the right to judge or execute another sinner?" Only a properly constituted government was entitled to punish an evildoer. Speaking of Patel and Nehru, Gandhi said: "[The two] have been colleagues for years and have the same aim," and added: "Both the Sardar and Pandit Nehru will be rendered powerless if you become judge and executioner in one. Do not sabotage their efforts by taking the law into your own hands."

Then Gandhi said something which may be relevant today in India and, with necessary substitutions, elsewhere: "If the vast bulk of the Hindus wanted to go in a particular direction, even though it might be wrong, no one could prevent them from doing so. But even a single individual had the right to raise his voice against it, and give them the warning. That is what I have been doing."

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## APRIL 16, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

### HISTORIC RAIL LINK

THE CENTURY-OLD dream of rail linking India in thousands in the recent past. And they have got so mixed with the local population that authorities are finding it difficult to identify them. The cabinet's political affairs committee, which discussed the matter the other day, noted "the gravity of the situation" and decided upon various steps to stop the people from crossing into India.

THE INCOME TAX intelligence authorities have unearthed a racket allegedly being operated by some promoters and brokers in the commercial and residential real estate business in the Northeast. The infiltrators, essentially from Bangladesh, have crossed into India in thousands in the recent past. And they have got so mixed with the local population that authorities are finding it difficult to identify them. The cabinet's political affairs committee, which discussed the matter the other day, noted "the gravity of the situation" and decided upon various steps to stop the people from crossing into India.

ness in the capital. A number of high officials of the Union Works and Housing ministry, the Delhi Development Authority and the local bodies are also suspected to be involved. The fraud came to light when the tax officials came across some suspicious entries in the accounts submitted by some multi-storeyed companies. The promoters had shown huge amounts as "conversion charges" paid to an office under the UWH ministry. Conversion charges are paid to the government while converting a residential plot into a commercial one. Reliable revenue intelligence sources said that some promoters managed to get their plans cleared without paying those "charges".

### ILLEGAL INFILTRATION

THE GOVERNMENT IS greatly concerned over infiltration into Assam and some other



# 13 THE IDEAS PAGE

## 2019: Blowin' in the wind

The 'hawa' this election season is very different from the 2014 general election. The BJP alone is no longer setting the agenda



HARBANS MUKHIA

IN THE PLETHORA of impressionistic narratives around the elections, here is one more: Has the *hawa* acquired a different tone this time round?

To begin with, the euphoria centred on a messiah, pervasive in 2014, is now conspicuously absent. The untiring preoccupation with one individual's pronouncements, from the most casual to the most elaborate, whether uttered at a gathering of a village school kids or a massive public meeting in the national capital, commanded the same amount of coverage on the TV channels for a couple of days throwing everything else on to tickers below the line. That preoccupation is much more subdued now. Thus, one of the pillars of the earlier campaign — unprecedented publicity — has lost much of its vigour.

Much more significant, however, is the winning — or losing — strategy of setting the agenda for the elections. 2014 saw Narendra Modi setting the agenda and the ruling party, the Congress, responding to it defensively. Responding to, in lieu of setting the agenda, in any case, is defensive by nature. Modi set the agenda of *sab ka vikas*, giving it the irresistibly seductive wrapping of *sab ka saath*. An add on was the highly inflated image of corruption, while the subterranean communally divisive agenda was getting organised support of the RSS at the ground level.

The conspicuous absence of euphoria is now matched by the equally conspicuous absence of any reference to either *sab ka saath* or *sab ka vikas* in the current campaign. This absence gets all the more highlighted in the face of the Opposition's centring of the economic issues of farmers' distress and joblessness in the campaign. The centring isn't a last-minute improvisation by one party. The several farmers' marches organised by the Left parties and numerous farmers' associations of a variety of hues over the past nearly two years brought the issue inescapable attention on a national scale. Joblessness grew into an established fact with such data as was becoming public and the truth of it was reinforced by the government's clumsy attempts to conceal the data.

The Opposition, especially the Congress under Rahul Gandhi, combined the two issues of economic distress as the centrepiece of its campaign in the state elections in Gujarat and later in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, yielding impressive dividends. There, too, the agenda was being set by the Opposition and Modi was responding to it by seeking to divert attention from it.

Now, with the entire electoral process in full motion, the Opposition in general and the Congress, in particular, has seized the initiative by framing an imaginative and attractive plan of action through its manifesto at least on the farmers' issue. The fact that the BJP leaders only respond to it is to keep announcing that the plan is unimplementable is defensive at best and getting caught with its pants down at worst. Interestingly, the BJP manifesto was released three days before the first votes were cast indicates its low opinion of electoral promises.

Caught unprepared, the BJP hopes to get home by playing the divisive as well the nation-in-peril card vis-à-vis Pakistan, thus ad-



CR Sasikumar

mitting the Opposition's charge of complete failure on the economic front. At any rate, contrary to the common assumption of the communal divide and the national security as the unfailing harbingers of electoral victory, history tells a completely different story. The 1965 war with Pakistan brought the Congress in 1967, to loss of governments in all states from Punjab to West Bengal, except at the Centre, where too it suffered setbacks. In 1971, Indira Gandhi had already won the massive mandate before the decisive war with Pakistan. The victory did not give her comfort for long and by 1974, India was engulfed in unprecedented unrest led by Jayaprakash Narayan, leading ultimately to the Emergency and Congress defeat in the 1977 elections. The victory at Kargil in 1998 did not give any relief to Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh's "inaction" after the horrendous Mumbai attack in 2008 did not bring any electoral punishment — he comfortably won a second term in 2009 for his impressive show of economic growth.

The same is true on the question of divisive politics. The BJP's rise from two Lok Sabha seats to 86 occurred between 1984 and 1989 before the now "liberal" LK Advani led his rath yatra from Dwarka to Ayodhya. The demolition of the Babri Masjid in the presence of all the stalwarts of the BJP on December 6, 1992, failed to become the vehicle for its jump to power. Indeed, in the elections held in 1993, the BJP lost three of four Hindi speaking states: Uttar Pradesh (the locale of Ayodhya), MP, Himachal Pradesh and barely survived in

The Opposition, especially the Congress under Rahul Gandhi, combined the two issues of economic distress as the centrepiece of its campaign in last year's state elections in Gujarat and later in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, yielding impressive dividends. There, too, the agenda was being set by the Opposition and Modi was responding to it by seeking to divert attention from it.

Rajasthan where the Chief Minister, B S Shekhawat had kept himself aloof from the Advani adventure. If the BJP won the election in 1998, six long years after the demolition, clearly the two events were unconnected.

More recently, within months after the grand victory in 2014 with 31 per cent of the vote, it badly lost Delhi and Bihar where it pitched its campaign on the divisive agenda. The Indian electorate votes through its lived experience of governance and between the options of economic welfare and jingoism, internal or external, it prefers the former.

The defensiveness of the BJP's current campaign has many facets. The euphoria the media had created is subdued now because even the achievements on the security front have been clouded with questions and its equation of a question with *desh droh* is hardly resonating. Partly also because over the past five years, the media itself has become immensely diversified with innumerable small-scale, local-level channels, videos on the social media and local level regional newspapers have proliferated and these are not slavish to the regime as much of the "national" media is. And the BJP's strategy, perfected by its top leadership, to pursue either divisive measures or especially measures to undermine almost every working institution and blaming it on the Opposition cannot yield more than the minimal dividends. Lies have a limited life span.

The writer taught history at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi

### WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

Amritsar (Jallianwala Bagh) remains to this day the most potent embodiment of the violence on which British rule partly rested for nearly two centuries.

— THE GUARDIAN

## Embracing the Islamic world

The key to Modi's success in the Muslim neighbourhood has been the decision to focus on India's national self-interest rather than religion



RAJA MANDALA

BY C RAJA MOHAN

SPECULATION CONTINUES ABOUT Prime Minister Narendra Modi's travel plans to Abu Dhabi this weekend at the very peak of the election campaign. If he chooses to be present at the *shilanyas* ceremony for a temple in Abu Dhabi, Modi might also receive the Zayed Medal that the United Arab Emirates has awarded him recently.

Whether he travels to Abu Dhabi or joins the temple ceremony by a video link, the event caps the transformation of India's engagement with the Middle East. Under Modi, India has shed its traditional defensiveness towards the region. The Middle East, in turn, has responded with great enthusiasm to India's new pragmatism.

That brings us to a paradox. The significant expansion of India's engagement with the Muslim neighbourhood comes at a time when religious nationalism has sharpened domestic political divisions. While the ruling party has been accused of fomenting Hindu majoritarianism, some of the more important diplomatic successes of the Modi government have been with Muslim countries. Within the Subcontinent, Afghanistan and Bangladesh see India as a valuable partner and their engagement with India has gained a strong foundation. Both Kabul and Dhaka have better relations with Delhi than with Islamabad. The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation invited India's Minister for External Affairs, Sushma Swaraj to address a meeting of its foreign ministers in the face of Pakistan's strong objections.

India's relations with Sunni Arab states like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have never been better than today. At the same time, the last four years have seen progress in implementing strategic projects like the Chabahar port in Shia Iran. Modi has also brought out India's longstanding partnership with Israel from behind the veil. There have been few objections from the Arab or Muslim world.

One would think Pakistan would be the last government that wants welcome Modi's return to power. But as Prime Minister Imran Khan put it, a strong government under Modi may be more credible interlocutor than a weak coalition government.

While Manmohan Singh could not convince the Congress party of the wisdom of him travelling to Pakistan during his decade-long tenure as PM, Modi was prepared to show up in Lahore on a few hours notice at the end of 2015. That the relationship has gone nowhere is another story. But the pertinent point is the impression that Modi is confident enough to wage either war or peace.

The key to Modi's success in the Muslim neighbourhood has been the decision to focus on India's national self-interest rather than religion. When he came to Delhi in 2014, Modi found the relations with Bangladesh at a difficult juncture. The

Manmohan Singh government had negotiated the important agreement on resolving the land boundary dispute with Bangladesh in 2011. But the Congress could not get it ratified in the Parliament.

To his credit, Modi persuaded the BJP units in Assam and Bengal to stop opposing the agreement and got it ratified by the Parliament. He was also quick to accept an award of the international tribunal on the maritime boundary dispute with Dhaka. It was certainly possible to quibble over the technical details of an award that went largely in favour of Bangladesh.

Contrast this with Modi's difficulties with Nepal, the world's only Hindu nation that Modi likes to call "devabhumi" — the land of the gods. Yet, Modi's tenure saw the tensions between the two countries spike.

There is no doubt that most countries love to demonstrate solidarity with other states and peoples on the basis of shared political values, common religious faith or ethnic kinship. Yet, this empathy is more often than not discarded when a government has to choose between national interest and external solidarity. There is no better example than Pakistan's muted voice on China's current controversial treatment of the Muslim population in the Xinjiang province. For Islamabad, the logic of strategic partnership with Beijing is far more compelling than the declared commitment to take up Muslim causes around the world.

In the Middle East, the fear of Iran's expansionism and potential hegemony has driven Saudi Arabia and the UAE into political collaboration with the Jewish state of Israel. Much in the manner that communist ideology was not strong enough to bind Soviet Union and China in the 1960s and 1970s, religion has never been a sticky enough glue for Muslim majority nations.

While the proposition that national interest trumps all else appears self-evident, it was not easy for independent India to operate on that premise. The partition of the Subcontinent and Pakistan's claim to speak in the name of Islam and its relentless efforts to mobilise the Islamic world in its favour on disputes with India complicated Indian diplomacy. It has been a rather long learning curve for Delhi to separate presumed transcendental religious solidarity and the logic of national self-interest in engaging the Middle East.

Complicating the Pakistan factor outside has been Delhi's concern about the reaction of its large Muslim population at home on foreign policy issues, especially those relating to the Middle East. The idea that India's relationship with Israel or the United States matters more to the Indian Muslims than securing their rights as citizens has always been a political myth of Lutyens' Delhi.

In the end, what matters in foreign policy is not the colour of national ideology or the flag of its faith. Internal coherence and the capacity for practical give and take are the factors that count. Diversity, along multiple axes, has been India's greatest structural vulnerability. Anything that deepens those faultlines will inevitably undermine, over the longer term, Delhi's ability to effectively engage the world.

The writer is Director, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore and contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express



AKHILESH MISHRA

## Dole versus entitlement

Congress manifesto offers patronage to poor, BJP aims to enable self-sufficiency

BOTH THE BJP and the Congress manifestos are now in the public domain and we have had time to read and digest the core message from each of these. Beyond the instant headlines, can we glean some insights about the approach of each party from their flagship announcements?

Undoubtedly the flagship scheme of the Congress is the Nyuntam Aay Yojana (NYAY) and how it intends to tackle poverty. The Congress' promise is that it will raise the family income of the poorest Indians from the present monthly average of Rs 6,000 to Rs 12,000. On the face of it, this looks like a winner and a sure shot method to eliminate poverty. But, how does the Congress intend to fund this scheme? After a lot of furore, their advisors have, at least for now, backed off from their proposal of raising taxes for the middle class. But they have still not backed off from their other proposal — of funding NYAY through an inflation tax.

What does inflation tax mean? Simply that, instead of the average two to three per cent inflation now under the Modi government, we will return to the double-digit inflation regime that we witnessed during the entire tenure of UPA-II. To understand what this means for the poor, consider the effect of inflation on purchasing power and prices. With average 10 per cent inflation for five

years (as was witnessed during UPA-II), the purchasing power of Rs 12,000 — that the poor will get through NYAY in 2019 — will be reduced to just Rs 4,627 by 2024. The prices of essential commodities, on the other hand, would have multiplied exponentially. A product priced at Rs 100 today would be around Rs 161 after five years of average 10 per cent inflation. Effectively then, with the way it has been designed, the poor will be poorer after five years of NYAY. This is not just an incidental fallacy of this scheme, it is also reflective of the entire approach of the Congress in tackling poverty. A majority of their interventions, since the "Garibi Hatao" slogan in the 1970s, have been dole-based. By their very design, they do not empower the poor to create their own durable income earning opportunities. Instead, they are designed to keep the poor perpetually in subsistence mode, so that each election cycle they remain a catchment for new vote-seeking devices. That is why despite 40 years of Congress style "Garibi Hatao", poverty has not been eliminated.

Now consider the BJP's flagship interventions as promised in their manifesto. Rs 100 lakh crore worth of investment in infrastructure, 25 lakh crore investment in the agri-rural sector, up to 50 lakh collateral-free loans to ignite entrepreneurship and

housing for all by 2022. None of these are doles. Instead, they are designed to kickstart an economic cycle of sustainable empowerment. An enterprising youth from a poor family who has an idea to build a sustainable business, but is held back due to lack of capital, can now avail the opportunity of collateral-free, low interest, bank loans. The economic empowerment that such a model brings, as has been proved world over, not only lifts people out of poverty but also progressively puts them in the middle-class category.

The Ayushman Bharat scheme, which intends to cover 50 crore people, is another such example. That poor families will no longer have to fear penury in case of any serious health emergency, is the obvious benefit. But the virtuous economic cycle that Ayushman Bharat will kickstart will, perhaps, be the biggest benefit of this scheme. There was always a demand for top quality health services in the villages and towns, but the paying capacity to meet this demand did not exist. With significant paying capacity now created in one go, the entrepreneurial genius of Indians will create the supply chains needed to meet this demand. High quality hospitals, wellness centers, trained doctors and other medical professionals will all be in demand, not just in the metros but in tier II and III cities and towns.

This will create permanent employment which in turn will drive its own economic cycle of consumption and growth.

Building more than 60,000 kms of roads in the next five years, doubling of functional airports, ensuring tap water supply in every home, 24 hours power for every house, pension schemes for small shopkeepers in addition to unorganised workers, and, the promise to further rationalise taxes for the middle-class are some of the other ideas in the BJP manifesto. Curiously, the Congress manifesto is absolutely silent on the middle-class: Is it because of the intrinsic guilt that they will be at the receiving end of the vote gathering device of Congress?

In totality, the manifestos present two competing visions. The Congress manifesto, reflective of its dynastic culture, offers a vision of subsistence living for the masses with a benign dynast to look after their future. The BJP manifesto, reflective of PM Modi's vision, seeks to provide an enabling environment to empower the genius of each individual and to take India to middle-income status by 2030. The choice is now upon us. The decision we make today will determine the future of our children tomorrow.

The writer is CEO, Bluekraft Digital Foundation and was earlier director (content) MyGov

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### POLLS AND PEOPLE

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Poll machine and the people', (IE, April 15). The process of management of elections in India has no parallel in human history. The hierarchy within the machinery and the chain of command and control is critical to the smooth conduct of the electoral process. The idea of sensitising people about the conduct of the elections in India and making a case for a popular acknowledgment is better left to the mass media.

Sudip Kumar Dey, Kolkata

#### FLYING LOW

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Turbulence ahead' (IE, April 15). The pathetic state of affairs in the aviation sector needs to be rectified. The government should encourage more investment in this sector. Public carriers like Air India should be given more financial support.

Sanjay Chawla, Amritsar

#### US INTOLERANCE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Light and dark' (IE, April 13). The arrest of Julian Assange in the UK is a blow to whistleblowers around the world. The US politicians, especially the Democrats, have felt that he had a chilling effect on US democracy and led to the defeat 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](mailto:editpage@expressindia.com) or sent to The Indian Express, B-1/B, Sector 10, Noida-UP 201301. Letter writers should mention their postal address and phone number.

THE WINNER RECEIVES SELECT EXPRESS PUBLICATIONS

Hillary Clinton in 2016 by colluding with Trump and the Russians. His revealing of US surveillance, its war crimes and its disinformation campaign globally has not gone down well with US politicians. They have become intolerant of free speech and made it clear that they want no refuge to be available to crusaders like Assange.

Sauro Dasgupta, Kolkata



@ieExplained  
#ExpressExplained

If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to [explained@expressindia.com](mailto:explained@expressindia.com)

THIS WORD MEANS

LONG PERIOD AVERAGE

The IMD yardstick for determining whether rainfall will be normal, deficient or in excess

ON MONDAY, while releasing its monsoon forecast, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) expressed the projected rainfall in terms of Long Period Average (LPA), saying that it was expected to be 96% of LPA. The LPA of the monsoon season over the country is 89 cm, calculated for the period 1951-2000. This is the average rainfall recorded during the months from June to September, calculated during the 50-year period, and is kept as a benchmark while forecasting the quantitative rainfall for the monsoon season every year.

July, 26.13 cm for August and 17.34 cm for September.

So, when IMD forecasts the category of rainfall, be it for country, region or month, the forecast is based on these standardised figures calculated for a period of 50 years. As per the outputs obtained from the weather models, the rainfall is categorised as normal, below normal, or above normal.

IMD maintains five rainfall distribution categories on an all-India scale. These are:

**NORMAL OR NEAR NORMAL:** When per cent departure of actual rainfall is +/- 10% of LPA, that is, between 96-104% of LPA

**BELOW NORMAL:** When departure of actual rainfall is less than 10% of LPA, that is 90-96% of LPA

**ABOVE NORMAL:** When actual rainfall is 104-110% of LPA

**DEFICIENT:** When departure of actual rainfall is less than 90% of LPA

**EXCESS:** When departure of actual rainfall is more than 110% of LPA

Like the countrywide figure, IMD maintains an independent LPA for every homogeneous region of the country, which ranges from 71.6 cm to 143.83 cm. The region-wise LPA figures are: 143.83 cm for East and Northeast India, 97.55 cm for Central India, 71.61 cm for South Peninsular India, and 61.50 for Northwest India, which put together bring the all-India figure to 88.75 cm.

The monthly LPA figures for the season are 16.36 cm for June, 28.92 cm for

SIMPLY PUT

# What black hole image tells us

When scientists 'photographed' an invisible black hole: the image captures the area around it, generated from data collected by a set of telescopes, and provides a platform for understanding black holes better

WHY 'BLACK'?

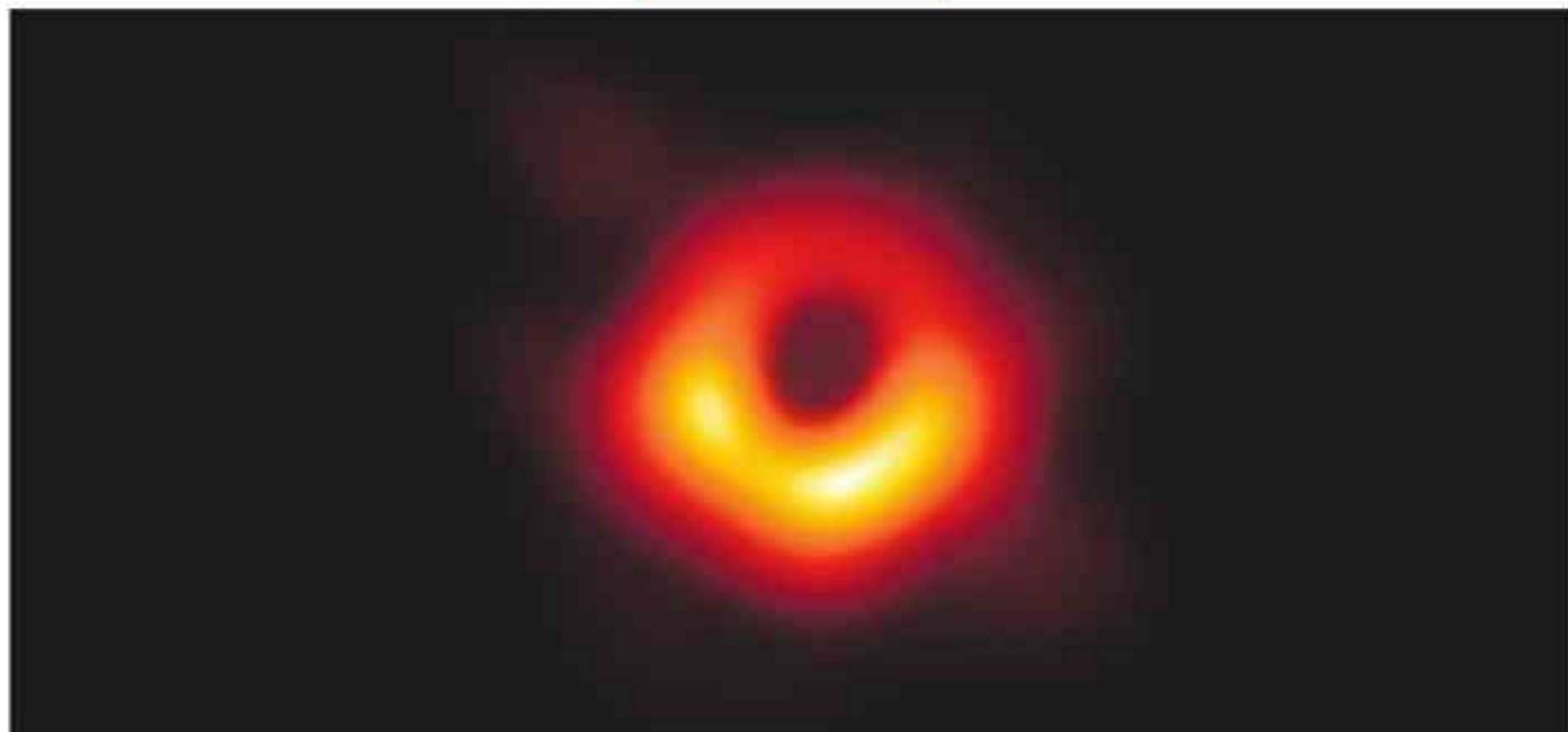


Image of black hole released by Event Horizon Telescope (EHT) and National Science Foundation. Reuters

AMITABH SINHA  
PUNE, APRIL 15

BLACK HOLES are supposed to be the darkest regions in the entire universe. And yet, when scientists announced last week that they had, for the first time ever, been able to capture a photograph of a black hole, the image they unveiled was anything but dark. It appeared bright orange and doughnut-shaped in what became one of the most widely circulated images in the last one week. When light cannot escape a black hole, how was the photograph achieved, and what makes the achievement important?

What the image shows

The main subject of the photograph, a black hole located 55 million light-years from Earth, at the centre of a galaxy named Messier 87, was confined to the small and dark central core of the doughnut shape in the image, identifiable only because of the bright surroundings it was enclosed within. This was the only way that a black hole could have been photographed — by capturing the entire area surrounding it. The black hole itself does not emit or radiate light, or any other electromagnetic waves that can be detected by instruments built by human beings. But the area just outside the boundary of the black hole — referred to as event horizon — which has vast amounts of gas, clouds and plasma swirling violently, emit all kinds of radiations, including even visible light.

The outside of the black hole was not easy to be photographed either. The black hole in question had a diameter of 1.5 light-days, or about 40 billion kilometres. The ring outside a black hole usually has 4 to 5 times greater expanse. But the very vast distance from Earth meant that recording anything better than a point-size picture was physically not possible with available instruments. Scientists had calculated that a greater resolution picture, like the one they finally were able to capture, required a telescope whose antenna was as large as Earth itself.

Why it matters

Scientists have been using computer-simulated images of black holes for several years to study these regions. For the first time, they have an actual image. While they appear quite similar, scientists will now start looking closely at the actual image to see whether it differs from the computer-simulated images in the details, and whether these differences could be explained by instrumentation, observation or other errors. This can provide a test for existing theories of the universe, and lead to a better understanding of black holes and the nature of the universe itself.

Choosing the black hole

There was an alternative to photographing the black hole in the M87 galaxy — trying to photograph a black hole that was much nearer. There are thousands, possibly millions, of black holes much nearer to Earth, but not every black hole could be a candidate for being photographed. Scientists were looking for a particular size of black hole, large enough to be captured by instruments available on Earth. The black hole in the M87 galaxy is about 6 billion times the size of the Sun, and one of the biggest ones known. There is no black hole of comparable size nearer to Earth.

There was a candidate nonetheless, in our own Milky Way galaxy. The Sagittarius A\* black hole, at the centre of the Milky Way, is

AMITABH SINHA  
PUNE, APRIL 15

ALBERT EINSTEIN'S General Theory of Relativity showed that massive objects in the universe, like Earth or the Sun and other stars, created curvatures in space-time, very similar to what a heavy object would do when placed on a taut rubber sheet. And, that the force of gravity is nothing but the drag that another object feels when inside this curvature. It is because of this curvature that an object either falls on the Earth or keeps orbiting it. To escape this curvature, an object needs to move at fast-enough speeds, called the escape velocity. The escape velocity to move out of Earth's gravity is 11.2 km per second.

The more massive a body, the bigger and deeper the size of the curvature it creates in space-time. Consequently, the higher is the escape velocity required to pull away from its gravity.

It was soon evident that this reasoning would lead to the concept of black holes,

about 4.3 million times the size of the Sun, and only 25,000 light-years from Earth. It is about 2,000 times nearer to Earth compared to the one in the M87 galaxy, but also about 1,500 times smaller. In scale, therefore, the two candidate black holes offered similar opportunities to be photographed.

Setting up the telescope

An Earth-size telescope was not something that could be made available. So, scientists had to devise ingenious new methods to overcome the limitations of their instruments. They decided to use eight of the biggest and most sophisticated radio telescopes in the world, and linked them with a technique that could make them act like a virtual Earth-sized telescope. The telescopes made simultaneous recordings of the radiations coming in from the black hole region. Each of the telescopes was fitted with atomic clocks so that their recordings could later be matched with extreme precision.

The individual telescopes each collected



Dr Katie Bouman, computer scientist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who created the algorithm that made the image possible. MIT CSAIL via Twitter

areas from where nothing could ever hope to escape. That is because there is an upper speed limit in the universe. Nothing can move faster than light, or electromagnetic waves in general. But there is no upper limit, as yet known, on the massiveness of a heavenly body.

Stars that are billions of times more

massive than our Sun are known to exist. The Sun itself is about 1.4 million km in diameter, and has a mass of about 2x10<sup>30</sup> kg. Massive stars, when they are dying, are known to collapse under their own gravity, forming extremely dense spheres of astronomical masses. They pack the mass of thousands or millions of Suns into a radius of a few kilometres.

Such mindboggling bodies create incredibly narrow and deep curvatures in space-time, from where even light, travelling at nearly 300,000 km per second, is unable to escape. Once an object falls inside this curvature, there is absolutely no hope of coming out, ever. That is why black holes do not send out any signals or radiation, because nothing can escape from it.

Initially, many scientists, including Einstein himself, were skeptical about black holes. Over the years, however, scientists have gathered several evidences of the existence of black holes. For example, the observed orbits of several heavenly bodies could be explained only by the presence of a black hole nearby.

working on the black hole image was more complicated than the techniques used for compression of files. They had a huge amount of amount of data to deal with, and yet extremely limited information directly obtained from the radiation. Not surprisingly, therefore, they had to write entirely new algorithms, using groundbreaking approaches, to regenerate the image.

As a result, a large number of pixels on that photo presented to the world could have been generated by the computer. But they were generated using the information in the pixels that were the result of direct observation of the telescopes, rather than being produced from mathematical models, as happens in a computer-simulated images.

It took two years for some of the world's fastest supercomputers to process the huge amount of data and recreate the image of the black hole in the M87 galaxy. A photograph of the Sagittarius A\* black hole is yet to be released, apparently because the image is not yet ready.

TELLING NUMBERS

## What political parties earned through electoral bonds in 2017-18

DURING 2017-18, the BJP earned Rs 200 crore from electoral bonds and the Congress Rs 15 crore, the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) had said last January based on an analysis of the parties' tax returns and contribution statements submitted with the Election Commission. No other national party declared any contributions through electoral bonds, according to details released by ADR.

Citing lack of transparency, the ADR later challenged the electoral bond scheme in the Supreme Court, which last week asked parties to submit to the EC details of contributions through electoral bonds. Incidentally, the CPM, also a petitioner, had not

submitted its returns at the time the ADR released its report.

The Rs 200 crore that the BJP received through electoral bonds was out of Rs 1,027 crore declared by the party. This included Rs 553 crore received from undeclared sources; the amount through electoral bonds was part of that. The Rs 15 crore collected by the Congress through electoral bonds, meanwhile, was out of Rs 120 crore received from unknown sources, and Rs 199 crore declared overall. All national parties (barring CPM) considered, the Rs 215 crore received via electoral bonds accounted for nearly one-third of all contributions (Rs 689 crore) received from unknown sources.

AS DECLARED BY NATIONAL PARTIES, 2017-18

Party	Known sources	Unknown sources		Total
		Electoral bonds	Other	
BJP	484	200	353	1027
Congress	79	15	105	199
BSP	41	0	10	51
NCP	3	0	5	8
Trinamool	5	0	<1	5
CPI	1	<1	<1	1+
<b>Total</b>	<b>613</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>474</b>	<b>1293</b>

Figures in Rs crore (rounded off); all national parties barring CPM. Source: Association for Democratic Reforms, January 2019

# Campaign bar: Powers of the EC, and how it has used them in the past

LIZ MATHEW  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 15

ON MONDAY, the Election Commission of India barred Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and BSP chief Mayawati for three days and two days respectively for making "highly provocative" speeches that could "aggravate existing differences and create mutual hatred between different religious communities".

Later in the evening, the Commission issued orders also barring Azam Khan of the Samajwadi Party and Maneka Gandhi of the BJP from campaigning for three days and two days respectively starting 10 am on Tuesday.

Such action by the Election Commission is rare — and it came on a day it told the Supreme Court that its power to act against violations of the Model Code of Conduct was limited to "issuing of notice" and "advisories", and "in case of repeated violation of the advisories... to file a First Information Report with the Police for initiation of criminal proceedings".

The court responded that it would "like to examine the matter", and asked the Commission to send a "representative... who is well conversant with the issues raised" to the court on Tuesday.

The offences

The ban on campaigning by Adityanath and Mayawati begins at 6 am on Tuesday. It means the leaders will miss the last day of the campaign ahead of the second phase of elections on April 18. Eight UP constituencies — Nagina, Amroha, Bulandshahr, Aligarh, Hathras, Mathura, Agra, and Fatehpur Sikri — will vote in the second phase.

Mayawati was scheduled to address a rally in Agra on Tuesday, which she will not be able to do now. Yogi was to address rallies in Nagina and Fatehpur Sikri, and was expected to campaign outside UP on April 17 and 18.

The EC has censured Mayawati for her speech in Deoband on April 7, in which a "special mention was made to the minority community of Muslims to vote in a consolidated manner in favour of the candidate of coalition parties"; and Adityanath for his 'Ali and Bajrang Bali' comment in Meerut on April 9, and for referring to the "hara virus", indicating Muslims. The EC said that as senior leaders they "should have desisted... (from) making statements that have the undertone and propensity to polarize the elections".

Khan has been punished for making derogatory remarks against the BJP candidate from Rampur, Jaya Prada; Maneka for telling Muslims that if they do not vote for her, they should not expect help after she wins.



Mayawati addresses a press conference in Lucknow after the EC order Monday. PTI

Earlier instances

The only other occasions on which the EC has acted in a similar manner against violations of the Model Code have been in 2014. It had banned Azam Khan and BJP president Amit Shah from holding public meetings, processions, or road shows in UP, and had directed the state chief secretary to initiate criminal proceedings against them in case there was a violation. The ban on Shah

was lifted after he wrote to the Commission promising that he would not disturb public tranquility or law and order. According to the poll panel, Shah vowed not to use "abusive or derogatory language".

Also during that Lok Sabha election campaign, the EC had banned BJP leader Giriraj Singh from campaigning in Jharkhand and Bihar for saying that those who did not vote for Narendra Modi, then

the prime ministerial candidate of the BJP, would have to go to Pakistan.

Code and Court

When the elections were announced, the EC had issued a detailed 286-page Code of Conduct for parties. On April 5, it issued a general advisory, seeking "strict compliance" of instructions such as "No appeal shall be made on the basis of caste/communal feelings of the voters; no activities which may aggravate existing differences or create mutual hatred or cause tension between different castes/communities/religious/linguistic groups shall be attempted; and no temples/mosques/churches/gurdwaras or any place of worship is to be used for election propaganda, including speeches, posters, music etc or electioneering".

Separately, the Commission has asked parties and candidates to desist from displaying photographs of defence personnel or photographs of functions involving defence personnel, in campaign advertisements. However, it did not issue any order after Opposition parties complained that BJP leaders were "politicising" the armed forces.

An EC official said action depended on the "gravity of the offence" and on whether the accused was a "serial offender". However, hate speech would attract several provisions under the Indian Penal Code, the

Code of Criminal Procedure, and The Representation of the People Act.

"The EC could separately file a complaint with the police under IPC provisions. If no one approaches the court, election officials can do so themselves," the EC official said. "The court can refer charges of corrupt practices to the President, who can seek the views of the Election Commission. The Election Commission can advise barring the individual from casting his/her vote for six years."

In 1999, Shiv Sena supreme Bal Thackeray was banned by the EC from casting his vote and contesting elections for six years with effect from 1995. Thackeray had delivered an inflammatory speech at a rally in Mumbai in 1987 while campaigning for an Assembly bypoll. The Commission's order, which came after 12 years, was based on a 1995 judgment of the Supreme Court, which confirmed the Bombay High Court order that found Thackeray guilty.

The Model Code of Conduct, which evolved from a draft code voluntarily approved by representatives of leading political parties in Kerala in February 1960, has been in place since 1962, when the Election Commission circulated it to all recognised parties. "But a lot of time has passed, and the nature of elections and electioneering have undergone many changes. It is time to revise it thoroughly," the EC official said.



## Slowing down fast

The downturn in industrial activity and the spike in retail inflation pose a policy challenge

Yet another indicator, worryingly, points to the Indian economy slowing down fast. Industrial growth was just 0.1% in February from the year-earlier period, the slowest pace in 20 months. Industrial output had expanded by 6.9% in February 2018. Industrial growth, as measured by the index of industrial production, has been slowing down considerably in recent months, dropping to just 0.2% year-on-year in November. Manufacturing, which has a weight of almost 78% in the index, continues to be the biggest drag, with output contracting by 0.3% as compared with an 8.4% jump in the year-earlier period. The largest contributor to the slowdown in February was the capital goods sector, which shrank by close to 9%, with the contraction widening from the preceding month's 3.4%. That the revision in this closely watched proxy for business spending plans has widened, from the 3.2% contraction reported last month, is striking. GDP grew by just 6.6% in the quarter ended December, the slowest pace in six quarters. Various institutions such as the Reserve Bank of India and the International Monetary Fund have been lowering their expectations for India's growth in the coming quarters. With other economic indicators such as the purchasing managers' index and high-frequency data like automobile sales also signalling weakening momentum, the overall scenario, when viewed along with the slowdown in industrial output, suggests that a turnaround in economic growth is not in sight.

Retail inflation as measured by the consumer price index reached a five-month high of 2.86% in March due to the rise in food and fuel prices. While price gains still remain below the RBI's stated inflation threshold of 4%, the trajectory is hardly bound to be reassuring. The RBI, which has cut interest rates at two successive policy meetings to help bolster economic growth, is likely to be tempted to opt for more rate reductions. While monetary easing could be an easy solution to the growth problem, policymakers may also need to look into structural issues behind the slowdown. The high levels of troubled debt in not just the banking sector but the wider non-banking financial companies are hurting credit markets, and unless these issues can be resolved, no amount of rate cuts would serve as an effective stimulus. To a large extent, the slowdown is due to investments in sectors that turned sour as the credit cycle tightened. In the fiscal year ended March, new investment proposals fell to a 14-year low, says the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy. Easing interest rates without reforms may only help hide investment mistakes instead of fostering a genuine economic recovery.

## A mammoth election

Much is at stake in Indonesia's presidential, parliamentary and provincial polls, all in a day

Indonesia's single-day presidential, parliamentary and provincial elections on April 17 will be a mammoth exercise. It will also test the popular mood on President Joko Widodo's moderation, which has been under attack from the religious right. Popularly known as Jokowi, he is seeking a second and final term, as Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority nation, approaches 75 years since gaining independence from the Netherlands in 1945. Mr. Jokowi, a former Jakarta governor, from the ruling Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle, faces Prabowo Subianto, a former army general, of the Great Indonesia Movement Party; they had clashed in the 2014 race too. Opinion polls show Mr. Jokowi winning comfortably. The roughly 5% rate of growth in GDP in the last few quarters is well below the President's 7% target, but is still an improvement over previous years. Sentiment has also turned positive since the rupiah regained its value after the slide during the 2018 currency crises in emerging markets and the return of capital flows. Jakarta's current account deficit, owing to a slump in exports, could cause concern unless the U.S.-China trade dispute is settled amicably. But the liberal-leaning President's challenges are linked to the poll-time rise in religious tensions.

In the 2014 contest, Mr. Jokowi's opponents played the identity card by claiming that he, a Javanese Muslim, was a Christian and a communist. In 2017, an ethnic Chinese and Christian successor of Mr. Jokowi as Jakarta governor was convicted of blasphemy soon after re-election. The government's subsequent ban on Hizb ut-Tahrir, an Islamist organisation wedded to the establishment of an international caliphate, underscored the difficulties in balancing conflicting political interests. Rising religious militancy in some regions of Indonesia has also endangered the rights of the LGBTQ community, denting the country's record of respect for cultural pluralism and tolerance of heterodox social behaviour. While the constitutional court in 2017 rejected a bid to ban same-sex marriages, human rights groups are concerned over the lack of anti-discrimination protections for gay persons. Mr. Jokowi's choice of an orthodox Islamic cleric as running mate is being viewed as an attempt to boost his religious credentials. In a unique Indonesian electoral operation, votes for thousands of seats, fought by hundreds of thousands of candidates at various levels, are tabulated manually in full public view during daylight hours. Final results of the April 17 polls are expected after weeks. The complex nature of the process and provision for quick counts based on a sample of the actual votes cast have in the past led rival camps to trade accusations of manipulation and intimidation. Mr. Jokowi, whose party narrowly won the 2014 legislative and presidential vote after spectacular poll ratings, would be acutely aware of the high stakes involved. A nascent democracy, Indonesia will hope to see through this transition with fortitude.

# An India without the Left?

To understand the Left's central role, one has to take stock of the mass mobilisations to highlight injustice and inequity



VIJAY PRASHAD & SUDHANVA DESHPANDE

One out of every two Indians goes to bed hungry at night. That's almost 700 million Indians. The number comes from McKinsey. But you don't need a consultant to tell you about the distress in India. It is evident on our streets and in our fields. Agrarian distress (amplified by the suicide of farmers) and urban distress (illustrated by the growth of slums) have become normal. Policy from the Central government does not effectively address any of the challenges faced by over half of the Indian population. Deprivation and desolation set the mood. The emotional dial switches to anger ever so often.

The voices of peasants and workers, of Dalits and Adivasis are muffled. Most political parties ignore them, making their appeal to the middle-class as if this class should set the terms for political decision-making. It is evident that the real beneficiaries of government policy since 1991 have not been this middle class, but it has been what should be called an oligarchy (10% of Indians own 75% of India's social wealth). Centre-stage have been the interests of prominent business houses. Not the voice of Chhinna Balayya (a farmer from Parigi mandal, Andhra Pradesh, who killed himself) nor the voice of a 16-year-old girl from Gaya, Bihar who was killed in an

honour killing, nor hundreds of lakhs of people like them.

### Amplifiers on the street

The amplifiers of the voices of the farmers and the workers, the women and the Dalits are one section or the other of the organised Indian Left and of leftist movements. One often hears chatter about how the Left is anachronistic or how the Left is marginal. Yet, in 2018, the Left played a central role in hundreds of public actions by ordinary people whose extraordinary courage stunned the nation. It was the long march of the farmers of Maharashtra in 2018 that pushed a section of the urban middle class to acknowledge the suffering in the countryside and to welcome the marchers to the outskirts of Mumbai late on a Sunday evening. When the farmers realised that the next day an examination for students had been scheduled, they picked up their belongings and marched into the night to reach Azad Maidan. This sensitive gesture won the hearts of Mumbai. It is one thing to keep saying 'farmers', and another to say that the farmers came as part of the All-India Kisan Sabha, a mass organisation of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). Farmers suffer the agrarian distress in a relatively isolated way, and the suicide of farmers is an illustration of their solitary experience of sorrow. It is the organisation that takes this loneliness and makes it political.

Across India, over the past year and more, people agitated against the vicissitudes of capitalism and the failure of the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to address this turbulence. There



PRASHANT WADKAR

was the agitation of the ASHA and Anganwadi workers, the workers and peasant march into Delhi, and the general strike in early January 2019 as well as other, smaller public actions. All of these were organised by trade unions and peasant and agricultural worker platforms of the Left. The Left and other left-liberal platforms — pushed by sensitive sections of the Indian public — fought against the dangerous cow protectors and the honour killing murderers. The most volcanic of these agitations were the cascading kisan mobilisations by the Left mass fronts in Rajasthan. These protests, along with those in Maharashtra and the peasant march into Delhi, put agrarian distress on the table. They are what contributed to the churning of political fortunes in the three Hindi-speaking States — Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh — where the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was defeated in the Assembly elections last winter. That the Left was not able to convert these mobilisations into more seats for Left candidates is a sad commentary on the Indian electoral system — where caste and other sectarian

affiliations, as well as sheer money power, determine the outcomes.

### The Kerala example

A pall of gloom descended on the country after the disaster of demonetisation and the goods and services tax, after the daily reports of lynching and communal mobilisations, after the ghastly anti-science drift of intellectual institutions, after brutish language began to define public discourse. Meanwhile, in Kerala, the Left Democratic Front government provided an alternative discourse and practice. Small gestures of care were offered to break the rigidities of culture. The government provided free sanitary pads for schoolgirls in government schools, so that they would not feel the social penalty heaped on women for menstruation. Transgender rights came into focus, with some of Kochi Metro's ticket collectors being recruited among the transgender community. The divisiveness of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh was consistently fought by Kerala's incomparable Chief Minister, Pinarayi Vijayan, and his fellow Ministers.

Then came the massive flood that swept through the small State. Central government aid was paltry and slow. It was a reflection of how parties like the BJP tackle tragedy. Relief and rehabilitation, particularly for the poor, takes ages. When we travelled recently across the length and breadth of Kerala, in cities as well as the countryside, it was hard to imagine that the State had been ravaged by ferocious floods. A large part of the credit goes to the people of Kerala and the culture of public action in the State. They organised them-

selves in myriad, more or less spontaneous ways to help each other. The courage of the fisherfolk who ventured into the waters with no regard for their personal safety is one example. There were so many others.

Coupled with this was the attitude and fortitude of the Left Democratic Front government itself. It plunged into rescue and relief in an absolutely non-partisan manner. This was contrasted with the attitude of the Modi government at the Centre, which sought to penalise the people of the State for the government they had elected. It is also in sharp contrast to the Hindutva organisations, which gave even this colossal tragedy a sectarian and communal colour.

### Being human

Imagine if there were no Left in India. Would anyone pay attention to the voice of the worker and the peasant, the voice of the dispossessed and the frustrated? Would anyone amplify their dreams and desires, their aspirations for a good life? Who would take up the Supreme Court order to allow women into the Sabarimala temple, or go out on the street to form a Women's Wall of lakhs of women? Who would stand for reason above division, social care above individual wealth? Years ago, Akbar Allahabadi sang, "You were people. With great difficulty you became human." That 'difficulty' is the place where the Left lives. Without its efforts, would humanity survive?

Vijay Prashad and Sudhanva Deshpande are Chief Editor and Managing Editor, respectively, at LeftWord Books, New Delhi

# Weather-vane of democracy

The Election Commission's weakening commitment to the Model Code of Conduct is cause for concern



RASHMI SHARMA

For the first time since the general election of 1996, the reputation of the Election Commission of India (ECI) has taken a beating. Subsequent to the 1996 election, which marked a turning point in the reduction of electoral malpractices, surveys showed that trust in the ECI was the highest among the major public institutions in India. However, there are now perceptions that the ECI has responded inadequately, or not at all, to violations of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC), which is in effect from March 10 to May 23. Some examples in this election include the Prime Minister's announcement on national television of India's first anti-satellite weapon test, the Rajasthan Governor making statements in favour of the ruling party, leaders of the ruling party invoking the Indian Army in their election campaign, and, in a spate of dubious media initiatives, a continuous line of statements along communal lines.

The MCC, like the ECI itself, is a unique Indian innovation and encapsulates an important story about democracy in India — the conduct of free and fair elections.

Though just a brief set of guidelines, not law, the MCC is a powerful instrument. It comes into force when the ECI announces election dates and comprises directions to government functionaries, political parties and candidates aimed at an impartial election process. Important provisions include barring governments from making policy announcements to sway voters and restraining political actors from inciting hatred against any group, or bribing or intimidating voters.

### Down the years

The origins of the MCC lie in the Assembly elections of Kerala in 1960, when the State administration prepared a 'Code of Conduct' for political actors. The leading political parties of the State voluntarily approved the code, which proved useful during the elections. Subsequently, in the Lok Sabha elections in 1962, the ECI circulated the code to all recognised political parties and State governments; reports were that it was generally followed. The emergence of the code and its voluntary acceptance by political parties showed the commitment of the political elite to the holding of free and fair elections.

However, from 1967 till 1991, as political competition intensified, political actors began to resort to corrupt electoral practices. Governments made populist announcements on the eve of elections,



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had pliant officials in key positions while intimidation of voters and booth capturing increased. The ECI's appeals to observe the code of conduct were largely ignored. The ECI now resorted to a familiar, but ineffective, strategy in Indian public life. It refined the code, making it more stringent by including a section about the misuse of powers by ruling parties and renamed it the MCC. Though it demanded that the MCC be incorporated in the law, no such law could be passed.

### A turning point

After 1991, the ECI used new means to enforce the MCC. The then-Chief Election Commissioner, T.N. Seshan rebuked prominent political actors publicly and even postponed elections, thereby re-interpreting the ECI's power to fix election dates. The burgeoning electronic media of the time reported these initiatives with enthusiasm, while candidates were happy to capitalise on the mistakes made by their rivals. Conse-

quently, political actors began to take the MCC seriously, fearing it even if they did not respect it. The MCC now countered the lack of commitment of the political class to free and fair elections, the ECI began to command a new respect and electoral malpractices declined dramatically.

### New flashpoints

Today, the MCC is at a crossroads, as is the ECI. Two distinct trends are visible. One, electoral malpractice has appeared in new forms. Voter bribery and manipulation through the media have become the techniques of unethical influencing voters in place of voter intimidation and booth capturing. These malpractices are harder to stem. Booth-capturing is an identifiable event, taking place at a particular time and place. Voter bribery is spread over time and space. Voters resent being intimidated and are likely to cooperate with authorities in preventing it, but may be willing to be bribed. The misuse of the media is difficult to trace to specific political parties and candidates.

The ECI's response to the new challenges has been inadequate. It has appointed expenditure observers, evolved a code for social media, and, very recently, after a spate of criticism, stopped the release of biographical pictures that could influence voters. But there is little evidence that it has got to the core of the problem as it did after

1991. As in the pre-1991 phase, its efforts have hardly borne fruit. At the same time, the misuse of money and media power has intensified since the last two elections.

The second trend is that the ECI's capacity to respond to the older types of violations of the MCC has weakened. Its response to inappropriate statements by powerful political actors has been weak, or delayed. Consequently, political actors are regaining the confidence to flout the MCC without facing the consequences. As the ECI's capacity to secure a level playing field has dipped, attacks on it have increased. They now encompass its processes such as the use of electronic voting machines, which had become acceptable when the ECI was stronger. A vicious cycle has been set in motion.

The MCC is, in many ways, the weather-vane of our democracy. The initial idea of free and fair elections was embraced by the political elite voluntarily, and the MCC emerged. Over time, the commitment of the political class to free and fair elections declined, and it flouted the MCC. During the early to mid-1990s, the ECI enforced the MCC on reluctant political actors, and MCC began to be feared, if not voluntarily followed. Today, the ECI's own commitment to the MCC seems to have weakened, a bad omen for our democracy.

Rashmi Sharma is a former IAS officer

## 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.

### Opposition on EVMs

The move by some parties in the Opposition to approach the Supreme Court again to demand verification of at least 50% of VVPATs with the electronic voting machines is odd (Page 1, April 15). It appears that the Opposition wants to disturb established democratic processes, such as stalling the checking of money power in elections and raising unwarranted doubts over the EVM which has shown its worth in terms of faster and error-free operations, thus enabling free and fair elections.

Does the Opposition want to return to an era of booth capturing and a troublesome ballot box system? Why this wicked and cunning intent to derail a working system?

V.S. GANESHAN,  
Bengaluru

Opposition over the dependability of EVMs is strange. Will these leaders care to recollect that it was on the basis of these very EVMs that they were returned to power in States such as Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh? Do these leaders mean to say that the EVMs started misbehaving after the completion of Assembly elections? To the common man, the new and renewed demand sends out a signal that these leaders and parties are making accusations in anticipation of their defeat. While there is always scope for improvement in efficiency and transparency, making wild allegations does not help in creating a positive image

S.V. RADHAKRISHNAN,  
Chennai

■ The move by some Opposition parties could have a snow ball effect. The continuous levelling of

allegations about the credibility of EVMs could destroy the trust of the common man in the electoral process. It could discourage people from voting and have long-term implications on the voter turnout. Also, the global perception that the most transparent electoral process takes place in India could be reversed. The Opposition has to understand the impact of what it is doing.

SIMRAN AGARWAL,  
Jaipur, Rajasthan

■ Technology always moves forward and the demand for paper-based votes is backward thinking. Instead the demand should be for incontrovertible proof of tamper-proof software. In the event of an EVM malfunctioning, there must be a foolproof spare EVM. This is where the ECI needs to be nimble and give no room for complaint. The electoral system cannot be subverted by wily politicians

out to ensure their self-preservation. The poll code also needs to be reinforced.

B. GANGA RAJU,  
Hyderabad

### Corporates and deals

It has become a fashion to berate the corporate world for political gains without examining the role they can play in the development of the country (Page 1, "Anil Ambani firm got tax relief after Rafale deal: French paper", April 14). No doubt there are procedural lapses in the Rafale deal which definitely warrant a probe. However, the revelations have not progressed beyond that phase to the level of evidence of corruption. No middlemen were involved in the exercise. In this context, the 'continued assault' on the business house connected with the Rafale deal, on the basis of conjecture largely based on media reports, is nothing but a tactic especially by the

Opposition to gain political mileage in the general election. For argument's sake, if the government was favouring the business group, would its owner be in such dire straits today and faced with a crumbling empire? In this entire saga, one only wishes that the NDA government had yielded to a probe instead of stonewalling as soon as reports of alleged transgressions surfaced earlier. This would have not only helped clear the air but also avoided a court intervention and prevented uneasiness in the corporate world.

V. SUBRAMANIAN,  
Chennai

### CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

In the FAQ page story on capturing the image of a black hole (April 14, 2019), the reference to *Sagittarius A\** needs to be corrected to *Sagittarius A*. In the same story, in the answer to the question, "What has been discovered?", the reference to 55 trillion light years should read 55 million light years.

It is the policy of The Hindu to correct significant errors as soon as possible. Please specify the edition (place of publication), date and page. The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300 (11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday); Fax: +91-44-28552963; E-mail: readerseditor@thehindu.co.in; Mail: Readers' Editor, The Hindu, Kasturba Buildings, 855 & 860 Anna Salai, Chennai 600 002, India. All communication must carry the full postal address and telephone number. No personal visits. The Terms of Reference for the Readers' Editor are on www.thehindu.com



# Respecting leaders in a democracy

We do not defer to our rulers. Our equals, they earn our respect only if they perform well



RAJEEV BHARGAVA

Respect for politicians is in short supply in our times. Most citizens of contemporary democracies seem to tolerate, not respect, those they elect. Are we troubled by the absence of respect in politics? Should politicians even be accorded respect? If yes, what form of respect must they get?

**Directive respect: Egalitarian**  
'Respect' has multiple senses, of which three are relevant here. One sense, that might be called 'directive respect', was elaborated by the late 18th century German philosopher, Immanuel Kant. For him, respect had the force of an authoritative moral instruction, a directive. Why? Kant understood that humans in their social interactions can never entirely eliminate using one another for personal benefit. When I enter a bus, I approach the conductor not out of love, affection or curiosity, but with one goal in mind: to purchase a ticket to travel. And the conductor is in the bus to do a job for the bus owner: sell tickets. All of us – the passenger, the conductor, the driver and the bus owner – relate to each other as instruments to achieve our respective ends: travel home, earn a livelihood, make profit. However, Kant argued, while this may well be so, each must also keep in mind that we are moral agents with distinct purposes, with our own subjective take on the world, with the capacity to endow the world with meaning, purpose and value. In short, we have inherent dignity that imposes limits on the extent to which we can use each other for personal benefit. I can't treat the bus conductor as a mere thing to be pushed around, offended or humiliated, even as I buy the ticket from him. I must respect him.

To reiterate, the quality of dignity that inheres in a person is the ground for a moral directive not to treat someone only as an instrument to realise my purpose but also always as a person with distinct purposes of her own. Put differently, to respect others is not just to have an attitude, but



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also to act towards humans in a way that does not merely use them. This is what makes it a form of directive respect. In addition to being directive, Kant's notion is also egalitarian. This is because each of us commands this respect regardless of our differential social status or position, class, gender, race, talent or achievement.

**Directive respect: Hierarchical**  
This egalitarian feature alone differentiates it from another instance of directive respect where the quality that commands respect from others inheres not in the person qua person but in the social position she occupies or the role she performs. Thus, children must respect their fathers; wives, their husbands; servants, their masters; lower caste people, those in higher castes; and so on. Indeed, this unequal status is the original site of the idea of respect, its breeding ground. The notion of respect was for long intertwined with ideas of superiority and inferiority and had deep hierarchical overtones. Virtually indistinguishable from fear and deference, it was expressed not only in words but through silence and bodily stances. Thus, a person believed to be inferior could not call a superior by his name; could not look him in the eye; always had his or her head bowed or covered; could not touch any part of the superior person or could, at best, touch only his feet; was always to obey, do as he was told, never question or even respond.

This hierarchical notion of directive respect has not disappeared

from our society (as many had hoped) and continues to permeate social relationships. But disturbingly, just when we thought that because of our anti-colonial struggle and equality-centred reform movements led by Jyotirao Phule, Mahatma Gandhi and B.R. Ambedkar, it is fading away from politics, it appears to be raising its ugly head again. Revived here is the older, deeply hierarchical idea of respect as deference which brooks no dissent, muffles voices, demands unquestioning silence from all. It is also being used to elicit obedience to a 'supreme leader'. This appears to be happening not only in India but in many other polities of the world. I am told that many conversations between Trump loyalists and his critics come to an abrupt, screeching halt by the complaint that critics don't respect the President. In Hungary, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán says that any attack on his policies is a sign of disrespect for Hungary. The Turkish writer, Ece Temelkuran, drew attention to similar demands by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. When charged with rigging the polls, Mr. Erdogan claimed that this showed disrespect to the people of Turkey and their choice.

The hierarchical notion of respect is a one-way street and incompatible with the very idea of democracy. The egalitarian notion of respect articulated by Kant, a perfect riposte to respect as deference, is presupposed by democracies and relevant as a value in relationships among citizens but is too general to be of use in the specific context of citizen-ruler relationship.

Does this mean then that respect for politicians is entirely dispensable in democracies? I don't think so.

## Evaluative respect

Another kind of respect exists: this is owed to people not because of what they are or their social position but by virtue of what they have achieved. This may manifest in some praiseworthy qualities of character such as moral integrity or by perfecting some skills as a cricketer or scholar. This respect consists in an attitude of positive appraisal of the person's moral qualities or non-moral skills. Here respect is not presumed but earned. We can appropriately say that this attitude of respect is deserved when a person meets some standards of excellence integral to that practice. Precisely because it is something one achieves, it can also be a matter of degree. Rightly or wrongly, one can say that one has greater respect for Sunil Gavaskar than, say, Chetan Chauhan, or Jawaharlal Nehru than, say, Govind Ballabh Pant.

It is this notion of 'evaluative respect' or 'appraisal respect' that is relevant in democratic politics. Politicians occupy a contingent political position where they have a job to perform: work for the common good; ensure that everyone is treated as an equal, not suffer from negative discrimination at the hands of the government; get what the people need; ensure that there is peace and justice. Also, that they work truthfully, sincerely, transparently. When politicians achieve these goals and behave in accordance with the highest standards of political morality, they earn our respect. When they fail to do so, we begin to disrespect them.

There is no question of hierarchical respect or deference to our leaders in modern, democratic politics. It is our right to question, challenge and criticise our politicians. All power wielders, including the Prime Minister, must submit to these demands. All of us, the rulers and the ruled, are bound by norms of egalitarian respect more generally, and by evaluative respect specific to democratic politics in particular. To our politicians, we can only say: perform well, and earn our respect!

Rajeev Bhargava is a political theorist with the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, New Delhi

# A lot to say, but little to offer

The current nationalist hysteria does not enable the voter to make her choice in tranquility



SWAMI AGNIVESH

Elections are an opportunity for people to express their will. In healthy situations, electioneering is undertaken with sensitivity to a people's welfare. When public life becomes pathological, electioneering becomes indifferent to lived realities. People allow themselves to be bewitched by rhetorical demagoguery. Instead of choosing what is good for them, people punish persons and parties they are made to dislike.

The will of a people is that their real-life needs must be addressed. It is that governance should become a medium through which welfare is enhanced. If this is the case, electioneering will focus on the issues that concern the people. Good governance is its by-product. Governance stands rooted in freedom and justice for all. Good governance is not a matter of growth-related statistics or muscle flexing against political rivals.

The essence of freedom in a democracy is that citizens are able to exercise their right to choose in an informed fashion. It is to this end that electioneering and exercising one's franchise need to be 'free and fair'. Political parties which try to vitiate electioneering with extraneous factors so as to determine how citizens exercise their franchise can have no interest in providing good governance. That they feel obliged to resort to such strategies is tantamount to a confession that they have failed in providing good governance.

## Nationalistic hysteria

Consider, for example, the promise of development that dominated electioneering in 2014 ('*achhe din*'). But this promise does not figure at all in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's electioneering this time. Instead, he is busy whipping up 'national security' hysteria. The need to tom-tom 'national security' arises only because of an aggravation of insecurity. Admittedly, national security has deteriorated under Mr. Modi's watch, through terrorism and cross-border hostilities.

The strange thing is that this distressing sign of the failure of governance is being used to whip up nationalistic hysteria to prevent factual and rational thinking. This undermines the capacity of citizens to make rational choices conducive to their welfare. The purpose of jingoistic propaganda is to ensure that people do not express their will

through franchise, but vote according to the will of somebody else. No election conducted amid mass hysteria can be 'free or fair'. The Election Commission is in denial of realities, even if it maintains otherwise. The prescription that electioneering shall stop 48 hours before voting takes place is meant to provide voters the serenity to think for themselves in a calm and collected fashion. But thinking does not take place in a vacuum; it is substantially influenced by what a person has been exposed to in the immediate past. It is naïve to assume that the potent effect of jingoistic propaganda will wear off in two days. Propaganda of this kind affords the party in power a huge advantage over its rivals. All the more so given the support it enjoys of a partisan media, augmented by an army of social media warriors who enjoy freedom to distort information.

Even this would not have proved so lethal, but for the disarray among the Opposition parties, which seem to not know who to fight. Much of the impact of Mr. Modi's speeches stems from the Opposition's immaturity and irresponsibility. As of now, these parties seem to lack vision and consistency. When a voter, as yet unsettled by pro-Modi propaganda, weighs her options before deciding who to vote for, she is likely to wonder if there is a viable alternative to endorse.

## An irresponsible campaign

Elections must be fought on real-life issues. To fight is to stay focused. The outcome of staying focused is that the public are educated on the ground realities vis-à-vis the issues that concern them. Only within such a framework can alternatives be identified.

Instead, the energy in the present electioneering has gone into generating waves of mutual acrimony. The alleged inferiority of Opposition parties does not alleviate the deprivations of the people. The sole point on which the present electioneering is strategised is that people have no alternative other than oneself. Parties vie with each other in proving that all are vile and unworthy. Neither formation offers anything convincingly positive to decide rationally which way to turn.

But this one thing I know: the Modi show is based on violence and malevolence – linguistic, sentimental, ideological and communal. His idea of patriotism is no more than hostility towards Pakistan. But time will prove that reducing the outcome of the world's largest democratic franchise to settling scores with a neighbouring country, in utter indifference to pan-Indian lived realities, is at once idiotic and irresponsible.

Swami Agnivesh is a social activist

## SINGLE FILE

# The road to Kashmir

Respecting human rights is not at odds with providing security, but an essential component of it

MEENAKSHI GANGULY



After authorities declared that the highway linking Udhampur in Jammu to Baramulla in Kashmir will be closed to civilians for two days every week until May 31, Jammu and Kashmir residents reported extreme hardship in transporting products and getting services, including critical health care. In a letter to the Home Minister, 26 members of civil society and retired public officials, many of whom have been associated with Jammu and Kashmir, warned that the decision "undercuts our democratic credentials and attracts the charge of military rule". Many blamed the government's approach towards the Kashmir insurgency and towards Pakistani support for armed groups – an approach that both admirers and critics have described as "muscular".

Armed attacks and human rights violations have soared in Kashmir in recent years. The violence has taken a heavy toll on security personnel and civilians. Over 800 alleged militants have also been killed in the last five years, and security experts have reported increased recruitment of young Kashmiris by armed groups. There are allegations that security forces use excessive force to quell protests, causing serious injuries including permanent blindness. Hundreds have been held under the draconian Jammu and Kashmir Public Safety Act, which permits up to two years in preventive detention. Kashmiris also complain about rude treatment by security forces during search operations.

The "muscular" approach may also have encouraged a culture of collective punishment against Kashmir's Muslim citizens. On social media, admirers of the ruling party no longer distinguish between protesters armed with stones and militants armed with guns – they are all called terrorists. Kashmiri students, traders and street vendors in various cities across India have been threatened in mob attacks. In a shocking case of communal hate, following the rape and murder of a Muslim child in Kathua, a hard-line Hindutva group publicly supported the accused.

Kashmiris have expressed concern that the restrictions on civilian use of the highway is another form of collective punishment because of the attack in Pulwama in February. The State Human Rights Commission noted that "school-children, medical patients, government and private employees, as well as other civilians, will not be able to reach their destinations well in time." Under international law, measures such as closing a crucial highway that undermine fundamental rights to movement, food and health must be narrowly tailored and proportionate to a legitimate governmental aim. While the authorities have a responsibility to provide security, they need to recognise that respecting human rights is not at odds with providing security, but an essential component of it. What should occur is a muscular approach to minimise the hardships Kashmiris face and ensure that protecting their fundamental rights is a priority.

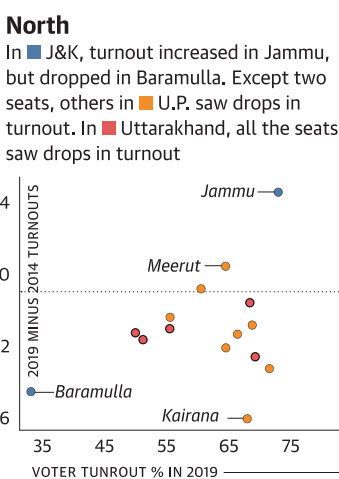
The writer is South Asia director at Human Rights Watch



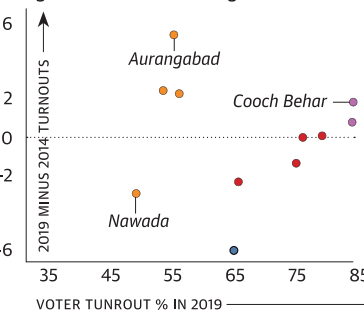
## DATA POINT

### A marginally lower turnout

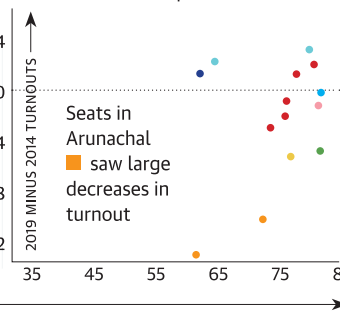
Voter turnout in a majority (58%) of the 91 seats in the first phase of this general election was lower than in 2014, according to provisional data released by the Election Commission. The overall turnout in these seats was 69.43%, compared to 70.8% in 2014. The graphs capture variations in turnout across regions. Each circle denotes a seat. Seats above the horizontal zero line registered a better turnout in 2019 compared to 2014. By The Hindu Data Team



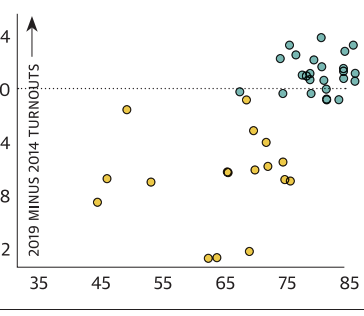
**East**  
Bihar's turnout remained poor, but improved in three of the four seats. Odisha's turnout didn't improve much. A&N Islands witnessed a drop in turnout. West Bengal recorded the highest turnout in the region.



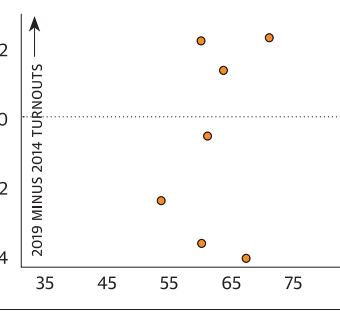
**Northeast**  
Meghalaya and Mizoram recorded better turnouts. The turnout in Assam increased in two seats. Sikkim and Nagaland saw significant drops in turnout. Tripura and Manipur recorded minor drops in turnout.



**South**  
The turnout dropped in all of Telangana's seats. The Nagarkurnool and Nalgonda seats saw the biggest decreases. Most seats in Andhra Pradesh recorded better turnouts



**West**  
Maharashtra recorded mixed results: the turnout decreased in four seats and increased in the rest. Even though Lakshadweep registered a high turnout, it was lower than in 2014



The lone seat in Chhattisgarh (central zone) saw an increase of 6.4% points in turnout

Source: Election Commission

## FROM THE HINDU ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO APRIL 16, 1969

### Constitution Bill on Assam passed

The Lok Sabha to-day [April 15, New Delhi] passed with an overwhelming majority of 369 votes to 28 the Constitution (22nd Amendment) Bill to enable the formation of an autonomous State for the hill districts of Assam. The Union Home Minister, Mr. Y.B. Chavan, who piloted the measure, firmly ruled out the possibility of extending a similar arrangement to Telengana or to any other region in the country. "Assam is a separate case, because already autonomous hill districts exist under the Constitution," he said. "It is wrong," he said, "to draw a parallel between Assam and Telengana. The question of Telengana is different. It has a different connotation. We have to consider the Telengana problem in the Telengana way." Conceding a demand for autonomous States within States would be the beginning of the disintegration of the country, Mr. Chavan said. There was record attendance in the House and the Congress Party took every precaution to see that its members were present at the time of voting in almost full strength.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO APRIL 16, 1919.

### German Missionaries.

In the Commons [in London] replying to Mr. Hailwood who alleged that great harm was being done to British interests in India and Far East by the seditious efforts of German Missionaries, and who asked if they were specially exempted from deportation, Mr. Harmsworth referred to Mr. [Secretary of State for India] Montagu's answer of July 1st. So far as India was concerned since then the situation had not changed in any way. Government was aware of the political activities in Far East of certain German Missionaries, but it was open to doubt whether British interests were greatly harmed thereby. The question of exemption from repatriation of German missionaries in China was being considered. His Majesty's Minister at Peking had been instructed to expedite repatriation of those whose attitude rendered them obnoxious during the war.

## POLL CALL

### Booth capturing

Booth capturing is an electoral fraud whereby supporters of a political party "capture" a polling booth and vote in place of the registered voters there in order to ensure that their candidate wins. The first recorded instance of booth capturing took place in the 1957 Bihar Assembly election; in later elections more rampant booth capturing was reported across the country. Under the Representation of the People Act, 1951, booth capturing was made punishable by law. On the ground of booth capturing, a poll can be adjourned or countermanded. Electronic Voting Machines were introduced in India in place of the paper ballot to, among other things, prevent this malpractice.

## MORE ON THE WEB

Blog: Umpire, umpire, on the wall, who is the fairest one of all?

<http://bit.ly/UmpiringTHREad>









