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## FACT CHECK, GROUND REALITY

## BEFORE 'OUMUAMUA VISIT, DID AN INTERSTELLAR OBJECT HIT EARTH?



Artist's impression of 'Oumuamua. It was so far the only known interstellar object to make a fly-by of Earth; now scientists have found evidence that an earlier object may have entered Earth's atmosphere. *European Space Observatory*

LAST YEAR, the interstellar object 'Oumuamua generated worldwide interest — discovered in late 2017, it was then the first known object from outside the Solar System to do a fly-by of Earth. Harvard University astronomer Abraham Loeb made headlines recently by suggesting that 'Oumuamua might have been part of an alien spacecraft. Now, Loeb and a colleague, Amir Siraj, have proposed that before 'Oumuamua, there may have been another recent interstellar visitor — a meteor from another solar system may have actually hit Earth in 2014. It burned up in the atmosphere and fell into the South Pacific, they suggest in a paper upload on the preprint server *arXiv*.

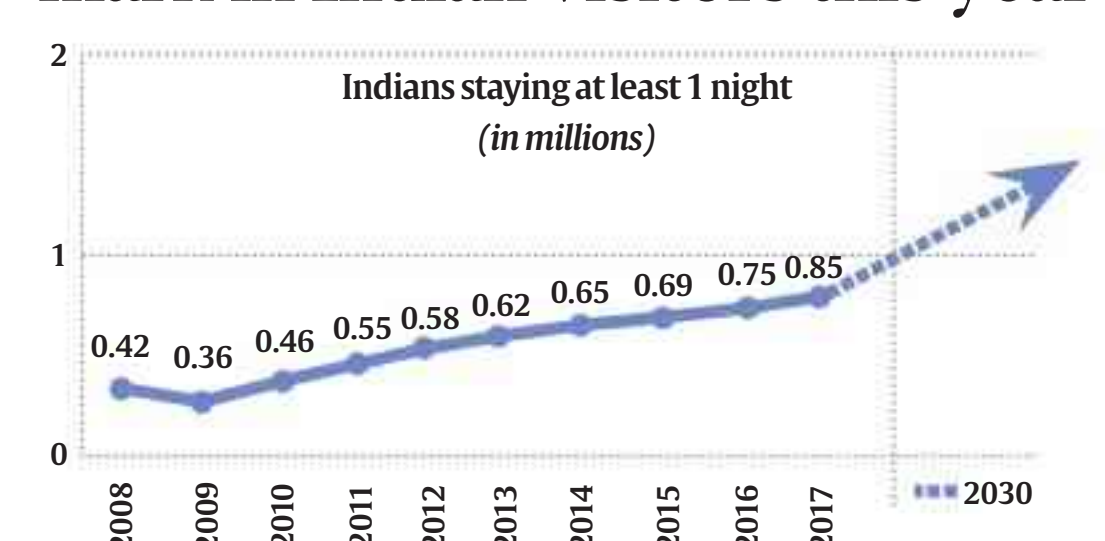
How did they reach their conclusion?

They searched NASA's Near Earth Object Database to identify the fastest meteors with strange trajectories. If an object moves extremely fast, it can be a sign that it is not tied to an orbit around the sun. The object they spotted was about 0.9 m in diameter and travelling at about 60 km/sec when it burned up in January 2014. The researchers traced the object's orbit back in time, and found that it might have come from the interior of another planetary or star system in the Milky Way. That would make the meteor the first known to have made the trip from outside the solar system to Earth. The researchers have submitted their paper to *The Astrophysical Journal Letters*.

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

## TELLING NUMBERS

## German tourism board eyes 1 mn mark in Indian visitors this year



Source: German National Tourist Board

ON THURSDAY, the India arm of the German National Tourist Board (GNTB) projected that the number of Indian tourists who stayed at least one night in Germany will likely reach 1 million by the end of this year. In 2018, around 9.22 lakh Indians who travelled to Germany stayed at least for a night, a year-on-year growth of more than 8%. "Our vision 2030 is to have 2 million overnights from India into Germany and we are right on track to achieve that," PTI quoted Romit Theophilus, Director (India), German National Tourist Office (GNTO), as saying.

A GNTB report for tourism shows 852,224 overnight stays by Indian vis-

itors in 2017. It states that the volume of overnight stays has increased by 102.2% between 2008 and 2017, at an average annual growth of 9%.

The GNTO's tourism theme for this year is the centenary of the Bauhaus art movement that started in 1919 in Weimar. "Rabindranath Tagore inaugurated our own Indian Bauhaus, the Kala Bhavan, in Santiniketan in 1919. Like the Bauhaus, it developed a modernist language. In 1921, Tagore visited Weimar. The first major Bauhaus exhibition took place in Kolkata in 1922," PTI quoted Jasper Wieck, Deputy Head of the German mission in India, as saying.

SUNNY VERMA  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 18

FOR FOUR decades after eight independent domestic airlines — Deccan Airways, Airways India, Bharat Airways, Himalayan Aviation, Kalinga Air Lines, Indian National Airways, Air India (formerly Tata Airlines), and Air Services of India — were merged to create state-owned Indian Airlines in 1953, India's aviation sector remained a national monopoly. Policy changes came in the 1990s — and liberalisation and economic reforms gave the private aviation industry new wings of hope. Several of the private airlines that took off during that decade were to hit air pockets soon, however — and in the years that followed, the sector saw the entry of quite a few new players even as the businesses of others collapsed or were taken over. The suspension of operations at Jet Airways — at one time India's largest private airline — announced Wednesday, follows the troubles at Kingfisher, Air Deccan, and Sahara.

## The beginnings

Founder promoter Naresh Goyal's Jet Airways was one of the first private airlines in newly liberalised India. In 1993, a year after its launch, Jet got an air-taxi operator's permit, which meant it could fly, but without a schedule. A flight schedule allows a carrier to estimate costs and revenues for six months, the period of a single schedule in India. Less than two years later, Jet got permission to fly as a scheduled airline after the government abolished The Air Corporation Act, 1953, which gave the state-owned carriers the monopoly to operate as scheduled airlines.

## Start-stop-start

Besides repealing The Air Corporation Act, the government announced an Open Skies policy in 1992, liberalising rules and regulations to open up the commercial aviation market. This led to the birth, over the next decade or so, of private sector players including ModiLuf, Damania Airways, Air

GROUNDED: (Clockwise from top) Kingfisher, East-West, Sahara, Damania. *Archive*

Sahara, and East-West Airlines. Most of these new players, however, folded up soon or were merged — Jet Airways in contrast, stood out as an efficient private sector operator, gaining market share with each passing year.

ModiLuf and East-West ceased operations in 1996. Air Sahara, which started operations in 1993 as Sahara Airlines, was acquired by Jet in 2007 — a business move that many analysts argue marked the beginning of the company's troubles.

ModiLuf, which had an excellent record for three years until it shut down in 1996, was later acquired by Ajay Singh, who launched it as SpiceJet in 2005 along with NRI businessman Bhulo Kansagra. As SpiceJet faced difficulties, Kansagra sold his stake to US distress investor Wilbur Ross in 2008, who sold it to Sun Group's Kalanithi Maran a couple of years later. The airline was teetering on the verge of closure when it was again acquired by Ajay Singh in 2015, who turned it profitable.

## Boom and bust

The real expansion of the private airlines, and the number of domestic flyers in India, started in the 2000s. In 2003, Captain G R Gopinath started the country's first low-cost carrier Air Deccan, which was followed by the launch of SpiceJet, IndiGo and GoAir. All these carriers followed the model of no-frills, cheaper tickets, and higher passenger load factors.

The LCC (low-cost carrier) model revolutionised the Indian aviation sector, pushing the country's annual passenger growth rate to double digits. Alongside the LCCs, Kingfisher Airlines started operations in 2005, pitching itself in the middle of a no-frills and a full-service carrier. These new airlines posed a formidable challenge to Jet Airways, which had so far operated largely in a duopoly with state-owned carriers Air India and Indian Airlines (which were merged in 2011).

But the situation changed soon.

## What Finland verdict signals to India, world

SHUBHAJIT ROY  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 18

FINLAND, RANKED the world's happiest country, held elections on Sunday, April 14. In a country whose 5.5 million population includes about 300,000 immigrants, immigration emerged the dominant, most politically divisive issue in the elections. What are the takeaways for the rest of the world, including India, which ranks 133 out of 156 countries in this year's World Happiness Report released by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network for the United Nations?

## Big 3 down

Elections to the 200-member Parliament, called Eduskunta, saw a turnout of 72%, the highest since 1991. The centre-left Social Democratic Party (SDP), which has strong links to trade unions, won 40 seats. The right-wing, anti-immigration Finns Party, got 39. The centre-right, economically liberal National Coalition got 38 seats. The incumbent Centre Party, which has liberal and traditionalist wings, managed merely 31 (down by 18 seats).

The number of women MPs elected, at 92, is the highest ever.

The combined 109 of the big three (SDP, National Coalition and Centre) is an all-time low. Professor Markku Jokisipilä, who led the Parliamentary Research Unit at the

The right-wing, anti-immigration Finns Party of Jussi Halla-aho (left) has emerged as a strong opposition while the Social Democratic Party of Antti Rinne (right) has won the elections with the smallest margin ever. *AP*

University of Turku, said this election marks the "end of the era of big parties". Between 1983 and 2011, the big three used to get two-thirds of the votes and 135-145 seats with 20-25% of the votes and 45-60 seats each.

The rise of the Finns Party broke this pattern. The big three got 55.2% and 121 seats in 2011, 55.8% and 120 in 2015, and 48.5% and 109 now.

This is the first time since 1999 that the SDP is the biggest party, and Antti Rinne is expected to become Prime Minister. However, the SDP's 40 seats and 17.7% votes are smaller than ever before. Compared to PM Paavo Lipponen in the 1990s, when the SDP got 28.3% votes and 63 seats, Rinne will be considerably weaker.

The incumbent PM's Centre Party paid a

high price for its four years in power even though employment went up and the economy fared well. Its 31 seats is the lowest since Finnish independence.

## Rise of the right

In June 2017, after a hardliner took over as Finns Party chair, the party split and the breakaway group formed the Blue Reform. While the Blue Reform lost all of its 17 seats, the Finns Party under the leadership of Jussi Halla-aho won back all the seats it had lost and even added one. Opposition to humanitarian immigration is its most important plank today. The high turnout is being attributed to the Finns Party being able to mobilize those who don't usually vote.

Halla-aho, 48, holds a doctorate in linguistics,

with a dissertation on church slavonic. Although dry, rational and reserved, his immigration-critical blogs have helped earn him a devoted following. His writing is inflammatory and has been critical of immigration and Islam. Finland's highest court in 2012 upheld a conviction and fines against him for inciting ethnic hatred and blasphemy in 2008.

## Message for Indians

For Indians, tightening of immigration rules does not bode well in a country known for good access to healthcare, long life expectancy, low corruption, less competition at work and better support for those without a job.

Out of 11,780 members of the Indian community in Finland as of end-2016, 5,016 are Indian citizens and 6,595 PIOs, according to the Indian embassy. Most of the settled ones had immigrated during the 1980s and 1990s from Punjab and are engaged in the restaurant business. In recent years, many Indians joined Finnish companies like Nokia and Indian companies like TCS, Wipro, L&T, Infosys, HCL, Mahindra InfoTech. Some Indian/PIO academics work in Finnish universities while 779 Indian students are enrolled at Finnish universities.

The political relationship is steady with Prime Minister Narendra Modi meeting leaders of the Nordic countries in April 2018 in Sweden, including Finland's PM Juha Sipilä.

## Recalling the 2004 Supreme Court order that EC invoked in NaMo TV case

KRISHN KAUSHIK  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 18

SECTION 126 of The Representation of the People Act, 1951, prohibits campaigning by candidates and parties in the 48-hour period ending with the scheduled conclusion of polling in an area. "Display to the public any election matter by means of cinematograph, television or other similar apparatus" is not allowed in these 48 hours — and as the second phase of voting approached, the Election Commission decided on April 16 to enforce this silence period with regard to NaMo TV.

The EC had said last week that the Chief Electoral Officer of Delhi had "confirmed... that there has not been any pre-certification of the content being displayed on NaMo TV/Content TV", and cited a direction given by the Supreme Court 15 years ago to underline that all political ads on electronic media need "pre-certification".

The Commission has said that expenditure on programmes and ads on NaMo TV will be attributed to the BJP or its candidates,

saying in effect, that everything on NaMo TV is BJP-sponsored advertisement. NaMo TV is available on all major DTH platforms, and is classified as a "platform service" paid for by the BJP. Despite the silence period having kicked in, the channel was available in several states on the eve of the April 18 vote.

## Who 'pre-certifies' political ads that are aired on TV?

The Supreme Court, in *Secretary, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting vs M/s Gemini TV Pvt Ltd & Others* on April 13, 2004, directed that "advertisement of political nature on TV Channel or Cable Network" could be issued "only after obtaining necessary clearance from the (Election) Commission or the (EC's) designated officer".

Two days after the court's interim order, on April 15, 2004, the EC directed that "for pre-viewing, scrutinizing and certifying advertisements to be telecast over TV channels and cable networks by any registered political party or by any group or organization/association, having headquarters in NCT of Delhi, the Chief Electoral Officer,

Delhi is to constitute a Committee". For parties or organisations headquartered in other states, the respective CEOs were to set up the committees. Each committee was to be headed by an additional or joint CEO of that state. Members include a Returning Officer from one of the parliamentary constituencies in that state's capital, and an expert who is an officer "not below the rank of Class-I officer to be requisitioned from the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting".

## What is the procedure to get an advertisement certified?

Recognised political parties and candidates must apply three days before the ad is to be aired, but in the first phase, applications can be sent just two days in advance. Parties or candidates must submit two copies of the ad, its transcript, cost of production, and the approximate cost of the proposed telecast with the break-up of the number of insertions and the proposed charge for each insertion. The application has to mention whether the ad is for the benefit of a candidate or party.

A person of organisation other than the

party or candidate, too can get political ads approved by the committees. However, applications by any other persons or by unregistered political parties must be made seven days in advance. Along with the details above, unregistered parties or other entities have to give an undertaking that "it is not for the benefit of the political party or a candidate and that the said advertisement has not been sponsored or commissioned or paid for by any political party or a candidate".

Payments for ads, either by registered/unregistered political parties or anyone else, cannot be made in cash.

## How did the matter reach the Supreme Court?

The landmark decision that led to the establishment of these committees specifically for political ads during the election period, when the Model Code of Conduct is in place, came on a challenge by the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting to an order of the Andhra Pradesh High Court that had stayed Rule 7(3) of The Cable Television Networks Rules, 1994, which

prohibits religious and political ads on TV. The High Court order came in March 2004, weeks ahead of the first phase of polling for that year's Lok Sabha elections. Section 7 of the Rules defines the Advertising Code; part 3 therein says: "No advertisement shall be permitted, the objects whereof, are wholly or mainly of a religious or political nature; advertisements must not be directed towards any religious or political end."

After the I&B Ministry appealed, the Supreme Court asked the EC to suggest the modalities to allow such ads. The EC's suggestions were shared with the Union government, which recommended minor changes. On April 13, the court ordered the setting up of the committees, setting aside the HC's stay, and laying down the procedure to regulate political ads.

## And who had gone to the High Court against Rule 7(3)?

Gemini TV, a Telugu channel, had approached the court saying that the Rule was impacting its business. Gemini TV is part of the Sun TV network owned by the Maran

family of Tamil Nadu, which is closely related to the family of M Karunanidhi.

Gemini TV asked the court to declare "illegal, void, inoperative" the Rule regarding "political advertisements during General Elections and the consequential instructions" of the government "banning political advertisements through electronic media". The ban, the petitioner argued, violated several articles of the Constitution — including Article 14 (equality before the law); Articles 19(1)(a) (freedom of speech and expression) and 19(1)(g) (right to practise any profession, or to carry on any occupation, trade or business); Article 19(2) ('reasonable restrictions' on freedoms of speech etc.); and Article 21 (protection of life and personal liberty).

## What is the legal status now?

The Supreme Court had passed an interim order on April 13, 2004, but no subsequent orders or judgments were passed on this matter. The 2004 order, therefore, remains the law of the land, as is clear from the EC's invocation of it this month.





WORDLY WISE  
AFTER YOUR DEATH, YOU WILL BE WHAT YOU  
WERE BEFORE YOUR BIRTH.  
— ARTHUR SCHOENHAUER

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

GROUNDED

Collapse of Jet is a moment of reckoning for Indian aviation. The gains from liberalisation must not be reversed

FROM OPERATING A 120-aircraft fleet and being India's second largest passenger carrier as recently as January, to possibly flying for the last time on Wednesday, it's been a literally grounding-to-a-halt for Jet Airways. Except that it wasn't as sudden as would seem. The company's financial difficulties were public from around March 2018, when it started deferring disbursement of salaries, which was followed by defaulting on aircraft lease rentals and loan repayments towards October-December. The fault lay with the lenders for failing to see these signs of trouble. They allowed the founder-chairman, Naresh Goyal, to be on the airline's board right till March 25 this year, when its fleet size was down to a third and debts to banks had crossed Rs 8,000 crore. Given that the country today has a bankruptcy law, allowing lenders to file an insolvency petition against any defaulting firm and effect management change by inviting bids from prospective new promoters, it is striking why this option was not exercised early enough.

Only this month have banks finally acted and called for expression of interest from investors. It is unlikely that they would want to take over the ailing airline without the lenders agreeing to a substantial write-off of its outstanding dues. The fact that Jet Airways has suspended operations makes things worse. The company needed emergency funding from banks in order to be able to run. The latter declined the request. They had no choice really, as doing so would have risked more money going down the drain. But once an airline stops flying and its unused airport slots are allocated to others, the valuations during bidding are only bound to fall further. Such a situation could have been avoided had the lenders forced Goyal to step down earlier and sounded out other carriers, both domestic and foreign; they may have been more willing even about six months back. A nudge from the government, too, would have helped, especially with the likes of State Bank of India and Punjab National Bank being the main lenders. The losers in the bargain aren't just banks, but also Jet Airways' 16,000-odd employees. Their being on the streets while national elections are on isn't good news for the ruling party at the Centre.

What is the road ahead? Whether Jet Airways — a symbol of the 1991 economic reforms much like Airtel or Infosys — will fly again will be known only when the current bid process concludes on May 10. The country's leading domestic carrier Indigo already has a 43 per cent-plus market share. It is in the consumer's interest that no airline gets to monopolise the skies and reverse the gains from liberalisation. This is the time the government should do away with the 49 per cent ownership limit in Indian airlines by foreign carriers. Consumers ultimately want competition, never mind whoever provides it.

WHEN RAHUL DESCENDS

His remark that all thieves have Modi in their names is not very different from hate talk about identity from the other side

IT'S A GIVEN in the heat and dust of elections that candidates lose their cool. In a noisy, fractious democracy where so much is — and should be — deeply contested and churned, a little mud flying is par for the campaign course. And yet, over the past few weeks, there has been on display talk that's divisive, vicious and hateful. What kind of an echo this finds across the electorate only May 23 may tell. But one thing is clear, the bar has fallen so low that there's little to shock. Into this wades in Congress president Rahul Gandhi. He keeps reminding the voter that this fight is about the idea of India itself and then descends from this grand perch to the same low that he accuses his rivals of: Denigrating a community, collapsing identities and firing the cheapest of shots. Why do all thieves have Modi in their names, whether it is Nirav Modi, Lalit Modi or Narendra Modi, is the rhetorical question he asked at a rally in Karnataka. He has used this line more than once, perhaps believing that it's smart and devastating and that it makes his point that there is a kinship between the prime minister and these accused. Financial corruption by businessmen and how the government responded or didn't to their irregularities need to be vigorously debated but Gandhi trivialises his argument — and also debases it.

The Modi surname appended by different communities denotes multiple identities across castes and geography. To link theft to this name is damning a community. Ironically, this exact same framework and strategy is constantly deployed to polarise people. The recent Ali-Bajrang Bali talk, for instance, was intended to create a campaign thread that slotted Hindus and Muslims in silos and deny the possibility of a secular debate on governance. Similarly, the spectre of Pakistan and the Bangladeshi migrant are frequently raised to fuel a communal narrative against Muslims. Even the most recent anointment of Sadhvi Pragna Thakur is meant to push the falsehood that terror has a religion. Such talk dehumanises politics, reduces it to a transaction between collectives. It negates a foundational principle of democracy which is one person, one vote, one value; the vote is seen as an instrument to signal the pact between the individual voter and the candidate. Collective identities are invoked only to deny agency to the individual, relieve a person of her identity, undermine the very basis of liberal democracy.

Gandhi claims he doesn't stoop low to conquer. So he should lift himself up. An apology, an admission of error would be a good place to begin.

SCHRÖDINGER'S PIG

Porcine brains which are neither dead nor alive have opened up the possibility of a third state of being

THANKS TO SOME pigs sacrificed and resurrected in the cause of science, a death sentence hangs over traditional thinking about life, consciousness, and whether shuffling off the mortal coil is a one-way process. Published on April 17 in the journal *Nature* by the researchers Zvonimir Vrselja, Stefano G. Daniele et al, the fateful sentence reads: "The isolated, intact large mammalian brain possesses an under-appreciated capacity for restoration of micro circulation and molecular and cellular activity after a prolonged post-mortem interval." This is a learned way of saying that the scientists were wrong, pulp writers were right and a return from death is possible. At least in the brain cells of slaughtered pigs.

According to received medical wisdom, the brain is the first organ to go after the heart stops beating, and that it suffers irreversible damage from oxygen starvation. But this group of researchers found pig brains removed from the cranium and supplied with an artificial circulatory fluid still going four hours after death. Cells remained healthy and metabolism proceeded. At the tissue level, this was clearly not brain death. Even a few neurons were perceived to fire. While cranks the world over will take this as evidence that they were right about resurrection and zombies, the usual electrical activity of the brain, signalling awareness, was not recorded.

The implication is for ethics, which draws a clear line between the living and the dead. Now, sundry pigs have raised the bogey of partly dead, and therefore partly recoverable beings. The question had last arisen when a snail which went into suspended animation in Egypt in the time of the pharaohs stirred when put in water. But that was a simple gastropod, not a complex mammal, whereas pigs with brains neither dead nor alive pose a problem which almost rivals Schrödinger's cat.

Three mistakes, two ironies



CHINTAN CHANDRACHUD

EC order prohibiting Narendra Modi biopic is too broad in its scope, sets a disturbing precedent

THREE WEEKS CAN be a long time during an election season. Over the course of three weeks from the end of March to the middle of April, applications and complaints with respect to the biographical film on Prime Minister Narendra Modi have meandered from one venue to another. These venues include the Election Commission (EC), the Bombay High Court, the Delhi High Court, the Censor Board and the Supreme Court. Most recently, on April 9, the Censor Board certified the film — featuring Vivek Oberoi, Barkha Bisht and Boman Irani — for release. This was swiftly followed by an order from the EC prohibiting the release of the film on the basis that it would "disturb the level playing field during the elections".

The producers of the film approached the Supreme Court challenging the EC's decision on the basis that it violated their fundamental rights. On April 15, upon being told that the EC had issued its order without watching the film, the Court directed the EC to finalise its decision after watching the film. The next hearing at the Supreme Court is slated for April 22, by which time the viewership of the film ought to increase by at least one.

At first glance, the EC's order appears well intentioned. It is targeted at political parties seeking to circumvent the Model Code of Conduct through "surrogate publicity". The logic of the argument is that political parties cannot seek to do indirectly (through hagiographic films) what they cannot do directly (through advertisements or banners). Examined more closely, however, the order fails to identify important differences between an advertisement and a film, it is disproportionately broad in scope and sets an ominous precedent for the future.

An order of this scope and breadth sets a disquieting precedent for the future, as it effectively enables the EC to impose broad prohibitions on the publication of books and films. Hagiographies also have a place in our literary landscape — not least, they enable us to better appreciate more nuanced, sophisticated narratives. Books and films frequently prove soft targets to public institutions in India, and so it is with the EC.

In treating the film as an advertisement under the "garb of creative freedom", the EC fails to acknowledge the differences between an advertisement and a film. An advertisement is typically imposed upon the viewer during the course of another activity. Its aim is to have an impact over a short timeframe, even if that impact develops incrementally through multiple viewings. The viewer may pay for a collateral product that carries the advertisement (a newspaper or a television channel subscription), but not the advertisement itself. On the other hand, a film involves a large, voluntary investment of time by the viewer — in this instance, two hours and 16 minutes. A film almost invariably involves payment by the viewer.

What this means in practice is that the sphere of influence of a film is limited to those willing (and able) to make that investment of time and money. However, there is an important distinction between a film and an advertisement even for those that can make that investment. While an advertisement claims to represent reality, the creators of a film — even if it is based on a true story — are entitled to a generous artistic license. For the EC to assume that the film creates "an impression of truthfulness" and that the viewer is unable to distinguish between film and fact is to underestimate the intelligence of the viewer.

The EC's order is also disproportionately broad in a number of respects. It prohibits the release of the entire film, rather than suggesting cuts of any scenes that it considers especially likely to disturb the level playing field. It prohibits the release of the film until "further orders", which is probably a euphemism for "until the end of the election cycle".

Rather than just prohibiting the publication of promotional material for the film (which could arguably perform the same function as a political advertisement), the order prohibits the release of the film itself.

An order of this scope and breadth sets a disquieting precedent for the future, as it effectively enables the EC to impose broad prohibitions on the publication of books and films. Hagiographies also have a place in our literary landscape — not least, they enable us to better appreciate more nuanced, sophisticated narratives. Books and films frequently prove soft targets to public institutions in India, and so it is with the EC. While the EC has asserted the strength of its authority on this issue, it has been far less decisive in addressing a catalogue of divisive and hateful speeches made by politicians across the spectrum (although its recent embargoes on campaigning are a welcome first step).

This sequence of events is beset with two ironies. First, as is often the case with attempts at censorship, the EC's order feeds the flames that it seeks to quench. The producers of the film will be unhappy with the delays in the film's release, but its putative political beneficiaries may be smiling. Second, censorship begets more censorship, as the Supreme Court has, somewhat inexplicably, requested the EC's opinion to be submitted to it under "sealed cover". The ultimate point remains the same — the voter is mature enough to appreciate the difference between hagiography and reality, and to digest critical EC reports for what they are.

The writer is an associate at Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan, London. Views are personal



ABHAY SHUKLA

THE GOOD NEWS is that health has arrived on the country's political agenda. The bad news is that health systems are in critical condition and there is significant public discontent over the lack of quality and affordable healthcare.

We can confirm that health is making an impact on the political scene, when on the one hand, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launches the Ayushman Bharat scheme a year before the elections — a programme that claims to benefit 50 crore Indians — and on the other hand, the Congress's manifesto carries the party's pledge to enact a Right to Healthcare Act. However, in the past five years, the Union health budget has stagnated in real terms, allocations to the National Health Mission do not cover inflation and there have been avoidable deaths of scores of children in public hospitals in Gorakhpur and other places that can be ascribed to the lack of material and human resources.

Governments have failed to regulate private hospitals effectively, leading to numerous instances of mismanagement and massive over-charging of patients, such as the tragic case of Adya Singh in Fortis hospital, Gurgaon. There are convincing facts which show that the "solution" being offered in the form of the Pradhan Mantri Jan Aarogya Yojna is not only seriously underfunded (current funds being less than one-fourth of required) but it will only scratch the tip of the iceberg of healthcare requirements in India.

Given this context, India needs a major health policy reboot. The general elections are an appropriate occasion to propose such comprehensive changes. The Jan Swasthya Abhiyan — a national coalition of health sector organisations and activists — has attempted to do this through its *People's Health Manifesto 2019*. The manifesto includes the following proposals:

One, adopting a Right to Healthcare legislation at the Centre and state levels. This

A MANIFESTO FOR HEALTH

Paradigm shift to universal healthcare is not unrealistic, requires political will

would ensure that all residents of the country are entitled to healthcare facilities. Development of a system for Universal Healthcare (UHC) would be a key constituent of this initiative, which would require expansion and strengthening of public health services at all levels. Private providers would also be involved, as per need, to supplement the public health system.

Two, increasing the public health expenditure exponentially through taxation. This expenditure should be increased from the current grossly inadequate 1.2 per cent of the GDP to reach 3.5 per cent of the GDP in the next five years, and eventually touch 5 per cent of the GDP in the medium term.

Three, ensuring major reform and strengthening of public health services with increased staff and infrastructure. A key component of this reform would be guaranteed provision of free essential medicines and diagnostics to all patients in public health facilities, by adopting systems for procurement and distribution which are similar to the current models in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Rajasthan.

Four, there should be a comprehensive health sector human resource policy, which provides upgraded skill training, fair wages, social security and decent working conditions for all public health services staff. The services of all contractual health workers, including ASHAs and anganwadi workers, should be regularised.

Five, community-based monitoring and planning of health services that are being practised in a few states should be upscaled and user-friendly grievance redressal systems put in place to ensure social accountability and participation.

Six, the PMJAY component of Ayushman Bharat, which is based on a discredited insurance model, should be jettisoned. Such schemes need to be replaced by the universal healthcare system.

Seven, private hospitals must be brought under the ambit of regulations by modifying and adopting the Clinical Establishments Act in all states. This legislation must ensure that the Charter of Patient's Rights is observed, it must provide a grievance redressal mechanism to patients, the rates for services must be regulated and standard treatment guidelines should be adopted in healthcare institutions.

Eight, essential medicines and medical devices must be subject to price regulation, based on their manufacturing cost. A Uniform Code for Pharmaceutical Marketing Practices should be put in place to curb unethical marketing practices. Manufacturers should be asked, in a stepwise manner, to sell medicines only under their generic name, and doctors should be directed to write generic names of medicines in prescriptions.

These initiatives must be accompanied by measures to ensure that people with special needs — women, children, differently-abled persons, people living with HIV — enjoy appropriate health services. Traditional social determinants of health such as nutrition, water supply, sanitation and healthy environment must be ensured. There should be plans in place to tackle new determinants like air and water pollution and addictions.

Such a paradigm shift towards a rights-based system for universal healthcare, based on massive increase in health budgets and strengthened health systems, is not an unrealistic dream. Several low- and middle-income countries such as Thailand, Brazil and Sri Lanka have such systems in place. The core ingredient required for UHC is political will. As we prepare to exercise our choice in the elections, we need to boost such political will by supporting parties which have pledged the right to health care to all.

The writer is a National Convenor, Jan Swasthya Abhiyan



APRIL 19, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

JANA SANGH MINISTERS HARYANA WAS DRAWN into the vortex of the political crisis gripping Bihar and Himachal Pradesh when an emergency cabinet meeting presided over by Chief Minister Devi Lal authorised him not to allow any minister to remain in the cabinet who had any link with the RSS. The 15-member Haryana ministry has four members belonging to the erstwhile Jana Sangh. They did not attend the meeting where only six ministers and the chief parliamentary secretary were present. The sudden developments in Haryana, which are a result of the confrontation between the two major constituents of the Janata Party, the BLD and the Jana Sangh,

did not lead to the expected ouster of the Jana Sangh ministers immediately. Apparently, the dominant BLD leadership in the state wants to watch the situation in HP and Bihar.

SCRAMBLE IN PATNA WITH LESS THAN 24 hours to go for Bihar Chief Minister Karpoori Thakur to seek a vote of confidence at the Janata Legislature Party meeting, the dissidents and ministerialists were engaged in seemingly interminable activities in preparation for the showdown. The tempo of campaigning acquired a feverish pitch in the ministerialists camp soon after the arrival of Madhu Limaye, general secretary of the Janata Party, Union Home Minister

Dhanik Lal and Raj Narain.

JANATA'S FATE MUCH MORE THAN the fate of three chief ministers — Nilamani Routray, Karpoori Thakur and Shanta Kumar — is involved in the meetings of the Janata legislature parties to be held in Orissa, Bihar and Himachal Pradesh. On the eve of the crucial meetings where the three beleaguered chief ministers are to seek a vote of confidence, the state leaders' politics seemed to be pushing the party towards another crisis. Most observers in Delhi feel that Routray and Shanta Kumar will win the vote comfortably but it will be difficult for Thakur to scrape through.



# 13 THE IDEAS PAGE

## Coming down from ivory towers

Educational institutes and higher learning centres should devote a substantial chunk of their resources to solve local problems for vikas to be meaningful



MILIND SOHONI

AS ANOTHER ELECTION gets underway, we see the political class engaged, yet again, in a war of words — claims and counterclaims on what was delivered, of jumle-baazi and corruption. Sadly, there is no analysis of why is vikas — basic amenities, jobs and growth for small enterprises — not being delivered or why there is no coherent plan for the purpose. Instead, what we have is more rights-based beneficiary vaad and good intentions. The fact of the matter is that the politicians cannot deliver vikas even if they wanted to. They are the junior-most partner of largely spectators, touts and fixers in the bureaucrat-scientist-politician triumvirate which rules this nation. The sooner we citizens and our politicians realise this, the better.

Indeed, there are about 2,000 elite bureaucrats — the IAS — and a similar number of senior professors, scientists, social scientists and experts from elite centrally-funded institutions — the IITs, JNU, scientific and multilateral agencies — who determine what happens to most of our people. It is what they think and do, or fail to do, that decides how buses run, droughts or anganwadis are managed, what is taught in colleges, and how local businesses survive.

As an example, consider drinking water in Parbhani, a district in the drought-prone Marathwada region of Maharashtra. Traditional rural water supply schemes, which were based on wells, have failed long ago as groundwater levels plummeted and these wells went dry. This happened because cropping patterns changed and more land was brought under well irrigation. Of course, there was no systematic study of either of this by our elite institutions since this is not what they consider science. Regional universities are simply incapable of formulating such research and carrying it out, unhindered by the bureaucracy. Large water supply schemes based on surface water — that are needed — are moribund. No new techniques of design and optimisation have come up. The Water Supply Department is supposed to spend 1 per cent of its expenditure on monitoring and evaluation. The secretary has not bothered to establish protocols and standards or to set up a network of trusted institutions. As a result, "jar water" and RO plants abound. Many "jar water" plants are illegal and their quality is doubtful. There is no easy certification. Getting an ISI label is tied up in bureaucracy and red-tape, leading to corruption.

Yet another example is the recent BEST bus strike in Mumbai. For nine days, the common people were held to ransom by an argument between the management, which wants to reduce losses, and the employee union, which wants an increase in wages. And yet, there is no report in the public domain on the actual operations of BEST, the routes that are profitable, the crew and vehicle utilisation and the social welfare that it provides. This should have come from an IIT or an IIM. In the absence of such factual analysis, the can was kicked down the road, with few changes in planning or operations. The same situation prevails in social sectors such as public health, where an absence of analysis is a primary cause of paralysis.



Suvajit Dey

Why is this happening and what is to be done? The IAS system, itself an enormous concentration of power, has great faith in its own competence and does not allow any factual analysis or review. This has prevented the emergence of a long-term plan for any sector. The IITs, IISERs etc. have lost the plot on what science really means and how it connects with society and the real world. Let alone documenting and analysing the lived reality, they live in cocoons of borrowed rigour, which they call "global science". Their prestige comes from their monopoly over central funds and the right given to them by Parliament to conduct national-level competitive exams in the name of science. This has destroyed an important purpose of science — the means for the common man to speak truth to power. It has converted the university into a franking machine instead of an institution which empowers the community.

What our political parties should now do is to unravel the bureaucrat-scientist elite nexus through political means. A huge number of problems lie before us. Problems of planning and efficiency, nutrition and health, poorly-run small factories and disappearing forests and rivers. These threaten our very existence as a peace-loving and multi-cultural society. Solving these problems requires concrete steps to democratise knowledge and power and localise the ability to act. It also needs a revitalised university and an immersive curricula which prepares our youth to meet these challenges. So here are our top 10 suggestions to our politicians, our vikas manifesto:

The All India Services Act, 1951, will be amended so as to ensure accountability and competence and allow lateral entry at all levels, including the state and the district.

The secretary of each department at the state level will bring out every two years, a public document assessing the delivery levels, knowledge and practices within the department, the key problem areas, and a long-term vision.

A deputy secretary level position will be created within each department to handle monitoring, assessment and knowledge management. This should be done by creating a network of regional institutions and enterprises, who will support and conduct the required applied research.

Centrally-funded institutions like the IITs, IIMs, and IISERs will devote 20 per cent of their curricula, faculty time and funding in

solving regional problems. They should do this through innovative multidisciplinary field-work based curricula, in partnerships with state agencies and regional universities. These institutions and their partners will create a state-level knowledge network which implements a "Right to Know" — a right to an analysis of failures of public services and problems of small enterprises.

Centrally-funded agencies such as the Department of Science and Technology will disburse 50 per cent of their funds directly to state-level science and technology councils with guidelines on research topics and measurements of outcomes. Central and state scientific agencies will strive to make most useful data public, for example, maps in all formats, data from irrigation, agriculture and other departments.

Research in the form of case studies in key areas of sustainability, natural resources, small industries, public amenities, social welfare will be encouraged. Institutions like IISc, IITs and JNU will administer a journal of development research as an avenue for reporting such work. School curricula will include a substantial component of local and regional relevance — local maps, village handbooks, measurement of local produce, field trips to facilities such as bus depots or rice mills, and visits by local functionaries. Colleges and educational institutions at the district level will have an important role in studying the outcomes of development programmes and providing professional support to state agencies. This will be done by students, faculty members and fresh graduates through innovative curricula and mechanisms.

All national entrance exams will slowly be modified from ranking exams to qualifying exams in the spirit of the Constitution. States will have a more constructive role in student admissions into elite institutions so that graduates contribute to the national and state economy and society.

The above agenda will establish a new balance between science, the state and the community, and a social understanding to sustain it. Only when this emerges, will we see vikas and jobs which deliver value. It is also the only way to approach more vexing problems of sustainability, equity and culture.

The writer is with Centre for Technology Alternatives for Rural Areas, IIT Bombay. He is currently on deputation to IIT Goa

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People like the fact that he has raised issues that instil pride in the people. He has talked about an Indian past which is something to look up to. He has talked about a more muscular national policy where India will not take everything lying down. Not just with Pakistan but also against a powerful country like China. He has the ability to stand up to countries and does not appear indecisive. He has underlined India's scientific progress and believes that we can be great.

He also has the ability to take up issues like cleanliness and hygiene. No political leader put issues like toilets and sanitation on the national mainstream agenda. Only when leaders talk about these issues do we become conscious of their absence, one driver in Bengaluru mentioned. Making the cleaning of the Ganga a priority has connected with people. The Kumbh mela became a show piece and so many foreigners took a dip in the Ganges, with all their concerns about infection and hygiene. I must say that some of my friends living abroad, including the global chairman of the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and his wife, came and took a dip in the Ganges. They mentioned the mela was well-

organised and that my caution on the quality of the water was perhaps overstated.

Even demonetisation was seen as a strike against the corrupt, even if it hurt the people I spoke to personally. They believe some personal sacrifice to clean up the system for a larger purpose is acceptable. In fact, the relentless talk of corruption against Modi has just not stuck. People just don't believe "ki chowkidar chor hai" (the watchman is a thief). So, whether it is Nirav Modi or the Rafale deal, the attempts by the Opposition to paint Modi as corrupt have not worked. The early strike with "suit boot ki sarkar" (a suited and booted government) has waned.

Finally, Modi has managed to connect with and speak to young India. He challenges the credibility of the Opposition. He is good with social media and manages to convey strength and hope. Whether his personal popularity will be enough to take the BJP over the post is going to be tested, but were this a presidential election, he would be an easy winner. With the way our parliamentary democracy works, the results are always unknown. In a bid to short-circuit the process, I called up God to ask him who is winning. Even he said I don't know, let's wait and see.

The writer is chairman, BCG India. Views are personal

## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"China is strong, determined, and capable of tackling great challenges and making incredible achievements. Other countries should never underestimate and coerce China." — GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA

## Insecurity at the top

BJP's attempt to use national security as its poll plank betrays its desperation and fear at the unfulfilled promises of the last five years



SWAMI AGNIVESH

THE BJP HAS, predictably, pinned all its hopes on creating hype about our endangered national security. No one can miss the total break between Narendra Modi's rhetoric in 2014 and his election masala this time around. Intelligent voters will, given that Modi has failed to deliver on all promises made in 2014, conclude that "crying wolf" about a neighbouring country, which is no match for India in any respect, is meant to deflect attention from the poverty of a party's performance in office.

Yet, there are "threats" that we face today. To see them in perspective, a distinction needs to be made between the threats that the people endure and the threat that plagues those in power. Modi and company would like us to believe that they are the same. They are not.

The "security threat" that Modi faces is from the voters; a threat to continuity in office. The signs of desperation are everywhere, and they cannot be missed or mistaken. Why would Modi, who has a penchant for unrivalled leadership and hegemonic domination, be so desperately keen to enter into pre-poll alliances with uncomfortable outfits — the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra and AGP in Assam, to take just two examples — if he felt electorally secure? Why else would he use agencies like the CBI, ED and I-T against his rivals in an electorally suggestive manner? Are we to believe that economic offenders are to be found only among his political rivals? Why would Modi sacrifice five seats in Bihar out of the 22 his party is currently holding to ensure that the JD(U) is on board? Surely, there is a manifest "insecurity" issue here. And it is understandable that it has intensified to a feverish pitch since the setbacks the BJP suffered in the recent assembly elections.

Secondly, there are security threats that several sections of the society — especially farmers, unemployed youth, small-scale entrepreneurs, Dalits, Adivasis and religious minorities — are facing. There is no greater insecurity than a threat to one's survival. Suicide is the ultimate and unambiguous acknowledgement of insecurity. Ask the farmers across India, they will readily agree. Modi needs to answer why farmer suicides have increased, rather than decreased since 2014. How does this square with his promise to double the income of farmers? The talented and well-educated youths of India are second only to the farmers in the desperation they harbour. They are highly "insecure". Lynch mobs have added to the insecurity of vulnerable sections of the society. Anti-Romeo squads — unofficial, lumpen squads out to terrorise individuals who exercise the freedom to choose their life-partners — have widened the ambit of this insecurity. Free thinkers and votaries of our rational-secular culture are stigmatised and

damned as urban Naxals and anti-national saboteurs. Our liberal centres of educational excellence — JNU, University of Hyderabad, FTII, etc — too have felt the heat.

There is, finally, the threat from across the border. Admittedly we have an unwise and intransigent neighbour to live with. But this is nothing new. Successive governments have had to deal with this headache. It is integral to the duties of those who govern the country. If it is handled well, the security environment improves; otherwise, it worsens, as indeed it has in the last five years. That given, discerning voters will ask a few questions: Why is it that the borders begin to boil closer to election times? Why is it that the BJP is so palpably edgy when commonsensical questions are asked out of legitimate curiosity by anyone? Why does it become a patriotic duty to accept on blind faith — like in fundamentalist religions — "official versions" put out for public consumption? What patriotic duty is it that coerces citizens to consume what they are not free to examine? Why is it necessary that military operations are dragged into the public sphere where, in a democracy, citizens should be free to examine them on their merits?

The opposition parties — especially the Congress — are doing the country a service by re-focusing the national debate on people-centred, real-life issues. As a non-partisan political observer with a lifelong commitment to social justice, I am relieved that the 2019 elections are being fought on where the parties stand in relation to issues like rural and farmer distress, unprecedented unemployment, escalating social and communal tensions, economic and industrial instability due to reckless governance, etc. Citizens, if they are mature, will not allow themselves to be hijacked by mendacious propaganda, even of the most electrifying kind. They know that by voting in indifference to their needs, aspirations and lived realities, they invite, legitimise and perpetuate mis-governance.

Those who are in touch with the election scenario cannot miss the fact that the charismatic appeal that Modi had in 2014 has waned. Now, TV channels keep the cameras turned away from crowd-responses as Modi goes on with his predictable lines of attack. Such "Modi-Modi, Modi-Modi" chants now sound feeble, forced and contrived.

The common man appears to have aright the "security threat" that he is facing. He has concluded that his life and welfare matter a great deal more than potent doses of insincere rhetorical flourishes: Electrifying to hear, but illusory to live by. This had its novelty in 2014. But the last five years has dimmed its authenticity. Now the words remain; the magic is gone. As a politically savvy person put it the other day, with reference to the advertisement about gas connections given to the poor, "Well, they seem to have got gas connections; the rest of the country mere gas, without the connections." Many may not paint as vivid a picture as this cynic, but there are millions who feel likewise. This should worry Modi and his cheering squad.

The writer is Vedic scholar and social activist



JANMEJAYA SINHA

## Solving the Modi mystery

He remains India's most popular leader for his strong decisions, personal appeal

ONLY PRESIDENT LULA of Brazil could claim to have had a popularity level higher than Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the end of his first term in office. I exclude countries like Russia, where while Vladimir Putin is very popular, the nature of contestation and political freedom for opposition candidates is limited. In India, all the polls conducted by agencies of different hues and preferences, find Modi to be the most popular political leader in the country. The range of popularity may vary but not one survey disputes the fact that he remains the most popular Indian political leader. Nor, in fact, do leaders of the Opposition parties that I meet deny this — they only suggest that it is so because he has managed to fool people.

His popularity has sustained through the many strong decisions across a broad spectrum of issues that he has taken, many of which the intelligentsia has criticised — Aadhaar and its use, demonetisation, GST implementation, military strategy vis a vis Pakistan, the Doklam standoff, etc. Yet every Opposition party has only one theme — Modi is bad for the country and must be removed. Despite all this, he has remained popular with the mainstream of Indian public opinion, even when they have not agreed with him. It's a phenomenon that requires introspection especially as some of his decisions have

gone against the interest of his core supporters, unlike say, a Donald Trump.

I have to confess my analysis has been influenced strongly by the community of hired car drivers across the country. I travel a lot within India (admittedly city travel) and I use the travel time between the airport and the city to talk politics with my drivers. Most times, I find they have a positive opinion on Modi, even if they don't like the BJP or even if they vote for a different party in the elections (especially true in South India — Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala; I have to confess Bengal is a bit complicated to assess because most of the taxi drivers are Bihari).

There are a few things I have distilled through my conversations. Modi has found a way to communicate directly with the people. He is a phenomenal orator and talks on the issues that have not been raised before. He has embraced themes that give people both hope and pride. He has also been able to call upon the latent spirit of sacrifice in Indian's for a larger good. He has highlighted how other parties have failed India and repeatedly talked of a bigger agenda that he should be given time to complete. He has demonstrated that he is hard-working and shown he has no personal family interest to further. One driver in Calcutta, originally from Bihar, told me he is a welcome change from

the family business called Indian politics. It is also interesting that many drivers are aware that he has not delivered on all his promises but they see him as trying hard.

People like the fact that he has raised issues that instil pride in the people. He has talked about an Indian past which is something to look up to. He has talked about a more muscular national policy where India will not take everything lying down. Not just with Pakistan but also against a powerful country like China. He has the ability to stand up to countries and does not appear indecisive. He has underlined India's scientific progress and believes that we can be great.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### LACK OF PRINCIPLES

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Who cares,' (IE, April 18). The induction of Pragya Thakur in the BJP and granting her a ticket to contest from Bhopal at a time when she is out on bail and is one of the prime accused in the Malegaon blasts case sends alarming signals. The BJP has not only violated its own stance of zero tolerance to crime and corruption but has violated its credentials of upholding and promoting clean electoral politics.

Pranay Kumar Shime, Kolkata

### ALL WORK

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Work 996' (IE, April 18). Historically, it is not the advent of new technology but the way it has been applied by employers that has caused work-related problems for employees. The Industrial Revolution heralding mechanisation of work also coincided with extreme exploitation of workers. Now the computer-based and internet-related gadgets disturb work-life balance. The Chinese IT companies' insistence on their employees working 12 hours a day, six days a week is born out of their greed to make maximum use of technology to enhance output.

YG Chouksey, Pune

### WHO IS A PATRIOT?

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'What a community has lost,' (IE, April 18). The

### 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

problem of injustice towards the minorities arises due to the different understanding of patriotism. The dynamics of unity in diversity in India operates differently from countries which have a national religion. Prejudices against certain communities happen because one is considered a patriot only if one follows a particular religion. Common people are brainwashed into tagging certain communities as unpatriotic.

Titus Gonmei, Ahmedabad