

## How to be a bigot



### COUNTRY CODE

RAHUL JACOB

The morning assembly at a large primary and middle school, not far from Begusarai in Bihar, seemed like a rainbow after the endless torrents of abuse for which this election campaign will be long remembered. The boys and girls in blue uniforms were solemnly reciting passages from the Indian Constitution as if they were verses from a prayer. The TV anchor Ravish Kumar remarked on the beauty of this tradition, but the principal and senior teachers were matter-of-fact about the daily ritual as if they regarded it as a building block of education, as routine as learning to count.

Perhaps that is how it should be, but in this season of inspired mean-spirited campaigning, it still seemed remarkable that we are more likely to learn civics lessons from school children than our leaders. Instead, we have had almost daily lessons in bigotry and inappropriately wrapping oneself in the uniforms of our troops. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has led from the front in speeches such as the one in Latur where he asked first-time voters to dedicate their vote to Pulwama martyrs as well as to those who carried out the Balakot strikes. One is sympathetic for all members of the armed forces when they are invoked so frequently in the heat of a political campaign in a democracy where, unlike in Pakistan, the army does not have a role to play. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Adityanath's comments have been as ugly as ever but nothing he does shocks anymore.

No one should be surprised that the foreign press have momentarily shrugged off their obsession with Donald Trump, Brexit and China and are training their sights on India as never before. Last week, *The New York Times* ran a front page story on the plight of Muslims in India while Reuters reported that "the head of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling Hindu nationalist party took his invective against illegal Muslim immigrants to a new level this week as the general election kicked off, promising to throw them into the Bay of Bengal". Gurcharan Das, author of *The Difficulty of Being Good*, waxed banal in *Foreign Affairs* magazine, lamenting Modi's lack of purposeful economic reforms. "Had he delivered, I might even have forgiven his distasteful ethno-nationalist politics", writes Das who grandiloquently reminds us he was among the first, er, liberals to endorse Modi in 2014.

Much more significant has been the Supreme Court's intervention in this hate-filled campaign when questioning counsel, for the Election Commission (EC), on when it intended to act. I have sympathy of a sort for the EC given that the violations this election come fast and furious and the ruling party is allegedly responsible for so many, but the exchange between the exercised Supreme Court judges and the EC representative last week must count as among the most unsettling in the history of Indian democracy: "So you are basically saying you are toothless and powerless against hate speeches", the judges said.

Not to be outdone, Rahul Gandhi has jumped in with his juvenile observation that every crook appears to have Modi as a last name. Creditable as the Congress' humanist manifesto is on doing away with such arcane colonial holdovers as the laws on what constitutes sedition, I have not yet come across a sharp rebuttal of the BJP's minority-baiting from its senior leaders. Then again, the frightening campaign Rajiv Gandhi oversaw in the 1984 elections, not long after Sikhs had been massacred by Congress-led mobs on the streets of Delhi, was notorious as well. "Will Your Grocery List, in the Future, include Acid Bulbs, Iron Rods, Daggers?" read one of the advertisements created by Rediffusion.

The enduring problem for India is that while illiberal democracies the world over are hostage to abusive campaigns on WhatsApp and at election rallies, our young population are both poor, under-employed or without jobs and have had an education that is a far cry from the school Ravish Kumar lauded in Bihar, let alone the kind that we have enjoyed in urban India. Our current leaders, meanwhile, are a kind of endlessly diminishing return on democracy. By contrast, I spent part of this spring reading Ramachandra Guha's riveting account of Mahatma Gandhi's evolution into a leader in South Africa. His deep and yet routine connection with Muslims, Christians, Jewish as well as lower caste Hindus is a lesson in cosmopolitanism.

As a "Hindu Christian" to borrow L K Advani's ugly terminology from several campaigns ago, watching this frightening election has made me wonder what acts of ritualistic assimilation will be required of us who are not the real kind of Indian. Will being able to sing the wonderfully melodious *gayatri mantra* be necessary or can I get by arguing that I say "Om" (in yoga class twice a week) many times more often than as an agnostic I mouth "Amen". Perhaps it would be better for India if reciting parts of the Constitution every day were used as a foundation for citizenship instead.

## The man who hated to fly

Naresh Goyal would get nervous and pray each time a flight took off. Now, there's no Jet Airways and nowhere to go



### PLAIN POLITICS

ADITI PHADNIS

Everyone has their own favourite stories about Naresh Goyal. Here are a few.

NG (as his friends know him) was from Patiala in Punjab. He lost his father very early in life. His mother (whom he called *Beji*) was an adopted sister of Seth Charan Das, major-domo to the Maharajah of Patiala. She begged Das to take NG, the youngest of four brothers, under his wing. Seth Charan Das was an entrepreneur and visionary. In the late 1960s (1965 to be exact) few used airlines for international travel. At that time, it was Seth Charan Das who offered to become general sales agent (GSA) for

what was then called Middle Eastern Airways.

The GSA was a concept that began in India. Although international airlines like British Airways, Air France and KLM had huge offices, they had no wherewithal to cater to passengers who were coming straight from villages in Punjab, for instance. The GSA recognised and serviced the distribution needs of big international airlines for a commission. GSAs were given territory and an office in Delhi. In those days, Jalandhar was the main hub for Punjab and the KLM and British Airways GSA used to operate from there.

Seth Charan Das was a strategic thinker. In addition to Middle Eastern Airways, he managed to get the GSA-ship of Air France and two other European airlines as well. By the time NG came to him, Seth Charan Das had established a business but needed someone to run it day-to-day. NG was that person.

NG learnt on the job. In the mid 1970s, he got friendly with an Air France manager and became the airline GSA for Goa — but he could sell in Bombay. That was big business and that's how he grew his company. He got Europe and added other airlines to his portfolio. In 1972, he became the all-India GSA for Gulf Air. The Gulf jobs boom was about to start. He rode on the crest of the wave. In the early 1970s, he negotiated with Philippines Airlines and

became their regional head: Although it had no flights to India! But it got him entry into IATA which helped him in networking. He has not missed a single IATA AGM ever. At one of them, he told Marion Blakley, the US Federal Aviation Authority chief: "I need to talk to you, don't go anywhere", and Blakley just stood while he went around the room pumping hands and pressing flesh. He took his time and the representative of the most powerful country in the world waited...

In 1996, CM Ibrahim was Civil Aviation Minister. It was a coalition government, the best time for a person like Naresh Goyal to get things done. The policy was a cap of 49 per cent FDI in a domestic airline; 100 per cent for non-resident Indians (NRIs) — and by then he had become an NRI — but no investment by any foreign airline directly or indirectly. That was how he scuttled Singapore International Airlines (SIA) investment in a new airline the Tatas wanted to start. It helped that he knew everyone in government.

Jet had standing instructions about a shortlist of politicians who were to be upgraded. But there are other ways of influencing them. Once, Sharad Pawar was sitting in an airport lounge watching cricket. Naresh Goyal has never played a game in his life. He doesn't know the first thing about his cricket. Those

who know him were amused to see him sitting next to Pawar, watching him closely and pretending to follow the game, applauding when Pawar applauded, although he probably didn't know the front of the crease from the back!

Take the time Jet was about to be listed on the stock exchange. It was 2008. Hyderabad was hosting the air show. There was a lavish party at the Falaknuma Palace Hotel. Praful Patel was the Minister for Civil Aviation and there was talk that Jet might get permission to fly to the United States — it was a very big deal.

Just around that time, in a bid to downsize, NG had sacked a whole lot of cabin crew and ground staff. So on the one hand there was this lavish dinner at the Falaknuma, on the other, Jet Airways staff were demonstrating at the Hyderabad Airport and sending petitions to Praful Patel that they had hungry children to feed. The government-run airline Air India was saying piously: "We will never sack anyone the way private airlines do".

Patel, who was at the Falaknuma, was embarrassed and furious. So NG came up with a plan. He looked very serious as he called a press conference later that evening. There he said: "My mother came to me in my dream last night. She said: 'Naresh, what are you doing? These people have families and children. How can you let them go?' So I have decided to take back my orders. Nobody will be sacked."

Of course, over a period of time, those employees were transferred to such remote places that they had no choice but to quit.

The irony is: Naresh Goyal hated to fly. He would get nervous and pray each time a flight took off. Now, there's no Jet Airways and nowhere to go!

BRUNCH WITH BS ▶ VINEY SINGH | CEO | FABINDIA

## Design for change

Singh talks to Manavi Kapur about how he plans to expand the Fabindia brand without diluting its equity

Inside the Fabindia Experience Centre in New Delhi's Lajpat Nagar, a café, an interior design studio, retail space and a play centre for kids come together like pieces of a puzzle. I am reminded of a massive Muji store in Plaza Singapura, Singapore. The Japanese brand has a sprawling space that houses various categories of products, a nutrition-centric café and a design studio. IKEA's meatballs at the eatery inside its stores are almost legendary.

Fabindia launched its first experience centre in 2017 in Vasant Kunj — today it has 10 and plans to take this number up to 30 by 2020 — just a year after Viney Singh joined the company as managing director. After 19 years in Unilever, a stint at Reliance Infocomm and 10 years with the Landmark Group, the switch to a crafts-centric company like Fabindia seems almost out of character. "There's been a huge learning curve, especially when it comes to learning about Indian crafts, weaves and the products that we sell," he says.

When John Bissell set up Fabindia in 1960, he worked with craftspeople with a certain aesthetic in mind, one that has stayed with Fabindia even as it goes through different seasons of fashion. The block-printed *kurtas*, its indigo range, the *chikankari* saris and even its solid cotton shirts all sport a design unity. Singh is quick to add that his design sensibilities were always aligned with Fabindia, even when he was just a customer and not heading its business. "It's been a process of tremendous appreciation of what has gone into building this business and the product categories, especially the work that has gone into creating this brand over the past 60 years," he says.

And in nearly three years, Singh has acquired a remarkable knowledge of Indian weaves and textile traditions that would make any handloom enthusiast envious — I certainly am. He explains that the Nehru jacket he is wearing features a coarse weave from Amroha in Uttar Pradesh. His shirt has an abstract block-print design. "Personally, I am a huge fan of ajrakh and ikkat," he says. His wife, Ruma Singh, a wine writer and journalist, has played a significant role in developing the Singh's yen for food, wine and travel. As has the fact that Singh's father was a tea entrepreneur, working with plantations in Assam, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. "Though my family traces its roots to a small district near Jodhpur in Rajasthan, I have lived in 10 different states in India," says Singh. College took him to Chennai (Loyola College) and then to Jamshedpur (XLRI). He shuttles between his home in Delhi and Bengaluru, when he's not travelling to Fabindia's craft clusters learning about its business at the grassroots.

We pause to place our order at the Fabcafe inside the experience centre. It is almost noon, so we settle for a light brunch. Being a weekend, the space is buzzing with diners, and the boisterous laughter from a table nearby often overpowers Singh's mellow voice. He settles for a tri-grain *papdi chaat* medley, a healthier alternative to Delhi's popular street delicacy, and I opt for the *ajwain* croissant breakfast sandwich that has eggs, chicken and sun-dried tomatoes. Fabcafe calls itself an "inspired Indian bistro", with an Indian fusion menu that is made from organic produce. It almost feels like a food version of Fabindia's retail products.

Between mouthfuls of the *papdi* **With a reach wider than almost any handloom and handicraft brand — 293 stores across 105 Indian cities and 14 international stores — Fabindia has a network like none other**

*chaat*, Singh talks about the other brands in the market. He believes that it is just a question of widening the basket, offering more to the consumer to choose from. "I think this growth is essential to build the ecosystem," he says.

That may be true, but a huge Fabindia fan base has also lately been disappointed with the prohibitively priced apparel at the store. A tiny embroidery detail on the neck or the hemline often doubles the price of a simple cotton *kurta*. Even the home décor section that has been a great one-stop-shop for gifts now faces competition from cheaper brands offering similar aesthetics. Since Fabindia is a favourite with expats and foreign tourists, these prices seemed justified for that audience. Today, designers and boutique brands are riding the sustainability and handloom wave and offering products only at a small premium over Fabindia's range. For a customer willing to pay that price, it would only make sense to buy something more unique than Fabindia's mass-produced designs.

But since the introduction of the goods and services tax, Fabindia's products have seen some amount of price correction. Singh says that this is also because the volume of products with a lower price point has gone up in the apparel category. The original Left-liberal buyer could well be back at Fabindia. As would the middle-income buyer looking for a slightly blingy apparel range for occasion wear. This is also why Fabindia's brand for fusion Western wear, was amalgamated into the main apparel category in this month. Nearly 75 per cent of the brand's business comes from the apparel segment.

A larger question about livelihoods and community development haunts the handloom sector in India. A majority of young



ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA

weavers don't want to take their family's tradition forward and opt for better paying jobs in the cities instead. Fabindia is trying to keep craft traditions alive through design support, Singh says. "We try to strengthen our relationship with the craftspeople by offering them design support. This makes their designs more contemporary and thus, more marketable," he explains. That's a fairly obvious route to take. The Bissell family,

though, has considered its crafts suppliers as shareholders and shared a larger chunk of the profits than many big brands are known to have done. Singh sidesteps the details of these profit-sharing arrangements but says that the company works closely to ensure greater female participation in the handicraft process.

Singh also refuses to comment on the case that the Khadi and Village Industries Commission filed against Fabindia first in 2015 and then in 2018 for "illegally" using the khadi trademark. In September 2018, Fabindia gave an undertaking that it would stop using the khadi mark on its products. Fabindia now only uses the All India Artisans and Craftworkers Welfare Association's craftmark that certifies its products are completely handmade.

My *ajwain* croissant is cold now and I struggle with the fork-and-knife. Singh notices this and is quick to ask me if I'd like to order something else. I decide to focus my attention on the cold brew iced coffee. Singh is not one to jump to answers to my questions. He takes his time, sometimes even coming back to something I asked at the beginning of our conversation. "One is trying to see how we can strengthen processes within the business and this is where my own learnings have come in quite useful," he says. These largely revolve around business processes and now, marketing. Its loyalty programme, the FabFamily, is an effort to go beyond Fabindia's word-of-mouth marketing route. The rewards can be redeemed on shopping, but also on curated experiences such as forthcoming crafts tours or heritage holidays. This is also to incentivise customers who complain that Fabindia has no sale period, even when designer brands such as Raw Mango and boutiques like Ogaan do. Fabindia seems to also have given in to this, with its website offering a selection of products on discount.

But with a reach wider than almost any handloom and handicraft brand — 293 stores across 105 Indian cities and 14 international stores — Fabindia has a network like none other. And Singh now holds the charge to keep Bissell's legacy going and expand it without diluting the brand.

## It's time to choose



### PEOPLE LIKE THEM

GEETANJALI KRISHNA

As we approach phase three of the Lok Sabha election, politicians and their campaigns are trending on social media. Political spoofs and parodies are also hitting new highs. The one I laughed at the most was a parody of a Bollywood song video by Aisi Taisi Democracy. I'm no good at translating, but the gist of it is that in this election season, it is time for us to choose who will s\*\*\*\* us more. I found it funny then, but days later, when I had a chance encounter with Rajendra Kumar, a plumber, I realised that the parody packed quite a vicious little bite.

Kumar has been a plumber for the last 25 years. A little help from his father

enabled him to buy a small house in Delhi a few years ago. He earns about ₹30,000 a month, drives a motorcycle and is sending his eldest son to Delhi University and daughter to an expensive private school. All in all, not an uncomfortable situation, one would think.

However, it has taken a mere one month-long illness to turn his life upside down. For a couple of months, the 45-year-old had been experiencing pain in his right hip. "As a plumber, much of my work involves crouching and bending but I was able to manage," he said. One morning, however, he woke up to an excruciating pain and couldn't stand up. His alarmed family members rushed him to the nearest hospital. "Three days there, I was ₹46,000 down, but still had no idea what was wrong with me," he said. When his brother inquired if the hospital had any schemes for the needy, he was told that their household income was "too high" for them to qualify for the scheme. Finally, an expensive MRI indicated some degree of spinal spondylosis. The doctor advised physiotherapy and a month's rest.

While Kumar's income allows his family to live comfortably, he has meagre savings. For he supports not only his own family — wife, 20-year-old son and 16-year-old daughter on his income, he

also sends money to his aged mother who lives in a village near Mathura. "My bank balance was wiped out by the initial hospital fees and medicine expenses," he says. His younger brother loaned ₹25,000 but could little afford to part with more.

The forced bedrest gave Kumar time to think. "I have realised how vulnerable people like me are," he said. "We depend on daily work for our livelihood, which means that every day off that we take entails the loss of a day's income." Private medical hospitals are prohibitively expensive. Yet, people like Kumar cannot access the government's health and social security schemes as their income is, if there can be any such thing, "too high".

Consequently, Kumar has started accepting work whenever his son can take time off from studying for his college exams. "He's learning fast but I'd never want him to become a plumber like me," he said. No party, he says, has done anything to improve the vulnerabilities of India's vast unorganised sector. "Why should I even vote?" he asks. "People like me will continue to get shortchanged regardless of who's in power..." he says.

It really is, as the Aisi Taisi Democracy folk so aptly put it, time to choose who will s\*\*\*\* us most.

## A trip to Paris... has to wait



### PEOPLE LIKE US

KISHORE SINGH

My father's library was an eclectic one, its shelves lined with everything from Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* (mandatory reading then for army officers) to literary classics that included Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and Irving Stone's *Lust for Life*. I am not sure he'd read them all — surprisingly, we never talked about books at home — but as a voracious reader, I would devour everything I could lay my hands on even if I did not then fully comprehend Dostoevsky or Camus. Yet, one book I never made headway with was Victor Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, though not for lack of trying. With the stock of books exhausted, I'd poke

around his study for anything at all to read, but Hugo's love saga was heavy going. I never got past the first few pages, even if Paris was forever imprinted on my mind with the book's lurid cover featuring the eponymous hunchback.

It was a chilly spring day dappled with sunshine some three decades ago that I visited the Notre-Dame. Even though it towered over the skyline, there was something bleak about it. Inside, it was dark and forbidding, and I remember little of its treasures apart from the stained glass. A narrow staircase took us to the cathedral's parapets where, under the watchful eyes of stone gargoyles, the city, with the Seine threading through it, spread sunnily below. Someone amidst us had a camera, we posed for photographs against its ancient walls, the roll was given for developing in a local studio, and so it was, I returned from Paris clutching a handful of photographs.

A little after, I found myself engaged. My fiancée lived in Calcutta (as it was then), telephone connections were few and far in between, and so, in the absence of email, we wrote in long hand to each other. Photographs were requested, and since I had a batch from the Notre-Dame, these were duly dispatched by registered post. I didn't know then

that these were shared with her family, who decided they were probably faux studio shots. How would a lowly hack all those years ago have earned the foreign exchange to make his way to the city of romance? Maybe I was a show-off (at best), or a charlatan (at worst). It took surreptitious investigation conducted with the help of the slow Indian Postal Service to establish that the Notre-Dame in the background was as real as the person posing in front of it.

In due course, following our marriage, those photographs came back. "What was Paris like?" my wife asked. It had been a dream visit, and I was happy to share my memories of it with her, promising we would travel there together. "I want you to take pictures of me at the same spot," she said. I acquiesced, the photographs were put away and never seen again, my wife and I, with or without our children, travelled to places around the world, but Paris never made it to our itinerary.

And now, the Notre-Dame has been scarred by fire, closed for inventorying and repairs, and will probably be shut for years. It has quickened our desire to go to Paris this summer, or perhaps we might wait. For Paris without the Notre-Dame will not be the same — at least (or even) for me.

## Down the primrose path

The Association for Democratic Reforms says 230 candidates (14 per cent of the total) in the fray for the third phase of polling have serious criminal cases against them. Why, 14 candidates say that they have court convictions standing against them, while 26 candidates have cases of hate speeches filed against them. Even in such a milieu, the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP's) decision to put up Sadhvi Pragna Singh Thakur as its parliamentary candidate for Bhopal stands out for its in-your-face disregard for common sensibilities. It has provoked shock, and rightly drawn widespread criticism for the message that it sends out.

The sadhvi has not been convicted, and is out on bail on health grounds. She is not barred by law from being a candidate, but charges have been framed by a court. The BJP says she has been nominated as a response to Congress talk of "Hindu terror", but forgets that its own government in Madhya Pradesh had arrested the sadhvi in a case of murder, not once but twice. She says she has been tortured in police custody, but only the Congress has taken a position in its manifesto against custodial torture; the BJP is silent on the issue.

Her nomination as a party candidate is of a piece with other headline choices that the BJP has been making in recent times, including the selection of the former leader of a vigilante group, Yogi Adityanath, as chief minister of Uttar Pradesh. Other parties too have made hard-to-defend choices in the past. Manmohan Singh's extraordinary decision in 2006 to re-induct Shibu Soren as a cabinet minister, after the latter was given bail in a murder case, stands out. The BJP's then leader of the opposition in Parliament, L K Advani, had said at the time that "under the UPA, not just politics but even the Cabinet has been criminalised". Viewed in those terms, is the BJP now seeking to criminalise the Lok Sabha? The sadhvi has been quoted as saying: "We will put an end to [terrorists and Congress leaders] and reduce them to ashes." Is that the kind of talk that the country wishes to hear in Parliament?

It is said that, more than failure, it is success that reveals a person. And so it would seem to be with the BJP. In opposition, the party used to stand for law and order, but now it stands by vigilante groups and their members who attack Muslims. Its leaders used to be known once for their measured language, but they have been replaced by rabble-rousers who attract censure for divisive talk and holding out threats to voters. Its talk of "genuine" secularism, as different from what it called "minority appeasement", stands exposed by its own actions while what one hears now is talk of a Hindu *rashtra*. In opposition, the party rightly criticised partisan capture of autonomous bodies, nomination of Congress party faithful to Constitutional posts, and misuse of the government's investigative powers. But whatever the Congress did, the BJP now does in spades. L K Advani conceptualised Prasar Bharati as an autonomous broadcasting body, but it has become a partisan government mouthpiece. And the selective use of tax and other raids is too blatantly one-sided to be accidental.

The BJP is not alone in coarsening public discourse. Rahul Gandhi's constant description of the prime minister as "*chor*" or thief is clear use of unparliamentary language. His jibe that Narendra Modi is a "*darpok*" (coward) is laughable, and hardly improves matters with its childishness. Other opposition leaders have not distinguished themselves; Mayawati, Azam Khan and others have all crossed the line. But it is the BJP that has set the unfortunate tone of these elections. As the new pole party in Indian politics, it should have sought to improve political conduct and discourse. Instead, it has chosen to nominate Pragna Thakur. Whatever one might think of the idea of Hindutva, the words and actions of the party that advocates it are no advertisement for it.

# Modi out to conquer his 'Jingostan'

Modi-Shah BJP has resurrected dangers and the enemy from the past and built a scary jingoism. It's a great diversionary tactic but history shows it never ends well

In the course of my usual trawling of the Hindi media, I am struck by lyrics from a very distant, faded past. It was Kavi (poet) Pradeep's dire warning to India to watch out for threats from traitors within. These deadly enemies, the song featuring mega star Rajendra Kumar and sung in Manna Dey's stirring voice said, were hiding in our own homes, and menacing us over our walls. *Jhaank rahe hain apne dushman, apni hee deewaron se/sambhal ke rehna apne ghar mein chhupe huye gaddaron se*. It goes on to warn the patriot in us: *Hoshiyar tumko apne Kashmir ki raksha karni hai* (awake, for you have to also protect your Kashmir).

This was for Mahesh Kaul's *Talaq*, released and nominated for the Filmfare awards in 1958. Why has this again popped up in the heartland chatter?

You will also find references that Nehru disliked the song so much, as it insinuated that many fellow Indians were enemies, that he banned the song. And of course, facing a war in 1965, Lal Bahadur Shastri lifted the ban. Just see, the argument goes, how relevant is this song again today — when the enemy is at the gates, and millions of traitors hide within our homes. Never mind the facts, of course.

In 60 years, after winning two-and-a-half wars, dividing Pakistan into two and becoming a \$2.7 trillion economy, you would have thought we were much too secure, prospering and optimistic to bring back paranoias of the past.

But, after traversing large parts of India, in the Hindi heartland and the South, I have to report with humility that the contrary is exactly what the BJP under Narendra Modi and Amit Shah has been able to achieve. At a time when India should be feeling at its most secure, internally and externally, they've managed to convince large enough sections of the voters, especially the tens of millions of young who learn their history from WhatsApp and believe India came out of the dark ages in 2014, that the dangers of their grandparents' era have returned. So, who else can you trust to fight these but a strong, aggressive and fearless leader who doesn't think twice before sending commandos on surgical strikes or jets on bombing missions in enemy territory?

With the situation on the economy and jobs grim and the crisis so palpable that it couldn't be "fixed" with propaganda, we had anticipated Modi-Shah turning this into a "*desh khatrey mein hai*" national security election. We can now say they're succeeding.



ILLUSTRATION BY BINAY SINHA

There are three pre-requisites to building a "national security" election. The first, an aggressive, even paranoid redefinition of the national interest. Second, a formidable foreign enemy a true nationalist detests, hates and fears. And most important, a Fifth Column within, consisting of collaborators and sympathisers of the same enemy. Then you go out and seek votes against those no one can morally or politically defend. To call this merely politics of polarisation is an understatement. It is enormously more diabolical, and effective.

The key to building such a popular concept of the national interest is a sharp definition of identity. American strategist and Harvard professor Joseph Nye Jr., writing in Foreign Policy, calls the national interest a "slippery concept, used to describe as well as prescribe foreign policy". He then goes on to quote Samuel Huntington in the same journal, arguing that "without a secure sense of national identity" you cannot define your national interests.

I bet you have figured where I am headed. But, just in case you haven't, that identity is Hindu and the core of Indian nationalism. What's good for the Hindus is also good for India and vice versa had better be true. If it isn't, it needs fixing. And non-Hindus? Of course, they will benefit similarly. But if they complain, or not conform, they risk being lumped with the Fifth Column, along with liberal bleeding hearts, questioning journalists, activists, "compulsive contrarians" and "urban Naxals". Remember Kavi



## NATIONAL INTEREST

SHEKHAR GUPTA

# A campaign of venom and vilification



## AL FRESCO

SUNIL SETHI

"Vote kisiko bhi do, kisi tarah wapas to Modi hi aayega"—"We can vote for anyone we like but Modi will somehow manage to come back". This pearl of wisdom, dropped with a sigh of resignation, was delivered by Raees, the neighbourhood *raddiwallah* who comes from a village near Aligarh and who voted on April 18. For decades Raees and his family have been collecting the detritus of households — old newspapers, empty bottles, other discarded junk — in the locality and have prospered. From plying their trade on bicycles and push-carts they have progressed to motorbikes and announce their availability on Whatsapp messages instead of randomly ringing doorbells on Sunday mornings.

Sixteen seats in western Uttar Pradesh have now voted in the first two phases of the

election with a Muslim population of about 26 per cent. In the Modi wave of 2014 their votes counted for little as the BJP swept the region, partly as a result of Hindu-Muslim polarisation in the wake of the Muzaffarnagar riots in the previous year. This time it's different; the SP-BSP alliance forged by Akhilesh Yadav and Mayawati — with a 42 per cent vote share neck and neck with the BJP's 43 per cent — is a powerful alternative power centre with the Congress cutting in for third position in the crucial Gangetic heartland. The BJP's supremacy — it won 71 of 80 seats in the state — is seriously challenged. This has resulted in a campaign to intensify the Hindu-Muslim divide peaking after five years of the BJP's majoritarian politics.

The Election Commission, at the prodding of the Supreme Court, which called it "toothless", has had to impose campaign suspensions against Yogi Adityanath and Maneka Gandhi for their hate speeches against Muslims, all of a piece with the Narendra Modi-Amit Shah duo's insinuations against the community as anti-national, pro-Pakistan "infiltrators". Equally, it has had to restrain leaders across the political spectrum — Mayawati, Azam Khan and Rahul Gandhi — for poisonous personal attacks and wild assertions. The most squalid slurs, for instance, references to Jaya Prada's "*khaki underwear*" or forcing Mayawati "clean officials' shoes" have emanated from the SP's Azam Khan. And some of the most fatuous, such as

attributing the Modi-is-a-thief label to the Supreme Court, or lumping "all Modis [Narendra Modi, Nirav Modi and Lalit Modi] are thieves" are examples of Rahul-speak.

The high-pitched BJP narrative of demonising Muslims everywhere is now countered with the spectre of "saffron terror", a phrase attributed to Congress leaders such as P Chidambaram and Digvijaya Singh. This phantom has now come to haunt them in flesh and blood, in the form of Sadhvi Pragna Thakur Singh, an accused terrorist and criminal conspirator fielded by the BJP in Bhopal against Digvijaya Singh. The BJP has held the seat since 1989 so a contest was not so much an issue as polarising Hindu votes in Madhya Pradesh where it fears reduced numbers as in UP.

The tremors of the BJP's divisive campaign are felt far and wide: In Bengal, Assam and border northeast states where citizenship for Bangladeshi Muslim migrants is an emotive issue, now presented in the guise of righteous Hindu nationalism. In Begusarai in Bihar, where the former student leader and anti-BJP campaigner Kanhaiya Kumar is a prominent candidate for the Communist Party of India, sections of the youth express admiration for him. But as a lengthy on-the-ground report in the news portal Scroll.in this week suggests that may not be enough. A jobless graduate Sanjit Kumar, like hundreds of his ilk eking out a livelihood, is quoted as saying: "Since we did not get jobs, we can't say

*achhe din* have come. But keeping aside our selfish needs, this much we recognise: The country has become strong under Modi. The army's morale has been raised. If the country is safe, everything is fine, it doesn't matter whether we get jobs or not. Just as Kanhaiya Kumar had made Begusarai proud, Modi had made India proud."

The quote succinctly encapsulates the shift in the BJP's vote-capturing strategy in 2019. Long- evaporated assurances of "*Achhe din*" and "*Sabka saath sabka vikas*" are replaced with the overriding images of a "Supreme Leader" and "Resurgent India" after Pulwama-Balakote, necessary to tame enemies, external and internal, such as Pakistan and disloyal minorities.

The idea is backed by sufficient academic analysis to show that the BJP's rhetoric spirals at election time in states where it faces a major erosion of its electoral base. Since late 2017, starting with a bruising election in his home state Gujarat, the Modi magic has waned all through 2018. It has won just three out of 13 parliamentary by-elections, and managed to retain power in only five of 22 state legislatures.

The vitriolic campaign now in progress, the underlying threat of violence, and the elevation of Sadhvi Pragna as a star candidate are key markers in the BJP's obstacle-strewn march back to New Delhi. Our local *kabadiwallah* is not far wrong in his assessment.

# America's great college boom is winding down



## NOAH SMITH

The for-profit college industry is collapsing. The Chronicle of Higher Education reports that during the past five years, more than 1,200 college campuses have been closed — an average of about 20 every month. Of those that shut, 88 per cent were for-profit, and their students amounted to 85 per cent of those affected by the closures.

Enrolment at four-year for-profit colleges is in free fall, dropping 13.7 per cent from fall 2014 to fall 2015, 14.5 per cent the following year, and 7.1 per cent the year after that.

Perhaps the only surprising thing was that it took this long. For-profit colleges have long been plagued by poor performance — a 2012 study by economists Kevin Lang and Russell Weinstein found no earnings premium from attending a for-profit university. Follow-up studies yielded similar results. But the price tag for these colleges

was high, and students were encouraged to take out lots of loans to pay it. The inevitable result was a generation of for-profit college students with poor employment prospects and a mountain of debt.

Meanwhile, a whiff of dubious marketing hung about the industry, with DeVry University being forced to pay a \$100 million settlement for misleading prospective students about the economic benefits of attending.

The winning of the for-profit college industry shows that although it can take years for poor quality and high prices to reduce demand in the education sector, eventually it does happen. Fortunately, for-profits only account for a relatively small slice of undergraduate education — perhaps about a tenth. The more important question is whether the carnage among for-profits is a harbinger of similar declines for nonprofit and public colleges.

Enrolment at four-year public and nonprofit colleges has remained essentially unchanged during the past two years. And college enrolment rates overall — which includes the big decline in for-profits and a smaller decline in two-year public schools — are essentially constant since 2005. But this conceals some potentially important underlying trends. Hispanic enrolment rates are up since 2010, but white and black enrolment rates have dropped a bit. Meanwhile, tuition may now be falling at

four-year public and nonprofit universities — another potential sign of weakening demand.

If demand for college were weakening, this is probably how it would manifest itself. The number of spots at good schools is rationed by the application process — these schools limit their enrolment in order to maintain their prestige. So falling demand would reduce prices for these colleges, but not the number of people attending. Meanwhile, enrolment would fall at institutions that were less in demand, such as for-profits and two-year colleges.

Why might demand for college be weakening? One reason is that there are simply fewer young people in the country these days.

The reversal of Mexican immigration probably has something to do with that. Meanwhile, falling fertility rates will do even more to thin out the ranks of the young in the decades to come. US universities could make up the difference by allowing in more international students, but President Donald Trump's anti-immigration policies and attitudes have made that difficult; enrolment from overseas is now in decline.

The strengthening labour market might also be pulling a few young Americans away from college, though so far that trend seems to be very slight.

Another possible factor is that prospective college students may be learning to distinguish between the economic opportunities afforded by various college majors. Overall, the earnings

premium for a bachelor's degree has remained constant or continued to rise, depending on how it's measured. But those overall numbers conceal large differences by field of study.

This may be why college students are avoiding humanities majors. But it could also mean that some prospective college students who don't want to major in fields like science, technology, engineering, math, health or business might avoid college entirely, or be unwilling to attend more expensive schools.

Whatever the reason, if the decline in demand for college continues, it could be bad for many regions of the US. For more prestigious universities, falling undergraduate applications need not crush their plans for expansion. Most of the local economic benefit of a university comes from research, not from education. But a number of small towns owe their economic health to modest local colleges whose main activity is teaching; if these shrink or disappear due to falling college demand, the trend of local economic decline could accelerate.

Government programs to make college more affordable for lower-income Americans can help prop up enrolment in these vulnerable areas. But universities also need to help by cutting costs. Addressing administrative bloat and other sources of inefficiency will allow public and nonprofit colleges to make enrolment a more attractive proposition.

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# The future of TV

## EYE CULTURE

TARA LACHAPELLE

The TV-entertainment industry has managed to turn the conventional wisdom regarding market competition on its head. There are more ways than ever to watch TV, yet for many people that won't translate into greater choice or saving money.

Three major industry developments during the last week point further in this direction:

■ Walt Disney unveiled Disney+. Beginning November 12, it will be the exclusive home for a ton of the company's new and old content. For superfans of Disney's brands, such as Star Wars, and for parents of young kids, the \$6.99-a-month subscription (or \$69.99 a year) may be well worth it. Others will have to decide if it's yet another app worth signing up for, or if they'd rather just keep their money. I'm not even convinced the price will stay that low for long — Disney's left a lot of room to catch up to Netflix's \$12.99-a-month standard fee.

■ Meanwhile, YouTube TV raised its monthly subscription fee by \$10 to a whopping \$49.99. Eight Discovery networks were also added to its lineup, including HGTV and TLC. However, those channels are little more than \$1 a month per subscriber, meaning they don't come close to explaining YouTube TV's significant price hike.

■ T-Mobile introduced TVision, a \$100-a-month package of more than 275 channels — a couple hundred more than most people care to have. Initially it will require a cable box, just one more reason TVision looks like a glorified cable package.

This wasn't the future consumers — nor media companies, for that matter — envisioned. It's a total mess, and configuring the ideal set of subscriptions can get expensive. Say you want to watch the upcoming *Star Wars* series, *The Mandalorian*. You'll need to pay \$6.99 a month for Disney+. But to finish out HBO's "Succession," cough up another \$15 for HBO Now. For live TV such as sports and guilty-pleasure reality shows, maybe you subscribe to YouTube TV at \$50. And Amazon.com's involvement with the YES Network may signal that someday New York

Yankees baseball games will require yet another app. Add in the cost of an internet connection and suddenly an old-school cable bundle doesn't look so bad anymore. (Could it be, two of America's most despised brands, Comcast and the former Time Warner Cable, are vindicated? Nah.)

The only real improvement in consumer choice is the ease of canceling. That can be done online with basically the click of a button, and it's just as easy to sign back up when there's a show you don't want to miss. For example, fans of *Game of Thrones* — which returned Sunday night for its final season — could pay the next two months for HBO Now and then quit until the network's next big series. Cable packages, by comparison, are notoriously difficult to get out of and require begrudging calls to customer service. But if canceling is the streaming industry's biggest selling point, then that's a problem.

This is why, to me, Netflix still stands out as the simple, affordable, good-enough option. (We'll learn how many customers it enticed during the latest period when the company reports results at the close of trading Tuesday.) That said, Disney, for its part, is exploring how it can take the advantage of bundling opportunities by offering a discount to those who subscribe to all three of its apps: Disney+, Hulu and ESPN+.

The company made a move toward this on Monday in announcing Hulu will buy out AT&T's 9.5 per cent stake in the streaming company for \$1.43 billion. Disney, which owns a majority stake in Hulu, will bill the combo of the three apps as the complete package, ticking the boxes for family content, adult content and sports. In reality, though, there are still a lot of holes.

This is also why free, ad-supported services such as Pluto TV (recently acquired by Viacom) are catching on. Who knew the future of TV would mean yearning for the days of ads and bundles? Then again, T-Mobile's TVision goes too far the other way, cramming in everything but the kitchen sink at quite a steep price.

In a February, I posed the question, "What is TV?" The only concrete answer I have at this point: Frustrating.

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# Opinion

SATURDAY, APRIL 20, 2019



## REDACTED MUELLER REPORT

Bernie Sanders, member of US Senate

It is clear that Donald Trump wanted nothing more than to shut down the Mueller investigation. While we have more detail from today's report than before, Congress must continue its investigation into Trump's conduct...

## GOING INTO HIDING

OBSCURITY BRIDGES THE PRIVACY GAP WITH THE IDEA THAT THE PARTS OF OUR LIVES THAT ARE HARD OR UNLIKELY TO BE FOUND OR UNDERSTOOD ARE RELATIVELY SAFE

# Why you can no longer get lost in the crowd

**W**E ARE CONSTANTLY exposed in public. Yet most of our actions will fade into obscurity.

Do you, for example, remember the faces of strangers who stood in line with you the last time you bought medicine at a drugstore? Probably not. Thanks to limited memory and norms against staring, they probably don't remember yours either. This is what it means to be obscure. And our failure to collectively value this idea shows where we've gone wrong in the debates over data and surveillance. Lawmakers and industry leaders are missing the big picture. They are stuck on traditional concepts like "transparency, consent and secrecy" which leads to proposals that reinforce broken mechanisms like consenting to unreadable terms of service. They are operating under the dangerous illusion that there is a clear distinction between what is public and what is private. Most people probably intuitively know that their most deeply held secrets are private while the things about them that are commonly known or widely broadcast are not. But what about information about our everyday actions that is shared with some but not all?

Obscurity bridges this privacy gap with the idea that the parts of our lives that are hard or unlikely to be found or understood are relatively safe. It is a combination of the privacy you have in public and the privacy you have in groups. Obscurity is a barrier that can shield you from government, corporate and social snoops. And until lawmakers, corporate leaders and citizens embrace obscurity and move to protect it, your freedom and opportunities to flourish will be in jeopardy. The concept was first meaningfully articulated in a landmark 1989 Supreme Court decision, Department of Justice vs Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, which recognised a privacy interest in the "practical obscurity" of information that was technically available to the public but could be found only by spending an unrealistic amount of time and effort. After the concept was introduced, most lawmakers, judges and the tech industry promptly forgot about it. This has dulled the potential of obscurity as a rallying point for change and leaves society strugg-

## WOODROW HARTZOG & EVAN SELINGER



gling to protect something in dire need of defining and defending.

Understanding obscurity means paying attention to how space, time and people's cognitive limitations make it difficult for others to surveil us or find out things about us. Consider space. The further away people are, the harder it is to see with the naked eye who they are and where they're going. Usually, we are visible only to those nearby. But cellphone location data can reveal that same highly personal information to anyone with means and motivation. We should be disturbed that apps often collect location data simply because they can and that T-Mobile, Sprint and AT&T reportedly have illegally sold customers' 911 location data to third parties. And we should be pleased that the Supreme Court ruled last year in Carpenter vs. United States that, under the Fourth Amendment, cellphone records can't be seized without a warrant. Consider time. Memories fade as time passes. But the internet has impeccable recall. That is why we should applaud the senators who have proposed a bipartisan update to the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act that would give parents and children an "eraser button" to remove a child's data from platforms like Google and Facebook. It is also why we should be sceptical of Mark Zuckerberg's announcement that Facebook will become a more "privacy-focused platform" that emphasises features like ephemeral, expiring information. Truly ephemeral communications are certainly obscure, but it is unclear what information Facebook will scrub on the front end (for users) and the back end (from the company). The com-

pany's history suggests we shouldn't let our guard down.

Obscurity is also a better way to understand Europe's "right to be forgotten" law, which can't make anyone forget anything, but can make the remnants of your awkward youth harder to find online. Finally, consider cognitive limitations. Facial recognition technology poses an immense danger to society because it can be used to overcome biological constraints on how many individuals anyone can recognise in real time. If its use continues to grow and the right regulations aren't instituted, we might lose the ability to go out in public without being recognised by the police, our neighbours and corporations. Creating strong regulations for the technology is going to be an uphill battle, especially because it has already become widespread, being deployed at airports to make boarding easier and adopted by schools to increase safety. It is even being used at summer camps so parents can automatically receive photos in which their children appear.

Threats to our obscurity are growing because technology is making our personal information easy and cheap to aggregate, archive and interpret—with substantial growth in predictive analytics, too. To see what we mean, just look yourself up on the website MyLife and marvel at how much information has been cobbled together from different moments in your life for anyone to see at the click of a button. Even speaking in hushed tones to a friend at a crowded cafe might not be enough to protect your obscurity if cameras are someday equipped with lip-reading artificial intel-

ligence software. Obscurity is vital to our well-being for several reasons. It gives us breathing room to go about our daily routines with little fear of being judged, sent unwanted ads, gossiped about or needlessly shamed. Obscurity makes meaningful and intimate relationships possible, ones that offer solidarity, loyalty and love. It allows us to choose with whom we want to share different kinds of information. It protects us from having everyone know the different roles we play in the different parts of our lives. We need to be able to play one role with our co-workers while revealing other parts of ourselves with friends and family. Indeed, obscurity is one reason we feel safe bonding with others over our shared vulnerabilities, our mutual hopes, dreams and fears. Obscurity enables us to develop and grow as individuals. It provides us collectively with spaces to explore new and controversial possibilities, to transgress taboos and ignore arbitrary rules. You might have thought you could skip church without anyone knowing, but churches are being marketed by facial recognition systems that will make sure your absences are duly noted. It won't stop there.

Obscurity protects us from being pressured to be conventional. This buffer from a ubiquitous permanent record is especially important for the exploratory phase of youth. To develop as humans, people must be free to try things they might later regret. This is how we become better people. Without obscurity, we wouldn't have the freedom to take risks, fail and dust ourselves off. We'd be stymied by the fear of being deemed failures by a system that never forgets.

Finally, obscurity is crucial to democracy. Obscurity fosters civic participation and gives us the confidence to attend political protests and engage in political speech online without worrying about ending up on a government watch list. It is why the American Civil Liberties Union worries about the government monitoring social media. Things can be private even if others can see them. And there is so much of our lives that industry and governments have yet to find. But in our status-obsessed culture, it can be hard to appreciate that the opposite of obscurity isn't fame, but chillingly oppressive fear.

## Quotas in promotion are an abomination, scrap them

Apart from govt needing to show SC/ST are inadequately represented, it must show administrative efficiency is not hit

**T**HE SUPREME COURT has done well to stay the reservation for promotions in government jobs that SC/STs have been demanding. The apex court ruled in favour of a status quo on Monday after the Centre was unable to comply with the rules which required it to come up with quantifiable data to show that SC/STs were not adequately represented in government jobs. The current case in the Supreme Court is the result of the Centre being ordered by the Delhi High Court—in November last year—to implement the apex court's September verdict. Indeed, since the apex court is planning to hear the case in detail, it is important to relook the issue of reservations in promotions.

The September 2018 verdict, delivered by a five-bench constitution bench of the apex court, had upheld reservations for promotions for SC/STs. It had also rejected the argument made by the petitioners which said the government must have data to show the SC/ST were in fact backward; while this is what the Nagaraj judgment said, the apex court agreed with the government that proving backwardness ran contrary to the Indra Sawhney ruling. So, once the government listed a caste group as SC/ST, this implied the group was backward. However, in keeping with the Nagaraj judgment of 2006, the SC ruled last September that the government had to show that, once this reservation in promotions was done, it would not affect the efficiency of government administration. Interestingly, the SC also said that the concept of creamy layer that applied to OBC reservations would also apply to SC/STs since it would not be possible for SC/ST to move forward if the better-off cornered most of the benefits.

While reservation continues to be a contentious issue and is used by political parties to win votes, it goes against the principle of merit, so it has to be hoped the apex court will fix this; when the Karnataka order on reservations in promotions was being argued in the Supreme Court in 2017, for instance, it was argued that while this ensured a candidate who came in through reservations could reach the third level of seniority by the age of 45, the general category candidate would only make it by the age of 56. Applying the principle of ensuring that efficiency is not compromised in all cases—not just those of promotions—will be a big step forward if the apex court rules this, since the damage done by the reservations policy is evident. Also, the huge difference in the incomes of SC/ST families that are educated and those that are not makes it clear that SC/ST as a group cannot be considered backward or under-privileged; indeed, data from primary research agency Price shows that 7% of all SC households and 5.3% of ST ones have an income of more than ₹10 lakh per annum; in the case of OBCs, it is 8.5%.

Curiously, few seem to see these demands as evidence that the reservations policy is not working. If SC/ST/OBCs were really benefitting from reservations in colleges, for instance, the fact that they need reservations in jobs implies the education in itself didn't help too much. And if they need reservations in promotions, this suggests they are not performing well enough to get promoted on their own. While there are those who argue certain sections of society need some support, this should be provided on the basis of financial backwardness—across communities and castes—and not any other criterion. Bank loans, for instance, need to be given to promising entrepreneurs irrespective of their background. Unfortunately, no political party today can afford to roll back reservations or even suggest it be limited to one generation only for fear of losing votes. Indeed, the NDA has increased the scope of reservations to upper castes too, and though this is to be for the not so well-off, the cut-off of ₹8 lakh means over 80% of upper-caste households will be covered.

## Endorsing change

Ambani and Kotak endorsing Deora is a welcome move

**I**NDIAN BUSINESSMEN HAVE traditionally operated behind the scenes, whether it comes to getting their work done, or paying for it. In the case of the latter, it is only when the government brought in anonymous electoral bonds that political payments by cheque got a boost. And, even after a particularly bad budget, with onerous tax proposals for industry, due to a fear of retribution, a FICCI or a CII will vie with each other to give the finance minister a 12 or a 13 on 10 for it; parallel to this, however, the chambers and various others will be lobbying privately for reversing the proposals. Indeed, even when the government acts against individual companies, very rarely do you see even mild protest. Indeed, when the UPA refused to honour the legal commitment made by the NDA to give Anil Agarwal of Vedanta the option to buy more shares of Hindustan Zinc and Balco—under the privatisation done by the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government—at a set price, the London-based industrialist didn't complain or take the legal action many assumed he would. Which is why, most were taken aback when the UK-headquartered Cairn Energy Plc—it sold its stake in Cairn India to Anil Agarwal's Vedanta—decided to file for damages against the Indian government's tax demands and seizure of its shares and dividends a few years ago.

In this context, it is a pleasant surprise to see Reliance Industries' chairman and managing director Mukesh Ambani and Kotak Bank's managing director Uday Kotak openly endorse Congress candidate Milind Deora for the south Mumbai seat. It is true the Ambani association with the late Murli Deora—former oil minister—goes back a long way, but coming out in favour of an Opposition candidate is a bold step by Indian standards. Of course, what is not clear is whether this is part of a larger trend where Indian businessmen will endorse parties and candidates—as they do in the US—or whether this is a one-off; in the case of Ambani, perhaps, it could be that his empire is so large, no government can really afford to ignore him and the issues he wants attended or, for instance, the tax concessions that he wants in order to make certain investments. If it does catch on, though, it will be a good thing, since endorsements by industrialists or investors, or even the media, help others make up their minds about candidates. So, given his personal reputation, an endorsement by a Narayana Murthy, for instance, will go a long way in convincing voters the party/candidate is not corrupt. An endorsement by top corporates, similarly, will indicate to voters that the party will come out with pro-industry policies. Indeed, if well-known industrialists are willing to come out in the open in favour of candidates—and this means they don't think there will be any reprisals of any sort due to this—sooner rather than later, they will not be averse to making political donations even without the cover of anonymity.

## Disabling Access

The absence of information relating to disabled people in the new MBBS syllabus strengthens dangerous stereotypes about them

**P**EOPLE WITH DISABILITIES are among the most marginalised sections of society in the world. In India, as per the 2011 Census, the disabled population is around 26.8 million. However, this number could actually be a small fraction of the actual number living with disabilities in India, with World Bank data suggesting the number is between 40 and 80 million. With society comprising of such a large proportion of disabled people, it would make sense for textbooks and knowledge sources to contain information about them and ways to engage that do not ostracise them. However, the new syllabus of MBBS courses in the country due to come out in August of this year does not carry much on The Rights of Persons with Disability Act. Two letters, one written by the Delhi chief commissioner for persons with disabilities and the other by the national chief commissioner, addressed to the Union health ministry and the Medical Council of India (MCI), respectively, note the absence of specific requirements of the Act from the new syllabus and the absence of a "human rights" perspective and approach to disability.

The main problem lies in the fact that the failure to include a rights-based perspective relating to people with disabilities means that time and again they are met with apathy and indifference, not care and attention. In an effort to address this, the Parliament passed The Rights of Persons with Disability Act in 2016. A significant effort towards mainstreaming disabled people was incorporated in Section 39 of the Act, which mandates that the curriculum in universities, colleges and schools should include information on the rights of people with disabilities and also requires that "orientation and sensitisation at the school, college, university and professional training level on the human condition of disability" be carried out. Not only was this missing from the syllabus, but a central tenet of the Act, the incorporation of the word "dignity" in all matters pertaining to disabled people, was also absent from the updated syllabus and "disabled" was mentioned only once.

## Breaking the internet language barrier

One of the ways ICANN is trying to make the use of internet and its content accessible is through the introduction of Internationalised Domain Names (IDN)

## V SRIDHAR & AJAY DATA

Sridhar is a professor at IIT, Bangalore, and Data is chair of UASG and co-chair of ICANN Neo Brahmi Generation Panel

**DOMAIN NAMES PROVIDE** the important link between users and content on the internet. When we type "meity.gov.in" to access the web site of the ministry of electronics and information technology, we present the domain names interspersed by "dots" to the Domain Name System (DNS) that resolves them into machine readable Internet Protocol (IP) addresses for access. However, the label to the right of the dot (also called as the Top Level Domain, TLD) in any domain name is of utmost importance as this is administered and governed by the multi-stakeholder community model of internet governance under the aegis of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN). The TLDs are registered in the "root zone" of the internet with corresponding Label Generation Rules (LGRs) for the stable functioning of the domain name system.

The DNS started with 6 TLDs in the 1980s that consisted of just 3 Latin characters; subsequently, country code TLDs were made available (such as 'in' for India). Subsequently, generic TLDs that can have longer labels such as 'cookingchannel' and 'travelersinsurance' with certain restrictions were approved under the new gTLD programme of ICANN in 2012. While these developments were taking place, software and application developers, network engineers, and domain name registrars had to re-engineer their existing programmes to recognise the shift from legacy 2-3 character TLDs to lengthy TLDs. This, referred to as "Universal Acceptance (UA)" principle, enables any TLD, once defined in the Root Zone, to function within all applications regardless of script, number of characters, or how new it is.

Meanwhile, the internet penetration across countries started growing exponentially. However, despite the growth of

internet in non-English speaking countries, the content on the internet is still predominantly available in English followed by Chinese. One of the ways ICANN is trying to make the use of internet and its content accessible, especially among non-English speaking internet users, is through the introduction of Internationalised Domain Names (IDN). The solution was in adopting Unicode standard that provides a unique number for every character, no matter what platform, device, application or language. Realising the importance of Indian language specific TLD, the government of India obtained (Bharat) ccTLD in Devanagari script in 2011, which was introduced to the public for domain registration in August 2014. Variations of Bharat TLD is now available in 15 scripts including Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, Gujarati, Urdu and Gurmukhi.

As per the IDN World Report 2018, where IDNs are in use, the language of web content is more diverse than it is with traditional ASCII domains. IDNs help to enhance the linguistic diversity in cyberspace and seem to be accurate predictors of the language of the web content. The report also points out that Han (associated with Chinese language), Latin, and Cyrillic scripts represent nearly 90% of all registered IDNs. Major world scripts such as Arabic and Devanagari, which support some of the world's top 10 most spoken languages, are yet to be substantially represented in IDN. To make Indian language specific TLDs possible, the Neo-Brahmi Script Generation Panel (NBGP) was formed by nine communities in 2015. NBGP is developing Root Zone LGR for Bengali, Devanagari, Gujarati, Gurmukhi, Kannada, Malayalam, Oriya, Tamil and Telugu scripts. Once implemented, domain names in the above Indian languages can be registered to address the non-English inter-

net users in the country.

Apart from accessing web content, domain names are also used for email addresses and a host of other Internet applications. Hence, UA requires that software applications should be updated to accept the new gTLDs and IDNs. Once implemented in full, end users can use applications with the new domain names without compromising on functionality and performance. In a recent study by Analysis Mason, it is estimated that UA would provide an economic benefit of close to \$10 billion. To promote UA, ICANN has formed the Universal Acceptance Steering Group (UASG) which is spreading awareness of the ramifications of new gTLDs and IDNs amongst all stakeholders. Companies such as Google, Microsoft, Xgenplus have started supporting email address internationalisation (i.e. email address for IDN domain), thus providing UA-ready messaging services. Hence it is very important to educate software developers, engineers, domain name registrars and registries on the importance of UA in the context of new gTLDs and IDNs.

Currently India has more than 50% of the 900+ TV channels that broadcast in regional languages; Hindi language newspapers are the largest in terms of readership. It is time to prop up internet content with Indian languages. The internet 1.0 was the one without Web; the 2.0 variant with the hyperlinked web provided the much-needed network connectivity of content; 3.0 enabled access to the web through mobile and portable devices; internet 4.0 breaks the language barrier for both content and access. This revolution provides a fertile ground for development of content and applications based on the economic, social, cultural and linguistic diversity of the internet population around the globe.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Et tu Priyanka Chaturvedi?

It is unfortunate that Priyanka Chaturvedi, national spokesperson and convener of the media cell of the Congress, has quit the party being disappointed with the party's decision to lift the suspension of eight Congress leaders who were under suspension for misbehaving with her in Mathura. It seems the party has taken the decision after all the eight leaders expressed their regret over the incident and assured never to repeat the mistake. With the way Priyanka was defending the Congress party in public debates and TV discussions, her exit is definitely a loss to the Congress party. However, she could have given a chance to the eight leaders who have apologised and expressed their regret over the incident and waited to watch further developments without quitting the party  
— Shalini Gerald, Chennai

### Trump as a catalyst

China in 2018, a tale of a vicious cycle of over-production, low consumption and export dependence, has interest groups protecting heavy industries that generate revenue and jobs and block vital reforms to a shift to consumption and services sectors. Trump's aggressive tariff war has accelerated systemic weaknesses in China's economy. That said, Chinese companies, for sometime now, have been innovating on their own and are resilient to competition and require far less protection. China has initiated major policy corrections. An authoritarian economy driven by its energetic leadership can yet be counted on to reclaim its trajectory, with Trump serving as the catalyst  
— Janaki Narayanan, Mumbai

Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com



**PP SANGAL**

The author is a former ISS, UN Consultant, and Director, CSO



# Saving the Indian statistical system

Indian political leaders would do well not to jeopardise their country's statistical system for deriving political mileage

**T**HE REPUTATION OF India's statisticians and, for that matter, of our economists too is at stake as never before. It is because both function as twin brothers in framing a nation's economic policy for sustainable all-round development. We are creating a bad environment by continuing to publicly denigrate our statisticians by suspecting the quality of data/statistics they produce and blame them along with the fellow economists for various inferences they draw based on such information. Who is responsible for this situation? I think it is largely the political parties who do this from political angle and particularly for electoral gains.

A damaging atmosphere is now being created for the science of 'statistics' in our country. This has been observed in the past in previous regimes and now in the BJP-led government at the Centre. Here are two recent glaring cases in point which concern most significant measures of our nation's economic and social progress:

One relates to the debate around the recalculated GDP series by changing the base year from 2004-05 to 2011-12. These figures showed the performance in two years (2012-13 and 2013-14) in poorer light which fall in the UPA-2 regime. On the other hand, GDP numbers for 2017-18 were revised to 7.2% from 6.7%, and for the year 2016-17 (the year of demonetisation) it was revised upwards to 8.2% from the earlier 7.1%. So, in a way, 2016-17 becomes the best year of Narendra Modi government's five-year tenure, but this is not supported by industry and commerce, as hugely downward trend in sales was recorded. Also, calculating back GDP series down to 2004-05, without any comparable data being available from 2011-12 backwards, became a matter of great controversy.

The second pertains to the yearly report on unemployment rates released for 2017-18 by the NSSO, which the current government has suppressed being politically inconvenient in view of the ongoing general elections. The report showed an unemployment rate of 6.1%, which is the highest in the last 45 years. This finding, in some measure, has also been corroborated by other professional credible agencies like the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) and the Centre for Sustainable Employment at Azim Premji University.

The academic malady in statistics is not only confined to the cases mentioned above; suspicions have been raised on various

types of official statistics from time to time because of the political interference in the production of statistics. This is happening from the times of our first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, who was instrumental in setting up an Indian statistical system on the advice of PC Mahalanobis for meeting the needs of large-scale planning in India.

What is also happening now is partisan politics where a group of 108 economists, on one hand, charged the central government with hiding of information and manipulating figures to its advantage for fetching votes, while on the other hand, a category of chartered accountants, having no expertise in working out GDP figures and unemployment rates, are entering the debate to counter what the economists have said. Such unauthentic statements create unnecessary doubts in the minds of the people who have no capability to distinguish between good and bad information. So, the faith in 'statistics' gets eroded. This is bad politics and also creates disruption in planning process.

There is yet another burning example of data messing-up and playing with figures by two major national parties. Both the parties claim to be the 'messiah' of the poor. The BJP-led NDA-2 launched PM-KISAN recently and the Congress declared in its election manifesto that it would introduce a minimum income guarantee scheme called the Nyuntam Aay Yojana (NYAY) if voted to power. Their intentions are good as they want to end poverty. But what is disturbing is that both parties are duping the masses and confusing them by discarding each other's scheme by presenting unclear and twisted figures. Further, the other day, the BJP president said in an election rally that there is no crisis of jobs but there is crisis of data. Do such statements are not ultimately resulting in lack of faith in our statistical system?

It does not require any emphasis that high esteem the world over because of their high quality intellectual achievement and diligence and integrity in production of statistics. This is not to say that India's statistical system has no lacunae, which must be removed, but we are comparable to even the most advanced economies of the world in this respect.

To conclude, Indian political leaders would do well not to jeopardise their country's statistical system for deriving political mileage. The creation of a reformed but independent and powerful National Statistical Commission is a must to save our statistical system from ruins.

**A damaging atmosphere is being created for the science of 'statistics' in our country. This has been observed in the past in previous regimes and now in the BJP-led government**

## Creating more jobs

**ANJALI TANDON**

Associate professor, Institute for Studies in Industrial Development, New Delhi  
Views are personal



**J**OB CREATION HAS been a preoccupation for policy makers for long. The lacklustre performance of Indian manufacturing has prevented the absorption of labour force displaced from agriculture. Although some have found employment in services such as travel, tourism and hospitality, much of these are stopgap arrangements. Labour-intensive manufacturing could have been the most fitting option to absorb the mass labour force. But this did not happen. The most common argument for its failure to take off is the rigidities in labour laws preventing easy hire and fire of workers. Also associated are the entry and exit barriers for firms. However, one aspect has been completely ignored from consideration. It is the capital requirement of labour-intensive sector and refers to the relative significance of capital in their set-up and operations.

The idea that labour-intensive industries will work without appropriate capital is misguided. Even more erroneous is the concept of evaluating their relatively large proportion of labour use based on direct requirements only. It is necessary to work out labour and capital requirements after taking into account their respective use indirectly in activities of the supply chain of labour-intensive industries. Ignoring the indirect usage of capital in a labour-intensive industry amounts to underestimation of the capital proportion of labour-intensive manufacturing. For instance, despite its labour intensity, the food processing industry depends on capital equipment such as refrigerated vans. The omission tends to undervalue the proportion of capital. Therefore, it becomes fundamental to reassess the capital proportion of labour-intensive sectors so that appropriate finance policies can be designed for their revival and promotion.

A related attempt through an ongoing study under the IMPRESS (Impactful Policy Research in Social Science) scheme of the government finds that even the traditionally labour-intensive sectors have higher proportions of capital than normally recognised. For instance, labour-intensive manufacture of tobacco products and manufacture of macaroni, noodles, etc, enveloped under the broader food processing sector is noted to have capital proportions that are 18.4% more than normally assessed. An underestimation of that magnitude (of the order of one-fifth) for a labour-intensive sector, which is also largely unorganised and employs unskilled labour, suggests that employment generation in labour-intensive sectors demands more capital than estimated through measuring only their direct factor proportions. Similar is the case of unskilled labour-intensive activities related to manufacture of textiles, handbags, footwear and ropes under the broader textile and leather sector, although the underestimation is of a smaller order. The capital proportion of yet another labour-intensive activity—manufacture of refractory and non-refractory clay and ceramic products—is likely to be underestimated by 10.8%. As a labour-intensive activity, manufacture of structural metal products, included in the basic metal products sector, is found to have the highest level of underestimated capital proportion. The capital proportion in relatively low-value transport equipment such as bicycles is also underestimated by almost 10%. At the same time, the high value added but skilled labour-intensive products such as gems and jewellery would fall short of capital by 6.9% as assessed from the proportions for miscellaneous manufacturing sector which is also inclusive of production of sports goods using unskilled labour.

These findings have relevance for the industrial policy which is round the corner. Indeed, ignoring the greater than understood capital proportions of labour-intensive activities only belittles their capital requirements dishonourably. Thus, infusing appropriate capital into labour-intensive sectors gains primacy for their success in employment creation.

## DATA DRIVE

# Clipped wings

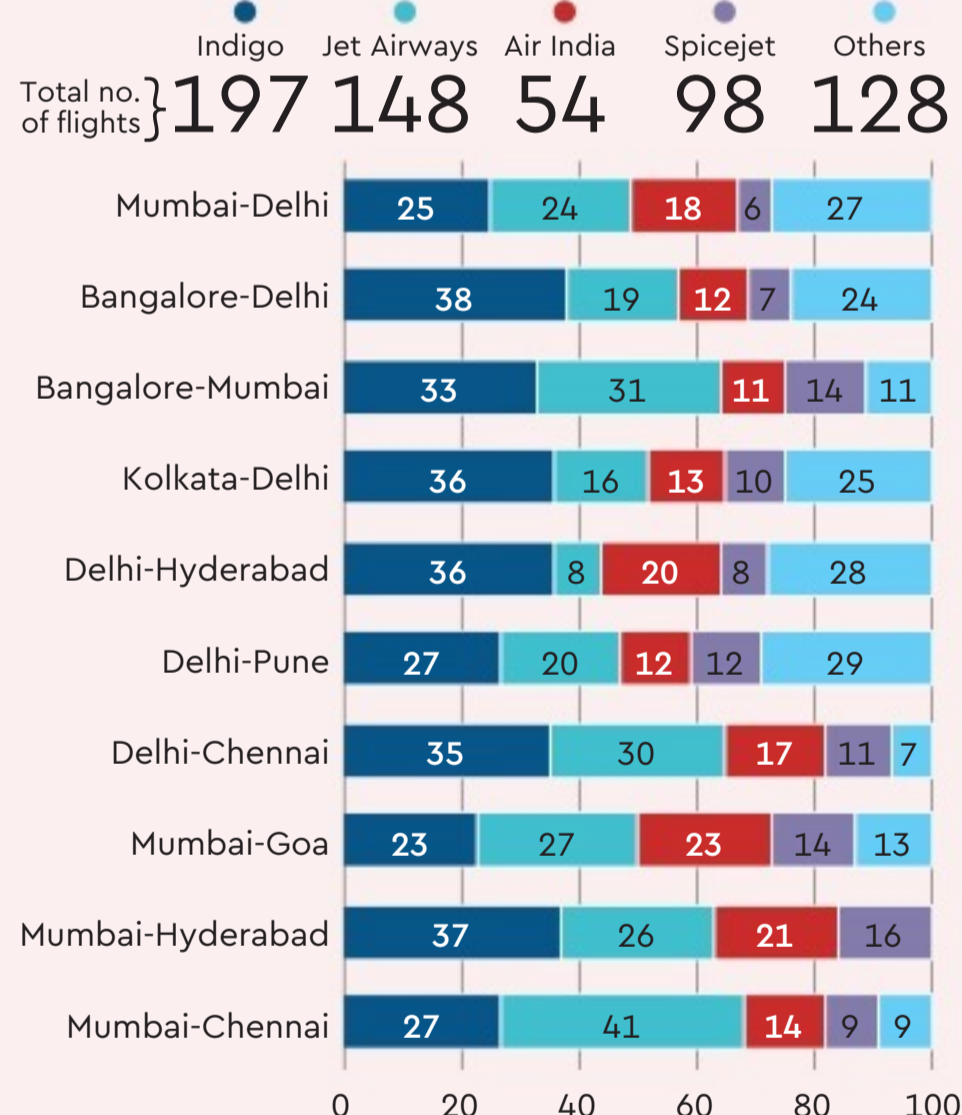
**J**ET AIRWAYS'S TEMPORARY shutdown will drive airfares upwards as the airline had a 15% domestic market share in October last year. It slipped to 11.4% in February this year. Its flight share in top-10 city-pair routes was 24% and it accounted for 14% of India's international airlines capacity share.

June, will depend on the quantum of capacity that the industry adds collectively to ease the demand-supply mismatch. In fact, airfares have been increasing since October last year because of capacity reductions by Jet Airways, grounding of MAX aircrafts by Spicejet and Indigo's pilots shortage. Air Asia and Air India have added the most flights after the disruption of Jet Airways by Indigo and Vistara. Spicejet has not been able to add capacity because of grounding of 13 Boeing Max 737 out of total 75 aircraft.

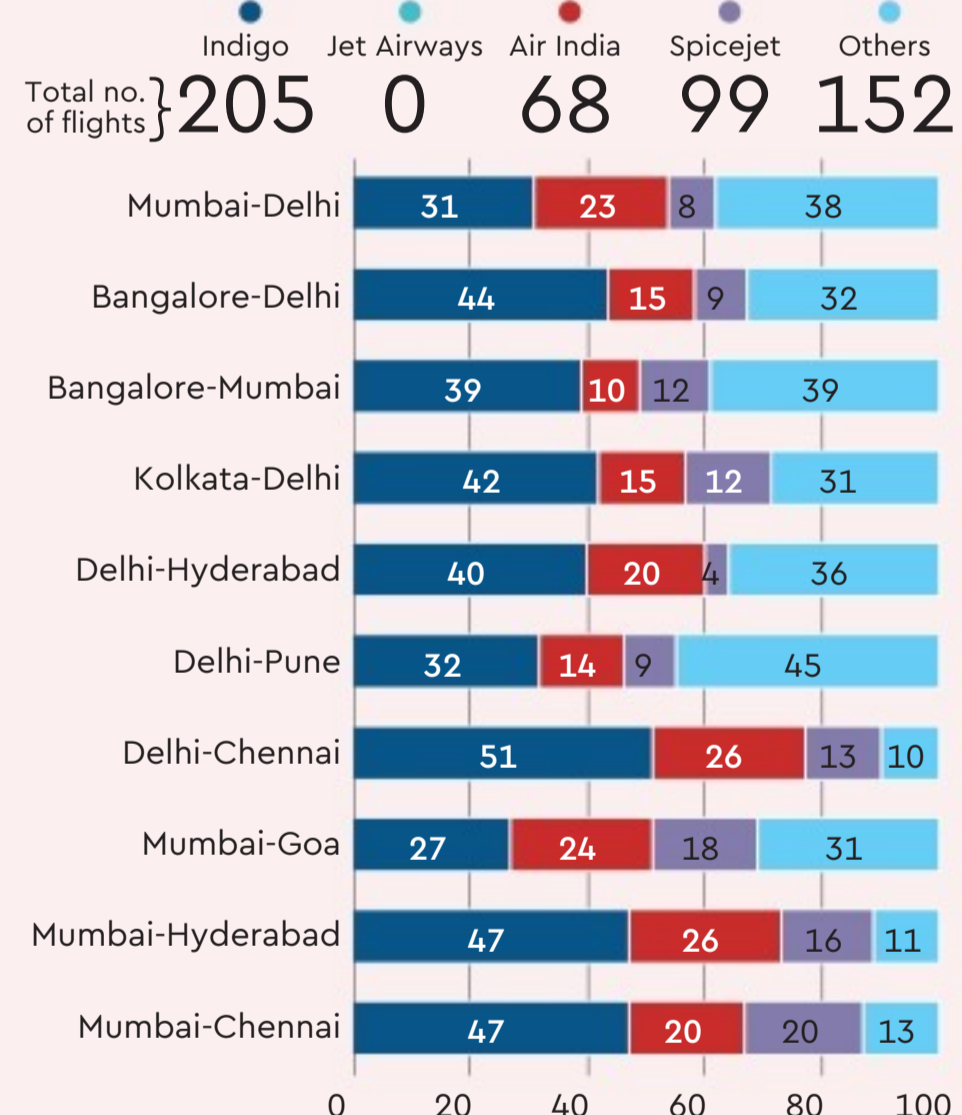
Total debt of Jet Airways  
**₹8,500 cr**  
Dues to lessors and vendors  
**₹3,500 cr**

### Jet's suspension of operations leads to demand-supply mismatch on top-10 routes

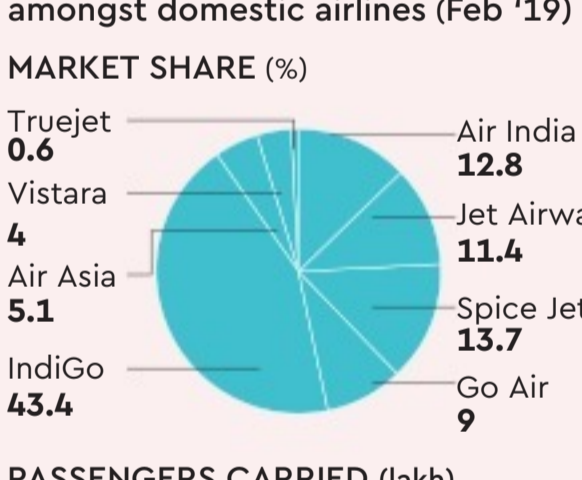
Operator-wise daily flight share in October 2018; in %



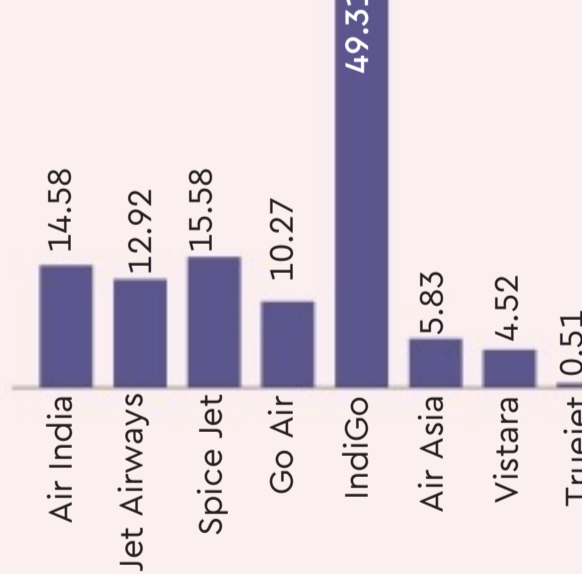
Operator-wise daily flight share in April 2019; in %



Jet Airways had 11% market share amongst domestic airlines (Feb '19)



PASSENGERS CARRIED (lakh)



### Passenger complaints against Jet Airways have been mounting

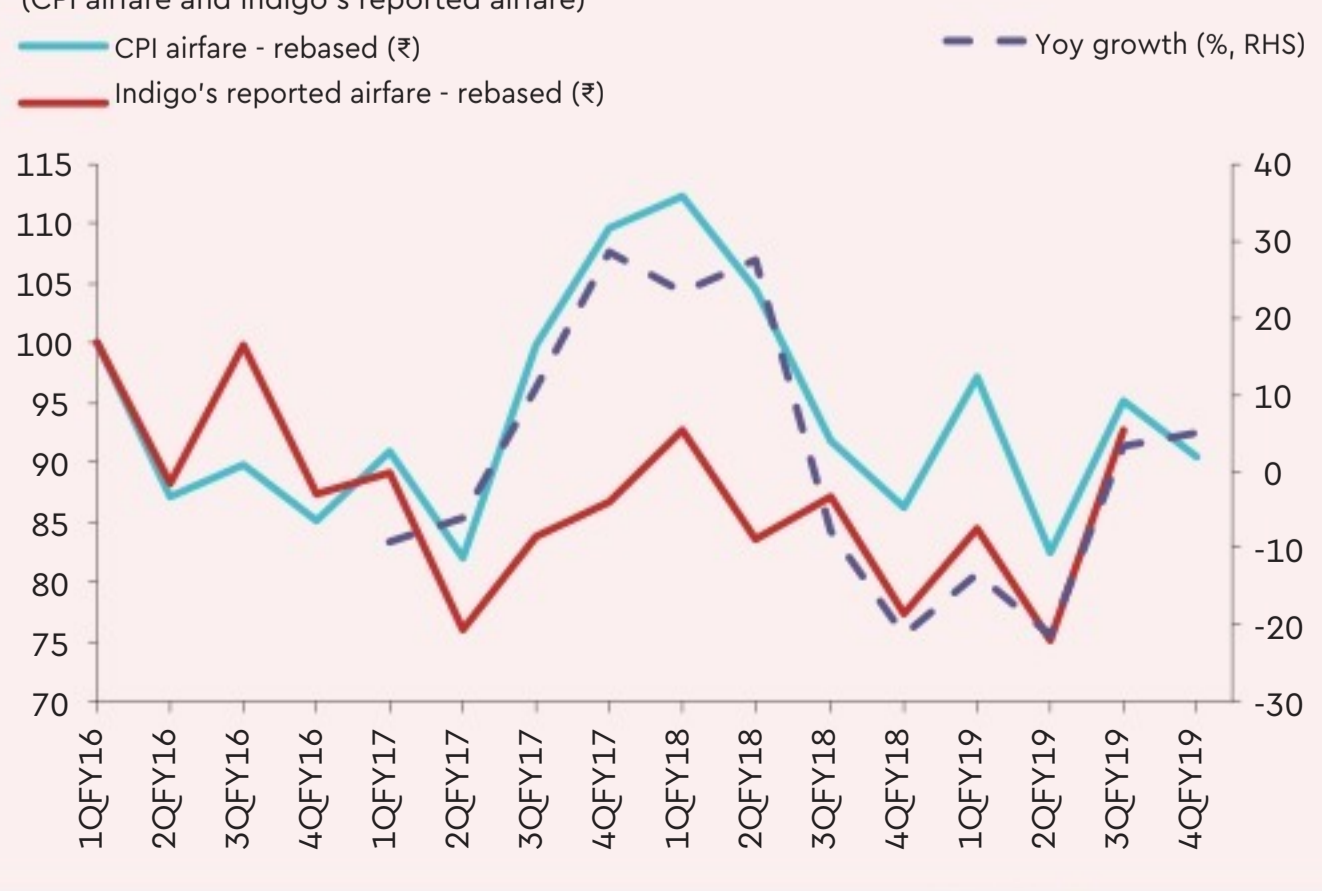
(No. of complaints/10,000 pax; month of February)



### Jet Airways' domestic passenger growth has underperformed peers



### CPI airfare index for Q4FY19 indicates increase in yields

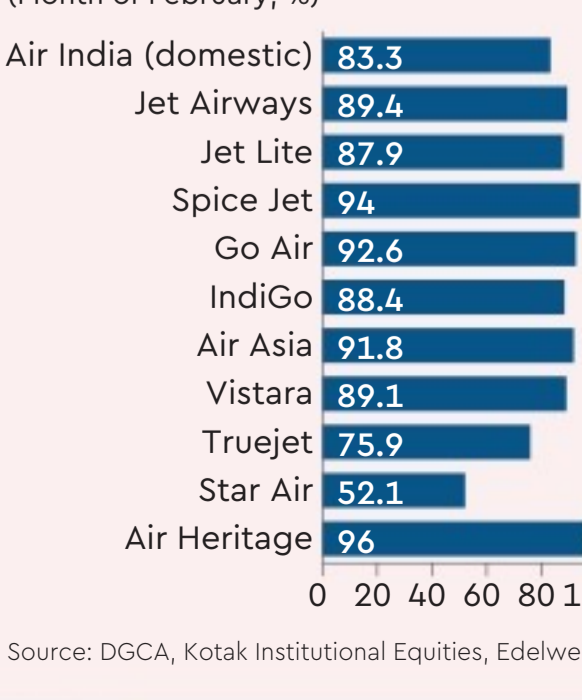


### ATF prices have declined in Q4FY19



### Passenger load factor has been high across all airlines

(Month of February; %)



Source: DGCA, Kotak Institutional Equities, Edelweiss



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 cuccu", 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.

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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 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.

The writer is consulting editor, Newsweek Pakistan

## 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.

**CHARAN SINGH'S MOVE**  
AFTER SQUARING UP with the BLD in Bihar

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.

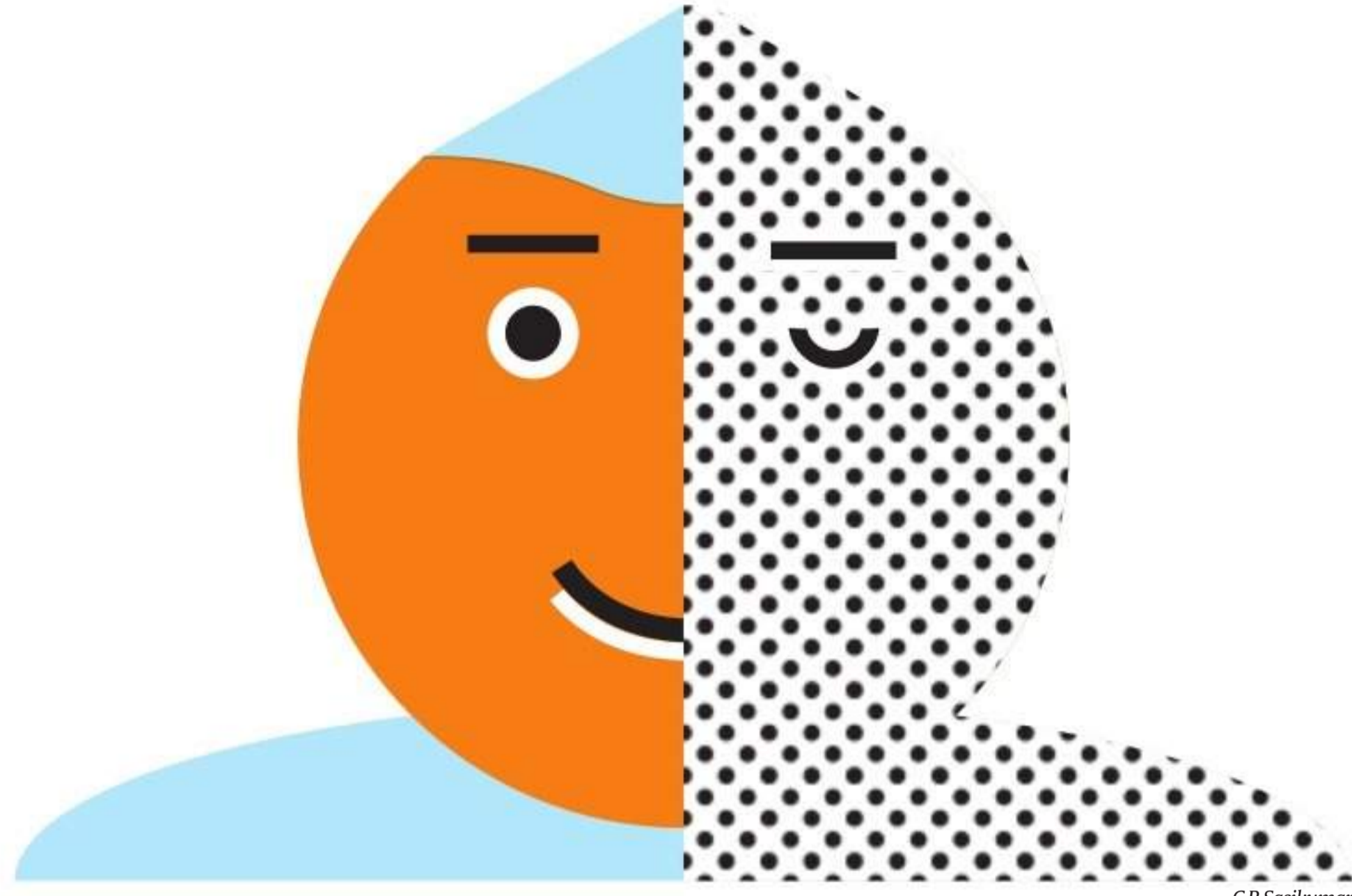
In the ongoing national elections, will the 543 MPs be elected by all the Indians who vote by May 19th (the actual voters)? Data shows that in the current first-past-the-post system (FPTP), Parliament is elected by only about 45 per cent of the actual voters whose representatives become Lok Sabha MPs. 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

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 audits booth-wise results.

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 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, Pannalal 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



## Saffron error

The BJP seems to have fielded

Pragya Singh Thakur for all the wrong reasons

Pragya Singh Thakur may not be the first person to contest in an election despite facing serious charges, but her candidacy on behalf of the BJP in the Bhopal Lok Sabha constituency stands out as exceptionally controversial. She is arraigned as the prime accused and principal conspirator behind the September 2008 blast at Malegaon, in which six persons were killed. In other words, a person accused of a 'terrorist act' and against whom charges have been framed under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act is being fielded as a candidate, by a party that wants to underscore its anti-terrorism credentials. While many candidates may have criminal cases pending against them, it is highly unusual to find among mainstream party contestants one who has been accused of planting a bomb targeting a community. An obvious problem with Pragya Singh's candidacy is that she appears to have been chosen solely as a totemic representative of aggressive Hindutva nationalism. She was not prominent as a BJP member until she was named the candidate for Bhopal, where she will take on senior Congress leader Digvijaya Singh. It is one thing to field a political leader who faces criminal charges, but quite another to create an electoral candidate out of a key terror suspect. It would appear that the sole purpose of fielding her is to bolster the BJP's narrative that there never has been any 'Hindu' or 'saffron' terror group. Two blasts at Malegaon (2006 and 2008), the Samjhauta Express bombing near Panipat (February 2007), the explosions at Mecca Masjid in Hyderabad (May 2007) and the Ajmer Dargah (October 2007) were linked to a fringe Hindu group called 'Abhinav Bharat', but the NIA had neither the political backing nor the ability to obtain convictions. To no one's surprise, Ms. Singh lost little time in embarrassing the BJP by making serious allegations against the chief of the Mumbai Police Anti-Terrorist Squad, Hemant Karkare, who was martyred in the 26/11 terror attack.

Election law as it stands today does not bar one facing criminal charges from contesting, except those convicted of specified classes of offences, or those that entail a sentence of at least two years. If the mere pendency of a case was made a ground for disqualification, a vindictive regime could get any political opponent disqualified by merely slapping a criminal charge. However, given the tortuous process of taking a criminal prosecution to its conclusion, some have made a case for advancing the stage at which disqualification kicks in – by making a legislative change to rule out of the contest any person against whom charges have been framed by a competent court. It may be difficult to get enough lawmakers to agree to this significant change, but it can be a principle political parties adopt on their own. There have been instances of Union Ministers resigning from office as soon as charges were framed against them. There is no harm in extending this norm to the selection of candidates.

## Humanise the law

The draft Indian Forest Act must be redrawn to rid it of bureaucratic overreach

Modernising colonial era laws is a long-delayed project, but the draft Indian Forest Act, 2019 is woefully short of being a transformative piece of legislation. The original law, the Indian Forest Act, 1927, is an incongruous relic, its provisions having been drafted to suit the objectives of a colonial power that had extractive uses for forests in mind. A new law enacted should make a departure and be aimed to expand India's forests, and ensure the well-being of traditional forest-dwellers and biodiversity in these landscapes. The need is for a paradigm that encourages community-led, scientifically validated conservation. This is critical, for only 2.99% of India's geographic area is classified as very dense forest; the rest of the green cover of a total of 21.54% is nearly equally divided into open and moderately dense forest, according to the State of Forest Report 2017. The draft Bill reinforces the idea of bureaucratic control of forests, providing immunity for actions such as use of firearms by personnel to prevent an offence. The headline policing approach is reflected in the emphasis on creating infrastructure to detain and transport the accused, and to penalise entire communities through denial of access to forests for offences by individuals. Such provisions invariably affect poor inhabitants, and run counter to the empowering and egalitarian goals that produced the Forest Rights Act.

India's forests play a key role in moderating the lives of not just the adivasis and other traditional dwellers, but everyone in the subcontinent, through their impact on the climate and monsoons. Their health can be improved only through collaboration. Any new forest law must, therefore, aim to reduce conflicts, incentivise tribals and stop diversion for non-forest uses. This can be achieved by recognising all suitable landscapes as forests and insulating them from commercial exploitation. Such an approach requires a partnership with communities on the one hand, and scientists on the other. For decades now, the Forest Department has resisted independent scientific evaluation of forest health and biodiversity conservation outcomes. In parallel, environmental policy has weakened public scrutiny of decisions on diversion of forests for destructive activities such as mining and large dam construction. Impact assessment reports have mostly been reduced to a farce, and the public hearings process has been diluted. When a new government takes over, the entire issue should go back to the drawing board. The government needs to launch a process of consultation, beginning with the State governments to ensure that a progressive law is adopted by all States, including those that have their own versions of the existing Act. The Centre must hear the voice of all stakeholders and communities, including independent scientific experts.

# Either way, the news is bad

If Pakistan does not take the IMF loan, it is in a mess. If it does, it is in a bigger mess



S. AKBAR ZAIDI

When Asad Umar, Finance Minister of Pakistan, returned from Washington after attending the Spring meetings of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank a few days ago, the first task he had in front of him was to deny the strong rumours that he was being demoted to be the petroleum minister. The rumours died down at that moment, but on Thursday, he was sent packing. He was, indeed, offered the petroleum ministry, which he has declined. (Dr. Abdul Hafeez Sheikh, a former Adviser under General Musharraf, has been named the adviser on finance, adding to the growing list of the Musharraf Cabinet in this current government.) At a moment when Pakistan's economy is facing a major crisis, it also has no finance minister now. Whoever will take the new job will have to face challenges they may neither be prepared for nor experienced enough to deal with.

### In free-fall mode

Pakistan's economy has been ruined in the last eight months since when Imran Khan became Prime Minister and his party, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) formed the government. Almost every indicator has deteriorated substantially. For example, inflation, at 9.4%, is at its highest level in five-and-a-half years and is likely to rise to double digits for the months ahead. The rupee conti-

nues to lose value every other day, which adds to further inflation especially with the oil price on the way up. More devaluation is expected over the next few months especially when the government gives in to yet another IMF programme. The fiscal deficit is about to hit more than 6% of GDP, and even a cut in development expenditure will not stop this rot, as defence spending and interest payments continue to rise. Pakistan's exports which have been stuck at around \$26 bn for years, despite the 35% devaluation of the rupee over one year, have barely budged. The government owes power producing companies huge amounts of money – known as the circular debt – which continues to accumulate, and interest rates are also going up making the cost of business even more uncompetitive. The State Bank of Pakistan recently lowered the expectations of the GDP growth for the current fiscal year to an eight-year low, to around 3.5%, an estimate which was reduced further by the IMF and the World Bank to a dismal 2.9% for the current fiscal year, and expected to fall further over the next three years. The GDP grew by 5.8% in the last fiscal year, the highest in 13 years. By all accounts, Pakistan's economy is in a dismal state.

### Key factors

A major reason why the economy has taken such a sharp plunge, with GDP growth being halved within a year, is on account of the mismanagement and incompetence of the current government and by its economic team. On top of that, there has been the hubris led by and manifested in Mr. Khan, once saying that he would rather



commit suicide than go to the IMF, popular slogans when one is the main nuisance factor in the opposition, but quite embarrassing as Prime Minister of a country facing a major economic meltdown.

The economic problem Pakistan faces at the moment, has two aspects to it, and is a major case of 'damned if you do and damned if you don't'. One reason why Pakistan's economy is in such a mess is because of the arrogance and bravado of Mr. Khan, which was mimicked by his economic and finance team, has come to haunt all of them. For eight months the economy has been mismanaged because of the fact that the then newly-elected government in August did not do what it should have. It was almost certain that whichever party would have won the elections of July 2018, it would ask the IMF for a major structural adjustment loan. At that time, there did not seem to be many alternatives. Mr. Khan's strategy was to run to a few of Pakistan's friends begging for money, and to not bow his head in front of the IMF. By not submitting to the IMF then, they now have no option but to submit almost a year later. A non-IMF policy and programme was always preferred and a better option in August last year, but the incompetence of Mr. Khan, matched with vanity, did not allow

for reforms to be undertaken, and has only made matters far worse.

So, after having said that they won't go to the IMF, that's exactly where they are now. From finding (and failing at) alternatives to revive Pakistan's economy, the finance minister has had to find ways to convince the IMF that Pakistan needs the IMF. The reasons for the rumours of him being dismissed from his post, should have been based on his poor performance of running the economy, but they shifted to how he wasn't able to cut an IMF deal a few days ago when he was in Washington. The fact that he was not able to meet the U.S. Treasury Secretary, Steven Mnuchin, nor the IMF head, Christine Lagarde, on this visit, was seen as yet another sign of this failure by the Pakistani media. Nevertheless, the IMF deal is now a certainty, and although the finance minister has been replaced, there was probably no need for a replacement. When the IMF implements its strict conditionalities and adjustment programme, to which the finance minister and the country supposedly 'agree', the finance minister becomes redundant and is simply the bearer and front for bad news and tough conditions. The new finance Adviser will fit this role perfectly.

### Tough road ahead

The new IMF programme, the biggest Pakistan is expecting to receive, to be between \$6-10 bn, which is almost a certainty now, is going to make things far worse for all Pakistanis, and especially for the working people already dealing with prospects of a marked economic slowdown and high and rising inflation. The IMF will furth-

er cut the minuscule development expenditure left, although defence spending will remain a matter of 'national security' never discussed in Parliament, hence, not to be touched. The IMF will ensure austerity, stabilisation and will cut the growth rate further. It will insist on further devaluation, or 'adjustment' of the rupee, as it calls it, causing greater inflation, and will insist on raising utility prices. In every respect, the people of Pakistan will face the prospects of fewer jobs, rising prices and an economy which is now the worst performer in all of South Asia.

This will be the 13th IMF rescue package for Pakistan's governments and its elites in less than four decades. Each time there is an economic crisis created due to mismanagement, the elite remain under-taxed, the IMF and World Bank jump in to save them. Usually, Pakistan's governments in the past, especially the military, leverage Pakistan's so-called geostrategic position and situation and gain undue access, with the U.S. having been Pakistan's biggest champion and supporter. As global power shifts and the region changes, so has Pakistan's position in it. One of the stumbling blocks to the deal this time has been the IMF's insistence that Pakistan reveal the financial deals made with China, including financial loans, as well as the \$60 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. If Pakistan doesn't take the IMF loan, it is in a mess. If it takes the loan, it is in a bigger mess. Either way, the news is bad.

S. Akbar Zaidi is a political economist based in Karachi. He teaches at Columbia University in New York, and at the IBA in Karachi

# A dialogue with our fragile past

The world needs to look differently at its historical memory and the cultural heritage which embodies it



RAMIN JAHANBEGLOO

It is only after our heritage is destroyed, in natural disasters and conflicts, that we realise how fragile historical memory is – even for a globalised period of history like ours. The large fire that broke out in Paris on Monday and which consumed a part of the Cathedral of Notre-Dame, is a grim reminder that centuries of heritage can be destroyed in minutes. Of course the French people can rebuild the physical structure and in this enterprise they will be certainly supported by the vast wealth of Europe, America and others, made possible by centuries of industrialisation and capital accumulation. But rebuilding the Notre-Dame de Paris does not mean that we can necessarily renew its original spirit – of blocks of sandstones which narrate their own geological and social history.

Undoubtedly, for over 800 years, the cathedral has been the driving force behind the eternal

return of Paris as the 'Heart of the World'.

### Repository of history

As a powerful spiritual symbol of Christian faith, it counts many treasures, such as the crown of thorns, which are believed to have been placed on Jesus Christ's head. Joan of Arc was beatified in the cathedral in 1909, after her execution for heresy in 1431. And, for more than three centuries, Notre-Dame has stood as a symbol of political change in France. During the French Revolution, its treasures were plundered. However, as seen in the famous painting of Jacques-Louis David, Napoleon Bonaparte crowned himself emperor of France at Notre-Dame in 1804. Other famous political ceremonies of the 20th and 21st centuries in France, such as the liberation of Paris from Nazi occupation in 1944, the farewell to Charles de Gaulle in 1970, and a requiem mass in tribute to François Mitterrand in 1996, took place in the Notre-Dame Cathedral.

Last but not least, for nearly nine centuries, Notre-Dame has been at the centre of French and world literature. We all remember Victor Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* (1831) with the cathe-



dral as its centre plot. Hugo's multiple references to the architecture of the Cathedral are breathtaking and stupefying.

Strangely, it is as if Hugo was present at the fire, when he described flames in the cathedral (when Quasimodo uses fire and stones to attack Truands in order to save Esmerelda): "All eyes were raised to the top of the church. They beheld there an extraordinary sight. On the crest of the highest gallery, higher than the central rose window, there was a great flame rising between the two towers with whirlwinds of sparks, a vast, disordered, and furious flame, a tongue of which was borne into the smoke by the wind, from time to time."

Even for those of us who are not religious and yet believe in the cathedral as a spiritual home and a monument in glory of the human creativity, the horrific fire destroy-

ing this Gothic edifice has been a moment of tragedy and despair. Time might have been the devourer of Notre-Dame as Hugo wrote in his novel, but humanity has long been the enemy of its own heritage.

### Spirit of freedom

As a matter of fact, what was important for Hugo, as for many other writers and intellectuals of his time, was the spirit of freedom represented by Notre-Dame. As he put it clearly, "There exists in this era, for thoughts written in stone, a privilege absolutely comparable to our current freedom of the press. It is the freedom of architecture." Hugo is right. To feel the spirit of Notre-Dame, as that of Paris, one needs the freedom of a flâneur. One needs to allow one's gaze to be further absorbed by the play of light upon a meaningful stone that remained alive after a catastrophe.

Without the stones of Notre-Dame, these aesthetic compasses, we would never be able to take our responsibilities in the world. If we want to be at home in this century, even at a price of living in a topsy-turvy world, we must try to take part in a dialogue with our fragile past. We need to educate our sens-

es and to look differently at our historical memory and the cultural heritage which embodies it.

For centuries, humanity has witnessed the destruction of its historical memory, and each time a new door to our common fate is closed forever. We all believe that this should not happen anymore. But it does happen, and we cannot reconcile ourselves with it. None of us can.

However, within this horizon of despair, which manifests itself in the fragility of human history, there is a moral horizon that expresses a love of humanity in spite of its brokenness. Heritage, therefore, expresses a joy of witnessing the past despite the sadness of historical destruction. It is this joy of witnessing the past that becomes an awareness of our landscape of memory. This awareness is the strongest evidence of the victory of peaceful coexistence between the past and the present. Those who fail to see it, forget to make a prayer that one day the organ pipes of Notre-Dame of Paris will once again reverberate through the sanctuary.

Ramin Jahanbegloo is Director, Mahatma Gandhi Centre for Peace, Jindal Global University, Sonapat

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

### Epidemic of hate

The writer (Editorial page, "A shameful marker of five years", April 19), has painstakingly highlighted right-wing extremism even going on to describe the trichotomy of lynching. However, between 2009-14, the present government was not in power and under the United Progressive Alliance. In a way, one has to point out that religious hate cuts across periods and regimes. The memories of the attack on the Sikh community has not been obliterated. Nor can the hounding and herding of Kashmiri pundits, which some intellectuals like the writer do not acknowledge. One need not be of a separate elite genre to condemn, in no uncertain terms, any attacks on minorities. Selective smearing is unfair. The fact is every true Indian condemns hate crimes.

P.S.S. MURTHY, Hyderabad

■ If India was so unsafe for minorities, one is unable to fathom why the minorities

from Bangladesh and Myanmar wish to seek refuge and shelter in India. There are many in the media who wait to pillory the government at the drop of a hat but they need to be fair and look at the record of all governments.

CHIRAG SHARMA, Palampur, Kangra, Himachal Pradesh

■ In the past five years, right-wing forces have been emboldened in creating a fear psychosis in the minds of the minorities. What is more disturbing is brazen felicitations of the perpetrators. There is also a marked difference between NDA rule under Atal Bihari Vajpayee and the leader now who is trying his best to instil his invincibility in the minds of the people by terming all those who question him and his actions as anti-nationals and those siding with Pakistan. One wishes the article also looked at rising intolerance which has resulted in the elimination of rationalists, a foisting of false cases and the invention of terms such as urban-Naxals which are attributed to social activists. The peaceful

coexistence of various religions in this country is being eroded.

G.B. SVANANDAM, Coimbatore

### Bhopal candidate

The BJP's move to field Malegaon blast main accused, Pragya Singh Thakur, against the Congress's Digvijaya Singh for the Bhopal Lok Sabha seat, should not come as a surprise, given the party's assiduously planned strategy to polarise voters on religious lines. While she is free to contest an election under the existing law, it certainly exposes the ruling party's hypocrisy on terrorism. Parliament, as the judiciary has recommended, needs to bring out a strong law whereby it is mandatory for political parties to revoke membership of persons against whom charges are framed in heinous and grave offences. Such persons should also be barred from standing for elections, both for Parliament and the State Assemblies.

S.K. CHOUDHURY, Bengaluru

■ What the BJP is trying to establish by fielding Ms. Singh is hard to fathom. The party, it appears, only wants to tell the electorate that the BJP is all set to rely on hardcore Hindutva philosophy to secure a victory in the crucial parliamentary elections. What happened to the campaign rhetoric of 'Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas'?

V. PADMANABHAN, Bengaluru

### Poll notes

The most annoying factor as far as the conduct of the general election in Chennai was concerned was that a vast number of permanent residents were turned away by poll officials as their names were "found missing" in the voter's list or for not having the booth slip. (Chennai city, "Confusion over booth slips leads to many being turned away from polling centres", April 19). While it is important for citizens to exercise their voting rights, it is equally important that the voter list should be perfect without any omission of names. In this day and age of electronic

communication also, the Election Commission of India should be able to think of a quick and credible solution. During the last elections, the voter list was checked by door-to-door verification. In certain areas, residents of entire streets found their names missing.

D. SETHURAMAN, Chennai

■ After going through the reports published in the Chennai edition of the daily, on the conduct of the general election in the city, I have this to say. India is flooded with software engineers and smartphones. Access to the Internet is also not very difficult as far as cities are concerned. Therefore, why cannot online voting be introduced? The voter turnout percentage in

### CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

The former Chief Election Commissioner, S.Y. Quraishi's clarification in regard to a reader's query on de-registering of political parties ('Parley', OpEd page, "Is the Election Commission toothless or is it refusing to bite?" April 19, 2019): "A judgment of the Supreme Court held that though the Election Commission has the power to register political parties, it has no power to de-register. It has to be specifically given to it by an Act of Parliament. The Election Symbols Order is an executive order of the EC and not an Act of Parliament."

The Reader's Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300; E-mail: readerseditor@thehindu.co.in













मुंबई आतंकी हमले में आतंकवादियों से सीधे भिड़ने वाले शहीद हेमंत करकरे के बलिदान को 'उसके कर्मों की सजा' बता रही है भोपाल-प्रत्याशी. जो मंच पर बैठे हैं, वे एक चुनावी हार-जीत के लिए बेगमों से ताली बजा रहे हैं। देश के लिए वहीं में शहीद हो चुके एक सिपाही के साथ ये सलूक?

डॉ. कुमार विश्वास, आम नेता

पति राजनीति की 'माया' देखिए कि ढाई दशक से सत्ता के लालच में लूट खसोट व भ्रष्टाचार में लिप्त एक दूसरे को नीच कहने वाले, पागलखाने भेजने वाले, गुंडों से अस्मिता तार-तार करवाने वाले आज एक दूसरे के लिए 'मुलायम' हो गये.

योगी आदित्यनाथ, सीएम, UP

ग्रांड रिपोर्ट. 34 साल पुराने इतिहास को दोहराने की कोशिश में कांग्रेस

# भोपाल में दिग्विजय और साध्वी प्रज्ञा की लड़ाई दिलचस्प मोड़ पर



30 साल से भाजपा का मजबूत किला

भोपाल से मिथिलेश

शाम के सात बजे भोपाल शहर के एक पोशा इलाके रिवेरा क्लब कॉलोनी में मंच के पूर्व सीएम दिग्विजय सिंह लोगों से पूछ रहे हैं- कितने लोगों के पास उज्ज्वला गैस कनेक्शन है? सब चुप. एक व्यक्ति ने खड़े होकर कहा- इसमें लाभ ही नहीं है, तो क्यों लें? दिग्विजय सिंह हाथ में माइक लेकर कहते हैं- कांग्रेस की सरकार बनी, तो उज्ज्वला योजना बंद. डीलरों पर चल रहे केस भी वापस. राजा साहब कहते हैं- आप लोग मुझे वोट देंगे? भौड़ से आवाज आती है- हां. अपनी जेब में रखे मोबाइल की ओर इशारा करते हुए राजा साहब कहते हैं- मेरा नंबर भी सब लोग लिख लो. फोन मत करना. मैसेज भेजना. 24 से 48 घंटे के अंदर मैं जवाब दूंगा.

विधानसभा चुनाव में मिली जीत से कांग्रेस उत्साहित है. शुरुआत में ऐसा लग रहा था कि दिग्विजय सिंह की लड़ाई मुश्किल नहीं होगी, पर भाजपा ने उनके मुकाबले साध्वी प्रज्ञा ठाकुर को उतार कर मुकाबले को दिलचस्प बना दिया है. साध्वी मंच पर रोजी हैं. अपने ऊपर हुए जेल में अत्याचार की कहानी कहती हैं. साथ में दिग्विजय सिंह पर व्यक्तिगत हमले भी करती हैं. उनकी दूसरी शादी पर भी आक्षेप करती हैं. दिग्विजय सिंह कहते हैं- मुझे कुछ नहीं करना. साध्वी की उम्मीदवाari से कोई फर्क नहीं पड़ता. उम्मीदवार कोई भी हो.

## भोपाल में रह रहे बिहारियों का यह है मूड

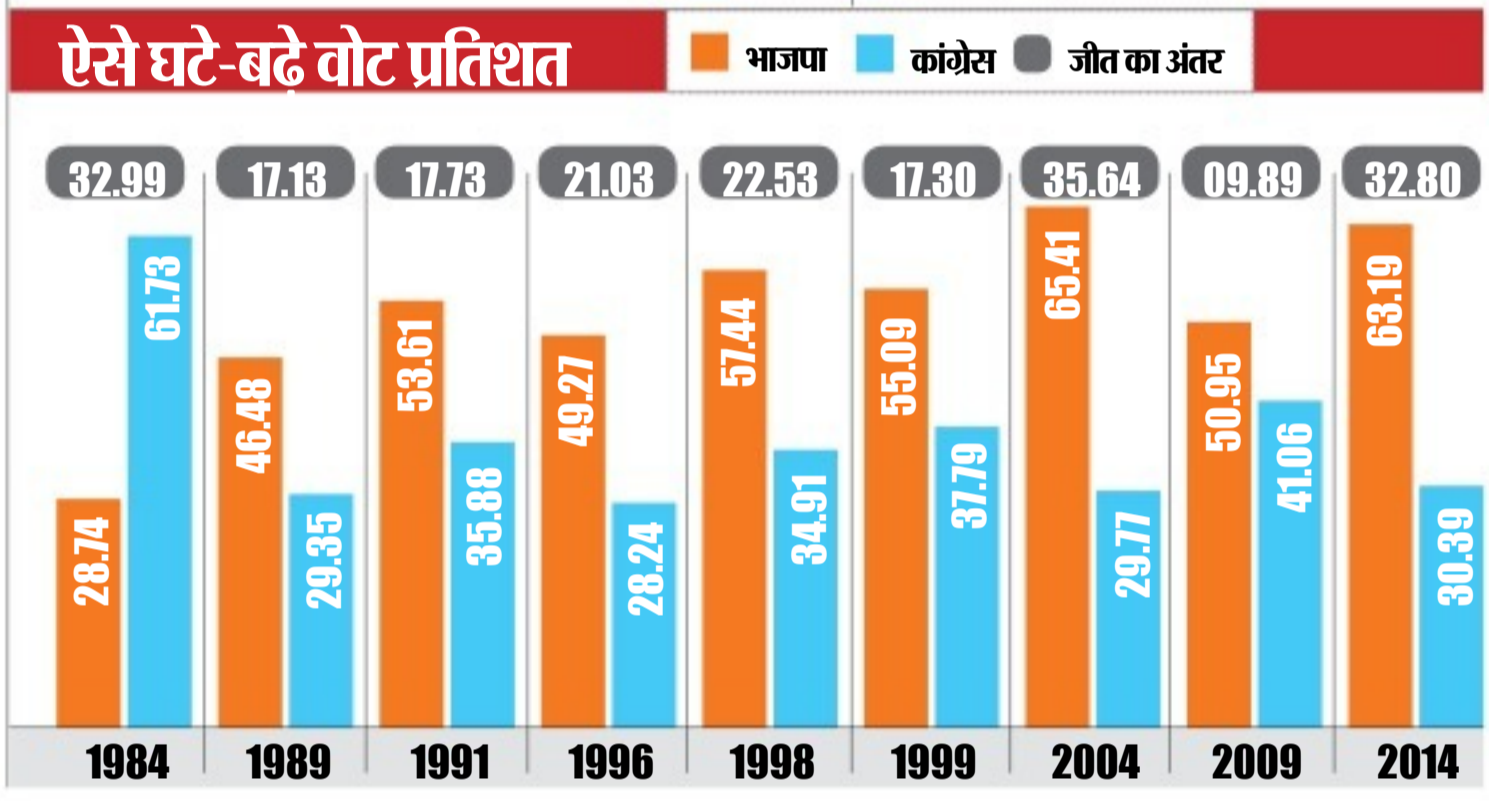
ज्यों-ज्यों चुनाव के दिन करीब आते जायेंगे, मतदाता मुखर होने लगेंगे. रेलवे अधिकारी और बिहार के मधुबनी जिले के नवहथ गांव के रहने वाले सुमन कुमार कहते हैं- मुकाबला फकरतपुर नहीं है. वहीं मुजफ्फरपुर निवासी सापटवेयर इंजीनियर कुमुद कहते हैं- भ्रष्टाचार की खिलाफत करने वाली पार्टी को ही वोट देंगे. करम अधिकारी ओम प्रकाश सिंह कहते हैं- कांग्रेस की किसानों की कर्जा माफी का असर ग्रामीण इलाकों में है. सेंट्रल बैंक ऑफ इंडिया में अधिकारी श्यामनाथ दास शिवराज सिंह चौहान के मुरीद हैं. कहते हैं, बिड़ला मंदिर की सीढियां उतरते पत्नी गिर पड़ी थी. सामने से शिवराज आ रहे थे. वह खुद दौड़ पड़े और पत्नी को सहारा दिया. दास की नजर में दिग्विजय सिंह बड़े नेता हैं, लेकिन पब्लिक जुगुप्स शिवराज का है. सीवान जिले के रहने वाले गोंधी शर्मा मेन बाजार में फर्नीचर का कारोबार करते हैं.

चुनौती तब थी, आज भी है. मंत्र में लोस की 29 सीटें हैं. 2014 में कांग्रेस को तीन सीटें मिली थीं. इस बार पार्टी कितनी सीटों पर जीत रही? दिग्विजय सिंह कहते हैं- पिछली बार से तीन गुना अधिक. भोपाल शहर में 12 मई को चुनाव होना है, पर यहां अभी चुनाव का माहौल नहीं बन पाया है. शहर के चौक-चौराहों पर कोई पोस्टर नहीं, नारेबाजी नहीं दिखती. शहराहा पार्क के सामने की सरकारी भवन की दीवार पर हाल ही में रामायण की पंक्तियां उकेरी गयी हैं. कुछ कलाकार अब भी चित्रकारी कर रहे हैं, पर राजनीतिक नारा कहीं नहीं दिख रहा. दिग्विजय सभाओं में शिवराज सिंह पर निशाना साधते हैं. डॉ. विश्वनाथ की बात याद दिलाते हैं कि भोपाल बहुत सुंदर शहर है. इसे और भी सुंदर बनाओ.



दिग्विजय सिंह टू अर्थ हुए

इधर, मुकाबले को आसान नहीं मान, दिग्विजय सिंह डाउन टू अर्थ हो चुनाव प्रचार कर रहे. अभी तक उन्होंने पूरे क्षेत्र को चार बार छान मारा है. भाजपा के नेता कहते हैं- यहां तो पूरी सरकार लड़ रही है. कमलनाथ सरकार के छह मंत्री दिग्विजय की चुनावी कमान संभाले हुए हैं. सीतामढ़ी के मूल निवासी देवेन्द्र चंद लाल मध्य प्रदेश की सरकार में कार्यरत हैं. वे कहते हैं- यहां काटे की टक्कर है. दिग्विजय सिंह के मुकाबले भाजपा किसी और को उम्मीदवार बनाती तो निर्णय कुछ और होता. मगर अब तो दिग्वी राजा का जोर है.



ऐसे घटे-बढ़े वोट प्रतिशत

## इस बार के चुनाव में गुजराती अस्मिता व राष्ट्रवाद बड़ा मुद्दा

अहमदाबाद से अंजनी कुमार सिंह

अहमदाबाद से लगभग 40 किलोमीटर दूर देहगाम ताल्लुका में लगभग सौ गांव हैं, जिसमें खेतिहर और दलित परिवार की संख्या ज्यादा है. इनकी समस्याएं हैं. कुछ किसान सरकार से नाराज भी हैं. गोपालकों की भी अपनी मांगें हैं. लेकिन सरकार के प्रति नाराजगी और शिकायतें से ज्यादा उनके लिए गुजराती अस्मिता और राष्ट्रवाद महत्वपूर्ण है. चाय दुकान पर बैठे 80 वर्षीय गोविंद गिरी केलाश गिरी गोस्वामी गुजराती 'वडा प्रधान' (प्रधानमंत्री) के लिए एक बार फिर से भाजपा को वोट देने की बात कहते हैं. बताते हैं, यह गुजरात के लिए वोट की बात है कि मोदी एक बार फिर से 'वडा प्रधान' बनें. नरेंद्र भाई कहते हैं, यह गुजरात की अस्मिता का सवाल है. आज जैसे ही 'वडा प्रधान' का नाम आता है, तो गुजरात का नाम भी आता है. यही विचार हरेश भाई, लाल शाह भी जाहिर करते हैं. हालांकि, कुछ लोग इसे वोट बैंक पॉलिटिक्स बता रहे हैं. भाई शिवद कहते हैं, बेरोजगारी चरम पर है. जीएसटी, नोटबंदी ने कमर तोड़ दी है. अलग-अलग क्षेत्रों में अलग-अलग मुद्दे हैं, लेकिन गुजराती अस्मिता और आतंकवाद की चर्चा शहरी मध्य वर्ग के



शहरी मध्य वर्ग का आकर्षण, पर अंडरकरेंट भी है गुजराती अस्मिता और आतंकवाद बनाम राष्ट्रवाद के मुद्दे पर यहां के बुद्धिजीवी भी स्वीकार करते हैं कि यह बात खासकर शहरी मध्य वर्ग को अपनी ओर आकर्षित करता है, लेकिन ऐसे मुद्दे के खिलाफ एक अंडरकरेंट भी चल रहा है, जो अभी दिख नहीं रहा, लेकिन चुनाव परिणाम में दिखे. गुजरात यूनिवर्सिटी के प्रोफेसर किरण देसाई कहते हैं, ये मुद्दा वोटक मध्यवर्ग को प्रभावित करता है. ऐसे मुद्दे के कारण मुख्य मुद्दे गौण हो गये हैं. गुजराती अस्मिता, आतंकवाद, राष्ट्रवाद को हम किस रूप में परिभाषित करते हैं, यह भी महत्वपूर्ण है. चुनाव के समय ऐसे मुद्दों पर फोकस कर जनात वोट करती हैं, तो निश्चित रूप से इसका फायदा भाजपा को मिलेगा.

लेने और असली मुद्दों से ध्यान भटकाने के लिए है. वहीं सड़क के दूसरी ओर संजय भाई, हरीश भाई दरवार कहते हैं, गुजराती अस्मिता का सवाल गुजरात के लिए सर्वोपरि है, जिन्हें अपनी अस्मिता और राष्ट्रियता से प्यार नहीं है, उनके विषय में आप खुद ही अंदाजा लगा सकते हैं कि वह किस से प्यार करते हैं.

## बांग्लादेश से रोज के रिश्ते, पर चुनाव प्रचार पर पहला बवाल

कोलकाता से अजय विद्याधी

पश्चिम बंगाल लोकसभा चुनाव में बांग्लादेशी विवाद से राज्य की राजनीति गरमा गयी है. पश्चिम बंगाल की सीमाएं बांग्लादेश से सटी हुई हैं. स्वास्थ्य व शिक्षा सहित विभिन्न मूलभूत जरूरतों को लेकर बांग्लादेश के लोगों का पश्चिम बंगाल प्रवास: ही आना-जाना लगा रहता है. कट्यों के पारिवारिक रिश्ते दोनों देशों में हैं. दोनों देशों में बनी बांग्ला फिल्मों व टीवी सीरियल परस्पर देशों में समान रूप से देखे, पसंद किये जाते हैं, पर हाल में चुनाव के दौरान अप्रत्याशित घटना घटी, जिससे राज्य की राजनीति में गरमा गयी है. अंततः केंद्रीय गृह मंत्रालय को हस्तक्षेप करना पड़ा है. पहली बार बांग्लादेशी अभिनेताओं ने किया चुनाव प्रचार: बांग्लादेशी अभिनेता फिर्दास अहमद और गाजी अब्दुल नूर ने रायगंज और दामन लोस क्षेत्र से टीएमसी उम्मीदवारों के पक्ष में चुनाव प्रचार किया. बंगाल में ऐसा पहली बार हुआ. भाजपा की शिकायत और ब्यूरो ऑफ इमिग्रेशन की रिपोर्ट के आधार गृह मंत्रालय ने इन दोनों का वीजा रद्द कर दिया और 'भारत छोड़ो' का नोटिस जारी कर दिया. इन्हें ब्लैक लिस्टेड कर दिया गया है. नूर वीजा अवधि समाप्त होने के बाद भी भारत में रुके रहे. हालांकि दोनों अभिनेताओं ने अपनी गलती स्वीकार करते हुए माफी भी मांगी है, लेकिन राज्य की राजनीति में विदेशी हस्तक्षेप की मुद्दा गरमाया हुआ है. राजनीतिक दल परस्पर एक-दूसरे पर आरोप लगा रहे हैं.

## बांग्लादेशी घुसपैठ और शरणार्थी का मुद्दा पहले से ही

बांग्लादेशी घुसपैठ और शरणार्थियों का मुद्दा राज्य में पहले से उठता रहा है. पीएम नोदी ने साफ कहा कि भाजपा दोबारा सत्ता में आती है, तो घुसपैठियों को बाहर निकाला जायेगा, हिंदू शरणार्थियों को नागरिकता मिलेगी. बंगाल में भी एनआरसी लागू होगा. टीएमसी इसका विरोध कर रही है. भाजपा का आरोप है कि बांग्लादेश से सटे जिलों में बड़ी संख्या में बांग्लादेशी घुसपैठियों के कारण जनसंख्या अनुपात बदल गया है. इसका चुनावी राजनीति पर प्रभाव पड़ रहा है.

## अभिनेता से नेता की ओर, बसपा के साथ



पवन कल्याण तेलुगु फिल्मों के लोकप्रिय अभिनेता चित्तोजी की प्रजा राज्यसभा पार्टी से राजनीति शुरू की अभिनेता से राजनेता बने पवन कल्याण तेलुगु फिल्मों के लोकप्रिय अभिनेता हैं. पवन कल्याण ने 2008 में अपने बड़े भाई और मेगास्टार चित्तोजी की प्रजा राज्यसभा पार्टी से राजनीतिक पारी शुरू की थी. हालांकि उन्होंने कोई चुनाव नहीं लड़ा. 2011 में प्रजा राज्यसभा पार्टी के कांग्रेस में विलय के बाद पवन कल्याण ने 2014 में जगू सेना नामक पार्टी बनायी. 2014 के लोकसभा चुनाव में उन्होंने भाजपा और टीडीपी के लिए चुनाव प्रचार किया. 2017 में उन्होंने घोषणा की कि वह पूर्ण रूप से राजनीति में रहेंगे. वर्तमान में उनकी पार्टी बसपा के साथ मिल कर लोकसभा चुनाव के साथ-साथ आंध्र प्रदेश के विधानसभा चुनाव लड़ रही है.

## पड़ताल राहुल गांधी के चुनाव लड़ने से सुर्खियों में है केरल की यह सीट, यहां 28% मुस्लिम व 21% ईसाई

# मुस्लिम बहुल वायनाड में रामायण से जुड़े हैं 30 स्थलों के नाम

नेशनल कंटेंट सेल

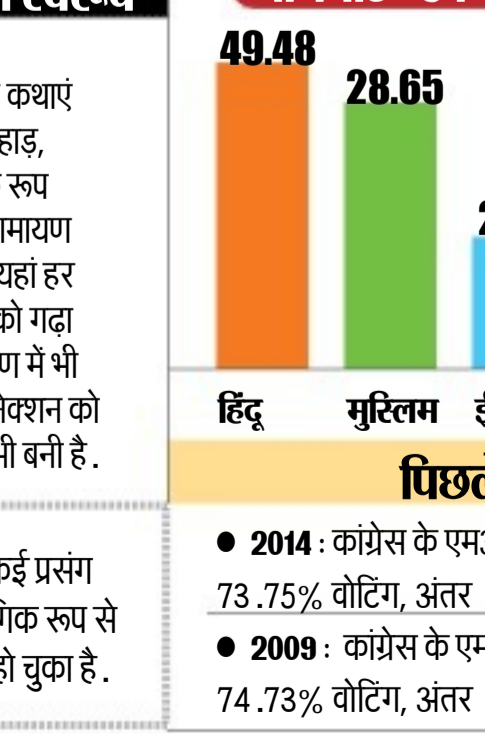
कांग्रेस अध्यक्ष राहुल गांधी के वायनाड लोस सीट से चुनाव लड़ने की घोषणा के बाद से ही यह बात तेजी से फैली कि अल्पसंख्यकों की बड़ी आबादी के कारण ही वह यहां से चुनाव लड़ने उतरे, पर वायनाड जिले में करीब 30 स्थान ऐसे हैं, जिनका नाम रामायण पर आधारित है. जनजातीय समुदायों के मौखिक रामायण का जो भाषायी स्वरूप स्थापित हुआ है, उससे उपजे नामों पर. इनमें पलपल्ली के निकट आश्रम कोल्लो स्थित वाल्मीकि आश्रम, अंबुकुटी माला, सीता माउंट जडायडुकावु, कावानी नदी की सहायक कन्नाराम पुला, पोकुडी, रामपल्ली इरुलाम प्रमुख हैं. पर्यटन विभाग तैयार कर रहा 'रामायण भूखला'



हर समुदाय ने गढ़ा रामायण का स्वरूप

विशेषज्ञ कहते हैं, चाहे स्थानों के नाम हो या लोक कथाएं और लोकगीत, या फिर कला, मंदिर, नदियां व पहाड़, यहां हर जगह रामायण जिंदा है. ये सभी मौखिक रूप से प्रचलित परंपराओं पर आधारित हैं. जो आदि रामायण की तरह मुख्य धारा से थोड़े अलग स्वरूप में हैं. यहां हर जनजातीय समुदाय ने अपने हिसाब से रामायण को गढ़ा है. यह उनकी संस्कृति और यहां तक कि पर्यावरण में भी परिलक्षित होता है. वायनाड और रामायण के कनेक्शन को लेकर किताब भी लिखी गयी है. और डॉक्यूमेंट्री भी बनी है.

वायनाड: एक नजर



8,17,420 आबादी

(इन्में करीब 18% जनजातीय, जो राज्य में सबसे ज्यादा) सभी आंकड़े प्रतिशत में

लोकसभा चुनाव की स्पेशल स्टोरी और वीडियो के लिए देखें prabhatkhabar.com, अपडेट रहें हमारी सोशल साइट के साथ. लाइक और फॉलो करें

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