



## The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY  
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

# The unpeople of India

Election rhetoric has only exacerbated Muslim fears. New government must combat the distrust and hate



ABDUL KHALIQ

## MONITOR'S TEST

Polling over, EC needs to urgently address crisis within, allay apprehensions about weakening of its hard-won independence

JUST AS THE seventh and final round of polling in the general election concluded on Sunday, the constitutional body that conducted the arduous exercise has again — and unhappily — come under the spotlight. Differences among its members, now out in the open, threaten to damage the EC's formidable and hard-won reputation as an impartial and effective poll monitor. In protest over his dissenting views going unrecorded in the Commission's final orders, Ashok Lavasa, one of the three election commissioners, has recused himself from meetings on complaints concerning violations of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) — Lavasa had opposed the clean chit given to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on four complaints that accused the PM of violating the Code during the campaign. Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora has said that disagreements among the commissioners are not new or surprising since they are not "clones of each other", but the circumstances surrounding Lavasa's recusal raise disturbing questions. They appear to lend credence to the Opposition's allegation that the Commission has leaned in favour of the ruling regime in general and of Prime Minister Modi and BJP President Amit Shah on complaints concerning MCC violations. In the long term, the current impasse within presents a challenge for an institution that has been losing its sheen in recent times. But in the short term, the EC needs to resolve the differences at the top since the tensions seem to have reached a breaking point.

The public turmoil within the EC threatens to make it part of a disquieting pattern seen earlier, featuring institutions such as the CBI and even the Supreme Court. The differences on the bench over the Chief Justice of India's allocation of cases saw four of the Supreme Court's senior-most justices hold an unprecedented press conference in January last year. The judges explained the move as an attempt to assert the independence of the judiciary and uphold the integrity of the institution. The year ended with the crisis within the CBI becoming public, requiring the apex court to step in, after the top two officials of the country's premier investigating agency, in the words of the attorney general, fought like "kilkenny cats" and brought "public ridicule" upon the institution. The Reserve Bank, too, has been visibly under stress with the exit of two governors in quick succession, reportedly after disagreements with the government on issues of institutional autonomy.

With the electoral process drawing to an end, the EC needs to reflect on the charges of institutional weakening, and address the gaps in the law governing its conduct. How it resolves the tensions within is of utmost importance to its credibility, independence. The full EC meeting scheduled on Tuesday will be tracked by all those with stakes in the health of this vital institution in a constitutional democracy.

## MASALA FOR THOUGHT

Spate of borrowings by sub-sovereign entities highlights the potential risk of rising contingent liabilities of many states

THE STATE GOVERNMENT-BACKED Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board raised Rs 2,150 crore from the international markets last week through a Masala Bond offering, which is essentially debt issued to overseas investors in rupees or the local currency. The listing of these bonds on the London Stock Exchange, with the state's chief minister and his team in attendance, marks a first for an Indian sub-sovereign entity, though other private Indian corporates and some Central PSUs, too, have in the past taken the same route. The symbolism of a Left-led government making this move has certainly not been lost on many, as also the coupon or interest rate on these bonds, which at 9.723 per cent for five years, appears to be high when benchmarked to the yield on the ten-year government bond which is now 7.36 per cent. A rupee offering — Amaravati Bonds listed on the BSE last year by the Andhra Pradesh Capital Region Development Authority — backed by the state government there helped raise Rs 2,000 crore at a coupon rate of 10.36 per cent for 10 years. The initial investor response to these two bonds in two different markets is sure to encourage other state governments to join the bandwagon.

Borrowings by these Special Purpose Vehicles provide an off budget mechanism or escape clause to states to circumvent the restrictions imposed on borrowings both in India and abroad, especially after the FRBM law came into force. For many investors, these are attractive pickings, as these borrowings are guaranteed by the state governments and with the comfort of escrow mechanisms. To be fair, after the higher resource transfers, following the 14th Finance Commission's recommendations, much of the burden of building and developing infrastructure entailing huge capital expenditure and with a longer payback period has fallen on states. That has been amplified by the slowdown in the economy and the consequent decline in revenues. Commendable as the recent effort by states such as Kerala or Andhra Pradesh to diversify their sources of funding is, however, the spate of borrowings by sub-sovereign entities also serves to highlight the potential risk of rising contingent liabilities of many states. What has fuelled concern is not just the growing recourse to off budget borrowings both at the federal and state levels in India, but the lack of transparency and classification of risk related to these explicit liabilities and the lack of adequate provisions for future repayment.

The BoP crisis of 1991 forced policy makers to change tack and adopt a prudent course on external sector management, marked by a record of no sovereign default. For the new government, the challenges posed by the banking sector and NBFs or shadow banks may well be on top of the economic agenda. But equally, the issue of rising internal debt and contingent liabilities should gain increased attention. Both are critical to the country's financial stability.

I FEAR FOR our future as a secular, multicultural country that once celebrated a richness of culture and tradition. Till not long ago we affirmed our common humanity even as we celebrated our differences. Our nation represented diversity, kindness, compassion and a revulsion of extremist views. But, over time, our collective souls have been deadened by violence, deepening communal and caste divides and the most perverse thinking. The cosmopolitan spirit has been throttled by hyper nationalism, populism and a deep distrust of the liberal values of tolerance and inclusion. A creeping majoritarianism is spreading across the land.

In this overheated, protracted election season, Muslims are up against it, caught between a rock and a hard place. Theirs is an Orwellian world where they are the "unpeople" — a term coined by George Orwell in his scary masterpiece *1984*, to define those whose names and existence had been erased because they had incurred "Big Brother's" ire. Muslims now have to live with the bleak truth that the most powerful political party and its ideological parent, with tentacles spread across the country, are pathologically hostile to Muslims. What makes their plight infinitely worse, is the fact that even the major allegedly secular party has consigned Muslims to social invisibility. Can one trust a party that is afraid to even allude to the Muslims' problems, let alone address them?

When the PM evoked the 1984 mass slaughter of Sikhs and quoted Rajiv Gandhi's infamous justification about the inevitable effect of the falling of a big tree, why did the Congress president not hit back by recalling the 2002 Gujarat riots and Modi's Newtonian observation justifying the killing of hundreds of Muslims as a reaction to an action? He refrained, not for any ethical reason, but simply for fear of being seen as empathetic to Muslims and their problems and of equating the two tragedies. Caught between the flagrant hostility of the right-wing and the fraudulent concern of the secular front, Muslims are India's outcasts.

In today's India, where all issues across the political spectrum are seen through the lens of identity politics, Muslims are vilified for their custom, dress and tradition. They

are physically attacked for the food they eat, discriminated against in employment, housing, and even civic amenities, and, they are routinely victimised by law-enforcement authorities simply for being Muslim. Social media is awash with the most hateful, stereotypical portrayal of Muslims as terrorist sympathisers, baby producing factories and worse. Although India has been the home of Islam and its adherents for much more than a millennium, Muslims today are constantly pilloried about their loyalty to the nation.

All assessments about Muslims are universalised, in black and white and deeply problematic. In a conversation with two CRPF sub-inspectors who have recently returned from Kashmir (I did not reveal that I was Muslim), I was told that "these Muslims are a nuisance as even their women throw stones at us." Please note that the stone-throwing by the disgruntled Kashmiris is perceived as a common trait of Muslims — all 190 million of them. Their other complaints were that Muslims support Pakistan and insist on eating only halal meat. When I asked how the civil unrest in Kashmir could be resolved, I got an answer that stunned me: "Make sure that the police force in Kashmir is recruited only from the Shia community and they will teach these Sunnis a lesson!" How well have the British taught us the art of "divide and rule" and of polarising communities! The conversation filled me with anguish at the gratuitous distrust and hatred for Muslims. The animosity runs deep and is expressed by ordinary citizens in a matter-of-fact tone that is unnerving.

I recall clearly the sense of cautious optimism among Muslims when Narendra Modi assumed power in 2014. His swearing-in was a strikingly symbolic moment, epitomised by the presence of the Pakistani PM that signalled hope of rapprochement with Pakistan (Indian Muslims know through experience that their well-being is linked to this crucial relationship). The PM represented a more decisive polity that promised an equitable social order expressed most eloquently in the Socratic slogan, "Sabka saath sabka vikas". This slogan encapsulated this nation's foremost mission of fostering social solidarity based on the principle that every human

being matters. Minorities felt reassured by the PM's emphatic assertion in 2015 that "my government will not allow any religious group, belonging to the majority or minority, to incite hatred against others, overtly or covertly." He repeatedly made appeals to preserve our core values of diversity, tolerance and plurality, calling on Hindus and Muslims to work together to fight poverty instead of fighting one another. His stunning embrace of Nawaz Sharif on Christmas Day 2015 filled everyone with hope.

On the ground, however, India began witnessing a deepening cultural mutation as vigilante squads terrorised and lynched Muslims in the name of protecting the cow, launched "ghar wapsi" campaigns that have all but ended the freedom to choose one's faith and used "love jihad" to stifle any kind of solidarity between the two communities. Minorities began to believe that the present dispensation's aim is to convert India into the Hindu Rashtra of Hindutva where Muslims and Christians would live as second-class citizens. The current election rhetoric has only exacerbated those fears. The BJP Lok Sabha candidate for Barabanki boasted that "Narendra Modi has made attempts to break the morale of Muslims. Vote for Modi if you want to destroy the breed of Muslims."

We are on the cusp of having a new government at the Centre. Opinion polls and the most reliable — the bookies — predict victory for the NDA, but with a reduced majority. Ironically, the return of Modi as PM is the best hope for peace within the country and the neighbourhood. Imran Khan was right when he said that only Modi could help resolve Kashmir. He is the only leader with the power to rein in the lunatics whose purpose in life is to polarise communities and engage in eternal war with Pakistan. In any case, the new government's first task would be to combat the overpowering atmosphere of distrust and hate bedevilling society which constitutes the foremost threat to the nation, more so than terrorism. The creation of a truly secular society free of prejudice and discrimination must be the prime mission.

The writer is secretary general, Lok Janshakti Party. Views are personal

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## THE SALT EXAMPLE

Fortifying staples with essential nutrients holds the key in fight against anaemia



ALOK KUMAR AND VEDEIKA SHEKHAR

INDIA HAS been able to dramatically reduce the number of people living in extreme poverty from 306 million people living on less than \$1.90 (on a PPP basis) a day in 2011 to 48 million today. However, it is puzzling as to why the country has been unable to show a similar dynamism in its record against malnutrition. Despite major government interventions — including providing highly subsidised foodgrains to the poorest 67 per cent of the population under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), a free Mid-day Meal Scheme (MDM) that targets around 100 million students in government schools and a supplementary nutrition programme through the ICDS network — the country is home to the largest number of malnourished children in the world.

In the decade between 2005-06 and 2015-16, stunting declined at the rate of 0.9 per cent per annum. Though anaemia among children has declined, it affects every second child in the country. There has been no perceptible decline in anaemia among 15 to 49-year old women; it affects around 60 per cent of them. This public health emergency needs to be addressed immediately.

Poverty, gender disparity, poor sanitation, low health and nutrition service coverage and poor nutritional intake — particularly an iron-deficient diet — continue to impede our fight against anaemia. The daily consumption of iron rich dark green leafy vegetables has reduced from 64 per cent to 48 per cent of the population in the last decade. Many, in fact, argue that the NFSA's focus on wheat and rice

has forced millets — traditional source for iron and minerals — out of the market. The government's iron supplementation programme to overcome IDA has led to only 30 per cent of pregnant women consuming iron and folic acid tablets. This compels us to think of simpler and effective strategies like fortification of food staples with essential micronutrients like iron and vitamin.

Food fortification is a largely-ignored, yet critical, strategy which has proved an effective, affordable, scalable and sustainable intervention in many countries. India too has tested this idea when it successfully tackled the widespread problem of goitre by mandating iodised salt in 1962. As there are numerous programmes to address malnutrition, this simple idea of fortifying meals has the potential to reach every segment of the population.

Policy-makers have recently begun to address this blind spot to change the country's nutritional landscape. Comprehensive regulations and standards have been framed by the FSSAI on fortification of food. The Women and Child Development and Human Resource Development ministries have issued advisories to the states to mandatorily use fortified wheat flour and edible oil in ICDS and MDM. However, given that fortification of these staples is still relatively new in India, traction has been slow.

Rice is the staple for 65 per cent of the Indian population, most of whom are located in high malnutrition burden states. Supply of fortified rice through a network of fair price

shops is a cost-effective intervention to address anaemia across all sections of the population. Evaluations in Odisha's Gajapati district, which experimented with fortified rice in MDM, found that the incidence of anaemia has reduced by 20 per cent between 2012 and 2015, of which 6 per cent reduction can be directly attributable to fortification.

The Department of Food and Public Distribution, facilitated by the NITI Aayog, has recently launched a centrally-sponsored scheme on rice fortification in PDS. The programme is designed to cover 15 districts, initially. Although the budget is a meagre Rs 147 crore, the implications for the fight against anaemia are huge. Our estimate for a pan-India roll out of rice fortification is around 2,400 crore (about 1.4 per cent of the total food subsidy bill in 2018-19). A successful pan-India scale up of fortification will depend on many factors — the political will of state governments, flexibility to allow states to adapt the fortification model to their procurement and distribution systems and capacity building of different stakeholders. The FSSAI's role, its enforcement machinery and the quality control labs needs to be strengthened. Lastly and most crucially, sustainability of fortification depends on the regular consumption of fortified food by the consumers and thus a comprehensive state specific strategy should be developed to generate awareness among the consumers.

The writers are with the Niti Aayog

## MAY 20, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

**PANCHAYAT POWERS**  
THE CHIEF MINISTERS' conference in Delhi decided to delegate more financial and administrative powers to panchayat raj institutions to make them effective instruments of development. The conference decided to set up a committee which would frame guidelines for a model legislation. The legislation is expected to be adopted by various states with suitable adjustments to provide a proper structure for the panchayat raj institutions and ensure delegation of adequate financial and administrative powers to them. The two-day conference, convened by Prime Minister Morarji Desai, discussed the role of panchayat raj institutions in the context of

the Ashok Mehta committee report.

**HAZARI PRASAD DIES**  
THE RENOWNED HINDI writer Hazari Prasad Dwivedi died of cardiac arrest at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences. Dwivedi, who was 71, is survived by his wife, three sons and four daughters. The body of Dwivedi will be kept in the Gandhi Smarak Sangrahalaya and cremated at the Nigambodh ghat. Dwivedi, who suffered a cerebral stroke early this month in Varanasi, was admitted to AIIMS on May 11. Last night, his condition deteriorated and he was in a deep coma. On examination, it was found that he had a brain tumour but he

could not be operated upon.

**COAL TO COST MORE**  
THE UNION CABINET is expected to take a final decision on the increase in coal prices next week. Knowledgeable sources point out that the quantum of increase may be Rs 20 per tonne, even though this falls short of the expectations of the Union Energy Ministry. Since July 1975, there has been no increase in the price of coal even though all vital inputs like power, steel and explosives used by the coal industry have become dearer over the years. The energy ministry's case for an increase in coal prices has been pending before the government for nearly two years.



## FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY





# THE IDEAS PAGE

## Iranian delusion and the American war machine

The million-dollar question is: How can Iran defuse one of this era's most serious crises?



RAMIN JAHANBEGLOO

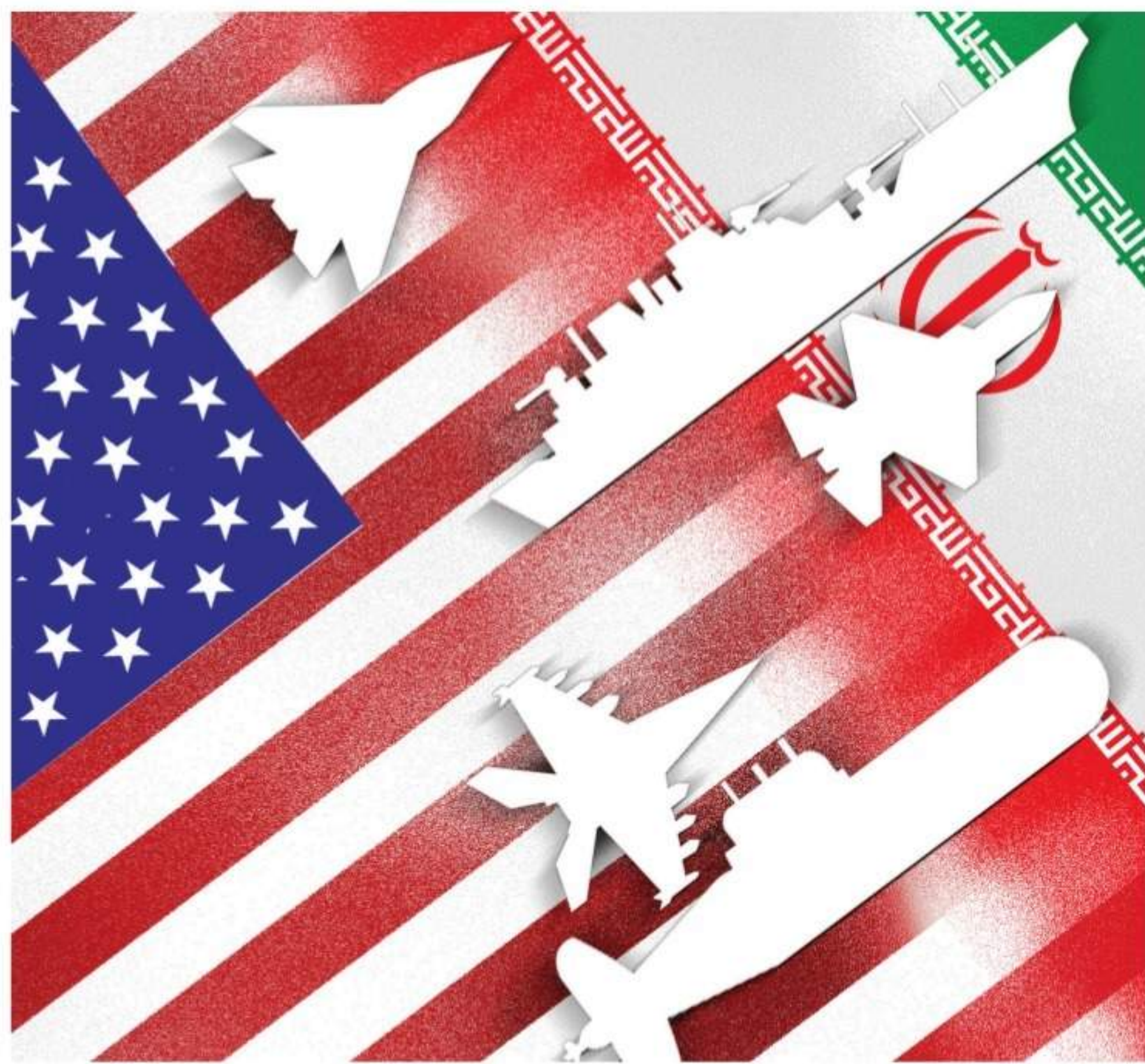
"SHOULD WE NEGOTIATE with Iran's ayatollahs?" This is a question which was put by Henry Kissinger, the former US Secretary of State under Richard Nixon, to Bernard Lewis, the British-American historian of the Middle East. "Certainly not!" came Lewis's uncompromising response. It looks like the overall stance of the Trump Administration goes in the direction of Lewis's general doctrine for the future of Iran and the Middle East. Lewis died a year ago, on May 19, 2018, but his influence among the American statesmen and strategists has not decreased. As a matter of fact, in his obituary for Lewis, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo wrote: "I owe a great deal of my understanding of the Middle East to his work. He was also a man who believed, as I do, that Americans must be more confident in the greatness of our country, not less."

Well, it happens that in the mind of Lewis, the greatness of the United States goes hand in hand with a radical Balkanisation of the Middle East. Dick Cheney, the 46th US vice president (2001 to 2009), had a similar strategic ambition in terms of the invasion of Iraq. About half a million people died in Iraq as a result of war-related causes between the beginning of the US-led invasion in 2003 and mid-2011.

Inspired by the same line of thinking, Pompeo and John Bolton seem to be impatient to try once again the "Bernard Lewis Doctrine". However, as the recent verbal confrontation between the authorities in Tehran and the Trump administration shows, nobody can say what the end game of the new American sanctions and the recent military measure taken by the Pentagon in the Persian Gulf would be. Are these measures part of Donald Trump's campaign for re-election? Or, is it an effort to force Iran to negotiate a "better" nuclear deal? Or is it to prepare for a regime change in Iran? One does not need to be in on the secret of the gods to answer these questions. As the saying goes, "When the chips are down, these civilised people will eat each other."

Let us be very clear: By hitting Iran between the eyes, the US is hoping to provoke the ayatollahs and the Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) to react militarily. But for the time being, Iran's response has not been to attack any American interests in the region. As a matter of fact, in a calculated step-by-step escalation, Iran declared that it will not abide by some of its obligations under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Also, during a visit to Moscow, Iran's Foreign Minister Javad Zarif added that Iran will not leave the nuclear deal. It is also doubtful that Zarif's recent visit to Delhi will have any effect on the American decision to suspend its sanctions' exemption to Iran's oil customers such as India or to stop the US aircraft carrier, *Abraham Lincoln*, from going to the Middle East.

Interestingly, leaked video footage aired on Israeli TV shows Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu boasting that he had



CR Sasikumar

personally convinced President Trump to abandon the Iran nuclear deal. The video, aired by Israel's Kan News, shows Netanyahu praising his own and the Likud leadership's efforts. "We convinced the US president to exit the deal and I had to stand up against the whole world and come out against this agreement," Netanyahu claimed. Netanyahu posted the interview segment with the commentary in Hebrew: "I will continue to strengthen Israel as a rising global force." It looks like Lewis's doctrine of "Balkanisation of the Middle East" is also taken very seriously in Tel Aviv, especially since we know that Ben Gurion, the first prime minister of Israel, too had a similar strategic ambition.

Now, the million-dollar question is: How can Iran defuse one of this era's most serious crises?

Despite increasing pressures and threats, there is no indication from the various statements by Iranian officials that Tehran is preparing itself for an American attack. Tehran is still hanging its hopes on Trump's defeat in the 2020 US presidential elections. Another dangerous misconception among the leaders of the Islamic regime is that in the event of a war with the US, Iranians will be galvanised in the same way as they were in 1980 against Saddam Hussein. However, for the younger generation of Iranians — the 70 per cent of the population under the age of 35 — who are disenchanted with the Islamist ideology and have suffered from a brutal eight-year war

with Iraq and domestic unrests in 1999, 2009 and 2017, a war against the US is not necessarily a desirable objective. Jobs, social freedoms and better economic opportunities are one thing, but dying for the revolutionary principles of 1979 is another. Tehran is also hanging its hopes on its proxies in the region. Surely, the Lebanese Hezbollah will make a military move against Israel and the American interests in the region, but no doubt, they too, would have to pay a heavy price, though nothing compared to what Iran would pay in case of an America attack. However, it would be contrary to any expectation that a country in West Asia or the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region would help Iran. Unfortunately, the delusion of the Islamic regime is that it could cause enough harm to Americans and their allies so that they will be forced to end the war.

There is no doubt that Iran will not recover easily from the damage done by a possible American attack. Even if Iran does not suffer a devastating civil war and ethnic fissures like post-Saddam Iraq, the fates of tens of millions of Iranians, including the Iranian-American citizens who are spending time in Evin prison, are at stake. Let us hope that Pompeo and Bolton will not follow the advice Bernard Lewis offered to Henry Kissinger.

The writer is professor and vice dean, Jindal Global University

### WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The US cannot strangle Huawei, nor will it be able to contain the development of China and deprive the 1.4 billion Chinese people of their development rights." — GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA

## Behind the veil

The young Muslim woman of today may choose to go ahead and own the hijab. She has decided to carve her own path



### IN GOOD FAITH

ZEHRA NAQVI

"HIJAB" IS ONE of the most emotionally charged and politically flammable words of our times. And it doesn't help that the word rhymes with — of all things — jihad. Being a hijab-clad woman who chooses to assert herself within the mainstream is like being a walking target for "counter-terror operations" in the form of allegations and assumptions fired in your direction with great speed and precision.

In New Delhi on Friday, May 3, at the launch of Rakhshanda Jalil's book *But You Don't Look Like a Muslim*, the discussion centred around how identities are cultural more than religious; how they borrow from and seep into each other. It is, therefore, presumptuous to imagine a single way that a Muslim looks like, which leads to the oft-repeated exclamation: But you don't look like a Muslim!

Which is when I raised the question: And what if you do?

What of those people within the Muslim community, or any other community, who choose to carry identity markers upon their person — in an entirely harmless, non-intrusive, non-threatening way? Who are otherwise productive, constructive, compassionate members of society, but dress differently for whatever reason? If you look visibly like a Muslim, is that reason enough for you to be marginalised or demonised?

Javed Akhtar, who was one of the panellists at the event, proceeded to ask me why I dress the way I do: In a headscarf and abaya (albeit not black, which perhaps makes me less of "the Muslim" too.)

My answer was this: I am a practising Muslim. There are various levels and ways of being a practising Muslim. For someone, it may be praying five times a day, for someone else it may be celebrating Muslim festivals. This, then, is my way of practising my religion.

And yes, just as one can be a practising Muslim without a hijab, one can be a practising secularist with a hijab. Why do I feel the need to emphasise being secular? Because I identify very strongly with secular values as entrenched in the Constitution of India. And nowhere do I find them conflicting with my core values. I do not discriminate between people on the grounds of religion, nor do I divide people into "us" and "them".

People equate secularism with absence of religion. The literal meaning of the word may well be that, but as times change, so do meanings. Language is flexible, malleable and words expand to take on new meanings as the sensibilities of society change gradually. "Secular" in our times has come to mean an unbiased, non-discriminatory approach towards people from all religions. Our secularism is built on empa-

thy and mutual respect. It does not, in any way, denote the imposition of uniformity and homogeneity.

In fact, "hijab" itself is a classic case of words acquiring new meanings. In principle, hijab is an act and an observance, not a piece of clothing. By "doing" hijab, one declares that I observe a certain manner of dressing which, to my belief, is prescribed by my religion. "To my belief" is an important qualifier because there is a whole spectrum of ways in which Muslims across the world choose to dress.

The burqa, too, is no longer just a nondescript black robe. It has been replaced by the abaya, which now comes in as many colours and designs as any other dress. The headscarf has undergone drastic transformations — so much so that in 2017 Nike launched their sporty headscarf for hijabi athletes, tested by Emirati figure-skating champion Zahra Lari. Recently in the news was Somali-American model Halima Aden, the first woman to wear a hijab and burkini on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* magazine. Olympic fencer Ibtihaj Muhammad even inspired Barbie to make a hijabi doll. That's a world of a difference from the image of the oppressed woman that we are routinely presented with.

India, too, has witnessed a steady growth of hijabi professionals. Ramnath Goenka Award-winning journalist Ashwaq Masoodi is an unapologetic hijabi, as is Falak Naaz Syed, a financial journalist from Mumbai. Andaleeb Wajid, the prolific writer, chooses to keep her hijab and abaya on while churning out bestsellers. Asiya Ahmed Khan, a naturalist from Hyderabad, conducts tree walks and lectures, along with providing professional consultancy services to those who wish to plant native trees. Her daughter Mariam, who is a post-graduate in environmental science from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, works with an NGO that spreads awareness on animals. Both mother and daughter don the hijab out of choice. And these are just a few examples.

The fact is that the young Muslim woman of today has chosen to go ahead and own the hijab. She has personalised it and decided to carve her path following her own rules.

True, there are still sections of women who may not entirely have a choice. But banning or ridiculing the hijab won't empower them or give them agency, given that their socio-economic conditions won't change. Far more productive would be to give hijabi or burqa-clad women access to the same mainstream education and employment opportunities as others, without them being turned away for their dress. Countless Muslim women are, ironically, forced to take off their hijab in order to pursue education or employment, since people refuse to hire them in that dress — knowledge and skill be damned. How, then, are we speaking of free choice?

Providing access to mainstream education and employment are the only ways to bring agency to women. Only when they have the wherewithal to stand up for themselves can they be in a better position to take life's decisions independently, including the choice of doing hijab. And that, right there, is real agency.

The writer is a freelance journalist

### VIEW FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD



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

### HISTORY LESSONS

AKBAR AHMED, A former Pakistani-American diplomat and academic, has written a two-part essay in *The Express Tribune* (published on May 14 and 15) titled "What Modi can learn from Akbar". Ahmed argues that along with Ashoka and Kanishka, Emperor Akbar presents a model of stagecraft for all subcontinental leaders. First, under his rule, India (as it was then) was among the greatest economies in the world, accounting for nearly a quarter of the world's GDP. In contrast, India, Pakistan and Afghanistan together today account for less than four per cent. Second, "In any discussion of these emperors, we must not overlook their military might. Akbar's army possessed some 30,000 armour-plated elephants which acted like modern tanks. His infantry and cavalry numbered in the hundreds of thousands. He was a successful military commander and doubled the size of his empire, extending — after half a century of his rule — from Afghanistan in the north, to the Muslim kingdoms in south India, from Sindh in the west to Bengal in the east." Then there's the fact that of Akbar's "nine jewels" four were Hindus — his religious tolerance allowed him the best of talent in the military, arts and administration. In the second part of the article, Ahmed focuses more on how contemporary India is

squandering its legacy and opportunity, so unlike Akbar or even Modi's more recent predecessors: "As someone committed to inter-faith understanding and building bridges of peace between the two neighbours, I remain baffled and distressed to see India so casually throwing away its greatest identifying feature, one inspired by the very Indian religion of Jainism, that of Gandhian non-violence. Modi and his loyal media have been recklessly priming the country for nuclear war and putting Pakistan on alert, thus preparing the scenario for a nuclear exchange. The danger of all this to India itself and the world at large is ignored. Any nuclear exchange will be the ultimate act of self-destruction. The big lesson Modi can learn from the three emperors is that you can crush the opposition and minorities through your security forces and taxes, but if you want your country to truly prosper, you must win their hearts and minds which can only happen when you embrace all your citizens as part of the greater whole. If awoke in Modi's India, the three emperors would ask, what has happened to our beloved homeland? Yes, they would say, Modi may have reached out to Mars, but we reached out to the hearts of our beloved people."

### GWADAR ATTACK

THE MAY 13 editorial in *Dawn* weighs in on

how to deal with the insurgency in Balochistan in the aftermath of the second attack in the region this month. "Even more disturbing, the incident took place in Gwadar city, whose port is the gateway to CPEC and the veritable jewel in the crown of the multi-billion dollar project — which makes the area one of the most heavily secured in the restive province," remarks the editorial.

The motive behind the attack is clear: "Baloch separatist groups have made no secret of their hostility towards CPEC, which they perceive as yet another manifestation of state plunder of Balochistan's resources. They seem to have stepped up their campaign in recent months with a number of high-profile attacks."

According to the editorial, "the only long-term resolution to this extended, if low-key, conflict is a political one. The state must reach out to disaffected nationalists and individuals who have some currency with the more obdurate Baloch."

### DECODING DESPERATION

ZIAUDDIN CHOUDHURY, A former Bangladeshi civil servant, puts into perspective Bangladesh's "economic miracle" in a *Dhaka Tribune* article on May 16. Between 40 and 60 Bangladeshis reportedly drowned in the Mediterranean earlier

this month attempting to migrate to Europe. While others that perished were fleeing war, destruction and instability in West Asia, Choudhury asks "why this group would include people from relatively "politically stable" countries such as Bangladesh and Pakistan. Is it so difficult to live in their countries that they have to take such measures to leave their country for unknown territories?"

In addition, the article states that many of those seeking a better life in Europe are not peasants or the illiterate, but "the majority of these voluntary refugees are young people; they are not peasants who left farming in search of better occupations. They are high school-educated, many with some college education. I know, because I have met many such young people in Italy, Spain, and Portugal who had succeeded in their adventurous journeys across the seas".

The article then states that "we (Bangladeshis) flatter ourselves by gloating over our economic miracle. Our GDP quadrupling in the last 15 years. Our growth rate being consistently ahead of neighbouring countries. Our rate of literacy growing ahead of expectation." Yet, he argues, that unemployment has been left unaddressed and the education system has failed the youth. An argument that could be made for nearly all of South Asia.

### LETTER TO THE EDITOR

#### WEST ASIA WORRY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'As Iran takes on US' (IE, May 17). The situation in West Asia will be a real test for the government that assumes office in the next few weeks. The critical test will be in maintaining relations with Iran on one hand and tackling the US's sanctions on other. It is unfortunate India has buckled under US pressure when it comes to relations with Iran.

Mayank Khatri, Ujjain

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'As Iran takes on US' (IE, May 17). For long, Indian ships have sailed the waters of West Asia. The major reason behind the success of Indian diplomacy in the past owes to the fact that it never got involved in the Shia-Sunni and Arab-Persian conflicts. But, recent developments suggest that India is titling towards the Arab world. India should maintain a balance between both powers.

Suchak D Patel, Ahmedabad

#### UP POLITICS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'What goes UP' (IE, May 16). The writer is correct in saying that in UP caste and communal factions have come together against the BJP-led government. The battle is between the nationalism of Prime Minister Narendra Modi on one side and caste and regional factors allied with Nehruvian ideology on the other.

LR Gupta, Lucknow

### 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

#### JET'S FALL

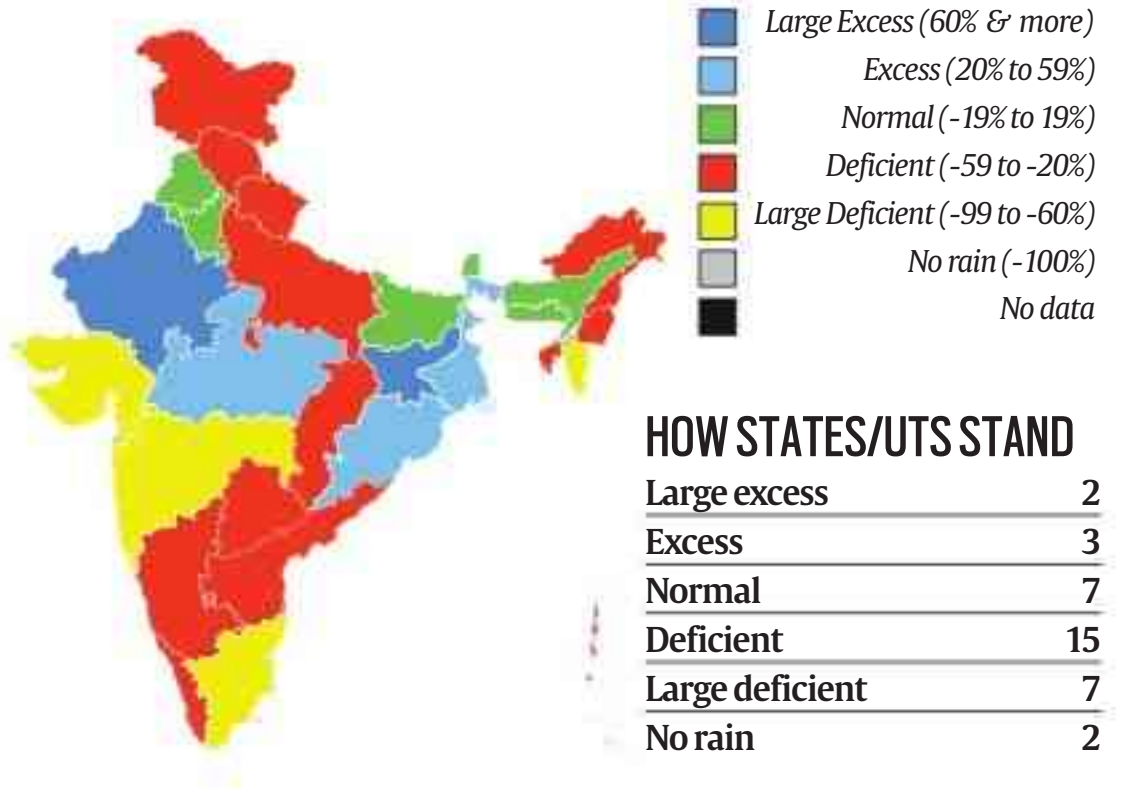
THIS REFERS TO the article, 'The crashing of jet' (IE, May 17). Defaulting promoters are able to save the earnings from the company while the employees lose their jobs. Promoters, lending banks and executives are complicit in creating this situation. The government too must share blame for the crisis.

YG Chouksey, Pune



**TELLING NUMBERS**

**Pre-monsoon rain 22% short so far, large deficiency in 7 states**



**PRE-MONSOON RAINFALL** since March has been 22% deficient so far, according to India Meteorological Department (IMD) data. From March 1 to May 19, the country has had 82.1 mm rainfall against the normal of 104.6 mm for this stage. Pre-monsoon rain is vital to agriculture in several parts of the country. So far, 22 states and Union Territories have had deficient rain (short by 20% or more), including seven with large deficiency (60% of more). Rainfall has been normal in seven other states, and in excess in five states (including three with large excess). The southwest monsoon has advanced into South Andaman Sea and

conditions are favourable for it to reach the North Andaman Sea and the Andaman Islands in the next 2-3 days, PTI quoted IMD as saying. From March 1 to April 24, the overall deficiency had been 27%. The lower deficiency now follows rainfall over the East and Northeast. A PTI report said the deficiency had reduced to 22% by March 15 (75.9 mm against a normal of 96.8 mm). Until March 15, the South Peninsula had a pre-monsoon deficiency of 46%, followed by Northwest Subdivision with 36%, and East and Northeast with 7%. There was no overall deficiency in the central region. *Source: India Meteorological Department (including map); PTI inputs in text*

**AN EXPERT EXPLAINS**

**How to conduct, read exit polls**

With various forecasts for the Lok Sabha election results out, which ones are more reliable than others? A veteran analyst describes the various methods, challenges and shortcomings in conducting an exit poll



**HOW DOES** the common man judge which exit poll is most reliable? Rely on the one whose numbers you like the most and dismiss the one whose numbers you dislike? Today, some even judge the accuracy of an exit poll by looking at the survey agency that conducted the poll, or by looking at the television channel that commissioned the poll. Some others make a judgment from the sample size — a commonly shared notion is that the bigger the sample size, the more reliable should be the exit poll.

In reality, these should not be the indicators for judging the accuracy of an exit poll. Then how should one read these numbers, and should we even rely on these exit polls?

The numbers thrown up by various exit polls can neither be rejected in totality, nor can all be accepted without a pinch of salt. There are good exit polls and there are some not-so-good exit polls. As the least we expect from a physician is to measure the temperature of the patient, the least one should expect from an exit poll is to give the viewer/reader an estimate of the vote share. The science of surveys, which includes exit polls, works on the assumption that the data have been collected after interviewing a large number of voters using a structured questionnaire. It is a different matter whether the interview was conducted over the telephone, or face to face using either pen and pencil or a gadget (iPad or a mobile app). This method is not new; it began back in 1957 during the second Lok Sabha elections when the Indian Institute of Public Opinion conducted a poll. But not even the best guesswork or estimate can skip the methodology that is required. Without a structured questionnaire, the data can neither be collected coherently nor be analysed systematically to arrive at vote share estimates.

**Sample size, representativeness**

Since exit polls began in 1957, there has been enormous improvement in at least one aspect, which is sample size. Gone are the days when a national sample of 20,000-30,000 looked like a very large sample. Even those who pioneered psephology in India, like Pranjoy Roy and Yogendra Yadav, worked with similar samples from the early 1980s until the late 1990s. Though the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) does not normally conduct exit polls, it did conduct a few — I recall CSDS's first exit poll during the 1996 Lok Sabha polls with Nalini Singh and Doordarshan using a sample size of 17,604. We went on to make a very accurate national projection of both vote share and seats. The CSDS has continued its voting behaviour study (National Election Study) using post-poll surveys as a tool, which is a much larger study, and has also used the study for making projections of vote share and seats at times. Our samples for post-poll surveys during the 1998 and 1999 elections remained below 10,000, and



our projections were not off the mark. With changing times and for state-level projections and analysis, we increased our sample size in 2004, 2009 and 2014 to a little more than 20,000 (the biggest sample size was about 37,000 in 2009). When we complete our post-poll survey for the 2019 Lok Sabha election, we should have a sample of about 22,000. Our seat projections may have been off the mark on some occasions but the vote share estimates have been very close on many occasions.

I am happy to note that the sample sizes of various exit polls for 2019 run into several lakhs. I only hope I was able to learn the art of collecting a properly randomised sample of such a large number. Yes, a large sample size is important, but based on my experience, I can say for sure that more than the sample size, it is far more important to have a sample that is representative of the profile of voters. But in recent years, the pressure on television channels (which in most cases are the sponsors of these exit polls) to have the largest sample has resulted in exit polls with bigger and bigger samples. Earlier, the competition among the channels was only about which channel aired its exit poll the earliest; now, it is also about whose poll has the largest sample size.

In recent times, seat projections by CSDS based on post-poll surveys went completely wrong; in Chhattisgarh we predicted the winner wrong, and in the UP Assembly elections we predicted the winner right but were way off the mark for the final tallies for different parties. We tried to introspect as to what may have gone wrong in these surveys as the methodology remained the same — we got data collected from representative samples. If someone asked if there was a possibility of having got those post-poll survey estimates correct had we taken bigger samples, I would not have hesitated to say no, a bigger sample would not have helped. Certainly, something else went wrong with those post-poll surveys; maybe a case of some fake interviews filed by the investigators, which we could not figure out on time. Technology — calls back to respondents, images of interviews being conducted and phone calls from the field, WhatsApp groups and similar tools — have

helped us in overcoming such shortcomings, yet there is no thumb rule for how to get the prediction correct.

**Swing model & complexities**

There are other challenges in conducting a pre-poll survey, a post-poll survey or an exit poll. The prediction of seats is based on a swing model — the current poll makes an estimate of vote shares for different parties and alliances by interviewing selected respondents, and the seat forecast is made based on the result of the previous election.

Estimating the vote share is not an easy task either, given various diversities in India — diversity of location, caste, religion, language, different levels of educational attainment, different levels of economic class — and all of these have a bearing on voting behaviour. Over- or under-representation of any of these diverse sections of voters can affect the accuracy of vote share estimates.

If these were not enough, there are other difficulties. Since the swing model is applied on the previous vote shares, a change in alliances, or a split or a merger of parties, between two elections poses a difficulty in making this estimate of past vote shares. During the 2014 Lok Sabha election, the JD(U) was not an ally of the BJP and polled 15.7% of the vote in Bihar, while the NDA together polled 38.7% and the UPA polled 29.7%. Now the alliances have changed and the JD(U) is part of the NDA. Since the JD(U) contested against the NDA in 2014, it is difficult to estimate what the NDA vote share would have been in 2014 had the JD(U) been part of NDA. To put it simply — if 38.7% votes for the NDA resulted in 31 Lok Sabha seats in 2014, how many seats might it get if the vote share is likely to increase or decrease? This was the story of just one state; imagine the complexity of working out this forecast state-wise for 29 states.

The task of applying the swing is far more complex than one might think. Measurement of swing and electoral change is easier when the contest is limited to two parties. The complexity of swings increases as more and more political players are added. For example, the swing from the Congress to the BJP or vice versa is easier to measure than

the swing from BJP to Congress to SP and to BSP in the same election. This model could be understood only by those who are still engaged in conducting such polls (pre, post, exit) using conventional methodology. In the current phase of exit polls, it is more an estimation of just seats, which could be done by a method (count method) other than the swing method.

**How comprehensive is it?**

The count method is itself time-consuming and labour-intensive, as one is expected to make an estimate for each seat. When agencies claim to have made seat-wise estimates, it is presented as the most comprehensive poll. This is when the sample size is as high as several lakhs. Some of the agencies have made innovations in the count method and this results in maximising gains by spending relatively less time and resources.

While an exit poll might claim to have covered all constituencies, in practice the poll is not required in some seats — like, why would one waste time and energy in doing a poll in Varanasi where the Prime Minister is contesting, or in Gandhinagar where the BJP president is contesting? If one looks carefully at constituencies, state-wise, many such seats could be eliminated where a survey need not be conducted and one could still make the most accurate estimate. After this elimination method combined with the count method, the survey is required in a limited number of difficult constituencies (swing constituencies). It is possible for an exit poll to be far more accurate than polls conducted using traditional methodology. But while the polls using traditional methodology estimate vote share and help us analyse voting behaviour on the basis of different social economic backgrounds, the count method can hardly give an estimate of vote shares, and any systematic analysis of voting behaviour could only be a dream.

**Time to reflect**

The numbers from various exit polls for the 2019 Lok Sabha elections are out. The question is, would these numbers have the same fate on May 23 as the projections of 2004, or will these exit polls be more accurate than those in 2014? During the 2004 elections, all exit polls predicted a comfortable victory for the NDA, but finally we had a fractured mandate with the Congress emerging the single largest party. The average of all exit poll projections for NDA was 255 seats, and it won 187; the average of predictions for UPA was 183 seats, and it ended up with 219. Will the latest exit polls be similar to the exit polls of 2014, when most polls predicted the winner right but most failed to assess the extent of the BJP's victory (though there were a few that also predicted the extent of victory with great accuracy)? At the moment, we do not know how seriously these numbers should be taken — which poll may be more accurate than the other.

The CSDS voting behaviour study using post-poll survey techniques will be completed in the next couple of days. We are not in a position to estimate the vote share yet, as CSDS has not conducted an exit poll outside the polling booth on election day.

*Professor Sanjay Kumar is currently Director, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies. Views expressed are personal.*

**TIP FOR READING LIST**

**UNTOLD EFFECT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

IN 2013, the World Health Organization released a report in partnership with the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine and the South African Medical Research Council, declaring violence against women as "a global health problem of epidemic proportions". Physical or sexual violence is a problem that affects more than one-third of all women globally, the report said. Yet today, many people generally do not believe domestic violence has anything to do with them, with the result that most people are silent about it.

would just leave; that shelter is an adequate response; that violence inside the home is a private matter, sealed from the public sphere. Through the stories of victims and perpetrators — which allows readers to see the world through their eyes and raises the question whether men can recover from their addiction to brutality — as well as law-enforcement agencies and reform movements, Snyder examines the ripples created by individual acts of violence, affecting the victim as well as those close to them, and leading to what *The Washington Post* describes as "intergenerational cycles of trauma". "The stories are devastating, but Snyder keeps us reading by pointing us toward possible solutions. She delves into how researchers and front-line interveners are creating practical, cost-effective, evidence-based ways to save lives," *The Post* says in its review.



In *No Visible Bruises*, American journalist Rachel Louise Snyder explores what many people don't know they are seeing. The book is an account of the scale of domestic violence in the US — where domestic violence accounts for 15% of all violent crime. The book explodes the common myths — that if things were bad enough, victims

**SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER**

**Why appeals are stuck at WTO, how India will be hit if process breaks down**

**PRABHA RAGHAVAN**  
NEW DELHI, MAY 19

THE WORLD Trade Organization's (WTO's) dispute settlement mechanism is going through a "crisis": the body is struggling to appoint new members to its understaffed Appellate Body that hears appeals in trade. Unless the issue is resolved, the body could become defunct, and countries locked in international trade disputes will be left with no forum for recourse.

Over 20 developing countries met in New Delhi last week to discuss ways to prevent the WTO's dispute resolution system from collapsing due to the logjam in these appointments.

**What is the WTO's Appellate Body, and why is it important?**

The Appellate Body, set up in 1995, is a standing committee of seven members that presides over appeals against judgments passed in trade-related disputes brought by WTO members.

With over 500 international disputes brought to the WTO and over 350 rulings issued since 1995, the organisation's dispute settlement mechanism is one of the most active in the world, and the Appellate Body is the highest authority in these matters.

Countries involved in a dispute over measures purported to break a WTO agreement or obligation can approach the Appellate Body if they feel the report of the panel set up to examine the issue needs to

be reviewed on points of law. Existing evidence is not re-examined; legal interpretations are reviewed.

The Appellate Body can uphold, modify, or reverse the legal findings of the panel that heard the dispute. Countries on either or both sides of the dispute can appeal.

The WTO's dispute settlement procedure is seen as being vital to ensuring smooth international trade flows. The Appellate Body has so far issued 152 reports. The reports, once adopted by the WTO's dispute settlement body, are final and binding on the parties.

**So, what is the problem in the WTO Appellate Body?**

Over the last two years, the membership of the body has dwindled to just three persons instead of the required seven. This is because the United States, which believes the WTO is biased against it, has been blocking appointments of new members and reappointments of some members who have completed their four-year tenures. Two members will complete their tenures in December this year, leaving the body with just one member.

At least three people are required to preside over an appeal, and if new members are not appointed to replace the two retiring ones, the body will cease to be relevant. Between 1995 and 2014, around 68% of the 201 panel reports adopted were appealed.

While the US is directly involved in more disputes than other WTO member countries, several countries—including India—enter

**INDIA-RELATED DISPUTES, APPEALS INITIATED SINCE 2012**

Year	New disputes	New India-related disputes	Appeals by India	Status of appeals
2012	27	3	2	Concluded
2013	20	1	1	Concluded
2014	14	0	0	NA
2015	13	1	0	NA
2016	17	3	1	Pending
2017	17	0	0	NA
2018	39	2	0	NA
2019*	9	4	0	NA

**STATUS OF DISPUTES INITIATED SINCE 2015**

Year	New disputes	In consultations	Total panels established/composed	Total verdicts	Appeals
2015	13	3	10	8	2
2016	17	5	12	7	4
2017	17	8	9	2	1
2018	39	12	27	0	0
2019*	9	9	0	0	0

**TOTAL DISPUTE CASES BY COUNTRY**

Country	Complainant	Respondent	Third party	Verdicts delivered by Appellate Body since 2014
India	24	30	158	2014: 7
US	123	153	150	2015: 7
China	20	43	171	2016: 8
Japan	26	15	203	2017: 7
Brazil	33	16	139	2018: 2
				2019*: 0

\*2019 numbers until May. Source: WTO

disputes as third parties. India has so far been a direct participant in 54 disputes, and has been involved in 158 as a third party.

The understaffed appeals body has been unable to stick to its 2-3 month deadline for appeals filed in the last few years, and the backlog of cases has prevented it from initiating proceedings in appeals that have been filed in the last year. The three members have been proceeding on all appeals filed since October 1, 2018.

In February 2019, the body said it would be unable to staff an appeal in a dispute between Japan and India over certain safeguard measures that India had imposed on imports of iron and steel products. The panel had found that India had acted "inconsistently" with some WTO agreements, and India had notified the Dispute Settlement Body of its decision to appeal certain issues of law and legal interpretations in December 2018.

The body has so far been unable to review at least 10 appeals that have been filed since July 2018.

**What can happen if this situation is not addressed in time?**

With the Appellate Body unable to review new applications, there is already great uncertainty over the WTO's dispute settlement process. If the body is declared non-functional in December, countries may be compelled to implement rulings by the panel even if they feel that gross errors have been committed.

Should such a country refuse to comply with the order of the panel on the ground that it has no avenue for appeal, it will run the risk of facing arbitration proceedings initiated by the other party in the dispute.

This does not bode well for India, which is facing a rising number of dispute cases, especially on agricultural products. In the last four months alone, four cases have been brought to the WTO against India's alleged support measures for its sugar and sugarcane producers.

Also, the overall weakening of the WTO framework could have the effect of undoing over two decades of efforts to avoid protectionism in global trade. This is a major concern currently, as trade tensions, for example between the US and China and the US and India, are on the rise.

**And what is the way forward from here on?**

While new appointments to the Appellate Body are usually made by a consensus of WTO members, there is a provision for voting where a consensus is not possible.

The group of 17 least developed and developing countries, including India, that have committed to working together to end the impasse at the Appellate Body can submit or support a proposal to this effect, and try to get new members on the Appellate Body by a majority vote.

This, however, may be an option of the last resort, as all countries fear unilateral measures by the US as a consequence of directly opposing its veto.