



@ieExplained
#ExpressExplained

If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to explained@expressindia.com

TELLING NUMBERS

30% of MPs under age 40 are postgrads, including 2 doctorates



Sujay Radhakrishna Vikhe Patil (left), Sukanta Majumdar are doctorates

OF THE 64 newly elected Lok Sabha MPs who are under age 40, more than three in four — 49, or 76% — are at least graduates, according to a data analysis by PRS Legislative Research. Nineteen of them, or nearly 30%, are postgraduates, including two doctorates.

Both doctorates are BJP MPs. Sujay Radhakrishna Vikhe Patil, 37, son of Congress leader Radhakrishna Vikhe Patil, was elected on a BJP ticket from Ahmednagar in Maharashtra. He holds a Master of Surgery degree in neurosurgery from Dr D Y Patil Medical College in Pune. The other doctorate is Sukanta Majumdar, elected from Balurghat in West Bengal. He got his PhD last year from

North Bengal University, from where he had also done his MSc in 2005, according to the PRS analysis.

The BJP has six MPs among the 19 under-40 postgraduates, including the two doctorates. The Congress has four. The other nine are from nine different parties — Sikkim Krantikari Morcha, TDP, Shiv Sena, JD(U), Trinamool Congress, YSRCP, Apna Dal (Soneylal), NPP and AIADMK. Three of the 19 are doctors — Vikhe Patil, Heena Vijaykumar Gavit (BJP) and Shrikant Eknath Shinde (Shiv Sena). Two others — Rammohannaidu Kinjarapu (TDP) and Gaurav Gogoi (Congress) hold a B Tech in addition to their respective PG degrees.

THE DOCTORATES AND THE POSTGRADS

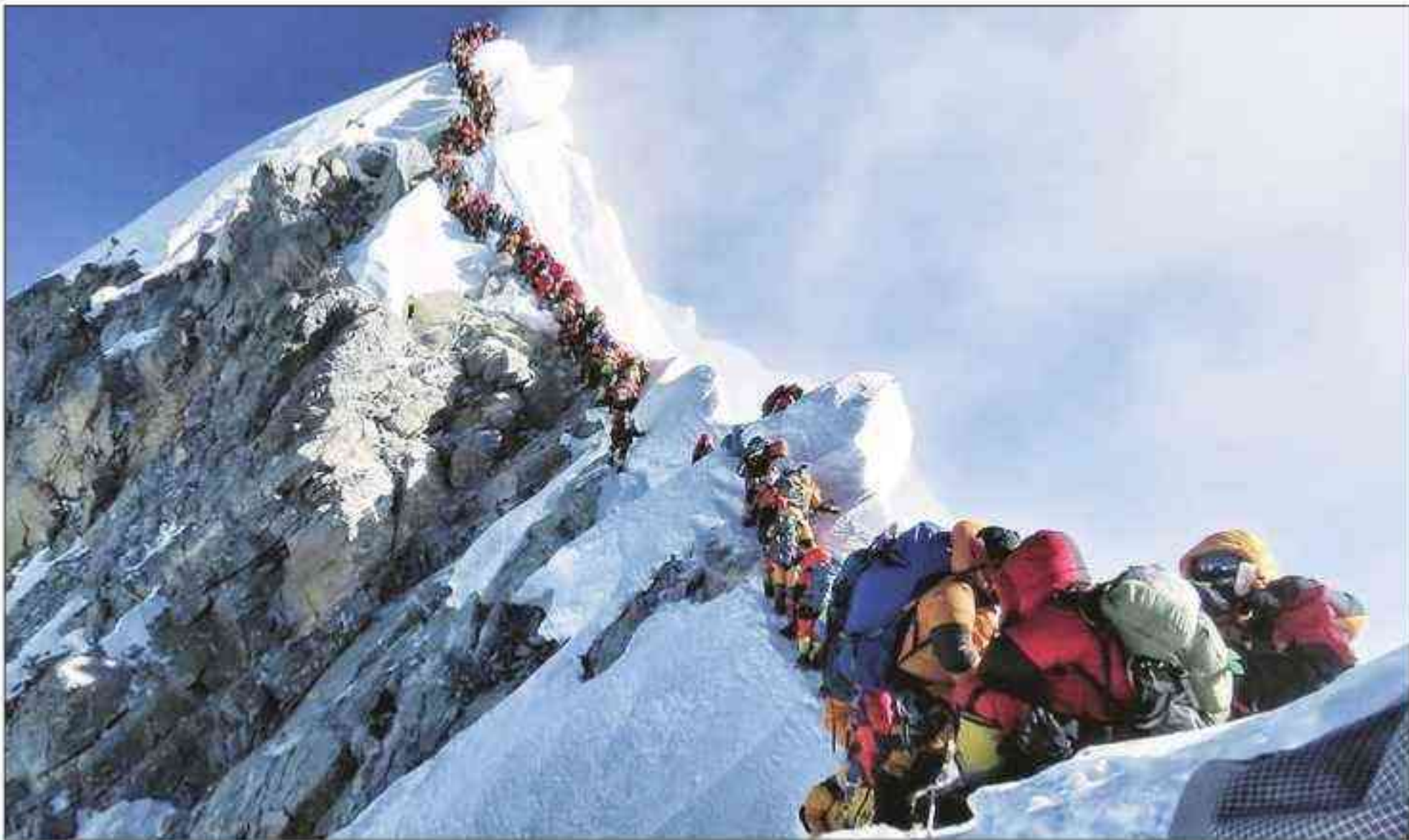
The young MP	Party	Degree
Sujay R Vikhe Patil	BJP	MCh (Neurosurgery)
Sukanta Majumdar	BJP	MSc, PhD
Indra Hang Subba	SKM	MSc (Physics)
Heena Vijaykumar Gavit	BJP	MD (General Medicine), LLB
Rammohannaidu Kinjarapu	TDP	BTech, MBA
Shrikant Eknath Shinde	Shiv Sena	Master Of Surgery (Orthopaedics)
Kavita Singh	JD(U)	MA
Aparupa Poddar (Afrin Ali)	AITC	MA
Yeduguri Sandinti Avinash Reddy	YSRCP	MBA
Geeta Kora	Cong	MBA
Gaurav Gogoi	Cong	BTech, Master in Public Administration
Pritam Gopinathrao Munde	BJP	MD
Dean Kuriakose	Cong	MA (Politics & Human Rights)
Anupriya Singh Patel	Apna Dal (S)	MBA
Chavda Vinod Lakhamshi	BJP	LLB, BEd
Deepak Kumar Baij	Cong	MA
Agatha K Sangma	NPP	Masters Degree In Environmental Management
P Raveendranath Kumar	AIADMK	MBA
Feroze Varun Gandhi	BJP	MSc (Public Policy Management)

Source: PRS Legislative Research

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

Peak traffic on top of the world

The death of 11 climbers on the world’s highest peak has drawn worldwide attention. What does it take to climb Mount Everest? How many get permission, and how? What are the risks involved in the ascent?



A dramatic photo of the rush of climbers on Mount Everest on May 21. The last sprint to the summit is critically dependent on the weather, and predictions of several hours of clear skies brought some 250 of the 381 climbers who were given permits this year, out at the same time. Nepal has been criticised for not having a policy for permits, and for allowing virtually anyone who pays on to Everest. AP

HEART-STOPPER

Year	Summiters		Killed	
	Climbers	Sherpas	Climbers	Sherpas
1990	100	76	—	—
1991	146	78	2	—
1992	201	135	3	2
1993	186	159	4	1
1994	119	90	3	1
1995	164	109	—	1
1996	242	158	11	1
1997	209	163	5	3
1998	205	134	1	—
1999	170	119	4	—
2000	309	223	2	—
2001	278	228	3	1
2002	203	177	2	—
2003	436	344	3	1
2004	336	269	7	1
2005	450	392	6	—
2006	453	375	7	4
2007	538	493	6	1
2008	366	293	1	—
2009	402	386	3	2
2010	416	437	3	—
2011	423	473	4	—
2012	486	483	7	3
2013	471	550	4	4
2014	96	295	—	17
2015	173	435	3	11
2016	425	460	5	—
2017	518	532	5	1
2018	545	653	2	3

Source: The Himalaya by the Numbers: A Statistical Analysis of Mountaineering in the Nepal Himalaya, by Richard Salisbury and Elizabeth Hawley

Who can climb Everest?

Adults over age 18, who have completed basic and advanced courses in mountaineering from recognised training institutes, are eligible. They are required to have above average physical and mental fitness. Experts say only those with four to five years’ experience of Himalayan trekking, including a few peaks at heights over 7,000 metres, should attempt to climb Everest.

Applications are cleared by the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB). The climbing season is for three months, ending on May 31; however, the most favourable period, called “weather window”, lasts for only about 10-12 days of May. For most of the year, a powerful westerly jet stream surrounds Everest, and the constant winds of speeds around 120 km/hr — double the maximum wind speed that climbers can usually tolerate — make it almost impossible to climb the peak. During the weather window, westerly winds blow at below 2,000 metres, and speeds can drop to 40km/hr.

What happened this year?

The NTB has not given a reason for the 11 deaths this year. “We don’t really know,” a senior NTB official told *The Indian Express*. “It could be loss of energy, loss of courage, waiting in low-oxygen conditions, or altitude sickness.”

Indeed, even the fittest humans struggle at altitudes higher than 8,000 feet — the most common symptoms being fatigue, headaches, vomiting, and dizziness. The Everest base camp on the southern side is at 17,600 feet; Everest itself soars 29,000 feet. Beyond 26,000 feet, surviving every minute is a challenge.

A lot has been written and said about overcrowding and “traffic jams” on the peak

after a picture was published in the international media showing a long line of climbers, virtually holding on to each other, making their way along a ridge. While the NTB did issue permits to a record 381 climbers in 44

teams this year, Karma Tenzing, who scaled Everest on May 15, said the descriptions of “traffic jams” on the mountain were “misrepresented and exaggerated”. TIME magazine quoted Mohan Krishna Sapkota, Nepal’s Secretary of Tourism and Civil Aviation, as saying: “There has been concern about the number of climbers on Mount Everest but it is not because of the traffic jam that there were casualties. In the next season we will work to have double rope in the area below the summit so there is better management of the flow of climbers.”

The crowding happened on May 21, when some 250 out of the 381 climbers — accompanied by a roughly equal number of sherpas — attempted to reach the summit all at once. “Sophisticated technology has contributed to a very accurate weather forecast, and climbers for that day had hours of fair weather to get to the top,” said Suman Pande, Nepal’s leading tourism and hospitality entrepreneur.

Is it difficult to get a permit?

On the contrary, generally, all applications received at the NTB are granted permits. “We issue permits on a first-come-first-served basis,” said Meera Acharya, who coordinated on behalf of the NTB with various stakeholders of this year’s expedition. Critics have said that the absence of a policy has allowed many non-serious or inadequately trained individuals to attempt the climb, putting lives at risk.

The NTB awards permits to groups of mountaineers against a payment for \$11,000 (approximately Rs 7.65 lakh), plus a refundable deposit of \$4,000, which is returned after verifying that the climber has adhered to all regulations. Climbers from India said expeditions are planned by a mountaineering

agency or company that is recognised by Nepal’s government. Individual climbers pay \$35,000 (about Rs 24.3 lakh) to the agency, which covers transport, camping and lodging, food, medicine and the company of a sherpa per climber. Each sherpa is paid between Rs 3 lakh and Rs 4 lakh.

What equipment is needed?

The list of mandatory climbing gear includes 20-22 different types of equipment, including headgear, goggles, various rappelling devices like harness, carabiner and descenders, mountain boots, crampons, ropes, ice-sacks, etc. Special clothing includes a down jacket, mountain boots, windproof thermal layers, mitten gloves, thermal socks, oxygen masks and sleeping bags. The clothing can cost Rs 5 lakh, the most expensive items being the down jacket (Rs 60,000 to Rs 80,000) and the mountain boots (Rs 50,000 to Rs 60,000). Climbers also require at least five 4.5-kg oxygen cylinders, plus a spare. Each cylinder lasts 7-8 hours at normal usage rate.

“Only those with required experience of Himalayan mountaineering and good fitness levels must attempt such a feat. The mountaineers must be well aware of their own body’s responses at such high altitudes and must have expertise to judge challenging situations, including taking halts at appropriate places and from time-to-time,” said Umesh Zirpe, president, Akhil Maharashtra Giriyarohan Mahasangha, Mumbai.

While there can be no control over weather conditions, the possibility of human-induced errors needs to be addressed, experts say. “The system we have is not perfect, but we are trying to make it foolproof and more credible,” an NTB official said.

EXPERTS EXPLAIN

Months after Raje ceded Assembly, how BJP swept all LS seats again



CHRISTOPHE JAFFRELOT & JUSMEET SINGH SIHRA

RAJASTHAN IS one of the states where the BJP swept all 25 seats in both the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha (LS) polls. Even though many commentators believed there was no “Modi wave” in the 2019 elections, the victory in Rajasthan for the BJP is even bigger in 2019 than in 2014. The average vote share of the winning BJP candidates has increased from 54.08 per cent in 2014 to 60.35 per cent in 2019. The average winning margin of the BJP candidates has increased by almost a lakh between the two elections (from 2.5 lakh votes in 2014 to 3.4 lakh votes in 2019).

Rajasthan, however, presents a curious case. In the December 2018 Vidhan Sabha (VS) elections, the Congress made a strong comeback, and formed the government in the state with the help of the BSP’s two seats. So, what happened in the last five months that the Congress could not win a single seat in Rajasthan in Lok Sabha?

One, it has to do with the way Rajasthan’s voters voted in the 2018 VS elections. Voters wanted to punish Vasundhara

Raje for several reasons — agrarian distress, Rajput anger, her alleged governance scams, her uneasy relationship with the RSS, an increasingly arrogant image of her as a *maharani* and a general anti-incumbency in the state where power alters alternatively between the Congress and the BJP every VS election. The slogan *Modi tujhse bair nahin, rani teri khair nahin* (We have no grudges against you, Modi, but Vasundhara will not be spared) encapsulates it all. The Congress used all this to its advantage. Moreover, it brought the Muslims and Dalits to its fold after a spate of lynchings of individuals of both communities. Vasundhara Raje was ousted, but Modi was spared.

In the 2019 LS elections, the loan waivers that Congress announced after winning in Rajasthan backfired. Only loans from cooperative and land development banks were waived and not those from commercial and rural banks. This gave an impression of a half-hearted implementation of the scheme. Farmers, anyway, were less excited about it since loan waivers would not address the deeper structural issues such as minimum support price or the water crisis. With the Model Code of Conduct kicking in on March 10, the Congress ran out of time to do anything more substantial.

There were other regional issues that weakened the Congress considerably in the state. First, sources in the Rajasthan Congress said that workers were disgruntled with the Congress faction leaders. After the 2018 vic-



tory, only those closer to Ashok Gehlot, Sachin Pilot and C P Joshi were rewarded. Further, workers were not consulted about the choice of 2019 candidates. While experienced party workers were sidelined, new faces were put in the fray in at least 10 seats. Then, the winning/losing 2018 MLAs were given charge of leading campaigns in their VS constituencies. But those who were not favoured previously by the Congress for the MLA ticket barely extended their support, and worked against the 2018 MLA candidates. The infighting thus continued at many levels.

Second, the Congress lost support within two key communities in the state — the Gujjars and the Jats. Gujjars were still unhappy about Sachin Pilot not being made Chief Minister. The Congress candidate could not come first even from Pilot’s VS seat Tonk in the 2019 LS elections due to Gujjars ditching the Congress, according to sources

in the Congress. Besides, the BJP received crucial Gujjar support with Kirori Singh Bainsla, the prominent leader of the Gujjar quota agitation, joining the BJP along with his son Vijay Bainsla before the LS elections.

Jat support to the Congress was severely diminished due to the way it tackled the Rashtriya Loktantrik Party (RLP) leader Hanuman Beniwal. Beniwal commands strong support amongst the Jat voters and the party won three seats in the 2018 VS elections and came second in at least two seats. His discussions with the Congress for the ticket from the Nagaur LS seat, his home turf, went in vain and Congress instead fielded Dr Jyoti Mirdha, a dynast from a very prominent Jat family (her grandfather was a six-time MP and four-time MLA). BJP quickly made the best of it and allied with Beniwal despite his acrimonious relationship with Vasundhara Raje. The Beniwal factor got huge Jat support to the BJP in the state and contributed significantly to the defeat of Ashok Gehlot’s son Vaibhav Gehlot from Jodhpur. What also contributed to Vaibhav Gehlot’s defeat was further resistance from the Jat community at the behest of Congress MLA Divya Maderna. Ashok Gehlot had sacked her father Mahipal Maderna in 2011 from the Cabinet due to his alleged involvement in the Bhanwari Devi murder case. It was Divya’s chance to settle scores.

The Jat factor also influenced the result of the high-profile contest of Congress candidate Manvendra Singh, son of the former



A BJP worker in Bikaner celebrates during counting on May 23. PTI

BJP IMPROVES FROM 2014 TO 2019		
	2014	2019
Average vote share	54.08%	60.35%
Av. victory margin	2.5 lakh	3.4 lakh

BJP veteran Jaswant Singh. Kailash Chaudhary, a Jat, from the BJP was pitted against Manvendra. Although Manvendra was able to amass Rajput as well as Muslim votes, Jat and upper caste votes were consolidated for Chaudhary. Moreover, Ummeda Ram, an SC who was Beniwal’s RLP candidate in Baytu (an SC seat in Barmer) in the 2018 VS elections, helped



The Indian EXPRESS
FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA
BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

THE WATER TEST

Providing piped water to all households is a long overdue project. It will have to join several dots

DURING AN election rally in Tamil Nadu last month, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had promised that if voted back to office, he would “ensure the creation of a Jal Shakti ministry that will deal with supplying clean drinking water to people and providing top-class irrigation facilities to farmers”. He moved to meet this promise during the portfolio allocation of ministers, last week. A new Jal Shakti Ministry has been formed by reorganising the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation and merging it with the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation. The idea behind the creation of the new ministry — “to approach the issue of water management holistically and ensure better coordination of efforts” — is salutary. And, the new Jal Shakti Minister, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, has begun work by announcing that the government intends to provide piped drinking water to every household. This is a long-overdue initiative given that, according to a 2018 NITI Aayog report, “600 million Indians face high to extreme water stress and about two lakh people die every year due to inadequate access to safe water”.

The new ministry will, however, have its task cut out. According to a 2017 assessment by the Ministry of Water Resources, India’s estimated per capita availability of water in 2025 will be 1,340 cubic metres. This is likely to fall to 1,140 cubic metres in 2050. The NITI Aayog report underlines one of the reasons for this state of affairs. Seventy per cent of the country’s water aquifers are polluted. Much of this owes to the Central Groundwater Board’s (CGWB) aggressive projects to tap groundwater. These endeavours, that began in the 1970s, did not pay adequate attention to the constraints placed by the country’s geology: Hard rocks constitute more than 60 per cent of the surface area of underground water sources. This means that they have poor permeability, which constrains their re-charge by rainfall. The Jal Shakti ministry’s endeavour to provide clean water will require a paradigm shift from the CGWB’s groundwater-centred approach.

Currently, less than 20 per cent of rural households have access to piped water; hand pumps are their main source of potable water. Piped water schemes in rural areas have been dogged by problems of infrastructure maintenance: Power fluctuations often damage motors and pipes are prone to leaks. Last year, a CAG report pointed out that “poor execution” has marred the National Rural Drinking Water Programme’s attempt to provide piped drinking water to 35 per cent of the country’s rural households. The auditor pointed out that, in most states, the panchayats were not provided with the informational know-how to operate the expensive piped water systems. The Jal Shakti ministry’s challenge will be to ensure that such mistakes are not repeated. It will have to join several dots.

REVERSING THE SLIDE

On economy, near-term focus should be on capital expenditure, and steps to boost demand in sectors with a multiplier effect

THAT THE Narendra Modi government, which returned to office with a resounding mandate, should hit the ground running was much needed, given the state of the economy. But that among its first steps should be to sign off on the proposal to expand the PM Kisan Yojana to cover 2 crore more farmers and a pension scheme to cover 3 crore retail traders and shopkeepers, is more debatable. The extra expenditure may be justified, though, by a government struggling to meet budgeted revenue targets — as a way of addressing political constituencies which supported the BJP, and also as a directional shift towards income support and building of a social safety net in a limited manner. It is also consistent with the party’s commitment to follow up on these in its poll manifesto. The question is whether these government interventions can be effective or will at best provide a temporary boost at a time when the fourth quarter GDP numbers are at a five-year low and when growth for the last fiscal at under 7 per cent is below most expectations. Some economists argue that the economy may well now be at the bottom of the cycle and is on course for a gradual reversal this fiscal.

The challenge, especially when the economy is firing on one engine, and when expectations are riding high, is to ease the fiscal tap and to attempt the so-called big bang reforms. The fact is, however, that such reforms can wait for now. Rather, the near-term focus should be on capital expenditure and steps to boost demand in sectors such as housing, steel and cement, which have a multiplier effect. It should help that interest rates appear to be headed southwards.

Logically, average GST revenues should be higher, with an expansion of the base, more simplification and stricter compliance. Banks also should be on course to lend more provided the government doesn’t delay stumping up capital and carrying out governance changes this time around. In the first budget after the Modi government took over in 2014-15, Arun Jaitley, who was then finance minister, said that the country was in no mood to suffer unemployment. Five years on, that still resonates.

FREEZE FRAME



Soumya Kanti Ghosh

FRIDAY, MAY 31, was an interesting day in Indian politics and economics. On the economics front, Q4GDP numbers plunged to a 20-quarter low while annual growth came to a five-year low of 6.8 per cent. However, despite much scepticism, India could stick to its fiscal deficit of 3.4 per cent for FY19. Bank credit growth declined by Rs 1.5 lakh crore in April, but this has always been a seasonal phenomenon. On the political front, the country got its first woman finance minister (PM Indira Gandhi did hold the portfolio, but that was only as an additional charge) in 72 years.

Domestic growth was even weaker than what was expected. Manufacturing GVA, which grew by 12.1 per cent in Q1, decelerated sharply, growing by 3.1 per cent in Q4. This was expected, based on the Q4 FY19 results of 932 listed corporates — around 550 companies had reported either negative or single digit revenue growth. For FY19, manufacturing GVA grew by 6.9 per cent compared to 5.9 per cent in FY18. Core GVA, an indicator of private demand, slowed down to 6.1 per cent (the lowest since Q2FY18).

Agriculture and allied activities grew at 2.9 per cent in FY19, compared to last year’s growth of 5.9 per cent. In Q4, the sector registered a negative growth of 0.1 per cent. However, the good thing was that the agricultural price deflator, an indicator of rural purchasing power, has finally recovered in Q4 after two successive quarters of de-growth. In fact, our estimates suggest that since the MSP increase in July 18, wholesale prices of 18 major crops (includes cereals, pulses and oil seeds) have recovered from lows and are now on average 10 per cent higher than the MSP. However, such rise in mandi prices has no material impact on retail food inflation, which seems to have declined even as wholesale inflation has moved up. The divergence is a matter of debate, but low inflation now seems entrenched in India’s psyche.

In this context, the government decision to now extend the PM-KISAN scheme to all farmers is a positive step. We also did some rough estimates to find out the fiscal cost of such an ambitious programme over the next five years. Our calculations suggest that even

Government should target a structural deficit as an alternative to the fiscal deficit

if we progressively increase the income support from, say, Rs 6,000 to Rs 8,000 in the terminal year (inflation indexed) and reduce the fiscal deficit to 3 per cent in 2024 (with a nominal GDP growth of around 11.5 per cent), the additional cost for 14-crore farmers over the baseline estimates could be Rs 12,000 crore per annum, same as the revised estimates if only Rs 6,000 was provided to all 14 crore during the next five years. We need a definitive consumption push in rural areas.

The figures on the expenditure side of GDP do not foretell a promising picture. The decline in private final consumption expenditure is a matter of concern, though an increase in government final consumption expenditure has been able to offset it. After reaching a high growth of 9.8 per cent in Q2 FY19, PFCE growth declined to 7.4 per cent in Q4. The growth in gross fixed capital formation dipped to 3.6 per cent in Q4FY19, which is the lowest in the last eight quarters. It seems that election uncertainties have taken a toll on investment and government spending.

The decline in private final consumption expenditure is a matter of concern, though an increase in government final consumption expenditure has been able to offset it. After reaching a high growth of 9.8 per cent in Q2 FY19, PFCE growth declined to 7.4 per cent in Q4. The growth in gross fixed capital formation dipped to 3.6 per cent in Q4FY19, which is the lowest in last eight quarters. It seems that election uncertainties have taken a toll on investment and government spending.

if we progressively increase the income support from, say, Rs 6,000 to Rs 8,000 in the terminal year (inflation indexed) and reduce the fiscal deficit to 3 per cent in 2024 (with a nominal GDP growth of around 11.5 per cent), the additional cost for 14-crore farmers over the baseline estimates could be Rs 12,000 crore per annum, same as the revised estimates if only Rs 6,000 was provided to all 14 crore during the next five years. We need a definitive consumption push in rural areas.

The figures on the expenditure side of GDP do not foretell a promising picture. The decline in private final consumption expenditure is a matter of concern, though an increase in government final consumption expenditure has been able to offset it. After reaching a high growth of 9.8 per cent in Q2 FY19, PFCE growth declined to 7.4 per cent in Q4. The growth in gross fixed capital formation dipped to 3.6 per cent in Q4FY19, which is the lowest in the last eight quarters. It seems that election uncertainties have taken a toll on investment and government spending.

On the fiscal front, the latest data shows that the government has been able to meet the revised fiscal deficit estimate of 3.4 per cent of the GDP. However, there has been a Rs 1.45 lakh crore reduction in expenditure with a Rs 69,140 crore cut in subsidies (majorly food subsidy), covering for Rs 1.57 lakh crore reduction in total receipts. Now that FY19 estimates are revised, the FY20 BE may be on the higher side.

The problem is that global uncertainties have compounded in recent times. Tax cuts by the US did not have much impact on its growth last year and going forward there is not much room for further support. World trade growth is likely to remain weak into the second quarter of 2019. The latest World Trade Outlook Indicator (WTOI) remains well below the baseline value of 100 for the index, signaling continued falling trade growth in the first half of 2019. The outlook for trade could worsen further if heightened trade tensions are not resolved or if macroeconomic policy fails to adjust to changing circumstances. For example, the ongoing trade skirmish between USA and China is showing no signs

of abating with the US increasing tariffs on Chinese products. China, in retaliation, has said that it will raise tariffs on \$60 billion worth of US imports starting June 1. There are even concerns about the tariff war spilling over to financial markets in the form of China cutting its exposure to the US treasury market. Worsening economic indicators in the US, like student loan delinquency and yield curve inversion (the worst since 2007), as well as US exports getting squeezed by trade wars, are also going to pose challenges for the US economy.

Given the growth slowdown that the country is facing, the question arises whether the government should continue to focus on the path of fiscal consolidation or keep deficit numbers constant for the next two years at 3.4 per cent (or keep it marginally higher), before reducing it as growth revives. We believe that the government should target a structural deficit as an alternative to targeting the fiscal deficit, like most advanced and several emerging economies. This serves as an automatic counter-cyclical stabiliser unlike the current target that has been set from the outset as a fixed percentage of GDP and is a statistical misnomer. But, for sure, fiscal policy should be transparent and credible, and we must strive for what we can achieve through resource mobilisation, and not through expenditure compression.

We also expect monetary policy support to complement fiscal policy in the interregnum. The RBI could also advise banks for effective rate transmission (the SBI has proactively moved to external benchmarking of the repo rate to lending rates, there is no harm in replicating this).

We end on a positive note. Recently, S&P Global Ratings upgraded Indonesia’s sovereign rating to BBB from BBB– just after the re-election of President Joko Widodo. Strong economic growth prospects, low debt, an infrastructure drive of more than \$400 billion and prudent fiscal policy enabled the upgrade. India has also seen the re-election of the Modi government with an even larger mandate. Uncanny similarity for S&P?

The writer is group chief economic advisor, SBI. Views are personal

A MONTH TO REFLECT

Ramzan has always been the time to look inwards, build bridges



IN GOOD FAITH
SABA RAHMAN

AS THINGS STAND across the world today, religion cannot be a private experience for Muslims — even if they want it to be. Burdened, demoralised and anguished with terror attacks in the name of Islam, Muslims find themselves — and their faith — implicated in global events almost every day. More recently, the targeting of mosques in New Zealand or churches in Sri Lanka have made Muslims either helpless victims or motivated perpetrators of violent attacks. Closer home, rising Islamophobia coupled with an almost non-existent political representation in the government, have driven India’s Muslims to the edge. It is amidst such a feeling of fear and siege among Muslims that Ramzan, Islam’s holiest month, began, and is set to draw to a close in a couple of days.

Ramzan is when the Muslims believe the Quran was revealed to Mohammad, the last prophet of Islam, in 610 CE in Mecca. People know the drill for the believer in these 30 days. Those who observe Ramzan go without food and water, and also abstain from sex between dawn and dusk. There is, however, much more to Ramzan than just hunger and thirst. The month is about self-restraint, discipline, charity and intense reflection. It is about the struggle to attain spiritual goals. Prophet Mohammad said that Allah has no need for his followers to abstain from food

and water if they do not abstain from falsehood and other sinful practices.

In fact, Islam has a powerful Arabic word for a larger struggle to resist temptations and fight anger, malice, jealousy, vengeance and similar negative traits. That word is jihad. Unfortunately, the most spiritual concept of Islam has become its most sullied at the hands of extremists who kill innocent people in the name of jihad. It wasn’t jihad that happened on 26/11 in Mumbai or during the attacks on the churches in Sri Lanka. The Quran does not endorse such mindless acts of violence. It is also not jihad when Muslims kill other Muslims, as they are doing in Syria, Somalia and Afghanistan. The Prophet did engage in military expeditions, but those battles were more to survive than conquer. In fact, upon returning from one such expedition, the Prophet is said to have described war as “a lesser jihad” in comparison to “the greater jihad” that calls on one to look inwards for spiritual purification. Ramzan epitomises this idea.

In India, Ramzan started in the middle of the country’s general elections, whose verdict left Muslims feeling further alienated. The election campaign was communal and vitriolic. However, did Muslims abstain from posting or responding to messages of hate on social media? Did they quarrel with their colleagues or neighbours because of their contrarian political stands? Did they share their iftar with them? It is not easy for many Muslims to live up to the behavioural expectations that fasting demands when anti-

Muslim hatred is on the rise. But this is what Ramzan is all about: To train the self to rise above base instincts. The Prophet said: “The believer does not insult, he does not curse, he is not profane, and he is not crude.”

Significantly, the Quran is replete with messages that obligate Muslims to remain committed to social justice. Zakat (charity) is one of the five pillars of Islam and it assumes greater significance during Ramzan. Zakat is mandatory on all Muslims who have a certain amount of wealth. The idea is to bridge the gap between rich and poor, and restore the dignity of the socially ignored people. In his famous last sermon, the Prophet had declared: “A white has no superiority over black, nor does a black over a white, except by piety and good action.” The Prophet’s closest aides were two former slaves who went on to command much respect in the first Muslim society.

The Quran puts it beautifully: “We created you from a male and a female, and we made you into nations and tribes for you to get to know each other.” This verse, and Quran has many such, is central to Islam’s message of peace, friendship and love among people who are different. These 1,400-year-old wise insights can help us overcome fear, hatred and discord, which have become the hallmark of modern societies. Ramzan is the perfect time to renew such pledges and build those bridges.

saba.rahman@indianexpress.com

JUNE 3, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO



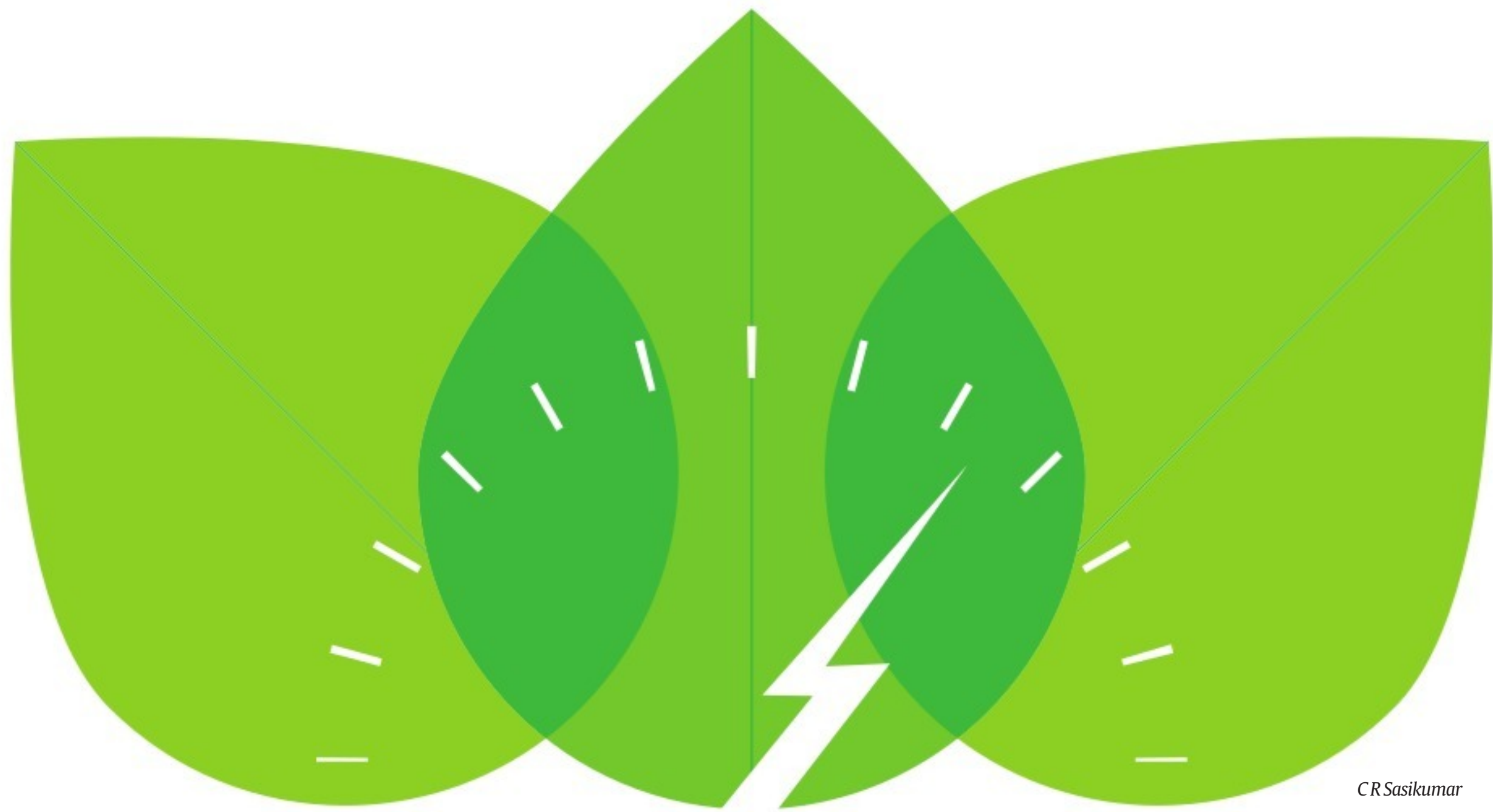
AHMEDABAD AGITATION
AHMEDABAD WAS COMPARATIVELY quiet on the sixth day of the policemen’s agitation today amid reports that the state government is ready to negotiate with them. The home minister, Popatlal Vyas, will meet a deputation of policemen to resolve the dispute, which had virtually led to the collapse of the city police administration and forced the government to seek help from the army and para-military forces. This virtual climb-down by the government has brightened prospects for a negotiated settlement before the chief ministers conference in Delhi on Wednesday. The government had earlier taken the stand that nothing would be dis-

cussed before the proposed Delhi meeting.

CURBING PRICE RISE
THE CABINET IS divided over measures to curb price rise. Ministers agreed to cut down expenditure, money supply and burdens on the exchequer, but differ on how to do this. The one point on which they are all agreed is credit squeeze. The Reserve Bank governor has been instructed to take necessary steps in that direction. During discussions in the last three days, the cabinet has considered many suggestions to effect the economy. They vary from banning strikes and giving the public sector undertakings the right to dismiss erring or sluggish employees to

freezing wages. The basic document which the cabinet has considered emanated from the Planning Commission, which describes a four-pronged approach.

AIRLINES ON ALERT
THE GOVERNMENT HAS placed all aircraft of the German Lufthansa and US Pan American Airlines under commando guard, along with those of the Japan Air Lines at the four international airports. Stating this, official sources told UNI that this has been done following the highest rating security alert given by Interpol about the Japanese “Red Army” terrorists. Similar measures have been taken by various governments worldwide.



C R Sasikumar

How to boost the energy drive

A blueprint of initiatives the new government can consider



OVER THE BARREL
BY VIKRAM S MEHTA

INDIA FACES A VARIETY OF CHALLENGES RELATED TO ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT. HERE ARE SOME INITIATIVES THAT THE NEXT GOVERNMENT COULD CONTEMPLATE EARLY ON ITS TERM.

ONE, INTEGRATE ENERGY AND environment policy. The various ministries currently engaged with energy and the environment should be collapsed into one omnibus Ministry of Energy and Environment. This will perforate the current siloed approach to energy policy and enable the new government to view the sector through an integrated and holistic lens. It could more easily track and evaluate the systemic implications of changes in any one or more component variable. Secondly, an “Energy and Environment Security Act” should be passed at the earliest possible opportunity. The objective of such an act should be to bring energy and environment into the national narrative; to set out the road map for managing and mitigating the emergent challenge of balancing economic development and energy demands with the goal of environmental protection; and, to mobilise public support for the policy and regulatory changes required to hasten the transition to a non-fossil fuel based energy system. Finally, energy data is scattered across various government departments. This hinders policy and investment. The new government should establish an integrated energy data centre, whose data should be regularly updated and made available to all players on commercial terms.

Two, decarbonisation, demand management and efficiency should be the watchwords of the new government’s energy policy. In this context, the focus should be on generating electricity from solar and wind, incentivising electric vehicles, curtailing diesel consumption in agriculture, enforcing standards and emission norms, redesigning

buildings and factories to make them carbon neutral and influencing behavioural change towards energy conservation. A multi-pronged thrust along these lines will weaken the current unhealthy relationship between economic growth, energy demand and the environment. Additionally, the “clean energy fund” which is currently funded through a cess on coal production and is managed by the ministry of finance should be augmented through the issuance of “green bonds” and a clean energy tax. This is to intensify research and development on clean energy technologies (battery storage, carbon capture and sequestration, hydrogen, coal gasification, modular nuclear reactors, etc.) and to fund the transmission and distribution infrastructure required for absorbing the flow of clean energy. Its loci of administration should be handed over to those with domain expertise. This to safeguard the funds from sequestration into the consolidated fund and to ensure that the conditions are created for incubating innovation, and forging international R&D and technology partnerships.

Three, energy diplomacy. The levers of energy and, in particular, oil policy, are today in the hands of autocratic leaders. This “personalisation” of energy politics would not have been an issue in the past when oil was traded mostly against long-term supply contracts. But today, against the backdrop of an integrated, liquid and fungible market characterised by short-term flexible supply deals, this is of relevance especially for import-dependent countries like India. The local actions of leaders now have global, supply-related ramifications. The new government should, therefore, look to develop a specialised cadre of “energy diplomats.” It should contemplate lateral entrants at mid- and senior levels of government with relevant domain and international expertise. It should unshackle the energy public sector units from intrusive bureaucratic oversight to enable their management to respond with agility to unexpected market developments. And it should establish strong personal relations with the leaders of oil exporting states. At a crunch time, the latter could be the peg on which will hang India’s supply security.

Four, intensify exploration and enhance recovery. India’s unattractive geology is the reason why the various bidding rounds for private sector investment in oil and gas exploration have not been a success. The new government should not stop this effort but

The local actions of leaders now have global, supply-related ramifications. The new government should, therefore, look to develop a specialised cadre of “energy diplomats.” It should contemplate lateral entrants at mid- and senior levels of government with relevant domain and international expertise.

it should consider three changes to the current contract terms. One, it should replace the current revenue-sharing model with a production-sharing model for new exploration. Two, it should link investment in the marginal and smaller discovered fields with access to the domestic retail market and remove the condition that only companies that have invested Rs 2,000 crore will be eligible for a marketing licence. Three, it should contemplate bidding out Mumbai High and other major producing oil and gas fields to international players with proven enhanced oil recovery technologies. The current recovery rates of production from these fields are well below the global average.

Five, increase competition. Coal India Limited (CIL) is a major producer of coal but faces huge legacy issues (labour unions, mafia, politics and organisation) which constrain its ability to fully and efficiently harness the country’s indigenous coal reserves. These issues cannot be addressed without first redrawing the contours of India’s political economy. The new government cannot, understandably, tackle these issues early on in its tenure. It can, however, resurrect an earlier decision to allow private sector companies into commercial coal mining. The consequent pressure of competition will bear positively on the performance of CIL.

Six, natural gas. This has also not realised its full potential. Five early initiatives should be contemplated. First, Gas Authority of India Limited (GAIL) should be unbundled into a monopoly gas pipeline company. It should be divested of its upstream (production/ re-gasification of LNG) and downstream (petrochemicals) operations. These can be merged into one or more of the existing PSUs. Second, the “common access” principle must be fairly enforced. Every player, private or public, must have equal access to gas pipelines. Third, the price of gas should be determined on the basis of market and competitive principles. This principle should apply across the gas value chain, except pipeline transport tariffs which should be linked to return on capital. Fourth, a gas trading hub should be expeditiously established. Finally, special energy courts should be established to expedite adjudication of disputes and ensure sanctity of contracts. The latter have been major deterrents to investment in the energy sector.

The writer is chairman & senior fellow, Brookings India

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“The rise of anti-Jew actions in Germany is profoundly worrying, but Angela Merkel’s fightback sets an example of moral seriousness and rigour.”
— THE GUARDIAN

A refugee market, an elitist outpost

The curious journey of Khan market in the national capital



NARAYANI GUPTA

A FEW YEARS ago, a student visiting Delhi from Oxford was looking for picture postcards. These are rare items in India, but we tried our luck at a stationer’s in Khan Market. The elderly gentleman at the counter listened to Nadir’s question. Instead of answering, he looked at him intently and asked, “Where are you from?” When his hunch that Nadir was from Pakistan’s North-West Frontier province (after 2010, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) turned out to be true, he was overjoyed. Coffee/tea and *thanda/garam* were eagerly offered, and they plunged into a conversation, where nostalgia was inseparable from a sense of community.

In the shops of Khan Market, the features and manners of many owners — Hindu relocates of 1947 from the Frontier Province — are unmistakable. And in the name of the market, the benign faces of Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan and his brother Khan Saheb — independence activists, who opposed the Partition — swim before us.

After 1947, Lutyens’ small capital enclave of New Delhi was surrounded by an outer ring of resettlement neighbourhoods, in one of the most impressive projects of rehabilitation India has known. Livelihoods were also addressed, and “refugee markets” was one of the options — in Queensway/Janpath, in front of the Red Fort, and in the empty space at the south end of New Delhi, east of Lady Willingdon Park (later Lodhi Garden). If the place-names in New Delhi celebrated rulers from the past, the new “colonies” and markets celebrated freedom-fighters — hence Malviya, Lajpat, Patel and Rajendra nagars; Ajmal Khan Road, Lajpat Rai Market, Khan Market. These names were inspirational, and the Hindu refugees who got shops and homes in Khan Market saw the name not as that of a Muslim, but of a beloved leader.

Sharada Nayak, a longtime resident of Prithviraj Road and then of Sujana Singh Park recalls: “The construction of Khan Market started soon after Partition and was completed in 1951. We welcomed the convenience of a neighbourhood market. The first shop owners were Hindu migrants from West Pakistan, and many of them lived in small two-roomed flats above each shop. The shopkeepers were all known to us by name, and we were usually welcomed with a cup of tea and a leisurely visit. Girdhari Lal, who had his Empire Stores in Connaught Place, had a branch at the western corner of Khan Market which was run by his son Om; next to them was Sovereign Stores. These two establishments were our favourite haunts for ice creams, and various foods.

It was best avoided in the evenings, when the government liquor store next door made it difficult to negotiate our way through the crowds. The most prominent shop in the middle of the front row of shops was Bahrison’s, a book store that is still the most popular, with Mr Bahri a familiar figure at his desk. His son Anuj now runs the book store.”

On the eastern end next to the Bank of India were a chemist, Bata shoe-store and Mr Gupta’s Vishnu Cloth store where we could buy yardage and go to the tailor next door for our clothing needs. He lived in the flat above his store, as did many of the shop owners. His son, Om Prakash, who was born in the flat above the shop, now runs the Vishnu Cloth store, along with his son, Nayak reminisces, and adds: “Some of the flats were rented by private tenants. I don’t remember ever climbing the steep stairs to the second floor until the Eighties when book stores, dentists, and a small restaurant took over the rented flats”.

According to Nayak, the 1980s saw a change as the younger generation, unlike Anuj Bahri and Om Prakash Gupta, decided they did not want to run the family business. “We miss Empire Stores and Sovereign Stores, and even the bank has completed its lease and has moved out, as businesses with international repute have leased out the space. The middle lane, once used as entrances for residents and parking, was commercialised in 1990,” she says.

The rental value of shops in Khan Market has soared from the 1990s and, as a result, something similar has happened in Lodhi Colony and Meher Chand and Khanna Markets — after the first flush of nationalist fervour, two other refugee markets were economically named after one person, by splitting the name of Mayor Meher Chand Khanna into two. Parking is becoming a nightmare, when shops close in the evening, because a plethora of restaurants have taken over the first floor flats and the central lane. Where once residents parked their cars at the entrance to their flats, shops have taken over.

Nayak laments that “for someone who has shopped at Khan Market for 50 years, prices are now way beyond reach”. “But people-watching has become much more interesting,” she says. Khan Market has been ranked as one of the most expensive retail locations and shops have been taken over by many international brands.

As one of the old shopkeepers told Nayak, “Nowadays people are ready to spend Rs 16,000 on a pair of shoes but not Rs 16 on some practical household item.” However, says Nayak, “most noticeable is the rapid turnover of businesses, restaurants and shops. Here today gone tomorrow, for money is also easy come easy go.”

Badshah Khan, if you were to return, what will you make of the twists and turns of the fortunes of your people in this outpost? You will realise that it is a reflection of the game of dice that is Delhi.

The writer is a historian of Delhi

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

MISLEADING TITLE

THIS REFERS to the editorial, ‘Race for Tel Aviv’ (IE, May 31). I was surprised to see this headline. Choosing to use Tel Aviv in the article and in the title as if to name it Israel’s capital is false and misleading. Tel Aviv is not Israel’s capital, nor does the parliament (Knesset, for which the elections are held) sit in Tel Aviv. The seat of the parliament is in Jerusalem, and always has been. While some newspapers may choose not to mention Jerusalem as Israel’s capital for political reasons, naming any other city in its place is disrespectful and unnecessary.

Avigail Spira, spokesperson, Embassy of Israel in India

MANDATE WOES

THIS REFERS to the article, ‘Don’t blame the mandate’ (IE, May 31). In a rather visceral and prompt (or hasty) attack on Amartya’s Sen’s article, the author herself falls prey to presenting a biased view. She conveniently misses to mention that BJP spend multiple times the amount the Congress could and how that there was widespread dismay over the election commission’s role as a watchdog. As important as it maybe to her, her family and people that live around them are not nearly a credible sample to represent why people voted for Narendra Modi.

Annie James, Pune

LUMPEN ELEMENT

THIS REFERS to the article, ‘Reassurance that isn’t’ (IE, May 30). The author de-

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

monises the prime minister as a leader of the lumpen elements and blames him for hate crimes and majoritarian dominance. He needs to examine causes of conflict of the two communities he mentions with Hindus and almost a complete absence of communal conflict among communities professing Indian religions. The hate crimes have genesis in religious conversions and killing of cows and both are deliberate provocations. No one has issued fatwa against either of these activities.

Shiv Kumar, via email

VIEW FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD



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

DREADING KASHMIR

THE PAKISTAN press has continued to analyse Narendra Modi’s victory and its implications for India, bilateral relations and matters of nationalism and religion in South Asia. In its June 1 editorial, *Dawn* weighs in on what Modi 2.0 could mean for Kashmir. The paper strikes an ominous tone — quite in keeping with its line and that of most media in Pakistan — on the Indian state’s role in Kashmir. It says that in its first term, the Modi government put in place a “brutal approach, with a militarised response to Kashmiris’ yearning for freedom and dignity. In fact, the radical Hindu BJP said it would end Kashmir’s special constitutional status, and remains committed to this dubious goal.”

It remarks that “the cycles of ugly violence” have become the norm in the Valley and unless New Delhi “comes up with a new approach, they will show no signs of abating”. Yet, the editorial ends with questions, that hint that there is as yet time for a course correction, though such hope remains slim: “Will the Indian prime minister continue with his hard-line approach, pushing Kashmiri youth to the wall and forcing them to fight the Indian state? Or will he display statesmanship and adopt a fresh approach to the troubled region? While those wishing to see peace prevail in

South Asia will be hoping that Mr Modi picks the latter option, the reality may be more of the same. However, while the BJP’s suppression of the Kashmiri freedom struggle has resulted in the disillusionment of practically all Kashmiris with India, even some of Delhi’s most loyal supporters in the region — the Abdullah clan, Mehbooba Mufti etc — appear dismayed at the way the Hindu nationalists have treated Kashmir.”

JINNAH VINDICATED

M BILAL Lakhani, a Fulbright scholar and columnist, asks an important question in *The Express Tribune*, one which has become a common refrain in Pakistan: Is Narendra Modi India’s Zia-ul-Haq? Lakhani begins his article by saying “Modi’s win is a loss for India.” He adds that “What Zia orchestrated in the 80s to use religion for the realisation of political goals Modi is engineering in India today. With one important nuance. The Pakistani people never elected Zia into office.”

This sentiment, which began to be articulated after the 2014 Indian general election, can be summarised as many in Pakistan viewing the overwhelming mandate for a Hindutva party as a vindication of Muhammad Ali Jinnah’s two-nation theory. Lakhani points out two dangers of Modi’s po-

litical dominance in India. One: “It took 72 years but the Quaid-e-Azam’s Two-Nation theory has been decisively endorsed by the long arc of history. Forget my arguments, Narendra Modi is the only person ever to be denied a US visa based on a little-known law on religious freedom, even though he applied for a diplomatic visa as a sitting chief minister. This led to nearly a decade-long US travel ban imposed over his role in Gujarat’s anti-Muslim riots, which left thousands dead (the UK and several European nations had also slapped a de facto travel ban on Modi).”

And two: “what’s worse is that Modi is also the symptom of a far more dangerous problem; an Indian electorate at peace with war-mongering. The performance of the Indian economy wasn’t exactly the reason behind Modi’s win, it was his headline rhetoric and warmonger-like adventurism with Pakistan that allowed him to sweep the elections. This is in striking contrast to Pakistan, where every mainstream political party runs on a platform of peace with India and if any political leader was to call for war with India to get re-elected, they would be laughed out of office.”

BANGLADESH AND BRI

“BRI IS a comprehensive undertaking that

can transform our development endeavours and also support us in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. We will need to have a coordinated policy approach in three policy domains: trade, finance and investment (TFI). Only then can we better streamline the efforts to a win-win outcome.” This is the thrust ANM Muniruzzaman’s argument in *The Daily Star*.

What should be of concern, or rather interest, to India is the degree to which Bangladesh may be integrated in China’s flagship project: “Bangladesh is a signatory country of BRI. It is also a key strategic partner of the initiative. Of the six economic corridors upon which the concept of BRI is built, one corridor will pass through Bangladesh. The old Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) corridor is now to become the BRI corridor linking Kunming to Kolkata. There are only two corridors of the six corridors which are identified as maritime corridors and the old BCIM corridor is one of them. It will start at Kunming in China, pass through Myanmar and Bangladesh, and end up in Kolkata, India. Recently, a bilateral contract has been signed between China and Myanmar known as China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC).”