



I SAY LET THE WORLD GO TO HELL, BUT I SHOULD ALWAYS HAVE MY TEA.
— FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

The new techno-nationalism



PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

In this imagination, the focus is on creating carriers of national power in the form of private companies

WRONG STEP

Colombo's ban on the niqab is against a woman's right to choose — and is just the thing extremists feed on

PRESIDENT MAITHRIPALA SIRISENA has taken the extraordinary step of effectively banning the niqab, a face covering worn by some Muslim women, under the country's Emergency regulations, promulgated after the Easter Sunday bombings claimed by ISIS. It makes Sri Lanka the only country outside Europe to take such a decision. The directive does not explicitly mention the garment, which covers the face almost entirely and leaves narrow openings only for the eyes. It says all face coverings are banned for national security reasons. It is unfortunate that President Sirisena took such an extreme step without wider consultation, as it goes against the fundamental freedoms set out in the Sri Lankan constitution. Even accepting that the Emergency gives the government vast powers to suspend some freedoms, this is an unwarranted and extreme measure. The niqab is an import from the Middle East. It is not a common sight in Sri Lanka. Few women wear it. There is now the danger that the ban on the niqab will be read up in its implementation to include the more commonly worn hijab and burqa, especially as there have been demands earlier by Buddhist extremists that these garments should be banned. It could also open up demands for banning other visible identity markers, such as caps and bears worn by men.

Significantly, even before the President took the step, Muslim civil society organisations and the clergy had already urgently appealed to their "sisters" to stop wearing the full face veil or desist from being seen in public spaces wearing it. It is unclear if the male dominated civil society groups and the leadership of the clergy thought through the implications of the appeal. It is clear the community, which is more integrated into the Sri Lankan polity and economy than the Tamils, are fearful of the repercussions of the attack, and wants to play down identity markers. It is unclear if the women in the community were consulted. They are being asked to shoulder the burden of holding up the community's credentials.

It cannot be stressed enough that the problem that has erupted in Sri Lanka has not been caused by women's apparel. Banning the niqab may make the government look as if it is taking action, but it is hardly the way to meet the challenge posed by radicalism of the ISIS kind. From 2015 at least, Sri Lanka has been aware that some of its young citizens have been attracted to ISIS and were travelling to Syria for battle inoculation. There is no evidence to show that it acted seriously on this information. True, Sri Lanka was still in the first flush of the post-Rajapakse years, and the government was more focussed on dismantling some of the authoritarian structures from his time. Still, it is beyond comprehension that the government did not have an accurate handle on the radicalisation of even the handful of ISIS recruits.

PUSHING BUTTONS

Process of examining complaints of EVM malfunction is legally problematic and detracts from the sanctity of the elections

THE HARD-PRESSED ELECTRONIC voting machine (EVM) is again controversial, but now the issue is legal, rather than yet another allegation of malfunction. The Supreme Court has sent notices to the Election Commission on a petition seeking the withdrawal of penal provisions in the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, which threaten voters complaining of EVM malfunction or "deviant behaviour" with a jail term, if the allegation is not borne out. At present, under Rule 49MA read with Section 177 of the Indian Penal Code, which deals with supplying false information, the onus of proof lies with the complainant. The threat of punishment stifles free speech and has the effect of deterring complaints which, the petitioner has argued, are integral for improving any process. These effects were visible in Assam in the course of the ongoing election. H K Deka, a former director general of police of the state, refrained from challenging the patency of a machine where he had cast his vote, even though the Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) showed a different outcome from his input. He hesitated because he did not have full faith in the process of verifying a claim.

Indeed, it is legally fraught. The presiding officer, having informed the complainant of the punishment which could ensue if the claim could not be proved, proceeds to test the machine by registering a single vote in the presence of other poll officers. If it is accurately reflected in the VVPAT, the complainant is presumed to have lied. This is scarcely an infallible method, since a machine may produce "deviant behaviour" (in the words of the petition) at intermittent intervals. Besides, it makes the complainant a witness in his own case, which militates against the principles of justice.

Though parties across the political spectrum have cast aspersions on EVMs in the past, the 2019 general election has thrown up an unusually rich crop of malfunctions from West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, Gujarat, Odisha and Goa. Akhilesh Yadav has made sweeping allegations. The Telugu Desam Party has accused the EC of shying away from the issue, and a candidate in Anantapur district smashed an EVM. The machine may not be the problem, but the enduring controversy about it, and the draconian provision limiting complaints, are serious issues which detract from the perceived credibility of elections. The failure of the EC to address the problem does a deep disservice to democracy.

BED-CHAI PE CHARCHA

Bed tea is an institution in railway junctions. But like the trains, it sometimes arrives late, and that could ruin your day

ASANSOL, A JUNCTION at the heart of one of the oldest divisions of the Indian railways, is steeped in a long tradition of bed tea. Here, the line going "upcountry" (as English railwaymen termed north India) forks into the main line via Patna and the Grand Chord via Gaya. Another line connects the busy junction with the Sahibgunj Loop, opened to traffic in 1866. Passengers on these lines with evocative names have been plied with bed tea in their bunks since colonial times. And the railwaymen quartered here for generations have institutionalised bed tea in the town. The fortunate sip it from porcelain in their homes, the less fortunate from thick tumblers at tea stalls. Which, in Asansol, are conveniently located wherever one tumbles out of bed. Didi takes care of all.

But in our troubled times, the great tradition is sometimes broken. Trains do not run on time, and the bed-tea is late. No chai, no charcha. Moon Moon Sen, Trinamool Congress candidate in Asansol, did not learn and could not tell of the mayhem her party workers had wrought in the constituency because her bed-tea was served late. The workers had got their tea right on the button, while she slept, oblivious. Suitably energised, they had got a head start on the day.

But Sen is being unfairly pilloried over her other comment, that the political violence we are seeing is a piffle compared to what her generation had experienced. This is the honest truth. The streets of Kolkata, the state capital, have seen political workers in police helmets running amok with police lathis. Lethal attacks were fairly commonplace. But not any more. Didi takes care of all. Smell the bed-tea. Go back to sleep. Don't get excited until May 23. There's no future in it.

TECHNOLOGY AND NATIONALISM have always had a very intimate relationship. Technology has often been an instrument of national power; and the quest for national power has, in turn, led to the investments in, and the creation of, different models of scientific organisation. In some senses "techno-nationalism" has always been around as long as states have existed. Over the last two-three decades, the rhetoric of globalisation blunted visible expressions of techno-nationalism. One of the most euphoric ideological constructions of recent technological revolutions was that it would make the nation as a unit less salient for the development and deployment of technology. But there is a growing sense that the zeitgeist might be shifting. The one common thread that we will see emerge in global discourse is the more open reassertion of techno-nationalism. A techno-nationalist imagination will be more ascendant in political discourse, and this will shape the course of economic reform as well. India's politics is too distracted to focus attention on this. The RSS has been calling attention to the issue of techno-nationalism for a while, and don't be surprised if it rises up the agenda very quickly after the elections.

The current moment of techno-nationalism has both continuities and discontinuities with the past. The rise of China has upended technological globalism in several ways. First, many people around the world now buy the old argument that techno-nationalism is a good development policy. Chinese success, then, is not seamless integration into a global system; rather it is the artful use of the rhetoric of integration into the world economy to advance national technological goals. For Indian critics, the missing piece in our reform story is that there is no serious national technology strategy as a development policy. Second, China demonstrated capabilities to resist the western-led institutional order in a number of key areas such as information technology; precisely the areas that techno globalists thought would dissolve national salience. Third, as in the past, great power competition will in part depend upon countries' abilities to take the right bets in technologies of the future, and these have to be proprietary national tech-

nologies. This race is now increasingly at the heart of Sino-US rivalry. The fourth issue is the redefining of the relationship between political order and information order. The Chinese and Russians have done this in two ways: First, by demonstrating that political control of the information order can still be possible in this age; and, second, if this political control is not exercised, open information orders can be vulnerable to manipulation. Even as authoritarian tendencies grow in democracies, the desire to reassert political control over information orders will surface more and more. Given the nature of modern technologies, it is difficult to see that assertion happening without a degree of techno-nationalism. Fifth, techno-globalism is always premised on shared values in the international system. As consensus around the shape of the international order weakens, and more countries take divergent authoritarian paths, the temptation for technological nationalism will grow.

The concerns would lead countries to create national technology strategies. But there are other curious ideological aspects to the new discourse of techno-nationalism as well. One is an old trope, namely new nations telling a narrative of their past in terms of "national" traditions of science. Some recent writing in China uses Joseph Needham's classic work to reassert China's national identity in terms of a distinctive scientific tradition. India has its own version of "India as Scientific Civilisation" trope, unfortunately hijacked more by its nuttiest proponents rather than those who engage more thoughtfully with the question of the relationship between science and tradition.

But the more curious aspect of the current wave of techno-nationalism is the association of private companies with the techno-nationalist imaginary. States have often aligned to promote the interests of national companies. But in this techno-nationalist moment, many see the presence of big companies as a sign of being able to harness national technology prowess. In Indian techno nationalist circles you will always get questions like: Where is the Indian Amazon or Indian Alibaba? This might be a sensible question and an answer might focus on the

nature of Indian regulation. Indian companies could use a lot of help in many areas. But the underlying premise is less about regulation or development; it is more about creating large private sector icons as signs of national capabilities. There is open talk in many circles that what India will need is a couple of behemoth private companies that can leverage scale to rival global giants. It is almost as if Amazon versus Jio versus Alibaba becomes a proxy for national prowess. The economic logic of this construction is not the issue here. What is of interest is that in the new techno-nationalist imagination, the issue is not protecting small producers or indigenous technology etc. The focus is on creating what people believe to be the carriers of national power in the form of large companies. India's regulatory flip flops on globalisation in recent months (most notably in e-commerce), are in part driven by this temptation that we need to create big Indian private companies that are also national icons.

Again, the issue here is not the technological or economic logic at work. The issue will be positioning the necessity of these behemoths as signs of success of techno-nationalism. To take a random example, the rise of Jio and associated companies, becomes a national mission, not just an ordinary private sector investment. The nexus of big companies, state power and consumerist populism might be the new carriers of techno-nationalism, instead of the old public sector. So one of the oddest manifestations of techno-nationalism will not just be conventional arguments for investing in more R&D. They will be arguments for the subtle promotion of a few big companies, now positioned in their nationalist avatar. Of course, reality will be far messier than a simple unfolding of techno-nationalism. In reality, countries like India will continue to be hobbled by capacity issues. But both the changes in the international system, and the new domestic political economy, point in the direction of a greater salience for techno-nationalism, in all its varieties. We might enter an "RSS meets Jio" ideological world.

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WELFARE FOR QUALITY

Tamil Nadu's success in education underlines empowering, assertive populism



SUNNY JOSE AND BHEEMESHWAR REDDY A

THE NATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL Ranking Framework (NIRF) ranking for 2019 has just been released. This year, 860 higher education institutions are ranked, up from 445 in 2018. The NIRF ranking covers institutions from nine categories, such as overall, university, engineering, college, management, pharmacy, law, architecture, and medical. For what it's worth, the NIRF ranking not only measures the performance of education institutions in India, but also, for good measure, expects them to measure up. Can the NIRF ranking exercise help enhance the quality of higher education?

To play up its potential is to be unrealistic, yet to despise it as an unworthy attempt is to be myopic. A prudent endeavour would be to scrutinise the NIRF ranking, identify interesting or intriguing patterns, and initiate an informed discussion. Our attempt is aimed at this. What we observe from the 2019 NIRF ranking is a remarkable regional dominance and disparity. Such dominance and disparity might appear, to the voodoo pundits, prosaic. To our understanding, they are primarily the products of, and draw attention to, substantive aspects — policies and governance.

Of the 860 institutions ranked, 182 institutions (accounting for 21 per cent) are from Tamil Nadu (TN). The combined contribution of six big states — Bihar, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh — is 127 institutions. In relational terms, they

account for about two-thirds of the singular contribution of TN.

The above regional disparity appears from the category of "overall", which is generic, denoting nothing novel or nuanced. "Colleges" would be a better category to scout, as they serve as the backbone of higher education in India. Again, of the 200 colleges ranked by the NIRF in 2019, 74 colleges are from TN. Kerala, with 42 colleges, comes next. Thus, these two states are home to more than half of the quality colleges in India. Delhi, with 37 colleges, comes third. Surprisingly, no college from Bihar, MP, UP and Odisha is of a standard to find a place in the 200 ranked colleges. Even the share of Gujarat and Rajasthan together is minuscule — five colleges.

Thus, an important pattern emerges: The adequate contribution of TN coexisting with the inadequate share of some big states combined. Is there something unique to Tamil Nadu? An analysis of its performance, welfare and politics brings out two important insights. First is the "populist" nature of its welfare policies. The regional parties which have been governing TN since 1960s progressively built a competitive populist platform. Central to this is a progressive and expanding pool of welfare programmes, a fair measure of effectiveness in delivery, and a reasonable degree of commitment to their stability.

The second aspect is the "form" of populism — it is empowering and assertive. The

welfare policies were fortified with and paved a way for a carefully crafted micropolitics of identity creation and assertion. Identity-based reservation in education and employment was an important component of this form of populism. These two aspects created a critical mass of quality education institutions, which in turn benefited and empowered the middle and bottom groups, which were marginalised or ignored by the earlier political regime and its ruling elites.

The demands and assertions of these groups, in turn, forced the state to deliver and expand the services. Of the 74 ranked colleges from TN, only one-third (17 colleges) are based at Chennai and the rest (57 colleges) are spread across various cities. This raises an important question: Can populism promote quality? TN's experience shows that it is eminently possible to deliver and sustain higher education institutions without lowering their quality and access. The populist form notwithstanding, what Tamil Nadu's case underlines also is effective welfare policies and governance. This brings us back to the issue posed at the beginning. It is possible to use the NIRF ranking to draw attention to issues of governance and quality that blight higher education in India.

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MAY 1, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO



RESTORING THE STATUTE THE PRESIDENT TODAY gave his assent to the 44th Amendment Bill restoring to the Constitution to a great extent what it lost during the Emergency — it has been passed by the Lok Sabha and, with some modifications, the Rajya Sabha. The Bill seeks to undo the damage done to the Constitution by Indira Gandhi's 42nd Amendment and to deprive the executive possible avenues of cutting into the democratic content of the Constitution.

ROUGH FLIGHT THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE on public undertakings, in four reports, has voiced "se-

rious suspicion" about the bona fides of Air India's purchases of Boeing 747 aircraft, and recommended that "further deals with the Boeing company should be stopped immediately". The committee had pointed out that the airline paid no income tax on its profits for three years, allowed its outstanding sums to mount to over Rs 45 crore, and built serious imbalances into its fare structure.

FAMILY GOALS THE JOINT CONFERENCE of the Central Councils of Health and Family Welfare has scaled down the national family planning target for 1979-80 in the light of poor performance by some states on the family plan-

ning front in 1978-79. The earlier national target was to cover, through different methods, 10.7 million people. It has now been scaled down to 9.65 million.

PROBING PM'S FAMILY THE CHIEF JUSTICE OF India refused to look into the corruption charges against the family members of Prime Minister Morarji Desai and Deputy Prime Minister Charan Singh. The matter has been placed before a retired judge of the Supreme Court, Justice Vaidialingam, who will say whether any prima facie case exists in respect of charges which pertain to the period after the Janata government came to office.

13 THE IDEAS PAGE

New era, old scars

Japan switches from Heisei to the new Reiwa era, but old cultural and political faultlines remain



KEVIN RAFFERTY

JAPAN IS MAKING much fuss, including an unprecedented 10 consecutive days of holiday, over the end of the Heisei era and the beginning of Reiwa on May 1, as Emperor Akihito abdicates in favour of his son, Crown Prince Naruhito.

For all the hype, and acres of newsprint and online space about the new emperor, and, prime minister Shinzo Abe's determination to milk the change for electoral advantage, any talk of a new era is largely wishful thinking.

Japan's old ghosts will continue to haunt it, and no political leader has shown a clue on how to frighten them away: Deep scars remain from war and defeat, the economy is sluggish, population decline is beginning to bite, Japan Inc — meaning the business and bureaucratic establishment — remains set in the post-war past; while politicians' horizons, with Abe leading the pack, get pushed further back.

Akihito deserves the praise heaped on him. He has shown himself as a caring father figure: In tough times, after a volcanic eruption, or earthquake, or nuclear meltdown, Akihito and Empress Michiko were quickly on the scene, bending to mourn, comfort and listen to the concerns of the devastated people in ways unthinkable before. Akihito has consistently displayed a common, relatable touch, absent in other Japanese leaders, especially politicians.

The question remains whether Naruhito can fill his father's shoes. He has the advantage of a good education, including two years at the Oxford University, where he did his own laundry, and flooded the room. He married a highly intelligent and personable woman, Masako Owada, herself educated at both Harvard and Oxford, who gave up a burgeoning career as a foreign ministry diplomat.

Naruhito pledged his love and protection for his princess. But his wife still suffered from crushing court protocols, retiring from public life several times because of nervous exhaustion — no doubt affected also by pressures to produce a male heir, unsuccessfully. Indeed, even their daughter, Princess Aiko, now 17, took days off from school in her early teens because of "fatigue". Despite their foreign experience, the new imperial couple have remained hidden — imprisoned, I am tempted to say — behind the court walls.

In Japan, there is always a big gap between form and substance. From May 1, the Heisei era will be gone and Reiwa year one will start. Many dates, from identity cards, government bills and even local train tickets are designated in terms of the imperial era — so a bus ticket issued on May 31, 2019, would be Reiwa 1, 05, 31; a local council bill for 2020 would be Reiwa 2; and someone born in 1961 was born in Showa 36, referring to the era of Akihito's father, Hirohito.

The emperor may control the calendar, but he is not even the head of state. According to Japan's constitution, he is the symbol of the state. Walter Bagehot famously said that the British monarch had limited but powerful powers, to consult, advise and warn the prime minister. Japan's emperor does not regularly meet Abe in the way that the British prime minister goes to Buckingham Palace every week, usually on a Wednesday at 6.30 pm, to inform the queen of what is happening.

Even the name Reiwa was chosen by the government with no input from the emperor, neither Akihito nor Naruhito. Reiwa has been officially translated as "beautiful harmony", and Abe boasted that the name came from an ancient Japanese anthology of poems, instead of drawing from old Chinese texts, as with previous era names. The "rei" character is some-



Suvajit Dey

times used to mean "command" or "order", which would fit Abe's philosophical vision.

In applauding the choice of Reiwa, Abe stressed the importance of traditional values. This reflects the crux of Japan's problems: At the very start of Reiwa, it is stuck with old attitudes while the world changes around it at whirlwind speed.

Critics concede that the Heisei era was marked by peace, but also by natural disasters and economic stagnation. Reiwa offers a new opportunity, they contend. Innovation should be a Reiwa goal, claimed one commentator. That's perhaps even nicer than the American belief in motherhood and apple pie, but wishing it isn't the same as achieving it.

Abe reigns supreme politically, but owes his dominance to an uneasy coalition of lukewarm reforming conservatives and traditional conservatives who thrive on pork barrel politics. This has led to awkward choices of ministerial colleagues, not least of which is Yoshitaka Sakurada, who recently resigned as Olympics minister: He had previously been a cybersecurity minister who could not use a computer, and, in 2016, he described Korea's comfort women — press-ganged by the Japanese Imperial Army into brothels for the troops — as "professional prostitutes".

Abe learned his politics literally at the knees of his grandfather, Nobusuke Kishi, who signed Japan's declaration of war, but escaped punishment to become a post-war prime minister. He still carries the baggage of war in his determination — despite popular opposition — to change Japan's "no war" constitution to legitimise its armed forces. This has also undermined Japan's repeated apologies for wartime atrocities, which China or Korea do not consider to be very genuine.

Internationally, Abe has put his faith in Donald Trump, who will be the first foreign leader to make a state visit to Reiwa Japan. But Abe's faith in his buddy Trump is risky. The US president is unhappy about Japan's trade surplus and is likely to turn on Abe to demand damaging changes in their trade relations.

Bias towards Trump's US also leaves Japan blindsided in dealing with China or respond-

ing to South Korea's initiatives with the North. Abe's own headline views have made him come across as unreliable in Beijing, Seoul, not to speak of Pyongyang.

Japanophiles claim that economically and socially, the country is managing its relative decline. Unemployment is at a record low, and female participation in the labour force is as high as in the US. Abe has opened the door to large numbers of immigrants to fill labour shortages.

But this is a roseate view. If immigrants enter in the numbers required to sustain the economy, will they become confined to ghettos or be allowed to compete for top jobs — something Japanese women have failed at? Because Japan Inc resists women: There is no woman heading a Nikkei 225 company, only 6.5 per cent of women as directors in the top companies, no woman heading a major bank or university, and, only one woman in Abe's cabinet.

Japan Inc and innovation are almost polar opposites, even as leading companies like Olympus, Toshiba, Tokyo Electric Power, Kobe Steel, not to mention the car company Nissan, succumb to scandal, financial irregularities and poor management. The electronics company Sharp suffered the indignity of being bought by Hon Hai Precision (Foxconn) of Taiwan.

There's nothing magical that a new imperial reign can accomplish, especially as Abe and his conservatives refuse to allow women to sit on the Chrysanthemum throne: After the Crown Prince ascends the throne, from May, there will only be three male heirs, aged 53, 12 and 83. Innovation is hardly in evidence except on the cultural fringes, including manga.

But hey, Japan is the safest country in the world, even though it's living beyond its means. The water is warm and it's only getting hotter slowly, as the frog said, on the way to being boiled to death.

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Japan's old ghosts will continue to haunt it, and no political leader has shown a clue on how to frighten them away: Deep scars remain from war and defeat, the economy is sluggish, population decline is beginning to bite, Japan Inc — meaning the business and bureaucratic establishment — remains set in the post-war past.

National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) for insolvency proceedings under Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) 2016. And coming back from that point would be almost impossible for Jet Airways". This would render "20,000 employees jobless" and also raise "question on the sustainability of already struggling aviation sector in India". The article talks of the Indian aviation industry's dilemma: The industry does not seem to be "sure which model (low cost or full fledged) of operation it should opt for". "Profits of a few profitable carriers are continuously falling and most are making huge losses and this clearly indicates that on overall aviation sector is not in good health," the article notes. It contends "that a careful look in the incipient over a few decades in the industry clearly indicate that the reasons for the problems in the aviation sector are not only limited to the operational strategies of these carriers but also the government's policies on fuel pricing and maintenance charges imposed by the Airport Authority of India". It goes on to ascribe the situation to a "regulatory failure to ensure good corporate governance practices."

"Moreover, the statutory committees seem to be not working efficiently. Independent directors failed to ring a bell. Ministry of Corporate Affairs and Ministry of Aviation along with AAI could not check whether its policies are working well for the industry or not. This needs to be addressed. Besides these, there is a need to check the way financing is done in the industry," the article notes.

MATTER OF DEGREE

AN ARTICLE IN *Organiser* on April 23 alleges that Congress president Rahul Gandhi's series of lies do not seem to end. It claims that after his lies on Rafale were exposed in the Supreme Court, "it has come to light that the president of the Indian National Congress has lied in his election affidavits filed both in Amethi and Wayanad Lok Sabha constituencies". It says that while "we wait" for "the returning officer at Amethi and the Election commission to act, it is also time that Rahul Gandhi comes clean on these charges".

A similar report in *Panchjanya* says that after Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi, questions have been raised on the educational qualification of Rahul Gandhi. The report says that Congress has become defensive on the issue of educational qualification of its president. It claims that Indian politicians misleading people about their educational qualification is nothing surprising. West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee had once claimed that she has a doctorate from East Georgia University. "There is no such university across the world," the report claims.

Compiled by Lalmani Verma

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The best candidate (for US President) will understand the urgency of restoring U.S. leadership throughout the world, in respectful concert with democratic allies from Mexico and Canada to Japan and South Korea to India and Europe." — THE GUARDIAN

A resurgence foretold

Since its defeat in Syria, ISIS has been updating its strategy. Terror through local proxies, as in Sri Lanka, is part of its evolving modus operandi



ANJU GUPTA

ISIS HAS RELEASED the second video of its supreme leader, Abu Bakr Baghdadi on April 29, the first since he appeared in a video delivering a sermon as the Caliph at the Al Nuri Mosque of Mosul in Iraq on July 5, 2014. The focus of the video was to showcase Baghdadi, alive and healthy, discussing global matters with masked commanders. He praised attacks by "brothers" in Sri Lanka to avenge the loss of the last bastion of the Caliphate in Syria, Baghouz, on March 23, as well as an Australian jihadi holding a key position within the group.

Less than a month after the declaration of decimation of the Caliphate, on April 21, ISIS has claimed attacks in Sri Lanka — arguably the second-deadliest attack in history after 9/11. The selection of the day, time, targets, modus operandi and media messaging strongly indicates that ISIS must have been planning its "signature" global attacks on the chosen day to project a message to the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, as well as to its own fighters and supporters, that "ISIS is alive and kicking". Now, Baghdadi has himself owned the attacks as revenge for targeting Baghouz — where over 2,000 airstrikes over three months eventually managed to evict ISIS completely.

The group chose Sri Lanka carefully — a seemingly low-threat country, which had ample number of targets, a local network, and a known radicaliser, Zaharan Hashim, who had made his loyalty to ISIS known. His online presence for some years helped build the credibility of it being an ISIS attack.

However, a small group like the National Thowheed Jamat (NTJ), and its smaller ally, were not capable of mounting such attacks on their own. The scope, precise execution of the serial bombings and deadly suicide responses to raids by Sri Lankan forces, between April 21-25, point to months of training by top-class experts, including dry runs. Training of more than seven suicide bombers is a supremely difficult task, fraught with the risk of some developing cold feet, or exposure before the targeted date of attacks. Such detailed planning and training required key ISIS experts, who would have kept the bombers motivated, and kept control over their thought processes and activities, till the final act.

Since August 2014, ISIS has chosen to fight frontal battles with security forces and supportive militia. This trend continued upto March 2019 when it lost its last bastion in

Syria. It is unthinkable that the core ISIS leadership was not working on a strategy for its post-Caliphate phase, like the al Qaeda did after 9/11, anticipating the US-led response.

ISIS was steadily losing territories in Iraq and Syria since late-2014, yet it continued its global operations. Even though attacks in Western Europe were lower in number in 2018, leading experts are of the view that attempts to attack did not reduce. In May 2017, ISIS Wilayat in Philippines (ISP) gained control over the city of Marawi and was evicted only after five months of sustained military operations, with international support.

The UN, in its August 2018 report, assessed that ISIS had about 20,000 fighters in Syria and Iraq, including those "concealed in sympathetic communities and urban areas... the group's leadership has also decentralised to mitigate further losses, and is thus likely to survive in the two countries in the medium term, due to the ongoing conflict and complex stabilisation challenges."

It has been reported time and again that thousands of foreign fighters escaped from Syria and Iraq before the Caliphate fell. On the strength of the idea of the Caliphate, ISIS has already amassed huge wealth through oil, taxes, extortion, ransom, bank robbery, sale of artefacts, etc.

It is clear that for the post-Caliphate phase, ISIS has also changed its external and internal communications strategy, as its previous strategy has been effectively countered. The three media companies of ISIS, namely Al Bayan, Al Furqan and Amaq are active in circulating messages through pro-ISIS accounts. Key ISIS accounts are not as easily visible or approachable, and can only be joined by screened "invitation links". Hence, the challenge to detect the organisation's online presence is much greater for law enforcement agencies.

Unlike Bangladesh — where the ISIS claimed many attacks before the big attack in Dhaka (July 2016) — in Sri Lanka, in order to recruit fighters for the Caliphate, ISIS waited to mount attacks on a scale and at a time of its choosing to deliver a strong message to the Global Coalition. The pattern of ISIS attacks in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, as well as other theatres, clearly indicate that ISIS is fashioning strategy and tactics on the basis of local complexities. Local groups appear to be following the dictat of the main group, with regard to selection of targets, timing and media messaging.

The April 21 attacks in Sri Lanka are surely not a one-off event for the region or the world. Like the al Qaeda, ISIS may now also make concerted efforts to use "front groups" to capture pockets of influence in conflict zones, while carrying out its signature global attacks, seemingly, at will.

The writer is an IPS officer. Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

FARMERS ARE RIGHT

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Lay off' (IE, April 30). The case by PepsiCo against Gujarat potato farmers goes against all logic. The farmers have not breached any IPR. It's better that PepsiCo withdraws its case against the farmers at the earliest as it will yield no benefit to the company. The farmers are right in their stand on this case. **Sanjay Chawla, Amritsar**

ELUSIVE CURE

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'A healthy signal' (IE, April 30). With the increase in life expectancy in the last few decades, providing affordable healthcare is a non-negotiable concern for the government. As the writers point out, there is a dearth of manpower not only for doctors but other technical staff like nurses and lab technicians. Some states like Jharkhand and Haryana have a very poor doctor-population ratio. The need of the hour is for the next government to think beyond PMJAY and not only create sustainable public healthcare infrastructure but ensure that they attract talent at all levels. **Bal Govind, Noida**

UNREALISTIC LAWS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Regulator's role' (IE, April 30). The Supreme Court has given two edicts to the RBI recently. The first challenges the time-frame of 270 days under the insolvency law and now it has asked the central bank to reveal the details of defaulters. This highlights two things: First, the laws are at odds with each other as the RTI act enjoins the RBI to divulge defaulters' names but the

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

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

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banking secrecy law prevents it from doing so. Second, 270 days is an unrealistic time-frame given the way the law operates in the country. **Deepak Singhal, Noida**

CREDIT IS DUE

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Newspeak on poverty' (IE, April 30). Since it assumed office at the Centre, the BJP has been finding faults with the Congress-led UPA government's policies. But at the same time, it has tweaked some of them, given them new names and taken credit for them. The BJP and the Congress must be generous and give credit to each other's policies wherever due. **Tarsem Singh, Mahilpur**



VIEW FROM THE RIGHT

ATTACKS IN SRI LANKA

THE EDITORIAL IN the *Organiser* on April 30 comments on the recent attacks on luxury hotels and churches in Sri Lanka and a mosque in New Zealand. It says that when "Bharat is finding its own way to fight state-sponsored terrorism from across the border and trying its best to build a consensus on defining and tackling terrorists, a new debate is shaping up globally". It notes that "though the Islamic State has claimed responsibility for the attack, a local group called the National Thowheed Jamath is considered the main executor". "This is believed as the revenge attack in response to the Christchurch terror strike by a few white supremacists," it adds.

The editorial talks of the perpetrators of the attacks and notes that "first, we have to accept that this Jamaat does not consist of a senseless, directionless, poverty-stricken, uneducated youth. They are well-educated and well-to-do individuals, inspired by a funda-

mentalist religious thinking that essentially believes in converting the entire world to the same faith and there is a clear politico-religious ideology and modus operandi to this." "When a demographic jihadism is considered as a threat by some whites, then it is termed as Islamophobia, but at the same time, the kafirophobia that inspires so many radical organisations is not even named," the editorial argues.

It talks of another aspect: "The Jamaat works unconsciously to support these radical elements. In the name of charity or religious brotherhood, these people always remain in ghettos of insecurity." It describes this "third layer" as "perhaps the most dangerous". It argues that the Jamaat will use legal instruments and intellectual might "to either protect terrorists or project them as poor, exploited human beings. Distorting history and discarding evidence to glorify blatant acts of terrorism has been a common practice".

AIRLINE GROUNDED

AN ARTICLE IN the *Organiser* on April 30 talks of the Jet Airways crisis. It notes "that after many incidents of defaults on meeting liabilities on many occasions, the bankruptcy of Jet Airways looks to be an utmost possibility. If the bids of May 10, 2019 are not accepted by lenders, they would move to



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THIS WORD MEANS

THE CHRYSANTHEMUM THRONE & REIWA ERA

The world's oldest surviving hereditary monarchy, which has witnessed its first abdication in 200 years



In the final moments of his reign, Japan's Emperor Akihito (left) and Empress Michiko (second from left) with Crown Prince Naruhito (second from right) and Crown Princess Masako (right) at the abdication ceremony at the Imperial Palace in Tokyo on Tuesday. *Japan Pool via AP*

OM MARATHE
NEW DELHI, APRIL 30

AT MIDNIGHT Tuesday — 8.30 pm IST — Japan's 59-year-old Prince Naruhito officially succeeded his father Akihito as Emperor, the 126th incumbent of the Chrysanthemum Throne, the world's oldest surviving hereditary monarchy. Akihito, 85, who became Emperor in 1989, had declared in a rare speech in 2016 that he feared his age and poor health would make it difficult for him to carry out his royal duties. In June 2017, Japan's Parliament passed a law to allow the Emperor to abdicate, and on December 1 that year, it was announced that the country would have a new Emperor on May 1, 2019. On Tuesday, Akihito became the first Emperor to step down in 200 years.

The Imperial Throne...

Legend has it that Japan's ruling dynasty was founded by the Emperor Jimmu, whose accession is traditionally dated to 660 BC. The Japanese Emperor is revered in the Shinto religion, in which the royal family is believed to have divine descent. Emperor Hirohito, the father of Akihito, renounced his divinity as part of Japan's surrender in World War II — and the 1947 Constitution identified the Emperor as "the Symbol of the State and the Unity of the People". While the Chrysanthemum Throne refers to the monarchy itself, it is also the name of an actual octagonal throne that sits in the Tokyo Imperial Palace, which is used on special occasions.

...And Imperial Era

The monarchy is an institution beloved of the Japanese people, and an integral part of their national identity. The reign of each Emperor is given a name, or *genjo*, which is used with the Western calendar to mark years. With the end of the reign of Akihito, the 'Heisei' era ended, and with the ascension of Naruhito to the Chrysanthemum Throne, the new 'Reiwa' era has begun in Japan. Reiwa is made of the characters *Rei* — that can mean either 'commands' or 'order', or 'auspicious' or 'good' — and *Wa*, meaning 'harmony', which is used in the word 'hei-wa', or 'peace'.

The name of the new era has been taken from an ancient anthology of Japanese poems, the *Manyoshu*, which dates back to the 8th century, and symbolises Japan's "profound public culture and long tradition", Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had said when the name was unveiled. The name of the new era is picked from a list that scholars and experts draw up. The name appears on coins, newspapers, driver's licences and official documents; it also stands for a certain period and what is seen as its defining spirit — such as "the 90s" or "the Victorian era", the BBC wrote in an explainer on the new Emperor and his *genjo*.

Emperor Akihito's *genjo*, Heisei, or 'achieving peace', followed the Showa era (1926-89), which translates as 'enlightened harmony'. Showa was preceded by the Taisho era (1912-26), or 'great righteousness', and the Meiji era (1868-1912), which translates as 'enlightened rule'.

AMITABH SINHA
PUNE, APRIL 30

GIANT FOOTPRINTS 32 inches long and 15 inches wide — that is what an Indian Army team claims to have seen during a Himalayan expedition earlier this month.

The longest known feet of a human being, according to the *Guinness Book of Records*, measure 15.78 inches. The normal width of human feet is not more than two to four inches. The average size of feet of apes like the gorilla is between 10 and 14 inches.

This has led to the Indian Army concluding that the footprints they have observed — and whose photographs they have put out on the Internet — must be of the Yeti, a mythical snowman that is said to inhabit the high Himalayas. There is no scientific evidence thus far that a creature like a snowman — bipedal, hairy, five to eight feet tall — exists, but the Yeti remains a part of Himalayan folklore, making frequent appearances in popular culture, including in fiction and children's books like *Tintin* and in movies, where it is often depicted as a bigger version of a mountain gorilla.

Buying into the myth

The Indian Army is not the first to buy into the Yeti myth. For over a century, mountaineers, adventurers and scientists from the West have brought back tales of the Yeti from their expeditions in the Himalayas, having possibly heard these from their local guides for whom the Yeti is a matter of faith. Some of them reported to have actually sighted the beast, like N A Tombazi, a Greek photographer and geologist (some texts describe him as an Italian), who during an expedition in Sikkim in 1925 claimed to have seen the Yeti from about 200 to 300 yards.

"It walked upright and bent down occasionally to uproot a few rhododendrons. It looked dark against the snow and wore no clothes. Within a moment or so it had moved on to disappear in the undergrowth. I examined the footprints which in shape were like those of a man but only about 5 inches long. The five toes and the arch were distinctly recognisable, and the imprints were certainly those of a biped," he is reported to have written in his *Account of Photographic Expedition to the Southern Glaciers of Kanchenjunga in the Sikkim Himalaya*, published in 1925.

The footprints

There have been several reports of large footprints in the Himalayan snow, and described as being of the Yeti. The most famous of these were photographs of a long line of apparently fresh footprints taken by Sri Lanka-born mountaineer Eric Shipton and his colleague, Michael Ward, a surgeon, in a 1951 expedition. The footprints they saw were 13 inches long and 8 inches wide. Having no measuring equipment, Shipton took the photograph of the footprint alongside an ice-axe to bring an element of scale. Those photographs triggered immense excitement, were studied extensively and taken as strong evidence of the existence of the Yeti. They also became the genesis for many expeditions aimed solely at searching for the Yeti, many of which returned with hairs, bones and faeces claimed to be of the mythical creature.

In July 1986, the legendary mountaineer Reinhold Messner reported having seen "gigantic" footprints in Tibet. "It was absolutely distinct. Even the toes were unmistakable. To see that the imprint was fresh I touched the soil next to it. It was fresh," he was quoted as saying in Graham Hoyland's book *Yeti: An*

SIMPLY PUT

Footprints in snow: myth, fact

Army has claimed large footprints it has seen are of the Yeti. The mythical creature has often been the subject of expedition reports and depicted in popular culture, but there is no scientific evidence that it exists.



Photo tweeted by the Indian Army, which said it was of Yeti footprints and taken close to Makalu Base Camp (in Nepal) on April 9. "The elusive snowman has only been sighted at Makalu-Barun National Park in the past," the tweet said.



Abominable History.

A number of other eminent mountaineers, including Sir John Hunt and Sir Edmund Hillary, too have reported their encounters with the Yeti, mainly in the form of strange footprints that did not look like those of humans or any other known animal.

Scientific tests

These repeated accounts of footprints led to rigorous scientific analysis of various specimens brought back by the expeditions. Two of the most recent studies were published in the *Proceedings of The Royal Society B*, in 2014 and 2017.

The 2014 study, led by geneticist Bryan Sykes, now an emeritus fellow at the University of Oxford, studied 30 hair samples brought from different sites in the Himalayas. It said all samples except two could be matched with known species. But the study suggested that those two samples, which appeared to belong to a polar bear, could not be matched fully with any known species, thereby giving rise to speculation that an unknown animal could be lurking. However, upon rechecking the results, it was found that there was a mistake, and what appeared to be the genetic sequence of a new animal was in fact an incomplete sequence of known species.

The 2017 paper was by a group of re-

searchers led by Tianying Lan of Department of Biological Sciences at the University of Buffalo, New York, and described a comprehensive genetic survey of all available specimens collected from the Himalayas and claimed to belong to the Yeti. This group discounted the possibility of the existence of the Yeti from the available evidence.

"This study represents the most rigorous analysis to date of samples suspected to derive from anomalous or mythical 'hominid'-like creatures, strongly suggesting that the biological basis of the Yeti legend is local brown and black bears," the study concluded.

Whose footprints, then?

Several explanations have been offered for the unusually large footprints that have been observed and photographed. Writing many years later, in 1997, about the photographs that he and Eric Shipton had taken in 1951, Michael Ward, the surgeon, said that these could be the footprints of human beings with unusually large and deformed feet.

"The attribution by some people of the footprints seen by Shipton and myself... to a Yeti seems untenable, as many years of investigation have revealed no evidence of any such animal. A more likely explanation is that they were those of a local inhabitant with cold-tolerant feet and possibly some congenial or acquired abnormality or foot infection. The possibility that they were formed by overlapping prints must be considered. Other possibilities are that the prints are those of a brown bear or Langur monkey, but no tail marks were seen. It is doubtful if this puzzle will ever be solved," he wrote.

Ward said he had personally come across people in the Himalayas who walked barefoot in snow and cited a couple of examples. In another article titled *The Yeti Footprints:*

Myth and Reality, he wrote "We will never know for certain what man or animal made the footprints in the Menlung basin in 1951, but I think that the above possible explanations (human deformed feet) are as plausible as any that have been put forward so far."

Many others have suggested that these could be the footprints of bears found in the region — Asiatic black bear, Tibetan brown bear and Himalayan brown bear. "A frequent comment about the prints is that they may have been made by a smaller, known, animal, whose tracks were subsequently distorted and enlarged by melting. This is no doubt true of some of the footprints found in the Himalayas..." wrote J A McNeely, E W Cronin and H B Emery in their 1973 article *The Yeti — Not a Snowman*.

The footprints reported by the Indian Army could be the biggest ones spotted till date, but possibly again be attributed to local bears.

"This is most certainly the Himalayan black bear, with overprints of hind foot on to front foot," said Daniel C Taylor, author of *Yeti: The Ecology of a Mystery*, told *The Indian Express*. "If only one footprint, this is the size of a dinosaur. So it has to be an overprint (overlap), almost certainly *Ursus thibetanus* (Asiatic black bear). Maybe a mother bear with a cub hopping behind," he said.

Charlotte Lindqvist, an associate professor at the University of Buffalo, and co-author of the 2017 genetic study, also suggested that these footprints could only be of bears. "So far, all genetic evidence extracted from supposed yeti remains show that they came from bears that live on the region today. No research has proven the opposite and I am not at all convinced these footprints provide any new evidence to prove otherwise. I am sure there are many more plausible explanations for these footprints," she told *The Indian Express*.

"It is indeed curious that they seem to follow in a line, and where did these other prints on the picture come from? I believe experts have said before that bears can walk in their own footprints, possibly making the imprints look larger and possibly explaining such large footprints," she said.

After the video, 3 questions about ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, APRIL 30

Is the video released by ISIS that claims to be a message from its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, genuine?

The video was published by al-Furqan, the media wing of the Islamic State (or ISIS), late evening India time on Monday. Its authenticity has not been questioned. The SITE Intelligence Group, which tracks the online activity of ISIS and other jihadist groups, posted the video on its site, and said Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi had "reemerged in visual form" after his first video appearance in July 2014.

Al-Furqan "is part of ISIS's central media ministry and is responsible for putting out some of the most important ISIS releases to date... as well as audio recordings of the group's leadership", Rukmini Callimachi, who covers ISIS for *The New York Times*, posted on Twitter. The publication of the video was preceded by a build-up by ISIS-linked channels that began on Sunday, promoting what would be the first video from al-Furqan Media Foundation since 2016.

CNN quoted Col. Scott Rawlinson, spokesman for the US-led coalition fighting the ISIS, as saying they were "working to independently corroborate the validity of the

video... reportedly showing Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi". The man in the 18-minute video, sitting crosslegged on the floor, leaning on a cushion with an assault rifle to his right, strongly resembles al-Baghdadi, if a little heavier than the man seen delivering a sermon at the Great Mosque of al-Nuri in Mosul, Iraq, nearly five years ago in the only other known video of the ISIS leader. (Some experts say he appeared in a video in 2008 too, but was wearing a mask.) His beard is a lot more grey than in the 2014 video, and hennaed from about halfway to the tips. Experts agree that it is indeed, al-Baghdadi, who is believed to be around 47 years old now.

Why has it been released now?

This is a key question because, as Callimachi tweeted, "Baghdadi has always maintained an extreme security protocol, which explains how he's stayed alive since 2010, when he became emir of the Islamic State of Iraq." He has taken "the enormous risk of showing his current appearance to rally his followers", she suggested, "perhaps because the terror organization he leads is at an inflection point".

Al-Baghdadi described the attacks in Sri Lanka on Easter as revenge for the defeat in Al-Baghuq Fawqani in Syria, which was taken from ISIS in late March — the last remaining bit of territory of the Islamic proto-state he



Al-Baghdadi in image made from a video released by an Islamic State media group and distributed by the SITE Intelligence Group on Monday. *SITE Intelligence Group via The New York Times*

once ruled, as big as Great Britain at the height of its power in 2015, with millions of inhabitants across Iraq and Syria. "Our battle today is a battle of attrition, and we will prolong it for the enemy; they must know that the jihad will continue until Judgment Day," he said in a translation of the video provided by SITE.

According to experts quoted in multiple media reports, al-Baghdadi was forced to reveal himself in order to underline that the

military defeat notwithstanding, ISIS continued to exist and he remained its emir, and to warn that its fighters would keep staging attacks indefinitely.

In June 2017, Russia claimed he had been killed in an airstrike near Raqqa, Syria; two weeks later, the mostly reliable Syrian Observatory of Human Rights reported "confirmed information" that al-Baghdadi was dead. He has proved now that he is not

dead, and not crippled.

"Baghdadi has remained off the grid for so long that his sudden appearance will very likely serve as both a morale boost for ISIS supporters and remaining militants and as a catalyst for individuals or small groups to act," *The New York Times* quoted Colin P Clarke, a senior fellow at the Soufan Center, a research organisation for global security issues, as saying. "He is essentially reasserting his leadership and suggesting that he sits atop the command-and-control network of what remains of the group, not only in Iraq and Syria, but more broadly, in its far-flung franchises and affiliates."

The formal structure of ISIS has crumbled, but thousands of its fighters are believed to have gone underground — and the Sri Lanka attacks showed that its affiliates overseas can in 2019 kill double the number they killed in Paris in November 2015. In an interview given to *The Indian Express* soon after she finished her reporting assignment in Baghuz, Callimachi said: "...ISIS lives on and today it is much stronger than it was in 2011, when American troops pulled out of Iraq and the group was considered defeated. At that point, CIA estimated that the group had just 700 fighters. Now according to General Joseph Votel [the top US general overseeing military operations in the Middle East], it has tens of thousands of fighters, and

is present as a physical insurgency in Iraq and Syria and remains as deadly and as destructive a terrorist force as it was."

Besides its thousands of fighters in Iraq and Syria, ISIS has a Khorasan province and provinces in the Philippines and West Africa, Callimachi said, and it was "strong and growing in Afghanistan". "These are groups that are robust on the ground and there is enough evidence to suggest that there is connective tissue between the affiliates and ISIS's core group in Iraq and Syria."

Where is al-Baghdadi now?

It is not known. He released an audio message in 2018, but his location was not clear. Multiple US agencies are hunting him, and some analysts believe he is hiding in the sparsely populated desert along the Iraq-Syria border, using no electronic devices that would give him away. Iraq's Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi al-Muntafiki was quoted as saying Tuesday that the video was recorded in a "remote area", but did not mention a country. It was unclear when the recording was done, but the parts that refer to recent events like the Sri Lanka attacks, the Israel elections, and the toppling of Omar al-Bashir in Sudan and Abdelaziz Bouteflika in Algeria, are on audio, not video, which suggests the video was made earlier, and newer audio portions were added subsequently.