



WORDLY WISE
NOBODY IS QUALIFIED TO BECOME A STATESMAN WHO IS ENTIRELY IGNORANT OF THE PROBLEM OF WHEAT. — SOCRATES

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA
BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Why Imran bats for Modi

For Islamabad, a non-secular India is easier to contest



AYESHA SIDDIQA

YOUR HONOUR

How the SC responds to the sexual harassment complaint will test its institutional integrity, and fortify it against attacks

THE SEXUAL HARASSMENT complaint against Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi by a woman who once worked in his office is about much more than an individual accusing an individual. Given that it names the chief of the highest court, an institution fundamental to the health of the nation's democracy, the complaint tests the integrity of the entire institution. More so at a time of delicate — and sometimes indelicate — balancing of powers between the executive and unelected supervisory institutions. In January last year, it was Justice Gogoi who risked his elevation to the highest judicial office by joining three of his colleagues in the collegium — at a press conference — to caution the nation against attempts to undermine the independence of the judiciary. The jury is still out on how that unprecedented airing of an internal dispute affected the institution but one thing is clear. Since then, a lot more of the Supreme Court has been in public glare than ever, there is, often, a frenetic rush to judge judicial independence through the prism of politics. Into this swirl, drops the sexual harassment complaint. Curiously, the court responded in a hurried manner convening an "extraordinary" sitting barely hours after the allegations went public. The government's representative, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, with the CJ himself in attendance, tore into the complaint, questioned the motives of the complainant. In the presence of two brother justices, Justice Gogoi warned of "a bigger force" behind the complaint set off by people who "want to deactivate the office of the CJ". The alarm bells couldn't have been more ominous; they raised more questions than they answered. Who are these people the CJ refers to, what constitutes this bigger force out to "de-activate" his office, what about the woman's right to be heard — these questions can't be brushed aside by anger or piety. Justice Gogoi's warning of a plot needs elaboration. So does the complaint that details dates and names and records — each can and should be probed. How, that's for the court to decide. For one, there is already an in-house mechanism but it's required to seek the CJ's permission. Surely, the judges can find a way around this. After all, it is the Supreme Court that has, over the years, interpreted and re-interpreted the Constitution to empower women, to lay down the law for their protection at work and at home, underlined the primacy of due process for every voice to be heard — whatever its motive. That's why how the court responds to the complaint will test its institutional integrity and resolve. The Supreme Court is its history, its tradition, its verdicts, its formulation of Constitutional morality, it is also its Chief Justice and the 26 Justices of the Court, they shape its future, fortify it against any attack. So, over to Their Lordships.

FIELD LESSONS

The Modi government squandered an opportunity by ignoring farm crisis, next government can't afford to do so

HOW MUCH OF a factor farm distress is in the current Lok Sabha elections will be known only on May 23, the day of counting. What's clear, though, is that the party or coalition in power next cannot afford to ignore the challenges facing agriculture. The new government will, to start with, have to deal with the prospect of a not-so-good monsoon. The Met Department has, in its April 15 forecast, predicted overall rainfall for the southwest monsoon season (June-September) at 96 per cent of its historical long period average. This prognosis of a "near normal" monsoon must, however, be tempered by the warnings of global weather agencies vis-à-vis El Nino — the abnormal warming of the equatorial eastern Pacific Ocean waters, seen to adversely impact rainfall in India. But the real challenge for agriculture isn't weather-related. The Narendra Modi government's tenure has actually witnessed bumper harvests on a whole, despite monsoon failures in 2014 and 2015. The pressure on farm incomes has come more on account of low prices. That, in turn, is a result of the end of a decade-long global commodity boom after 2014 and also domestic policy measures, whether relating to export, internal trade and stocking restrictions (in the name of inflation targeting) or demonetisation. These have ultimately impacted sentiment and liquidity in the mandis. The sufferers from the lack of buying interest for agri-produce — the best indicator of it being consumer food inflation ruling below general retail inflation for 31 months running since September 2016 — have been farmers. Reviving sentiment — both amongst the trade to buy and stock up as well as agri-businesses to invest in modern processing, warehousing, transport, finance, research and extension — should be a top policy focus for the next government. Indian agriculture can do with a lot of supply-side reforms to unleash the true potential of a sector for generating jobs, both on- and off-farm. It is welcome to see the BJP promising to institute a "predictable export and import policy" for agriculture and the Congress poll manifesto stating that its government "will repeal the Agricultural Produce Market Committee Act" and make trade in farm commodities "free from all restrictions". Equally reassuring is the focus of the two main national parties on direct cash transfers and income support, which are less market-distorting than physical grain purchases at unrealistic minimum support prices or provision of fertiliser, electricity, water and credit at way below economic cost. The Modi government squandered an opportunity to address these distortions. This luxury will not be available for the government that takes over after May 23.

IT SEEMS THAT people from very odd quarters — such as Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan — want Narendra Modi to win the upcoming elections. Khan's recent comments, in which he desired victory for his counterpart as good for the future of a peace initiative, may be driven by pragmatic reasons, but it indicates the separation that exists between the two countries. Following comments by the Opposition and in segments of the social media, the federal information minister intervened and pretended that Khan, who can often open his mouth before engaging his brain, was misunderstood. Intriguingly, despite India being the most significant country in the neighbourhood, its election outcomes have marginal impact on the region. Khan's statement, in fact, indicates that disconnectedness in which the head of the government of a neighbouring state refused to measure the implications beyond tactical effect. It seems a right-wing government in India does not matter to Pakistan. Or, perhaps, a Modi-led right-wing government is a wish come true for the ideological right-wing in Pakistan. For the first time since 1947, people do not have to convince each other of how right Muhammad Ali Jinnah was in creating Pakistan: Not that Pakistan was ever designed for all Muslims of the Indian subcontinent, but it now sees its formula for ideological nationalism justified in the face of rising religious-ideological nationalism next door in India. I have lived through the times when Pakistan's intelligentsia was confused in the face of Indian secularism and democracy. Despite having their own country, there would be an internal conversation about the Indian experiment being better. The last four to five years has brought about a change in that thinking. The BJP leadership of the last five years cannot be held entirely responsible for all the political and sociological change. If anything, the last four years have helped expose the true colours of the rising Indian middle-class that does not necessarily think very differently from the Hindutva supporter on certain issues. There is no sign that the Congress under

Rahul Gandhi would have the gumption to change the course of society. Hearing the young Congress leader speak at a university in London, he did not seem to possess the temerity to deviate markedly from the ideological path that the BJP has chosen for India. However, there is an opinion in Pakistan that a Congress-led government, or any dispensation other than the present formulation, may be more cautious in how it approaches issues in the region. Meanwhile, the general sense is that with Modi at the helm of affairs, war and conflict will mark the tone of relations between the two countries. However, this would be beneficial for Pakistan's nationalist project that gets strengthened with every news of mob lynching of Muslims and other minorities, from India. This is not to argue that the state of minorities in Pakistan is any better: But New Delhi no longer represents a secular ideal. For Islamabad, a non-secular India is easier to contest. The only limitation that Pakistan faces in fighting a BJP-led India is its own internal problems, like the dearth of financial resources, and not the intent. This also means that conflict cannot remain the only shrill refrain: A resolution would have to be negotiated for which the establishment in Rawalpindi prefers a BJP-governed India. Khan's statement basically means that he, and others who share his thinking, believe that a strong right-wing government is the only credible element with which Pakistan could settle its matters. The question then is, what happened after the Lahore declaration? Wasn't it a BJP-government that was willing to talk peace? Or, what happened to the peace initiative between the A B Vajpayee and Pervez Musharraf governments? Seen purely from the Pakistani establishment's perspective, Kargil happened because the military wanted an equaliser at a time when the political government had not taken it into confidence. As far as the breakdown of talks at Agra are concerned, the right-wing in India was divided at the time and the segment represented by LK Advani did not want peace.

For Rawalpindi, Modi represents a neat synthesis of India's right-wing. Hence, the negotiations would be more comprehensive than ever before. The only problem, however, remains that how does one predict Pakistan's deep state — whose contours, today, are even more difficult to define. This understanding goes hand in hand with the thinking that the pragmatism of the Hindu right-wing would not stop Delhi from talking to Pakistan despite the latter's habitual U-turn from peace initiatives. While the emphasis following most track-II dialogues, particularly after a bilateral crisis, is on the Indian members of the group to apprise their counterparts of the anger in India, the Pakistani side has always maintained that it is possible to pick up the conversation thread from where it was dropped. A decade into this behaviour, there is barely anyone on Pakistan's side with the capacity to remind their own the highly problematic nature of this approach. Not unlike today's India, the cost of dissent in Pakistan is very high. There is little traction in the corridors of power towards an alternative approach to resolving the conflict. The deep state in Pakistan — which is not necessarily the entire military, but is symbolised by it — has gained excessive control of all discussions and dialogue. There is also the confidence that international and regional geopolitics allows Rawalpindi the opportunity to continue with its old approach. Money matters are critical, but it will not force a course correction unless Pakistan reaches a breaking point. The re-election of BJP may not necessarily mean a sturdier India. It will certainly be a more defiant India. Notwithstanding Khan's desire, a peace initiative would become less of a possibility, unless a foreign player forces Pakistan's hand and Delhi does a tactical readjustment. Until then, any communication between the two civil societies will become even more difficult.

The writer is a research associate at the Center for International Studies & Diplomacy at SOAS, University of London



AJAY VIR JAKHAR

THE DANGER OF SILVER BULLETS

Rural crisis needs nuanced interventions, not tall promises in party manifestos

FARMERS WERE SOLD a dream in 2014 that everything was going to change. But now they have compelling reasons to feel they were deceived. Party manifestos indicate what the politicians want us to believe. After elections, winners get either selective amnesia (Rs 15 lakh in each bank account), re-interpret promises (MSP at C2+50 per cent), continue to tout failures as successes (crop insurance) or devise policy fine print to exclude proposed beneficiaries from the promised largesse (farm loan waiver). Actions not even referred to in manifestos wrecked a stable economy (demonetisation and GST) and, consequently, unemployment percentages have risen. Unable to create jobs (let alone the promised 100 million jobs in five years) or kickstart the Make in India initiative, the wisest thing BJP did with the lost causes was that it let them go. I had naively presumed it would similarly bury the "doubling farmer income by 2022" slogan. But it hasn't. Though, there are countless reasons and measurable indicators for rural India to reject the government and not cry over spilt milk, in election time it's time to heed the words of CS Lewis: "You can't go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending." Considering the acuteness of the crises in the rural economy and the external factors, it's time to focus on practical deliverables and prioritise from amongst the best combination of trade-offs, rather than on populist unicorns (PM Kisan, Farm Loan Waiver, NYAY). The earth is on the verge of crossing the planetary climate change tipping point and

depleting natural capital. Everything has a cost, which we are transferring to the next generation, including what has not been even attempted. The unregulated over-exploitation of scarce natural resources is resulting in a falling groundwater table, deteriorating soil health and environmental pollution. While this generates today's food surpluses and low commodity prices, it also ultimately foments farm distress. Ironically, this leads to public scorn and policy apathy towards farmer demands. Political parties are unable even to fathom the urgency of the existential crisis we are headed for. Transferring agriculture input subsidies (fertiliser and power) to farmers in cash is the need of the hour. This must precede attempts to transferring cash for subsistence. Politicians have clarified that the proposed large cash transfers will not be funded by removing existing subsidies. I do not wish to speculate whether this is wishful thinking or wilful deceit. Experts advising on cash transfers, designed it as a "rationalisation" of subsidies — an academic way of saying "reducing or removing" subsidies. My fear is the ensuing fund crunch will not only grind to a halt improvements in essential basic services of healthcare and education, which are far below acceptable levels but also strangle the flow of productive public investments. Policies propagated by theorists, twisted by politicians, fine-printed by bureaucrats are akin to jumping from the frying pan to the fire. At the same time, many government programmes will need to be shelved. For exam-

ple, the concept of 100 smart cities must be replaced by developing 6,000 smart census towns (population over 5,000) spread across rural India. Even a novice would have suggested developing the hinterland rather than draw the millions to a few megapolises. Instead of aping western development models, it's better to try establishing institutions like US Department of Agriculture (USDA) to provide timely market intelligence services. Prioritising a "nationally consistent database" will be the key driver for improved transparency, traceability, governance, policies and implementation. The undeniable fact is that farmers will need to be supported in perpetuity — we need to tread cautiously in designing support systems because neither do we have the luxury of time, nor do our nuanced problems have silver bullet solutions. The required transformative change can come from a statutory "farmers commission" headed by a farmer with a mandate to review existing interventions and recommend new initiatives to improve rural livelihoods. For coordination and deliverables, ideally the commission must be comprised of an IAS officer as a full-time member-secretary and agriculture secretary as an official member. Finally, after the heat and grind of the elections is over, India needs a national government with practitioners heading important ministries. It's time for professional politicians and armchair experts to step aside.

The writer is chairman, Bharat Krishak Samaj

FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



APRIL 22, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

THAKUR VS DAS
A FRESH CRISIS is feared in the Janata Party as the erstwhile Bharatiya Lok Dal and some supporters of the former Bihar chief minister, Karpooi Thakur, have decided not to cooperate with the new ministry in the state headed by new CM and socialist leader, Ram Sunder Das, "so long as RSS elements are in it." The BLD group at a meeting today, attended among others by Raj Narain and SN Mishra, decided that no one from among them should join the ministry. They also decided to work for toppling Das' ministry either from inside the state legislature party or on the floor of the Assembly. The move has the blessings of the deputy prime minister,

Charan Singh, according to a party spokesman.
VINOBA BHAVE FASTS
HIGH-LEVEL EFFORTS ARE on to persuade Vinoba Bhave to give up his threatened fast on the cow-slaughter issue. The Union home minister, HM Patel, tonight rushed a wireless message to the chief ministers of 14 states asking them whether they will agree on changing their state laws banning the transport of cows to slaughter houses outside their states where there is no total ban on cowslaughter. The chief ministers of Kerala and West Bengal have rejected Bhave's plea for a total ban. Patel is reportedly working on

the presumption that if cows are not transported to Kerala and West Bengal, a formula may be found to save Bhave's life.
ZIA ON INDIA
PAKISTAN PRESIDENT GENERAL Zia-ul-Haq, said that relations between his country and India were "very delicate". At a news conference in Rawalpindi, General Zia referred to the Jamshepur riots and said, "I have conveyed my feelings to the Indian government." He also expressed his sympathy with those affected in Jamshepur. Zia also said that Pakistan was not building a uranium enrichment plant, but vowed his nation would continue efforts to acquire nuclear technology.

THE IDEAS PAGE

11



Sivajit Day

Ram Naam as a sanctuary

In Mumbai, the akhanda kirtan during Ram Navami provided a relief from the bustle of elections and an opportunity to approach politics from a broader view

IN GOOD FAITH
BY RAJNI BAKSHI

TEN DAYS OF akhanda kirtan are an annual delight at the Ram Mandir on the edge of the quiet and lush green Dadar Parsi colony in Mumbai. The chiming of cymbals and mellifluous chanting of "Sri Ram Jai Ram, Jai Jai Ram", round the clock, begins eight days before Ram Navami and concludes the day after.

For the third time, in my experience, this celebration of Ram Naam took place amidst a frenzied Lok Sabha election. Both the contrast and consonance of bhajan and politics opens up endless possibilities for looking within and outwards. At a time when one often feels buried under and suffocated by "data" here is a chance to view the familiar with new eyes.

The Shri Ram Mandir in Wadala is perhaps unique for being directly opposite a Hanuman temple. Though the Albela Hanuman Mandir is much older, the Ram Mandir was designed so that that the Hanuman idol on one side and the Lakshman, Ram, Sita idols on the other are perpetually in direct sight of each other. Between them is a busy road and the overhead track of the monorail — which has been built with care so that a column does not stand between the two temples. From a modernist perspective, here stand two houses of worship in rather mundane buildings. Outwardly there is nothing unremarkable.

For those who feel a connection, there is sanctuary from the ceaseless hubbub at the heart of a megapolis. Yet, there is more than

respite from the jostling of the mad race outside. What is this "more" and why does it feel more precious when the akhanda kirtan is happening in an election year?

Ironically, the feeling of sanctuary derives partly from what is not there. The iconography is similar to what our older people are familiar with, akin to what was handed down by our grandparents. Completely missing is the feral, angry face which in many other places now masquerades as an image of Hanuman. Here, Hanuman is still a loving and lovable presence. Absent also is any hint of Bollywood style images — which have become common at many newer temples. At the Ram Mandir, the black stone idols are beautifully carved and utterly simple. Here Ram is not alone, as often depicted in many contemporary images. Ram is completed by the presence of Lakshman on one side and Sita on the other.

Exquisite flower decorations are always done in a traditional manner with meticulous care. This aesthetic, becoming more intense and elaborate in the festive mood of Ram Navami, is an essential element of fostering a sense of welcome and respite. But all of this remains true year after year. Why should the feeling be any different because the experience is happening in an election year? This question stayed with me, long after I had returned to the world outside. Here are some of the answers that have slowly become visible.

That lightness of being, experienced in the midst of the akhanda kirtan, is possible because of what I am able to leave outside — most of all history and politics as a string of events and contestations. For that is the domain that houses all my angst and feelings of conflict with those who hold or promote a perspective with which I passionately disagree. Since these emotions are at fever pitch in an election season the sense of relief and respite in the sanctuary is proportionately more intense. Could this be the escapism of religion that in modern progressive jargon is called an opium? It might be, if the escapism — be it playing candy-crush or video gaming — locks you away from social and political

Since these emotions are at fever pitch in an election season the sense of relief and respite in the sanctuary is proportionately more intense. Could this be the escapism of religion that in modern progressive jargon is called an opium? It might be, if the escapism — be it playing candy-crush or video gaming — locks you away from social and political questions and choices that need to be addressed. The proper function of a sanctuary is not escape but renewal and recharge.

questions and choices that need to be addressed.

The proper function of a sanctuary is not escape but renewal and recharge. This can happen through a 10-day silence retreat within the Buddhist tradition or at an akhanda kirtan within a Brahmin tradition, as at the Ram Mandir, or in singing praises at the Vithoba temple next door which celebrates centuries of tradition of non-Brahmin saint poets.

An exhaustive list of such spaces within all the religions of the world would fill volumes. It is not that the disagreements and conflicts are dissolved. What constitutes justice, who should win in this election, what is at stake, who is endangering democracy — all these questions and more are waiting outside. The difference is that even a brief experience of sanctuary can alter the form that these questions take. To me, even the questions seemed to be waiting somewhat peacefully — as opposed to the usual images of pulling at a thin leash and baying for blood.

It is not the nature or complexity of the questions, the problems, that changes. But rather that they appear on a much wider, a more multi-dimensional frame or view of existence. Consequently, "reality" acquires nuance and appears less monochromatic. Why? Because the sanctuary is like an entry point into a space where we can reflect on the most basic questions of all: Who am I? Why am I here?

None of this is new. Long before the frenetic pace of life in industrialised society, the essentials may have been the same — that is why the ashram, the monastery have been around for centuries. Newer forms of such time-away sanctuaries are also growing in the contemporary world. But most require a considerable time commitment.

This is why the akhanda kirtan, right in the middle of the confusion and jostling of everyday life, is like the respite of a soothing gurgling stream of cool clean water on a blazing hot day.

Bakshi is a Mumbai-based author

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"This report is further proof that Mr Trump is unfit for office, and of the methods which helped to place him there. Mr Mueller took his time, but the matter could hardly be more urgent as the next presidential race approaches." — THE GUARDIAN

Democracy vs militarisation

Restrictions on using national highway further alienate Kashmiris, feed into a narrative of exclusion



WAHEED UR REHMAN PARA

DESPITE REPEATED CLAIMS by top political leaders that India is intent on safeguarding the Kashmiri people, the ground realities now reflect a total siege with restrictions on all freedoms, including the freedom of movement. This unfreedom, more than containing the pro-azadi sentiment, has further alienated the population of Kashmir, Chenab Valley and Pir Panjal region of Jammu and Kashmir.

Over the past few years, there has been a consistent effort to brand every Kashmiri a terrorist through a carefully-crafted campaign by Hindutva groups who ignorantly see a forcible demographic change — dismantling the Muslim-majority character of J&K — as the only solution. This dangerous mindset has gained official patronage and a boost from certain television anchors who misrepresent and spread venom against the Muslims of J&K for petty gains: Naturally, this hostility isn't limited to the fringe right-wing groups.

The recent restriction on the use of the national highway — the most important road link in the state — by the people is the latest manifestation of the Centre's hegemonic approach. This measure, too, can only be understood in the context of larger and widespread approval to harsh treatment of Muslims of J&K, particularly Kashmiris. The latest ban, of course, isn't the first instance of deprivation of Kashmiris at the hands of jingoistic decrees; overpowering us has been a constant strategy.

The current phase of the conflict in J&K was triggered by the Amarnath land row, which was followed by an economic blockade of Kashmir when the adherents of Hindutva assembled in Jammu and shut down the national highway. Those who defied the government in 2008 and forcibly blocked the highway are now ruling both the state and the country. That's why it is an official act this time.

The subjugation in Kashmir has become personal and the reactions, whether in terms of militancy or stone pelting or protests, too, are an outcome of individual experiences of the larger political climate. The consequences have been predictable — the fissures have only widened. These fissures are dangerous to the very idea of India that places Jammu and Kashmir, its only Muslim-majority state, as an emblem of its secular credentials.

Hostilities towards minorities have dangerously increased in the recent years and have become more common, personal and discriminatory. It would be pertinent then to pause for an introspection: If spewing venom against Muslims, lynching them for what they eat, banning their roadway access to the mainland, vituperating them for how they look or pray can secure votes for a po-

litical party and ensure its victory, how true is the nation towards its own idea of a secular state? If India doesn't have a respectable position for its Muslims, then why does this country even want a Muslim-majority state in the Union?

The ruling class must realise that actions like the blocking of the national highway only reinforce the Kashmiri belief that Kashmir is maintained only to be fed into the incinerator of campaign speeches and vote-seeking across the country: Each time depleting the faith that Kashmiris have in the Delhi elite. The blocking of the national highway is a blatant dismissal of years of investment in reconciliation, aimed to reduce conflict between the people and security forces. By pitting the public against the security forces, the government has further estranged the population that it should, ideally, be engaging with. The security forces that should provide people a sense of security have become the main cause of insecurity and inconvenience for the people because of the myopic policies of the political elite.

Many questions arise about the motives behind this policy when one realises that, if army and security force convoys are safe in sharing the highway with the public for five days, why ban public use for two days? Meanwhile, the tactical specific schedules of security convoys will endanger soldiers more than mixed traffic, by making movements predictable and official. So, ironically, by making public the schedule of movements of the security convoys, the government itself has jeopardised the safety of the security forces.

Generalising threats and fear, reducing democracy to token elections — and elections to a security drill, inconveniencing tax-payers for securing convoys, and, disproportional and misdirected counter-reaction to every attack, may not embody the democratic ideals that India professes to adhere to: Instead, it represents the novel solutions that have been proposed for the Kashmir issue. This is a glaring contradiction, and there are many others. For example, in removing the security of the mainstream politicians in Kashmir, the state has risked the same people who have been the custodians of the mainstream political space in Kashmir for seven decades. To all the questions of dissent and resentment in the Valley, Delhi's response earlier was democracy. Now it is more about securitisation.

It is also relevant to question that if mainstream parties in the state — that have traditionally won more than two-third majority together in consecutive elections — have no say in the matters concerning their people, cannot put forth facts about the foundations of J&K's constitutional relationship with the Union, and, are dismissed as anti-nationals, then who is a patriot in Kashmir?

When the world is focused on connectivity, we are unfortunately blocking our own ways to our own people, and then celebrating this disconnect in the name of territorial control. If policies are framed as tools for revenge, if law enforcement agencies are used as weapons against ideological and electoral opponents, democracy can't survive.

The writer is youth president of the PDP

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

RAHUL'S GAFFE

THIS REFERS TO your editorial, 'When Rahul descends' (IE, April 19). Rahul's barb that all thieves have the Modi surname in common is totally uncalled for. It does a disservice to his relentless attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi for promoting crony capitalism. It vilifies a whole community. At a time when personal attacks are becoming the new normal in Indian politics, Rahul Gandhi would do well to exercise a little restraint and stay away from such sordid mudslinging.

Vijai Pant Hemptur

BABASAHEB'S LEGACY

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'The legacy of Ambedkar' (IE, April 18). As the architect of the Indian Constitution, B R Ambedkar stood for the sanctity of fundamental rights. He believed in constitutional methods to solve the social, economic and political problems of the country. Untouchability has largely been eradicated. Democracy is thriving in India, the judiciary is independent and elections are conducted regularly with impartiality. Credit for these achievements must go to Ambedkar.

Atul Thakre, Nagpur

FILMS AS ADS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Three mis-

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

To encourage quality reader intervention, The Indian Express offers the Letter of the Week award. The letter adjudged the best for the week is published every Saturday. Letters may be e-mailed to editpage@expressindia.com or sent to The Indian Express, B-1/B, Sector 10, Noida-UP 201301. Letter writers should mention their postal address and phone number.

THE WINNER RECEIVES SELECT EXPRESS PUBLICATIONS

takes, two ironies' (IE, April 19). Releasing political movies during elections is a type of advertisement. Parties cannot convey through banners what they can do through political movies. But unlike banners, not all political parties will have films made about them or their leaders.

Akshata Anil, Rupnagar

VIEW FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD



A weekly look at the public conversations shaping ideas beyond borders — in the Subcontinent. Curated by Aakash Joshi

IMRAN'S U-TURNS

IN HIS COLUMN in Dawn on April 20, Irfan Hussain compares Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan rather unfavourably with Jacinda Arden, his New Zealand counterpart. The thrust of Hussain's argument is this: Khan has gone back on nearly all his campaign promises, and worse, "there appears to be little compassion in our prime minister's heart for the plight of the Hazaras who are regularly targeted by Sunni extremists".

The suicide bomb attack in Quetta, in which 20 people lost their lives, took place in an area where the Hazara community lives. By not visiting the families of the victims of the attack, Hussain believes Khan is "sending out a signal". On the campaign trail a year ago, Khan had "promised an inclusive Pakistan". In fact, Hussain argues that U-turns on his most important promises have marked Khan's tenure: "Less than a year into his tenure, the prime minister has been forced into a number of U-turns that would have been embarrassing had he not been blessed with a thick skin. At campaign rally after rally, he vowed he would not beg for aid and loans. Indeed, he went so far as to vow he would commit suicide rather than extend a begging bowl before the IMF. But as soon as he was sworn in af-

ter a contentious election in which many detected the active role of hidden forces, there he was in China, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, asking for alms. And just a few days ago, his verbose now ex-finance minister was in Washington, negotiating a loan from the IMF."

Hussain also gives several other examples of PM Khan's going back on his word. Khan had also promised, for example, "that transfers and promotions in the bureaucracy would be made strictly on merit. However, the swift changes of officers in Punjab have shown that little has changed: personal likes and dislikes take precedence over efficiency and transparency."

PM Khan did visit Quetta and address the Hazara community on Sunday, April 21.

DOUBLE STANDARDS

MANO RATWATTE, A Sri Lankan commentator, writes in *The Island* on April 16 of the double standards on issues like war crimes and human rights' violations. Taking off from the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, the article uses a series of examples of how the West gets away with such crimes while third world countries are constantly vilified. He argues: "Is Accountability not required when the ones committing atroci-

ties are resource-rich, powerful western nations? This is no defence of alleged war crimes in Sri Lanka (those need to be investigated) or India, but just a commentary on the rank hypocrisy that is part of geopolitical realities. There is definitely a different playing field for different nations."

US Senator Bob Kerry of Nebraska, for example, has admitted to committing war crimes in Vietnam, and the My Lai massacre was initially covered up by the US government. "And only this week did EU member Belgium apologise for the kidnapping, segregation, deportation and forced adoption of thousands of children born to mixed-race couples during its colonial rule of Burundi, Congo and Rwanda. The apology is the first time that Belgium has recognised any responsibility for what historians say was the harm on the Central African nations, which it colonised for eight decades."

UNFREE MEDIA

REPORTERS' WITHOUT BORDERS' recently published report on media freedom ranks Bangladesh at dismal 150 out of 180 countries when it comes to freedom of the press. According to the editorial in *The Daily Star*, "it cannot be a pleasing thought that every

other country of South Asia stands above us; even in Myanmar (where there's a virtual military government), the press seems to be doing somewhat better than ours."

India ranks at 140, so perhaps some of the following issues raised by the editorial could have some resonance, across South Asia: "Regrettably, the press in Bangladesh is in a unique situation. Like most segments of the society, the media has become fractured, and thus vulnerable to the powers that would want a pliant media. This has given way to the media exercising more self-censorship than is necessary for it to perform its job with impartiality and fairness, devoted to projecting news as it is rather than twisting the tale to give the people what a particular media outlet wants them to read. But there are compelling reasons for the press to choose discretion over valour—physical harassment of journalists by ruling party cadres, unnecessary litigation as well as the newly enacted draconian rules that encumber free media, are a few."

The editorial remarks that a free media is also an index of other freedoms available in a society — and on that front, the neighbourhood has much room for improvement.

THIS WORD MEANS

ODEBRECHT SCANDAL

It has sent a once iconic South American leader to prison, and last week drove a former President to suicide. What is it?



Friends and family carry the coffin of Peru's former President Alan Garcia, who killed himself last week, in Lima, Peru on Saturday. Reuters

PERU'S FORMER President Alan Garcia shot himself in the head last week after investigators probing his role in the Odebrecht corruption scandal sought to arrest him in Lima.

THE SCANDAL: The Odebrecht Scandal, one of the biggest corruption cases of its kind in history, was discovered by Brazilian authorities in 2014. The scam gets its name from Odebrecht (pronounced Odeb-resh), a giant construction firm based in Brazil, that has been accused of paying over \$800 million in bribes to politicians and government officials in countries across South America over the past two decades.

Odebrecht is alleged to have built an elaborate structure for sending bribes to patrons in over 12 countries in South America and Africa in return for contracts to build largescale projects such as roads, pipelines, trains, and irrigation systems. Many of these projects overbilled the countries many times over the approved costs -- an example is the Inter-oceanic Highway between Peru and Brazil, which cost more than four times the budgeted amount.

Odebrecht allegedly used shell companies in the British Virgin Islands and Belize to funnel money to politicians and officials, using multiple bank accounts scattered across the globe. Smaller banks whose employees could be compromised were chosen, typically in jurisdictions with strict confidentiality laws. A separate "Division for Structured Accounts" at Odebrecht ran these clandestine operations.

The Brazilian investigation began after authorities stumbled upon illicit cash transfers taking place through car-wash stations in the southern part of the coun-

try. As their "Operation Car Wash" spread and gathered momentum, politicians started to fall in the net, and public anger grew. 77 Odebrecht functionaries agreed to cooperate with the investigators. In 2016, the company's CEO was sentenced to 19 years in prison. That same year, the US and Switzerland too pressed charges, and the company was forced to settle for \$4.5 billion, one of the largest corruption settlements of all time.

POLITICAL FALLOUT: The most visible upheaval was seen in Brazil, with leftist leader and President from 2003 to 2010, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, being sent to jail for 12 years and 11 months in 2018. Lula was a favourite to win the recently concluded Brazilian elections, but his conviction paved the way for the hard-right Jair Bolsonaro to grab the Presidency. Another former President, Michel Temer, too was briefly incarcerated.

In Ecuador, a former Vice President has been sent to prison for six years. There are accusations against former Presidents of Colombia and Argentina. In Venezuela, the government of President Nicolás Maduro has targeted journalists investigating the scandal.

In Peru, three former Presidents are accused in the scandal. Garcia killed himself last Wednesday; his predecessor in the post, Alejandro Toledo, has fled to the US. The Peruvian daily El Comercio, while expressing regret for Garcia's suicide, said, "... We must not lose sight of the importance of continuing with the investigations that are taking place today. It is essential that the truth advances, and that justice prevails in order to break with a past of impunity, and to speak of a future where no citizen is above the law."

OM MARATHÉ

SIMPLY PUT

LoC trade, in perspective

India last week suspended the cross-LoC trade, alleging misuse of the facility by individuals linked to terrorist groups. How and when did this trade start, and what was it intended to achieve for India and Pakistan?

NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN
MUMBAI, APRIL 21

COMPARED TO the cross LoC bus service that was flagged off with much fanfare in 2005, cross-LoC trade between Jammu and Kashmir and Pakistan Occupied Kashmir got off to a low-profile start, receiving little attention at the time in India or Pakistan.

In diplomatic parlance, these two measures are categorised as "Kashmir specific confidence building measures" and flowed out of backchannel negotiations between India and Pakistan on a resolution to Kashmir, in the belief that this would then give both sides legroom to "remake" India-Pakistan relations.

Four-point proposal

Specifically, these measures seems to have originated in a four-point proposal for Kashmir that began to get regular airing from about 2005 from then military ruler General Pervez Musharraf. The four points were:

The LoC will stay but Kashmiris on both sides will be allowed to move freely back and forth; (ii) self-governance or autonomy to the region, but not independence; (iii) gradual demilitarisation on both sides; (iv) a joint supervision mechanism with India, Pakistan and Kashmir represented on it.

In India, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh spoke about "soft borders" and "making borders irrelevant" in Kashmir. These proposals, now denied by both India and Pakistan, represented the closest that the two sides have got to an agreement on Kashmir, but neither side could take it further, each for its own reasons. The joint mechanism was one stumbling block in the proposals themselves.

The road to opening

On July 7 that year, the Indian Embassy in Kabul was bombed, killing an Indian diplomat and a senior Army officer and several Afghans. The US and India said the ISI was behind the bombing.

But the India-Pakistan foreign secretaries' talks were held as scheduled later that month on July 21 under the composite dialogue format, and they agreed to the opening of trade routes across the LoC. The two sides then rushed to finalise the details in the following weeks, including at a meeting of the "working group of cross LoC CBMs" on September 22, 2008.

To Pakistani observers it appeared that India was eager to provide a vent for the steam building up in Kashmir over the Amarnath land row earlier that year, when there was a blockade of the Valley by the Jammu-based BJP and other Hindutva groups. That in turn led to the demand for opening the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad road. Separatists and others called a "Muzaffarabad March" on August 11. Firing on the march left 5 people dead.

Cheer on both sides

Both sides of Kashmir welcomed the opening of the trade routes. On October 21, two crossing points, Srinagar-Muzaffarabad at Uri, and Poonch-Rawalakot at Chakan da Bagh, were opened for trade. A convoy of 13 trucks carrying apples and honey set off from Kashmir to PoK, and 13 trucks came



The trade has been taking place through two crossing points, Poonch-Rawalakot at Chakan da Bagh and Srinagar-Muzaffarabad at Uri. Shuaib Masoodi/Archive

INDIA'S TRADE WITH PAKISTAN (\$ MILLION)				
	EXPORTS	IMPORTS	TRADE BALANCE	TOTAL TRADE
2009-10	1,573	276	1,297	1,849
2010-11	2,040	333	1,707	2,372
2011-12	1,542	398	1,144	1,939
2012-13	2,065	542	1,523	2,607
2013-14	2,274	427	1,847	2,701
2014-15	1,857	497	1,360	2,354
2015-16	2,171	441	1,730	2,612
2016-17	1,821	454	1,367	2,275
2017-18	1,924	489	1,435	2,413
2018-19*	1,608	441	1,167	2,049

*2018-19 figures from April to December
TRADE BALANCE: Exports minus Imports
TOTAL TRADE: Exports plus Imports
Source: Directorate General of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, via 'Recent Trends in India-Pakistan Trade, 2018-19: ICRIER paper

A FEW ITEMS, SMALL NUMBERS

THE CROSS-LOC trade is technically not considered bilateral trade. When it was started in 2008, trade was allowed twice a week, which was increased to 4 days a week in 2011.

THE INDIA-PAKISTAN Joint Working Group on Cross-LoC Confidence Building Measures, which reviews the

cross-LoC trade, last met in March 2014.

UNTIL RECENTLY, only the initial 21 items, which included embroidery items, bananas, red chilli, dry fruits and mangoes, were allowed to be traded.

THE TRADE since 2008 is valued at approximately Rs 7,000 crore.

from Muzaffarabad to Kashmir. Three trucks crossed over from either side at Chakan da Bagh.

PDP president Mehbooba Mufti said at the time "it is a dream come true", and Sardar Attique Khan, the prime minister of POK, named the day "Youm-e-Karvaan-e-Commerce" (Day of the Caravan of Commerce). The Mumbai attacks put a freeze on India-Pakistan relations, but the cross-LoC trade remained unaffected by that.

Hiccups and demands

The agreement was for zero duty trade for a list of 21 items. It ran into problems almost immediately as traders on both sides floundered on currency and communication

issues. A chamber of commerce, called the Intra Jammu & Kashmir Chamber of Commerce & Industry (IJ&KCCI), came into existence. They pointed to the need for banking relations and mutual acceptance of letters of credit, a communication network, a regulatory network to determine the composition of trade, and a legal network for dispute resolution.

The joint chamber recommended expansion of the list of items for trade, facilitation of travel and traders' access to each other, infrastructure facilities, banking services, use of dual currency of both countries as the mode of payment with the US dollar as the reference point, inclusion of the services sector, and opening of more trade routes.

Despite the difficulties, trade grew. In the absence of banking facilities, traders on either side, mostly from divided families, made it work. From 180 trucks carrying freight worth Rs 1.3 crore, the value of the trade grew to Rs 3,076 crore by March 2019. There were complaints that the trade had expanded to include non-Kashmiri goods. The complaints were particularly loud from the traders at Wagah border who catered to the same markets and were envious of the zero-duty cross LoC trade.

Trade in perspective

Last week, the government cited malpractice and the involvement of terrorist groups in the trade to suspend the LoC trade. There have been previous suspensions. Once in 2015, trade was suspended for 40 days after drugs were discovered in a truck from Muzaffarabad. The longest suspension came during the post-Burhan Wani killing agitation in the Valley, for three months. There were other brief spells when trade was suspended, mostly at Chakan da Bagh, on account of heavy cross-border shelling.

However, Kashmiris point out that trade has never been suspended for under-invoicing or other such violations at any other port in the country where Customs and other enforcement officials strictly monitor the inflows and outflows, and the same could have been done at the LoC.

As for the involvement of former militants in the trade, this was seen as a welcome development towards creating "constituencies of peace" and building stakes for normalcy in the Valley. In 2011, a four page report called Intra Kashmir Trade, jointly prepared by the Delhi-based IPCS, Conciliation Resources of London, and the Islamabad-based Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency, said cross border trade had proved it could be insulated from the ups and downs in the India-Pakistan relationship, and had begun to establish a "bottom up" approach to peace-building. "Trade has attracted divided families and some former combatants and provided a non-violent and alternative vision for change and conflict transformation," the report said. It spoke about 40 former militants who had chosen to participate in the economic activity.

More than its value in currency terms, the cross LoC trade holds much symbolic value in Jammu & Kashmir, especially in the Poonch-Rawalakot sector, where there are more divided families and villages than at the Uri crossing point. They would be hoping that the current suspension is not permanent.

SUGGESTED READING

■ *The Back Channel: India and Pakistan's Secret Kashmir Talks*, by Steve Coll, *The New Yorker*, February 22, 2009 (Print edition of March 2, 2009)

■ *Expanding Cross-LoC Interactions: A Conflict Transformation Approach to Kashmir*, by Shaheen Akhtar, *Institute of Regional Studies, in Regional Studies*, Vol. XXX, No.1, Winter 2011-12, pp.3-37

Why the Notre Dame fire was a tragedy waiting to happen

A week after the devastating fire that wrecked the 850-year-old jewel of Paris and triggered a global outpouring of grief, it is evident that peculiarities of structure and construction made the cathedral especially vulnerable. Also, that fire safety procedures at Notre Dame were premised on assumptions that were proved grotesquely wrong -- and that the reaction time for the emergency was far too long

1 INACCESSIBLE, INFLAMMABLE

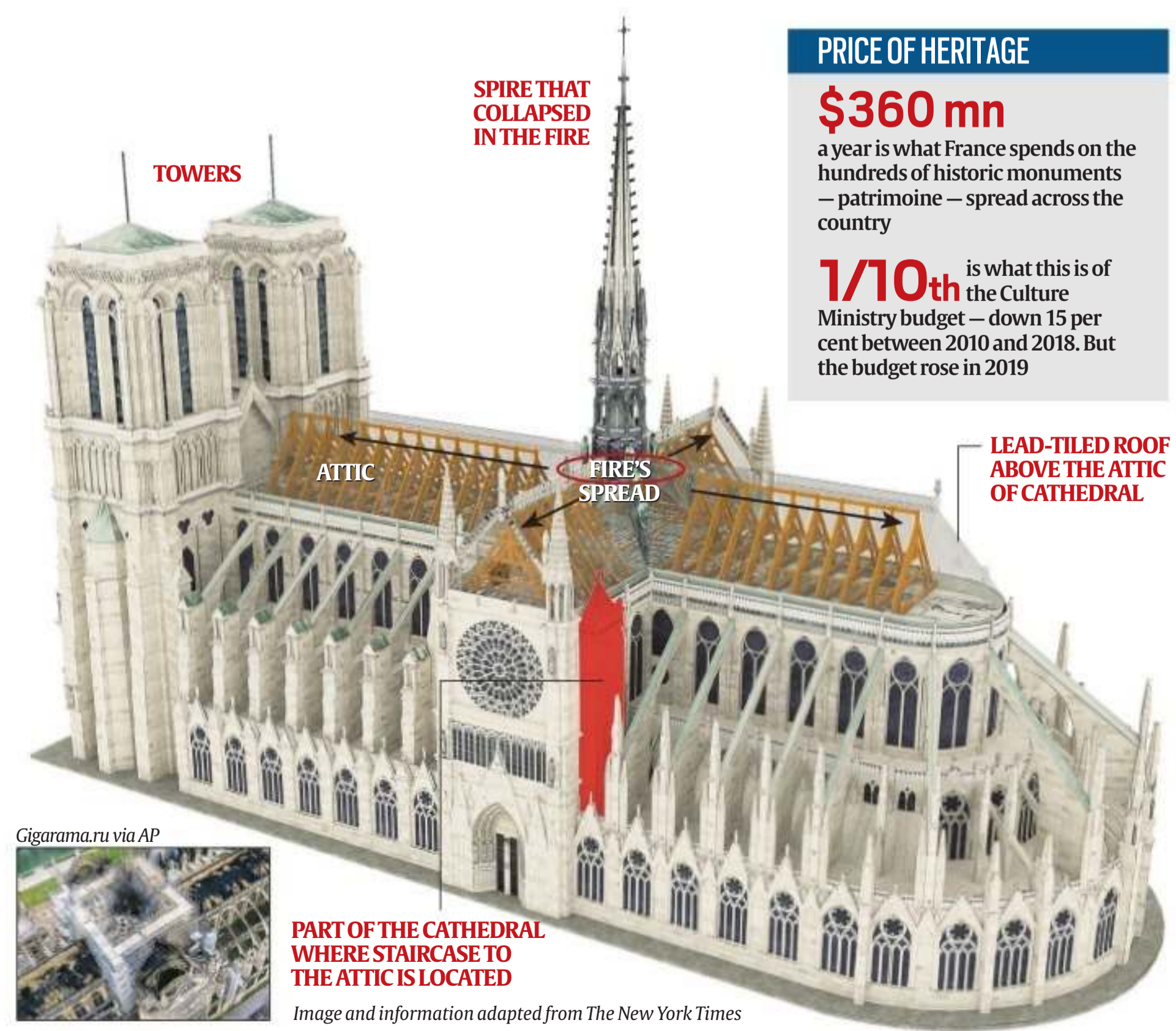
Structural features and architecture of cathedral made fighting the fire difficult

VAULTED STONE ceiling prevented firefighters from shooting water up into the attic from within. Lead roof of attic may have hindered access further; firefighters may've had to wait until lead panels were burnt through before they could start spraying water from above. Attic structure was enormous, complex, made of extremely dry, super inflammable wood. Giant oak beams were entangled with each other in a 'forest' that was near impossible to enter. And because preservation designers didn't want to mutilate wood by cutting it, they put no fire walls.

2 UNDERESTIMATION OF RISKS FROM FIRE

Prevention and detection of fire was the focus; keeping the Notre Dame 'original' the mantra

OFFICIALS HAD misjudged the speed with which a blaze, once ignited in the attic, would spread. According to the top architect who oversaw the fire protections, the system had assumed that the ancient oak timbers would burn slowly, leaving time for firefighting action; what actually happened was, therefore, "incomprehensible" (right). A conservative bias towards preserving the beautiful historic structure unaltered ensured that sprinklers or fire walls were not installed in the attic; the mantra, instead, was prevention and detection of fires.



Cigarama.ru via AP
Image and information adapted from The New York Times

PRICE OF HERITAGE

\$360 mn
a year is what France spends on the hundreds of historic monuments -- patrimoine -- spread across the country

1/10th is what this is of the Culture Ministry budget -- down 15 per cent between 2010 and 2018. But the budget rose in 2019

3 BUILT-IN DELAY IN RESPONSE TIME

As per the emergency drill, staff had to complete -- twice -- 6-minute climb to the attic before calling fire services

6.20PM
FIRST ALARM WENT OFF
A fire security agent alerted church staff. A guard started to climb the steep staircase to the attic to have a look.

6.26PM
A FULL SIX MINUTES LATER
Guard reached attic, but found no fire. Climbed down, reached the ground after several minutes, announced all was well.

6.43PM
SECOND ALARM WENT OFF
Just as cathedral was closing to visitors, alarm rang again. The fire had likely been burning for well over 20 minutes then.

6.49PM
A RACE BACK TO THE ATTIC
Two staffers who climbed up this time found a big fire. Hurrying down, realised they'd locked door; had to go back up.

6.51PM
CALL FOR HELP, FINALLY
Fire department was called in. Smoke and flames were clearly visible by then.