

The American media diary

Why local news rocks and other observations from the mecca of the global media and entertainment industry



MEDIASCOPE

VANITA KOHLI-KHANDEKAR

Early on Monday morning, we got back from a three week holiday to the United States of America. Here are three observations from my first

ever trip to the world's largest media and entertainment market and the industry with the biggest global footprint.

One, local news dominates. Sure local newspapers are dying and there is phenomenal stress on national ones too. But switch on the television and irrespective of the city you are in, the options for local news are huge. On news channels in Niagara, the news was all about Niagara, the little town that houses the falls. Move a little further to Buffalo and that town dominates. Go to Chicago, Houston or New York and the leading story could be a local accident, a weird fight between two women in the local mall or even the weather that determines each day for the working American. This is peppered with news

on scientific discoveries, research, holiday tips by reporters in a city or a suburb who are part of that community.

Of course, there is political news but it is not the only thing and there are none of those ten-window discussions pretending to be news. Given the stressed, unprofitable and overcrowded news television industry in India, can a few channels try this simple trick of reporting pure news, at a very local level? You could argue that India has 400 news channels, scores of them very local. For example: Andhra Pradesh or Kerala have several Telugu or Malayalam channels. However, local in India is more about local languages, a bit of regional news and most of it political. Maybe exploring the possibilities of news other than politi-

cal could be a first step — it is rare for Indian news channels to talk about research, science, or even interesting local developments at length.

Two, marketing and advertising of anything in the US is at another level. We flew United Airlines throughout the trip and as luck would have it, it had a tie up with the about-to-be-released *Spider-Man: Far from Home*. From the napkins on the flight to mini-trailers of the film on our in-flight screens to the posters at airports among scores of other things, there is no way anybody could have not remembered that *Spider-Man: Far from Home* is releasing on July 2 and that United has a role to play in the film. Of the half a dozen cities that we visited, every single one had some stuff around Spider-Man. Not just Spider-Man, the local realtor, lawyer, medical centre were all big advertisers, on posters, on TV channels or even on the screen inside taxis. In India, not all brands manage to break through the way even small local businesses in the US do. Maybe it is something to do with the way media is

planned or with how strong local media — especially outdoor — is in many of these cities.

Three, Americans, to my surprise, are more polite and friendly than Europeans. Every one of the people we spoke to or asked for help, responded, some beyond the call of duty. But what struck me again and again was the feeling that everyone was talking as if they are working in a film, their deep voices and accent was straight out of a Hollywood film. That is when I realised that Hollywood films may make two-thirds of their money outside of America, but they are largely based in America, with American actors and their voices. And for decades a large part of my exposure to America has been through hundreds of Hollywood films. The accents and styles of real Americans are a part of their films. What I was hearing and seeing was reality. Art had imitated life so much that real life seemed like art to me.

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CHINESE WHISPERS

Slogan war

The oath taking ceremony of new Lok Sabha members turned into a spectacle on Tuesday. If Bharatiya Janata Party members raised slogans of *Jai Sri Ram* and *Bharat Mata Ki Jai* either at the start or the end of their oaths, some from the Bahujan Samaj Party ended their oaths with *Jai Bhim* and *Jai Samajwad*. The Lok Sabha saw a verbal duel between the BJP and the Trinamool Congress MPs from West Bengal. After several BJP MPs concluded their oaths with *Jai Sri Ram*, Trinamool Congress (TMC) MPs raised the slogan *Jai Bengal, Jai Maa Durga, Jai Hind* and even Mamata Banerjee *zindabad*. Kalyan Banerjee of the TMC recited the *Durga Path* after concluding his oath while his party colleague Abu Taher Khan began his oath with *Bismillah, ar-Rahman, ar-Rahim* and ended with *Allahu Akbar*. After BJP members chanted *Jai Sri Ram* when Mamata Banerjee's nephew Abhishek Banerjee's name was called for oath, he said even Modi was not so popular in the House.

Didi's medicine



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee (pictured) was benevolence personified during the protracted meeting that ended the government-doctor stalemate in the state on

Tuesday. Even before the meeting started, Banerjee held out an olive branch for the doctors by sending out word that she had agreed to their rather brash demand for live broadcast of the meeting. As the meeting got underway the doctors clapped when "Didi" promised stern action if their security was compromised and finally gave in when she asked them to make a "mishti kore (sweet)" promise to withdraw the strike. The formal withdrawal of the strike came about three hours after the meeting ended at 5.40pm.

Slipping on water

The ruling All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in Tamil Nadu had its foot-in-the-mouth moment earlier this week when SP Velumani, Minister for Municipal Administration, Rural Development and Implementation of Special Programme, rubbished news reports on the water shortage in the state saying they were "manufactured". That statement came even as the state government announced it would set up a monitoring committee to look into the water supply related issue. Velumani later backtracked and said he had chaired a review meeting with senior government officials to determine the steps needed to address the water crisis in the state.

Labour reforms: NDA has its work cut out

The reforms hold the key to India's low-growth, high-unemployment paradigm but the government may struggle to push them through this time as well

SOMESH JHA

Now that the government has officially acknowledged that unemployment is at an all-time high of 6.1 per cent and the National Statistical Office has shown that Gross Domestic Product has hit a five-year low, minds in the new government have been concentrated on labour reforms as the first step on the road to economic revival.

This will mark Prime Minister Narendra Modi's second attempt at reorienting labour policies to augment workers' rights as well as giving more flexibility to businesses in hiring labour for their factories.

The government has already swung into action with Home Minister Amit Shah chairing a meeting on labour reforms last Tuesday with his Cabinet colleagues, including Labour and Employment Minister Santosh Gangwar, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Commerce and Industries Minister Piyush Goyal.

Soon after the meet, the labour and employment ministry already moved two set of laws — one on social security and the other related to occupation safety health and working conditions — for seeking comments from other ministries.

Flexibility in the hire-and-fire policy has been a key demand of trade and industry for at least two decades, but no government has been able to deliver meaningful change. Thanks to a law set in place under Indira Gandhi, factories with more than 100 workers need to seek permission from the government to retrench workers or close their units. In 2001, Yashwant Sinha, as finance minister in the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government, had tried to introduce a small



LABOURING FOR REFORM

Key points of CII's 100-day memorandum

- Codification of labour laws
- Labour inspection and documentation process should be simplified and standardised
- Fixed-term employment should be implemented at the state-level for allowing flexibility
- Government should desist from fixing a national floor for minimum wages and give the power to the states
- Provide child care subsidies to enhance female labour force participation rate under Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017



a silver bullet of sorts to the low growth and high unemployment paradigm that currently assails the Indian economy. So how can the Modi government sort out these issues in its second term? First, a look at its labour reform proposals it had set out in its first term.

After assuming power in 2014 with a full majority of its own, the BJP-led NDA government started an ambitious process of reforming labour laws in the form of codes aimed at making the framework less cumbersome with a variety of alterations. It had planned four codes each for industrial relations, wages, social security and welfare, and occupational safety, health and working conditions. To this end, 35 central labour laws were to be converted into four codes that would have had the virtue of streamlin-

ing labour relations. But none of the proposed code Bills could be converted into a law principally because neither trade unions nor industry representatives came on board. The unions had raised the most objections to the codes on industrial relations and social security.

And some industry representatives feel that four codes amounted to three too many.

"We need a single code for labour laws instead of four codes. Why should there be a multiplicity of definitions and authorities? It helps no one and is a major hurdle for the industry. A universal enterprise number should also be pushed which can be linked to the Goods and Services Tax (GST) instead of an establishment obtaining multiple set of numbers from authorities," said

Manish Sabharwal, chairman of Teamlease Services, a recruitment and online jobs portal.

Sabharwal added that the government should also make the Employees' Provident Fund scheme, currently compulsory for all non-contractual employees, an optional benefit reducing costs for employers and increasing in-hand salaries for employees by doing away with compulsory savings. Those employees who prefer some sort of long-term saving should be given the option to choose between the EPF and the National Pension Scheme, he added.

These suggestions, too, have been in the air for at least five years, but with the government announcing a fresh initiative, the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) held a series of internal meetings to discuss the immediate changes required in the labour law framework. Those discussions have been distilled into a 100-day memorandum, which it submitted to the labour and employment ministry recently.

In fact, to lessen the cost burden on employers, the government last week decided to reduce the total rate of contribution towards the Employees' State Insurance scheme from 6.5 per cent to 4 per cent for the first time in over two decades. This is expected to give an annual relief to the tune of ₹8,000 crore-₹9,000 crore to employers who have to make a contribution for employees earning below ₹21,000 a month towards insurance.

Other key demand of the industry is standardising the process for factory inspections. Though the government took steps to ease compliance related to labour laws, industries still need to maintain five registers (from 56 previously) under nine central labour laws and rules and have to maintain 12 forms (instead of 36 earlier) for three central Acts. Despite the NDA government's move to do away with manual inspection at the central level, industry is still grappling with this issue.

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INSIGHT

How India must fight the battle against piracy



MEGHA PATNAIK

The release of the 2019 status report on IPR infringement by the European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO) brings to light the disturbing fact that there are no methodical estimates of piracy in India. The music and film industries in India have massive domestic as well as global presence, generating revenues of about ₹10.7 billion and ₹175 billion respectively in 2018. Internet network coverage and speed along with mobile ownership has grown exponentially, allowing for both legal and illegal content to be accessed more easily. However, calculations of losses through piracy remain rudimentary.

The EUIPO together with the OECD have used global customs data to estimate the losses due to counterfeiting. For digital piracy, they "follow the money", using information from advertisements on piracy sites to calculate revenue losses. Their consumer survey results show that 10 per cent of respondents had intentionally accessed, downloaded or streamed content from illegal sources in the last year and another 24 per cent respondents were unsure whether the content they were viewing or downloading was through legal means.

A Global Online Piracy (GOP) study conducted across 13 countries in 2018 by the Institute for Information Law (IVIR), estimates piracy through understanding moral attitudes of consumers.

The domestic market picture is

more complex. There are severe financial constraints among households in India, and affordability and pricing plans are key. Similar to FMCG companies selling by the sachet, distributors may find that smaller installments are more affordable to Indian consumers due to cash constraints. The provision of cheap and easily accessible legal content through streaming services may lead consumers away from piracy. Payments remain a barrier for online services, which require card payments for subscriptions. Technological advancements in payment systems facilitated by industry stakeholders may help in this regard.

In a population where literacy is a limitation, financial and legal literacy remain barriers too. Consumers may have trouble understanding pricing plans of streaming content, or understanding the laws and regulations surrounding viewing and sharing pirated content, either locally or at a commercial level. Socio-cultural aspects surrounding movie viewing as well as live events, and a long history of public broadcasting in India may affect the willingness of consumers to pay for quality content.

A deeper problem that affects piracy is legal. The legislative response to tackle infringement has largely been to push for harsher penalties, without necessarily distinguishing between the kinds of piracy that can occur (for personal consumption versus on a commercial scale, for example). Although the power to legislate on copyright rests with the Centre, some states have included piracy in statutes dealing with other issues related to public order, which is a state subject. Piracy is punishable under the Goondas Act and similar legislations

in a few states, which were introduced to deal with drug trafficking, sex trafficking, physical violence and the like. The penalties provided for under these statutes include preventive detention, which is a disproportionate response to piracy, which is a civil wrong. There is also a lack of uniformity in the judicial response to piracy, with different high courts responding differently to cases involving infringement, and a broader problem of weak enforcement of laws by courts and the police due to resource constraints.

Consumer surveys based in India provide some information on the drivers of piracy but have not been used to impute aggregate losses. In the IMI Digital Music study in 2018 survey, many users stated that downloading for free through piracy stops them paying for streaming: 38 per cent of respondents said they prefer downloading music for free, and 32 per cent say they can download whatever they want for free. A 2016 report on the film exhibition sector by Nirmal Bang found similar trends, with 52.2 per cent of the respondents opting out of watching movies in multiplexes if the price of the ticket increases by 5-10 per cent.

A concerted effort can only occur if the government allocates resources towards estimating and understanding piracy. Building on the methodologies of the OECD and the EUIPO using customs and website data, and the consumer survey in the GOP study by the IVIR is the first step. Understanding the context for India would be next, including the role of law enforcement, literacy, payment systems and financial constraints, and socio-cultural factors. Only then can we curb piracy — facilitate users' access to content at affordable prices, while ensuring that the producers are able to earn from their investments in developing high quality content.

The author is faculty at ISI Delhi and a fellow at the Esya Centre. Views are personal

LETTERS

Common man suffers

After the Lok Sabha election, we have heard and read a lot about what the government must do. But no one, least of all the government, seems to worry about things that will make the life of an individual easier. Please don't tell me there are consumer courts and other courts — we all know how they function. Builders, banks, insurance companies, airlines, telecom companies, are all milking the consumer with one-sided laws and facilities.

Take a bank. It is quick to deduct a penalty for not maintaining a minimum balance. But what does the customer get when the ATM does not function or does not have cash? What can he do if his credit card bill does not reach him on time? Every time you fill a form for a new facility, the bank wants PAN even if you have already given it when the account was opened. Why this multiple demand for identity proof?

Insurance companies are very eager to sign you up but make a claim, and all sorts of questions are raised to deny or delay payments. Why can't it be mandated that the insurers must do their due diligence before writing a policy and no questions are asked thereafter?

Airlines are quick to charge for excess baggage and even deboard you if they have over-booked or you reach late, but what do we get if flights are delayed or cancelled? And why do the "free and fair" media not take this up? Is it because they get advertisement revenue and hence are part of the organised establishment mafia?

TR Ramaswami Mumbai

Give free hand to lenders

This refers to "The three Rs of public sector banking" (June 17). Though the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) has helped reduce the level of stressed assets of public sector banks, the government has to execute further reforms to ensure the IBC and judicial system speed up resolution and recovery of the non-performing assets (NPAs).

While banks, especially the state-owned ones, are engaged in driving social development too, they should be manifold in lending. Asset creation in some of the segments of the economy alone will not propel growth holistically, but pave the way for the rise of defaults. Lenders must lend to all segments to augment capital formation. They should not restrict lending for fear of defaults. NPAs are bound to happen. How to minimise or control the birth of NPAs is the foremost task of the lenders. The decision to create an asset must be a thorough process. Risk is an integral part of the economic activity and lenders can't escape risk. Managing risk to minimise its effects is crucial.

The consolidation of banks won't be of much help in bringing down the NPAs. The government must give a free hand to lenders in decision making.

VSK Pillai Kochi

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Let's get real

Futile to speak of \$5trn economy without preparatory work

Speaking at the fifth meeting of the Governing Council of the NITI Aayog, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that the government's goal was to make India a "\$5 trillion economy" by 2024, the end of his second term as prime minister. This goal, he admitted, was "challenging, but achievable" if state governments contributed to the effort. This is not the first time that Mr Modi or senior officials and ministers have spoken of this target in this time frame. However, repetition of the goal does not make it any more likely. India's GDP is currently about \$2.71 trillion. What is needed is an 85 per cent increase in output over the next six years, which compares to a 47 per cent increase over the last six. Getting to \$5 trillion in six years would require a compound annual growth rate of 11 per cent in nominal dollars. For the next couple of years, even eight per cent growth looks difficult.

It is good to aim high, and to have stretch targets. But this process should not be taken to the point where it becomes counter-productive, or where the set targets will essentially be unachievable. Other such targets have been spoken of in the past — for example, the goal of doubling farmer income by 2022, which the prime minister reiterated in his speech to NITI Aayog. In any case, what is needed is to focus on the immediate goal of taking the economy out of its current slump, and in the medium term to push it to sustained growth of above eight per cent a year. Double-digit growth has been talked of before, but did not happen. Even today, such ambitions should be reserved for later. Acceleration will come in phases.

There is considerable preparatory work required in order to super-charge growth. For one, the financial system continues to suffer, the woes of public sector banks being added to by the new troubles of the non-banking financial sector. The problem of who will pay for the infrastructure build-out is also unresolved. NBFCs cannot do it, as the IL&FS fiasco shows. Public-private partnership models have their own problems, and the government cannot find the resources to increase infrastructure funding forever. Depressed corporate earnings and over-capacity in the private sector are weighing on the economy as well. Flexibility of land and labour markets is long overdue. India also has a dysfunctional power sector, with the utilisation of installed generation capacity at just over 50 per cent, even as large parts of the country go without power. In general, the quality and productivity of the country's physical infrastructure does not stand comparison with the economies of East Asia. Finally, sustained double-digit growth requires growing exports and a healthy, educated and productive workforce. These have not been priorities so far and need a lot of spadework. Once steps have been taken on these and other fronts, it will be time to start talking about double-digit growth.

Pakistan's isolation

PM's focus on its terror network is paying off

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit in the Kyrgyz capital of Bishkek reflected the gains of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's sustained campaign against Pakistani sponsorship of terrorism. For the first time, the declaration from the SCO's Heads of States Council contained an explicit reference condemning terrorism "in all its forms and manifestations" and urged member states to work towards a consensus on adopting a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism. Given that Pakistan is a member of this grouping, which is headed by its principal sponsor, China, the declaration marks a significant achievement for Mr Modi. Affirmation of sorts was, in fact, available last month when the United Nations overcame long-standing opposition from China and passed a resolution designating Jaish-e-Mohammad's founder Masood Azhar a global terrorist.

Since the 2016 attacks on army bases in Pakistan and Uri, Mr Modi has pivoted sharply from his strategy of personal overtures to Pakistan's then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and replaced it with a more nuanced and integrated approach. First, he signalled a no-tolerance policy with sharp military responses (a surgical strike in 2016 and then bombing runs across the Line of Control in Balakot), with variable results. More usefully, he tapped into the growing international disaffection with Islamic terror in general to build a global consensus against Pakistan's military-intelligence sponsorship of terrorism in Afghanistan and India. He made sure to diligently highlight Pakistan's terror record at international forums. He has also consistently signalled that talks would be conditional on Pakistan displaying a commitment to ending its sponsorship of terror outfits in Jammu & Kashmir, categorically declining to deal with the Pakistani-sponsored separatist group Hurriyat.

Collateral developments during the Bishkek summit underlined the rationale of this strategy. On Sunday, the Paris-based Financial Action Task Force (FATF) declared that Pakistan had failed 25 of the 27 action points for terminating funding for such groups as the Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed and its front organisations. The country was added to FATF's "grey" list last year, which means it has been downgraded by the International Monetary Fund, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and global credit rating agencies. The absence of FATF compliance means that those downgrades will continue. The FATF's report substantially adds to Pakistan's economic woes since it precludes it from loans from multilateral institutions — on Monday, the ADB rebuffed the Pakistan government's announcement that it would receive a \$3.4 billion loan for budgetary support. Mr Modi has also leveraged the opportunities of India's market by expanding on the long-standing strong relations with West Asian powers, especially Saudi Arabia, another major financial backer of Pakistan's non-state actors. That Aramco, the state-owned oil producer, is eyeing a tie-up for a refinery in India, is another sign of a weakening of Pakistan's ties with traditional regional allies.

Mr Modi appears to have learnt from his early mis-steps in Indo-Pak policy. He refrained from inviting Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan to his second swearing-in ceremony, and he sensibly bypassed Pakistani airspace, for which he had insultingly been given "in-principle approval", for his visit to Bishkek. He should also focus on handling the unrest in Jammu & Kashmir, where disaffected youth create ready-made terror recruits for Pakistan's military-intelligence complex. But for the moment, Pakistan is indubitably on the back foot.

Nature's own museums



BOOK REVIEW

GEETANJI KRISHNA

One theme common to almost all of the world's mythologies is that of the Tree of Life, a sacred tree that holds within its boughs the essence of human existence. Across India, too, trees have traditionally symbolised life, creation and immortality and treasured for their life-giving and life-affirming qualities. Today, however, despite the growing sense that urban greenery is critical to the quality of the lived experience in the city, trees are giving way to roads, housing developments

and malls. This ever-expanding urban sprawl has sharply eroded not just the tree cover in Indian cities, but also the deep-rooted connection that we once had with trees. This is what makes Harini Nagendra and Seema Mundoli's love letter to trees, *Cities and Canopies*, timely and important. With a mix of anecdotes, botany, recipes and history, the book has the air of a rambling nature walk with many pleasurable detours and not much of an agenda.

Native and exotic, floral and evergreen, sacred and haunted — trees are the most visible signs of nature in cities, as well as repositories of our collective memories and shared histories. Imagine, for instance, what the roughly 600-year-old banyan tree, Thimmamma Marri manu, in Andhra Pradesh would have witnessed in its lifetime... As Ms Nagendra and Mundoli write: "They are our roots: their trunks our pillars, their bark our texture,

and their branches our shade. Trees are nature's own museums." Unlike good museums, however, *Cities and Canopies*, in which chapters on common urban trees such as the banyan and neem alternate with short essays on all things arboreal, seems somewhat disjointed and lacking a tight narrative flow. The reader ends up flitting like a bird going branch to branch and tree to tree, finding tasty nibbles but no dinner. By themselves, however, the nibbles are tasty indeed. The book, peppered with gorgeous monochromatic illustrations by Alisha Dutt Islam and all manner of botanical, cultural and historical factoids, is an enjoyable romp for tree lovers.

One of the most interesting chapters in the book, Talking to Trees, offers insights into the secret ways in which trees talk to one another. It describes an early study of the Sitka Willow by David Rhoades and Gordon Orians in 1983. They discovered that when the leaves of this willow were attacked by caterpillars, the tree made its leaves more unpalatable by filling them

with poisonous chemicals. The scientists were surprised to find that neighbouring trees more than three meters away, which had not even been attacked, also reacted in the same way at the same time. This suggested that they had received some sort of warning signal from the tree under attack. At first, other botanists accused Rhoades and Orians of anthropomorphising their findings, but subsequent studies have shown that trees, not just of the same species, but even different ones, are capable of communicating and cooperating with one another in myriad ways. Such research has immense implications for urban planning in India. Can trees planted in a row along a city avenue communicate with each other? Could hoary old trees act as central communication nodes of an invisible network that operates through their root systems and underground fungi? These questions raise significant concerns for the urban predilection of replacing "over-mature" trees with young saplings. In doing so, urban planners could unwittingly destroy intricate tree

communication networks that have developed over the years.

However, the exigencies of modern existence often result in pitting tree protection against urban development. To argue in favour of more sustainable city planning that includes space for people as well as trees, the authors go back to history. Whether it was in the era of the British, the Mughals or even Emperor Ashoka, trees used to be treasured for the shade and coolness they provided. Today, they offer the best antidote not only to air pollution but also to the urban heat islands that have been created because of excessive traffic and human activity. As one turns the final page of *Cities and Canopies*, one is left with the sense that even though trees often outlive men, they are fragile and impermanent. Yet their well-being and ours is inextricably linked.

Quite unexpectedly, *Cities and Canopies* faces the real danger of ending up preaching to the converted. Its luscious cover and meandering contents will instantly warm the hearts of tree and

nature lovers. Only someone who has spent childhood climbing trees would truly appreciate some of the references made in it. Would it also appeal as much to younger readers at whom it is seemingly directed, who have been brought up on a diet of online games and instant gratification? Would they find suggestions on how to devise games with gulmohar sepal or tamariand seeds useful, interesting even? Perhaps not as much. That said, *Cities and Canopies* is a simple read, not just because it examines how trees have formed an inalienable part of our collective sub-conscious — but because it also conjures up a wistful nostalgia for a simpler time when people and trees coexisted in harmony.

CITIES AND CANOPIES: Trees in Indian Cities
Harini Nagendra and Seema Mundoli
Penguin 256 pages; ₹499

India's adult children

Condition has improved but India needs to speed up

Globally, nearly 700 million children enter adulthood before experiencing or ending childhood. Save the Children, a not-for-profit organisation that works for children's rights, has issued its 2019 Report. It has sourced data from the World Bank, UNESCO, other United Nations offices for global population, World Health Organisation, and others. It enables a discussion of children's condition in a cross-country context.

The criteria to assess early end-of-childhood comprise eight indicators. They are: Under-five mortality (per 1,000 live births), malnutrition causing stunting (percentage for 0-59 months), exclusion from primary and secondary school (percentage of age five-17), child labour in adult roles (percentage of age five-17), girls married or in union, and adolescent births per 1,000 girls (both for girls aged 15-19), and displacement through conflict or victims of homicide (deaths per 100,000 among age 0-19).

We use eight comparable countries to assess India's performance with two questions: (a) What is the prevailing score? and (b) how much improvement in score was achieved? Table 1 begins with some good news in that, out of a maximum score of 1,000, India's 2019 reported score of 769 was higher than for Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan, though remaining below China, Brazil, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. Only China and Sri Lanka scored above 900.

The derivation of the score needs elaboration. Since each of the eight indicators is measured differently, it has to be "normalised" or brought down to a common denominator. Thus XN, a normalised indicator value, equals $(X - L) / (H - L)$, where X is a country's actual value for that indicator, L (Worst) is the highest observed value for the indicator among all countries, and H (Best) is the lowest observed value for the indicator. The overall score for a country is calculated by summing XN for all eight indicators and dividing the sum by eight, then multiplying by 1,000 to get numbers between 0-1,000.

India's current score reflects an improvement of 137 points—from 632 to 769—during 2000-19. This improvement fell short of improvements made by Bangladesh and Nepal though that did not allow them to reach India's score. China and Sri Lanka, already with high scores, could not of course improve much, though Brazil's improvement was even smaller. Indonesia and Pakistan also made lacklustre improvements. These coun-

try scores allow an ordering of countries. For 2019, India was ranked 113 out of 176 countries.

Table 2 deconstructs the overall picture into selected indicator components. Thus, India reduced child mortality during 2015-17 as did every sample country. Yet, over a longer period 2011-18, India made no improvement in reducing severe malnourishment (stunting), while Sri Lanka and Pakistan deteriorated. In particular, Sri Lanka's worsening is surprising. Tellingly, India's indicator for out-of-school children worsened during 2011-18 (see my column in this paper dated November 21, 2011). This is deeply lamentable in light of improvement in every other sample country and in the global average.

Table 3 focuses on what I would term "child-adult" indicators. There was no improvement in India in reducing child labour (my columns dated October 17, 2017 and November 13, 2018). Bangladesh and Indonesia also made nil progress in reducing child labour, while Brazil and Sri

Lanka did improve.

An area in which India made striking progress is child marriage during 2011-18, though the picture of other countries is mixed. Bangladesh and Sri Lanka improved. China—already with a high score—and Indonesia remained the same, while Nepal, Pakistan and Brazil worsened. Indeed, Brazil's worsening appears stunning (perhaps an error?). India's 2016 score for child-mother is considerably better than all sample countries other than, expectedly, China and Sri Lanka. This Indian achievement is worth recognising.

Last is the indicator that cries out most in calling attention to the violent cutting short of a child's life. Here again India ranks just after China and Sri Lanka, a commendable score despite poverty, while Brazil is by far the worst.

In sum, India is making progress in improving its children's condition though certain indicators have stagnated. Overall, India has to run much faster to improve its global rank. Another conclusion is that Brazil's reputation for violence appears corroborated. To emphasise again, pure economic indicators are meaningless in a vacuum that excludes socio-economic indicators. This could be nowhere more relevant than in India.

1. Also see Sana Ali's reprint dated May 30, 2019 in this paper

2. Higher indicator values show worse performance



TABLE 1: CHILDHOOD: RANK AND SCORE

Country	Rank, 2019	Score (1-1000)	Change in score (2000-19)
	2000	2019	
China	36	861	941 80
Bangladesh	127	575	728 153
Brazil	99	785	806 21
India	113	632	769 137
Indonesia	107	721	792 71
Nepal	134	543	685 142
Pakistan	149	540	626 86
Sri Lanka	56	867	915 48

Source: Global Childhood Reports, 2017 and 2019, Save the Children

TABLE 2: CHILDREN: SELECTED INDICATORS

Country	Child Mortality	Severely malnourished	Out of school			
	2015	2017	2011	2013	2011	2013
China	10.7	9.3	9.4	8.1	11.6	7.6
Bangladesh	37.6	32.4	36.1	36.1	28.0	17.4
Brazil	16.4	14.8	7.1	7.1	7.3	7.2
India	47.7	39.4	38.7	38.4	18.6	20.2
Indonesia	27.2	25.4	36.4	36.4	14.3	14.2
Nepal	35.8	33.7	37.4	35.8	13.4	13.8
Pakistan	81.1	74.9	45.0	47.2	42.9	40.8
Sri Lanka	9.8	8.8	14.7	17.3	10.1	6.4
World	42.5	39.1	23.2	22.2	17.8	17.6

Source: Global Childhood Reports, 2017 & 2019, Save the Children.

TABLE 3: CHILD-ADULT: SELECTED INDICATORS

Country	Begins work life	Marries	Child-Mother	Victim of extreme violence		
	2011	2013	2011	2013	2016	2016
China	3.1	3.1	6.5	0.6
Bangladesh	4.3	4.3	44.2	32.4	84.4	1.5
Brazil	8.1	6.6	3.9	15.1		

Opinion

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 19, 2019

RationalExpectations

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Trai is the judge, & Trai is the jury!

Even apex telecom body couldn't overrule Trai's ill-conceived ₹3,050cr-penalty suggestion, had to send it back for review

AN UNFORTUNATE CONSEQUENCE of a system where even legitimate decisions are looked at suspiciously is that even a body like telecom's Digital Communications Commission—among others, DCC members are the telecom, industry and finance secretaries and the CEO of NITI Aayog—couldn't overrule Trai's ill-conceived recommendation of a ₹3,050 crore penalty on Airtel, Vodafone and Idea, and instead, just sent it back to Trai for review; it okayed the penalty but asked Trai to relook the amount as ₹3,050 crore is the highest possible penalty. But without any firm direction from DCC, it is not clear if Trai will change its mind. So, while the government has to be focussed on trying to resuscitate an industry that it—and Trai—have driven to the ground, precious time will be wasted dealing with this. Indeed, given Trai's track record of imprudent decisions—and second thoughts—and being pulled up by various bodies including the TDSAT, the Supreme Court, and even DCC, it is unfortunate that DCC has had to put its faith in Trai taking the right decision this time around.

The current case pertains to Rjio asking Airtel etc for Points of Interconnection (PoIs) in June 2016 to enable its subscribers to talk to those on Airtel etc's networks. Though a limited number of PoIs are provided during the testing phase—Rjio had not, till then, announced a launch date—Rjio asked Airtel for 5,246 PoIs. Under the rules, these had to be provided within 90 days of Rjio making a payment and four weeks were allowed for the bill to be raised and the payment to be made. Since Rjio's PoI demand was far greater than that given during testing and even relative to what other incumbents had—Airtel had given Vodafone 22,645 PoIs for its 200+ million subscribers—the incumbent telcos questioned why so many PoIs were needed. It didn't help that, in the test phase itself, Rjio offered free services and got millions of subscribers.

All these issues—including those of fair play and predatory pricing—were raised before the government since there was no clarity on them; no telco had ever wanted so many PoIs so fast, no telco had offered free services and got millions of subscribers... even so, the telcos reported that they provided Rjio the PoIs within the stipulated time, even if kicking and screaming. As telecom regulator, Trai was aware of all these issues, but it still decided to recommend the highest penalty of ₹50 crore per telecom circle be levied on Airtel etc since, due to their alleged delays in providing PoIs, Rjio's network was congested.

While not giving PoIs stifles competition—if Rjio didn't get enough PoIs, its service would never have taken off—it is worrying that neither the government nor Trai provided clarity on the issues raised and, more important, while the Quality of Service rules mandate congestion be measured over 90 days, Trai took data for just one or two days to make its recommendation. Ironically, it later started a consultation on whether 90 days for providing PoIs was too long; if it was settled law, why have a consultation?

Indeed, when the matter was in the Bombay High Court—Rjio petitioned the Competition Commission of India and alleged cartelisation by Airtel, Vodafone and Idea as it was not getting the PoIs it wanted—the court also commented on there being "no such clear terms and obligations provided and/or crystallized at any earlier point of time". Indeed, it is because Trai took such an extreme stance that over two-and-a-half years, the DCC never acted upon this; indeed, an internal ministry panel ruled against the fine.

Though the government was impressed enough with Trai to give its chairman an extension—no regulators are, by law, given an extension as this is seen as an attempt to influence them—this is not the first time Trai has got it horribly wrong. When Trai continued to recommend higher and higher reserve prices for spectrum—as a result of which so many auctions failed—DCC asked Trai to explain how it reached the conclusions it had on spectrum pricing, but Trai refused to do so.

At another point, Trai suggested large penalties on telcos for call drops and, a month later, it issued a technical paper that explained why telcos weren't entirely responsible for the call drops! When SC ruled on this, it said "a legislatively pre-determined penalty, without fault or loss being established... (is) manifestly arbitrary and unreasonable"; it went on to say "(Trai) must respond in a reasoned manner to (comments) that raise significant problems, to explain how the agency resolved any significant problems raised by the comments, and to show how that resolution led the agency to the ultimate rule... including a rational connection between the facts it found and the choices it made".

And when Trai was examining the issue of predatory pricing, it said a telco must have a market share of at least 30% to be even investigated for predatory-pricing. While ruling on this, TDSAT said Trai's definition of significant market power (SMP) showed "a degree of pre-determination to dilute the entire concept of SMP", it was "arbitrary without any deliberation and effective consultation", that it was "not backed by any intelligible and objective criterion nor any convincing reason" and so was "an extreme step and unnecessary abdication of its regulatory powers by TRAI". TDSAT went on to add that the Trai's ruling provided "artificial protection to a TSP (telecom service provider) who may have the capability and intent to destabilise the sector through predatory-pricing".

Given this history, DCC needs to ponder over what it will do if Trai doesn't reduce its penalty recommendations dramatically. It is obvious that telcos like Airtel and Vodafone-Idea will take the matter to court, and that the Supreme Court will finally decide the issue, but if the government hopes to revive investments, it needs to take some firm decisions, not leave everything to be decided by the courts, especially since there is no saying how long this will take.

WeakDOSE

BPPi finding 25 batches of drugs entering the Jan Aushadhi system to be substandard points regulatory failure

THE BUREAU OF Pharma PSUs of India (BPPi) has found 25 batches of drugs by 18 pharmaceutical manufacturing companies, supplied to Jan Aushadhi outlets from January 2018, to be substandard. The Jan Aushadhi scheme aims to make generic drugs affordable to the poor. While BPPi has promised strict action against the companies—from banning the sale of the respective batches to blacklisting them, one of the 18 is a PSU. A state-owned company being counted as an offender, along with the fact that there have been 18 recalls in the past two years, points at a larger problem—the country is unable to enforce strict quality control and drug standards regulation. Holes in the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation net and lack of deterrence from BPPi's quality control let spurious, substandard drugs hit the market, with no accountability for failures in the processes of procurement under Jan Aushadhi.

Drug stability requirements vis-à-vis wide availability of cheap generics must be addressed. In India, the stability test is mandatory only for "new drugs"—after four years of the drug's existence in the market, it is not required. In 2017, Drug Controller General of India had issued an order whereby manufacturing companies were 'advised' to submit their stability testing. Stability testing is one of the most important aspects of quality testing and it is indeed shocking that the highest drug regulatory authority of the country is not seeking to make it mandatory.



ON SANSKRIT

Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Yogi Adityanath
Sanskrit is in the DNA of India. It is now limited to religious mantras and rituals. We should realise that Sanskrit begins where science ends. We have weakened Sanskrit by not using it in day to day life

THE REAL MAINSTREAM

HEATWAVES WILL BECOME MORE FREQUENT AND INTENSE DUE TO GLOBAL WARMING.

WE MUST PREPARE TO DEAL WITH THIS LOOMING CRISIS

Declare heatwave a natural disaster

AS A SEVERE heatwave continues in Bihar, Section 144 of the penal code (curfew) has been imposed in Gaya to keep people indoors. Section 144 is invoked to deal with lawlessness, but the risk posed by the heatwave is so high that the Gaya's district magistrate has used this penal provision to ban all construction activities, manual labour, and public programmes in open spaces from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. At the same time, the state government has ordered the closure of government schools till 22 June. So far, more than 180 people have reportedly died because of the heatwave in the Magadh region of Bihar.

Bihar alone is not suffering because of searing temperatures. Over the past month, parts of Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Punjab, Telangana, and Maharashtra have witnessed record temperatures. On 10 June, Delhi recorded an all-time-high temperature of 48 degrees Celsius (°C), while Churu in Rajasthan registered 50.8°C—the highest maximum temperature ever recorded in India. If the heatwave continues for a few more days, 2019 will become the year with the longest spell of heatwaves on record. The question is: is this a one-off year, or is there a trend?

A heatwave is defined as a period of abnormally high temperatures. Many studies have established that the frequency and intensity of heatwaves in India are rising. A study by Vimal Mishra and others published in 2017 in Environmental Research Letters shows that there has been a substantial increase in the frequency of heatwaves from 1951 to 2015. It also shows that the five most severe heatwaves out of the top ten happened after 1990. Another study, also published in 2017 in Science Advances by Omid Mazdiyasi and his colleagues, shows that

CHANDRA BHUSHAN

Deputy director general, CSE

Views are personal

the number, duration, and intensity of heatwave events have all increased over most of India from 1985 to 2009 relative to 1960 to '84.

Deaths due to heatwaves are also showing an increasing trend. According to the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), between 1992 and 2016, heatwave caused 25,716 deaths, with maximum deaths in 1998 (more than 3,000) and 2015 (about 2,500). But these numbers are highly unreliable because only deaths due to 'heat stroke' and 'heat exhaustion' were recorded; overheating can lead to organ failure, stroke, cardiac arrest, etc., which are seldom linked and recorded as heatwave deaths. Still, heatwaves are the third biggest natural cause of death in the country. And this number is likely to increase significantly due to global warming.

There is now a large body of research that shows that global warming has a significant role to play in heatwaves. Scientists from the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM) have recently published a paper in which they examined nine climate models to understand how the frequency, intensity, and duration of heatwaves in India would increase. They found that the frequency of heatwaves and their duration in India may begin to increase from as early as 2020, and this will keep increasing as global temperatures increase further.

Vimal Mishra's projections suggest that the frequency of severe heatwaves in India will increase thirtyfold by 2100 if

the global temperature increases by 2°C compared to the pre-industrial era. Omid Mazdiyasi's projections indicate that even a moderate increase in temperature will lead to a significant increase in the number of deaths in India, especially of those living in poverty. So, all the projections point to the fact that heatwaves will become a massive natural disaster in the coming years.

Are we prepared to deal with this imminent crisis?

Some cities and state governments have taken the initiative to develop Heat Action Plans (HAPs). Ahmedabad was the first city to develop a HAP in 2013 to improve public awareness, identify high-risk communities, issue heatwave alerts, and promote inter-agency coordination. Presently, about 30 cities in 11 states have adopted similar HAPs. State-wide HAPs have also been developed by Tamil Nadu and Odisha. But the efforts of the central government remain woefully inadequate.

The Government of India doesn't currently recognise heatwave as a natural disaster under the National Disaster Management Act, 2005. Heatwave, therefore, is not eligible for support under National or State Disaster Response Funds. Hence, there are not enough resources to build resilience against heatwaves. But it is time that the

Central government recognises the looming danger and notifies heatwave as a natural disaster. A mere notification, however, will not be sufficient. The central government will have to put resources and help cities and states prepare for the heatwave emergency by developing and implementing Heat Code and HAPs.

NDMA now has a guideline for preparing HAPs. This is a good beginning and should be used as a base document to develop HAPs for cities and states. But, we need a Heat Code. The Heat Code should clearly define the heatwave emergency based on temperature and humidity factors. Currently, the IMD definition of a heatwave is based only on temperature, which most scientists believe is insufficient to capture heat stress. The Heat Code should also

define the Standard Operating Procedure to be activated during intense heat, like restrictions on working hours and provisions for relief at public places and hospitals. Similarly, the district administration should not be using Section 144 to deal with natural calamities. Provision should be built under the National Disaster Management Act, 2005 to declare an emergency and stop outdoor activities during severe conditions.

In 2018, global CO₂ emissions reached a record level of over 37 billion tonnes. The growth in emissions was also the highest in the last seven years. So, there is no indication that global emissions will plateau and start reducing quickly. This means that intense heatwaves will soon become a part of our lives and we must do everything to save lives and livelihoods. This is a climate emergency and we must treat it as such.

Frequency of heatwaves and their duration in India may begin to increase from as early as 2020, and this will keep increasing

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Electronic vehicles

While larger allocation of funds to expedite the launch of E-Vehicles remains a priority, it is the lacking infrastructure, low number of charging-points and a high purchase-price—that has hitherto impeded the implementation of the concept. Keeping in view the rising levels of PM2.5 and PM10 levels in Tier1/Tier2 cities, it may not be a bad idea to mandate the use of e-vehicles in near future. Authorities

are continually improving the policy-framework to attain standardisation by uniformly promoting e-mobility. Tax-exemption on initial capital-expenses is equally important to incentivise the manufacturers as well as buyers of electric vehicles, in order to establish a viable/workable means of transport and reduce cost of oil-imports, across a large geography. While a lower customs-duty/GST rate on components can encourage the large-scale production of e-vehicles, a differential registration-rate and exemption from road tax/parking charges can motivate the consumers. Initiatives to develop e-highways, offer charging stations in residential/commercial spaces, improve existing facilities, develop on-spot metering and payment services; ought to be executed as a large-scale project and accomplished at the earliest.

Now, this doesn't mean that there will necessarily be large-scale defections on the part of Trump's beloved "poorly educated." On the other hand, health care—where his betrayal of past promises was especially obvious—seems to have played a big role in Democrats' midterm victory. And he is certainly more vulnerable than he would be if he engaged in even a smidgen of actual populism. Why won't he?

Part of the answer may be personal: Trump's whole career shows him to be the kind of man who, if anything, takes pleasure in taking advantage of people who trusted him.

Beyond that, however, for all the talk about how "it's Trump's party now," he still needs the support of the G.O.P.'s big-money interests. For now, the party establishment is happy to provide cover for the administration's corruption, closeness to Putin, and all that.

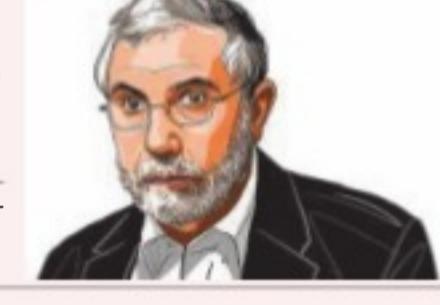
But that could change. If Trump ever did anything that might hurt the rich or help the poor, many Republicans might suddenly discover that self-dealing and accepting help from hostile foreign powers are actually bad.

Whatever the reasons, the simple fact is that Trump isn't a populist, unless we redefine populism as nothing but a synonym for racism. At least some in the white working class seem to have realised that he's not on their side. And Democrats would be foolish not to make the most of this opening.

—Girish Lalwani, New Delhi

PAUL KRUGMAN

NYT



The simple fact is that Trump isn't a populist, unless we redefine populism as nothing but a synonym for racism

"I love the poorly educated."

SO DECLARED DONALD Trump back in February 2016, after a decisive win in the Nevada primary. And the poorly educated love him back: Whites without a college degree are pretty much the only group among whom Trump has more than 50% approval.

But in that case, why has Trump been unwilling to do anything, and I mean anything, to help the people who installed him in the White House?

News media often describe Trump as a "populist" and lump him in with politicians in other countries, like Hungary's Viktor Orban, who have also gained power by exploiting white resentment against immigrants and global elites. And there are indeed strong and scary parallels: Orban has effectively turned Hungary into an authoritarian state, retaining the forms of democracy but rigging the system in such a way that his party has a permanent lock on power.

It's alarmingly easy to envision the U.S. going the same way, and very soon: If Trump is re-elected next year, that could mark the end of America's democratic experiment.

But Orban's success has depended in part on throwing his base at least a few bones. Hungary has instituted a public jobs programme for rural areas; offered debt relief, free schoolbooks and lunches; and so on, paid for in part by a significant rise in taxes.

True, those public jobs pay very low wages, and Orban has also practised crony capitalism on a grand scale, enriching a new class of oligarchs. But there's at least a bit of actual populism—that is, policies that actually do offer some benefits to the little guy—in the mix.

In 2016, on the campaign trail, Trump sounded as if he might be a European-style populist, blending racism with support for social programmes that benefit white people. He even promised to raise taxes on the

rich, himself included.

Since taking office, however, he has relentlessly favoured the wealthy over members of the working class, whatever their skin colour. His only major legislative success, the 2017 tax cut, was a huge break for corporations and business owners; the handful of crumbs thrown at ordinary families was so small that most people believe they got nothing at all.

At the same time, he keeps trying to destroy key provisions of Obamacare—protection for pre-existing conditions, premium subsidies and the expansion of Medicaid—even though these provisions are highly popular and have been of enormous benefit to states like Kentucky and West Virginia that favoured him by huge margins.

As if to symbolise who he's really working for, on Wednesday Trump will give a Presidential Medal of Freedom to Art Laffer, best known for insisting that tax cuts for the wealthy pay for themselves. This is a classic zombie idea, one that has been repeatedly killed by evidence, but keeps shambling along, eating our brains, basically because it's in plutocrats' interest to keep the idea in circulation.

And here's the thing: White working-class voters seem to have noticed that Trump isn't working for them. A new *For News* poll finds that only 5% of whites without a college degree believe that Trump's economic policies benefit "people like me," compared with 45% who believe that the benefits go to "people with more money."

Trump may believe that he can make up for his pro-plutocrat tax and health policies with tariffs, his one significant deviation from G.O.P. orthodoxy. But despite Trump's insistence that foreign

will pay the tariffs, an overwhelming majority of non-college whites believe that they will end up paying more for the things they buy.

Oh, and remember Trump's promises to bring back coal? His own Energy Department projects that coal production next year will be 17% lower than in 2017.

Now, this doesn't mean that there will necessarily be large-scale defections on the part of Trump's beloved "poorly educated." On the other hand, health care—where his betrayal of past promises was especially obvious—seems to have played a big role in Democrats' midterm victory. And he is certainly more vulnerable than he would be if he engaged in even a smidgen of actual populism. Why won't he?

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But that could change. If Trump ever did anything that might hurt the rich or help the poor, many Republicans might suddenly discover that self-dealing and accepting help from hostile foreign powers are actually bad. Whatever the reasons, the simple fact is that Trump isn't a populist, unless we redefine populism as nothing but a synonym for racism. At least some in the white working class seem to have realised that he's not on their side. And Democrats would be foolish not to make the most of this opening.



ILLUSTRATION: ROHIT PHORE

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CALCULATING GDP

Is the CSO's the right approach?

While we may have to take a harder look at the calculations and proxies being used, deviating from the approach being pursued is definitely not called for. The CSO, on its part, will have to continue working on ways to make the data more robust

here are around 17? The curious part of this set, which has been used, is that almost all of them are already a part of the GDP calculation. Also, a statement made that the variables chosen have the advantage of not coming from the CSO is curious because the IIP growth numbers for manufacturing and industry are actually brought out by the CSO!

While this approach has been validated across countries, it is not pursued anywhere. No country uses regression models while calculating GDP growth, as it would be too facile an approach, fraught with dangers of oversimplification. This is relevant even more for India where there is a large unorganised sector and data is opaque, which requires the use of proxies for better representation.

In short, the methodology used is that a set of variables are used to see how the economy grew in the past, which validated the GDP growth numbers. This includes auto sales, power consumption, IIP, petroleum consumption, cement, steel, overall real credit, real credit to industry, exports of goods and services, etc. There are a host of jargon and complicated equations and sophisticated diagrams that are presented to prove the final GDP growth numbers. The approach shows that post 2011-12 these variables showed growth, which was around 2.5% lower than CSO's estimates, but which was not the case when other countries were tested.

The ultimate justification for this thought is that other problems in the economy, which are in the form of unemployment or banking, are well-aligned with the new number and not 7% growth that we have been speaking of. As a corollary, all the policies that have been pursued so far were incorrect because these went on the basis of wrong numbers of GDP, which is serious as results would have been different if RBI had cut interest rates sharply at a time when it was increasing the repo rate. Therefore, there is a need to kick-start the economy today.

The methodology can be examined a bit closely. The 17 variables chosen are all from the organised sector and leave out the unorganised, which is 40-50% of the

Should we really be concerned that we pursued incorrect policies in the last seven years? The answer is a 'no'—as ex-Chief Economic Advisor's views are a personal academic venture

as this can also question the reputation of the concerned institute. The processes are surely rigorous, with peer review being mandatory, but when the results potentially can be controversial and struck down as being incorrect, serious questions can be posed on the release of such research.

Should we be concerned that we pursued incorrect policies in the last seven years? The answer is 'no', as the ex-CEA's views are a personal academic venture, which need not be accepted however dramatic the results may be. The conclusion would not have been alluring but for the fact that the release of GDP series of the CSO has been fraught with controversy for different reasons. While we may definitely have to take a harder look at the calculations and proxies being used, deviating from the approach being pursued is definitely not called for. The CSO will have to continue working on ways to make the data more robust, but a change of approach is definitely not on.

ARE OUR GDP GROWTH NUMBERS right? One is not sure, for certain, because the 6.8% number for FY19 does not seem to rhyme with other indicators such as industrial growth or exports or even the state of the banking sector, employment and so on. In fact, the growth number of 8.2% in GDP in 2016-17 when the economy came to a standstill for five months is still hard to reconcile. But the methodology is of global standard and hence there can be no debate on the approach used by the Central Statistics Office (CSO).

Now the latest controversy has been raised by the former Chief Economic Advisor's academic paper, which shows that growth has been overstated in the last few years, starting 2011-12, by 2.5 percentage points. Academic papers have their own charm, as in economics, and once the assumptions are stated and the models run, there is nothing amiss if all the tests are performed and are shown to work. But that is academia, which has an important position on the library shelf or the hard disk.

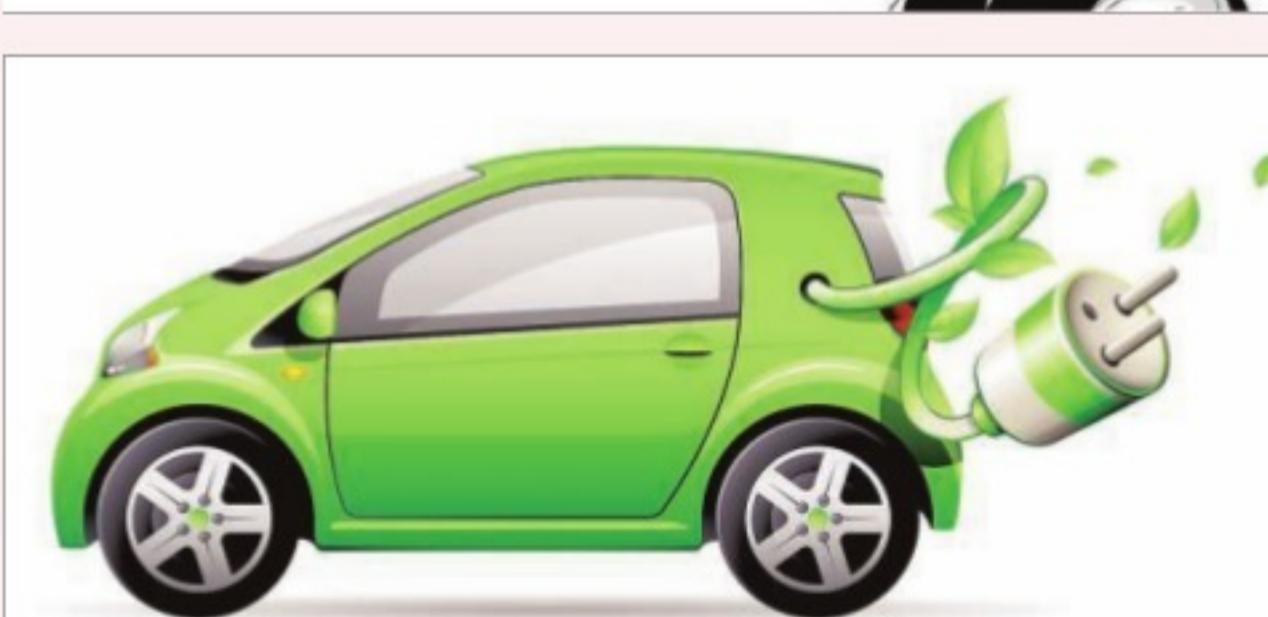
Can the GDP of any country be calculated based on a set of variables, which

A long haul ahead

FAME-2 needs consistent, sustained policy backup to succeed

**SURAJIT
MITRA**

The author is a former secretary, government of India



to provide subsidies for purchase of cars to well-off citizens irrespective of environmental benefits. Similarly, as currently most EV parts are imported, a move towards electric mobility threatens to shift manufacturing and value-addition abroad. Hence, it is logical that unless the government takes corrective policy measures, the auto sector, which accounts for half of India's manufacturing GDP, may go the way of the electronics industry, where huge imports have become a big problem.

At the same time, policymakers cannot ignore the ground realities. While the growth outlook for auto sector is positive, the consumer acceptance of EVs in India remains challenging. Indian consumers demand highest performance levels at lowest prices, and Indian driving conditions are tough due to high temperatures, slow average speeds, etc. Also, local manufacturing of batteries and parts, which constitute the bulk of the cost in an EV, will need time and substantial investment.

economy. There is no mention of agriculture in the model, which makes it weak as 60% of the workforce in the country resides in this segment. The government is not a part and taxes are excluded as they are not reliable. Such a model is bound to be questioned on the assumptions made. Also, if it were so easy to arrive at the GDP number based on these independent data series, it would be a plain desk job that would not involve any surveys or ground studies. This is not convincing, more so because it appears that the 17 variables that have been pulled out from the existing GDP are used separately to reckon GDP as they were well-correlated during the earlier time period.

The exercise would have normally not gone beyond academic discussions because there have been other experts who have put forward their versions of GDP growth in the demonetisation year, which was negative. Yet it has not made the headlines. The fact that the current revelation comes from an ex-CEA stands out as he was from the establishment. All through those years, the Economic Survey, which was authored by him, made the point that India was in a sweet spot, with a touch of hubris. This could not have been said unless there was conviction that growth was blooming everywhere. The fact that the new exercise shows that the economy was abysmal is a turnaround. The audience would ask: Which version was right? Also, the former CEA had defended demonetisation when it was on, but took a different view when out of the government. This raises a broader issue at the government level, because an ex-employee speaking differently once out of the system questions several foundations of the regime.

The issue of credibility, hence, comes in. There has already been a storm over the GDP series, both the back series as well as the revised numbers, as it became a tool for political gamesmanship. With the former CEA now adding a new dimension, data from the government would tend to be questioned. The situation is not very different from, say, a CMD of a bank saying after retirement that all the loans that turned NPA were given based on impressionistic views and not a formal credit score! The government should probably really consider having confidentiality-like clause in place, which prevents those occupying 'systemically important positions' from talking on related subjects post tenure as there is a reputational issue involved.

Also, academic institutes that sponsor such research should be discreet when allowing for such paper releases, given the background of the scholars,

as this can also question the reputation of the concerned institute. The processes are surely rigorous, with peer review being mandatory, but when the results potentially can be controversial and struck down as being incorrect, serious questions can be posed on the release of such research.

Should we be concerned that we pursued incorrect policies in the last seven years? The answer is 'no', as the ex-CEA's views are a personal academic venture, which need not be accepted however dramatic the results may be. The conclusion would not have been alluring but for the fact that the release of GDP series of the CSO has been fraught with controversy for different reasons. While we may definitely have to take a harder look at the calculations and proxies being used, deviating from the approach being pursued is definitely not called for. The CSO will have to continue working on ways to make the data more robust, but a change of approach is definitely not on.

Going cashless is some time away

AJAY SAGAR

Former senior staff of ADB, Philippines. Views are personal

India's payments system, though changing, remains cash- and bank-dominated

NEW TECHNOLOGIES IN payments, diversification, disruptive forces and regulatory challenges are reshaping the monetary system. The Bank for International Settlements defines monetary system as money plus money transfer mechanisms for payments. Payment and lending-related fintech options are overtaking banks traditionally involved in this sector. Countries have individual payments systems—wholesale or retail, offshore or onshore, single, dual or multiple currency payments, non-bank players, fintech, etc. Cross-country variations exist in the state of payments infrastructure. Fintech options are crowding the market, forcing some players to rethink strategies or face closure. Mobile wallets introduced a few years ago have taken retreat.

So, which global standard-setting body will define common regulations for payments systems? There lacks a consensus, and a global standard-setter is required. Actions are under way to regulate monetary systems and a committee on payments has been formed under the aegis of BIS. Recognising vulnerability, some countries have introduced payments legislations, licensing rules, customer awareness campaigns and central counterparties. Countries are looking at introducing digital currencies. Sweden is likely to be the first to adopt a central bank-issued digital currency. Its legislation allows refusal to accept cash by sellers. Marshall Islands (population 55,000) has passed a legislation to introduce digital currency, though global agencies have expressed concern for adverse spillovers on monetary policy, credit delivery and usage for illegal activities.

Country's monetary system is driven by the sheer size of its payments volume to annual GDP and its nature of commerce. As per BIS, Japan ranks the first on the value of payments times its GDP, followed by the US. In 2017, India's payments volume was 500 times its GDP, versus Japan's at 7,500 and the US's over 5,000 times their respective GDP. High volume of digital payments indicates low corruption and high tax compliance. But even advanced economies face lower fintech penetration for retail payments, with cash and cheques still calling the shots. Overseas payments are not real-time, face excessive costs and arbitrary exchange rates.

Cross-border retail payments are slow, costly, risky, complex. Settlement in hard currency (dollar, euro, yen, pound) in emerging markets takes a few days to a month. Anxiety is evident amongst parties until money reaches destination. Developments are needed to facilitate cross-border payments mechanisms and fintech has a role to play here. A recent development by RBI allowing for FX trade by retail customers at near interbank rates on CII's platform is a welcome step. In the absence of viable alternatives, informal and *hawala* channels continue to flourish.

India's payments and settlement system, though changing, remains cash- and bank-dominated. Recent RBI data show India at 21st position globally in the use of cheques. RBI's proposal to not levy any charge on NEFT and RTGS transactions is a welcome step. RBI reported a non-cash payments volume of over \$3,698 trillion for January 2019. Demonetisation, GST, online bill payments, mobile payments, RuPay cards have helped India build a share of digital payments. DBT has helped reduce corruption. But despite digitalisation, retail vendors remain wary of accepting card payments for cost and working capital considerations. RBI needs to be at the forefront in facilitating overseas payments and settlements as India is a net importer with a large foreign trade component. It will help reduce remittance costs, FX charges and the time taken for remittance. Significant amount of float funds could be released in the economy by improving overseas payments mechanism.

A monetary system error has a potential of adverse spillover. Developments are needed globally to have common regulations across jurisdictions, setting up of central clearing bodies, improved cross-border payments mechanisms, 24/7 instant payments, etc. IMF and ADB could play a role in building international cooperation for common macro-prudential regulations, grass-roots level awareness, and confidence building for going cashless. Payments intermediaries could strengthen board governance for building trust. While going cashless is still some distance away, it's not a distant dream. The journey could be shortened with active collaboration of all the stakeholders.

MINING BAN

Time is running out for Goa

**CHARUDUTTA
PANIGRAHI**

Author and public policy expert

T'S BEEN MORE THAN A YEAR SINCE

mining in Goa came to an abrupt halt. It's not the first time the state witnessed disruption in mining activities. However, this time around, the situation is far more worrisome. The reason is that as Goans were still trying to wipe off the bad loans and financial crisis they faced due to mining closure during 2013-16, they were presented with this crisis in 2018.

On February 7, 2018, the Supreme Court ordered closure of all mining operation from March 15, 2018, onwards. This wasn't because of environmental concerns, but because of the technical reading of a new law, which didn't take into cognizance a two-decade-old case that would provide clarity. Nonetheless, the court decided to close mining activity, putting the livelihood of 25% of the population into a zone of uncertainty.

A year since, the Goan economy has eroded. The smallest barometer of financial robustness, i.e. the household saving of an average Goan family, has deteriorated. Our report (by the Forum for Integrated Development and Research, or FIDR) has noted that closure of iron ore mining in the state has led to 40% dip in income levels of Goans. The reason is that mining not only contributes to 30% of the

state's revenue, but the whole ecosystem is dependent on it. In fact, the mining industry had put Goans on a high pedestal of per capita income, and now they are not even eligible for the government's welfare schemes implemented on the basis of poverty or income deficit.

Referring to Mendes G, 2011 (Utkal University, Department of Economics), the FIDR in its white paper submitted to Goa CM highlights that "socio-economic status of households in mining regions is better as compared to that of its non-mining counterparts." Also, from an agrarian society of the past, "Goa has seen a shift to sectors like manufacturing and tourism."

The report notes that broader community provisions should have been driven over the years, and implemented by individual mining companies or associations, in a structured and collaborative manner. However, it cannot be denied that mining companies have worked in villages with a goal to discharge the responsibility of bringing in "positive impact through CSR interventions."

On the state's GDP, the report highlights that, for two consecutive years, Goa's GDP declined 2.0%, attributable to disruption in mining. Apart from job losses, there is a threat to increase of NPA's of banks as entities in the mining machinery, such as trucks, have lost their earning potential. This has put a burden on financial institutions.

The loss of livelihoods, if not reversed on a war footing, would end up making a severe dent on the social fabric of the people of Goa.



THE EDITORIAL PAGE

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

NOT JUST NUMBERS

PM is right, Opposition should stand up and be counted – but it's the government's job to help it do that

ON THE FIRST day of the first session of the 17th Lok Sabha, Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke of the elephant in the House: The severely diminished space of the Opposition in Parliament. And the prime ministerial words were reassuring. Parties of the Opposition, he said, should not worry about their paltry numbers as every word of theirs was "valuable" for his government. An "active Opposition, an effective Opposition", he said, "is a pre-requisite for parliamentary democracy" and expressed confidence that the spirit of bi-partisanship would trump and transcend the faultlines of "palksh" and "vipalksh", government and Opposition. After a Lok Sabha election which saw the ruling NDA return to power with an overweening majority – the BJP alone has 303 seats in the 543-member House, and the NDA has 353, while the Congress falls three seats short of the number required to stake claim to the status of Leader of Opposition – the PM and his party will be held to his assurance of accommodation and the democratic spirit. It will, of course, be the Opposition's challenge to make itself heard in the BJP-dominated House. But the larger responsibility for the conduct of debate in a way that includes and respects all and not just the majority's views, lies with the government. The PM has done well to acknowledge that at the very outset of his second term.

The PM's assurance will be tested in a session in which controversial issues and contentious legislation may come up – be it the proposed switch to one-nation-one-election or the bill criminalising triple talaq that failed to become law in the preceding Modi regime. But it is also shadowed by the way Parliament functioned, or failed to, in the last five years. As the Congress has been quick to point out, the 16th Lok Sabha saw the government take the ordinance route all too often, evidently to bypass questions and debate, instead of treating it as an emergency measure. Key bills were pushed through without according them the necessary and desirable legislative scrutiny through committees. The way in which the government with a decisive mandate relegated the Opposition inside Parliament, while remaining in what seemed to be permanent electoral campaign mode outside it, has led to a disbelief in its commitment to listen to the political opponent, not just have its own way. It will be the government's task, most of all, to reach out, and address that disbelief. It must ensure that the norms of constitutional democracy, not the brute dead-ends of majoritarianism, prevail.

For the Opposition, an uphill journey begins now. It cannot just depend on the government's generosity or scruple. It will be watched for how it pools its strengths, how well or poorly it marshals its resources and uses its opportunities to influence legislation and hold the government to account.

A FAILING STATE

The death of children in Muzaffarpur due to AES, a preventable disease, shows that malnutrition needs to be addressed urgently

MORE THAN 100 children in Bihar's Muzaffarpur district have died of acute encephalitis syndrome (AES), with the state's medical authorities initially blaming the deaths on the heat wave, hypoglycemia (sudden drop in blood sugar levels) and lack of awareness. Now, belatedly, they have acknowledged the two most critical reasons for the deaths – malnutrition and the inadequacy of primary health centres (PHCs).

The state government's lack of preparedness is indefensible. AES has struck Muzaffarpur with regularity in the summers since 1995. The disease claimed nearly 1,000 children between 2010 and 2014. It seemed to have become less virulent after 2014. At the same time, however, a growing body of literature on AES underlined that the medical authorities had no room for complacency. For example, a 2014 study by researchers from the Christian Medical College, Vellore, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta in the US showed how a combination of factors, unique to Muzaffarpur, sharpened the vulnerability of its children to the disease. The district is a major litchi-growing region and the study found that toxins present in the fruit were a source of AES. But the fruit was a triggering factor only in the case of children who had not received proper nutrition, the study reported. It said that the toxins in the fruit assume lethal proportions when a poorly-nourished child eats litchis during the day and then goes to sleep without a proper meal. The links between the fruit and AES have been debated but most researchers agree that the disease affects only under-nourished children. However, the state government has not taken the cue from medical research. It does not have a special nutrition programme for AES-prone areas.

Medical literature has also shown that AES can be contained if the child is administered dextrose within four hours of the onset of symptoms. But every AES outbreak in the past 10 years has shown that Muzaffarpur's PHCs – the first point of healthcare for most AES patients – are ill-equipped to deal with the disease. Most of them do not have glucometers to monitor blood sugar levels. The Sri Krishna Medical College and Hospital, the designated hospital in Muzaffarpur to deal with the disease, does not have a virology lab or adequate number of paediatric beds. Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan has assured that these shortcomings will be remedied urgently. The state government has also issued similar assurances. Both the Centre and the state will be watched in how they deal with an eminently-preventable disease.

PUPPY EYES

It turns out that dogs have evolved to manipulate human emotions. Dog-owners know it doesn't matter

IT'S ALL IN the eyes. They look up at you, imploring you to part with the tiniest morsel from your plate, a scrap really. Or they can apologise – express guilt and contrition – with just a twitch of the brow, a muzzle pointed downwards. Move over Mata Hari, the greatest manipulator of human beings has been our best friend.

Only the truly heartless – or the pathologically psychopathic – can maintain their resolve against "the look" that a canine throws at you at the dinner table, or after having chewed through an over-priced pair of patent leather shoes. But there is now consolation for those who have been defeated by the cuteness of their puppies. Research at the Centre for Comparative and Evolutionary Psychology at the University of Portsmouth has proven that millennia of evolution have ensured that the very biology of dogs makes us vulnerable to their expressions. As wolves began to be domesticated by early humans, dogs developed a new forehead muscle – the levator anguli oculi medialis (LAOM). In a process that relies on "survival of the fittest", the LAOM allowed dogs to generate facial expressions that human beings are particularly susceptible to, and which generate feelings of protectiveness and affection. In doing so, our canine companions have ensured that they are fed and showered with affection.

The question is whether the LAOM is just a physical advantage, or whether, as dog-owners claim, their furry friends are genuinely capable of emotional attachment. Anyone who has returned home from work to the excitable affection of their best friend knows the answer. And as manipulations go, things can be far worse. After all, it's not like we are talking about cats.

WORDLY WISE

YESTERDAY I WAS A DOG. TODAY I'M A DOG.
TOMORROW I'LL PROBABLY STILL BE A DOG. SIGH!
THERE'S SO LITTLE HOPE FOR ADVANCEMENT.

— CHARLES M. SCHULZ

The Hong Kong question



THOMAS ABRAHAM

Can China's communist party go against its own grain, give Hong Kong greater space to run its own affairs?

HONG KONG IS like a pressure cooker on a stove, hissing steam when the temperature from China rises, and subsiding when the powers that be lower the flame. Last week, over a million protesters, many young, took to the streets to protest a new law that would allow people from Hong Kong to be extradited to China, a move that would threaten critics of the Chinese regime who have till recently found relatively safe haven in Hong Kong. After clashes between the police and protesters, the head of the Hong Kong government, Carrie Lam, was forced to temporarily shelve the extradition law.

The current wave of protests will perhaps gradually die down, but there is little doubt that new explosions are going to occur in the future, just as they have, periodically, over the last decade.

At the heart of the discontent in Hong Kong lies the peculiar arrangement worked out in the 1980s between the then British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, and China's strongman, Deng Xiaoping, for the return of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty after 150 years of British colonial rule. In order to calm British as well as Hong Kong anxieties about the city's future, Deng propounded the so-called "one country two systems" formula, under which Hong Kong, though part of China, would enjoy a high degree of autonomy and retain the economic and administrative structures that the British had bequeathed, including western liberal freedoms of thought, expression, an independent judiciary, and a liberal capitalist market system. This autonomy is to last till 2047 for 50 years after the British departure in 1997.

At the time he propounded it, "one country two systems" was hailed as another master stroke of Deng Xiaoping's fabled pragmatism: It ensured Hong Kong's return to the motherland after more than a century of British occupation, while at the same time showing to the world a new, flexible China, shorn of the rigidities of the Maoist era.

But there are contradictions within this arrangement, that both Hong Kong and the

Chinese government have found hard to resolve.

Take the incident that sparked the latest troubles: An extradition law that would allow Hong Kong to send wanted people back to China. The fact that Hong Kong, a Chinese city, needs to have an extradition arrangement with the rest of China, is an indication of Hong Kong's autonomy. But it is also bound to cause friction. From the Chinese point of view, if Hong Kong is part of China, then it is necessary to have a mechanism whereby people fleeing from the Chinese authorities should not be able to find safe haven in Hong Kong. Otherwise, what is the point of saying that Hong Kong is part of China?

But those in Hong Kong feel differently. In the 22 years since the hand-over, suspicion of China has increased, and if there is one thing that unites the city, it is the desire to preserve its British era institutions and Hong Kong's unique way of life, and not become "just another Chinese city."

Hong Kong has always seen itself as a westernised global city, open to the rest of the world, a place where people can go about their daily lives protected by the rule of law. In the eyes of most Hong Kongers, the biggest threat to the city's future comes from its slow, creeping, absorption into the larger fabric of Communist China.

It is particularly telling that the generation that was born and grew up in Hong Kong after the British left, a generation that has known only Chinese rule under one-country-two-systems, is at the forefront of the protests against Hong Kong's further integration with China. China's leaders probably felt in 1997 that with the passing of time, a new generation would be born in Hong Kong that would be increasingly comfortable with being part of China. Instead, the opposite seems to have happened. Hong Kong's young look outward to the rest of the world, rather than inward to China, and see liberal democracy, rather than communist rule, as a political ideal to aspire to.

China had earlier tried to get the Hong

Kong government to reform the school education system to instil greater "patriotism" and Chinese "national spirit" among the young. But this only served to spark the first big popular protest in Hong Kong in recent times, forcing the government to shelve plans for patriotic education.

The rising discontent in Hong Kong will be cause for unease in China. Hong Kong's autonomy under the 1997 agreement formally ends in 2047, and by default, the city will become like any other Chinese city. But as new generations of Hong Kongers drift further away from the Chinese motherland, both culturally and politically, the worry in Beijing must be that it will have to contend with an increasingly ungovernable city on its southern coast.

The Chinese Communist Party has traditionally dealt with unrest with a heavy hand, as the violent crackdown on pro-democracy protesters in Tiananmen Square in June 1989 showed. If Hong Kong was any other Chinese city, the response from Beijing would have been harsh. The leaders of the agitation would be thrown into jail for long periods of time, and the protesters would be brutally dispersed.

But this is not an option that China can use in Hong Kong, an international city where events occur under the full glare of the media. Heavy handed repression will set back China's aim of becoming a global leader by several decades.

Repression is not an option, and persuasion to become "more patriotic" has not worked either. The sensible option is to give Hong Kong greater space to run its own affairs, rather than trying to integrate it more closely. But this goes against the grain of all that the Chinese Communist Party has stood for. So there is a real danger that the Hong Kong pressure cooker will reach a point where an explosion becomes inevitable.

The writer, a former editor of The South China Morning Post in Hong Kong, is now based in Bengaluru



CHAKSHU ROY

A WATCHFUL PARLIAMENT forms the foundation of a well-functioning democracy. The presiding officers of Parliament are the key to securing the effectiveness of this institution. The MPs look to them to facilitate debate, protect their rights and uphold the dignity of Parliament. On Wednesday, Lok Sabha MPs are set to elect one amongst themselves, to play the pivotal role of the presiding officer for the 17th Lok Sabha.

The primary challenge before the new Speaker will be to conduct the proceedings of the Lok Sabha free from disruptions. To do so, the Speaker will have to earn the trust of the Members of Parliament: One way to earn the trust of MPs will be by being neutral, both in practice and perception while running the House.

Securing the neutrality of the Speaker is a question that experts in India have been grappling with for 60-plus years. In Britain, the promise of continuity in office for many terms is used to ensure the Speaker's impartiality. By convention, political parties (usually) do not fund a candidate against the Speaker at the time of general elections. And the Speaker can continue in office, until deciding otherwise. By convention, the Speaker also gives up the membership of his/her political party.

The first Speaker of the Lok Sabha, G V Mavalankar, was aware that the British convention for securing the neutrality of the Speaker might not be an easy sell in the nascent years of our democracy. In his 1952 ac-

VOICE OF INCLUSION

Speakers must rise above party loyalties, with Constitution as their guiding light

ceptance speech as Speaker of the first Lok Sabha, he said: "We have yet to evolve political parties and healthy conventions about Speakership, the principle of which is that, once a Speaker he is not opposed by any party in the constituency or in the House, so long as he wishes to continue as Speaker." He went on to say, "to expect the Speaker to be out of politics altogether without the corresponding convention is perhaps entertaining contradiction expectations."

In 1951 and 1953, the Conference of Presiding Officers of legislatures in India passed a resolution for the adoption of the British Convention. Mavalankar tried to create a consensus among political parties on adopting this British convention but was unable to make much headway. The 1954 decision of the Working Committee of Congress in response to Mavalankar's attempts sealed the fate of the issue. It stated, "The Working Committee considered Shri G V Mavalankar's letter for establishing a convention for the uncontested election of Speakers and felt that this was not a feasible proposition for the present in view of other political parties being involved in the election."

With no security in the continuity of office, the Speaker is dependent on his or her political party for reelection. This makes the Speaker susceptible to pulls and pressures from her/his political party in the conduct of the proceedings of the Lok Sabha.

Jawaharlal Nehru alluded to this aspect of the Speaker's responsibility in 1948. At the unveiling of the portrait of Vithalbhai Patel, he said: "We would like the distinguished occupant of this chair now and always to guard the freedom and liberty of those from every possible danger, even from the danger of an executive incursion. There is always that danger even from a National Government – that it may choose to ride roughshod over the opinions of a minority, and it is here that the Speaker comes in to protect each single member, or each single group from any such unjust activity by a dominant group or a dominant government."

Other than the election of Mavalankar, every other Lok Sabha Speaker has been elected unanimously. After the election, the Speaker is escorted to her/his chair by the leaders of both the ruling and opposition party. These conventions are meant to reflect that after her/his election, the Speaker belongs to the entire House. For the next five years, all her/his actions will be weighed on the scale of neutrality. She/he will have to be vigilant to defend the sanctity of the institution and also have the vision to strengthen it. In this challenging journey, her/his guiding light will be the Constitution and the rules of procedure of Lok Sabha.

The writer is head of outreach, PRS Legislative Research



JUNE 19, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

SINO-SOVETIC EQUATION

CHINESE LEADER HUA Guofeng (Hua Kuofeng) said that prospects for negotiations with the Soviet Union on improving relations depend on whether the Soviet government makes a substantive change in its position.

Hua told the National People's Congress that the Soviet government had agreed to hold negotiations, but asked: "Did this change the essence of the matter?" China has accused the Soviet Union repeatedly of wanting to subjugate China and using Vietnam to set up a Soviet outpost in South-East Asia.

SALT II TREATY

SITTING AT A gilded palace table, the US pres-

ident, Jimmy Carter, and the Soviet president, Leonid Brezhnev, signed the SALT II treaty. Carter termed it a victory for peace but warned that "the threat of a nuclear holocaust still hangs over us." Brezhnev declared: "We are helping to defend the most sacred right of every man – the right to live." Earlier, the two presidents signed the treaty texts in Russian and English, and then got up and kissed each other on both cheeks. The crowd applauded with enthusiasm.

WHAT TO IMPORT

THE MINISTER FOR Commerce and Civil Supplies, Mohan Dharia, said that the government would import the essential com-

modities included for the public distribution scheme, wherever necessary, to ensure its smooth functioning. Under the scheme, to be launched from July 1, 13 items have been selected for distribution including wheat, wheat products, rice, coarse grains, processed oils, kerosene, controlled cloth, common varieties of cheap cloth, matches, toilet soaps and washing soaps, exercise books, tea and coffee. Dharia said that the real emphasis of the scheme should be viewed from the fact that it would be a production-cum-distribution scheme. Production of all the items to be distributed would be ensured before their distribution outlets are undertaken by public distribution outlets.

Once upon a time, a nation

The ground for the 2019 election outcome was prepared in advance. Story-telling took precedence over reality and what ails the nation faded into the background



NAYANTARA SAHGAL

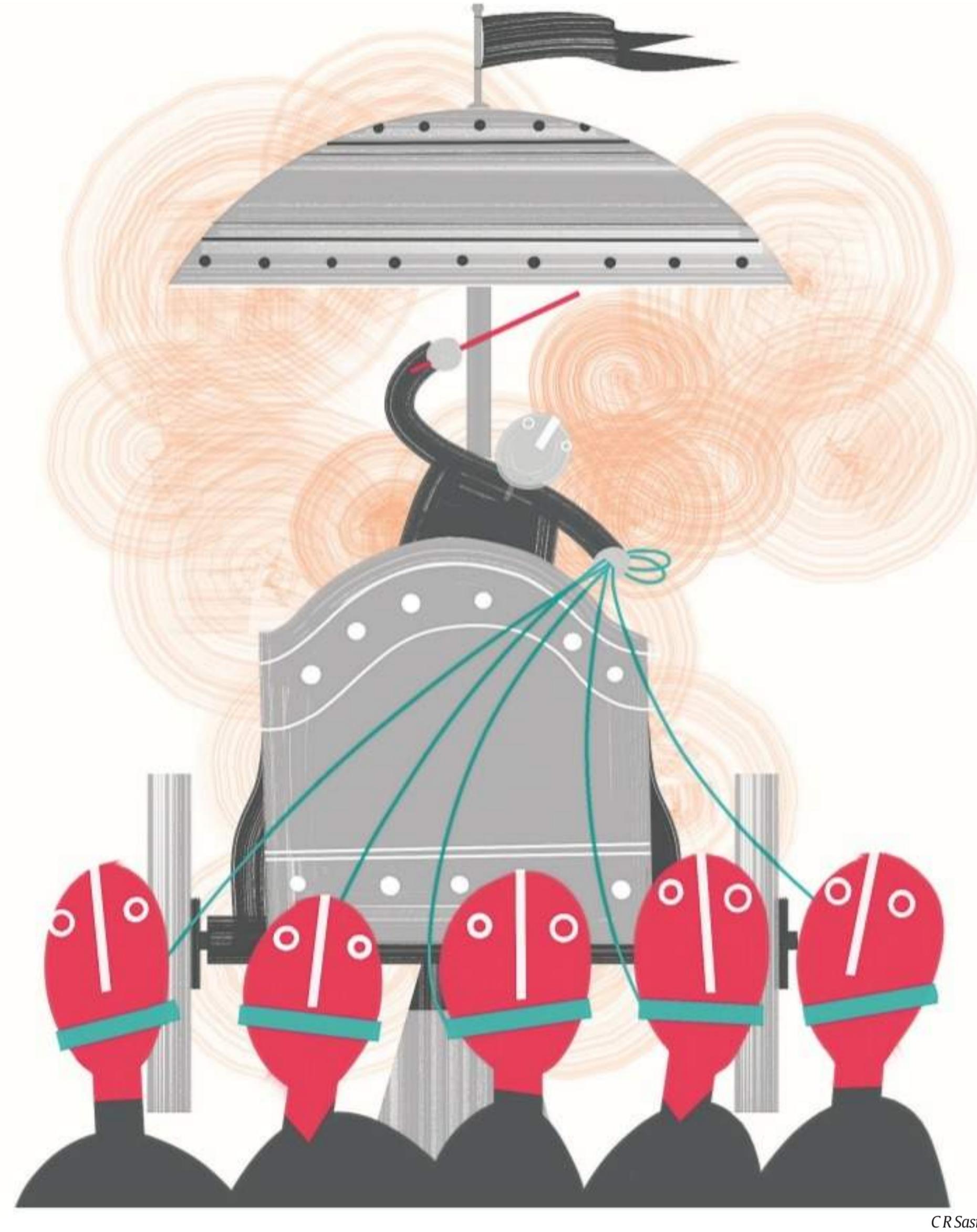
NOW THAT THE dust has settled on India's most hard-fought national election, and it has been hailed as a spectacular democratic victory, it is possible to take a quiet look at the election result. It was no surprise to me for I had not only expected it but realised it could have gone no other way. I had the help of literature in seeing it as a story with only one possible ending. My favourite novel by Gabriel Garcia Marquez is titled *The Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. With the ending already known, the novel goes backward to unravel the path that makes it inevitable. The 2019 election has been the same kind of fascinating exercise whose outcome could not have been otherwise, given the precise path that was taken to achieve it.

The other help I had in foreseeing the result came from a philosophy professor. As Marquez's novel spells out the sequence of events that lead inevitably to the "death foretold" in his story, a philosophy professor at Yale University, Jason Stanley, has made a study of the swing to right-wing extremism and the resulting breakdown of democracy in countries across the world. He has found that there is a standard formula by which democracy is broken down and a climate of intolerance built up in its place in which hatred, violence and criminal behaviour become acceptable to people. On this prepared ground, an ideology such as fascism, or any other similar doctrine, takes over unopposed. The professor has found this formula common to all breakdowns of democracy wherever they have occurred or are now occurring, and he spells it out in two books: *How Propaganda Works* and *How Fascism Works*.

To begin with, the majority community is made to feel threatened and victimised by minority groups. Once this seed is planted, it breeds resentment, anger, and a mood of vengeance mounting to hysteria against those named as offenders. They are classed as outsiders (to the religion and culture of the majority) and usurpers who are preying upon the rights and privileges of the dominant community. The definition of outsider covers socialists, communists and atheists, and all differences of opinion from the ruling view. These citizens, branded anti-national, are therefore to be feared as enemies of the state. Fear is spread by cutting out all rational argument and appealing to the emotions for an emotional arousal. The next step is then taken.

Step two warns that the nation is in danger from the designs of its internal and external enemies. Conspiracy theories are manufactured to prove the point. Citizens labelled anti-national are accused of conspiring against the state. The focus is on defending the nation from its enemies. In this atmosphere, the need of the hour is a "strong" militant leader who alone can protect the country and the people. The nation's leader is glorified. The military takes centrestage and pride of place alongside him and shares his glory.

In this wholesale absence of facts, the disappearance of truth is complete. Democracy fights for survival and loses. Long held values – freedom of expression, equality, fraternity, human rights – are discarded as being of no use. In fact, they are seen as a hindrance in dealing with the dangers the nation faces. Authority and hierarchy take their place. The hierarchy can be ethnic, or religious, or gender-based. One



C R Sasikumar

ethnic group gets placed over others, one religion over others, men over women. And the yawning vacuum, where truth used to be, is filled by myth. Fantasy now substitutes as reality. In Stanley's words, the myth that replaces reality is one "of a glorious by-gone era, where the nation was supposedly ethnically or religiously pure, and rural patriarchal values reigned supreme". To this description, I am adding "racially pure" since racial purity has loomed large in right-wing extremism. In a chilling conclusion Stanley adds, "History shows that such propaganda licenses extreme brutality".

The standard formula he describes has an uncanny resemblance to the path India has followed since 2014, including the "extreme brutality" the path licenses. Writers, artists, students, teachers and journalists have been punished for their independent views. Four famous writers have been assassinated. On television, we have seen the torture and murder of workers by "gau rakshaks" and other armed vigilante mobs, with the police and public standing by. We have heard these crimes being justified on the grounds that they were committed by patriots against the nation's enemies. In some cases, alleged acts of terror have been rewarded, as recently with a seat in Parliament. Such behaviour towards fellow citizens, and brutality against them, doesn't just happen. It is taught. It is the end result of the indoctrination that has taken place.

From what we have seen here, it is clear that the formula works and that story-telling takes precedence over reality. Unemployment, rural and urban distress, well-documented corruption and whatever ails the nation fade into the background. They are no match for the story-teller's fine art of invention; no match for the mood of involvement, expectation and enthrallment a story builds up in its readers/listeners as it unfolds; and no match for the ageless allure of "Once Upon a Time". Those who master the art of story-telling create the mood of their choice – as music and all forms of art also do in their different artistic mediums.

The formula has been faithfully followed in other respects. In a democracy the military stays out of politics and out of the public eye, and war is not celebrated. The nation's leader is not held in awe. He is held accountable. He is required to face the press and answer questions. The leader of a democracy who does not uphold and nurture this democratic tradition, shows himself to be above it, as has been evident here.

From what we have seen here, it is clear that the formula works and that story-telling takes precedence over reality. Unemployment, rural and urban distress, well-documented corruption and whatever ails the nation fade into the background. They are no match for the story-teller's fine art of invention; no match for the mood of involvement, expectation and enthrallment a story builds up in its readers/listeners as it unfolds; and no match for the ageless allure of "Once Upon a Time". Those who master the art of story-telling create the mood of their choice – as music and all forms of art also do in their different artistic mediums.

Could this be why art and literature are deemed dangerous and why they must be controlled to ensure that they create the mood a regime desires and no other?

Sahgal is a novelist and a commentator. Her latest work of fiction is The Fate of Butterflies

nity feels insecure or threatened in Bharat. The so-called majority has many sects, and still, they share a common worldview of acceptance and respect for all. The mindset of being erstwhile rulers and the fundamental belief that our 'Truth' revealed by certain Prophet or Book is the only and ultimate truth, and everyone has to follow the same are at the root of insecurities (sic)," says the editorial.

It adds that recently, many incidents of heinous crimes like child rapes are getting communalised. "Do we need to bring in religion either of a perpetrator or a victim in the case of a heinous crime? There are many people from the so-called majority who raise the voice against such criminal mindsets, how many of the so-called minorities, especially Muslims have raised voice against the brutal rapes during the pious month of Ramzan? How many columns could we see against the attack on the resident doctors in West Bengal?" it asks.

YOGA IS MAGIC

AS INTERNATIONAL Yoga Day approaches, Organiser and Panchayana have a series of articles about Yoga and its benefits. An article in Organiser says that "Hindutva is the best choice for humanity, it's a gift from India, to India and the world, and yoga marries so well

with Hindutva". The article says that yoga truly is magic for the mind, body and soul and it aligns all these together so your body and thought are in harmony. The article claims that yoga is growing rapidly in the US and adds that the yoga industry in 2012 was \$6.9 billion and by 2020 it will reach \$11.56 billion. "Sadly, there are a lot of certified teachers in the USA who just get their certificate because it is a money making generator. They are missing out of the core fundamentals of the spirituality and magic of yoga," asserts the article.

Another article says that in "vedic and yogic thought, consciousness is the supreme reality, not matter, energy or mind... Consciousness is all-pervasive like space, self-fulgent like light, uniting everything in the universe in the highest awareness and bliss as the Self of all." It also says that the yogic science of consciousness is India's greatest contribution to human knowledge and probably the most important science we have as a species because "it alone grants true knowledge of the Infinite and Eternal". Dharmic education, it claims, requires a yogic approach.

IMRAN'S NIGHTMARE

AN OPINION article in Organiser claims that the "biggest nightmare" for Pakistan's prime

minister, Imran Khan, is the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) – a Paris-based inter-governmental body that sets standards and promotes effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering, terror financing and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system. It says that on the basis of its assessments, the institution puts rogue nations on the "Grey List" and very serious cases on the "Black List". Pakistan was placed on the Grey List in 2018.

The article claims that Pakistan is continuing with attempts to place itself on a high moral pedestal in the global arena, not realising that the international community is worried about the impact of the breeding of violence in Pakistan. The best option for Pakistan, according to the article, is to make an honest effort to tackle terrorism and get on the right side of the global order, which includes India. The article adds that there is only one factor that is hindering Pakistan from taking this path – the need to feed terrorism in Kashmir. "It is reluctant to touch many many terrorist organisations operating on its soil that deal with Kashmir. It now remains to be seen if Pakistan can read the writing on the wall and mend its ways before it is too late," the article asserts.

Compiled by Lalmani Verma

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

Previously apolitical sections of Hong Kong society have been radicalised and are making sure they are heard.

— THE GUARDIAN

The general's job

With Pakistan's economy in dire straits and rising political tensions, the 'internal security' expertise of the new ISI chief could come into play



TILAK DEVASHER

LT GENERAL FAIZ Hameed is the third ISI chief appointed by Pakistan Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa. Soon after becoming chief on November 26, 2016, Bajwa had appointed Lt General Naveed Mukhtar (Armoured Corps) as the ISI Chief on December 11, 2016, in place of Lt General Rizwan Akhtar (Frontier Force), who was shifted out prematurely.

Following Mukhtar's retirement in October 2018, Lt Gen Asim Munir (Frontier Force) was appointed DG ISI. Barely eight months into his tenure, Munir has been shifted out as Corps Commander Gujranwala. Hameed has been appointed as DG ISI in his stead. Both Hameed and General Bajwa are from the Baloch regiment. Like Munir, who had headed military intelligence, Hameed too has intelligence experience, having headed the internal security wing of the ISI.

Bajwa had hand-picked Munir as DG ISI. He had served as Force Commander Northern Areas (FCNA) when Bajwa was Corps Commander X Corps. To understand the reasons for the sudden curtailment of his tenure, several dots, both external and internal, need to be connected.

The Pulwama terror strike in February 2019 took place when Munir was DG ISI. There is a realisation in Pakistan and in the international community that the incident could have precipitated a major clash between India and Pakistan. Following the Balakot air strike, there is recognition of the fact that India, under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, will not turn the other cheek but take the battle into Pakistan. The doctrine of pre-emption articulated by the Indian foreign secretary also makes it more likely that India will hit back in the future too. This view has been bolstered with PM Modi's massive victory in the recently-concluded elections. With the economy in dire straits and opposition parties gearing up to destabilise the government, the internal "security" expertise of the new DG ISI could come in very handy to ensure the health of the Imran Khan government.

Another critical issue is the clumsy manner in which the Pashtun protests have been dealt with. The Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) has been growing in strength and its call to end violence and harassment in the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) has been getting traction among the Pashtuns in Pakistan. The army sees its latest slogan, *lar-o-bar yaw Afghan* – the spectre of the merging of Pakistani Pashtun (*lar*) with their Afghan brethren (*bar*) within a so-called Greater Afghanistan – as indicative of secessionist tendencies. Given that about 20 per cent of the Pakistan army consists of Pashtuns, the PTM could pose a clear and present danger.

General Hameed's task is cut out. He has to ensure that things do not get out of control internally in Pakistan. However, as far as India is concerned, the lull – if one can call it that – would only be temporary till the situation cools down. Once international pressure eases, the Pakistan economy is under an IMF programme and the threat of being blacklisted by the FATF recedes, it will be back to business as usual for the new DG ISI.

Devasher is the author of *Pakistan: Courting the Abyss and Pakistan: At the Helm*. He is a former Special Secretary, Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India and is currently member, National Security Advisory Board and consultant, Vivekananda International Foundation

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

FOCUS ON QUALITY

THIS REFERS to the editorial, 'Search for cure' (IE, June 18). Expecting more empathy from overstressed is asking for too much. The root cause of the troubled doctor-patient relationship is the skewed doctor-patient ratio. This is exacerbated by crumbling infrastructure in our hospitals. It appears that the aim of hospitals is to attend to the ever growing number of patients without focusing on the quality of treatment. State run hospitals require radical reform.

Deepak Singh, Noida

A CASH-LITE ECONOMY

THIS REFERS to the report, 'Digital transactions set to rise four times by 2021' (IE, June 17). Digital payment channels like mobile banking, UPI and IMPS are comparatively safe and convenient. The use of UPI is gaining momentum because it leads immediate settlement of funds round the clock. More PoS terminals will be the game changer in a building "cash-lite economy".

Amiyavrat Kumar, Navi Mumbai

CLEAN THE ROT

THIS REFERS to the article, 'Case for compassion' (IE, June 17). Violence upon doctors cannot be seen simplistically. It is a result of factors such as inadequate healthcare facilities in public hospitals, lack of compassion from doctors, over-treatment and under-treatment of poor patients. These issues require attention in order to improve the doctor-patient relationship.

Dilip Kumar Duta, Midnapore

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

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

Letter writers should mention their postal address and phone number.

THE WINNER RECEIVES SELECT EXPRESS PUBLICATIONS

THIS REFERS to the editorial, 'A home in space' (IE June 15). ISRO's has announced its ambitions plans to build a space station. This comes at a time when the NASA's ISS is set to retire by 2028. While some may consider the project as too expensive, we must remember that Vikram Sarabhai, the father of India's space programme, had said that while the world may ridicule the space ambitions of a third world country, we must focus on building and developing a robust space programme.

Sauro Dasgupta, Kolkata

VIEW FROM THE RIGHT

COMMUNAL MINORITIES

IN RESPONSE to the call by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to ensure his government has "Sabka Vishwas" some Muslim leaders have written an open letter appreciating the PM's initiative with a rider – undertake more "Confidence Building Measures" (CBMs). The editorial in Organiser says that though there is an absence of consensus about this initiative within the Muslim community, as many pessimists have raised red flags, CBMs must be considered at the community level, rather than just as a matter for the government. It claims that it is not that the Modi government did not try to reach out to all sections in the first term. The problem lies somewhere else, and addressing it goes beyond mere economic or educational benefits.

The editorial theorises that the entire division of majority and minority is based on flawed considerations and is a creation of the colonial rulers. "Barring Muslims and to some extent Christians, no religious commu-



THE INDIAN EXPRESS

AS INTERNATIONAL Yoga Day approaches, Organiser and Panchayana have a series of articles about Yoga and its benefits. An article in Organiser says that "Hindutva is the best choice for humanity, it's a gift from India, to India and the world, and yoga marries so well





Preventing violence

A law to protect doctors is good, and a health-care upgrade is essential

All it took West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to end the week-long strike by junior doctors in the State was a meeting with the agitating medics and a credible assurance that their safety was a priority for her government. The attack on a junior doctor on June 10 over the death of a patient had sparked the agitation, which spread to other parts of the country when it appeared that the State government was reluctant to negotiate with the striking doctors. Now that Ms. Banerjee has reached out to young doctors and conceded that their demands are genuine, the government, in West Bengal and elsewhere, must focus on addressing the deficiencies afflicting the health-care system as a whole. Reprisal attacks on doctors by agitated relatives of patients who die during treatment are known to happen. Such violence is invariably the result of systemic problems that adversely affect optimal attention to patients, such as infrastructural and manpower constraints. It is apparent that doctors work in stressful environments, sometimes under political pressure with regard to admissions. Several States have enacted laws to protect doctors and other health-care personnel from violence. Last week, Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan wrote to State governments highlighting the need for stringent action against anyone who assaults doctors. He asked States that do not have a law to protect doctors against violence to enact one, and circulated a 2017 draft of a law that envisaged imprisonment besides recovery of compensation from perpetrators for loss or damage to property.

However, is such a law really effective? Ironically, West Bengal, the epicentre of a strike that involved nearly the entire medical fraternity across the country, has such a law too. Like the law in most other States, the West Bengal Act provides for a three-year prison term and a fine, which could go up to ₹50,000, to anyone indulging in violence against any "medicare service person", which covers doctors, nurses, medical and nursing students and paramedical staff. The offence is cognisable and non-bailable. It also provides for recovery of compensation for loss. Many other States have similar laws, with the one in Tamil Nadu providing for a prison term that could go up to 10 years. It is clear that having this law did not prevent the incident that sparked the latest agitation. There are no figures available on how many times the medical service person protection law has been invoked. In any case, causing simple or grievous injuries to anyone is a criminal offence under the Indian Penal Code. Treating the issue as a law and order problem is just one way. The real solution may lie in improving health infrastructure, counselling patients about possible adverse treatment outcomes, and providing basic security in medical institutions.

Organisation men

J.P. Nadda's elevation as BJP working president reveals the party's long-term goals

The appointment of J.P. Nadda as the Bharatiya Janata Party's working president is proof yet again that it does not leave anything to chance in the relentless pursuit of its politics. Union Home Minister Amit Shah will continue as party president until his term ends in December 2019, when Mr. Nadda is expected to succeed him. Mr. Shah has been Prime Minister Narendra Modi's close confidant and strategist for several years, and an architect of the party's Lok Sabha victories in 2014 and 2019. The decision to appoint a working president, as Mr. Shah would not be always available for party work, is a sign of the importance the BJP and its ideological mother ship, the RSS, attach to organisation. Except for the communist units, this is in contrast with the general nature of all other parties, which give limited attention to organisation-building. The RSS had meticulously assigned distinct roles to the multiple outfits that it floated over the decades, all converging into the larger stream of Hindutva politics. The BJP's emergence as the primary pole of Indian politics through sweeping victories in two consecutive general elections could strain the organisational edifice of the Sangh Parivar, but not immediately. The orderly, clinical manner in which Mr. Nadda was selected, with the concurrence and prompting of the RSS, demonstrates the Parivar's ability to be clear-eyed in its priorities.

Hindutva politics does not see power as an end in itself but as a tool to advance its ideological goals. Also, individual ambitions are expected to be subordinate to organisational priorities. The rise of Mr. Modi with Mr. Shah alongside, and their combined role in the party's outstanding electoral performances in recent years, have inspired commentaries that put them on a pedestal. Mr. Modi and Mr. Shah will remain in command of the overall scheme of things, and Mr. Nadda, by all accounts, is a proven loyalist to both of them. At the same time, by promoting a new power centre the BJP is also demonstrating that individuals are not indispensable despite the commanding authority and presence of the two big leaders. Mr. Nadda is not as combative as Mr. Shah but is as disciplined, a trait that he imbibed through his long association with the RSS. His elevation is also a continuation of the BJP's efforts to promote leaders who have spent more time in the States than in Delhi - Himachal Pradesh in Mr. Nadda's case. The selection of Thawar Chand Gehlot as the BJP's leader in the Rajya Sabha is also remarkable in this context. A Dalit who came up from a small town through the trade union wing of the RSS, he is an outlier in the Upper House's general character, which is metropolitan, upper class and usually upper caste. Mr. Shah recently stated that the BJP has not yet peaked. The organisational changes are evidently being made in that belief.

An idea whose time may not have come

But the debate on simultaneous elections is useful — it could throw up other reforms to cleanse the electoral process



S.Y. QURAISHI



GETTY IMAGES/STOCKPHOTO

Not even a month after the world's largest elections in history were over, the debate around "one nation, one election" has been resurrected. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who had continued to flag the issue for the last five years, has now called for a meeting on the subject with leaders of other political parties.

The 2014 manifesto of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) read: "The BJP will seek, through consultation with other parties, to evolve a method of holding Assembly and Lok Sabha elections simultaneously. Apart from reducing election expenses for both political parties and Government, this will ensure certain stability for State Governments."

Constant campaigners

In an interview with a news channel in January 2018, the Prime Minister had rightly highlighted the demerits of the country being in constant election mode. "One election finishes, the second starts," he said. He argued that having simultaneous Parliament, Assembly, civic and Panchayat polls once every five years and completed within a month or so would save money, resources and manpower. This, he pointed out, happened on account of a large section of the security forces, bureaucracy and political machinery having to be mobilised for up to 200 days a year on account of electioneering.

The BJP's 2019 manifesto also mentions that simultaneous elec-

tions for Parliament, State Assemblies and local bodies to "ensure efficient utilisation of government resources and security forces and... effective policy planning". It goes on to say that the party "will try to build consensus on this issue with all parties". It is in this spirit of reform and consensus building that the Prime Minister has revived this debate, calling an all-party meeting for discussions on June 19.

The re-elected Chief Minister of Odisha, Naveen Patnaik, has already welcomed the idea, saying, on June 15, that frequent elections affect the development climate, and hence it is better to have simultaneous elections in the country.

The Law Commission had recommended simultaneous elections to Lok Sabha, Vidhan Sabha and the local bodies as far back as in 1999. The BJP's L.K. Advani also supported the idea back in 2010 in an eloquent blog post. The matter was examined by a Parliamentary Standing Committee in December 2015, and was also referred to the Election Commission of India (EC). Both supported it in principle.

Genuine concerns

The concerns raised are indeed genuine, and the idea is worth debating. First, it is becoming more and

more difficult to contest elections. The 2019 general election was the most expensive on record; a whopping ₹60,000 crore was reportedly spent on the whole exercise. Given that there is no cap on the expenditure incurred by political parties, they spend obscene amounts of money in every election. It is argued that simultaneous elections would help reduce this cost.

Second, frequent elections hamper the normal functioning of the government and disrupt civic life. This happens because the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) comes into operation as soon as the EC announces the election dates. This means that the government cannot announce any new schemes during this period. This results in what is often referred to as a policy paralysis. The government cannot make any new appointments or transfer/ appoint officials. The entire government manpower is involved in the conduct of elections.

I would also like to add that elections are the time when communalism, casteism and corruption are at their peak. Frequent elections mean that there is no respite from these evils at all. This has directly resulted in the souring of the political discourse, something that was on full display during the 2019 general election.

From the point of view of EC, simultaneous elections make perfect sense because the voters for all three tiers are the same, polling booths are the same and staff/security is the same – the suggestion of "one nation, one election" seems logical.

The hurdles

The idea, however, has some hurdles. First, how will "one nation, one election" work in case of premature dissolution of the Lok Sabha, for instance, as happened in late 1990s when the House was dissolved long before its term of five years was over? In such an eventuality, would we also dissolve all State Assemblies? Similarly, what happens when one of the State Assemblies is dissolved? Will the entire country go to polls again? This sounds unworkable both in theory and in the practice of democracy.

Second, as for the implementation of schemes of the government during the MCC period, only the new schemes are stopped as these could be tantamount to enticing/bribing voters on the eve of elections. All ongoing programmes are unhindered. Even new announcements that are in urgent public interest can be made with the prior approval of the EC.

Additionally, frequent elections are not so bad for accountability after all. They ensure that the politicians have to show their faces to voters regularly. Creation of work opportunities at the grass-root level is another big upside. The most important consideration is undoubtedly the federal spirit, which, inter alia, requires that local and national issues are not mixed up.

Now, as the debate has been rekindled, wider deliberation on the need for a range of reforms must be considered. Till the idea

achieves political consensus, there are two alternative suggestions to deal with the problems that arise due to frequent elections.

First, the problem of uncontrolled campaign expenditure can be remedied by introducing a cap on expenditure by political parties. State funding of political parties based on their poll performance also is a suggestion worth considering. Private and corporate fund collection may be banned.

Second, as I have suggested elsewhere, the poll duration can be reduced from two-three months to about 33 to 35 days if more Central armed police forces can be provided. The problems associated with a multi-phased election have been getting compounded, with more issues being added to the list with every election. Violence, social media-related transgressions and issues related to the enforcement of the MCC which are unavoidable in a staggered election will vanish if the election is conducted in a single day. All that needs to be done is to raise more battalions. This will also help in job creation.

A healthy debate

To conclude, it is undeniable that simultaneous elections would be a far-reaching electoral reform. If it is to be implemented, there needs to be a solid political consensus, and an agenda of comprehensive electoral reforms should supplement it. The pros and cons need to be appropriately assessed and practical alternatives sincerely considered. It is good that the government continues to encourage a debate on the subject rather than forcibly pushing it through.

S.Y. Quraishi is a former Chief Election Commissioner of India and the author of *An Undocumented Wonder – the Making of the Great Indian Election'*

Building confidence, BIT by BIT

Indian bilateral investment treaties need to strike a balance between foreign investor interests and those of the state



PRABHASH RANJAN

As Minister of Finance and Corporate Affairs Nirmala Sitharaman gets ready to present the first budget of the 17th Lok Sabha, she faces enormous challenges. The GDP growth rate is at a five-year low, domestic consumption is sinking, the business confidence index has plunged, and India has recorded its highest unemployment rate in the last 45 years. To add to this list of woes is a claim made by Arvind Subramanian, India's former Chief Economic Adviser, that India's GDP has been overestimated. Foreign direct investment (FDI) equity inflows to India in 2018-19 contracted by 1%, according to the government's own data. After an increase of 22% and 35% in 2014-15 and 2015-16, respectively, FDI equity inflows began tapering off since 2016-17 with the growth rate falling to 9% and then to 3% in 2017-18.

Lost opportunity

This contraction in FDI inflows comes at a time when global supply chains are shifting base as a re-

sult of the ongoing trade war between the U.S. and China. India has failed to attract firms exiting China. Many of these supply chains have relocated to Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia and Indonesia. India is clearly not the natural/first option for these firms for a host of reasons, such as poor infrastructure, rigid land and labour laws, a deepening crisis in the banking sector and a lack of structural economic reforms.

The decline in the FDI growth rate, despite the well-advertised improvement in India's ease of doing business rankings, interestingly, has coincided with India's decision, in 2016, to unilaterally terminate bilateral investment treaties (BITs) with more than 60 countries; this is around 50% of the total unilateral termination of BITs globally from 2010 to 2018. Unilateral termination of BITs on such a mass scale projects India as a country that does not respect international law. India also adopted a new inward-looking Model BIT in 2016 that prioritises state interests over protection to foreign investment.

In the absence of empirical evidence, one cannot conclude that termination of BITs and adoption of a state-friendly Model BIT adversely impacted FDI inflows. Nonetheless, since studies have shown that BITs positively impact-

ed foreign investment inflows to India, an examination of the link between the two should be a high priority for the Ministry of Finance and Corporate Affairs – the nodal body dealing with BITs.

The decision to terminate BITs and adopt a state-friendly Model BIT was a reaction to India being sued by several foreign investors before international arbitration tribunals. The government concluded that these claims were an outcome of India's badly designed BITs, signed in the 1990s and 2000s that were based on a laissez faire template.

Bad regulation
True, India's BITs gave extensive protection to foreign investment with scant regard for state's interests – a characteristically neoliberal model. This design flaw could have been corrected by India negotiating new balanced treaties and then replacing the existing ones with the new ones instead of terminating them unilaterally, which has created a vacuum. Im-

portantly, the design flaw was not the real reason for the increasing number of BIT claims. A large number arose either because the judiciary could not get its act together (an example being inordinate delays in deciding on the enforceability of arbitration awards) or because it ruled in certain cases without examining India's BIT obligations such as en masse cancellation of the second generation telecom licences in 2012. Likewise, the executive – the Manmohan Singh government – got the income tax laws retrospectively amended in 2012 to overrule the Supreme Court's judgment in favour of Vodafone and cancelled Devas Multimedia's spectrum licences in 2011 without following due process, thus adversely impacting Mauritian and German investors.

These cases are examples of bad state regulation. They also reveal an absence of full knowledge of India's obligations under BITs by different state entities. Thus, the Ministry of Finance and Corporate Affairs should invest extensively in developing state capacity so that the Indian state starts internalising BITs and is not caught on the wrong foot before an international tribunal.

In correcting the pro-investor imbalance in India's BITs, India went to the other extreme and

created a pro-state imbalance as evident in the Model BIT.

For a four point plan

Correcting this imbalance should be high on the reform agenda of the government. 'Progressive capitalism' (channeling the power of the market to serve society, as explained by Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz) provides the right template. Indian BITs should strike a balance between interests of foreign investors and those of the state. A certain degree of arrogance and misplaced self-belief that foreign investors would flock to India despite shocks and surprises in the regulatory environment should be put to rest. Clarity, continuity and transparency in domestic regulations and a commitment to a balanced BIT framework would help India project itself as a nation committed to the rule of law, both domestically and internationally, and thus shore up investor confidence. As the 2019 World Investment Report confirms, since India is fast becoming a leading outward investor, balanced BITs would also help in protecting Indian investment abroad.

Prabhash Ranjan teaches at South Asian University and is the author of *India and Bilateral Investment Treaties: Refusal, Acceptance, Backlash'*

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.

Bihar deaths

If proved to be true, the dereliction of health-care duties in Bihar is unpardonable as it has resulted in over 90 precious lives being lost (Editorial, "The litchi link?", June 18). In India, life is cheap and the underprivileged are almost like the cat with nine lives. It is shocking that simple treatment is not delivered. Even more appalling are the flimsy excuses being used in defence such as the heat wave. Such lapses harm the credibility of the medical fraternity and the outcome is ugly episodes of the West Bengal hospital-type.

DEEPAK SINGHAL
Noida, Uttar Pradesh

■ Undernourishment is a major problem in India, with alarming data on underweight, stunted and wasted children in Bihar. The POSHAN Abhiyaan, which is a multi-ministerial

convergence mission with the vision to ensure attainment of malnutrition-free India by 2022", must reach every corner of India. On the lines of the Right to Education, a 'right to nutritious food' should also be implemented for children below five.

BALAJI AKIRI,
Hyderabad

■ It is unfortunate that announcements made in 2014 about improving the infrastructure in health facilities have still not been met. There are large gaps in the infrastructure. The doctor-patient ratio is way below what is required. It is the same situation for paramedical staff. Technical facilities too are below par, a reflection of the apathy towards the poor in a region known for health-care issues. A long-term strategy must also include special investigative procedures (including autopsy) to reach

the causes of such events quickly. The government needs to increase public spending on health.

Ds. ARUN MITRA,
Ludhiana, Punjab

GM farming
We should not forget that farmers' fields are not botanical gardens (Editorial page, "Serious concerns about Bt brinjal", June 18). Farmers do practise artificial ways and means to grow crops. Brinjal has the one of the most diverse germplasms in the plant world, so fears about its gene erosion appear to be misplaced. As far as nutrition issues are concerned, it may be incorrect to say that GM crops will have low nutrition. The WHO itself is taking an active role in exploiting biotechnology. One should also not forget that there are proper guidelines that have been set by the Codex Alimentarius guidelines on safety assessment of GM

foods. We should at least consider the success of the U.S. where 93% of soybean and maize that is used is GM.

ARJUN SHARMA,
Bathinda, Punjab

Chennai's water woes
The water problem in Chennai began around the late 1950s with the installation of public taps, often below ground level. Then came the hand pump followed by small borewells. Fortunately the groundwater level was by and large satisfactory. Trouble began to brew when the population crossed the five-lakh mark. The 'water history' of Chennai for the past 50 years can be characterised by good rains, floods and a few droughts in between. But the response to the drought this year is a reflection of apathy, inaction, lack of imagination and a total lack of planning. Of course, water tanker owners have hit a gold mine. What is shameful is the

absence of a sustainable plan to reverse this disgraceful situation.

S. RAJAGOPALAN,
Chennai

■ In some of the extensive coverage being given to the 2019 water crisis in Chennai (Chennai city pages), I disagree with the opinion expressed (June 14) that rainwater harvesting (RWH) systems alone could have saved the city; we have not had even a drop of rain in the last six months. I say this as a former director of the IMD. Lack of periodic maintenance of RWH systems is essentially about

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:
The second deck headline in the report, "Priyanka's outburst panned, but party men back her" (June 16, 2019, some editions), erroneously referred to byelections due in 11 Lok Sabha seats in Uttar Pradesh. The text, however, correctly talks about a clutch of by-elections to the Assembly that are due.

"Modi to meet Xi, Putin at SCO" (June 11, 2019) erroneously referred to Sooronbay Jeenbekov as the Uzbekistan President. He is the President of the Kyrgyz Republic.

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Averting deaths in Muzaffarpur

All it could have taken was to ensure that the children had a meal at night



T. JACOB JOHN

Along with my colleagues, I had investigated the so-called mystery disease in Muzaffarpur, Bihar, during its outbreak in 2012, 2013 and 2014. The local name for it was acute encephalitis syndrome, but we found that the disease was not encephalitis but encephalopathy. This distinction is important. Encephalitis results from a viral infection, unless proved otherwise. The pathology is primarily in the brain. Encephalopathy is a biochemical disease, unless proved otherwise. The primary pathology is not in the brain. Specific treatment is scanty for viral encephalitis, but encephalopathy is eminently treatable.

Hypoglycaemia (when the level of glucose in the blood falls below normal) is usually due to an overdose of insulin in children with diabetes. It is easily corrected with oral sugar or intravenous glucose. The easily available 5% glucose solution suffices. Hypoglycaemic encephalopathy, however, is different from simple hypoglycaemia.

The disease pathway

We found that the disease broke out during the months when litchi was harvested, i.e. April, May and June. Muzaffarpur is full of litchi orchards. The illness started suddenly – children were found vomiting, displayed abnormal movements, were semi-conscious, and were convulsing between 4 a.m. and 7 a.m. The disease progressed fast – children went into coma and died within a few days. When sick children were tested, the blood glucose level was always below normal.

This disease was reminiscent of the Jamaican Vomiting Disease, a form of hypoglycaemic encephalopathy. It is triggered when unripe ackee fruits are eaten. These fruits contain a substance, methylene cyclopropyl alanine, which blocks a biochemical process called fatty acid oxidation, or gluconeogenesis.

There are two essential steps: gluconeogenesis is turned on and is then blocked midway by methylene cyclopropyl alanine. The back-up molecules of the unfinished process are certain amino acids that are highly toxic to the brain cells. Ackee and litchi belong to one plant family. My toxicology colleague, Dr. Mukul Das, found generous



PTI

quantities of methylene cyclopropyl glycine in litchi fruit pulp.

The disease affected only malnourished children between the ages of two and 10. A majority of them were from families camping in orchards for fruit harvesting. No child from the nearby towns fell ill. Children of well-to-do families never fell ill.

Litchi harvest usually begins by 4 a.m., which means that families are awake before that. They go to sleep early. If children go to sleep without dinner, parents usually do not wake them up and feed them. Litchis are collected in bunches and sent to the collection points, but single fruits fall to the ground. Children are free to collect and share the fruits with their friends.

With this information we made the hypothesis that the disease was hypoglycaemic encephalopathy. Along with my paediatric colleague, Dr. Arun Shah, we conclusively showed that the disease was indeed hypoglycaemic encephalopathy. With all the pieces in hand, we reconstructed the disease pathway.

After prolonged fasting, malnourished children slipped into hypoglycaemia in the morning. Since they had very little reserve glycogen in their livers, they were unable to mobilise glucose from liver glycogen, unlike well-nourished children. The brain needs glucose as a source of energy. As a result of lack of liver glycogen, gluconeogenesis was turned on. Had there not been litchi methylene cyclopropyl glycine, the glucose levels would have been maintained, and the children would have come to no harm. As the children had consumed litchis the previous day, gluconeogenesis had been blocked, aminoacidaemia had developed, and brain functions had been affected. Hypoglycaemic encephalopathy had set in.

We were unable to demonstrate aminoacidaemia in children with hypoglycaemic encephalopathy, but that was done by investigators from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The only missing piece in our

studies was filled in by CDC colleagues.

The disease can be prevented if children are well nourished, but that is not possible in the immediate term. It can also be prevented by ensuring that children eat a meal at night. All families were taught to provide a cooked meal to children before going to sleep at night. Preventing children from eating litchis is not easy, but the quantity of the fruit can be restricted with parental supervision. With all this health education, I was told that the disease number had come down drastically in 2016-18 compared to what it was in 2014-15. I don't know what went wrong this year.

In 2015, all primary health centres were supplied with glucometers to check the blood glucose levels of sick children. Doctors were instructed to take a blood sample for glucose estimation and, irrespective of the results, infuse 10% glucose intravenously. To correct mild hypoglycaemia, 5% glucose is enough, but here the problem is not hypoglycaemia alone, but aminoacidaemia as a result of blocked gluconeogenesis. To prevent any further back-up amino acid from accumulating, the fatty acid oxidation process has to be turned off quickly. That requires raising blood glucose level to abnormally high levels so that insulin secretion is stimulated, and that in turn turns off the gluconeogenesis.

No sustained health education

What Dr. Shah and I found was that if ill children are infused with 10% glucose within four hours of onset of brain dysfunction, recovery is fast and complete. If only 5% glucose is given, or if 10% glucose is not administered within four hours, recovery is unlikely. I do not have detailed information from the field, but there seem to have been some human slip-ups this time.

Glucometers have not been maintained well. Health education was not sustained. New doctors are not familiar with all the information. Instead of 10% glucose, 5% is given. Children are taken mostly to private clinics and are then referred to the Sri Krishna Medical College in Muzaffarpur city since ambulance services are free of cost and easily available. Ambulances take more than four hours to reach the city hospitals from many rural clinics. We might think each error is minor, but when all the errors add up they contribute to deaths that should have been averted.

T. Jacob John is a retired professor of virology from CMC Vellore

SINGLE FILE

Linking civilisation, culture and religion

We need to make sense of these terms in less exclusive ways

UDAY BALAKRISHNAN

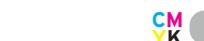
The words civilisation and culture are bandied about a lot these days. We are defensive about the first and protective of the other to a point where insulation becomes exclusion. Add religion to the two and we have a venomous plait that is near impossible to undo. Collectively we need to step back and look at these terms in perspective, if only to make sense of them in less exclusive ways and appreciate the common thread that runs through them. This is more important now as majoritarian points of view are being mistaken for, or are being passed off as, voluntary consensus.

Let's take religion first. Is mine better than yours? This is a question that has no answers, no sensible ones in any case. However much we may argue, there is much to commend in each faith and a lot to condemn in every one of them. The great philosopher, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, observed: "To admit the various descriptions of God is not to lapse into polytheism. When Yajnavalkya was called upon to state the number of gods, he started with the popular number 3306, and ended by reducing them all to one Brahman. 'This indestructible enduring reality is to be looked upon as one only.' So where is the big difference between the many faiths in India? I, for one, am proud of the juxtaposition of a temple, a mosque and a church at Palayam in my home town Thiruvananthapuram, and hail the Holkar queen of the Maratha Malwa kingdom, Ahilyabai Holkar, for preserving the Gyanvapi Mosque even as she rebuilt the Kashi Vishwanath Temple. There is a lot to learn from our past.

Culture is more problematic than religion. It is an omnibus term that hints at something good. But in the way it is deployed, it is a loaded and sinister term seeking to establish the superiority of one way of life and the inferiority of another. In his thoughtful book, *The Seduction of Culture in German History*, the sociologist Wolf Lepenies suggests a direct relationship between the German understanding of culture, which "has remained the catchword by which the Germans tried to distinguish themselves from the rest of the civilized world", and the rise of Hitler. Totalitarianism has deep roots in the collective minds of people. To be aware of it and keep it in check is a task cut out for civilisation.

As a term, civilisation is somewhat ambiguous but it strongly suggests harmony, unity, tolerance, enlightenment and confidence. But civilisation can be easily destroyed, as the renowned art historian Kenneth Clark cautions, "by cynicism and disillusion just as effectively as by bombs". That happens when, quoting Yeats in his book *Civilization*, he claims, "The best lack all conviction, while the worst / Are full of passionate intensity." How true.

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M ND-NDE

Doctors and patients deserve better

Violence against doctors is a symptom and not the disease. Structural and policy changes in India's hospitals, and not increased security, may help in controlling it



SANJAY NAGRAL



AFP

that common citizens who see swanky private hospitals delivering quick, organised care wonder why they get such a raw deal? That they now realise that just putting an oxygen mask on an individual who is gasping for breath is not enough, a ventilator is needed? In other words, is the realisation that there is a more effective way of care, which the common man is being denied because of his or her inability to pay for it, the cause for anger which periodically explodes in a perverse manner?

One reason why laws are unlikely to work is that patients and their families or friends do not come to a hospital with a plan to attack. Attacks are impulsive responses in an emotional moment. What may work instead is softening the blow on families by examining how, where and who delivered the bad news to them. If family members in moments of intense grief are now regularly donating organs to their near and dear ones, there must be something that we are doing right. This is happening probably because the news is broken to them in a planned and organised manner by a trained transplant coordinator, usually in the sanitised setting of an intensive care unit of a large private hospital.

Demanding change

As members of a profession who have been trained in the method of science, we can do better than imitate the impulsive, inappropriate responses of those who attack the first doctor in sight, as well as the political class. We can certainly do better than come up with ludicrous demands such as appointing bouncers or bodyguards in hospitals. Several structural and policy changes in the way India's hospital systems work can reduce, if not eliminate, the perception that there is negligence in caring for patients. Medical associations who swing between fawning over politicians when they need favours to faux militancy after an incident, such as the one that took place in Kolkata, need to take the lead in demanding policy change.

The huge workload in large teaching hospitals in cities, such as in Kolkata's Nil Ratan Sarker Medical College and Hospital, is also the result of the poor capacity of suburban and rural hospitals to handle sick patients. This uneven scenario is due to excessive centralisation of funds, staff and equipment.

Examining the setting

The setting in which a majority of such incidents have taken place offer some clues. The most common scenario is that of a patient being brought to the casualty ward of a public hospital in a critical condition by family members or neighbours. If the patient does not survive, there is the reality or perception that treatment was not administered to him or her in time. The tipping point is when the staff in hospitals display insensitivity when they are questioned

about delays. It is true that the emergency wards of India's public hospitals are chaotic, disorganised and resemble conflict zones. While there are several factors that contribute to this, the complete absence of the globally recognised protocol of 'triage' is a big reason. Triage involves a rapid examination of a patient to determine whether he or she needs instant care, early care, or care that can wait. The absence of this protocol means that emergency wards are often occupied by patients with all sorts of minor injuries. Data from a study at our hospital showed that more than 90% of patients frequenting the casualty ward over a two-year period had minor injuries which could have been easily treated in a smaller setting. In India, when people go to the police with a complaint of an assault, they are advised to go to a government hospital even if they have very minor injuries, to record them to strengthen their legal case. All these patients come to the casualty ward adding to the crowd and the burden of the hospital staff. If the staff have to treat only 10% of the load of critical patients, they would do a much better job and perhaps even save lives.

Will punitive action, new laws or increased security change this scenario? Will we never see an incident like this if such measures are taken? As someone who participated in a strike by junior doctors as long back as 1985 in response to an assault by a corporator in Mumbai and continues to witness such events in the public hospital where I work, I can only dismiss these as rhetorical questions. But is there something beyond this customary discourse that springs from the debris of such a fracas that we should recognise? In medical parlance, is there a disease that is producing these symptoms in recurring fashion? These are questions worth examining.

A growing chasm

A dangerous argument that is put forth in the aftermath of such attacks is that people's expectations have increased. I am not sure what this means in a system where the bar has been set very low. Are people who see huge delays, rickety ambulances and lack of equipment or malfunctioning equipment not supposed to respond? Isn't it possible

Sanjay Nagral is a Mumbai-based surgeon

FROM The Hindu ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 19, 1969

P.M.'s choice of Giri not fully supported

All day to-day [June 18] and until late to-night, there was hectic political activity in the capital [New Delhi] with an endless series of high-level consultations between the Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, and her senior Cabinet colleagues and the principal Congress party's nominee for the Presidential election. But even after these intensive discussions, it was not clear whether Mrs. Indira Gandhi and her close supporters will be able to have their way in getting Mr. V.V. Giri nominated as the Congress candidate. The party leaders led by the Congress President, Mr. Nijalingappa, were still opposing Mr. Giri's nomination on the ground that a tried and trusted Congressman – which clearly meant one of them – should be chosen for this key post in view of the many political uncertainties ahead.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 19, 1919.

Swadeshi Campaign.

Another swadeshi cloth store to sell purely indigenous cloth was opened last night [June 18] at Morariji Goculdas Market [in Bombay] by Mr. Gandhi. One of the organisers of the movement, Mr. Narandas Purohitamdas, in opening the proceedings said that the necessity of opening the stores arose from the fact that there had been promulgated two swadeshi vows, the pure swadeshi vow and the mixed swadeshi vow. Those who had taken the first vow found it difficult to obtain such goods from the existing stores. The stores they were opening would sell only goods manufactured from Indian yarn charging only five per cent on the cost price so that the buyers would get clothes at the cheapest rate. Mr. Gandhi in declaring the stores open, said that the swadeshi vow was necessary for the progress of a nation and if they took a vow to use swadeshi clothes only, they would achieve truth.

CONCEPTUAL

Epistocracy

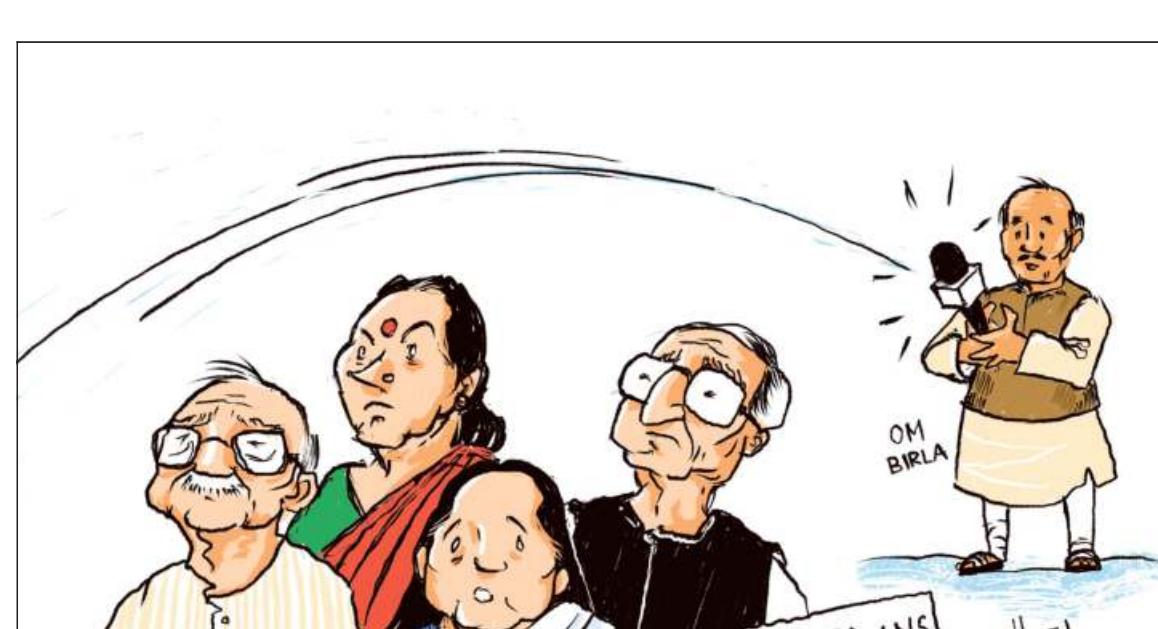
POLITICS

This refers to a form of political governance where the votes of people who are well informed about politics are weighed more heavily than the votes of people who have very little political knowledge. This is in contrast to democracy where everyone's vote is given the same weight despite the large differences in the political knowledge possessed by individual voters. The idea of epistocracy was first proposed by American political scientist Jason Brennan in his 2016 book *Against Democracy*. Supporters of epistocracy believe that such a system will incentivise people who are ignorant about politics to educate themselves in order to vote.

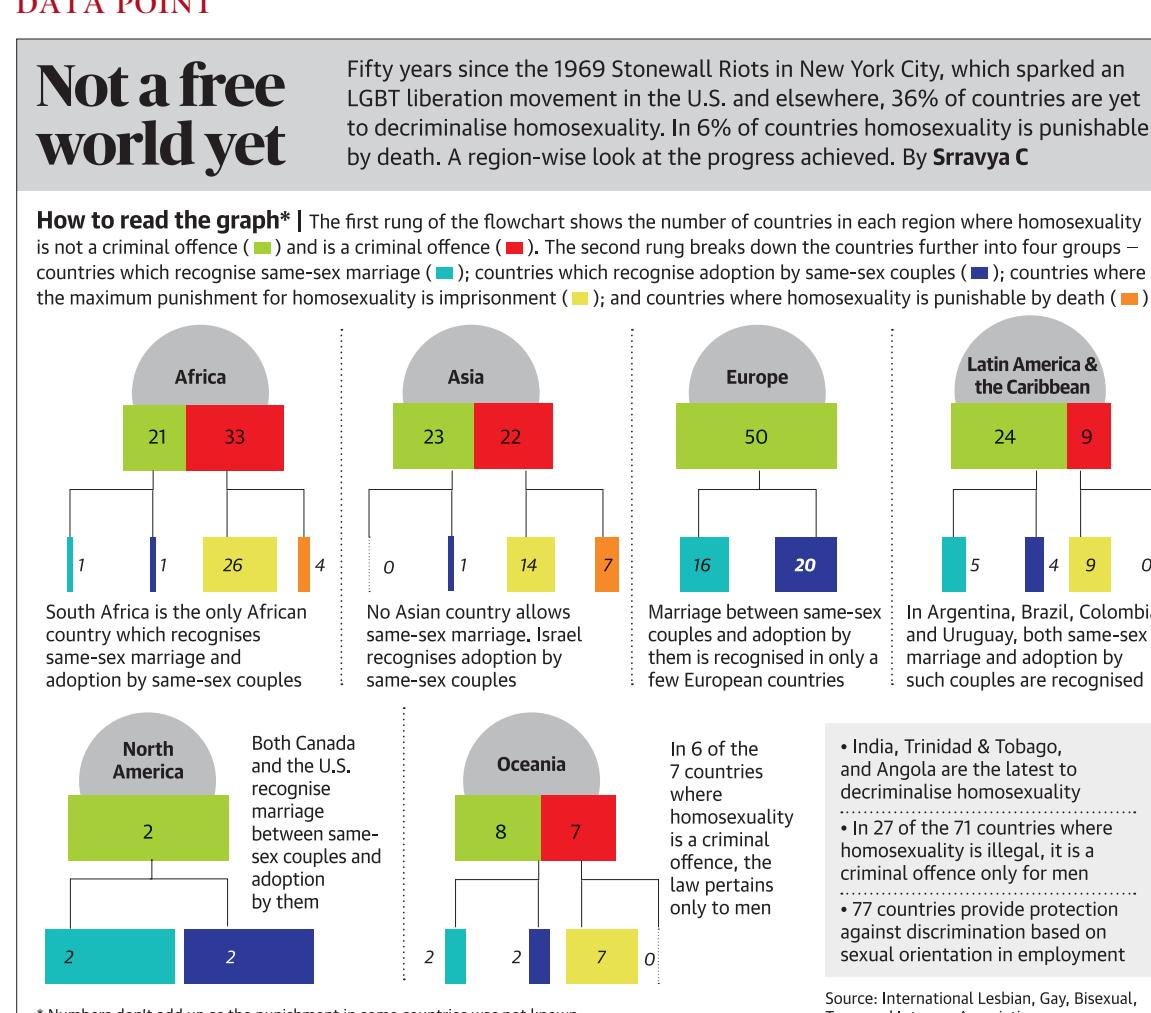
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DATA POINT



रांगी, बुधवार, 19.06.2019

राज्य मंत्रियों की भूमिका

के ग्रीष्म परिषद में शामिल राज्य मंत्री अब अधिक उत्तरदायित्व का वहन कर सकते हैं। इस प्रौढ़ी में अनिवार्य कर्निट मंत्रियों का कार्य कैबिनेट मंत्रियों का सहयोग करना होता है, लेकिन यह लगभग परिपार्टी बन गयी है कि अक्सर उन्हें कम महत्व के विभागीय काम, जैसे-राजभासा से जुड़े मामले, संसद के अताराकित प्रश्नों के उत्तर दैवार करना आदि-मिलते हैं, ऐसे में वे निर्णय करने की प्रक्रिया में अधिक योगदान नहीं कर पाते हैं, कैबिनेट मंत्री द्वारा राज्य मंत्रियों को शिकायत पूर्ववर्ती समाजों के दौर में आती रही थीं, पर अब इस स्थिति में तो सब बढ़ावाला के समाजों को यह सुनिश्चित करने का विदेश दिया है कि हर संचिका राज्य मंत्री से होकर ही कैबिनेट मंत्री के पास पहुंचे। इस दिनेश में यह भी आज दिया है कि अति अवश्यक होने का आधार बना कर संचिका को सीधे कैबिनेट मंत्री के पास भेजने की कोशिश न हो, ऐसेंटों के अनुसार, शपथ ग्रहण के बाद हुई पहली कैबिनेट बैठक में प्रधानमंत्री नेट्रो मोटी ने मंत्रियों से अपने

अगर राज्य मंत्रियों को अधिक जिम्मेदारी दी जाती है, तो इससे न सिर्फ उनकी क्षमता के विकास में मदद मिलेगी, बल्कि सरकार का प्रदर्शन भी बेहतर होगा।

ही उन्हें बोल कर जाता था स्पष्टीकरण-देने का अवसर मिला था। अहम बैठकों के अन्तिम दिनों में भी भागीदारी न के बावजूद एक सामाजिक तरीके से विनिर्दित कर दिया गया है, प्रधानमंत्री मोदी के पहले कार्यकाल के दैवान भी इस तरह के निर्देश देने का क्षमिता था और बहुत कम अवसरों पर