



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Dragon-elephant tango

Matters like the listing of the Security Council 1267 Committee should not curb growing India-China ties



LUO ZHAOHUI

BETWEEN THE LINES

On paper, Congress breaks some new ground on issues related to free speech but on others, remains stuck in its old groove

SPECIALLY SINCE THE rise of the Narendra Modi led-BJP, the Congress has been criticised for fighting the BJP armed with nothing more than anti-BJPism. It has been legitimately accused of practising a negative politics, and on crucial issues, either being incoherent or spooked into a BJP-lite response. It has been charged with the failure to hold up the liberal, or simply the Opposition's, end of the polity. It is not that the manifesto for the 2019 elections that Rahul Gandhi's party unveiled on Tuesday changes all of the above. It won't. Because that will take more than a compendium of intentions and talking points. But what the Congress's new manifesto does manage to do is still significant: It signals that the party is willing to stake out its own positions in ways that do not just counter its political opponent, but also break from its own — on many of these issues, tainted — record. Rahul Gandhi's party is sending a signal that it may be ready to begin shedding the silence, ambiguity and timidity accumulated over years and risk being held accountable for what it says. As it does so — if it does so — the wider democratic polity stands to gain from a genuine contest of ideas between its two main national parties, instead of the shadow-boxing so far.

Congress's Manifesto 2019 is welcome, therefore, for giving the sense of a party in motion. There are questions, however, of direction and judgement, workability and credibility. And there are still crucial silences. The minimum guarantee scheme, Nyay, is ambitious, but its dependence on state governments filling lakhs of jobs in a year or having a ministry for employment points to an over-reliance on an unimaginative, sarkari response to a slowing economy. The promise to omit the IPC section that deals with sedition is well intended, but it comes shadowed by previous Congress governments' appetite for using the law to curb freedoms of those like Aseem Trivedi, jailed in 2012 for a cartoon. The pledge to review the AFSPA, to rework the balance between requirements of security and protection of human rights, and the immunity provided to the armed forces, is again burdened with suspicions of bad faith on account of the conduct of Congress governments, and the visible irresolution within the party. While it may be necessary to enforce some accountability for national security, it may not be wise to do so by making the National Security Adviser report to Parliament. It is certainly an illiberal idea to enforce a code of conduct on reporting in situations of national disaster, communal conflict and terror attacks — tying the media's hands could undermine the fundamental right to freedom of expression in critical times.

Overall, the Congress seeks to stake out softer, more liberal positions on issues of individual liberty and national security even as it still seems to lack a voice and conviction on economic issues. In comparison to its earlier manifestos in 2009 and 2014, the Congress is less forthcoming on minorities, which have felt besieged in the BJP-led regime. With all the health warnings, however, on Tuesday, the Congress has made an interesting new beginning. Where it goes from here will be watched.

THE IMPERIAL HOTEL in New Delhi is much favoured by the Chinese because of its close bond to the People's Republic of China. After the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and India on April 1, 1950, the hotel was rented as a temporary chancery for Chinese diplomats for three years. The first batch of Chinese diplomats started their mission from scratch and made a great contribution to laying the foundation of China-India relations. As a Chinese saying goes, "A man seldom reaches the age of 70 years in ancient times."

Looking back on history after the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and India for nearly 70 years, I can't help but feel emotions. In my view, China-India relations can be divided into four phases since the establishment of diplomatic ties:

The first phase is the "honeymoon period." In addition to jointly proposing the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, Premier Zhou Enlai and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru exchanged visits and attended the Bandung Conference, guiding its agenda.

In the second phase, after the border conflict in 1962, China-India relations fell into a "frozen period". It was not until Labour Day in 1970 that Chairman Mao Zedong, after shaking hands with Rajesh Mishra, then Charge d'Affaires of the Indian Embassy in China at the Tian'anmen Rostrum, said: "We cannot keep on quarrelling like this. We should try and be friends again." In 1988, then Indian PM Rajiv Gandhi started his "ice-breaking visit" to China, and both sides reached a consensus to delink the boundary question from the overall development of bilateral relations.

The third phase, from the 1990s to the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, is the "recovery period" in which the two countries promoted reform through mutual learning and pushed for a complete settlement of the issues of Tibet and Sikkim left by history. The fourth phase, from the CPC's 18th National Congress in 2012 until the present, is the "acceleration period." President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Narendra Modi initiated "hometown diplomacy" and put huge efforts into bilateral relations. India was the first stop of Premier Li Keqiang's outgoing visits since he took office. Bilateral relations experienced large fluctuations due to the Donglang standoff in 2017.

However, the two leaders decided to take a forward-looking approach to "turn the page and open a new chapter of the bilateral relations" during the BRICS Xiamen summit in September 2017. With great vision, President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Modi held their first historic informal meeting in Wuhan in April 2018. Subsequently, the two leaders met three times and three Chinese State Councilors

visited India. China-India relations have upgraded and entered the fast track of development. This represents a successful practice of Xi Jinping's Thought on Diplomacy.

The current momentum has not come by easily and should be cherished. Taking history as a mirror, we have the following observations: First, our two leaders have always firmly grasped the general direction of the development of China-India relations. Whenever we fought side by side during the national liberation movement or put relations back on track after border conflicts, whenever we learned from each other in the tide of reform, our two leaders, like helmsmen, always set things right at crucial moments and led the ship of China-India relations through the waves to forge ahead. Second, the forward momentum is unstoppable. From the perspective of the four phases after the establishment of diplomatic relations, China-India relations have experienced ups and downs. From the perspective of peak-valley fluctuation model, the fluctuation interval is getting shorter and shorter which shows the sensitivity, maturity and adaptability of China-India relations. The past 69 years have proved that friendly cooperation, which has dominated most of the time, is the general trend and the mainstream, far more prominent than differences and frictions.

Third, people-to-people exchanges are the "adhesive" for bilateral relations. In 1981, China and India resumed yatra for official Indian pilgrims to Mount Kailash and Lake Manasarovar, Tibet, China. The two countries have established over 10 pairs of sister cities or provinces and personnel exchanges have exceeded one million. The total number of Indian students studying in China is over 20,000. Chinese food, acupuncture, martial arts and movie stars are increasingly popular in India. Yoga, Darjeeling tea and Bollywood are fashionable among Chinese youth. Yunnan Minzu University of China became the first university out of India to award Master's degree in yoga.

Fourth, pragmatic cooperation is the "ballast stone". In 2006, China and India reopened the Nathu La border trade route which had been closed for 44 years. China has been India's largest trading partner for consecutive years with bilateral trade reaching a record high of \$95.5 billion in 2018. At present, more than 1,000 Chinese companies are doing business in India and Chinese mobile phone brands such as Xiaomi, VIVO and OPPO have represented half of the Indian market. The National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM) of India has established three IT corridors in Dalian, Guizhou and Xuzhou. China and India have great potential for cooperation in the fields of medicine, information technology and interconnectivity. Fifth,

multilateral cooperation is the "growth point". China and India face the tasks of improving people's livelihoods, both are at a critical stage of deepening reform and advancing the modernisation process which require a favourable external environment. As members of multilateral organisations such as RIC, the BRICS, SCO, the G20, etc., both China and India share common interests in promoting globalisation and opposing trade protectionism. By speaking in one voice, the two countries are injecting new impetus into the development of bilateral relations.

Sixth, managing differences is the "stabiliser". China-India relations have been disturbed by differences and problems from time to time. The "negative list" not only includes issues such as boundary and Dalai Lama left by history, but also emerging ones such as the listing issue of the UN Security Council 1267 Committee. Some third-party factors such as Pakistan, the United States and South Asia have implications for China-India relations as well. China and India have successfully resolved the issues of Tibet and Sikkim through consultation and dialogue. In recent years, the two countries have been exploring "China-India Plus", a new model of cooperation, and have successfully carried out a joint training program for Afghan diplomats. It should be the direction of efforts for China and India to enhance mutual trust, enlarge cooperation cakes and narrow down the divergence.

China and India will celebrate the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations in 2020. Looking forward, we should continue to take Xi Jinping's Thought on Diplomacy as guidance and highlight the three key words of "transmission", "stability" and "vision." We need to transmit the consensus of the two leaders achieved during the Wuhan summit to the grass-root level and translate it into action. Regarding stability, we need to transcend crisis-managing diplomacy, explore a model to actively shape relations and break the cycle of ups and downs in bilateral relations. Regarding vision, we need to be guided by four-area cooperation, namely negotiating and signing "China-India Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation", exploring free trade agreements, initiating consultations on early harvests of the boundary question, and achieving synergy on the Belt and Road Initiative.

I believe that as two ancient civilizations, China and India have the ability and wisdom to find the path for major emerging and neighbouring countries to get along with each other, join hands to realise the "Dragon-Elephant Tango," create the Asian century, and achieve greater glory in the next 70 years.

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ERDOGAN HUMBLLED

Turkey's ruling party's loss to a united opposition in Ankara, Istanbul is a symbolic and political setback for its president

FOR THE DETRACTORS of Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, his party challenging its loss in the urban body elections in Ankara and Istanbul could be a sign that the right-wing, populist leader is shaken. The largely government-controlled media in the country is echoing the ruling AKP's (Justice and Development Party) stand that ballots were tampered with. The AKP may also take solace in the fact that, nation-wide, it polled over 50 per cent of the vote. Yet the election results represent the biggest blow to Erdogan's political fortunes in nearly two decades.

First, both symbolically and politically, the loss in Istanbul is a huge setback for the AKP and Erdogan personally. Erdogan came to prominence as mayor of Istanbul, and the loss of the major urban centre, along with Ankara, could disrupt the intricate network of favours and finances that the AKP has built in these centres. The poll is seen as a referendum on his rule: Erdogan reportedly addressed as many as eight political rallies a day during the campaign, and hand-picked the candidates. Second, the myth of Erdogan's electoral invincibility has been, if not shattered, certainly dented. A united campaign by the Opposition has yielded results. The principal anti-Erdogan force in Turkey, the Republican People's Party, promised economic, social and political changes. Others like the People's Democratic Party, a party of the Kurdish minority, supported the main opposition strategically. This unity, if it does not crumble, could pose a serious challenge to the AKP in the 2023 general elections. Finally, Erdogan and the ruling establishment in Turkey would be remiss to not view the result as a reflection of its policies. The Turkish economy has been in a slide, with unemployment and inflation rising.

Of course, Opposition unity may not last until 2023. Repressive tactics that Erdogan's regime has employed against political opponents — the press and activists — could intensify to a degree that they make a genuine electoral contest impossible. For the moment, though, the election results in Turkey provide a signal to politics dealing with populist leaders that can undermine democratic institutions while claiming to represent the popular will. It is through the ballot that the popularity of populists is undermined.

SPINNING IT

Cricket's love affair with the leg-spinner continues in this edition of IPL

ENCHANTED BY FORMER Australian leg-spinner Richie Benaud's craft, British poet Alan Ross romanticised the most romantic of cricket's arts. "Leg-spinners pose problems much like love. Requiring commitment, the taking of a chance. Halfway deludes; the bold advance," he wrote. While watching leg-spinners ply in cricket's superperson version might not elicit verse, it brooks no argument that they, along with genuine all-rounders, are the most loved in the IPL, a tryst that began with Shane Warne in the inaugural edition through a brigade of leggies. Their effectiveness has resonated in the ongoing edition too.

From Imran Tahir to Rashid Khan to Yuzvendra Chahal, besides a raft of youngsters, every team has at least one exponent of what once was an elusive craft. It's a justifiable obsession, as they embody the most valuable of T20 values — economy and strike rate. Tahir concedes just 7.04 runs a game. Rashid, the 20-year-old from Afghanistan, nabs a wicket of every 15 ball. Suffice to say that leg-spin is the most fashionable skill in T20 cricket. So much so that even such a pedigreed off-spinner as Ravi Ashwin attempted leg-spin last year.

What makes them so effective, handing a clear edge over the finger spinners? One could be the sidespin they generate, irrespective of assistance from the pitch. Right-handed batsmen dominated as the ball spinning away from them makes it incredibly hard to target the leg-side, where a majority of the sixes are struck. So they try hitting them over cover or extra cover, the relatively less riskier route though the stroke requires nimble feet and quick hands. That's when the leggies slip in their googlies. Shreyas Gopal's dismissal of Virat Kohli was a case in point. Another, more basic reason, is that a lot of T20 batting is about premeditated the shot. It means less time to think and adjust. The ensuing confusion breeds chaos. Beating them requires mastery and commitment. Halfway deludes; the bold advance.



NIDHI GAUR

TERROR HAS two faces. One face is easier to recognise, it is the face of extreme fear. If you look at this fear-stricken face for a moment, you will recognise the other face as violence. The Pulwama attack has left us terrorised and hurt. When feeling terrorised, the first thing one needs to ensure is to restore the feeling of safety for all. Then comes the part of attending to the wounds. Healing takes a long time. It requires support from our fellow citizens. There is a bond between us, observed in marches and the public outcry after the attack. What we needed to be reminded of was to not react when in shock. This is our ancestral wisdom. Catch your breath. Look for the wounds, attend to them and then assess the situation.

Mahatma Gandhi opens the dialogue in *Hind Swaraj* by explaining the role of media in a modern society. He writes, "one of the objects of a newspaper is to understand the popular feeling and to give expression to it; another is to arouse among the people certain desir-

HIND SWARAJ'S HEALING TOUCH

It informs us on creative ways to restore a sense of safety in times of terror

The feeling of terror is settling down in our lives just as dust settles after a storm. To see clearly we have to wipe the dust settled on our eye-glasses. We need to do the same with the feeling of terror that is settling down in our psyche. Otherwise, it will foster fear and violence.

able sentiments; and the third is fearlessly to expose popular defects." After the Pulwama attack, the media should have helped the nation by restoring its faith in itself. A feeling of safety for all should have been fostered. Then it should have helped the people to assess the situation. One may argue that the media was as shocked as we all were. They were among the first to arrive at the scene and prepare an authentic report. Is there a mechanism in place for the media community to process and manage their shock and to strengthen their emotional state to get a grip on the situation?

Times of terror call for careful reporting. The media community needs to take a moment to plan the way to report on the attack and subsequent events. The reports and photographs need to be carefully worded and sensitively composed. Unfortunately, images that had the potential to evoke terror were splashed all over. The media's inability to manage shock acted as a catalyst for the display of unreasonable acts of aggression. Otherwise,

can you imagine people having a problem with the name Karachi Bakery?

Now, the feeling of terror is settling down in our lives as dust settles after a storm. To see clearly we have to wipe the dust settled on our eye-glasses. We need to do the same with the feeling of terror settling down in our psyche.

Living in terror is not the kind of *swaraj* anyone of us would want. "To be able to live fearlessly" is how Mahatma Gandhi defined *swaraj* in *Hind Swaraj*. The media needs to acknowledge this general feeling of terror and respond to it. It also needs to find creative ways to restore a sense of safety amongst all. At the same time, it needs to initiate and mediate the process of collective reflection. To recall Gandhi, "to a certain extent the people's will has to be expressed; certain sentiments will need to be fostered and defects will have to be brought to light" by the media.

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APRIL 4, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

BHUTTOS MEET THE CONDEMNED FORMER prime minister of Pakistan, Z A Bhutto, had a long tearful meeting with his wife and daughter in a Rawalpindi jail amid some signs that Bhutto's execution is imminent. Family friends said Nusrat Bhutto and her daughter, Benazir, were told that the session would be their last before Bhutto is hanged for ordering a political murder in 1974, when he was prime minister. Pakistan president, General Zia ul-Haq has not been persuaded by the hundreds of mercy appeals before him to commute the death sentence of the man he overthrew in 1977.

JANATA INFIGHTING DESPITE THE SEEMINGLY rigid postures

adopted by the BLD and Jana Sangh leaders at a conclave of Janata leaders, senior party leaders are hopeful a solution to the questions now dividing the party may still be found. Their hopes are partly based on the informal efforts going on behind the scenes to avoid a showdown and partly on the assumption that no constituent unit of the party is ready to break the Janata at this stage. This consensus will relate not only to the election of the office-bearers of the party at the national and the state levels but also the composition of the state governments.

FILM AWARDS FOR THE FIRST time in the 26-year history of the National Film Awards, no film was

considered good enough to win the award for the best feature film of the year for 1978. South Indian actress Sharada won her third best actress award for her performance in the Telugu film *Nimajanam*. Arun Mukherjee won the best actor award for his performance in *Parasuram* (Bengali). Music director R C Borai was awarded the year's Dadasaheb Phalke Award. Tarun Majumdar's *Ganadevata* (Bengali) won the award for the best feature film with mass appeal, wholesale entertainment. Aravindan's *Thamp* (Malayalam) won the best direction award, second time in a row. *Ganadevata* also won an award for the best child actor (Master Kanchan De Biswas) and *Thamp* for the best black and white cinematography (Shaji).

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WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Mr. Erdogan could try to increase his flagging support by undertaking long-threatened military operations against America's Kurdish allies in Syria."
— THE NEW YORK TIMES

NYAY: Garibi bachao, not hatao

Congress's programme of poverty elimination is so flawed that its advocacy before an election is akin to political suicide



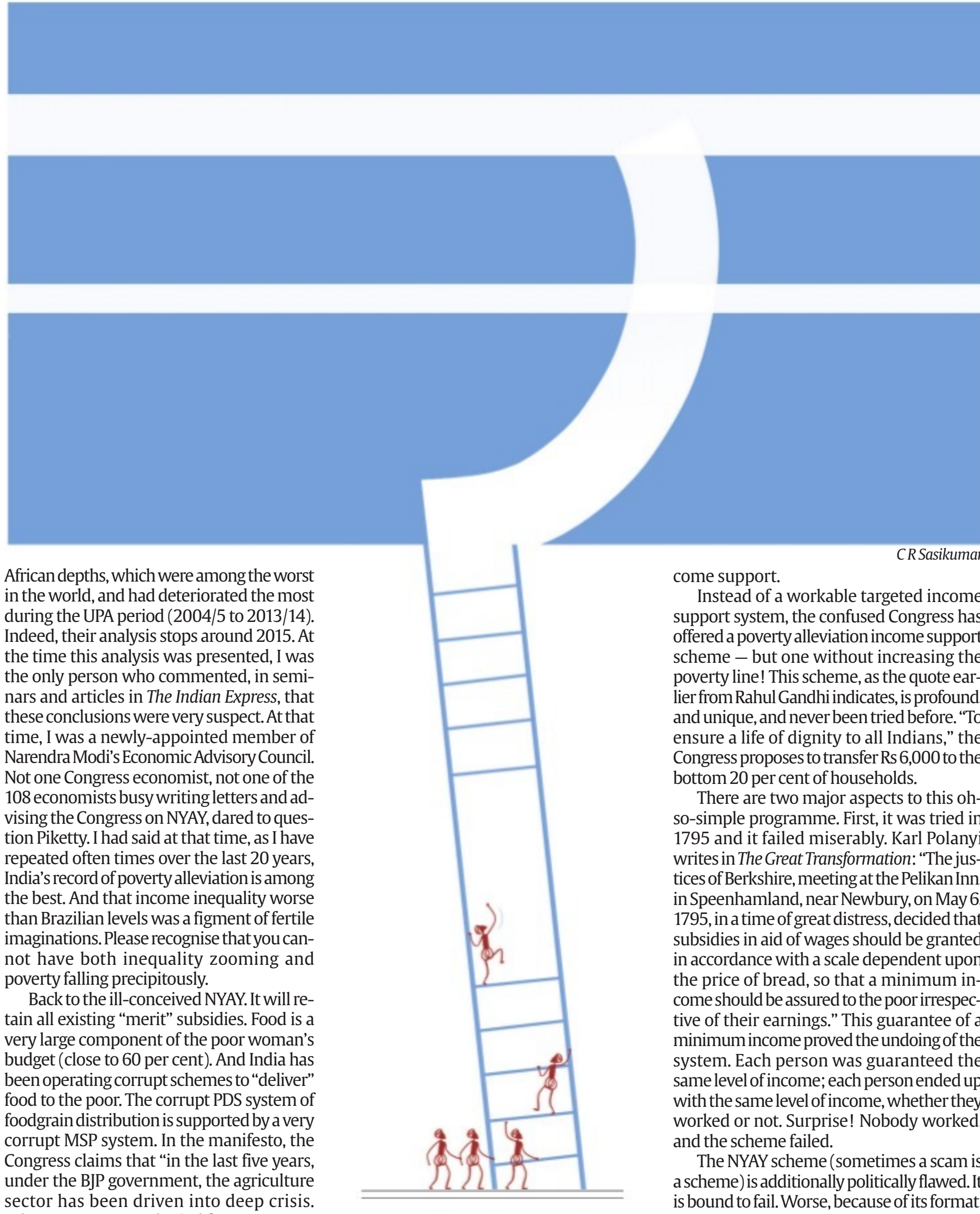
IT IS NOW official. After the release of the manifesto, the Congress believes its NYAY programme for poverty elimination is a game changer, a political winner, and a winner of advanced thinking on the subject. To bolster this claim, Congress president Rahul Gandhi said the party had consulted "all big economists, without telling anyone, without giving any speeches" on the Nyuntam Aay Yojana or NYAY. A news report quoted Rahul Gandhi as saying: "We were engaged in this work for six months. Take the list of all big economists of the world, we consulted them. Raghuram Rajan... one by one. The first thing we came to know that there should be a minimum income line. We calculated and the result was that the minimum income line should be Rs 12,000 per month." (emphasis added).

Further, if you look at the hoopla surrounding this master design (names of some leading poverty economists of the world — from Abhijit Banerjee to Raghuram Rajan to Thomas Piketty — were invoked to show thinking behind the plan) one would infer that this was a major development in thinking. I will show how the minimum income guarantee (MIG) scheme involves some very confused thinking, and knowledge, about the Indian record of poverty, and its alleviation.

I find it most unusual (but not surprising) for the Congress to not claim credit for poverty alleviation (and near elimination according to the existing too-low official poverty line). For purposes of discussion, let us analyse India's poverty alleviation record till 2011-12 (and 2013-14) — the time-period when the UPA was in power. Since this is a record going back the last 70 years, let us give most of the credit (and blame) to the Congress for all the economic developments that have taken place in India. At the time Indira Gandhi coined the slogan, *garibi hatao* in 1971, India was a very very poor country with over 80 per cent of the population deemed absolutely poor, according to the official Tendulkar poverty line. According to this poverty line [approximately a consumption level of Rs 850 per person per month (ppmm)], and the same as the World Bank poverty line of PPP \$1.9 per person per day, poverty in India was only 12 per cent of the population in 2011-12. This is amongst the best poverty alleviation efforts in the world, and comparable to China which had reduced its absolute poverty rate to 9 per cent over the same period. You would think that the Congress would be proudly proclaiming from the roof-tops that it had provided a spectacular reduction in poverty. But you would be wrong — and I would not be ashamed.

What is the poverty line in NYAY, eight years after 2011-12? The same in real terms as in 2004-5 and 2011-12. It is Rs 1,400 per person, or Rs 6,000 per month for a family of 4.3 persons. The approximate absolute poverty level in India in 2019-20 — just 3 per cent of the population. By ostensibly targeting the bottom 5 or 10 per cent, the NYAY programme is *garibi bachao*, not *garibi hatao*.

One of the major consultants to the Congress masterplan of poverty alleviation is Piketty. His analysis (along with co-author Lucas Chancel) claimed, in the latter half of 2017, that Indian income inequality had worsened to beyond Brazilian and South



CR Sasikummar

African depths, which were among the worst in the world, and had deteriorated the most during the UPA period (2004/5 to 2013/14). Indeed, their analysis stops around 2015. At the time this analysis was presented, I was the only person who commented, in seminars and articles in *The Indian Express*, that these conclusions were very suspect. At that time, I was a newly-appointed member of Narendra Modi's Economic Advisory Council. Not one Congress economist, not one of the 108 economists busy writing letters and advising the Congress on NYAY, dared to question Piketty. I had said at that time, as I have repeated often times over the last 20 years, India's record of poverty alleviation is among the best. And that income inequality worse than Brazilian levels was a figment of fertile imaginations. Please recognise that you cannot have both inequality zooming and poverty falling precipitously.

Back to the ill-conceived NYAY. It will retain all existing "merit" subsidies. Food is a very large component of the poor woman's budget (close to 60 per cent). And India has been operating corrupt schemes to "deliver" food to the poor. The corrupt PDS system of foodgrain distribution is supported by a very corrupt MSP system. In the manifesto, the Congress claims that "in the last five years, under the BJP government, the agriculture sector has been driven into deep crisis. Adequate MSP was denied for 4 years". In other words, support more PDS, higher MSPs for rich farmers, and NYAY.

Are there better alternatives available? In early January, 2018, Karan Bhasin and I presented a detailed paper (*Towards a Targeted Basic Income Policy for India* available at <http://tinyurl.com/yxuxxldh>) on a targeted basic income (TBI) scheme for India. A scheme which was not very costly (only Rs 2.7 trillion or about 1.6 per cent of 2019-20 GDP), had the World Bank middle-income poverty line of PPP \$3.1 as its basis, and could easily be financed by phasing out corrupt PDS and MSP regimes. Note that both the Congress and the BJP have followed and enhanced the wrong PDS/MSP policy. This must change in the new government, regardless of who wins the next election.

There are moral, logical and economic reasons for helping the bottom third of the population achieving a much higher standard of living. This is very doable, and can easily be financed. Note that a TBI (targeted basic income) scheme is identical to the much-applauded negative income tax scheme — the only difference being that you need not be in the tax net to receive in-

The ill-conceived NYAY will retain all existing "merit" subsidies. Food is a very large component of the poor woman's budget (close to 60 per cent). And India has been operating corrupt schemes to "deliver" food to the poor. The corrupt PDS system of foodgrain distribution is supported by a very corrupt MSP system. In the manifesto, the Congress claims that "in the last five years, under the BJP government, the agriculture sector has been driven into deep crisis. Adequate MSP was denied for 4 years". In other words, support more PDS, higher MSPs for rich farmers, and NYAY.

come support. Instead of a workable targeted income support system, the confused Congress has offered a poverty alleviation income support scheme — but one without increasing the poverty line! This scheme, as the quote earlier from Rahul Gandhi indicates, is profound, and unique, and never been tried before. "To ensure a life of dignity to all Indians," the Congress proposes to transfer Rs 6,000 to the bottom 20 per cent of households.

There are two major aspects to this oh-so-simple programme. First, it was tried in 1795 and it failed miserably. Karl Polanyi writes in *The Great Transformation*: "The justices of Berkshire, meeting at the Pelikan Inn, in Speenhamland, near Newbury, on May 6, 1795, in a time of great distress, decided that subsidies in aid of wages should be granted in accordance with a scale dependent upon the price of bread, so that a minimum income should be assured to the poor irrespective of their earnings." This guarantee of a minimum income proved the undoing of the system. Each person was guaranteed the same level of income; each person ended up with the same level of income, whether they worked or not. Surprise! Nobody worked, and the scheme failed!

The NYAY scheme (sometimes a scam is a scheme) is additionally politically flawed. It is bound to fail. Worse, because of its format, it is a self-designed political disaster. (As someone said, if you are going to commit suicide, do it at the beginning!) You decide for yourself from the following simple extrapolation of the 2011-12 NSSO consumption distribution to 2019-20.

The following per month family income levels are obtained, after the Rs 6,000 NYAY transfer, for the following percentiles in the distribution (1, 5, 15, 20): Rs 10,280, Rs 12,500, Rs 14,480, Rs 15,240. So far so good — everybody in the bottom 20 per cent has Rs 6,000 extra consumption (income). Now I want to report the 30th, 40th, 50th and the 58th percentile levels of income: Rs 10,670, Rs 12,130, Rs 13,820, and Rs 15,440. Note that the Congress will succeed in political harakiri — it would upset, and alienate, close to 40 per cent of the population, from the 21st to the 58th percentile.

Rahul Gandhi, and his world-renowned team of advisers are right. The NYAY scheme is unique, never been tried. The reason — no one has (stupidly) dared to adopt it!

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The politics of information

Information systems strengthen socio-economic transformation, but transparency and accountability are crucial

RAJENDRAN NARAYANAN, RAKSHITA SWAMY AND NIKHIL DEY

AN ARTICLE IN this publication, 'The learning state: How information becomes insight' (IE, March 18), written by two economists, has made some important points about "information", but it is their perspective on "insight" that needs to be challenged.

Designing, using and evaluating information systems is all about perception and perspective. Information systems that might strengthen socio-economic transformation, is contingent on the active participation of people. Digital tools have proliferated over the last decade leaving millions out of the ambit of meaningful participation. For instance, an MGNREGA worker is the primary producer of information but she has no stake in its presentation and access. This raises pertinent questions about transparency of what and for whom. The citizen has been made transparent to the State and the market instead of the other way around — Aadhaar is a powerful example of this. Rural workers and pensioners have been coerced to migrate to the Aadhaar platform without their explicit consent. The authors make an important mention of the proliferation of management information systems (MIS) without examining its obvious inherent biases. The term "management" itself reflects the lack of a participatory framework in information design. There is a genuine concern in the context of MGNREGA that the MIS has become the de-facto implementing agency thereby burying accountability in reams of software codes hidden behind "administrative logins".

The Right to Information campaign has, for long, made a demand for a Janata Information system (JIS), instead, driven by a democratic and moral compulsion towards an information system designed by and for the people. Activists and concerned citizens have had to campaign for generating and accessing actionable information — to dig for pertinent jaankari (knowledge) from the universe of soochna (available information). Years of reiterative practice have demonstrated that for this to happen, it is imperative that the main users of information must be involved in the complete cycle of information — designing of frameworks for information collection, collation, disclosure, and, subsequent action.

There has been considerable progress made to take this principle from theory to practice. For instance, the Department of Information Technology (DoIT) of the Rajasthan government has engaged with a consortium of civil society organisations working over a range of issues such as MGNREGA, ration, land rights, mining, education and health over the past two years through an ongoing process of consultation called the "Digital Dialogue": It provided a platform to suggest and determine means by which existing information systems could be reformed for ensuring greater public accountability. This resulted in the development of a JIS for registering, availing and monitoring monetary relief for patients affected by pneumoconiosis/silicosis; for making applications under the Forest Rights Act, and, enabling applicants to trace their status. This also led to the development of a single window portal

known as the "Jan Sookhna Portal" for disclosing information related to all the gram panchayat/ward-level schemes. Each of these initiatives were based on consultations with the people to demonstrate how people-centric monitoring systems can be strengthened through appropriately designed technology. There is also an urgent need to move away from the myopia of the digital medium as the sole substrate of information: Dissemination of information shouldn't be a mutually exclusive, reductive debate of online versus offline.

Disclosure of information through MIS is not an act of benevolence by the State. It is a legal mandate. Section 4(2) of the RTI Act makes it mandatory for public authorities to "provide as much information suo-motu to the public at regular intervals through various means of communication, including internet, so that the public have minimum resort to the use of this Act to obtain information." Administrators need to be mindful of this legal commitment: While there are indeed 400 MIS developed, it is a matter of great distress that they ignore and violate the RTI Act. Admin logins for viewing rights are regularly introduced in the MIS as a way of doing the opposite of what Section 4 of the Act mandates. In any case the only permissible criteria for placing an admin login is under Section 8 of the RTI Act that mandates exemptions to the disclosure of information. Lack of a framework has created situations when the MIS is causing disempowerment. In the MGNREGA MIS, which is more "transparent" than most others, there are numerous instances of how the highly centralised system has resulted in software codes overriding the law. For example, in contempt of a Supreme Court order, the BJP government continues to use the MIS to willfully suppress the delays in wage payments caused by the Centre.

In conclusion, a JIS must have at least the following three building blocks to ensure that information does result in insight in a democratic polity: First, user groups/affected communities must be compulsorily involved in the complete cycle of information production, dissemination, and action. Second, there must be equal access of information between administrators and citizens. The concept of "administrative logins" promoting privileged access of certain kinds of information to administrators must be revoked. Third, the priority must be to recognise and create a system where information leads to enhanced democratic participation and accountability.

The BJP-led Central government has carefully manipulated, fabricated and suppressed critical information in several domains. For example, the leaked Periodic Labour Force Survey containing crucial data on the worst unemployment in the last 45 years, continues to be suppressed. Control over data and information cannot be only in the hands of the government or subject to the whims of the political leadership. Building on the renowned statistician, John Tukey's comment — "Information comes with politics on its back", it is high time that information is seen as a political tool in the hands of every citizen: To question, confront, monitor, and, to more effectively demand accountability.

Narayanan teaches at Azim Premji University, Swamy is with the Social Accountability Resource Unit, and the Dey is with the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan



More fiscal imprudence

Congress's NYAY could add to mindless welfare schemes that abound

THE RECENT ELECTORAL promise by the Congress party of an assured minimum income of Rs 72,000 per year to the poorest 20 per cent is yet another step that will lead India inexorably to bankruptcy sooner than later.

The Indian Bankruptcy Code consists of endless cash doles and freebies: From free power to free mobile phones and free laptops. To this ever-increasing list must be added the staggering amounts spent on fertiliser, fuel and food subsidies and on massive welfare schemes like the MGNREGA.

The minimum income scheme, formally called NYAY (Nyuntam Aay Yojana), is expected to cost the exchequer a staggering Rs 3,50,000 crore each year, almost 2 per cent of the country's GDP. Over a five year period, this scheme will cost the exchequer at least Rs 17,50,000 crore. The scheme, which has the potential to seduce a large number of voters, will be very difficult to implement. Will the amount of Rs 6,000 per month be in addition to other benefits that a person is entitled to under other Central or state government schemes? Do we have adequate and reliable data to identify the "poorest 20 per cent"? Is the entire funding to be done by the Centre? The next question is: What are the sources

to pay Rs 3,50,000 crore each year? Broadly, taxes and borrowings are the main sources. Sadly, India is already among the most heavily taxed nations. Our corporate taxes (at 35 per cent) are much higher than developed countries. Strong resentment against high GST rates has compelled the reduction of rates for numerous commodities. Thus, increasing taxes will not be feasible as it will further cripple industrial growth. There is also no scope for more borrowings as it will vastly increase the fiscal deficit.

The deleterious consequences of the Indian Bankruptcy Code is that lesser and lesser funds are now available for investments in industry, education, public health, defence and other essential services. In most states, the local governments have to fund the free education provided in non-minority private schools under the Right to Education Act, 2005. The reality is that payments are delayed by 24 to 36 months because the finances of most states are already stressed. We have the sorry spectacle where thousands of crores of tax refunds have been withheld due to lack of funds. In this scenario, another gargantuan welfare scheme will break the nation's fiscal backbone.

After 70 years of Independence, we have sadly not learnt that, in the long run, endless doles and subsidies do not solve the enormous problems of the poorest citizens but only perpetuate poverty. The grant of free power and numerous farm subsidies has not resolved the agrarian crisis. Every control order issued under the Essential Commodities Act was intended to ensure that sugar, cement, steel and food was distributed equitably. The reality was just the opposite — chronic shortages and a thriving black market economy.

Mohamed Yunus, the pioneer of the micro-finance movement and the Grameen Bank, in his brilliant book, *Banker to the Nation*, has pointed out that despite serious calamities like cyclones, loans were never waived in Bangladesh but were rescheduled. Yunus points out that loan waivers seriously erode the character of a nation. Repeated loan waivers in India have had a crippling impact on the banking sector but have not made the slightest dent to rural indebtedness or the number of farmer suicides.

The NYAY scheme will lead to colossal corruption and misuse. The identification of the poorest 20 per cent and the actual delivery of Rs 6,000 per month to those individu-

als is guaranteed to lead to large-scale leakage.

As India marches on in the eight decade of her independence, the most worrisome feature is the mindless growth of welfare schemes that make India's economic foundations increasingly weak. Manufacturing has slowed down and we do not have a competitive edge in any industrial or service vertical except software. Sadly, no party has any concrete plan to revive India's economy and put her on a growth trajectory that can alone generate vitally needed jobs. This requires serious thought and a high level of commitment to a long-term strategy coupled with short-term goals. Promising minimum income or other freebies, on the other hand, does not require any thought or planning.

Finally, what is worse is that doles and freebies, as experience has shown, are like cocaine and only whet the voters appetite for more. Such measures put India into a downward spiral that, after a tipping point, will become impossible to stop. Thanks to the Indian Bankruptcy Code, that tipping point is a cliff that is not too far.

The write is a senior advocate at the Supreme Court of India

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

VOTERS, DECIDE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Stoop to conquer' (IE, April 3). The electoral gains from communal polarisation are such that no political party will raise their moral standards. It's time voters decide that they won't be attracted to the immoral bait of communalism.
Ketan Kishan, Gurugram

FUNDING THE CITY

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'How a city cleans up' (IE, April 3). An issue left out by the authors is the lack of effective expenditure reforms by municipalities. A major share of the budgetary resources of municipalities are diverted to wages and other non-development expenditure. Fixing a statutory ceiling on grants from the Centre and states for financing expenditure on wages et al and a transition towards project-based grants would resolve the resource constraints.
Joseph Abraham, via email

DANGEROUS PROMISE

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Party changes own tune: No sedition law, diluted AFSPA' (IE, April 3). The Congress's poll promise of repealing the sedition

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

law is a threat to national security, while repealing the criminal defamation law is a threat to society. The fact is that every law is susceptible to misuse.
MC Joshi, Lucknow.

TELLING NUMBERS

Of deaths due to toxic air in 2017, half in China and India: report

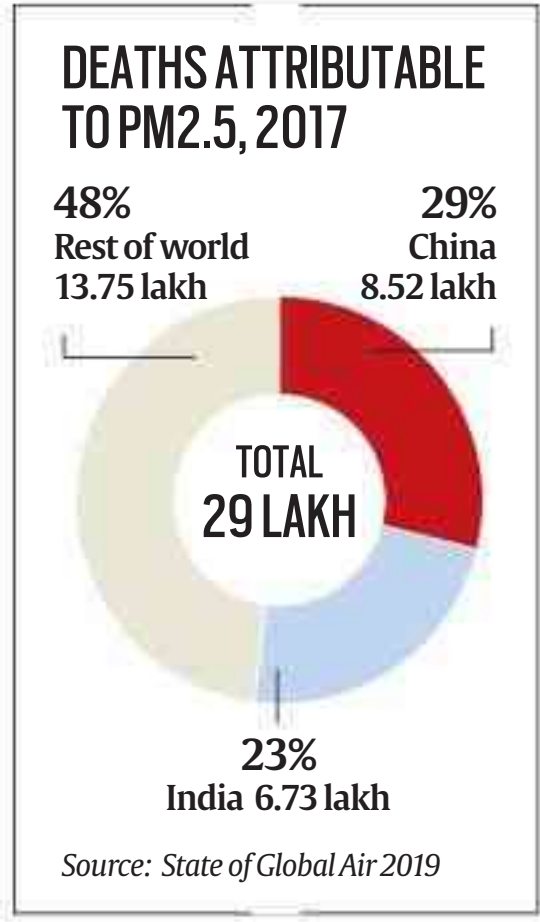
DEATHS ATTRIBUTABLE TO AIR POLLUTION, 2017

China	12 lakh
India	12 lakh
Pakistan	1.28 lakh
Indonesia	1.24 lakh
Bangladesh	1.23 lakh
Nigeria	1.14 lakh
US	1.08 lakh

SOWMIYA ASHOK
BEIJING, APRIL 3

A STUDY released Wednesday has found that China and India together were responsible for half the total global attributable deaths from air pollution in 2017. Long-term exposure to outdoor and indoor air pollution is estimated to have contributed to 4.9 million deaths in 2017, of which China and India accounted for 1.2 million deaths each, states the State of Global Air report 2019, prepared by the Boston-based Health Effects Institute (HEI).

The report cites an analysis of the Global Burden of Disease data from 2016 to conclude that air pollution collectively reduced life expectancy by 1 year, 8 months on average worldwide, rivalling the effect of smoking. "This means a child born today will die 20 months sooner, on average, than would be expected in the absence of air pollution. When considered separately, exposure to ambient PM2.5 is responsible for just over 1 year, household air pollution is responsible for almost 9 months, and ozone is responsible for less than 1 month of life span lost," it states.



PM2.5 exposure

The report found that long-term exposure to ambient PM2.5 contributed to 2.9 million deaths in 2017, making PM2.5 exposure responsible for 5.2% of all global deaths. The highest burden was concentrated in the world's two most populous countries: China (8.52 lakh deaths) and India (6.73 lakh deaths), together accounted for 52% of the total global PM2.5-attributable deaths.

Annual PM2.5 exposures were highest in South Asia, where Nepal (100 micograms/cubic metre), India (91 micograms/cu. m), Bangladesh (61 micograms/cu. m), and Pakistan (58 micograms/cu. m) had the highest exposures. Bhutan's exposure level (38 micograms/cu. m) was the lowest in the South Asia region. The 10 countries with the lowest national PM2.5 exposure levels were the Maldives,

the United States, Norway, Estonia, Iceland, Canada, Sweden, New Zealand, Brunei, and Finland. Population-weighted PM2.5 concentrations averaged 8 micograms/cu. m or less in these countries.

Household air pollution

In South Asia, household air pollution contributes to an additional life expectancy loss of about 1 year and 3 months, bringing the total life expectancy loss from air pollution to 2 years and 6 months, the report states. In sub-Saharan Africa, where more than 80% of people cook with solid fuels, household air pollution dominates the impact on life expectancy, accounting for 1 year and 4 months of the nearly 2 years in life expectancy loss from air pollution overall.

AN EXPERT EXPLAINS

Judicial reforms in Cong manifesto

The party has promised to 'deliver' several interventions in the judiciary. An analysis of some key points



FAIZAN MUSTAFA

THE MANIFESTO of the Indian National Congress released on Tuesday has a section on the Judiciary, which promises, among other things, to "make the Supreme Court a Constitutional Court that will hear and decide cases involving the interpretation of the Constitution", "establish a new Court of Appeal", and enhance representation in the judiciary at all levels of sections of society that are underrepresented currently.

These ideas are not original, and most have, in fact, been debated for years. While the party has said that "Congress Will Deliver" if it is voted to power, and promised to "present a report to the people of India, every year, on the status of implementation of our manifesto", election manifestos are not legally enforceable documents. In 2015, a Bench of Chief Justice of India H.L. Dattu and Justice Amitava Roy declined to entertain a petition filed by advocate Mithilesh Kumar Pandey on this subject, saying there was no provision in law under which political parties could be held liable for not fulfilling promises made in their election manifestos.

Constitutional Courts

The world's first constitutional courts were set up in Europe — in Austria in 1920 and in Germany after World War II. Today, 55 countries have constitutional courts, including most European or civil law jurisdictions.

In the early decades of the Republic, the Supreme Court of India, too, functioned largely as a constitutional court, with some 70-80 judgments being delivered every year by Constitution Benches of five or more judges who ruled, as per Article 145(3), on matters "involving a substantial question of law as to the interpretation of [the] Constitution".

This number has now come down to 10-12. Due to their heavy workload, judges mostly sit in two- or three-judge Benches to dispose of all kinds of cases — including a demand for a ban on sardar jokes, bans or lifting of bans on films, PILs asking that Muslims be sent out of the country, and allegations that a commissioner of police is misusing his powers.

This is because India's Supreme Court is perhaps the world's most powerful court, with a very wide jurisdiction. It hears matters between the Centre and states and between two or more states, rules on civil and criminal appeals, and advises the President on questions of law and fact. On the question of violation of fundamental rights, anyone can approach the Supreme Court directly.

The result: more than 65,000 cases are pending in the Supreme Court, and disposal of appeals takes many years. Several cases involving the interpretation of the Constitution by five or seven judges have been pending for years.

The Congress manifesto promises that the Supreme Court will hear, apart from constitutional matters, "other cases of legal significance or national importance". This is a vague expression, and can open the floodgates to a wide variety of cases.

The Congress proposal then, is neither innovative nor new. Back in March 1984, the Tenth Law Commission of India (95th



Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi at the release of the 'Congress Will Deliver' manifesto for the Lok Sabha elections in New Delhi on Tuesday. Neeraj Priyadarshi

Report) under Justice K K Mathew recommended that "the Supreme Court of India should consist of two Divisions, namely (a) Constitutional Division, and (b) Legal Division", and that "only matters of Constitutional law may be assigned to the proposed Constitutional Division".

The Eleventh Law Commission under the chairmanship of Justice D A Desai (125th Report, 1988) "reiterated (d) that the recommendation for splitting the (Supreme) Court into two halves deserves to be implemented".

The Eighteenth Law Commission under Justice A R Lakshmanan (229th Report, 2009) recommended that "a Constitution Bench be set up at Delhi to deal with constitutional and other allied issues", and "four Cassation Benches be set up in the Northern region/zone at Delhi, the Southern region/zone at Chennai/Hyderabad, the Eastern region/zone at Kolkata and the Western region/zone at Mumbai to deal with all appellate work arising out of the orders/judgments of the High Courts of the particular region".

Indeed, many countries around the world have Courts of Cassation that decide cases involving non-Constitutional disputes and appeals from the lower level of courts. These are courts of last resort that have the power to reverse decisions of lower courts. (Cassation: annulment, cancellation, reversal)

Prior to the establishment of the Supreme Court, appeals against decisions of Indian High Courts could be filed only with the Privy Council in London. The Federal Court of India established in 1937 under the provisions of the Government of India Act, 1935, had jurisdiction only in constitutional matters. When the jurisdiction of the Privy Council was abolished in 1949, appeals pending with it were transferred to the Federal Court, which was subsequently named Supreme Court.

Court of Appeal

The Congress has said it would amend

the Constitution "to establish a Court of Appeal between the High Courts and the Supreme Court" that would "sit in multiple Benches of 3 judges each in 6 locations", and hear civil and criminal appeals from the High Courts.

Article 39A says that "the state shall secure that the operation of the legal system promotes justice, on a basis of equal opportunity, and shall... ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disabilities".

Indeed, travelling to New Delhi or engaging expensive Supreme Court counsel to pursue a case is beyond the means of most litigants. Standing Committees of Parliament recommended in 2004, 2005, and 2006 that benches of the court be set up elsewhere. In 2008, the Committee suggested that at least one Bench be set up on a trial basis in Chennai. But the Supreme Court has not agreed with the proposal, which in its opinion would dilute the prestige of the court.

Article 130 says that "the Supreme Court shall sit in Delhi or in such other place or places, as the Chief Justice of India may, with the approval of the President, from time to time, appoint." Supreme Court Rules give the Chief Justice of India the power to constitute Benches and he can, for instance, have a Constitution Bench of seven judges in New Delhi and set up smaller Benches in four or six places across the country.

Judicial accountability

The Congress manifesto has promised to "establish a National Judicial Commission (NJAC) that will be responsible for selection of judges for appointment to the High Courts and the Supreme Court", and "an independent Judicial Complaints Commission to investigate complaints of misconduct against judges".

A National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) was set up by the Narendra Modi government in 2014. In 2016, the Supreme Court struck down the 121st

Amendment and the NJAC Act as being violative of the basic structure of the Constitution with regard to the independence of the judiciary and primacy of the opinion of the CJI in judicial appointments.

The Congress seeks to make another attempt, with an NJC "comprised of judges, jurists and parliamentarians", but has given no details on whether the lawmakers would be from the ruling party or the opposition, or on how they would be selected.

Currently, there is no mechanism to ensure accountability of Supreme Court and High Court judges short of impeaching them under Articles 124(4) and 217(1)(b) for "proved misbehaviour or incapacity". The procedure is so cumbersome that no judge has been impeached and removed from office so far. A controversial move last year to impeach CJI Dipak Misra was thwarted by the Chairman of Rajya Sabha.

Impeachment proceedings are currently conducted under The Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968. The Judges (Inquiry) Bill, 2006, which was introduced in Lok Sabha in December 2006, was based on the 195th Report of the Law Commission. In December 2010, the UPA-2 government introduced The Judicial Standards and Accountability Bill, 2010, in Lok Sabha. The Bill, which Lok Sabha passed in 2012, sought to set up a Judicial Oversight Committee, a Complaints Scrutiny Committee, and an Investigation Committee to examine complaints of misbehaviour against judges, and required judges to declare the details of their and their family members' assets and liabilities.

The Bill was criticised on the grounds that the Constitution does not permit Parliament to assign the task of examining proved misbehaviour of judges to an outside agency or committee. The definition of "misconduct" was considered problematic, as even the delayed filing of assets statements could be considered "misconduct". Due to opposition by judges and the lack of political consensus, the Bill was not passed by Rajya Sabha, and lapsed on the dissolution of Lok Sabha in 2014.

Diversity in judiciary

The Congress's promise "to enhance representation at all levels of the judiciary for women, SC, ST, OBC, minorities and other under-represented sections of society" is not a proposal to introduce reservation in the higher judiciary, but a mechanism to improve its diversity quotient.

It is true that the diversity of India is not reflected in its judiciary, especially in the High Courts and the Supreme Court. The nation is yet to have its first woman CJI. The first woman judge of the Supreme Court, Justice M Fathima Beevi, was appointed only in 1989. After the retirement of Justice Ruma Pal in June 2006, the Supreme Court had no woman judge until 2010 when Justice Gyan Sudha Mishra was elevated. Thereafter, Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai was appointed in 2011. Justices R Banumathi, Indu Malhotra, and Indira Banerjee were appointed in 2014, April 2018, and August 2018 respectively.

President K R Narayanan had raised the issue of poor representation of Dalits in the higher judiciary. Justice KG Balakrishnan has been India's only Dalit CJI so far. Justice S Abdul Nazeer is the only Muslim judge in the Supreme Court at present, even though there were four Muslims on the Bench in 2013.

(The author is an expert of constitutional law and Vice-Chancellor of NALSAR University of Law, Hyderabad. Views are personal.)

'Coordinated inauthentic behaviour': why FB removed pages in India

KARISHMA MEHROTRA
NEW DELHI, APRIL 3

EARLIER THIS week, Facebook removed four networks of groups, pages and accounts from India and Pakistan. Three of these were taken down for what it called "coordinated inauthentic behaviour" (*The Indian Express*, April 1). What kind of behaviour led to this crackdown?

Two kinds of behaviour

Two of the India networks, one each linked to the Congress and BJP, had been on Facebook's radar for the past two months because of "coordinated inauthentic behaviour" — or "CIB" as the company has described it since early 2018. CIB refers to an orchestrated set of platform violations operated by a single common entity or source.

The company described the category of a third India takedown as "civic spam" and not "CIB". With no common linkages between the individual pages, these pages were not "coordinated".

Regardless of the existence of a common source, the signals and violations in both categories are similar: single user with multiple accounts (SUMA), spamming behaviour, clickbait behaviour, location obfuscation, and content or ad farms. Content or ad farms are websites and pages with large amounts of low-quality content, typically to make money, which appear high on search engines.

The company linked one CIB India net-

work to the Congress's Gujarat IT cell. Initially the platform's algorithms repeatedly flagged and took down multiple accounts. The company traced these accounts to an IP hub in the party's Gujarat IT Cell. Most of the accounts exhibited bot-like behaviour, rather than human efforts.

The other Indian CIB network was linked to the company Silver Touch Technologies, with special focus on a BJP-leaning page called India Eye. Facebook says the page, with 2.6 million followers and \$70,000 in ad spending, was hiding its location and using a fake name. The company matched the admins to Silver Touch, and took down the page. While Facebook saw no formal connections between Silver Touch and BJP in the back-end network, Silver Touch has worked for both the ruling party and the government on IT solutions.

The company reached out to the Election Commission and both political parties the morning they took down these pages.

For the company taken down for civic scam, Facebook's algorithms did most of the detection of violations and displayed the number of violations per page. With little human investigation, the technologists looked at those numbers and decided which pages to take down.

Because the violators in this category are often small players with a small number of followers, the company has a policy not to disclose their identity. Company sources said a majority of the pages in this category were political, and BJP-supporting page cre-

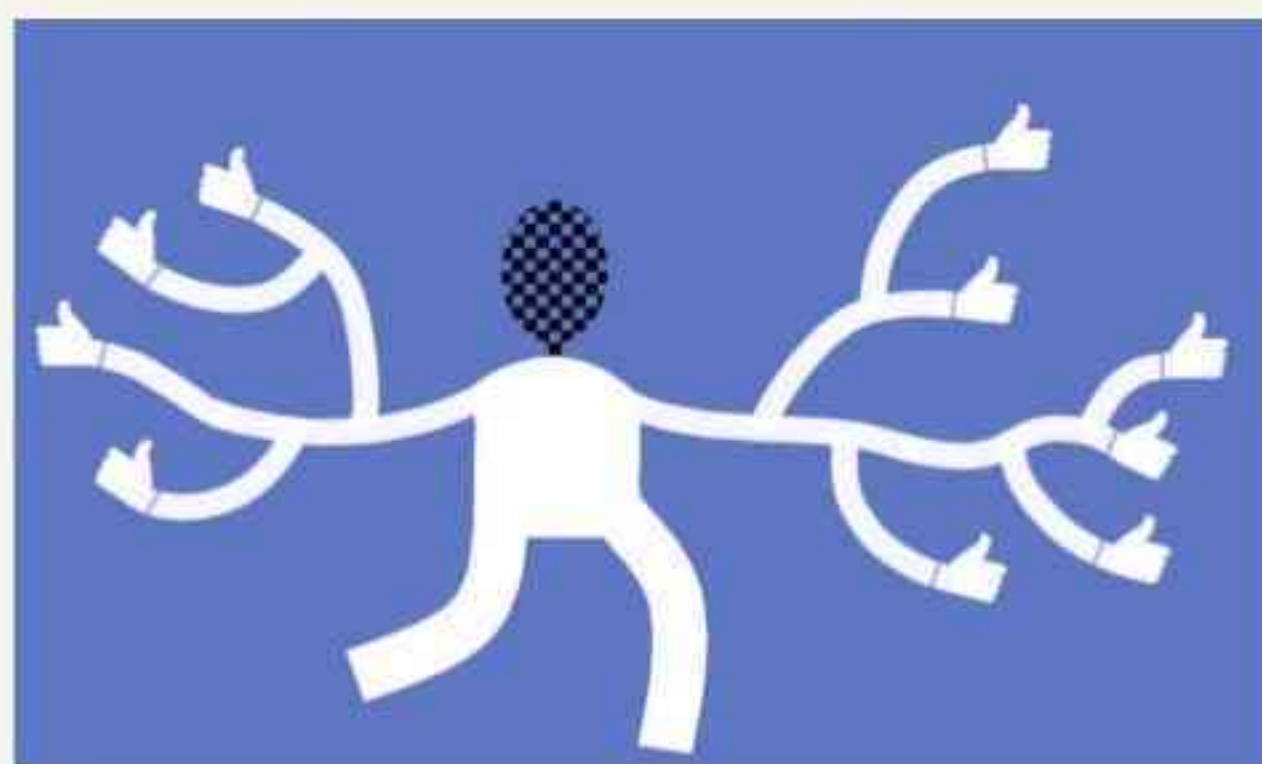


Illustration: C R Sasikumar

ators told *The Indian Express* that they were severely hit by the sweep.

"In one short night, Facebook has removed over 40 of our BJP base pages, which had Rs 10 crore investment. Almost 90 per cent of our strength on Facebook. They just want to say that they have acted against spam for their investors," a BJP social media volunteer said.

The CIB takedown in Pakistan was of a network that linked back to that country's military media wing. Amongst other misleading tactics, an online group of Pakistanis disguised themselves as Kashmiris aggrieved by the Indian Army, therefore violating loca-

tion policies, according to Facebook.

CIB and fake news

Like many of Facebook's policy shifts over the past two years, the impetus to tackle coordinated inauthentic behaviour began with a backlash over the platform's impact on the 2016 US presidential election. This catapulted the phrase "fake news" to worldwide attention, but waves had already begun with the Brexit campaign and Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea.

"Inauthentic behaviour" and "fake news" are not exactly the same thing. Facebook's CIB refers to the tactics that actors use to

spread content, such as building networks of Facebook pages and accounts using false identities. To understand how "fake news" might relate to this, it's important to recognise the distinction between "misinformation" and "disinformation." The former refers to false information regardless of whether or not the intent of those spreading it was to mislead the audience; the latter means that there was a deliberate effort to spread a manipulative narrative.

Because Facebook's CIB policy focuses on the intent to deceive the audience, it may involve "disinformation". The analysis of the content shared by the taken-down India and Pakistan pages will be included in a report by American think tank The Atlantic Council.

US election and after

After the 2016 presidential election, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg said it was a "pretty crazy idea" to think that fake news on the platform influenced the results. Soon after, *The Washington Post* reported that a "sophisticated Russian propaganda campaign" used a network of websites and social media accounts to mislead the public against Hillary Clinton and in favour of Donald Trump.

Facebook makes much of its revenue through advertising plans; people can pay it to target their ads to specific demographic groups, and the Russian group is alleged to have targeted paid advertising as well.

Months later, Facebook conceded that 150 million Americans saw Russian Internet Research Agency disinformation on the plat-

form. The US Congress began summoning company executives and commissioning studies. *The New York Times* detailed the internal processes that slowly made the information public, and the US Justice Department's Special Counsel Robert Mueller began investigating Russian links to Trump.

First takedowns for CIB

A Facebook team led by head of cybersecurity policy Nathaniel Gleicher (which was also behind the takedown of the India and Pakistan networks) began its research in the runup to the 2018 US midterm polls.

In January 2018, five months before the midterms, Facebook deleted pages and fake accounts it said were potentially aiming to disrupt the elections. By August, it began to use the CIB lexicon as it initiated another large sweep of 652 pages, this time focused on Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

By the US midterms in November, Facebook had projected itself as going hard against disinformation campaigns. The company then had spurts of similar takedowns in Bangladesh, Philippines, and elsewhere.

The US and India contexts differ in at least one significant way. Facebook coordinated heavily with the US government and law enforcement agencies because the attention remained on Russian, and hence foreign, influence. However, the campaigns in India are not only Pakistan-related, but are also internal domestic campaigns linked to the ruling party and the Opposition.