



Surviving Fani

The Odisha government has shown by example how to manage a natural disaster

Cyclone Fani has left a trail of destruction across a large part of coastal Odisha, but its management has emerged as a global example of how timely weather alerts, preparedness and informed public participation can dramatically reduce loss of life. The toll from the extremely severe cyclonic storm on May 3 stood, at last count, at 34 deaths. In terms of material losses, several districts were battered, houses flattened and electricity and telecommunications infrastructure destroyed, but the relatively low mortality shows a dramatic transformation from the loss of over 10,000 lives in 1999 when super cyclone O5B struck. Odisha then worked to upgrade its preparedness, which was tested when very severe cyclonic storm Phailin struck in 2013. It was able to bring down the number of deaths to 44 then, in spite of a wide arc of destruction: 13 million people were hit and half a million houses destroyed. The Odisha government and the Centre now have the task of rebuilding infrastructure. They should use the opportunity to upgrade technology, achieve cost efficiencies and build resilience to extreme weather, all of which can minimise future losses. Given the vulnerability of Odisha and Andhra Pradesh to cyclones, the frequency and intensity of which may be influenced by a changing climate, the Centre should press for global environmental funding under the UN framework to help in the rebuilding. Both States have received funding from the World Bank in cyclone risk mitigation efforts since 2011.

The priority in Odisha is to restore electricity and telecommunications, which will require massive manpower. This should be treated as a national mission. Public health interventions are paramount to avoid disease outbreaks. The State government has been able to restore some physical movement by opening up highways and district roads; the Centre has relieved tension among students by postponing the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test in Odisha. Overall, there is a sense of relief that in the midst of a national election the toll was effectively contained. Looking ahead, India must prepare for many more intense and frequent cyclones along the coastal States. Preparedness has to focus on building resilience and strengthening adaptation. This can be achieved through better-designed houses and cyclone shelters, good early warning systems, periodic drills and financial risk reduction through insurance. Early weather warnings hold the key to better management, and during the Fani episode the India Meteorological Department played a crucial role. Its commendable performance has been recognised by the UN as well. Odisha's experience, which coincides with similar devastation along east Africa this year, will be keenly followed at the UN Disaster Risk Reduction conference convening on May 13 in Geneva.

Endless crisis

The Maduro-Guaidó stand-off is deepening Venezuela's economic distress

Venezuelan Opposition leader Juan Guaidó has been trying to oust President Nicolas Maduro for months. Last week, in his most daunting effort yet, he called for a military uprising. Hours later, the U.S., which has recognised him as Venezuela's President, supported his bid. A few soldiers broke ranks with the military and joined him, along with tens of thousands of protesters who battled for two days with police and government supporters. Still, Mr. Guaidó failed to topple the Maduro regime. This was the third major attempt by Mr. Guaidó to seize the government. In January he declared himself President, saying Mr. Maduro's presidency was not legitimate as he had "rigged" last year's election. Since then, the U.S. has imposed sanctions on top Venezuelan government officials and the state-run oil company PDVSA on the calculation that these would make the already battered Venezuelan economy worse, rendering Mr. Maduro even more unpopular. In February, Mr. Guaidó launched another bid when he went to the Colombia border to accept U.S. aid, which the government had rejected. He called for mass protests, but Mr. Maduro survived. Last week's failed attempt was Mr. Guaidó's biggest setback so far.

It is evident that Venezuela is going through serious political and economic crises. Governance has broken down, with state institutions at war against one another. Mr. Guaidó is the President of the National Assembly and has the support of most Opposition parties. Mr. Maduro has the support of the executive branch, the military and the judiciary. While they fight, the most pressing problems remain unaddressed. Inflation is sky-high, food and medicine are scant, and millions have fled the country owing to its economic woes. Mr. Guaidó says he will solve the problems after Mr. Maduro is ousted. But the way he is trying to achieve his goal has pushed the country deeper into misery. The Opposition miscalculated the durability of the Maduro regime. Mr. Maduro's Socialist Party, thanks to the pro-poor policies under his predecessor Hugo Chavez, still commands loyal support among sections of society, especially among the poor. Second, even if the Opposition parties' narrative that Mr. Maduro lacks legitimacy is accepted, the military's support is pivotal if they want to remove him by force. Repeated attempts by Mr. Guaidó to win over the military have failed. Third, his over-reliance on the U.S. seems to have backfired. It only strengthened Mr. Maduro's argument that "imperialists" are behind the chaos. Mr. Maduro also has the backing of Russia, China and Cuba. The way forward is not further clashes, but mutual talks aimed at resolving their differences and giving primacy to rebuilding both the economy and the governance system. If they continue on the path of confrontation, Venezuela will be in permanent crisis.

The difference between a job and work

Work satisfies a deeper urge than livelihood which, if denied, takes a significant political and social toll



KRISHNA KUMAR

Among the words that have infiltrated the vocabulary of common sense during the recent past, none is as egregious as 'aspiration'. Its rampant use in the economic and political spheres has dented public awareness of reality. In the sphere of economics, in terms of both policies and propaganda, the use of 'aspiration' in various combinations and contexts has pushed aside common sense knowledge about life's necessities. Things have come to a point where something as important as the need to work in order to make a living is referred to as aspiration. As political coinage, 'aspirational India' connotes revolutionary change. The users of this phrase ignore the long and tiring struggle of countless youth to find work. The vast majority spends years waiting, or in 'time pass' as an economist has called it. Those who portray India as 'aspirational' look at other basic needs in a similar vein. The security that a house gives and the basic amenities of life one needs in a house are deemed to be part of an aspirational package. We are not far from the day when the desire to avail one's constitutional rights will be treated as a sign of aspiration.

In an ethos where words and meanings are mutating fast, we must ask whether a right — any right — can be described as an aspiration. The debate whether the right to work is fundamental or not will hopefully be settled one day; for now, let us talk about

one's need to have some income, preferably by working. Someone who has no income can only survive as a dependent. That is how children and the elderly often do. The family provides the cover that the state does not explicitly acknowledge. In our society, the family provides a financial cover to the young for remarkably long periods. No wonder, university and college teachers routinely refer to their adult students as children. No matter how much you quarrel with this usage, its hold in academic institutions persists. One reason for this is that the family continues to support a student well past the official age of childhood. Parents go to remarkable lengths to support their progeny through expensive higher professional education for howsoever many years it takes.

Degrees and jobs

When they don't find employment, what do students do? Many enrol in another course, aiming to qualify for one more degree or diploma. They keep gathering qualifications, hoping that more qualifications will get them higher-level employment one day. Things seldom work out that way. More qualifications don't necessarily lead to better employment prospects. When a potential job slot does appear, you are told you are over-qualified. British sociologist Ronald Dore studied this phenomenon and presented his analysis in what soon became a classic title, *The Diploma Disease*. This book tells us that the tendency among youth to gather qualifications leads to devaluation of degrees. Dore was interested in the comparative study of industrial economies. He noticed that in Sri Lanka, only half the graduates in any given year ended up finding a job. That was in the 1970s; things are



now worse. Although Dore did not study India, his observations were equally applicable here. Bureaucratisation had led to strong linkages between paper qualifications and selection for employment. When Rajiv Gandhi spoke about the need to de-link degrees from jobs, he was referring to the problem Dore had spotted.

Today, when people say that educational standards are declining, they are in fact responding to devaluation of degrees. They feel that a certificate or degree does not mean what it did some time back, both in terms of knowledge and its value in the job market. People's memories are often subjective, but the phenomenon they are talking about is real. Quite often, the reason for devaluation of degrees is that institutions cannot cope with the increased number of candidates without letting norms become lax. Stagnant financial resources are often an additional reason why institutions cannot cope with swollen enrolment.

To say that the increasing clientele of higher and professional education is a sign of greater aspiration in society is to derive a misleading conclusion from the proliferation of degree-holders and degree-vendors. No doubt the market of degrees is wider today, but that has little to do with aspirations. Young people want to work

and have an income; when they find neither, they occupy themselves by enrolling in yet another educational venture, without necessarily wanting to do so. When a relative or well-wisher asks, 'What are you doing these days?', it hardly feels nice to reply, 'Nothing.' To name a course you are pursuing now feels better. As economist and planner Santosh Mehrotra has pointed out (*The Hindu*, Editorial page, "The shape of the jobs crisis", February 13, 2019), the number of young people who are 'not in education, employment or training' — 'NEET' — has been steadily increasing. According to his estimate, there are more than 115 million young people in this category, representing what he calls a 'potential lumpen fodder' available for political misuse. This analysis does not imply that if we cannot employ our youth, let us keep them enrolled in one course or another. Prolonging student life will not solve the problem posed by disappearance of work.

Job versus work

The term 'job' is now more common than 'work', indicating a shift in perspective. It also signifies the emergence of a new ideology that reinforces the traditional denial of dignity to work. 'Job' and 'work' differ in that a job is what someone gives you whereas work is what you do. For some kinds of work, the two meanings may be close or similar, but this is not true for many other kinds. If the political economy is eating up work opportunities, it can still keep on creating jobs artificially, to avoid social instability. Short-term jobs are often used to cite the success of an economic policy which, in reality, is decimating work and de-skilling people. This is often done in the name of modernisation. Driverless trains and automated manufactur-

ing are presented as symbols of progress. An automation-obsessed economy thrives by maintaining millions in replaceable, short-term positions involving low-skill tasks. Such jobs make it impossible for lower-income participants in the work force to gain experience and a self-identity associated with a specialised skill.

Those who justify all-round automation as a legitimate means of economic progress define the term 'skill' in a sense quite different from how it was understood so far. In its conventional sense, skill implies a specialised expertise that grows with experience and imparts a personal identity. Jobs that vanish after a brief period, forcing the work force to leave and look for re-training for a new short-term stint, offer no genuine opportunities for developing a skill.

An ideological trap

To treat such job-culture as a symbol of progress is to fall into an ideological trap. Supporters of reckless automation say that it represents a natural course of technological progress. They also suggest that there is no alternative to automation, so we have no choice in the matter now. This approach echoes a theory of destiny. It assumes that the human desire to find meaning in work and cultivate a personal identity through skill will soon surrender to economic pressure and acceptance of vulnerable jobs as a permanent fact of life. This is a rather limited and myopic view. The history of work shows that work is more than a means of livelihood. It satisfies deeper an urge which, if ignored or denied, takes significant political and social tolls.

Krishna Kumar is a former director of the NCERT

Talking fair trade in Delhi

At the WTO mini-ministerial meet, developing countries must make a case for stable and transparent multilateral trade



SEEMA BATHLA & ABHISHEK JHA

India will host the second ministerial meet of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), on May 13-14, 2019. To discuss the interests of developing and least developed countries in global trade, this informal meet will also focus on the accusation by the U.S. that these economies benefit from exemptions meant for the poorer nations.

Overall, it could be a preparatory meeting to set a common agenda at the 12th Ministerial Conference, scheduled for June 2020 at Astana, Kazakhstan. The 11th Ministerial Conference (Buenos Aires, December 2017) collapsed despite efforts by 164 WTO members to evolve a consensus on several issues. The U.S. has refused a reduction in subsidies and also pulled back on its commitment to find a perennial solution to public stockholding — an issue central to developing and less developed countries. In fact, the deadlock left many trade analysts wondering whether this was the beginning of the end for the WTO.

Despite the earlier outcomes of the ministerial meetings, the Delhi meet has created some hope of it being a platform to resuscitate the WTO. The issues under discussion will relate to protectionist measures, digital trade, fisheries, subsidies, environmental goods, standardisation and implementation

of sanitary and phytosanitary measures, and other matters ripe for negotiation and agreement, mainly investment facilitation. From a plurilateral approach toward multilateralism, members may also ensure the sanctity and 'drivability' of the WTO. It is, therefore, indispensable to bring mutual accord, mainly on the timelines, to implement policies as an outcome of talks.

Bridging the gaps

It may be useful to recollect that the WTO replaced the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) as an international organisation mainly to overcome tussles over trade interests. The economies of the developing and less developed world (with little bargaining power) were unable to gain market access in most of the developed economies (which were influential in negotiations), especially when it came to agricultural commodities. The deadlock on the issue of agricultural trade negotiations, first in the late 1980s and then in 2017, was no surprise. The disagreements between developed countries (the European Union and the U.S.) and developing countries (Malaysia, Brazil and India) to discipline the farm regime in their favour continue, thereby threatening the WTO's comprehensive development agenda.

The expectations of developing countries from trade also get belied due to sizeable support by the developed nations to their farmers in a situation of market failure and other uncertainties. The support through subsidies tends to bring distortions in commodity prices. The Organisation for Economic



Cooperation and Development estimates the quantum of subsidies by developed nations to vary from \$300 to \$325 billion annually, which is much higher than that estimated for developing countries. This has become a bone of contention in trade talks as farm lobbies in the U.S., Europe and Japan have steadily exercised political clout to influence officials and lawmakers to continue giving subsidies to farmers.

Another point of concern is that developed countries design and implement stringent non-tariff measures (NTMs) which exacerbate the problems faced by poor countries that are willing to export. NTMs significantly add to the cost of trading. However, the costs of acquiescence with many NTMs are asymmetrical across exporters because compliance depends on production facilities, technical know-how and infrastructure — factors that are usually inadequate in developing economies. These countries are, therefore, unable to compete in international markets and hardly gain from sectors with comparative advantage such as agriculture, textiles and apparels.

Developing countries are willing to break the deadlock on these issues and are preparing a common ground to jolt the mandate of the global trade body. India, in

particular, seeks amendment of laws on unilateral action by members on trade issues and a resolution of the WTO's dispute settlement system. The expectation is that the meeting may lead to policy guidance on issues such as global norms to protect traditional knowledge from patenting by corporates, protection through subsidies, e-commerce, food security and continuation of special and differential treatment to poor economies.

Breaking the deadlock

Importantly, if the interests of developing and less developed countries are not addressed, *ceteris paribus*, jargon, convoluted negotiations and dictums will become trivial now and in the future. For example, the 10th Ministerial Conference (Nairobi, December 2015) laid emphasis on agriculture trade. But it was a setback to most agrarian economies, including India and in Africa, when developed countries directly challenged their models of food security designed for the poor. The outcome eloquently showed the constraints of a 'multilateral negotiation system' where the need for agreement and not compromise prevails and allows any member, no matter how small, to block any progress on all issues. In what has become an increasingly politicised environment, members with wide and divergent interests have simply halted the process and refused to negotiate in good faith across a spectrum of issues.

There was a similar outcome at Buenos Aires in 2017. Developed nations created alliances to prepare the ground to push nascent

issues such as investment facilitation, rules for e-commerce, gender equality and subsidy on fisheries, while most developing nations were unable to fulfil or implement rudimentary dictums. For instance, e-commerce has been a key agenda following the second ministerial conference, in Geneva in 1998. It was agreed to 'establish a work programme to examine global e-commerce, with a focus on the relationship between e-commerce and existing agreements. It generated a sizeable debate on the fringes of the conference as many accredited NGOs opposed it and raised concerns that it was a push by dominant global players. The underlying fear was it might allow unfettered access to data, which could then be processed and exploited for profit' by developed nations, mainly the U.S.

The Delhi meeting can be a breakthrough if members negotiate these issues in a convergent manner. The time is opportune for developing countries to voice their concerns and push for a stable and transparent environment for multilateral trade. India must do its homework to focus on the unresolved issues and address the newer ones which are of interest to developed nations, mainly investment facilitation. The WTO needs to be sustained as countries need an international platform to formulate trade rules and bring convergence on divergent matters.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Early warnings

The lesson from handling cyclone Fani is that advancements in weather forecasting do aid the authorities in minimising losses. But the focus should now be on creating infrastructure that is resilient enough to withstand the onslaught of nature's fury. This is more important now with climate change-induced extreme weather becoming the norm rather than the exception.

M. JEYARAM,
Sholavandan, Tamil Nadu

Submission

The government appears to be doggedly challenging the

admissibility of documents on the Rafale fighter aircraft deal submitted by petitioners (Page 1, "PMO 'monitoring' Rafale deal progress not interference: govt.", May 5). Taking shelter under the guise of 'sensitivity of documents' is no ground to cover wrongdoings.

The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) seems to have created a fait accompli for the Ministry of Defence (MoD). For argument's sake, if we take that the PMO was indeed monitoring progress, it brings two points to the fore. First, the PMO has shown its lack of faith in the competency of the MoD.

Second, why does the PMO not monitor other ministries to the same level and extent?

DEEPAK SINGHAL,
Noida

'They visited India'

The Sri Lankan army chief's startling claim that some of the Easter Sunday bombers had "visited Kerala, Bengaluru and Kashmir" cannot be brushed aside (Page 1, May 5). Going by the General's statement, India seems to have had a narrow escape too. The government must deal with local terror with an iron hand.

SRAVANA RAMACHANDRAN,
Chennai

Points of conflict

As a senior banker and risk management specialist, I feel a more detailed analysis is needed as far as the issues of disclosure and "willful defaulters" being the point of conflict between the Reserve Bank of India, rights activists and the Supreme Court are concerned ("FAQ" page, "Points of conflict", May 5). The worrisome aspect of corporate finance is that it is happening under the watch of the government and banks.

Faults in banks will be exposed if inspection reports become public information — a step that could undermine the

financial system. Disclosure could also give rise to questions on the role of RBI directors on the boards of banks and its actions on bank inspection reports.

While disclosure is necessary, defining the features of 'disclosure' is important. Disclosure can take the form of a template to screen out sensitive information. Banks adopt a committee-based approach to take decisions on corporate advances. Most

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

The headline of a story on Namami Gange mission (May 4, 2019) has been amended to read: "Only 10 of 100 new sewage projects on Ganga have been completed."

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What we need today is social justice

The victims of capitalism have always been the disadvantaged sections of society



D. RAJA

The world celebrated the 200th birth anniversary of Karl Marx, which was on May 5, 2018, for a year. Marx was not like other philosophers who interpreted the world in various ways; he made it a point to change it. Marx and Friedrich Engels laid the formulations for the theory and practice of scientific socialism. They applied dialectics to the study of human society and human consciousness. They strove for the liberation of humanity from all forms of discrimination and exploitation. They argued that Parliament should be used as a forum to articulate the concerns of the working people. Marxism as a science, as an ideology, and as a methodology keeps demonstrating its relevance every day.

In the present election campaign to the Lok Sabha, the Left parties have been raising several ideological and political questions in order to save the Republic of India so that it ensures a dignified life to all the people and empowers them in every respect. But it is ironic that several ideological questions are being raised over the relevance of the Left and its future in India. While admitting the widespread influence of communist ideology, some people say communism is dead and the Left as a political force is dead.

The march of capitalism

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, some proclaimed that there was no alternative to neoliberalism. Since then, the so-called triumphant march of neoliberal capitalism has seen many hurdles, such as the 2008 financial crisis. The worst victims of this march and its consequent crises have always been the disadvantaged sections. This shows the presence of class conflict in society. Needless to say, the vulnerabilities of the disadvantaged are a creation of capitalism itself. The French economist Thomas Piketty exposed the essence of neoliberalism, which leads to unprecedented inequalities and disparities.

In the Indian context, liberalisation



"Only by saying a big 'no' to brutal capitalism can we remedy the problems that we face today." Workers walk past a portrait of Karl Marx in Ernakulam, Kerala. ■ THULASI KAKKAT

of the economy was initiated on the premise that the seemingly socialist and centrally planned economy had outlived its utility and that private ownership and market forces would efficiently replace public sector undertakings and provisions. Such an opening up of the economy was also tried in other parts of the world with only one consequence — unprecedented concentration of wealth in the hands of a few and a marked shift in the actual centres of power. Crony capitalism was soon making fast inroads into the policy-making coteries of India, and this new-found confidence of the private sector bore fruits. But for whom? Definitely not for the masses, as shown in a recent study which named India as the second most unequal society in the world. According to Credit Suisse Research Institute's Global Wealth Report, 1% of the Indian population owns 51.5% of the wealth in the country, and the top 10% own about three-fourths of the wealth. On the other hand, the bottom 60%, the majority of the population, own 4.7% of the total wealth.

Public-funded education and health are the worst hit by capitalism. Education spending by the Centre has been showing a downward trend — from 6.15% in the 2014-15 Budget to 3.71% in the 2017-18 Budget. Instead of expanding higher education horizontally (to more far-flung areas) and vertically (to the disadvan-

tagged sections of society), the Central government is allowing the Higher Education Financing Agency to allow the private sector to dominate the education sector and make higher education a distant dream for the deprived classes. In the health sector too, the government has chosen private insurance companies and private healthcare lobbies as its partners, taking away the attention from public healthcare infrastructure and its upgradation.

In a country like India, which is plagued with social problems such as widespread poverty, a deepening agricultural crisis, a very high unemployment rate, and abysmal health indicators, giving away public sector assets to private players and shifting the discourse away from realising socialism could prove fatal for a vast majority of the population.

Rhetoric over real issues

In India, in this election season, real issues of the people are considered secondary to vague appeals of nationalism and national security. The last five years are witness to the fact that the ruling elites of India favour improvement in 'Ease of Doing Business' to improvement in the Human Development Index. India is doing badly on many parameters — nutrition, peace, human development, and press freedom — while a section of the media is celebrating improvement in the Ease of Doing Business

Index. In other words, ensuring that people live a decent life is subordinate to ensuring that business becomes easier for crony capitalists.

The ruling party's appeals to nationalism and its use of the sacrifices of the Army for votes are attempts to hide its failure in giving employment to the youth, providing remunerative prices to farmers, ensuring social justice to the marginalised sections, and creating a conducive environment for the overall development of society. The government has presided over the gradual undermining of constitutional institutions, the giving away of national assets to the private sector and the increase in violence against minorities. It brands any opposition to its policies and views as 'anti-national'. All of these, however, are symptoms of a deeper problem. One has to look beyond the cacophony of high-pitched TV debates that are centred on sensationalism. As Noam Chomsky wrote, "It is easy to be carried away by the sheer horror of what the daily press reveals and to lose sight of the fact that this is merely the brutal exterior of a deeper crime, of commitment to a social order that guarantees endless suffering and humiliation and denial of elementary human rights."

The tying of national interest to global capital has not only produced adverse and livelihood-threatening consequences for the masses of the country, it has also deprived India of the higher moral pedestal in foreign policy. Deep-rooted socialism is the only true alternative to this 'post-truth' world where rhetoric has dislodged real issues.

Marx and Engels wrote in *The Communist Manifesto*: "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles... [where] oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight." It is the duty and the responsibility of socialism to carry on that struggle for humanity, and to bring politics back to where it belongs — to the people. Only by saying a big 'no' to brutal capitalism and by following what the Constitution envisages in its Preamble — social justice — can we remedy the problems that we face today.

D. Raja is national secretary, Communist Party of India, and a member of Parliament

FROM THE READERS' EDITOR

Seeking and seeing parallels does not undermine science

A recent article on black holes in this newspaper has provoked an age-old debate



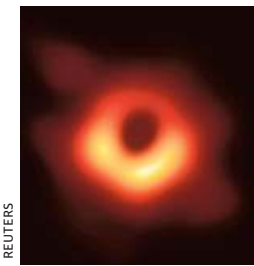
A.S. PANNEERSELVAM

The *Magazine* supplement of this newspaper recently carried a speculative piece on black holes by Vikram Zutshi. Mr. Zutshi, fascinated by the first-ever image of a black hole that was unveiled by astronomers in April, wrote that there are many striking parallels between Eastern thought and modern astrophysics, especially in their imagining of space, time and the birth of the universe.

Responses from scientists

Ajit M. Srivastava, Professor at the Institute of Physics, Bhubaneswar, wrote to us saying that he trusted only *The Hindu* for reliable science coverage in India, but that the publication of Mr. Zutshi's article had shaken his faith in the newspaper. Ravinder Banyal of the Indian Institute of Astrophysics, Bengaluru, wrote a stinging mail: "The author has absolutely no idea about the process of discoveries and underlying rigour

that mark the success of modern science. How can such [an] article evade editorial scrutiny and manage to find place in a respected newspaper? Conflating mythology with the findings of modern science has already created enough confusion and misunderstanding among [the] common public. Rationality and scientific outlook is our only hope to guard against the mighty tides of obscurantism and propaganda that need to be opposed and not encouraged. As a practising scientist, I appeal [to] you to kindly retract this article and issue a clarification for the benefit of your readers." Arnab Bhattacharya, Professor at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research in Mumbai, was equally livid in his response to the article. He wrote: "It is easy to conflate mythology and history, which, combined with a poor understanding of science, leads to an article which is honestly filled with logical fallacies. (Just because a particular deity is represented in black does not imply a connection with a black hole)."



BEUTERS

What was missed in this entire debate was the simple fact that the article was a soft feature; it was a personal and emotional response to a certain discovery. It was not a news article and it did not try to peddle religiosity or pseudoscience. In an earlier column, "Carnival of conversation" (November 30, 2015), I had explained in detail this newspaper's wisdom to draw a distinction between faith and bigotry, and its unwavering commitment to retaining the space for a multireligious and pluralistic public discourse. In another column, "Tall claim is not science" (January 18, 2016), I had spelt out the rules that govern the reporting of science and health stories. This newspaper walks the extra mile to give well-rounded stories on science and technology.

A newspaper publishes both reports and reflective pieces. The reflective pieces sometimes tend to draw parallels between an event and seemingly unrelated worlds. Even scientists have done this. Robert Jungk, in *Brighter Than a Thousand Suns: A Personal History of the Atomic Scientists*, records the reflections of J. Robert Oppenheimer about Trinity, the code name of the first detonation of a nuclear weapon. Oppenheimer quoted a short verse from the *Bhagavad Gita*: "If the radiance of a thousand suns/ Were to burst forth at once into the sky/ That would be like the splendour of the Mighty One/ I am become Death./ The shatterer of worlds."

The idea of scientific temper
In India, in the early 1980s, there was an intense debate about the idea of scientific temper. On July 19, 1981, the Nehru Centre in Bombay released a document by P.N. Haksar, along with Raja Ramanna and P.M. Bhargava, which was titled, 'A Statement on Scientific Temper'. It called for fostering scientific temper with care at the "individual, institutional, social and political levels". In his counterstatement, social scientist Ashis Nandy argued for a humanistic temper as he felt the argument for a scientific temper forecloses the space for criticism of critics. The feature in the *Magazine* is a continuation of this debate.

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SINGLE FILE

A battle won by many

Demagoguery aimed at appropriating the result of a hard-won battle against terrorism will diminish its effect

ANMOLAM & FARHEEN AHMAD



The persistent efforts of India, with the express support of France, the U.K. and the U.S., and the acquiescence of China, culminated in the designation of Masood Azhar as a global terrorist by the UN Security Council. This has come as a breather at a time of dwindling faith in international law and related institutions.

The UNSC said: "Masood Azhar was listed on 1 May 2019... as being associated with Al-Qaida for 'participating in the financing, planning, facilitating, preparing, or perpetrating of acts or activities by, in conjunction with, under the name of, on behalf of, or in support of', 'supplying, selling or transferring arms and related material to', 'recruiting for', 'otherwise supporting acts or activities of', and 'other acts or activities indicating association with' Jaish-i-Mohammed [JeM]." The UNSC recognised that Azhar founded the JeM upon his release from prison in India in exchange for 155 hostages held on an Indian Airlines airplane that had been hijacked to Kandahar. It said that he has been found to be financially supporting the JeM since its inception. However, it made no mention of his role in any of the attacks against India, including the recent one in Pulwama, which was mentioned in the original proposal.

The immediate impact of the listing would subject Azhar to an assets freeze, travel ban, and an arms embargo. Assets freeze means that all states are required to freeze without delay the funds and other financial assets or economic resources of designated individuals and entities. By virtue of the arms embargo, all nations are required to prevent the direct or indirect supply, sale and transfer from their territories or by their nationals outside their territories of arms and related material of all types to designated individuals and entities. This resolution is expected to have a long-term impact and is likely to have a preventive and deterrent effect on terrorist activities globally, and particularly in South Asia.

While this is a big diplomatic win for India, showcasing this as only an individual accomplishment is a parochial and imprudent approach. A nuanced analysis of international diplomacy shows that India's foreign policy decisions depict more of a continuity than a change. Any indulgence in whataboutery for petty political gains will clearly harm all political players. Facts affirm that compromises are often made in international negotiations. Diplomacy can neither be critiqued in rallies, nor steered by shrill mass media debates. It is important to appreciate that any form of demagoguery aimed at appropriating the result of a hard-won battle against terrorism will only arrest its enduring potential and diminish the real value of this extraordinary feat.

Anmolam runs a non-profit organisation called BDLAAAW, and Farheen Ahmad is a research scholar who is pursuing his Ph.D. in international law from South Asian University, New Delhi



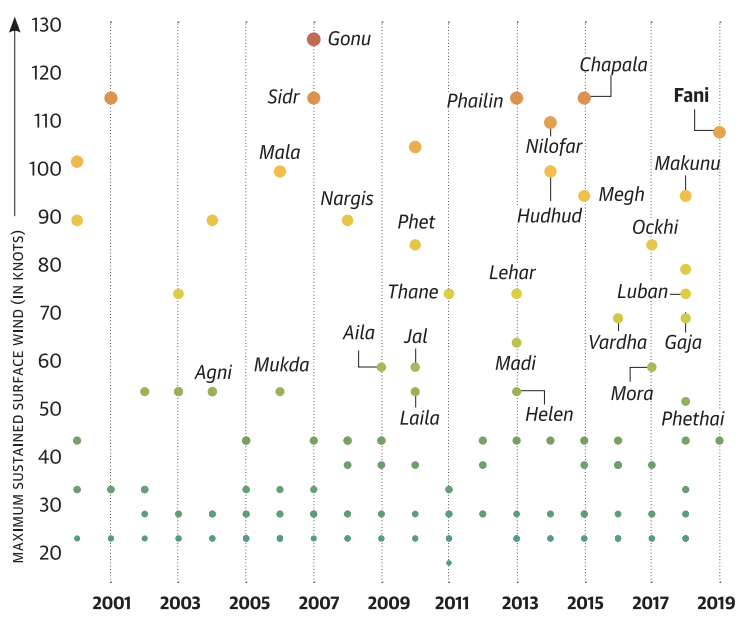
DATA POINT

Fani, an unusual storm

Fani, one of the biggest storms in years to make landfall in India, is a unique cyclone for two reasons. One, April is an unusual month for a cyclone (only 3% of cyclones have occurred in this month since 1891 in India). And two, only once before (in 1966) did a super cyclone form over the Bay of Bengal in April and make landfall in India. By Vignesh Radhakrishnan

Speeding list

Fani's maximum speed of 108 knots makes it the seventh fastest cyclone to have occurred in the North Indian Ocean since 2000. The chart plots all the 178 depressions (D*)/cyclonic storms (CS)/severe cyclonic storms (SCS) that have been recorded since 2000. The higher-up a storm in the chart, the higher the Maximum Sustained Surface Wind (in knots). Storm Gonu was the strongest (127 knots). It originated in the Arabian Sea and affected Oman, the UAE, Iran and Pakistan



A rarity... | Of the 1,528 D/CS/SCS over the North Indian Ocean since 1891, only 3% occurred in April. The table shows all the recorded storms between 1891 and 2019

Month	D	CS	SCS	Total
Jan.	10	7	2	19
Feb.	5	1	1	7
March	4	3	2	9
April	12	13	20	45
May	39	25	59	123
June	107	43	22	172
July	142	38	9	190
Aug.	190	29	4	223
Sept.	162	34	20	216
Oct.	120	66	51	237
Nov.	61	53	83	197
Dec.	37	27	26	90

... but high on severity | The probability of a depression getting converted into a CS/SCS is high in April. Between 1891 and 2019, 44% of all storms in April were SCS

Month	D	CS	SCS
Jan.	53%	37%	11%
Feb.	71%	14%	14%
Mar.	44%	33%	22%
Apr.	27%	29%	44%
May	32%	20%	48%
Jun.	62%	25%	13%
Jul.	75%	20%	5%
Aug.	85%	13%	2%
Sept.	75%	16%	9%
Oct.	51%	28%	22%
Nov.	31%	27%	42%
Dec.	41%	30%	29%

FROM THE HINDU ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MAY 6, 1969

Dr. Zakir Husain laid to rest

President Zakir Husain passed into history as he was laid to rest with full military honours to-night [May 5] amidst groves of blooming oleander, bougainvillea and gold mohur in Jamia Millia here [New Delhi] which he nurtured into a premier educational institution over the decades. The President's body was lowered, amidst benedictions, into the grave, and sprinkled with handfuls of earth by close relations and friends, including the acting President, Mr. V.V. Giri, the Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, and the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Morarji Desai. Citizens of Delhi in their thousands stood still for several hours in the sun along the 15-kilometre procession route from Rashtrapati Bhavan to the burial ground at Jamia Millia to have a glimpse of the body of a great humanist that the late President was. The gun-carriage bearing the body of Dr. Zakir Husain moved slowly along Rajpath, India Gate, Wellesley Road, Mathura Road and on to Jamia Millia.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MAY 6, 1919.

Message of Congratulations.

Sir M. Bohnaggee has received [in London] replies to the Addresses of thanks to the King Emperor and Premier and of congratulations to Lord Sinha on his peerage and appointment. The Address to the King was signed by numerous leading Indians in England. It expressed gratification at the recognition of the eligibility of Indians for such rank and position as proving His Majesty's desire to raise India to a state equally important as the Dominions. Mr. Montagu wrote that the King Emperor had read the address with great satisfaction. Mr. Montagu also expressed his own appreciation of the spirit animating the action of the signatories. The Premier wrote from Paris that he much appreciated the tribute. Lord Sinha wrote from Paris that he was deeply grateful for the congratulations.

POLL CALL

Polling agent

It is not possible for a candidate to be physically present at every polling station on the day of voting in her constituency. Therefore, the law allows the candidate, or his/her election agent, to appoint a polling agent to act as a representative at every polling station to watch his/her interests. The work of polling agents includes ensuring that EVMs and VVPATs are in order, detecting and preventing impersonation of voters, and helping to secure and seal the EVMs, VVPATs and election records after polling is over. Those holding government positions and those who have been given security cover at the state's expense, including Ministers, are not allowed to be polling agents.

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