

# TERMS OF PEACE

Direct talks between US, Iran are the only way to de-escalate tensions. A new framework, a new balance, must be found

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP's last-minute decision late last week to stop a planned attack on Iran, in response to Tehran's downing of an American spy drone, provides an opportunity for Washington to take a fresh look at the deepening crisis in the Gulf. White House's second thoughts are of a piece with the conflicting signals from Trump on Iran over the last two years. Trump seemed to have sided with the Iran hawks at home to pull out of the nuclear agreement that his predecessor Barack Obama, along with other major powers, had negotiated with Iran. Israel and a section of the Sunni Arabs were egging him on. Trump then embarked on a "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran by ramping up sanctions to cover Iran's lifeline, the energy sector. This effort has been widely viewed as an attempt to overthrow the Islamic Republic.

Even as the war party in his own administration, led by the national security adviser, John Bolton, has been itching for a military showdown with Iran, Trump has presented himself as the champion of the peace faction. During his campaign for presidency and since, Trump has repeatedly criticised America's endless wars in West Asia. Much of his political base in America's heartland is unwilling to support another war in West Asia after the costly failures in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is no surprise, then, that the world has seen on the one hand a steady drift towards a military conflict with Iran, and on the other, President Trump's frequent call for an unconditional dialogue with Iran. After he reversed the decision to attack Iran, Trump said he appreciates Iran's restraint in not shooting down a spy plane with about 30 security forces that was in Iran's range along with the unmanned drone. He seemed to have encouraged the Japanese premier, Shinzo Abe, who was in Tehran earlier this month, to convey his interest in engagement with Iran directly to the Iranian leadership. But Iran has apparently turned down the offer.

Tehran is betting that it can afford to wait. Although Iran is hurting amidst new sanctions, it is playing the few cards it has with some effect. Last month, Tehran set a 60-day deadline for scaling back its compliance with the nuclear agreement, if other powers don't abide by its terms. This is deepening the divisions between the US and Europe, which has affirmed the value of the nuclear agreement. As Washington threatens to escalate the conflict vertically, Tehran has promised to escalate it horizontally — expand it to cover the regional allies of the US. This, in turn, has widened the split among the Gulf Arabs. Direct talks between the US and Iran might be the only way to de-escalate the current tensions in the Gulf, devise a new framework for a stable regional balance while limiting the four decades of conflict between Washington and Tehran. Finding the terms of that direct dialogue will obviously be a significant challenge.

# RUNNING DRY

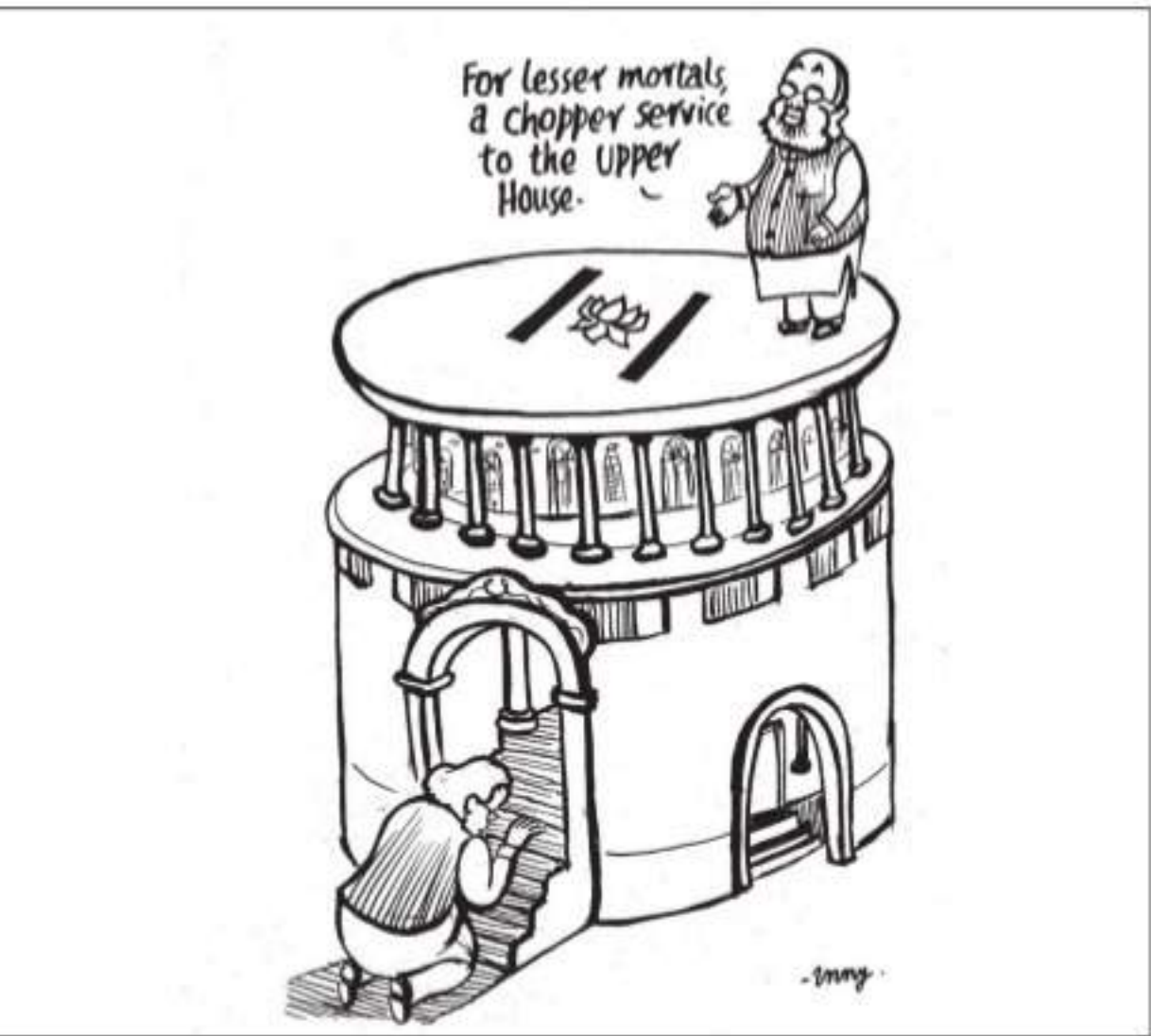
Chennai's water crisis bares the challenge for new Jal Shakti ministry — to ensure water security in growing towns and cities

AFTER A DRY spell of almost 200 days, Chennai received monsoon showers last week. But this has not mitigated the water crisis in Tamil Nadu's capital. Clashes over water have been reported from different parts of the city and firms in Chennai's Information Technology Park have asked employees to either work from home or bring their own water. The state government and the city's municipality have blamed the crisis on the deficient Northeast Monsoon in October-November last year. They are not completely wrong. However, the fact also is that in the past five years, Chennai's water supply has consistently fallen short of the city's requirement. The Chennai Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board has been able to supply only 830 million litres a day (mld) as against the demand of about 1,200 mld. This year, the agency's water supply dipped to 550 mld.

Chennai is a rain-shadow city. It gets more than 80 per cent of its water from the Northeast Monsoon. In the past, this water was stored in ponds, canals and lakes which would minimise the run-off — that a coastal city is susceptible to — and recharge groundwater. Besides, according to a study by researchers at the geology department of Chennai's Anna University, the city had more than 60 large water bodies at the turn of the 20th century. Three major waterways — the Buckingham canal and the rivers, Adyar and Cooum — crisscrossed Chennai. But Tamil Nadu's capital today has only 28 water bodies, large or small, notes the Anna University study. The Pallikaranai marshland which used to sprawl over more than 6,000 hectares has shrunk to about 650 hectares. A growing body of literature has shown that urban planners gave short shrift to the imperatives of Chennai's hydrology to meet the city's infrastructural demands. A parliamentary panel that enquired into the causes of the Chennai floods in 2015, for example, reported that that real estate business had "usurped" the city's water bodies. Today, Chennai gets its water from four reservoirs, which have gone dry after the retreating monsoon failed last year. Chennai's desalination plants can barely supply a fifth of the city's water requirements.

Chennai is amongst the 21 Indian cities which the Niti Aayog fears will run out of groundwater by 2020. The city's water crisis bares a critical challenge for the new Jal Shakti ministry. It has to play a leading role in resolving the tension in India's current urban planning paradigm between the developmental needs of people and water security imperatives. The new ministry should start by coordinating with local authorities in Chennai to rejuvenate the city's aquifers.

## FREEZE FRAME



## E P UNNY



AYESHA SIDDIQA

THE PAKISTAN ARMY'S public relations agency, the ISPR, recently announced cuts in the defence budget as the military's contribution to tough times. It was also stated that the money would be spent on development of the tribal areas and Balochistan without compromising the military's war preparedness. Notwithstanding the fact that the DG ISPR, a mere major general, jumped the gun by taking upon himself the authority of the current civilian government to announce how the money saved by the military would be spent, it draws attention towards the issue of how much is really needed to defend the country.

The announcement in itself does not mean anything until it specifies the total allocation for the military and exactly what cuts are being made. Surely, out of the PKR 1,100 billion for FY-2018/19, reduction cannot be brought into the 38 per cent spent on pay and personnel, 25 per cent on procurement and approximately 24 per cent as operational cost. The only element left is about 14 per cent under the head of civil works.

It is possible that like in the mid-2000s when Pervez Musharraf's handpicked prime minister, Shaukat Aziz, brought cosmetic changes to the defence budget — by putting pensions under civilian head of account that gave the impression of military expenditure being reduced — part of the civil works budget is diverted to development projects of FATA and Balochistan. In this case, the projects will be those that are closer to the army's heart. Since the days of Shaukat Aziz, about PKR 175-200 billion of military spending in the form of pensions, special projects, spending for military paid for from civilian expenditure, is not recorded as part of the defence budget, which makes it almost 3.7 per cent of the GDP.

Creating the impression that the military is cutting defence spending is vital to impress the IMF, which is the only organisation willing to provide cash to Pakistan to sustain the economy. While China is seen as a major saviour for Pakistan, funding for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) seems to have reduced in the last couple of years by approximately 54 per cent. The new MoUs

It is desirable, but not easy — especially in the case of the Pakistan military

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signed have not materialised in supply of cash to the Pakistani economy. Referring to the IMF, it wants the civilian government to not divert resources to non-development budget heads that are defence and debt servicing. This means that no money from the IMF funds is to be diverted to defence purchases from Russia, or to pay off China's debt.

Unlike the 1980s when General Zia ul Haq was able to shoo away multilateral aid donors by arguing that "Pakistan cannot afford any cut or freeze in defence expenditure, since you cannot freeze the threat to Pakistan's security," this time the IMF is proving more difficult. The main emphasis, however, is for Pakistan to reduce deficit spending or increase its earning. Since direct taxes have proven to be difficult, cutting costs remain the only option.

While one remains unsure of how much reduction will actually be brought about, the fact remains that cutting excess fat in the government, especially the defence sector, is possible. Pakistan could comfortably reduce about 25 per cent of defence spending without a change in its current capabilities. To attain such reduction it would require preplanning a rationalised defence structure, better human resource planning, conservation of available resources, stricter controls, cutting down duplication of activities, and reducing additional pomp and show. Inter-services rivalry alone is a major source of wastage. Many of the inter-services organisations, including the ISPR, are inter-services just in name. At the present moment, the ISPR is an army-dedicated organisation with the other two services operating their own public relations wings. Similarly, money could be saved through rationalising defence production.

Rationalising is easier said than done. It requires a vision to be given by a political government. The only time that happened in Pakistan was in the first two years of the Zulfikar Ali Bhutto government. In 1973 an elaborate higher defence management structure was laid out. This is not likely to happen again, certainly not under the present Imran Khan government.

The other person who could rationalise de-

fence spending is a visionary army chief to be followed by other service chiefs. An outgoing service chief may not have the capacity to rationalise defence decision-making and planning that has an impact on decreasing expenditure. Even if General Qamar Javed Bajwa gets an extension, he would be too eager to provide sweeteners for the top brass of the military, which is where most expensive perks are concentrated. A new chief in November this year would be too busy planning his own team; he may not have the time for such things. In a powerful organisation like Pakistan's, the service chief may not have the capability to reduce wastage as there is a paper trail for the money required by different sub-organisations and units of the armed forces.

Reduction cannot begin until there is some level of transparency and accountability from a source above the armed forces. The military has in the past killed institutional efforts at accountability. Though the audit of defence services is carried out by the government, a special organisation for the audit of defence purchases was closed down during the late 1990s after it could not function. Over the years, some sub-organisations like the Frontier Works Organisation (FWO) and the National Logistics Cell (NLC) that are part of the GHQ, got themselves out of the ambit of the existing defence audit. This was done through creating commercial structures to justify that a public sector audit couldn't be carried out. The military's control of the MoD has strengthened to a degree that no controls actually work.

The discussion thus far has not even touched upon the burgeoning commercial ventures of the military which are probably what will be used to divert additional funds to the military. After all, military business is anything but accountable to a civilian government. This segment has begun to establish a gradual control over the public sector and is drawing upon partnerships internationally. Reducing this economic giant is ideal but not doable in the near future.

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# CONGRESS, KNOW THYSELF

Party must look at its own history to address the current ideological vacuum

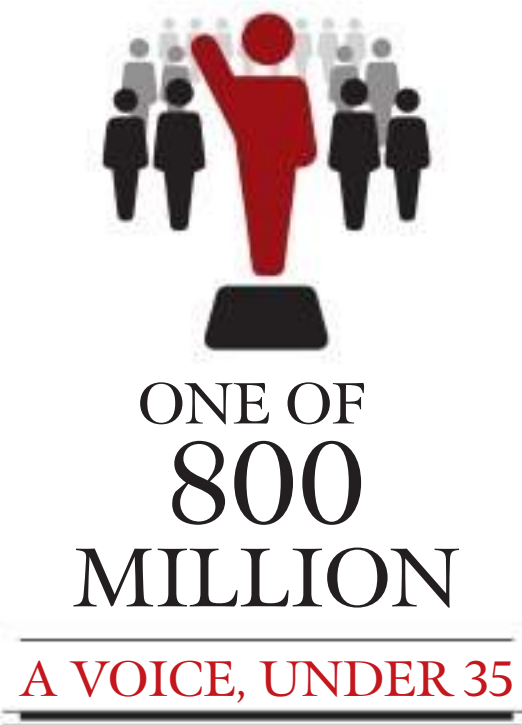


VANYA VAIDEHI BHARGAV

ONE CAN sympathise with the conundrum faced by the Congress after its resounding defeat. To meet the sticky charge of dynasticism, Rahul Gandhi must go, it is felt, but ejecting the family will remove the "glue" that holds its myriad factions together. Yet, the Congress needs to ask why it needs the family to hold it together in the first place. Does this not reflect an ideological vacuum? Rahul Gandhi claimed that he fought an ideological battle. A certain ideology crafted by leaders of our freedom struggle was indeed defended in the campaign. But not nearly strongly enough. The Congress failed its own history, its ideals, and ultimately the Indian nation. For this, it must assume responsibility.

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the Congress has forgotten the grand pantheon of thinker-politicians — Dadabhai Naoroji, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lajpat Rai, Bipin Chandra Pal, Sardar Patel, Maulana Azad, Jawaharlal Nehru and, above all, Mahatma Gandhi — each of whom moulded the nationalist ideology as they inspired the people of India to unite against the British Empire. The Congress had a clear stance on what constitutes Indian culture and history, on values like democracy, secularism and pluralism, on India's economic and foreign policy. It struck a morally justifiable balance between individual and community rights, had an unflinching commitment to social justice, attempted to reach decisions by consensus and articulate a largely non-masculine idea of courage and firmness.

Moreover, its nationalism was sincere:



Today's Congress appears to have forgotten what its core values were, and why they are still worth defending. Unclear itself, the Congress failed to convey to voters what was really at stake. To an ordinary voter, its appeals to 'Indian nationalism', 'the Constitution', 'democracy', 'inclusivism', 'diversity', just appeared to be nice-sounding words.

Many Congressmen were genuinely convinced about its moral worth, and their political actions were driven by it. Possessing clarity and conviction, Congressmen like Gandhi and Nehru could communicate this nationalism to the people of India, who comprehended it, found it reasonable, and were moved by it. While countless other factors were at play, the Congress's continued adherence to this coherently expressed nationalism explains its unparalleled popularity in politics for at least two decades after Independence.

Undoubtedly, one major reason behind the Congress' recent electoral defeat was its inability to communicate sincerely and coherently its nationalist ideology to voters, leave alone getting them to emotionally connect with it. The Congress might discuss its flawed slogans, alliances, communication, party organisation, or even its leadership, but ignoring its current ideological vacuum will be at its own peril.

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tive stood no chance. If Rahul Gandhi believed this was an ideological battle, he under-estimated his rival's clarity, missionary zeal, and their superior understanding of social media.

If the Indian nationalist vision so painstakingly fought for by our freedom fighters is to survive, the Congress needs to overcome its amnesia. This requires a deep, sincere study of its own rich intellectual resources and heritage. It also requires the humility to seek help from historians and political philosophers. This is not a suggestion to construct a theoretical, overly-intellectualised ideology but in fact its opposite — to weave a robust, meaningful narrative that explains to ordinary citizens the meaning of the Congress' nationalist values and why they matter. Further, the Congress must learn from its formidable opponent the skillful use of all kinds of media. It needs a communication model as creative as its rival's, albeit with different content. A media onslaught from one side can only be met by an equally passionate campaign from the other.

The stakes are terrifically high. The Congress must not endanger the nationalist vision which its forerunners so painstakingly evolved and for which they sacrificed so much. Indeed, those citizens who still understand the true worth of this vision are filled with dread at the prospect of its loss. These people deserve better. Will they be disappointed again?

The writer, 31, has a D.Phil in History from Oxford University. Her dissertation focused on Lajpat Rai's nationalist thought

## JUNE 24, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

### RAJ NARAIN RESIGNS

THE SIMMERING CRISIS in the Janata Party erupted with the resignation of the former health minister, Raj Narain, from the party and the deputy prime minister, Charan Singh, accusing the Janata top brass of conspiring against the BLD constituent. This is the fallout from the Janata Parliamentary Board decision directing the Haryana chief minister, Devi Lal, to seek a vote of confidence from the state legislature party. Lal, who belongs to the BLD faction, however, resigned as leader of the Legislature Party presumably in protest against what was yesterday described by his supporters as "dictatorial verdict".



### CRPF STRIKES

THE CENTRAL RESERVE Police Force (CRPF) jawans at the group centre at Jharoda Kalan near Najafgarh went on an indefinite strike last night in support of their demands for better working conditions and promotional avenues. After their supper, the jawans, numbering about 1,000, assembled in the stadium where their leaders addressed them. The group centre commandant, C M Pandey, failed to persuade them not to go on strike. However, senior officers at the group centre said that "everything was normal". The CRPF director general, R C Gopal, denied that there was a strike at the group centre. "We have heard that the jawans have ventilated their grievances

and we are looking into them," he said.

### WEST INDIES WIN

WEST INDIES DEFEATED England by 92 runs in the final of the Prudential Cup at Lords. Viv Richards scored 138 not out and Joel Garner took five wickets for 38. The West Indies reached 286 for nine in the allotted 60 overs. England, always trailing behind the clock, reached 183 for 2 but then suffered a dramatic collapse as they went recklessly for runs. In 26 minutes, the last eight wickets tumbled and England were all out for 194. Garner's performance was one to go into the cricket history books. At one stage he had taken no wickets for 37.



# THE IDEAS PAGE

## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"From a long-term perspective, China and the US will not persist with confrontational trade policies."

— GLOBAL TIMES CHINA

## Call of New India

Women leaders must be harbingers of harmony and progress, not macho-matchers. There must be gender-parity, not fractional reservation



RAMI CHHABRA

TSUNAMI/Tsunami is how Narendra Modi's return to power is being described. Critics may be sceptical but can hope repin on his post-triumph pledges to turn his back on the ugliness of the political contest, build consensus and carry all: *Sabka vikas sabke saath*, now with *sabka vishwas* to build *Naya India*? With four states going to the polls in the coming months, there will be an early test of whether campaign-mode-Modi reruns or he retains statesmanship beyond showmanship.

As one of the few women who entered the media in the late-fifties — then 18, now 80 — I stand witness that this is indeed a rare karmic moment in the nation's life, one that has come only twice before: In 1971, when Indira Gandhi rose Durga-like post-Bangladesh, arousing hopes that she would revive Jawaharlal Nehru's foundational legacy of India's Third-World leadership set-backed by the Sixties' wars and also, wipe-out poverty; again in 1984, when a nation mourning Indira's assassination gave an awesome peoples' mandate to a youthful Rajiv Gandhi diffidently accepting responsibility thrust by fate. But both times, fate also decreed otherwise. Will this third opportunity created by the nation have proverbial third-time-luck or is it destined to be frittered as before?

The minority issue is upfront and has many to canvas for what it takes to win *vishwas* with a communal-free perspective. But what about the country's largest minority — women?

As the prime minister plans actions to transform India — and politics — he needs to pay more heed to women's field-voices and needs. For the first time ever, a critical-half of voters constituted women, near-parity to male numbers with many exhibiting independent decision-making in vote-casting. This outpouring — despite 20 million women claimed as missing from voters' lists — testifies to the maturity of women's political agency. It is a self-propelled contribution to nation-building, notwithstanding lack of adequate support to women's political contestation from any major political party — other than the BJD in Odisha and Trinamool in West Bengal, which gave 33 per cent and 50 per cent of seats respectively to women-contestants.

The 17th Lok Sabha has the highest tally of women since Independence — 78. This still amounts to a mere 14 per cent of 543 members. A political environment wherein money and muscle-power dominate and women face demeaning sexist/sexualised smearing, militates for the emergence of a very different type of woman-warrior: More thick-skinned macho-clones than the softer gender-influence earlier projected as a potential uplifting force for politics. Further, as a recent study highlights, with the current rate of increase it will take 40 years for women to reach 33 per cent participation in Parliament/legislatures. (Thirty-three percent being the minimum threshold for critical-mass enabling gender impact.)

Demands to revive and pass the Women's Reservation Bill are already mak-

ing the rounds. The Bill, in any case, was a deeply-flawed proposal that sought to unseat one-third sitting members while holding the other two-thirds in perpetual jeopardy. Each attempt at its introduction saw unprecedented scenes of gross misconduct/violence blemishing the august halls, prophesying worse in the streets on its adoption. The vision of 21st century New India needs women-leaders as harbingers of harmony and progress, not macho-matchers; gender-parity not fractional reservation.

*Naya India* also needs to urgently put in place measures to reverse the massive drop in women's work-participation and threats to freedom of movement. A major issue identified by many pre-election surveys, perhaps a key propelling factor for voting in such large numbers, was the concern about physical security and safety. The plummeting work-force participation in past years, the resonating #MeToo movement, highlight growing insecurity for women in coming out onto the streets, in workplaces/public places, which are their birthright to access. Besides emphasising women's fundamental and constitutional right to dignity and security, bridging the gender gap in work-participation, according to a McKinsey estimate, would add \$770 billion to the Indian economy by 2025. *Naya India* cannot be built unless women hold-up-half-the-sky.

Equally, there is growing threat to women's personal and bodily integrity within homes and neighbourhoods. Building home-toilets was one key step towards women's physical security and it resonated. But cleansing the Internet and social media platforms of the pornography invading homes and turning fathers, brothers, sons, neighbours and of course, strangers into predators, is a burning issue yet left untracked. This is as much a national security-threat requiring prioritised strategic-action that brooks no further delay. Sadly, memes and morphs of political figures elicit political outrage but not the porn that bedevils ordinary women's everyday lives; rape/gang-rape has become a selective political-blame-game blunting the gruesome deadliness of rape per se.

Besides personal security which is paramount, attention to women's issues, including equitable political representation, could spearhead other vital democratic reforms desperately required to cleanse the system of the unabashed growth of money-and-muscle-power, a principal inhibiting factor for women-contestants - and equally, less-muscular-moneyed-men — in the electoral process.

Women's rights are fundamental human rights, not to be examined in silo fashion. Nor by using avante-garde Western-style models that currently dominate feminist thinking and media exposure. Demand for the *freedom from fear* and the *opportunity to grow* is a very different trajectory to pursue than the *freedom to slut-walk/sexually assert*. The former has widespread societal support, the latter provocative media space with societal backlash.

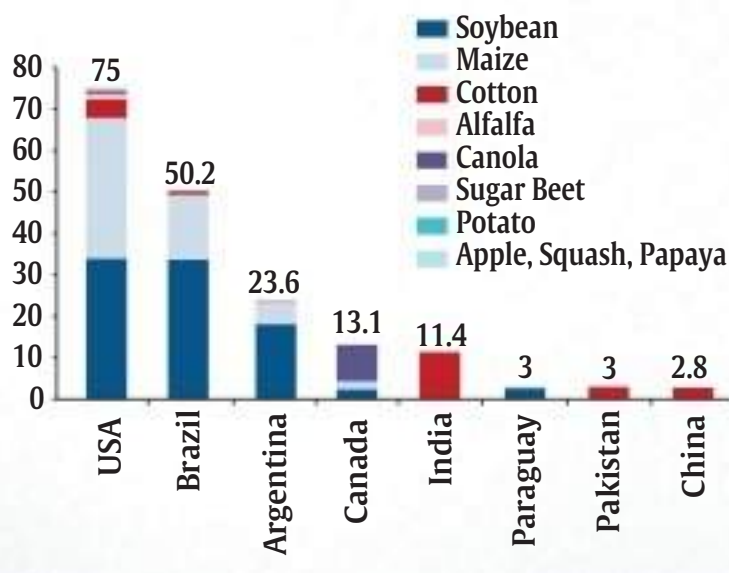
A holistic, interconnected and intrinsically Indian vision cross-cutting sectors and issues needs articulation with time-bound implementation deadlines as a major national priority. It could become the global exemplar.

*The writer is a senior journalist and has been member, National Population Commission*

### MAJOR COUNTRIES GROWING GMO CROPS

(area in million ha, 2017)

Area under biotech crops (covering 96% of global area under biotech crops)

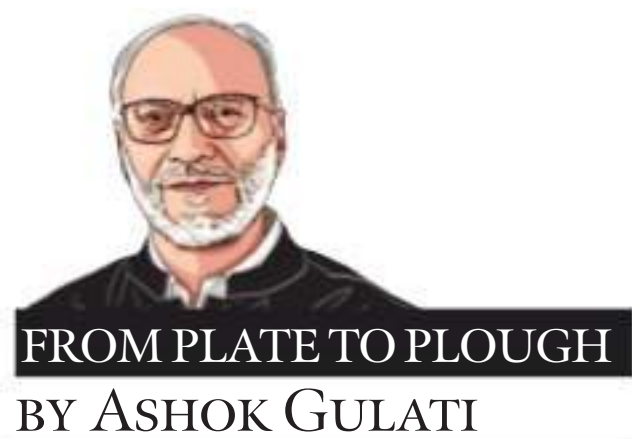


Source: ISAAA, 2017

Suvajit dey

## A farm question for Modi 2.0

Can India emerge as a leader in bio-farm technologies, including GMO?



FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH  
BY ASHOK GULATI

THE WORD SATYAGRAHA, meaning polite insistence for truth, is associated with the political movements of Mahatma Gandhi for civil rights — first in South Africa and, later, in India. The famous 24-day Dandi March (also known as the Salt March), a non-violent civil disobedience act against the British monopoly on salt in 1930, became a symbol of satyagraha.

But today, it is in the news because of the civil disobedience movement launched by supporters of the Shetkari Sanghatana (SS), a farmers' organisation, to defy the Government of India (GoI) when it comes to the planting of herbicide tolerant (HT) Bt cotton and Bt brinjal. SS was founded by the late Sharad Joshi, one of the tallest farmers' leaders in independent India. He gave up his cushy position in the United Nations to fight for the cause of farmers' freedom to choose the best farm technologies, and to sell their produce to the most lucrative markets at home or abroad.

Unfortunately, governments, since Independence, no matter how much they swear by the name of farmers, have constrained our farmers when it comes to access to the best farm technologies as well as the best markets. That's a painful fact which has meant the imposition of massive implicit taxation on the Indian peasantry, to the tune of about \$700 billion (cumulative) during 2000-01 to 2016-17, as per the OECD-ICRIER study (2018).

HT Bt cotton is not legally allowed by GoI. But the government's own committee has estimated that it is being planted on about 15-17 per cent of the cotton area. Growing any GM crop illegally attracts a five year imprisonment and a fine of Rs 1 lakh. But so far, no one

has been arrested, and the illegal trade has been thriving for several years. It speaks of not just a massive governance failure, but its connivance with unscrupulous seed companies where thieves are thriving. Farmers want that technology and are buying those seeds in the black market at prices much above those declared by the government for non-HT Bt seeds. Now, when SS supporters are openly defying government regulations, the GoI has suddenly woken up and asked for action from the Maharashtra government. Newspaper reports suggest that one farmer with HT Bt seeds has also been arrested. If the government is really serious in not allowing this, let it show its might by arresting hundreds of thousands of farmers who have already planted HT Bt cotton on 15 per cent of the crop area. And why not first arrest the fraudulent seed companies that have been selling these seeds illegally, and without any patent? Most people in this trade know who these local companies are and whose shelter they have politically. The big multinational companies, who are the original innovators of HT Bt cotton, have stayed away from this messy business. In fact, they have decided to withdraw most of their high bio-tech farm technology from India.

Let us peep into this new brave world of GMOs for better understanding. GMOs have been there on the global platform since 1996 and by 2017, for which I have the latest data, almost 190 million hectares around the world are being planted. A total of about 67 countries have accepted GM crops, of which 24 are planting and others are importing and consuming. GM crops range from soyabean, corn and cotton to papaya, brinjal, and, even apples and potatoes! There are no cases of human death, disease, or injury. And the landscape ranges from developed nations like the US and Canada to developing ones like Brazil, Argentina, India, Pakistan and China (see graph).

It may be noted that Bangladesh, not shown in the graph, has also adopted Bt brinjal and the area under that is fast catching up. Bt brinjal is an interesting case study as it was cleared by India's Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) way back in

Gujarat's 'agrarian miracle' of eight per cent average annual growth rate in agri-GDP during Narendra Modi's regime as CM from 2002-03 to 2013-14, was triggered and led by Bt cotton. And, this was the famous Gujarat development model that also helped him become the PM of India. It won't be an exaggeration to say that Bt cotton has been the secret force behind Modi's political successes.

2009, but our environment ministry, under pressure from NGOs, could not gather the courage to release it. Now that Bangladesh has taken the same technology, and is fast scaling that up, will it not be stupid on our part to presume that it will not enter the Indian side of West Bengal, if it has not already done so? GoI needs to wake up!

Almost a similar situation had arisen in March 2002, when it was found that some Indian farmers had planted Bt cotton. The Vajpayee government examined the whole issue from a biosafety perspective as well as farmers' needs. Then, it took a bold decision on March 26, 2002, to legally allow the planting of Bt cotton, the first GM crop of India and the only one so far. He extended the original slogan of 'Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan', given by Lal Bahadur Shastri, to include 'Jai Vigyan'. He was very clear that our agriculture should be science-based. Look at the results of this one bold decision by the late PM. Today, about 90-95 per cent cotton area is under Bt cotton, and India has emerged as the largest producer — and second largest exporter — of cotton in the world. In a much more detailed study that I did with Kavery Ganguly, we estimated that due to this "gene revolution" India gained about \$67 billion dollars of foreign exchange from extra exports of cotton and cotton yarn, and savings in imports, over the period 2002-03 to 2016-17, compared to business as usual. But, more important are the gains to the cotton farmers whose incomes doubled. And the maximum gain was to Gujarati farmers. In fact, we found that Gujarat's "agrarian miracle" of eight per cent average annual growth rate in agri-GDP during Narendra Modi's regime as CM from 2002-03 to 2013-14, was triggered and led by Bt cotton. And, this was the famous Gujarat development model that also helped him become the PM of India. It won't be an exaggeration to say that Bt cotton has been the secret force behind Modi's political successes. Considering this, can India now, under Modi 2.0, emerge as a leader in bio-farm technologies, including GMO? Only time will tell.

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## VIEW FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD



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

### CRICKET, A SYMPTOM

IRFAN Hussain, in his June 22 column in *Dawn*, asks the question that many in and from Pakistan have articulated since the countries seventh straight World Cup defeat to India: Why has the Indian cricket team improved while Pakistan has declined? "Compared to the agile, athletic Indian team, our boys came across as unfit and lacking focus and intensity. Our captain was all paunch and no punch," writes Hussain.

But the decline of the cricket team, as central to Pakistan's public life and political imagination as it is in India, represents failures on two fronts. First, according to Hussain, is the rot in the sport's administration and structuring: "The last 40 years or so have witnessed a steady fall in games played at school and college level. Street cricket has replaced the organised version. And while some talent has come through, by and large, we no longer produce world-class batsmen and bowlers as we once did... And it's true that for corporations and government departments to have their own teams is an anomaly that exists nowhere else as far as I know. However, if the current setup is replaced by teams representing districts and

provinces, funding would be a big concern."

The second aspect, the article highlights, is far more salient. "Expecting excellence in cricket," it says, "while so much else is crumbling around us is unreasonable." Cricket is a symptom of a country where "constant squabbling between institutions, a tendency to centralise power, and a need to seek personal benefits at the cost of the common good have become the norm."

Hussain writes that "connecting the dots, at the heart of this developing crisis is the disaster our educational system has become". Since Zia ul-Haq's administration, after the nationalisation drive in education and other state institutions, two generations of Pakistanis have been subject to "Islamisation", and its effects are visible across institutions.

### DEEP STATE DREAMS

MOONIS Ahmar, an international relations scholar, conjectures in *The Express Tribune* (June 21) on India's emerging "deep state". He defines the idea as "a state where some of the state institutions like the military and intelligence agencies run the affairs of the country and prevent any dissent or opposi-

tion to the state narrative. It can also be called as a state within a state." The article is in keeping with many of the newspapers recent contributions on India, theorising its imminent decline as a liberal democracy.

While in the past, India's diversity, institutions, vibrant civil society, the possibility of a deep state emerging was remote. That, argues Ahmar, has changed in the recent past. In something of a conspiracy theory, Ahmar gives three indicators — centred around a somewhat far-fetched nexus between the RSS, the Intelligence Bureau and the rise of Hindu nationalism — to substantiate his point. He also argues that the "role of the Indian Army today in the policymaking process is not submissive as it has several times vetoed the decision of its prime ministers, particularly related to Pakistan."

"With the weightage given to the Indian military and the security establishment, India is fast moving towards becoming a deep state at the expense of its democratic institutions," concludes the article.

### REFUGEE DAY KUDOS

THE editorial in *The Dhaka Tribune* on June 20 is rather self-congratulatory, perhaps un-

derstandably so. Since Bangladesh began to bear the brunt of the Rohingya crisis in terms of fleeing refugees, the newspaper's editorial line has consistently made two points: One, that the Bangladesh government must not be alone in handling the crisis; the international community must chip in. And two, that pressure must be put on the Myanmar government to normalise the situation in Rakhine state, ending the ethnic violence so that those that have had to flee with their lives are able to return.

The editorial says: "The prominence with which such crises take place all over the world is saddening, and is nothing short of an insult to the humanity we owe our fellow human beings. But there are instances where humanity did come first. Nowhere is this more evident than in Bangladesh, where over a million Rohingya have taken shelter, having fled the brutality of the Myanmar army, which has used every deplorable act possible against them to ethnically cleanse the region of the Rohingya population. No doubt, Bangladesh has emerged as an example of generosity and humanity in this regard, tackling what is by any means among the greatest refugee crisis of contemporary times."

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### WRONG TIME

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Pollarising' (IE, June 21). It is naive to expect the disparate parties which harbour animosity against each other, particularly after elections, to sit across the table and deliberate on sensitive issues. For any discussion to happen, a positive and conducive environment needs to be evolved. But the current milieu is one of cynicism and mistrust. Second, informed debates and meetings have been overshadowed by TV debates and social media.

Deepak Singhal, Noida

### LIBERALS' BLINKERS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Once upon a time, a nation' (IE, June 19). According to the article, the country's government received its mandate due to successful story telling. What prevented the liberals from presenting their story?

Girish Das, Noida

### QUESTIONS FOR BJP

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'One man show' (IE, January 21). Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Amit Shah, the BJP seems to be becoming akin to the Congress of the 1970s and 1980s. However, the BJP does have a crop of

### LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

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promising young leaders. Moreover, the BJP is also backed by the RSS, which sooner than later will assert itself against the centralising tendencies. The question, however, is: Will the BJP's young crop be in tune with the RSS's agenda?

Smita Pandey, Lucknow





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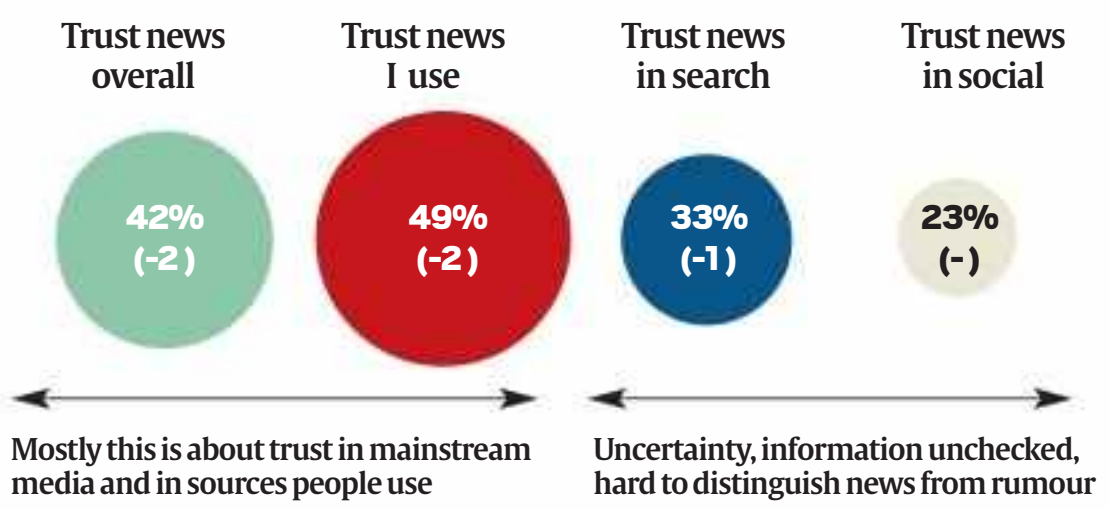
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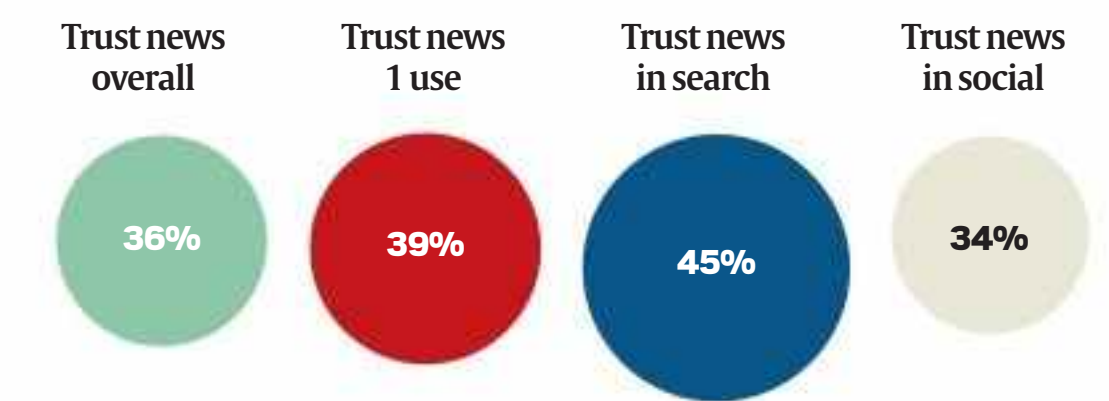
## TELLING NUMBERS

## Do people trust online news? How Indians, others responded

### 'TRUST NEWS FROM EACH MOST OF THE TIME' (38 MARKETS)



### 'TRUST NEWS FROM EACH SOURCE' (INDIA)



Source: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, Oxford University

**KARISHMA MEHROTRA**  
NEW DELHI, JUNE 14

TWO RECENT studies have found that less than half of online users trust the news they come across. A comparison between the two suggests that English speaking users in India trust online news overall less than users in other countries do, but they trust news found in search and social media more than those elsewhere do.

Both studies were conducted by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at Oxford University. The newer one covered more than 75,000 people in 38 markets (excluding India). The earlier one, released two months ago, was specific to India because "Internet use is not yet widespread enough there to make our on-line sample directly comparable to the countries covered here (in the second report)". The India study was limited to a small subset of 1,013 English speakers and online users, and was not representative of the country, the report said.

The global study also found that except in Nordic countries, "most people are not prepared to pay for on-line news today and on current trends look unlikely to pay in the future." Even in countries where consumers are paying for online news, they are still only limiting their subscriptions to one source, and in other countries, people are opting for entertainment subscriptions like Netflix or Spotify instead of news, it found.

In India, 36% of respondents trusted the news overall, including 45% in search and 34% in social media. In other markets, 42% of respondents trusted the news overall, with 33% trusting it in search and 23% in social media. Korea, France, Greece, and Hungary trust the news the least and Finland, Portugal, Denmark, and Netherlands trust it the most.

The India survey also found that 55% of respondents were concerned that expressing political views online could get them in trouble with the authorities.

India's English speakers were on par with other countries in misinformation and disinformation concerns. More than half (55%) in the new study were concerned about their ability to distinguish between real and fake on the Internet, with those in polarised countries such as Brazil, South Africa, and Mexico expressing more concern. In the India-specific study, 57% were concerned with this, while roughly half were concerned with hyper-partisan content.

The issue is related to challenges of "rising populism, political and economic instability, along with intensifying concerns about giant tech companies", the study says. "It is also raising new questions for journalists over how far to represent populist views, and how to satisfy a readership that no longer splits easily along traditional lines."

The global study found that populists are more inclined to television news than online news, dampening the role of social media in the rise of figures like Donald Trump. Populists are not more likely to use social media, but they are more likely to engage on social media, especially Facebook. The study measured populism by asking about the distance respondents feel from their elected representatives and how much they want people to make important decisions directly.

News consumers are less critical of the media's agenda-setting role (25%) and more concerned (39%) with the "negative" view that the media takes on events. Only half the respondents say the media helps them understand the news and 42% say the media fulfills a watchdog role. There were significant gaps between journalists' and consumers' perceptions.

## SIMPLY PUT QUESTION &amp; ANSWER

# One Poll: one idea, many views

Fresh push for simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly polls reopens debate over objectives it would meet, concerns it would create. What are the arguments on either side, how have previous efforts played out?

**PRADEEP KAUSHAL**  
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 23

REELECTED PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi has renewed the idea of "One Country, One Election", announcing last week that a committee will be formed to examine the issue, and holding a meeting with leaders of political parties. Many Opposition parties are, however, against the idea of simultaneous polls to Lok Sabha and all Assemblies.

### What purpose would simultaneous polls serve, if held?

There are arguments on both sides. Making polls simultaneous would address various concerns, such as reducing the cost of holding elections, and limiting all elections to a single season. At present, there is an election is close in one state or the other at almost any given time, and those who favour simultaneous polls argue that the Model Code of Conduct gets in the way of the government announcing projects or policy plans.

Against the idea, the arguments include the complexity of such an exercise, the widely held view that simultaneous polls would benefit the nationally dominant party at the cost of regional players, and the complications that would arise if any of the governments were to collapse before completing its term. Leave alone state legislatures, even the central government could fall. Of 17 Lok Sabhas since 1952, seven were dissolved ahead of schedule — in 1971, 1980, 1984, 1991, 1998, 1999 and 2004. There would also be logistical issues, requiring about twice as many electronic voting machines and Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail machines.

### When elections were first held in independent India, were they not simultaneous to begin with?

Lok Sabha and state legislatures went to polls together in 1952 and 1957, with the Congress initially comfortably placed all over the country. The synchronised cycle was first broken in Kerala, in July 1959, when the Centre invoked Article 356 of the Constitution to dismiss the ministry headed by E M S Namboodiripad of the Communist Party, which had assumed power after elections in April 1957. This was followed by state elections in February 1960.

As the Congress's popularity declined, it suffered major setbacks in several states — Bihar, UP, Rajasthan, Punjab, West Bengal, Orissa, Madras and Kerala — in the 1967 elections. Consequently, Samyukta Vidhayak Dal governments, comprising Bharatiya Kranti Dal, SSP, PSP, Swatantra Party, Jana Sangh and Congress defectors, came to power. Defections and counter-defections ultimately led to the dissolution of Assemblies, which separated the poll cycles of many states from the central one.

At present, Assembly elections in Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim are held together with Lok Sabha polls.

In recent years, Assemblies have been completing their tenures, mainly because of



Varanasi on May 19, 2019. Lok Sabha polls come 2 years after one UP Assembly poll and 3 years before the next. Anand Singh

the anti-defection law of 1985 and Supreme Court judgments on invoking Article 356. The Supreme Court had held that the President can put a state Assembly in suspended animation, but cannot dissolve it without concurrence of Parliament. Further, the validity of the proclamation of President's rule may be examined by the judiciary.

### Has the idea of simultaneous polls been explored before?

The Election Commission had suggested back in 1983 that such a system be worked out. The Law Commission headed by Justice B P Jeevan Reddy, in its 170th Report in May 1999, stated "we must go back to the situation where the elections to Lok Sabha and all the Legislative Assemblies are held at once".

In 2003, then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee took up the issue with Congress president Sonia Gandhi. She appeared initially receptive, but the idea did not take off from there. In 2010, BJP leader L K Advani met with then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, then wrote in his blog: "I found both of them (PM and Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee) receptive to a proposal I have been advocating for quite some time: fixed term legislatures and simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly polls." He noted that the country witnessed a "mini-general election" every alternate year, and wrote, "This is not good for the health either of our Central and State governments, or of our polity."

### How have matters moved after the NDA came to power?

In 2015, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice, headed by E M Sudarsana Natchiappan, compiled a report on 'Feasibility of Holding Simultaneous Elections to House of People (Lok Sabha) and State Legislative

Assemblies'. "The holding of simultaneous elections to Lok Sabha and state assemblies would reduce: (i) the massive expenditure that is currently incurred for the conduct of separate elections; (ii) the policy paralysis that results from the imposition of the Model Code of Conduct during election time; (iii) impact on delivery of essential services and (iv) burden on crucial manpower that is deployed during election time," the report observed.

However, the Congress told the committee it was "impractical" and "unworkable". The Trinamool Congress said it was anti-democratic and unconstitutional, while the CPI and the NCP said it was "not feasible". The CPI(M) too pointed at "practical problems".

In 2017, in his address to the joint session of Parliament (prepared by the government), then President Pranab Mukherjee expressed concern over frequent elections. They "put on hold development programmes, disrupt normal public life, and impact essential services and burden human resource with prolonged periods of election duty," Mukherjee said, pleading for a constructive debate.

Also in 2017, in a discussion paper, 'Analysis of Simultaneous Elections: The "What", "Why", and "How"', Bibek Debroy and Kishore Desai of NITI Aayog wrote that the elections of 2009 had cost the exchequer about Rs 1,115 crore, and the 2014 elections about Rs 3,870 crore. The total spent on the elections, including the expense incurred by parties and candidates, was several times more.

### Has there been an effort to address the concerns that would arise?

In a draft report on August 30, 2018, the Law Commission headed by Justice B S Chauhan held that simultaneous elections could not be held within the existing framework of the Constitution. These could be held together "through appropriate amendments to the

Constitution, the Representation of the People Act 1951, and the Rules of Procedure of Lok Sabha and state Assemblies". At least 50% of the states may ratify the constitutional amendments. The Commission recommended that all elections due in a calendar year be conducted together. Since a no-confidence motion, if passed, may curtail the term of Lok Sabha or an Assembly, the Law Commission recommended replacing the "no-confidence motion" with a "constructive vote of no-confidence" through appropriate amendments — a government may only be removed if there is confidence in an alternative government.

Last week, in his address to the joint session of Parliament, President Ram Nath Kovind said, "One Nation, Simultaneous Election is the need of the hour, which would facilitate accelerated development, thereby benefiting our countrymen."

Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora stated at a public function that simultaneous elections are "a very desirable goal, but for that, political systems of the country will have to take steps to align the life of a state Assembly with the life of Parliament".

### Is there a meeting point in sight?

The Opposition is wary of a concept that would take away the regional element of state polls, and leave regional personalities overshadowed by national leaders. The hugely expanding BJP, on the other hand, included the idea in its poll manifesto. With Prime Minister Modi as its face, a single campaign and election would take care of all Assemblies and Lok Sabha. Swaraj India president Yogendra Yadav has said the idea amounts to "One Nation, One Election, One Party, One Leader".

The Opposition is likely to remain hostile to the proposal. The government will have to wait until it has the numbers in Rajya Sabha to carry through the requisite amendments.

## THIS WORD MEANS: CONSTRUCTIVE VOTE OF NO-CONFIDENCE

## Provision in Germany, context in 'One Poll' push

**SAMPAD PATNAIK**  
BHUBANESWAR, JUNE 23

IN THE debate over simultaneous elections, one question being raised is what happens to the common cycle if any one of these simultaneously elected legislatures is brought down by a no-confidence motion. The ruling BJD in Odisha (where Assembly and Lok Sabha elections already coincide) has proposed a solution — a provision on the lines of what is followed in Germany (The Indian Express, June 22). This is based on a concept

called "constructive vote of no-confidence", also recommended by the Law Commission of India in a 2018 draft report.

### The provision

Article 67 [Vote of no confidence] of Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany) sets conditions for moving a no-confidence motion against the Chancellor — the Bundestag (Parliament) may express its lack of confidence in the Federal Chancellor only by electing a successor by the vote of a majority of its members and requesting the

Federal President to dismiss the Chancellor. The President must comply with the request and appoint the person elected.

Article 68 [Vote of confidence] states that if a motion of the Chancellor for a vote of confidence is not supported by a majority of members, the President, upon the proposal of the Chancellor, may dissolve the Bundestag within 21 days. The right of dissolution shall lapse as soon as the Bundestag elects another Chancellor by a majority vote.

### Its objective

Since the provision allows Parliament to

withdraw confidence from a head of government only if there is a majority in favour for a prospective successor, it narrows the scope of the Opposition to overthrow the government at will and necessitate elections before the government ends its term.

"The underlying premise is that there is a fixed five-year-tenure (for the House) and that there will be a government no matter what. The government will be presumed to have a majority unless another grouping is in a position to demonstrate that they have greater numbers," said Pinaki Misra, BJD leader in Lok Sabha.

# Record temperatures: trend projected to continue, what it will take to check it

**KABIR FIRAQUE**  
NEW DELHI, JUNE 23

AROUND THE world, record temperatures have become more and more frequent in recent years. This month, Delhi reported its highest ever temperature of 48°C while Churu in Rajasthan crossed 50°C. Last week, the United Nations' World Meteorological Organization confirmed two very recent readings as being among the hottest on record globally — 53.9°C in Mitribah, Kuwait (2016) and 53.7°C in Turbat, Pakistan (2017). India's highest ever, too, came as recently as May 19, 2016 — 51°C in Phalodi, Rajasthan.

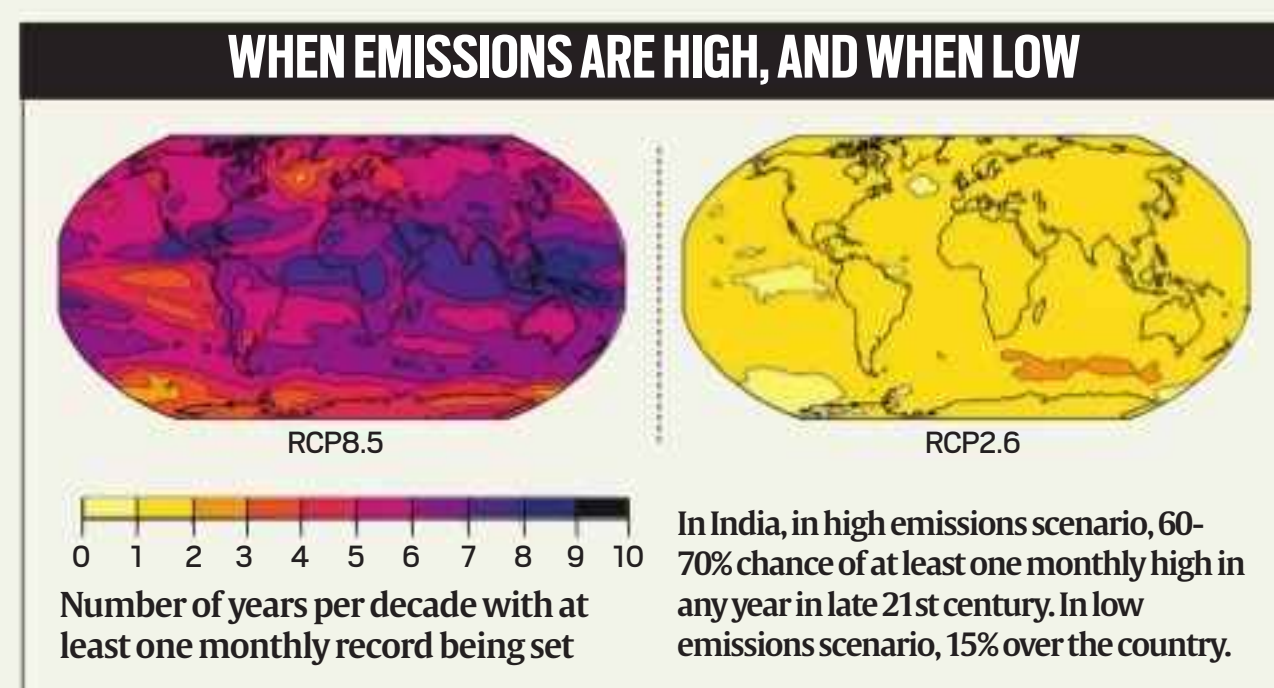
A new study has projected that the record-setting trend will continue for at least the next 20 years, and for longer unless measures are taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

From the findings, it can be inferred that India too is projected to experience the frequent occurrence of unprecedented high temperatures over the next 20 years, study author Scott Power of the Australian Bureau of Meteorology told *The Indian Express* by email. Power and colleague Francois Delage have reported their findings in the journal *Nature Climate Change*.

### The big picture

Using 22 climate models from the world's leading climate research centres, the new study projects temperature trends in two possible scenarios — high greenhouse gas emissions (called RCP8.5) and substantially reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 (RCP2.6).

If the high-emissions scenario were to continue, the study found that by the end of the century, 58% of the Earth's surface



will likely witness at least one new monthly record temperature every year. In the low-emissions scenario, however, the likelihood would drop to 14%.

In India, in high emissions scenario, 60-70% chance of at least one monthly high in any year in late 21st century. In low emissions scenario, 15% over the country.

Source: Power & Delage/Nature Climate Change

**Projections for India**

In the high-emissions scenario, the likelihood of setting at least one high monthly record in any given year varies regionally

from 60% to 70% in the late 21st century, which is larger than the global average of 58%, Power said. In the low-emissions scenario, the likelihood of setting at least one high monthly record drops to approximately 15% over the whole country.

And if the projection is for frequent record temperatures over the next 20 years, "after this, the frequency will increase if greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise or the frequency will fall if large and sustained cuts are made to global greenhouse gas emissions", Power said.

### Why 20 years?

Although the study looks at the benefits of reducing global greenhouse emissions by the end of the 21st century, these benefits take more than 20 years to become clear, Power said. "The likelihood of setting extreme temperature records is projected to remain at high levels for the next two decades."