



IF LIBERTY MEANS ANYTHING AT ALL, IT MEANS THE RIGHT TO TELL PEOPLE WHAT THEY DO NOT WANT TO HEAR. — GEORGE ORWELL

## The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

# At wit's end

When the cartoon is turned into a target, democracy becomes a joke



E P UNNY

## NO APOLOGY, PLEASE

SC has always expanded the contours of free speech. Its insistence on an apology on a political meme is distressing

THE SUPREME COURT vacation bench has granted bail to Priyanka Sharma of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM) in West Bengal. This was scrupulously correct, because bail is a right except in special circumstances, where the accused is deemed to be likely to misuse her freedom to interfere with the course of justice. Initially, the bail granted was conditional upon Sharma tendering an immediate apology for sharing a bizarre meme online, showing West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee. The final order was softened to restore Sharma's liberty without a pre-condition, but it required her to apologise after being set free.

This rider was deeply problematic on multiple counts. First, the court appears to have asked for an apology because the post was made by a political worker during elections, though situational matters generally do not concern the process of justice. What is deemed to be just today should be deemed so for all time. Second, Sharma's counsel has argued that she had only re-posted a pre-existing meme. The judicial remand of Sharma for 14 days was a travesty of justice, especially by a government that, ironically, claims to be pushing for a more liberal space. The judicial action, without doubt, was out of proportion with the act of forwarding a meme, and the demand for an apology by the highest court, as a condition following her release, heaps insult upon injury. Third, while the court is correct in observing a principle of natural justice, which requires a balance in the rights of individuals, Sharma's alleged transgression cannot have been probed sufficiently in a single hearing. Indeed, the order states: "The questions raised are kept open." To require her to apologise when her transgression has not been sufficiently established militates against natural justice.

Though the order states that "it shall not operate as a precedent", if the need for an apology is eventually upheld, the effects would be catastrophic, for all satire is political in nature and intent. Cartoonists would have to publicly repent every morning, shortly after newspapers land on the doorsteps of readers. Stand-up comics could apologise in the evenings, after the show. Theatre and cinema producers and directors dealing in political issues (and what is drama if it is not political?) would have to send pre-emptive apologies to the powers that be before their shows opened. And satire would be declared dead on arrival. The meme shared by Sharma was merely bizarre, even if it involved a political personality. If producers of real political satire could be prosecuted until they apologised, it would be the death of free speech.

AS A FAR-FROM-RESTRAINED poll campaign is coming to a close, the cartoon has made news — again for the wrong reason. Priyanka Sharma, a BJP youth activist from Bengal, was arrested for sharing a morphed image of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on social media. The screen image was seen by the state as offensive enough for detention. The Supreme Court granted bail to Priyanka and asked her to apologise.

The relief is partial; the cartoonish image remains an offence. Morphing such as this, done with graphic softwares like Adobe Photoshop, is part of the current practice of cartooning the world over today. It is no more offensive than the hand-done caricaturing by the conventional practitioner. If anything, the software extends the scope as well as the spirit of cartooning to amateurs and citizen cartoonists with sufficient wit but insufficient drawing skills. This is precisely the kind of irreverence and fearlessness that mature democracies seek to promote in citizens, enough to make them whistleblowers at a pinch.

This poll campaign began on a much happier note for the cartoonist. Early on, there was even a flattering mention of the wicked pencil. On March 27, briefing Chennai journalists on the Congress flagship NYAY, an unusual Chidambaram exceeded the welfarist brief to mention the big picture. Alluding to Tagore's "heaven of freedom", he asked the media gathering if they didn't want their days of freedom back, when TV shows could be anchored without stress and cartoons could be drawn without fear. He wound up on the broad note that this election had much to do with democracy itself.

Through the campaign itself, such high-minded articulation was hardly heard from any quarter. Least of all in Tamil Nadu, whose politicians had good reasons to remember a cartoon and its content. In November 2017,

not very long ago, a freelance cartoonist Bala G had posted on Facebook his reaction to the self-immolation of farmer Essakimuthu and his debt-trapped family in front of the Tirunelveli district collector's office. The cartoon showed the district police chief, the collector and the chief minister in the buff trying to cover themselves with currency notes even as a man in front was burning to death. The 36-year-old cartoonist was arrested on a Sunday in Chennai for obscene representation of the CM and officers under section 501 of the IPC and section 67 of the IT Act.

Whether nudity could be equated with obscenity was raised by jurists then. K Chandru, a retired judge of the Madras High Court, even cited in an article the iconic Abu Abraham cartoon carried in this newspaper showing President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed in a bathtub signing away ordinances. The cartoon didn't pull punches and was quite explicit by Abu's standards — usually more subversive and subtle rather than direct. Mostly Indian cartoonists leave the President alone. An early exceptional appearance was made by V V Giri in a Rajinder Puri cartoon as a rubber stamp in the Indira era. But that was no more than the public perception then.

The Abu cartoon was more invasive. It forayed into the Rashtrapati Bhavan bathroom, an extremely private space, to make a point on the sheer casual and arbitrary manner in which an Ordinance Raj was emerging. If this cartoon could appear on December 10, 1975 at the peak of Emergency, duly passed by sarkari censors, declared censorship might be a better working environment for the satirist and the cartoonist. At least the censor would be prosecuted as well.

Interestingly, the Bala cartoon was taken note of in 2018 by Justice G R Swaminathan, a judge of the Madurai bench of the Madras High Court. While examining offence caused

by another cartoonist in another case, the judge referred to how DMK chief and the state's opposition leader M K Stalin condemned the arrest of Bala and asked the offended parties to seek inspiration from their leader. Here, three DMK MLAs were angered by a cartoon that appeared in the Tamil daily, *Dinamalar*.

Drawn by Karna, the 2013 cartoon showed DMK supremo M Karunanidhi as a cap seller and his partymen as monkeys who had grabbed the caps. The familiar children's story setting meant to show how the aberrant cadres would be outsmarted by their cherished leader was actually complimentary to the leader, the judge points out. But the MLAs, on their part, were hurt enough and had the resources to drag the cartoonist first to the Theni Judicial Magistrate's Court and then to the appellate court. The five-year long process would have been punishment enough to an everyday practitioner whose job it is to raise a laugh.

In the bargain, the profession got an unequivocal legal backing. The short and cryptic judgment gives the cartoonist no licence to defame. However, it goes into the global history of the art to reaffirm that it is nothing if not an "intrinsic weapon of ridicule". "To apply the yardsticks of defamation in the case of cartoons, the threshold must be very high". "Law," said the judge, "envisages a reasonable person and not a touchy and hypersensitive individual."

The morphed image of the Bengal chief minister could as well have been drawn by a regular practitioner and much of what Justice G R Swaminathan said would apply. Particularly amidst the world's largest electoral exercise. If more people think like cartoonists and act, thanks to easy software, that should add value to this exercise.

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## OFF TRACK

The slump in auto sales is a fallout of the slowdown. It also flags the fragility of NBFCs, which are facing cash shortage

INDIA'S AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY has been finding the going tough for a while — a fact reinforced by the latest data on auto sales released by the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM). Worryingly for the industry and the broader economy, vehicle sales across all categories slumped in April, with passenger vehicle sales down 17 per cent at 2.47 lakh, an eight-year low, compared to 2,98,504 a year earlier with car sales declining almost 20 per cent while two-wheeler sales dropped over 16 per cent to 1.6 million vehicles. India's top manufacturers have all reported a sharp slide in sales having been forced earlier to cut back on production and to clear inventories. Clearly, the economic slowdown is hurting, reflected in weak demand, both in rural and urban areas. So is the liquidity squeeze in the Non Banking Finance Companies (NBFC) segment, a major source of financing for buying automobiles in India after banks and mutual funds shut the tap following defaults in the sector led by IL&FS and rating downgrades besides higher insurance costs for two wheelers in the wake of a ruling by the Supreme Court. Coupled with that is the rising popularity of ride-sharing firms such as Uber and Ola in some of the bigger cities in the country. It is a telling sign also of the state of the industry that sales of second-hand cars now aggregate two million. Not that the global auto industry is on a different track. Several car makers have, over the last few days, reported a drop in sales and a squeeze in margins.

For sure, there is a threat to the consumer story going by the latest numbers from FMCG companies. But what could pose a greater threat is the so called fragility of shadow banks or NBFCs, a decade or so after a clean up in the sector, brought about also by these companies occupying the financing space vacated by banks after the ballooning of bad loans. The RBI does not appear to share the assessment of many of these firms or the government that this sector needs direct intervention and support, an approach which led to a conflict leading finally to the exit of governor Urjit Patel. It reckons that there is no strong case to step in as lender of last resort even if NBFCs have linkage to infrastructure developers, SMEs and other industry segments. The central bank would rather prefer that NBFCs make balance sheet adjustments. Growth, of course, is an antidote to all these. But the current crisis presents an opportunity now to look at cycle-proof regulation.

## SHARMILA, IROM

With the birth of her twins, Manipur's most famous activist comes closer to experiencing the joys that many take for granted

IN 2017, BY all accounts, there were many in Manipur and beyond who did not want Irom (which means mother) Sharmila to end her 16-year-long hunger strike. She had become a symbol of peaceful, active resistance against the might of the state — her detention, force feeding, arrests and re-arrests, and deteriorating health were no match for her resilience. When Sharmila expressed her desire to end her fast to try and build a life with her partner, many thought it would dim the spotlight on the abuse of and atrocities under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, whose repeal Sharmila had been demanding. The "iron lady" of Manipur, after she broke her fast, contested elections in Manipur and married her long-time partner, Desmond Anthony Bellarmine Coutinho. With the birth of her twins on May 13, at least part of her dream for her life has come true.

Sharmila had contested the assembly election in Manipur in 2017 against then Congress Chief Minister Okram Ibobi Singh and polled just 90 votes. Her vast symbolic appeal, it became clear, did not translate immediately into electoral gain and the path of conventional politics promised to be an arduous one. And the physical and psychological toll that her hunger strike had taken, people feared, could be irreversible. Sharmila's poor showing at the polls could easily be seen as a symptom of cynicism on the part of the voter, a tacit acknowledgment that the kind of moral courage it takes to make one's body the site for a larger cause has no place in power politics. Yet, in small and significant ways, Irom Sharmila has continued to triumph.

AFSPA continues to be in force, but the atrocities committed under it have often been brought out of the shadows. And her own desire, for a normal life, a family and the everyday joys and sorrows that ordinary citizens enjoy has come true. Congratulations Sharmila, on the birth of Nix Shakhi and Autumn Tara. No one deserves it more.



APOORVANAND

RAHUL GANDHI'S firm and unambiguous rebuke to Sam Pitroda for his flippant observation regarding the violence of 1984 is welcome. But to say it was a "tragedy" which caused pain to "people" is to shy away from calling the violence by its name — that it was a violence targeted against the Sikhs. It was definitely a tragedy but only for the Sikh community. Besides, the hatred this violence unleashed was harnessed for the polls by the Congress campaign managers.

It is ironic but true that such acts of violence generate contempt and hatred for the victim and not sympathy in the perpetrators. There is hardly any repentance and atonement. They feel more empowered by this violence. Any claim for justice by the victims is thus resisted as it may weaken their newfound position of power, since justice would make the victims equal to the perpetrators. Another point we often miss is that in the wake of the violence, when processes of justice and reparation begin, the community of perpetrators starts consolidating. The community which treats the perpetrators as its own, begins to complain that their own are being wrongly and unnecessarily hounded by "victims", who refuse to come out of their victimhood.

The argument is the original fault lies with the victim who provoked simple, non-violent people and thus, dehumanised them. It was a momentary thing and should be forgotten; people need to move on. It is this attitude which subconsciously leads the system, made of people who identify more with the perpetrators, to create obstacles in the

## THE BANALITY OF HATE

Why it is necessary to remember and reflect on our history of mass violence

pursuit of justice. That the victims are left alone in the search for justice and mostly resent, explains why the idea of a "people" cannot turn into reality. Without a sincere community of pain, you cannot have a community of justice. In the absence of these, the talk of a nation becomes farcical.

Pitroda must take the flak for the crudeness of his remarks, but it should also be a moment for all of us to reflect on the nature of the violence and our complicity in it. Most of the persons, their numbers must be in the thousands, who participated in the massacre of thousands of Sikhs have not only escaped justice but continue to live with, and within, us respectfully. My mind often goes back to Ashok Rajpath of Patna and the shops of Sikhs being looted with glee by students and government employees. None of them had to face punitive action for the violence they unleashed on the Sikhs.

Non-reflection on the violence stops us from thinking about the implication of letting all the police and executive officers in the services, who were mute spectators of the violence or in many cases collaborators, go scot-free. To expect partners in arson and murder to keep law and order distorts the very concept of rule of law. The lack of a sense of urgency in various organs of the state, including the judiciary, to punish the perpetrators of violence, shows that a desire for justice remains an exception in this country.

It should not be a surprise that the anti-Sikh violence got a mention for the first time in the textbooks only in 2005. Ironically, the books were prepared under

the watch of a Congress-led government. Our carelessness towards acts of mass violence and the tendency as a society to be blind towards it has a long history! We, who claim to be traditionally a non-violent people, must be brave enough to face the genocidal tendency inherent in us. There is a substantial body of literature comprising testimonies of the victims, stories of their woes and agony, their struggle for justice. But there is almost nothing available to understand the minds of the murderers and their accomplices.

It is fine to keep the focus on the wronged, but it often makes them look helpless. We need to turn our gaze towards the perpetrators, and name them. It is not difficult to identify the origins of mass violence and reflect on the impact of the violence. We would then be able to see its relations to another episode of violence, committed by state agencies in Punjab in the decade following 1984. The police officers involved in the killings and disappearances, all of them Sikhs, were rewarded by the state. The deaths were justified as unavoidable to keep the nation intact.

In post-War Europe, textbooks, poetry, prose, films etc. help us understand the nature of mass violence. Anti-Semitism is treated as a crime in those lands. Those baying for the blood of Pitroda must also think about the need to remember and reflect on our history of mass violence and our own thoughtlessness towards it.

The writer teaches Hindi at Delhi University

## MAY 15, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

ALIGARH SIMMERS THE CURFEW WHICH was imposed on May 10, was further relaxed in various parts of Aligarh. The Deputy Inspector General of Police, Tusher Dutt, said that a three-hour relaxation was allowed in the Civil Lines area where the university is located. Dutt went round the city to take stock of the situation. He said over 300 persons had been arrested since the violence on May 10 and added the police were keeping a constant vigil and all efforts were being made to check the activities of anti-social elements. Commenting on reports that the PAC men had allegedly indulged in looting shops, the DIG said that he had looked into the allegations and found that the reports were without any basis. "We will take strict action if any specific instance

is brought to our notice," he said.

### WEAK ADMINISTRATION

THE ORGY OF arson and violence which swept the areas surrounding Aligarh Muslim University on the night of May 10-11 brought to the fore the cumulative weakness of the university administration. No serious effort seemed to have been made by the university authorities to mollify the highly-agitated students returning from the Delhi rally of May 9 with bitter memories of the Dadri incident. In the absence of the Students' Union president, Musthaq Ahmed Khun, who was in Delhi on that fateful night, there was no sober student leader on the campus to control the students. All of them were leaders unto themselves.

### POLICE PACKAGE

THE PUNJAB GOVERNMENT announced better salaries and allowances for its constabulary as the seven-day-old unrest among the policemen resulted in a total of 200 arrests and summary dismissal of 125. A constable now getting total emoluments of Rs 427 per month, inclusive of all benefits like house rent, kit allowance, etc, has been granted a hike of Rs 100 per month. His starting salary, inclusive of benefits, will now go up to Rs 527 per month with effect from January 1, 1978. Announcing the government decision after an emergency meeting of the state cabinet, Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal, told newsmen that the new package of benefits for policemen also included better chances of promotions.



## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The Chinese side is obviously more realistic while the US is falsifying. This will, to a large extent, influence how the two countries digest the trade war impacts."  
— GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA

# India's poor billionaires

Corporates owe banks, and the public, crores. They're the ones suffering poverty in more ways than one



SWAMI AGNIVESH

LANGUAGE IS A unique gift, and it needs to be used with care and integrity. We use words as clichés by habit, without paying any heed to the reality we seek to denote. We refer, say, to some people as very "rich" — our list of billionaires is growing by the day. In the near future, India is slated to sport more billionaires than any other country, including the US.

But a billionaire need not be rich. As things stand, most of our billionaires are, factually speaking, the poorest in India. We do not know the extent of debt that our corporate giants owe individually to banks. Now, banks don't produce money. The people of India do. It is our money parked with banks that the corporates siphon away. As per the latest count, the gross volume of non-performing assets stands at Rs 120,00,00,00,000!

You and I, and a billion others like us, cannot come anywhere near this Himalayan amount. Just imagine, only a handful of our billionaires are carrying all this burden. You and I would have been crushed under it. But they go on merrily, living like old time potentates at dizzying summits of insanely wasteful opulence — with our money. Each day, their indebtedness to us is increasing. No one gives a thought to their mounting misery. You and I would have gone mad. Farmers would have committed suicide in tens and thousands, like so many of them have done for indebtedness that is laughably meagre. But our long-suffering corporates live cheerfully under astronomical debt without a thought on their minds. That's fortitude of mind, folks.

This mythological resilience, this supernatural capacity for cheerful endurance in the face of gigantic adversity, is assuredly to their credit. For that, let us call them brave. Let's call them men of stoic fortitude. But let's not call them "rich". No, they are poor. They are the poorest in India! You'd agree that if I owe you a thousand rupees and someone else owes you only a hundred, I am poorer than him. Then how come we are unfair to these hapless fellow Indians, crushed under mind-boggling amounts of debt? It is only because these amounts are too big to be stated precisely, that the Reserve Bank of India is finding it difficult to comply with the Supreme Court directive to reveal details pertaining to NPAs. How do you count these amounts? Have you ever thought of that?

To get an idea of the brain-scattering magnitude of these numbers, consider the plight of Arun Jaitley, the finance minister. He was denouncing the promises in the Congress manifesto to set apart six per cent and three per cent of our GDP for education and health, respectively. Together, they comprise nine per cent of the GDP. Jaitley went on to say that our GDP stands at Rs 27 lakh crore. Nine per cent of the GDP is already 18 lakh crore, said Jaitley. Then what is left for anything else? It is tempting to ridicule Jaitley; but I won't. The sums are so astronomical. But, let that be. Let's return to our billionaire medics.

Forget about the debt burden they struggle under. Ask, "what does it mean to be rich?" What is the yardstick we should use for measuring richness? The king of Bhutan would say, "use the happiness yardstick". Is there a positive correlation between wealth



CR Sasikumar

and happiness? Will you be happier if tomorrow, instead of being a millionaire now, you find yourself, thanks to the politically-induced profligate generosity of our banks, a billionaire? How much more will you eat? (Already you resemble the inflated bull-frog that figures in *Aesop's Fables*) How much will you spend on your wardrobe and costumes? Do you think gilding your coat with your name a thousand times will make you feel richer? Or being carted around, like a piece of dressed turkey, in an obscenely expensive car? Or, a battery of a thousand servants showering attention on you? Or a bevy of flatterers fawning on you? Or, "your" money, stolen from the poor of this country, affording you endless forays into the dark corners of sensual and criminal delights? Have you seen anyone lost in mazes of sensual indulgences looking other than blasé and weary; at best, lugubriously effete and hollow?

It is a downright folly to equate the richness of life with material possessions and conspicuous consumerist excesses. If you stand gaping when told that the annual electricity bill of a particular fellow Indian is Rs 70 lakh, kick in the pants to bring you to terra firma. What you are gaping at is not a display of wealth, but the naked dance of poverty. Not just poverty, but poverty compounded with criminal dishonesty, crass selfishness and a sub-human incapacity to feel any sense of shame. Can you imagine a

Most of our billionaires are, factually speaking, the poorest in India. We do not know the exact extent of debts that our corporate giants own individually to banks. Now, banks don't produce money. The people of India do. It is our money parked with banks that the corporates siphon away. You and I would have gone mad. But our long-suffering corporates live cheerfully under astronomical debts without a thought on their minds.

model of poverty worse than this?

Given the way things are, it is futile to expect that governments will bell these corporate cats. They have outgrown governments. Politicians have become their vassals and courtiers. If anything is to happen to remedy the situation, and to save the country from economic ruin, the people of India have to wake up to an ethically enlightened idea of human richness and poverty. When a society makes it clear that stolen wealth — irrespective of how indirect the theft is — makes a man repugnant and that he is not entitled to respect and depravity at the same time, there will be a change. The ongoing worship of wealth — which has peaked under Narendra Modi's watch — is a disaster waiting to erupt. India is on the brink of an economic crisis. Corporate covetousness has taken an insufferably huge toll on our economy. Our national debt stands at over Rs 80 lakh crore. No number-crunching, data-dressing and propagandist flourish can window-dress the stark reality. The truth remains that we, who readily equated human richness with material wealth alone — not any less than our unconscionable corporate giants and their political collaborators — are to blame for nudging this country closer and closer to the brink, in the name of development.

The writer is a Vedic scholar and social activist

# A visit, a vision

Rajiv Gandhi visited Lakshadweep in 1988 on an official trip. The development of the island territory bears his imprint



WAJAHAT HABIBULLAH

IN A LETTER to me, dated August 4, 1987, as I left the PMO to take up an assignment in Lakshadweep, classified by the MHA as a "punishment posting", Rajiv Gandhi wrote: "Thank you... for your hard work and cheerful assistance over the last five years, first with my mother and then with me. We shall miss you, especially in our forays into the countryside. You are going to an important assignment. I look forward to seeing you in Lakshadweep at the winter meeting of the Island Development Authority."

Lakshadweep's lagoons are spread over about 4,200 sq km, its territorial waters cover 20,000 sq km and these little specks on a map give to India a vast 4,00,000 sq km of the Indian Ocean as an exclusive economic zone.

His visits since 1985 convinced Rajiv that the island territories needed a distinct approach for their development. For this, the Island Development Authority (IDA) was set up within the Planning Commission as head of which the PM appointed M G K Menon, a leading Indian scientist and environmentalist of our times. The IDA's inaugural meeting was held in Port Blair and a decision was taken that it would hold annual meetings every year thereafter, rotating between the two island territories and New Delhi. I hosted the scheduled 1988 meeting in Kavaratti. The Planning Commission hosted the 1989 meeting in the capital, but the next and last such meeting was only in January 2003, once again in Port Blair, which was addressed by then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

It was to the meeting of the IDA that Rajiv travelled to Lakshadweep with his entire cabinet in 1988. In reporting on preparations for the meeting, *The Indian Express*, in a report by P Raman published on December 16, 1987, waxed eloquent: "Engineers and workers are building helipads and temporary 'hutments' with modern facilities which have to be brought from the mainland, some 200 km to 400 km away. Almost everything — except coconut and fish — will have to be airlifted. This includes cooks, water and generators, in addition to the omnipresent security-men and attendants."

The official visit lasted two days but Rajiv was to stay on with family and friends for a holiday in Bangaram, an uninhabited island rich with coconut and coral, described in *The Indian Express* as 'Barren Islet to Host Rajiv's Holiday'. There, in a tropical resort with no television, no air conditioning but offering a range of sea water sports, Rajiv was to indulge his favourite hobby, photography, which was published in *Rajiv's World*. The elaborate arrangements described by Raman were for Kavaratti, expenses for which were the Administrator's. As the Express News Service Cochin's report of December 29 announced, "To Top

it all... The Lakshadweep administration has a pleasant surprise for the big contingent of Central ministers, official and their family members, not to mention the Prime Minister, visiting the island. Large quantities of Ambalappuzha palpayasam, one of the choicest puddings of Kerala, have been airlifted to Lakshadweep to treat the visiting dignitaries."

The arrangements in Bangaram were modest, made by the NGO, Society for the Promotion of Recreational Tourism and Sports, set up by the government in the islands to manage cultural and sports activity. Rajiv had invited me to drop in whenever I wished, but conscious of official decorum I, together with my family, visited but once to ask after the welfare of the guests. So N Madhavan Kutty's report of January 24 on Bangaram, 'The Holiday That was', based as it was on hearsay from over-awed attendants, was sheer exaggeration.

The IDA had in its first meeting in Port Blair, asked the Planning Commission to make a special study of the environment of the union territories so as to help plan their development. A report on each of the two island systems was presented in the meeting in Kavaratti and became the framework of the coming five-year plans for the island territories.

By then, Lakshadweep had its own airport and a flourishing tourist industry with an international tourist resort in Bangaram. A thriving tourist industry fuelled by economic activity in the UT was intended as the base for an economic take-off, always ensuring that this would not compromise but enrich the fragile coral ecology. This became the backbone of a thriving water sports industry in India, led by entrepreneurs such as the Mumbai-based Prahlad Kakkar.

Rainwater harvesting was introduced on every island — today every home has that facility — as was solar power for lighting. Today, Lakshadweep has the highest percentage of the use of solar power of any state or union territory. All islands were connected by Pawan Hans helicopters and orders were placed on international tender for high-speed passenger boats. Besides, a study by the Institute of Oceanography had helped to redesign the tripods used to buttress eroded beaches and water supply especially designed to be supplied through drainage by gravitation.

But all these initiatives, including the establishment of among the country's first Navodaya Vidyalaya in Minicoy, carried Rajiv Gandhi's signature. Under his directions to the National Informatics Centre, the office of the Administrator, Lakshadweep, became among the first in India to be computerised. Every island in Lakshadweep had a computer in an early extension of the Government of India's policy at the time of installing computers in every district. Endorsed with outlays by the Eighth, Ninth and Tenth Finance Commissions this established, in the words of the last of these Commissions "speedy and accurate generation of accounting information that might be needed for purposes of better planning, budgeting and monitoring". And Lakshadweep today has no poor. This was Rajiv's enduring gift to the islanders.

The writer is a former chairperson of the National Commission for Minorities

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### FRAGILE CPEC

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'The Gwadar warning' (IE, May 14). The attack has highlighted the fragile security situation in Balochistan. Gwadar has a strategic port on the Arabian Sea and is considered the heart of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The attacks on the luxury hotel undermines Pakistan's commitment of a fight against insurgents and jihadists.  
Pranay Kumar Shome, Kolkata

### ALT POWER SHIFT

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Amid US-Iran heat, Tehran sends its Foreign Minister to New Delhi for talks' (IE, May 14). India giving support to Iran in its latest standoff with the US and also to China in its ongoing trade war should be seriously considered by our foreign policy makers. The economic and geopolitical advantages of healthy relations with our two powerful neighbours are abundantly clear. This is a good opportunity to revive the idea of the Beijing-Tehran-New Delhi axis, mooted back in the 1950s. It can be the long-awaited counter to US hegemony since the collapse of the Soviet Union.  
SB Bhalerao, Mumbai

### RICH LEGACY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Makeover man' (IE, May 14). Yogi Deveshwar became chairman of the company when ITC was going through,

### 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](mailto: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

probably, its worst time, fighting disputes of unpaid taxes, trade related litigations etc. Deveshwar managed to extricate ITC from a messy situation, and ensured that British American Tobacco (BAT) remains a minority shareholder. Indeed, his legacy at ITC would be impossible to replicate and his life story would be taught at management schools in future. He was a true legend for India Inc.  
Bal Govind, Noida

Compiled by Lalmani Verma

## VIEW FROM THE RIGHT

### LANGUAGE ISSUES

AN EDITORIAL IN *Organiser* holds forth on the protracted electioneering process and the kind of language that is permissible (or not) during the election. It also states that the question being debated in Bharat (India) is who the person or authority should be to decide the language of the narrative. Though the Election Commission and the Supreme Court are making "judicious intervention as per the complaints received to these Constitutional bodies", the editorial says it all boils down to the perception of the common voters and the self-restraint shown by the political leaders. It adds that whether a former Prime Minister can be invoked in a campaign can be discussed from different perspectives, but "if you can ask vote in the name of lineage from the same Prime Minister, then you also are answerable to the acts of omission and commission of your family." The editorial further adds that, "What is most interesting in this battle of words is the invocation of an iconic villain from Mahabharata, 'Duryodhana'. First of all, using such analogy for the in-

cumbent Prime Minister is not in tune with the democratic ethos but those who have tried to draw this comparison makes it more interesting. It seems new kind of Mahabharat is being narrated in the battle for the future of Bharat."

Priyanka Gandhi-Vadra, who till recently was a seasonal politician, and otherwise, a private person with her husband suddenly targeted the Prime Minister and equated his behaviour with the 'arrogance' of Duryodhana. What does Duryodhana stand for? The editorial attempts to clarify what Duryodhana stands for: "Duryodhana is the epitome of the dynastic claim over the throne in the known history. Duryodhana's hatred for the Pandavas stems from his sincere belief that he is the only heir apparent to the throne of Hastinapur being the elder son of Dhritarashtra. This mindset of fiefdom is detrimental to democracy." It goes on to conclude that, "The heir of the Nehru-Gandhi-Vadra family who claims exclusive right to rule over Bharat making such reference to the Prime Minister who rose from a humble background and through organisational machinery is unpalatable".

### NO CONTEST

AS THE CONGRESS party has decided to not field party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi in Varanasi against Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a cover story in *Panchjanya*

claims four reasons for such a move by the main opposition party. The first reason, it says, is that Priyanka is a prominent face of the Congress party and political experts see in her the future of the party. Congress workers look for the image of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in Priyanka. "With these expectations, if Priyanka would have lost in her first election contest, it would have caused disappointment to the Congress workers and damage to the party as well," reads the story. The next reason, ventures the story, is that the party's top leader, Sonia Gandhi, and president Rahul Gandhi, are both already contesting from Uttar Pradesh. If Priyanka went on to contest from Varanasi, that could have stamped the label of "parivar" (family) on the Congress party. The third reason, the story says, has to do with how people often compare Rahul and Priyanka — and who is better in politics. So, the results of Varanasi could have triggered a new debate within the party. And the final reason, the story goes on to conclude, says that it is simply to do with the possibility of Priyanka losing to Modi, which would have demoralised the Congress party workers.

### INDIAN PLURALISM

AN OPINION ARTICLE in *Organiser* says that there is "a strong feeling in some quarters that if the BJP comes to power in 2019 it would subvert the pluralistic model of

Indian polity". The article asserts that, "This cannot be true in view of the millennia-old tolerant culture of Sanatan Dharma that has crystallised, in its present form, as Hinduism?" It further claims that, historically, the Hindu way of life has been the most tolerant and accommodative of all religions providing refuge to tormented minority groups like Syrian Christians, Parsis or Jews in the past. It goes on to state that history shows how Hindutva never punished its scientists for holding views contrary to conventional religious beliefs, unlike in Europe when, during the Middle Ages, theological doctrines tried to eclipse scientific findings. Being open, flexible and adaptable, Hindutva has discarded redundant ideas and institutions, and, absorbed the best elements of other cultures to reinterpret itself according to a changing milieu. "Sporadic incidents of violence against minorities" (viz. cow slaughter issue) are the handiwork of sick minds and cannot define a faith. Among the factors that provide wind to the sails of radical outfits are: religious conversions, minority politics to garner votes, denigration of Hindutva by pseudo-secularists, opposition to the construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya, the plight of nearly half a million Kashmiri Hindus living as refugees in their own country, the growing demographic imbalance between communities, and so on," the article claims.

**FACT CHECK, GROUND REALITY**

**WHATSAPP VOICE CALL VULNERABILITY, AND WHAT YOU SHOULD DO**



A software created by Israeli NSO Group (its logo on the building above) can reportedly take advantage of a security hole in WhatsApp voice call. AP

**HANSA VERMA**  
 NEW DELHI, MAY 14

A ZERO-DAY vulnerability in WhatsApp could leave users open to spyware that could turn on their phone's camera and microphone, and collect location data, the *Financial Times* reported on Tuesday. A software called Pegasus created by the private Israeli firm NSO Group is said to be able to take advantage of a security hole in WhatsApp's voice call function to carry out the attack. Pegasus can also trawl through emails and messages, the FT reported.

The attackers could simply call a user to install the surveillance software, even when the call was not taken. The report has said that the call would sometimes not even show up in the user's call log.

**Are you affected?**

The messaging app is used by 1.5 billion people worldwide, including more than 200 million in India, but the number of users who have been affected isn't clear yet. WhatsApp said in a statement to the BBC that the attack had targeted a "select number" of users.

It seems WhatsApp's Android version prior to 2.19.134, and WhatsApp Business for Android prior to version 2.19.44, are vulnerable to the spyware attack. On iOS, WhatsApp versions prior to 2.19.51 and WhatsApp Business versions prior to 2.19.51 are affected. WhatsApp for Windows Phone older than version 2.18.348, and WhatsApp for Tizen prior to 2.18.15 devices have been affected as well.

**Who is responsible?**

The NSO Group has denied direct involvement in the WhatsApp attack, and said that its software is operated by intelligence and law enforcement agencies.

"Under no circumstances would NSO be involved in the operating or identifying of targets of its technology, which is solely operated by intelligence and law enforcement agencies," the company told the FT. It added that it couldn't use its own technology to target any person or organisation.

**What is WhatsApp doing?**

WhatsApp, which is owned by Facebook, has acknowledged a "targeted surveillance attack", and is investigating. The company had issued a security advisory last week informing users of the attack, and asked them to update the app. "A buffer overflow vulnerability in WhatsApp VOIP stack allowed remote code execution via specially crafted series of SRTP packets sent to a target phone number," WhatsApp said.

The company issued a patch on Monday and is said to be working around the clock to close the vulnerability. On Friday, WhatsApp also started to release a fix for its servers.

"This attack has all the hallmarks of a private company known to work with governments to deliver spyware that reportedly takes over the functions of mobile phone operating systems," WhatsApp said. The company has also reportedly briefed human rights organisations, and is working with them to inform civil society.

**Should you stop calling on WhatsApp?**

No. The vulnerability has been used to essentially steal data from phones. It does not seem to be able to intercept encrypted voice calls. Also, to steal this data the calls will have to be intercepted as they are happening, as no part of the call is saved at the device level. This would be tough.

**SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER**

**Why Iran minister's visit matters**

Foreign Minister Javad Zarif's visit comes at a time when tensions have escalated between Iran and the US. What is India's stake in this; what are the challenges it faces diplomatically, and as an importer of Iran oil?

**SHUBHAJIT ROY**  
 NEW DELHI, MAY 14

IRAN'S FOREIGN Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif met Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj in New Delhi on Tuesday, the visit coming amid rising tensions between the US and Iran. What factors must India look at as it tries to manoeuvre a diplomatic and strategic position?

**What is the significance of Zarif's visit at this time?**

With the US reimposing sanctions on Iran after a four-year hiatus, India is in a precarious position. It cannot import oil from Iran, with the US having stopped sanctions exemption to India from importing Iranian oil after May 1. Zarif's trip is a strategic move by Tehran to rally support. A skilled diplomat who was at the forefront of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) negotiations between Iran and the P-5+1 countries, Zarif has already been to China and Russia, before he came to Delhi.

Zarif's visit to India took place at "his own initiative" to brief the Indian side on the Iranian approach to recent developments in the region, including on JCPOA, and to review bilateral cooperation. This is his second visit to India this year; after early 2019 when he spoke at an External Affairs Ministry-funded conference, the Raisina dialogue. This visit, apart from seeking to shore up support in favour of his country, is also key to Iran's effort to secure its economic interests.

**Where does India stand with regard to the sharply escalated tensions between Iran and the US?**

India has conveyed to Iran that it would like all parties to the JCPOA agreement to continue to fulfil their commitments and that all parties should engage "constructively" and resolve all issues "peacefully and through dialogue".

As tensions between the US and Iran escalated - with the US deploying the *USS Abraham Lincoln* Carrier Strike Group and a bomber task force to the US Central Command region - New Delhi is keeping a wary eye on these developments. US President Donald Trump's move to target Iran, and side with Saudi Arabia and Israel, can potentially have an adverse impact on the peace and stability in the region. Over 8 million Indian migrant workers live and work in the West Asian region. Any tension due to regional rivalry is going to impact the lives of these Indians and might even put them at risk. In previous tense situations, India has had to evacuate Indian nationals from the region. But its capacity to evacuate is limited - not more than in thousands - and getting Indians out of danger in a conflict-like situation would be a tough ask. At a time the Indian government - which often proclaims its ability to protect Indians overseas in distress - wraps up its term, it would not want a volatile situation on its doorstep in this election season.

**How important is Iran to India as a**



(Above) External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in New Delhi Tuesday. PTI  
 (Left) Aircraft carrier *USS Abraham Lincoln* in the Persian Gulf on May 10. A plan that envisions sending 120,000 US troops to the Middle East should Iran attack US forces or accelerate work on nuclear weapons, has been presented to President Donald Trump, *The New York Times* reported. US Navy via *The NYT*



**supplier of crude oil, and in the broader diplomatic and strategic sense?**

Iran is India's third-largest oil supplier behind Iraq and Saudi Arabia. It used to be the second largest after Saudi Arabia until 2010-11, when sanctions moved it to seventh spot in subsequent years. In 2013-14 and 2014-15, India bought 11 million tonnes and 10.95 million tonnes respectively from Iran. This increased to 12.7 million tonnes in 2015-16, before supplies of 27.2 million tonnes catapulted Iran to the third spot in 2016-17.

In the 10-month period between April 2018 and January 2019, India imported \$97 billion worth of petroleum oil and oil obtained from bituminous minerals crude. About 11.2% of imported petroleum oil, worth \$10.9 billion, came from Iran. The US decision to end waivers for countries importing crude from Iran beginning May 2 may hurt India's interests, as it will have to look for alternative sources. With the US now asking India to bring down oil imports to zero, it has also told Iran that a decision on importing oil will be taken "after the elections", after weighing the factors including "commercial consideration, energy security and economic interests".

Unlike during the previous set of sanctions that had kicked in 2010, this time the world is divided. Except for the US, other partners - especially the EU and the three major European countries UK, Germany and France - have expressed their commitments to go ahead with the agreement. There are also practical hurdles; the European Union's alternative payment mechanism - to pay through Euros instead of dollars - has turned out to be "theoretical".

What has however been a sole reprieve is that the US has not put sanctions on Chabahar port development, since both Delhi and Washington's objectives on accessing Afghanistan remain the same. Chabahar is India's strategic investment in the region and is being developed as an access point to Afghanistan, since the strife-torn country is landlocked. It is also seen as a gateway to Central Asia, which is inaccessible to India directly. The port is strategic as the only way to circumvent Pakistan and get to Afghanistan.

In the last three years, momentum has picked up as India and Iran have worked to develop this crucial port. Prime Minister Narendra Modi travelled to Iran in May 2016,

and Zarif and Swaraj on Tuesday expressed satisfaction at the operationalisation of the interim contract on the Chabahar Port between India Ports Global Limited (IPGL) and Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO).

**In what ways has India's recent outreach towards Saudi Arabia and the UAE, Iran's regional rivals, impacted the relationship between New Delhi and Tehran?**

This has been one of the diplomatic challenges for New Delhi, which it has navigated carefully. In the first two months of 2018, India hosted Israel PM Binyamin Netanyahu and Iran President Rouhani. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman then visited India in February 2019, and the UAE for the first time invited India to the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation meet early February this year. While Delhi has played the chessboard in the region tactically so far, hardening of the battle lines will make it increasingly difficult for India, especially because of the strong presence of the Indian community in the region.

**How did India manage earlier flashpoints in its delicate relationship vis-a-vis Tehran and Washington? What are India's options now?**

India had earlier maintained that it follows the UN sanctions, and not unilateral sanctions. But with the US investing in its relationship with India by doing the heavy-lifting on Jaish-e-Mohammad chief Masood Azhar's listing, New Delhi has had limited diplomatic space to manoeuvre. Following the listing of Azhar, the US expects reciprocity in dismantling Iran's terror network, leaving India with few choices. India has so far not contracted any oil import from Iran, which according to diplomats was as smooth as Amazon's doorstep delivery service - with transport, high credit period and insurance guaranteed.

With the next regime two weeks away, New Delhi will be worried about the inflationary impact on its economy if fuel prices soar and poses a challenge. It has to be nimble in making up the shortfall of 11% that would have otherwise come from Iran. The two largest exporters, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, account for 38% of India's total petroleum imports, while the UAE and Nigeria together account for 16.7%. However, the biggest change has been the entry of the US as a major player. Although it did not figure in the list of top 10 petroleum exporters for India in 2017-18, in the 10 months of FY'19 the US stood at number 9, with an over 3% share of India's petroleum imports.

New Delhi's mantra of "commercial consideration, energy security and economic interests" will guide its options in oil imports. It cannot afford to forsake Iran, with which it has had close civilisational and historical links; it has had a close relationship with Shia Iran while the Saudi-Pakistan bonhomie took strategic shape.

Mindful of Iran's influence in Kashmir and in the region, the next Indian government would not want to push Iran towards China and Pakistan.

**Tunnelling under the Mithi: how Mumbai Metro is meeting the challenge**



**33.5 km** Length of Colaba-Bandra-Seepez Metro, half completed  
**<2 km** Stretch from Dharavi to BKC stations, including underwater tunnel  
**15-20 m** Depth of tunnel below surface, equivalent to height of 4-storey house

Top: Layout of the underground Metro stretch between Dharavi and Bandra Kurla Complex stations, with part of it running underwater. Above: Typical illustration of a Tunnel Boring Machine excavating through rock. MMRC

**KAVITHA IYER**  
 MUMBAI, MAY 14

IN SPATE, the Mithi river in Mumbai rushed into headlines in 2005 when 944 mm of rain in the span of a single day saw much of the financial capital's suburbs under 4 to 15 feet of water. A clean-up of the river, which serves as the main drainage system and also an open sewer for large swathes of the suburbs, was carried out in fits and starts, but the river is back in the news for an ambitious technological milestone - India's second under-river subway tunnel.

Seventeen Tunnel Boring Machines (TBMs) lowered by contractors of the Mumbai Metro Rail Corporation Ltd into Mumbai's belly have now completed burrowing through about half the 33.5-km route of the Colaba-Bandra-Seepez Metro Rail, India's first fully underground Metro system.

Tunnelling has also begun between the Dharavi and Bandra Kurla Complex Metro stations, a distance of less than 2 km. Along this route, serving as a putrid partition between the throb of the slum's small scale industry and the affluence of the international commerce hub, is a mangrove thicket, part of the Mithi's estuarine mudflats, and a section of the river itself just before it meets the sea at Mahim creek. For the MMRC, this means a 170-m section of tunnel that will be dug at depths of 15-20 m below the surface, equivalent to the height of a four-storey building placed just under water.

**Why is this a milestone in tunnelling?**

The pitfall here is not the depth - it's the challenges that come with tunnelling below a water-body, mainly preparing for unex-



Metro construction in progress near the Mithi, as seen from BKC. Pradip Das

pected behaviour of soil owing to water, the pressure, and the possibility of mud and water rushing into a just-constructed tunnel section. The only other under-river tunnel for a mass transit project in India runs beneath the Hooghly in Kolkata, completed two years ago.

The soil under the Mithi is not even - it's mostly brecciated basalt, some of it weathered brecciated basalt, and with silty or gravelly weak points, all mapped out meticulously. The main tunnelling is done by TBMs with Earth Pressure Balance (EPB) shields. The EPB face monitors and adjusts pressure inside the cutterhead of the TBM, balancing the earth's pressure. The EPB shield is also sealed against fluid pressure outside.

In addition, a 153-m section at BKC station, part of which will be in the water-body, includes cross-sections for a third line, meant for stabling, emergency turnarounds, etc. This

cross-tunnelling will be built with the New Austrian Tunnelling Method (NATM), which uses traditional excavators very slowly, minimising damage to the soil formation around the tunnel by immediately "shotcreting", or spraying concrete on excavated section walls. According to SK Gupta, Director (Projects) at MMRC, the philosophy of NATM is to use the strength of the soil or geological formation around the tunnel to support it. "NATM tunnelling is carried out slowly, in three parts - the top of the tunnel or heading, the centre or benching and the floor or the invert. As you proceed, you have to almost feel the ground, watch it closely and see how it's behaving, to understand to what extent it needs to be supported," said Gupta.

**Why use NATM over regular TBMs?**

While TBMs need to achieve a break-