



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

The restive Kapu

The community's agitation in Andhra Pradesh is for political dominance and economic mobility



CHRISTOPHE JAFFRELOT & A KALAIYARASAN

A BAD DEAL

Suspension of LoC trade is a poorly-thought move that shrinks the space for manoeuvre in Kashmir and with Pakistan

SUSPENDING THE CROSS-BORDER trade across the Line of Control is yet another ill-advised step in Kashmir, and about as short-sighted as the highway closure. Cross LoC trade began in October 2008, just a month before the Mumbai terror attacks. That it was launched at all, and survived the deep freeze of India-Pakistan ties that followed 26/11, growing in value and symbolic importance to Kashmiris on either side of the LoC over the next decade, was due to the all around acknowledgment that Kashmir needs special specific confidence-building measures, and that these need to be kept separate from the India-Pakistan relationship. Cross LoC interaction carried huge symbolic value in Kashmir, even though the trade itself has been far below its actual potential, and was tied up with red tape and the absence of banking facilities and telephone connections. Moreover, it was being conducted through a barter system, as India and Pakistan could not reach agreement on currency transactions, even though its annual value grew from Rs 1 crore in 2008-09 to over Rs 3,000 crore at the present time.

It is unfortunate that the government has decided to "suspend" this Kashmir-specific confidence building measure now on the ground that it was being misused to push drugs, weapons and counterfeit currency into the Valley from across the border, as well as for trade in goods excluded from the list meant for cross-LoC trade. After all, no trade routes into India are free from misuse. Hawala, despite a severe crackdown, continues to exist as a channel through which Indians continue to send and receive money from abroad. In the case of Kashmir, the absence of banking channels must have exacerbated the situation. If the government had apprehensions that the trade across the two sides of Kashmir was being used by terrorist benamis or other unscrupulous elements, the better course of action would have been to monitor the crossing points at Uri and Chakkan da Bagh through which it was taking place four times a week. This is all in a day's work for customs and other enforcement agencies, and this is how drugs were caught being smuggled in trucks from Pakistan Occupied Kashmir.

Calling off an entire trade route because it is being misused by some sends out the message that the government has lost control, as with the highway closure. Plus, drawing increasingly tighter red lines in Kashmir, India only makes it more difficult for itself to get out of the corners it has painted itself into when the time for dialogue comes, as it will eventually. But if this has been done to create the impression in the rest of the country in the midst of election season that the government is unsparing with Kashmiris, it can only be described as cutting the nose to spite the face.

CAPITAL GAINS

The move to tighten tax regulations for MNCs is welcome, but the key to attract investment is a stable framework

INDIA'S TAX AUTHORITY is now considering a revamp of the rules for taxing multinational companies as well as digital firms, with a committee of the Central Board of Direct Taxes recommending changes to protect the country's revenue interests. At the core of this move is the issue of taxation rights on income generated by global firms operating across various jurisdictions in an age of digitalisation and profit shifting or tax avoidance strategies marked by exploiting loopholes to transfer profits to low tax destinations.

The rise of the digital and the gig economy in particular, has made the concept of a physical presence as a threshold for taxation redundant, posing challenges to governments and fiscal experts. The OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) G-20 Base Erosion and Profit Sharing Project recognises this situation and envisages a global consensus on tax rules by 2020. It has now forced governments to consider fundamental changes to taxation rules to ensure that tax revenues are not eroded. Indian authorities, like some of their peers globally, will now have to firm up their approach on profit attribution — the allocation of profits between jurisdictions where customers are located and where factors of production are located and where supply side activities are carried out. The OECD model tax convention favours granting taxation rights to the country of residence of the taxpayer, an approach which India and some other countries do not agree with. Rather, they argue taxation rights should be allowed in jurisdictions where value is created and which contributes to demand by economic activity. The other proposal which is now being considered is a formula for allocation of such taxes among countries based on sales, payroll or wages besides assets and property.

Indian authorities have argued rightly that adopting the OECD model will mean not just losing revenues but also taxing local firms, putting them at a disadvantage compared to their foreign firms, with an adverse impact on competitiveness, demand, revenues and profits. For a country like India, which needs greater inflow of capital to boost growth and create more jobs, what will count more is not the new formula or rules for taxing cross-border activities, but the stability and predicatability of its tax regime. That's what foreign investors fret about.

MIND OUR LANGUAGE

Prince Charles has sparked an insular furore by writing in a world language. Will English fundamentalisms never cease?

COLLATERAL DAMAGE OF the devastating fire in Notre Dame cathedral has spread across the Channel to wreak havoc in England. The sceptered isle stood appalled as Prince Charles wrote a letter of commiseration to the Élysée Palace, rife with typically American spellings like "realize", "agonizing" and "civilization". A native English speaker would have used the letter "s" in place of "z", and conspiracy theories broke out. Had the House of Windsor been infiltrated by a foreign power? Or was Meghan Markle handling her father-in-law's air mail while on maternity leave?

Historically, the English have had an easy relationship with spelling. Their language is a salad bowl of autochthonous material, along with Roman, Nordic and Romance imports. One of the oldest English songs describes the loud song of the cuckoo as "lhide sing cucu", and it never bothered anyone. The trouble started when Dr Johnson systematised the vocabulary and schools fell in line, insisting on standard spellings. And so words ending with -ize and -ise were etched in stone. The very same grammatical ending was spelled different according to whether the parent word was derived directly from the Greco-Roman world or aged in Romance languages before crossing the Channel. And then those words fell into the hands of Noah Webster, America's foremost dictionary-compiler, and he decided that -ize was less confusing and more American.

But now, English is our language. It belongs to the whole world and insular starchiness about spelling and grammar are simply ridiculous. Especially because the language has grown organically, in a disorderly sort of way. So organically that its native obsessions have travelled freely to foreign shores. Not many years ago, a society to put the "e" back in "judgment" (the favoured US spelling) was reported from America. It's just the sort of language fundamentalism that the English are notorious for.

RESERVATIONS ARE OFTEN used by castes to achieve something more than redressing deprivation. The Kapu agitation in Andhra Pradesh is one such example. Unlike the agitations of Jats in Haryana, Marathas in Maharashtra and Patels in Gujarat, which are marked by "fear of below", that is, the relative mobility of SCs and OBCs, the Kapu anxiety is driven by both "fear from below" vis-à-vis the mobility of SCs and other OBCs and "fear of above" — the uninterrupted hegemony of Kammas and Reddys.

While the demand for quotas is shared by all Kapus, the reasons differ on class lines. On the one hand, the Kapu elites long for political dominance in proportion to their numerical strength. The Kapu agitation intensified after the creation of Telangana as their share in the Andhra population went up from 16 per cent to 25 per cent. On the other hand, poor Kapus see reservations as a vehicle of mobility in education and jobs. But how pronounced is socio-economic differentiation between these two extremes? The last two rounds (2004-05 and 2011-12) of *The India Human Development Survey* helps to assess the Kapu claims of deprivation.

Unsurprisingly, the Kammas are at the top with the average annual per capita income (2011-12) at Rs 38,232, followed by the other upper castes at Rs 26,645 and Rs 25,169 for Reddys. Kapus average only Rs 23,021. The figures for the OBCs and SCs are Rs 21,172 and Rs 18,345 respectively. Seven years (2004-05) earlier, Kammas were ranked lower than the other upper castes (Rs 11,761 against Rs 15,027). Kammas incomes have multiplied 3.3 times in the seven years as against 2.4 times for the Kapus and 2.2 for Reddys, and 1.8 times in the case of other upper castes.

Kammas are also the most educated in Andhra Pradesh and is the only community that has not demanded reservation. They control most of the private educational institutions in the state. The percentage of graduates among Kammas is 12.2 as against 9.9 for Kapus, 7.5 among Reddys, 4.9 per cent in the case of OBCs and 4.4 per cent in Dalits. Seven years earlier, it was 3.8 per cent for Kapus, lower than that of Reddys (5.4 per cent). Credit is due to Kapu caste associations for the community's progress in education in the last decade.

However, only about 10 per cent of Kapus are in the salaried class as against 12 per cent

among other OBCs and 13 per cent among SCs. Kapus' anxieties towards lower castes lay in this lower representation in salaried jobs. While Kapus are an agrarian community, only 32 per cent of them are cultivators as against 57 per cent among Kammas and 56 per cent for Reddys. Notably, a good number of Kapus are labourers — about 37 per cent as against 12 per cent Kammas and 23 per cent Reddys. This is the point of anxiety of Kapus, particularly those who are placed at the bottom 60 per cent of the group whose average income is much lower than that of average income of Dalits and OBCs. Kapus is the only dominant community in direct conflict with Dalits, especially in the Godavari and Guntur districts. It is in this region that the massacre of five Dalits in Laxmipeta village took place. This violence arose from conflict over ownership claims on surplus land allotted to Madduvalasa irrigation project. The Kapus attacked the Malas on June 12, 2012 leaving five Dalits dead. This kind of clashes needs to be seen in the context of class differentiation within Kapus. The poorest 20 per cent not only earn 14 times less than the richest 20 per cent of the Dalits (Rs 4,320 against Rs 62,172), they also earn less than the poorest 20 per cent Dalits. In fact, the bottom three quintiles earn less than that of Dalits.

This is largely due because the Kapus' economic mobility is a recent phenomenon; it also came through the purchase of land sold by the Kammas in coastal Andhra. Reddys and Kammas, the other two agricultural castes managed to lift themselves economically, moved ahead in education and jobs earlier than the Kapus, and then, migrated to the cities. Using the Green Revolution, the Kammas consolidated their socio-economic dominance while Reddys inherited political power through their dominance in the Congress. The state continues to be controlled by Kammas and Reddys, whose population is much smaller than that of Kapus.

Since the formation of Andhra Pradesh in 1956, political power has been cornered by Kammas and Reddys. In the past 64 years, 32 years saw chief ministers from the Reddy community while 22 were from Kamma community. The Kammas won office following the formation of the Telugu Desam in 1983. The rise of Kapu elites has been facilitated mostly by the economic reforms initiated in 1991.

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THE USEFUL TEDIOUS OF TALKING

Imran Khan wants peace and dialogue. Engaging Pakistan is in India's interest



KHALED AHMED

PRIME MINISTER IMRAN Khan wants peace and wants to talk. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will not talk till after he has won the next election. This will make Pakistan retreat to its reflex of "brave defiance", as both kill each other's civilians on the Line of Control through senseless firing. India is under the spell of a vote-winning Hindutva; Pakistan risks taking the familiar path of jihad. Both need to talk. But they have talked numberless times in the past. Every time they talked, their bureaucrats ritually embraced deadlock to appear heroic back home. India said: First stop "cross-border terrorism". Pakistan said: First let's talk about Kashmir.

This year, for the first time, Pakistan has changed tack. It thought of normalisation of relations with India before frontloading Kashmir. There was the Kartarpur Corridor facilitating Sikhs in their devotional travels inside Pakistan. Planned also was a similar facilitation of Hindu visitors to the Sharada Peeth shrine. It seemed Pakistan was breaking the code of its past behaviour under Imran Khan with the tall figure of the Army Chief General Bajwa looming behind him in support. Then an old reflex reasserted itself when Pakistan included a Sikh in its negotiating team on the Kartarpur Corridor. This was an unwise quirk that is difficult to com-

prehend. Focused on the coming polls, India happily backed off. Luckily, the Kartarpur Corridor is once again on line, which underlines its bilateral importance.

There is a path of "normalisation" available within the "connectivity" concept developed under SAARC when Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was applying his mind to the Indo-Pak deadlock. He saw "normalisation" of relations in "free travel", "free trade", and "free road access" through each other's territory, apart from gas pipelines going to India from Iran and Turkmenistan through Pakistan, thus getting rid of the "revisionist" agendas that trigger war and terrorism through non-state actors.

India could have fought "revisionist" wars with China but it chose "trade" instead and is now a high-growth third-world state that the world looks up to. Bangladesh could have taken a revisionist stance on the many disputes it has with its big western neighbour, but under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, it has preferred "normalisation" to war and won for itself a growth-rate that shames a bankrupt Pakistan from which it separated in 1971.

It looks as if Prime Minister Imran Khan is willing to change tack. He may have sensed that the world is not with Pakistan as a revisionist state. The world doesn't want Kashmir to fall to Pakistan even if Pakistan's case is legally persuasive. The country's "internal" sovereignty has been so undermined by its "revisionism" eastward that it can only be a spawning-ground for global terrorism. One is persuaded that Prime Minister Khan has grasped the dire situation in which he finds himself. Without knowing it, he may be trying to tackle a "revisionist" economy that started dying decades ago because of Kashmir.

Maybe PM Modi will revert to Pakistan after he has won this year's election and walks back his Hindutva that is booby-trapping India's own multicultural society. Those in India who think it's no use talking to Pakistan when it is sinking should know that waiting for Pakistan to evaporate from the face of the earth may take too long and lose India the chance to help Pakistan at arriving at a bilaterally acceptable solution, which will actually be Pakistan's "self-correction" in disguise. It is quite possible that Pakistan has lost its ability to set things right at home even if it wants to, in which case it needs to be helped rather than challenged.

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APRIL 20, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO



BIHAR CM RESIGNS
BIHAR CHIEF MINISTER Karpoori Thakur tendered his resignation to the acting governor, K B N Singh. This followed his failure to win the vote of confidence from the Janata Legislature Party. Singh accepted his resignation and urged him to continue in office till alternate arrangements were made. The JLP is meeting again soon to elect another leader. The defeat of Thakur, who held office for 22 months, betokens the settling up of scores with the BLD, which kept the Jana Sangh out of power in Uttar Pradesh.

for the defeat in Uttar Pradesh, the Jana Sangh group in the Janata is expecting Charan Singh to retaliate at the Centre. Jana Sangh leaders fear that Singh may well threaten to quit the cabinet if their nominees, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, L K Advani and Brijlal Verma, are not ousted from the government. Knowing Morarji Desai's resistance to any such suggestion, Jana Sangh leaders wonder if Singh's close supporters have already reached an understanding with the other constituents of the Janata as well as with the Congress. It is argued that in case Singh threatens to resign, he must be willing to back it up with numbers in the Lok Sabha to be able to precipitate "things", if need be.

MISHRA DEATH PROBE
V M TARKUNDE, an eminent jurist, is believed to have proposed in a report submitted to the central government that the case filed by the CBI accusing some persons of having murdered the former railway minister, L N Mishra, should be withdrawn. Also, a fresh inquiry should be ordered into the explosion which caused the death of the minister on January 2, 1975. Tarkunde, who gave his report after examining the documents connected with the case in February — at the request of the Bihar government — opines that the case filed by the CBI is not factual, and those accused of the crime have been wrongly implicated.



13 THE IDEAS PAGE

Half MPs, half votes

The first-past-the-post system leads to the exclusion, and disempowerment, of more than half the voters from the power structure



NALINI SINGH

MANEKA GANDHI'S ARROGANT rebuke to Muslim voters in her new constituency, Sultanpur, on April 11, to vote for her, and if they don't, she will not help them when they seek her out as their MP, is an inevitable consequence of the electoral system that we're following — and of course, her assumed entitlement. Befitting a dynast in the BJP, Maneka Gandhi discarded niceties to shoot straight from the hip but in doing so, she told a bitter truth, which the hapless Indian voter has "normalised" over the last 70 years. Truth: MPs do not represent their full constituencies. They are Half MPs.

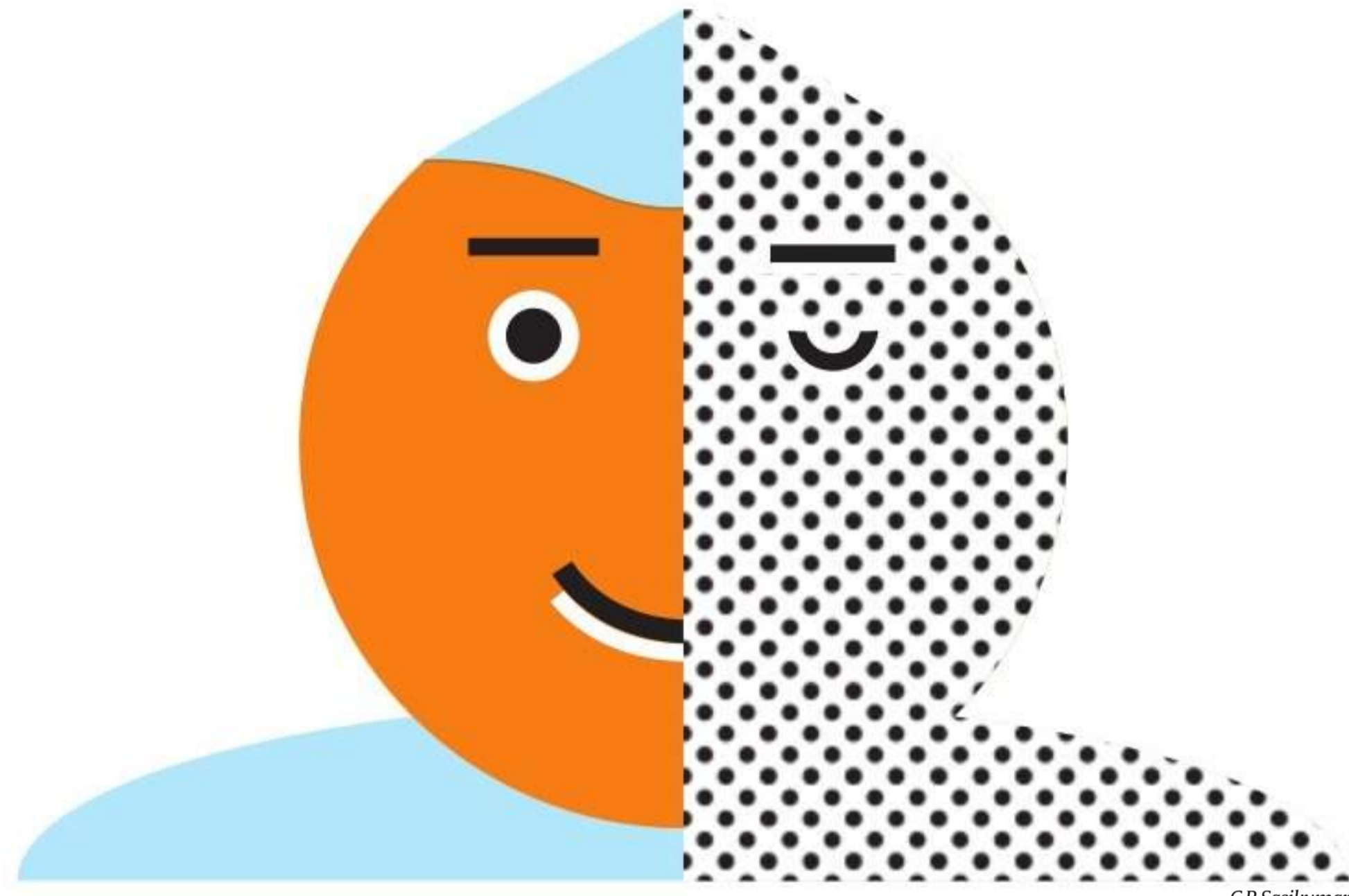
In the ongoing national elections, will the 543 MPs be elected by all the Indians who vote by May 19th (the actual voters)? Data shows that in the current first-past-the-post system (FPTP), Parliament is elected by only about 45 per cent of the actual voters whose representatives become Lok Sabha MPs. But what about the 55 per cent of the actual voters who do not vote for the winning candidate, and therefore, their votes are "wasted"? Who represents them for five years? As per Maneka Gandhi, the elected MP does not represent them. Fact: Nobody represents them because they did not vote for the winner. This is the first stage of exclusion of more than half the voters from the power structure for five years.

Now consider a deeper injustice embedded in our 70-year-old FPTP system. While only 45 per cent of the actual voters may have voted for the winner across all parties, of these lucky voters who scored the bull's eye and voted for the winner, only a much smaller fraction will have voted for the party or alliance whose MPs will actually form the government, and rule over the entire country for five years. So this is the second stage at which we, the voters, are distanced from power for five years.

Illustratively, consider the reality of the 2014 Lok Sabha poll results. With just 31 per cent of the actual vote, the BJP won an absolute majority of 282 seats. Add to this its allies' share, and we see that the NDA's vote share was 38.5 per cent of actual voters. So only a little over one-third of actual voters provided the basis of forming the NDA government, which has ruled over us for five years. Nearly two-thirds of Indians did not vote for those leaders, who imposed their own model of nationhood, identity and growth on the country. So, for the last five years, six out of 10 Indians have gone unrepresented in the power equations that underpin our existence.

The UPA government of 2009-14 was also formed on the strength of about 37 per cent of the actual vote, and then too, two-thirds of India's actual voters were not represented in government. Over the decades our "strong, decisive" governments have been formed on the basis of a shrinking voter base.

In the next five years, 2019-2024, crores of Indian voters will shuffle around as citizens of a lesser India, since they will have a hostile/indifferent MP in Parliament who they did not vote for. Each candidate knows the vote count in each booth, and so local communities get identified as "for" or "against" the winning candidate. Consequences abound as the MP



C R Sasikumar

audits booth-wise results.

Surely such a distortion of voters' will is totally unacceptable. A grave injustice has been caused by our unquestioning acceptance of the FPTP system — a system devised by a small island country which is now facing the poetic justice of the Brexit insanity, arising from a referendum in 2016.

So why are enough voices not being raised in India against the narrow-based FPTP, which has been condemning about two-thirds of actual Indian voters to political insignificance for five years? Is it because leaders have led us to believe that among the worse, this is the best alternative — TIBA?

Political pundits may stop reading now since what I describe below is a well-known, much more inclusive sab ka saath electoral system of polling — proportional representation.

But to build a case for an alternative system, consider another set of data points: In 2014, on average, the BJP needed six lakh votes to win a LS seat, the Congress needed 24 lakh votes per LS seat that it won; JD(U) won a LS seat with only 3.3 lakh votes but for Mayawati's BSP even 2.03 crore votes were insufficient to win a single LS seat and neither could the DMK snatch even one LS seat with 96 lakh votes!

A polling skew of this magnitude is persuasive evidence that the FPTP system assesses voters unequally, depending on which party they vote for. In the 2014 election, a vote for the BJP was four times more likely to make its candidate win, than a vote for a Congress candidate. And a vote for the BSP was infinitely powerless in achieving a victory for Behenji's candidate. Since votes are correlated to caste and community in large parts of our country, think of the exclusion of caste groups from the Lok Sabha due to the FPTP.

Clearly, the FPTP is gaming the enthusiastic and innocent Indian voter, and will do so in the 2019 LS election currently underway in the country. Parties with concentrated votes in dense clusters (vote vaults) will be rewarded under the FPTP, and other parties with more diffused votes in larger swathes of the country are likely to be punished.

Ninety-four countries around the world

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The writer is a senior journalist

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Mr Modi has always been an adherent of Hindu nationalism, but many who voted for him in 2014 hoped he would set aside sectarian issues and focus on improving the economy."
—THE WASHINGTON POST

Awards, beyond symbolism

The honours bestowed upon PM Modi by several countries signal the success of his foreign policy initiatives



VIJAY CHAUTHAIWALE

THERE ARE SEVERAL "firsts" in the foreign policy initiatives of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It began with an invitation to all SAARC country leaders for the NDA government's swearing-in ceremony. There are at least seven countries which no Indian head of government or state ever visited before 2014. Modi also addressed the British Parliament and World Economic Forum. His multilateral initiatives like the Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FPIP) Summit in Jaipur, India-Africa Forum Summit-III (IAFS-III), where participation by African countries was increased from 17 to 54, participation of all the 10 ASEAN countries in India's Republic Day celebrations, the first India-Nordic Summit in Stockholm deserve special mention. There were more than 20 countries where no high-level visit from India had taken place for more than a decade; the gap was bridged by the Modi government.

Another significant aspect of this story is the number of prestigious awards conferred on PM Modi by various countries and UN bodies. He has received the King Abdullahiz Sash Award of Saudi Arabia, Amir Abdulla Khan Award of Afghanistan, Grand Collar of the State of Palestine, the UN Champions of the Earth award, Seoul Peace Prize 2018 and the Zayed Medal of UAE. The latest is the highest order of the Russian Federation, the Order of St Andrew the Apostle.

Four of these awards are the highest civilian awards of the respective countries, while the UN award is for PM Modi's contribution to addressing climate change and the Korean award recognises his contribution to global peace. It is noteworthy that all four state awards are from Islamic countries.

When Modi took over as PM, everyone expected that he would strengthen relations with Israel but no one thought that he will take relations with Islamic countries to new heights. Modi became the first Indian PM to visit Israel. However, it's important to note that before visiting Israel, he visited all major oil-producing countries in the Middle East and strengthened our traditional relations with them. He didn't visit the West Bank during his Israel visit but went there separately, giving a clear signal that India will deal with Israel and Palestine independently.

Energy security is amongst the main agenda of Modi's foreign policy. India. In 2015, he negotiated the waiving off the penalty of one billion dollar by Qatar for lower intake of natural gas. In 2018, US President Donald Trump withdrew from the nuclear deal with Iran and imposed sanctions on the country. This could have been a major crisis for India as Iran was one of the top five crude suppliers of India. Moreover, the OPEC countries were determined to cut production of crude oil so as to "stabilise" oil prices. This resulted in significant rise of petrol/diesel prices in India. India convinced the US to exclude it from the ambit of sanc-

tions against Iran. Also thanks to the excellent relations with Saudi Arabia, New Delhi could convince Riyadh to take into consideration consumer interests in India. In a widely circulated interview, the Saudi energy minister admitted how PM Modi was forcefully arguing India's case and how they needed to listen to major consumer country like India. These negotiations prevented energy prices in India from skyrocketing.

These are short-term measures. India is also working on long-term energy security. Due to the excellent personal rapport between UAE's crown prince and PM Modi, a consortium of Indian companies have bought a 10 per cent stake in Lower Zakum offshore oil field of Abu Dhabi. It is India's first investment in a UAE oil field. In a mega investment of 44 billion dollars, the Saudi oil company Aramco will set up a refinery in the west coast of Maharashtra.

India-UAE cooperation is not confined to energy security and trade. Recent deportation of offenders from UAE to India, the UAE giving permission and extending all cooperation for building a grand Hindu temple in Abu Dhabi, presence of the UAE's Crown Prince chief guest at India's Republic Day parade show the depth of relations between the two countries. In spite of a threat of boycott from Pakistan, the UAE invited India as a guest of honour to the foreign minister's conclave of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

India-Saudi Arabia relations are also not confined to the energy sector. In February 2018, for the first time, Saudi Arabia invited India as a guest of honour to its prestigious annual "National Heritage and Cultural Festival", Janadriyah festival. Yoga has been recognised as a "sport" in Saudi Arabia, paving the way for coaching centres in that country. During his recent visit to India, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman announced investments of \$100 billion.

India is building the Chabahar port in Iran. It will significantly reduce the transportation cost of crude oil from Iran and enable better connectivity between India, Afghanistan and Iran — eventually with Central Asia and Russia, bypassing Pakistan. India and Iran also have common interests in combating terrorist groups in Pakistan.

In 2016, PM Modi and Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani inaugurated the Afghan-India friendship dam. India has also built the parliament building in Kabul and is committed to undertake more than 100 community development projects in Afghanistan, enabling the war-torn country to build democratic and civil institutions.

The prestigious awards conferred upon PM Modi by these countries need to be understood in these contexts. The fact that other recipients of most of these awards are mostly are leaders from developed countries — such as Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan, Former US President Barack Obama and President Xi Jinping of China — show India's rising stature in global affairs under Modi's leadership. These show a strengthening of bilateral ties with these countries. In the process, India has secured its strategic interests and strengthened its role as a global responsible power.

The writer is in-charge, Foreign Affairs Department, BJP



PREM SINGH

The justice and his report

Rajinder Sachar, a life-long socialist, showed the true picture of Indian Muslims

TODAY, APRIL 20, 2019, marks the first death anniversary of Justice Rajinder Sachar — a socialist visionary, a judge par excellence, a true secular democrat, an unrelenting champion of civil liberties and a wonderful human being. I personally feel a great sense of loss without him, particularly in my political activities. Sachar was very involved in the affairs of Socialist Party (India), which he and senior socialist leaders like Surendra Mohan, Bhai Vaidya, Pannal Surana and Keshav Jadhav formed in 2011 along with several young socialists. Sachar held on to the hope that the old glory of the Socialist Party and the original spirit of the movement/ideology will thrive once again in Indian politics. I often wondered about his optimism and used to ask him that if people around him did not respond adequately to his appeals, how could he hope that public in general would support his party and candidates? To that he only used to give an innocent smile, without a slightest sign of pessimism. His smile always kept us in a positive frame of mind.

In his later life, Sachar was known primarily for the Sachar Committee Report. The committee, headed by Justice Sachar, was constituted in 2005 by the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh with the aim to prepare a report about social, economic and educational status of the Muslim community in India. The committee's 403-page re-

port was presented in the Lok Sabha on November 30, 2006. The findings and recommendations of the report immediately became a topic of sharp debate in political, social and intellectual circles. The report was considered a mirror that showed the true picture of the Muslim community. Consequently, it received praise from a large part of the intelligentsia as well as from political parties. Although there were some dissenting voices about the findings, recommendations and methodology of the report, it was well received by most people. After its publication, there were severe reactions as well.

The report brought attention for the first time to the ever-growing economic inequality and social insecurity and alienation of Muslims since Independence. It found, on the basis of official data, that the Muslim population, estimated at over 138 million in 2001, were under-represented in the civil services, police, military and in politics. Muslims were more likely to be poor, illiterate, unhealthy and to have trouble with the law in comparison to the other Indians. Thus the myth of "Muslim appeasement" was thoroughly exposed. Justice Sachar's activities, including this Report, were guided by socialist ideology. First and foremost, he was a staunch Lohian socialist.

Soon, there was a race among various political parties to make promises in their

manifestoes to implement the recommendations of the Sachar Committee Report. The only exception was BJP which, in fact, opposed the report vehemently. However, when one reviews the progress of by the central and the state governments, particularly with respect to the implementation of the report's recommendations, the picture appears quite dismal.

The report states that the minorities, especially the Muslims, have been the ignored factor in all central governments. Amongst the various recommendations, the Prime Minister's High Level Committee Report had recommended the establishment of an Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) as an instrument to prevent discrimination against minorities in the private sector in matters such as housing and employment. It was an important point, since courts cannot interfere in cases of discrimination in the private sector. This recommendation has been inexcusably sidelined. The EOC can be set up by the state governments without taking permission from the Centre. A very urgent recommendation of the report dealt with the unfairness of divisions of electoral constituencies, which results in less number of Muslims in the legislature compared to their proportion in the population. This anomaly arises from the irrational demarcation of seats in the legislature.

In Uttar Pradesh, for example, there is

abundant potential for a substantial number of Muslims to win seats. As per the report, to address this, the delimitation of constituencies in a fair manner is essential. But, on the contrary, the constituencies with a substantial number of Muslims have been reserved for Schedule Castes, and constituencies with a substantial number of SC voters are unreserved. This is unfair to both the Muslim and SC electorate. The Sachar Committee had hoped that this issue would receive immediate government attention because the Delimitation Commission was at that time active and, evidently, any suggestion or exercise with respect to delimitation had to be undertaken during the term of the then Delimitation Commission. But, the Committee's suggestion was ignored during the delimitation.

But now, as far as the Muslim minority is concerned, politics has taken a different turn after the advent of Narendra Modi on the national scene. As a result, no political party has mentioned the recommendations of the Sachar Committee in their manifesto. Justice Sachar wanted to live on till this election. Unfortunately, his health did not permit him to fulfil that desire. Had he been alive today, he would have felt very upset about this development.

The writer teaches Hindi at Delhi University and is president of Socialist Party (India)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

OFFICIALS TO BLAME

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Coming down from ivory towers' (IE, April 19). The problems of huge bureaucratic centralisation and its inertia were first highlighted by Jawaharlal Nehru. The problem persists till date. Bureaucratic hurdles, the unwillingness of officials to cede ground and concentration of vast powers in the bureaucracy have inhibited the country's growth. The worst affected are the universities, the intelligentsia, the think tanks and deserving citizens. Decentralisation of executive power is a step towards empowering all stakeholders to play their bit in nation building.

Anirudh Parashar, Solan

MATTER OF DIGNITY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'When Rahul descends' (IE, April 19). Politicians losing their temper and slinging mud at each other in public meetings vitiates the political atmosphere. They need to maintain the dignity of their positions.

Rakshanda Kolekar, via e-mail

BJP'S DOUBLESPEAK

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'The truth about RSS' (IE, April, 18). The article is a fitting reply to Manmohan Vaidya's article on the relationship between Gandhi and the RSS. His lucid explanations backed by neutral references make it clear that Gandhi never backed

LETTER OF THE WEEK

SPACE FOR NEW

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Level-playing fields matters', (IE, April 16) In Rousseau words, "Laws are always useful to those with possessions and harmful to those who have nothing". State funding of elections could lead to registered political parties cornering public resources. It might end up giving an advantage to a few political parties, which is not good for a democratic polity. Political formations should reflect the changing dynamics of our demography. There should be funds for such a purpose.

Sudip Kumar Dey, Kolkata

the RSS. The compulsion of the RSS and BJP to show respect to Gandhi actually reaffirm the relevance of Gandhian philosophy in today's world. However, the irony is that on one hand the BJP government is celebrating the 150th birthday of Mahatma with an ostentatious display and on other hand, the party has selected Pragya Thakur to contest from Bhopal.

Nitin Navin, Delhi