

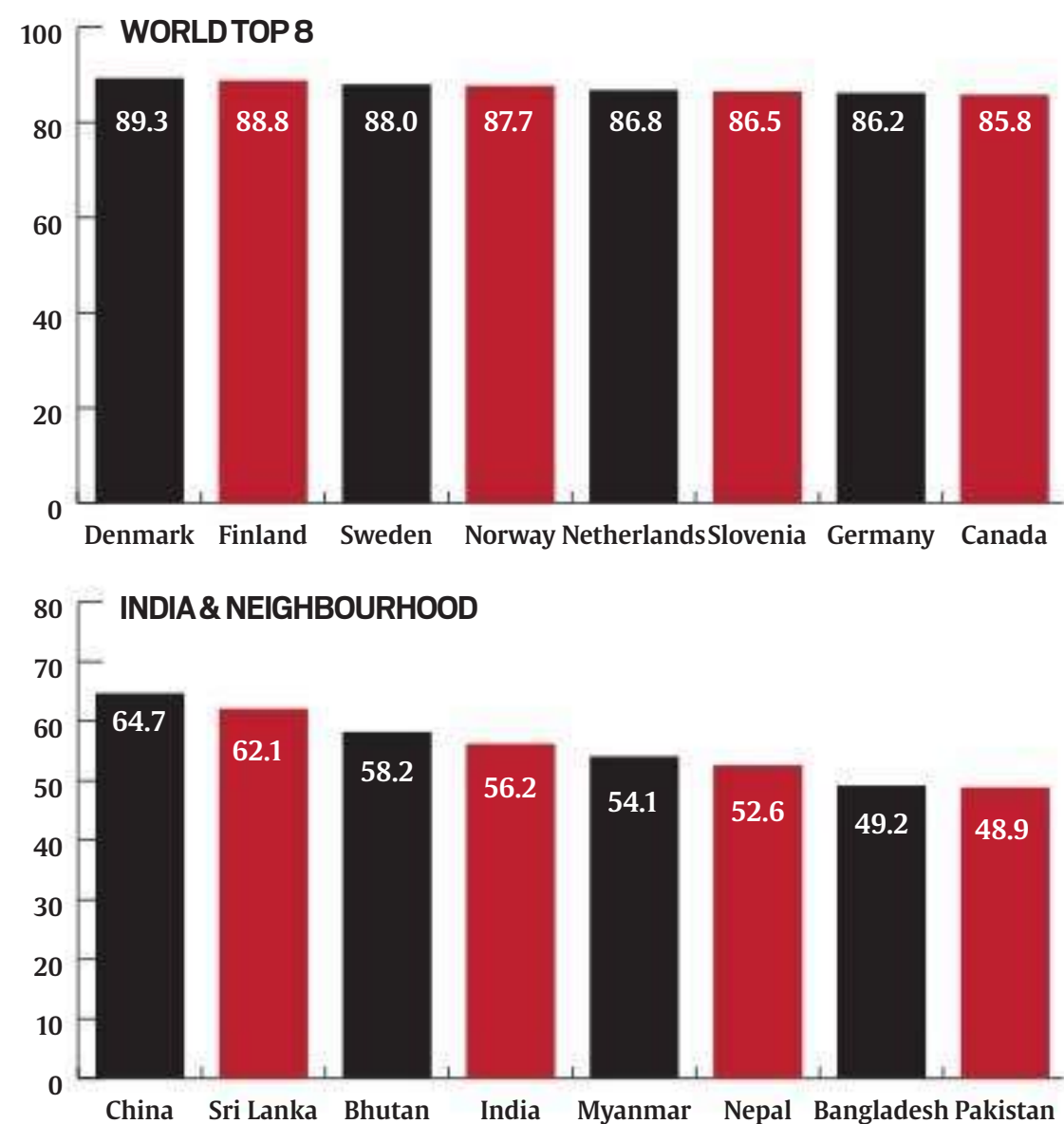


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TELLING NUMBERS

On new gender equality index, India is 95th in 129 countries



A NEW index to measure global gender equality, launched on Monday, ranks India at 95th among 129 countries. The SDG Gender Index comes close on the heels of the gender gap index of the World Economic Forum where India was ranked 108th.

How the ranking works

The SDG Gender Index has been developed by Equal Measures 2030, a joint effort of regional and global organisations including African Women’s Development and Communication Network, Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and International Women’s Health Coalition. It accounts for 14 out of 17 SDGs (sustainable development goals) that cover aspects such as poverty, health, education, literacy, political representation and equality at the workplace.

A score of 100 reflects the achievement of gender equality in relation to the targets set for each indicator. It means, for example, that 100% of girls complete secondary education, or that there is around 50-50 parity for women and men in Parliament. A score of 50 signifies that a country is about halfway to meeting a goal.

The big picture

The ranking found that the world is far from achieving gender equality with 1.4 billion girls and women living in countries that get a “very poor” grade. The global average score of the 129 countries — which represent 95% of the world’s girls and women — is 65.7 out of 100 (“poor” in the index).

Altogether, 2.8 billion girls and women live in countries that get either a “very poor” (59 and below) or “poor” score (60-69) on gender equality. Just 8% of the world’s population of girls and women live in countries

that received a “good” gender equality score (80-89) and no country achieved an “excellent” overall score of 90 or above.

“We are failing to deliver on the promises of gender equality,” said Alison Holder, Director of Equal Measures 2030. Renu Khanna, joint-national convener of the Jan Swasthya Abhiyaan, one of the partners of EM2030, said that not all countries’ scores on the index correlate with national income-some countries perform better than would be expected based on their GDP per capita, and others underperform. India performs about as expected based on GDP per capita.

Key findings for India

India’s highest goal scores are on health (79.9), hunger & nutrition (76.2), and energy (71.8). Its lowest goal scores are on partnerships (18.3, in the bottom 10 countries worldwide), industry, infrastructure and innovation (38.1), and climate (43.4).

On indicators that define such goals, India scored 95.3 on the percentage of female students enrolled in primary education who are over-age. Some of India’s lowest scores on indicators include the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (score 23.6; women made up 11.8% of Parliament in 2018). On seats held by women in the Supreme Court (4%), India has a score of 18.2. On gender-based violence, indicators include proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were married or in a union before age 18 (27.3%), women who agreed that a husband/partner is justified in beating his wife/partner under certain circumstances (47.0%), and women aged 15+ who reported that they “feel safe walking alone at night in the city or area where she lives” (69.1%).

ANURADHA MASCARENHAS

ASTHA SAXENA
NEW DELHI, JUNE 3

A RECENT study led by a group of researchers at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center has found that adding a drug, ribociclib, to hormone therapy significantly increased the overall survival in relatively younger women suffering from advanced breast cancer.

The study covered women who had not yet reached menopause or were still going through it. They were suffering from hormone receptor-positive (HR+) breast cancer and HER2-negative disease. HR+ cancer involves tumours that are receptive to anti-estrogen (endocrine) treatments aimed at blocking hormones while HER2-negative means that the patient lacks a protein of that name.

What the study found

Described as “one of the greatest advances in breast cancer in recent decades”, the study was conducted on 672 pre-menopausal women under age 59 years who had advanced HR+. After 42 months, 70% of the patients treated with combination therapy were alive as compared to 46% of those who received only the hormone therapy.

“Younger patients have been a particular concern, because breast cancer is known to be more aggressive and to be associated with poorer prognosis in younger women than in older women,” the researchers wrote in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, which will publish the article online on Tuesday, when the results are presented at the annual meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology, in Chicago.

Why it is significant

At the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, almost 35% of patients diagnosed with HR+ breast cancer and HER2-negative disease are under age 40. For such women, the standard treatment involved hormonal treatments such as tamoxifen to premenopausal patients and drugs called aromatase inhibitors to post-menopausal women.

One in every 28 Indian women — 1 in 22 in urban areas, 1 in 60 in rural areas — is likely to develop breast cancer during her lifetime. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), breast cancer is the most frequent cancer among women, impacting 2.1 million women each year, and also causes the highest number of cancer-related deaths among women — 6.27,000 or 15% in 2018. In India, breast cancer accounts for 14% of all cancers



At a run for breast cancer awareness in New Delhi in 2015. One in 22 women in urban India is likely to be hit by the disease in her lifetime. Ravi Kanojia/Express Archive

in women.

The drug in India

The drug was first approved by the Food and Drug Administration in 2017 for post-menopausal women with advanced breast

cancer, and then in 2018 for younger women. Since then, several private hospitals are already advising the drug to a few patients.

“Private hospitals may be using it, but the drug is not available at any government hospital. If any patient opts for the treatment,

THIS WORD MEANS | PARTHENOGENESIS

How an anaconda gave birth without a male

ABANTIKA GHOSH
NEW DELHI, JUNE 3

ABOUT A WEEK ago, the New England Aquarium in the US announced that a “virgin” anaconda had given birth during the winter. The aquarium does not have a male anaconda. Yet Anna, a green anaconda, gave birth to a few babies in January, two of which have survived. This is Immaculate Conception in Catholicism; in scientific terminology, it is parthenogenesis.

How it happens

The *Encyclopedia Britannica* defines parthenogenesis as “a reproductive strategy that involves development of a female (rarely a male) gamete (sex cell) without fertilisation. It occurs commonly among lower plants and invertebrate animals (particularly rotifers, aphids, ants, wasps and bees) and rarely among higher vertebrates”. A gamete is the egg in females and the sperm in males. In animals,



The babies are the product of parthenogenesis, or non-sexual reproduction. New England Aquarium

parthenogenesis means development of an embryo from an unfertilised egg cell.

Many species that reproduce through parthenogenesis do not reproduce sexually.

Others switch between the two modes taking cues from the environment. Anna is a higher vertebrate, which is why the birth of her two babies has been met with so much surprise.

The term parthenogenesis is a amalgam of the Greek words parthenos meaning virgin and genesis meaning origin. About 2,000 species are known to reproduce through parthenogenesis, which is one of the known means of asexual reproduction. Grafting (of plants) is also a type of asexual reproduction.

Clones of mother

Babies born through parthenogenesis are clones of the mother, as has now been confirmed by the aquarium through DNA tests. Parthenogenetic offspring tend to be clones of the parent because there has been no exchange and rearrangement of genetic information with another individual as happens in case of a sexual reproductive process. Each of Anna’s babies is a tiny Anna in every possible way. Many of the babies,

though, were stillborn. Since the birth in January, only two have finally survived. Stillbirth is common in parthenogenesis. In some species, offspring born by parthenogenesis from a mother can also be male but it lacks one X chromosome.

Rare in snakes

This is only the second known case of parthenogenesis in green anacondas. It is not unknown in snakes, but undocumented enough to make it to scientific journals. In 2018, researchers from the University of Adelaide reported in the *Royal Society Open Science Journal* about facultative (optional) pathenogenesis in elapid snakes (*Elapidae*), which include well-known taxa such as cobras, mambas, taipans and sea snakes. In 1998, researchers from the Kansas State University reported that a copperhead snake that had been in captivity and without any male contact for three years had given birth to two female offspring by parthenogenesis.

In bettering 2014 showing, BJP kept out ‘dynasts’, leveraged central schemes

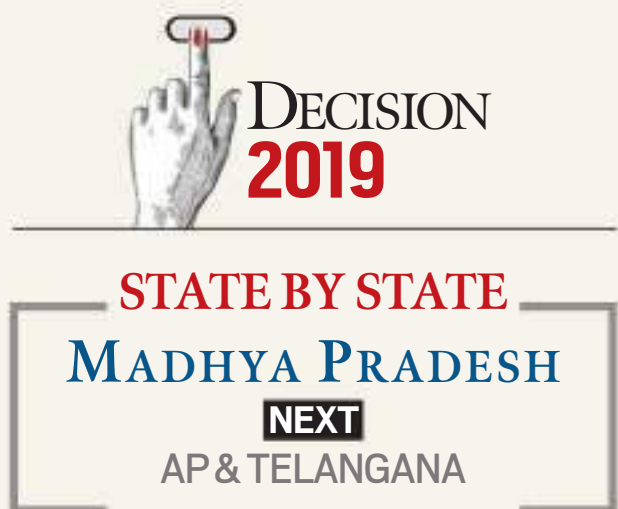


CHRISTOPHE JAFFRELOT & PANKAJ SINGH

THE BJP has swept Madhya Pradesh, winning 28 out of the 29 Lok Sabha seats and increasing its vote share to 58% from the 54.2% it had in 2014. The victory stands in sharp contrast to the results of the Assembly elections held less than six months ago, in which the Congress had dethroned the BJP after 15 years. In the close contest, the Congress had won 114 seats against the BJP’s 109, with the BJP winning a slightly bigger vote share (41.9%) than the Congress (41%). The Congress had formed the gov-

ernment with the help of two BSP, one SP, and four Independent MLAs.

The striking aspect of the Lok Sabha election results is the overwhelming rejection of the senior leaders of the MP Congress, including several “dynasts”. The Congress in the state has been traditionally dominated by prominent families such as those of the Scindias, Digvijaya Singh, Arjun Singh, Kamal Nath, Shri Niwas Tiwari, Subhash Yadav, and Kantilal Bhuria. They have their traditional Vidhan Sabha and Lok Sabha seats, and lead factions in the party in the state, with their own loyalist workers and MLAs. Nearly all these families lost heavily in the elections — among the tall leaders to fall were former Chief Minister Digvijaya Singh (Bhopal), four-time parliamentarian Jyotiraditya Scindia (Guna), and the former Leader of Opposition in the Assembly Ajay Singh (Sidhi). They all lost by huge margins; in contrast, the only successful Congress candidate, the Chief Minister’s son Nakul Nath,



could win his family’s seat of Chhindwara by only 37,536 votes.

While the BJP too, has powerful dynasties in Madhya Pradesh, it did not give too many tickets to the members of these traditional political families. In the Vidhan Sabha elections, Babulal Gaur, Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Sundar Lal Patwa, Prahlad Patel, Kailash Vijayvargiya, Narendra Singh Tomar, and Harsh Narayan Singh had succeeded in

getting nominations for their relatives, several of whom were elected MLAs.

In the Lok Sabha election, Chouhan could not get a ticket for his wife Sadhna Singh Chouhan (Vidisha). Leader of Opposition Gopal Bhargav could not get a ticket for his son (Sagar), and former Agriculture Minister Gaurishankar Bisen failed to secure his daughter’s nomination in Balaghat.

Instead, the BJP nominated more newcomers and played the Hindutva card in the most radical manner, as was evident in the campaign of Pragma Singh Thakur, who was fielded in Bhopal against Digvijaya Singh, one of the prominent secular faces of the Congress. Thakur, who faces charges of terrorism in the 2008 Malegaon blast case, fought a very active electoral battle, even canvassing for other BJP candidates, and giving a strident communal overtone to her party’s campaign.

The narrative of Hindu nationalism worked well in the context of the Pulwama terrorist attack and India’s response to

Pakistan, which had already helped the BJP shift the political discourse to national security from issues like unemployment and the agricultural crisis. That the Congress could not capitalise on these issues was due also to the flawed implementation of its promises on these fronts at the state level. At the time of the Vidhan Sabha elections, Rahul Gandhi had promised to waive agricultural loans within 10 days of the Congress forming the state government; however, despite having signed the loan waiver file on the day he took oath, Chief Minister Kamal Nath failed to implement the decision on the ground.

On the other hand, central government welfare schemes like the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan, and Ujjwala Yojana seemed to have nudged backward caste voters towards Narendra Modi and the BJP. Some 36.6 lakh houses in rural areas, and 5.5 lakh in urban areas, were sanctioned under the PMAY. Under the Swachh Bharat scheme, more than 54 lakh toilets



IF THOUGHT CORRUPTS LANGUAGE, LANGUAGE CAN ALSO CORRUPT THOUGHT.
— GEORGE ORWELL

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

TONGUE TWISTED

There is no need to paint English-speakers as oppressors in order to promote the use of languages of Indian origin

THE DRAFT NATIONAL Education Policy (2018) may have narrowly missed rekindling the language wars, when a sentence was read by the southern states to suggest that Hindi would be imposed upon schools in the region under the three language formula. That was averted by some swift damage control, but an impression that English is being demonised lingers. Besides, it appears that English-speakers must bear the burden of corrective action, to arrive at a level playing field in education and in professional life. It is suggested that English has been privileged by the “economic elite”, and has been turned into a “criterion” of education and a “prerequisite” for professional success. These phenomena do indeed exist on the ground, and contribute significantly to inequality in access to education, resources and jobs, but it is not the result of a nexus or conspiracy. English was first valued as a product of empire, and then it rapidly became a world language that is understood in almost all countries. It is now an instrument of access globally, and not only within the power structures of the country. To devalue it in the course of supporting the other Indian languages would amount to reducing access for a generation of students. English usage grew organic, and while language has indeed economically divided the people, a top-down firman, however well-meaning, is not a practical antidote.

The draft policy puts the onus to correct the imbalance upon “the elite and the educated”, who are called upon to value languages native to India, and to increase their use in the workplace, educational institutions, and daily conversation. The last category may be redundant, because only an infinitesimal minority converses exclusively in English. Languages of Indian origin are already valued and it is implicitly acknowledged by the boom in literature in translation, which uses English as a bridge language. The exhortation to value languages other than English in the workplace, especially in hiring, is perplexing. Companies are answerable to shareholders, not to the government, and managers follow the dictates of the marketplace, not political imperatives. If proficiency in English brings in better returns in a connected world, managers will hire accordingly. Lastly, the suggestion that languages other than English must be promoted in education is known to be disastrous. Such a political intervention was attempted in state-run schools in West Bengal, and it harmed the employment prospects and professional mobility of a generation of students.

The use of languages of Indian origin can be promoted without painting the English-speaking community as the overweening oppressor. Students should be allowed to take a number of languages, including the mother tongue. Languages widen access, and the more tongues a student can speak, the better she will do in life.

COMING UP SHORT

Tax collection targets presented in the interim budget now appear to be too optimistic

ALMOST TWO YEARS after the shift to the goods and services tax (GST) regime, tax collections continue to underwhelm. For 2018-19, the Centre had initially pegged the central goods and services tax (CGST) collections at Rs 6.03 lakh crore. This was subsequently lowered to Rs 5.03 lakh crore in the interim budget, as revenue during the year came in well below expectations. But, actual collections were even lower at Rs 4.57 lakh crore, according to recent data released by the Controller General of Accounts (CGA). The extent of the shortfall is worrying. Based on the CGA data, CGST collections would have to grow by 33.5 per cent in FY20, for the interim budget target of Rs 6.1 lakh crore to be met. And though there has been a modest improvement in collections in the first two months of FY20, the interim budget target appears to be too optimistic, going by current trends.

At the aggregate level, total GST collections have been pegged at Rs 13.7 lakh crore for FY20. This includes CGST and SGST collections of around Rs 6.1 lakh crore each, Rs 1 lakh crore which is expected to be mopped up through the compensation cess route and another Rs 50,000 crore of IGST collection, that is expected to remain unallocated at the end of the year. These numbers imply a monthly CGST run rate (including IGST settlement) of around Rs 50,833 crore. But, so far, collections have averaged Rs 41,721 crore per month, well below the required run rate. Further, one must also point out that this estimate does not include refunds. The net of refunds, actual collections will be even lower, increasing the collection deficit. As a result, the required run rate for the remaining part of the year has already jumped to Rs 52,830 crore, according to a report by Kotak Institutional Equities. Achieving this is a tall order, especially considering the slowdown in economic growth.

And then there's the shortfall on the income tax side to consider as well. As against a target of Rs 5.29 lakh crore in FY19, collections stood at Rs 4.61 lakh crore, implying that collections would have to grow by a staggering 34.8 per cent in FY20 to meet the interim budget target of Rs 6.2 lakh crore. Considering that nominal GDP is likely to grow around 10.5-11 per cent, the tax collection targets for FY20, presented in the interim budget, do appear to be too optimistic. The new finance minister should consider revising the estimates to present a more accurate picture of the government's accounts.

ENGLISH STRIKE

English Premier League trumps its European counterparts, but it misses a Messi or a Ronaldo of its own

FOR THE FIRST time in European football, clubs from one country featured in the continent's two major competitions. Liverpool defeated Tottenham Hotspur in the Champions League final, while Chelsea won the Europa League, beating Arsenal. The English Premier League proved its on-pitch dominance, along with its supremacy in the game's money league. The two are correlated. The Deloitte Football Money League for 2017-18 has six English clubs in the list of top 10. The Uefa's Benchmark Report for the year 2017 showed how the Premier League's aggregate revenue, north of £4.77 billion, dwarfed its nearest rival, Li Liga's £2.56 billion. The record £8.4 billion TV deals give the Premier League its pulling power and competitive edge. It's a result of aggressive global marketing, where the Premier League has trumped its European counterparts.

Because of its popularity and financial might, English top-flight football can woo the world's finest coaches and expensive players. Three coaches — Pep Guardiola, Jurgen Klopp and Mauricio Pochettino — have given English football a facelift. Guardiola has made the biggest impact. His style and philosophy, his occasional use of the Libero in a 4-3-3 formation, have inspired a revolution right down to the age-group levels. Two years ago, the England colts claimed the Fifa U-17 and U-20 World Cup titles, while the U-19s annexed the European U-19 Championship. The England senior team under Gareth Southgate reached the semifinal in the 2018 Russia World Cup. At St George's Park, the FA headquarters, they have taken a leaf out of Guardiola's book. The hurly-burly long ball is now dead and buried. Creativity and entertainment have become the buzzwords.

The Premier League has the world's most expensive goalkeeper in Kepa Arrizabalaga (£71.6 million) at Chelsea. It has the world's costliest defender in Virgil van Dijk (£75 million) at Liverpool. But English football is still bereft of a player like Lionel Messi or Cristiano Ronaldo.



SANJAYA BARU

UNITED STATES PRESIDENT Donald Trump's trade policy action against India suggests the narrative of a Rising India may well have met its comeuppance. The action has been explained away by some as collateral damage with the main targets being China and the trade-surplus enjoying OECD economies, especially Germany and Japan. The Federation of Indian Export Organisations has estimated that only \$6.35 billion worth of trade, out of a total bilateral trade of \$51.4 billion, benefits from US trade preferences. India can absorb that shock. The point is not that. How is it “fair” for the world's richest nation to target a poor one in the name of “fair trade”?

India is a lower middle income developing economy and will remain so for the foreseeable future. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the per capita national income (gross domestic product, GDP) of the US, in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms was US\$62,606 in 2018, compared to \$7,874 for India. Most European Union countries have a per capita income in the range of \$40,000 to \$50,000 and China's PPP-adjusted per capita income is \$18,110. Despite her low income, India remains an open economy. The share of external trade (exports plus imports) in national income is 40.7 per cent for India but only 26.6 per cent for the US.

India does not hide behind high tariff walls, as charged by President Trump, since it has consistently run a trade deficit with the rest of the world. The US, too, has long run a trade deficit with the rest of the world, but for very different reasons and at a very different level of development. At any rate, the US conducts all its trade in its own currency that it prints at will. China, Japan and Germany are the ones that enjoy a trade surplus with the rest of the world.

India has a trade surplus with the US, but Trump's complaint on that count is like a rich man complaining that he always gives gifts to his poorer friends, and they never give him

Part of the reason why India is at the receiving end of Trump's trade tantrums is because he may have fallen into the trap we created of projecting India as a “Rising Power” and the “World's Fastest Growing Economy”. In his rush to stop China in its tracks and get European and Asian allies to stand by him, Trump has mistakenly identified India as a target for corrective action. Apart from a couple of sectors, like pharmaceuticals, Indian industry does not pose a significant competitive challenge to US business.



SHONAR LALA

IN THE RUN up to the elections, a plethora of redistributive programmes, including farm loan waivers, cash transfers and minimum income guarantees came to the forefront as campaigners sought to balm rural distress. Amongst these is a proposal to launch a revised NREGA 3.0, in which 150 days of employment would be guaranteed to the rural poor. Almost 15 years after it was enacted, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) still makes waves in the news, but very little is known about its impact on the poor. Has the world's largest workfare programme worked?

To elicit a fair answer to this question begs another question. What does the NREGA intend to do? Enacted as a legal right, the NREGA's primary goal is social protection for the most vulnerable. But like all good things, expectations of the programme have ballooned — with some believing it could even enable most poor households in rural India to cross the poverty line. Measured against such ambitious objectives, any workfare programme would most likely not live up to its expectations. But India has had relative success with workfare, with the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme being the most important precursor to the NREGA.

The primary advantage of workfare programmes over farm loan waivers, cash transfers and minimum income programmes is that the poor self-select themselves into the programme, thus reducing the identification costs. The ability of a programme to parsimoniously target the ultra-poor without elaborate means testing is critical for its long-

SAFETY NET THAT WORKS

Before contemplating new rural programmes, government must expand MGNREGA

term success, particularly when fiscal resources are scarce.

Crucially, the most basic tenet of the NREGA — its self-targeting mechanism — does work. Poorer and disadvantaged households are more likely to seek NREGA work. In practice, however, not all those who demand NREGA work receive it. In 2009/10, almost half the households in rural India wanted NREGA jobs but only a quarter received them, according to estimates by Liu and Barrett (2016). More recently, employment provided under NREGA in 3,500 panchayats in 2017/18 was a third less than that demanded.

Given the enormous, though sometimes unmet, demand, has NREGA enabled the rural poor to cross the poverty line? Whilst the three available national counterfactual-based studies show modest increases in household per capita expenditures and consumption in the first few years of the programme, the picture is entirely different for marginalised groups, who have benefited greatly due to NREGA. A study by Klonner and Oldiges in 2014 find that Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe recipients increased their real monthly per capita expenditure by 37 per cent in the lean season of 2008, cutting poverty by almost half.

Likewise, state-level studies show NREGA favours the most disadvantaged. In Andhra Pradesh, monthly per capita food consumption amongst the very poor who received work under NREGA increased by estimates of 9-10 per cent in the first year of implementation (Ravi and Engler 2015, Deininger and Liu 2019). The poorest SC/ST households and those with a disabled mem-

ber saw even higher growth in consumption and nutritional intake in the short-run, and in the medium-term, substantially increased their non-financial assets. In Bihar, Dutta et al (2014) estimate that NREGA reduced poverty by roughly 1 percentage point in 2009, a figure that could be closer to 8 percentage points if it was rolled out to all those who wanted it.

Aside from its impact on the poorest, NREGA also plays a critical role in reducing vulnerability. Research indicates that NREGA provides employment after an adverse rainfall shock, enables workers to smoothen their consumption with variations in rainfall, and reduces risk during the lean season. Despite being severely rationed, NREGA acts, as per its mandate, as a very desirable social protection mechanism amongst the most disadvantaged classes. Compared to other proposals on the table, NREGA efficiently allows the most disadvantaged to spur their consumption in times of rural distress.

As a new administration weighs policy options at a time of rural unemployment and weakening consumption, pre-monsoon, it would be prudent not to eschew this proven pro-poor programme. Instead, they should quickly and substantially ramp up NREGA so all those who demand jobs, receive them. Why reinvent the wheel when NREGA would provide a vital safety net — and the dignity of rightful employment — to those who are most vulnerable?

The writer is a development economist who has previously worked at the World Bank and consults at 3ie



JUNE 4, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

ARMY IN BARODA

THE ARMY was called out and a 12-hour curfew from 8 pm imposed in Baroda today as the city was rocked by large-scale violence and arson following a hike in milk prices by the Baroda Dairy. The police control room said late in the night that army jawans were posted at vulnerable points. Assistance of three companies was sought, it was officially learnt. Baroda is the second city in Gujarat to come under army control within a span of four days. Ahmedabad is already under army control as the police agitation turned violent there. Agitating policemen, with black ribbons, had earlier apparently failed to control the increasing violence. By early night, al-

most all the milk booths of the dairy were destroyed and a milk van and three state transport buses were up in flames.

CAMBODIA VIOLENCE

HEAVY FIGHTING BETWEEN forces loyal to the ousted Cambodian Premier, Pol Pot, and the Vietnamese-led forces of Heng Samrin erupted last night south of the Cambodian border town of Poipet. Thai military sources said today. In the past several days Thai military observers in Aranyaprathet have reported that guerrilla forces loyal to Pol Pot have moved back into an area about 15 to 20 km south of Poipet. After the fighting erupted last night, continuing this morning, Thai army re-

inforcements supported by tanks were sent into the border area near Klong Nam Sai, south of Aranyaprathet, in case fighting spilled over into Thailand, the sources said.

HEAVY WATER

SOME DISTURBING FACTS have come to light which do not rule out the possibility of a deliberate hampering of Indian efforts to manufacture heavy water in adequate quantity. In the last couple of years, there has been startling frequency in the set back to manufacture heavy water plants at Baroda and Tuticorin. Work at the other plants at Kota and Talcher had also slowed down due to various reasons.



Sound the secular bugle

As the new government takes its oath of office, it is necessary to restore to public discourse the passionate advocacy and practice of secularism



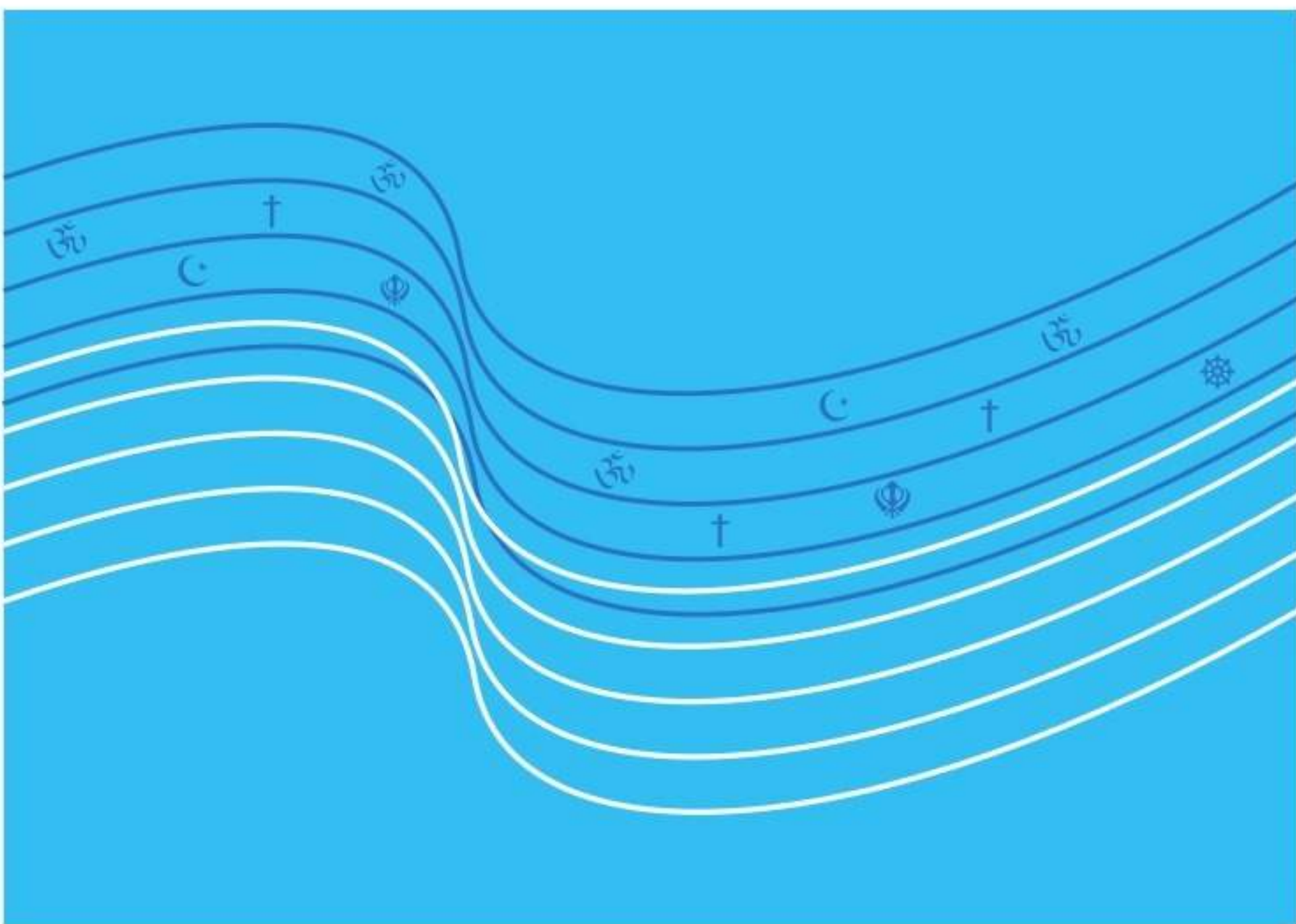
MANI SHANKAR AIYAR

WHILE FOR TACTICAL electoral reasons, the Congress and other Opposition parties chose to eschew the word “secularism” in the election campaign, M K Stalin in Tamil Nadu boldly altered the name of the alliance he was leading in his state from “United Progressive Alliance” (UPA) to “Secular Progressive Alliance”. SPA won. UPA lost.

This certainly throws up the challenge as to whether the century-old rift between the forces of Hindutva and the forces that reject Hindutva continues to require the bold and uninhibited advocacy and practice of “secularism”, as hitherto understood, or whether the time has come for old-style secularists to throw in the towel and seek political accommodation with the Hindutvawadis. Additionally, but most germane, do Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s soothing references to the minorities in his post-election remarks amount to his abandoning the ideological space in order to bridge the divide between him and his opponents? In other words, has Hindutva, as hitherto understood, now embraced the “secularism” of its traditional ideological foes?

I ask: Has the blot of the Gujarat **pogrom** of 2002 been wiped out? Are we resigned to the destruction of the Babri Masjid? Have Modi and his cohort given up their “infinite appetite to quarrel with the past” as journalist-historian Ashutosh put it in his recently published treatise, *Hindu Rashtra*? Has Modi caught in his throat the poison of V D Savarkar’s assertion that only those who regard Bharat as their “pitrubhu” (fatherland) and their “punyabhū” (holy land) are true Bharatis? Has Modi repudiated M S Golwalkar who “in the major compilation of what he has said and written about Hindu nationalism, has chapters identifying Muslims and Christians as internal threats to national unity” (Andersen and Damle: *The RSS: A View to the Inside*, p.250)? Is Modi 2.0 going to stamp out “love,jihad”, “ghar wapsi”, the lynching of Muslims by “gau rakshaks”? Is hate speech, not just by kar sevaks, and assorted sadhus and sadhvis, but also by senior BJP office-bearers, central and state ministers and members of legislatures, even governors, going to be reined in through condign punishment of the perpetrators, however high they might rank in the party or the sangh parivar or government? Are quasi militias like Yogi Adityanath’s Hindu Yuva Vahini going to be dismantled? Will the saf-ronisation of education and encroachment on the autonomy of the independent institutions that keep our democracy vibrant be ended? Are charges of sedition going to be pressed on those regarded by the establishment as “anti-national” because these dissidents recommend policies that are at cross-purposes with the convictions of the ruling dispensation? Is the vicious equating of Muslims with Pakistanis, especially by prominent spokespersons of Hindutva, going to get terminated? If no, what is the meaning of the prime minister’s pledge to secure “sabka vishwas”?

A host of knowledgeable commentators have, on the eve of the counting of votes and in its immediate aftermath, expressed their apprehension of India “walking towards electoral authoritarianism” or, to vary the metaphor, as “sliding towards non-theocratic majoritarianism” (Yogendra Yadav, IE May 22). Was or was not the electoral outcome “a



C R Sasikumar

victory for electoral Caesarism... a victory for majoritarianism... a desire to openly marginalise minorities and assert the cultural hegemony of Hindutva... a victory for the politics of fear and hate” (Pratap Bhanu Mehta, IE, May 24)? Did not the verdict amount to India taking “another step towards re-inventing itself as a de facto “ethnic democracy” (where) India continues to be a secular state on paper but, in practice, the minorities are becoming second-class citizens” (Christophe Jaffrelot, IE, May 24)? Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen (IE, May 29) has drawn pointed attention to “the ways and means of securing BJP’s victory, including instigation of hatred and intolerance of groups of Indian citizens, particularly Muslims”? And, finally, most tellingly, does the assessment of academic Vinay Sitapati of Ashoka University — “there is no Hindu rashtra down the road from here. It has already arrived” — hold?

Consider the contrasting views of two renowned Indian Muslim intellectuals, Zoya Hasan and Faizan Mustafa, on the one hand, and Ram Madhav, leading RSS intellectual and general secretary of the BJP, on the other. Hasan, professor emerita, JNU, attributes the “Modi landslide” to “Hindutva consolidation and majoritarian triumphalism, powered by a hyper-nationalist agenda” while Mustafa, an eminent jurist serving as the vice-chancellor of the NALSAR University of Law at Hyderabad, drawing attention to the numerous communal crises that nationalist Indian Muslims have survived over the last century and a half, argues that “if a government shows authoritarian tendencies, suppresses dissent and keeps mum on the violations of fundamental freedoms of its citizens” (IE, May 28) that is not an issue for the minorities alone but “should worry the whole country as it will equally affect all citizens not just its minorities”. That is true. It underlines the threat that “Hindutva, which is a political ideology and a political project” (Hasan) presents to the Idea of India as manifested in our Constitutional order.

BJP General Secretary Ram Madhav, at this juncture of heady electoral triumph, perhaps unwittingly, reveals the ugly reality of Modi’s “ideology in action” which he portrays as an admixture of Bonapartism, citing Napoleon, “What counts is what the people think is true”

This is not the time for pious hopes. It is time to sound again the bugle of secular fundamentalism. We need to revert to the language of Rajiv Gandhi when in the Lok Sabha on May 3, 1989, he began his speech in a debate on communalism with the ringing proclamation, ‘A secular India alone is an India that can survive. Perhaps an India that is not secular does not deserve to survive’. That is the ideological idiom and unambiguous language of the secularism espoused by Gandhi and Jawaharla Nehru, Lal Bhabadur Shastri, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, and all their successors till Modi, including Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Each in his or her own way ‘discovered’ that India was fundamentally a secular nation and reflected in their ‘Idea of India’.

and, curiously, considering the sangh parivar’s dread of the Red, a Marxist scholar, William Davies, as pronouncing “the leader becomes the truth”. Gandhiji, of course, held that “God is Truth and Truth is God”.

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That is the ideological idiom and unambiguous language of the secularism espoused by Gandhi and Jawaharla Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, and all their successors till Modi, including Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Each in his or her own way “discovered” that India was fundamentally a secular nation and reflected in their “Idea of India” the aspiration of Indians through the “trackless centuries” to live in a secular country. Hindutvists have tried to posit an “Idea of Bharat” as against the “Khan Market” gang’s “Idea of India”. There is only one “Idea of India, that is Bharat” and it is written into the letter and spirit of our Constitution. It constituted the national consensus, especially in the wake of the horrors of Partition and lasted till the rise of Modi. Do these elections signal, in the words of a secular, liberal Pakistani Muslim intellectual, F S Aijazuddin, writing in the *Dawn*, “the fading away of the hieroglyphics of Nehruvian ‘secularism’”?

In the final decade of his life, M A Jinnah propagated the utterly un-Indian theory of “two nations”. For seven decades, independent India proudly refuted that proposition by remaining a secular nation despite break-away Pakistan becoming a Muslim nation. Under Modi, we are being taken towards the fulfillment of Jinnah’s dream. Now, more than ever, as the new government takes its second oath of office, it is necessary to restore to the public discourse the passionate advocacy and practice of “secularism”, as understood hitherto. We have lost the secular battle. We must win the secular war.

The writer is a former Union minister

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation has, in particular, been ineffectual in promoting unity and the common interests of over a billion Muslims across the globe.” —DAWN

From Tiananmen to digital dystopia

Rise of the all-knowing surveillance state has reinforced Deng Xiaoping’s model of open economy and closed polity in China



RAJA MANDALA

BY C RAJA MOHAN

THREE DECADES AGO this week, the Chinese Communist Party cracked down hard on student protests demanding the liberalisation of China’s political system. The movement that began on a small scale in the early summer of 1989 in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square spread rapidly to many towns and cities and gained significant popular support. During the night of June 3–4, troops of the People’s Liberation Army fought their way into the heart of Beijing against civilian resistance and cleared the square of thousands of citizens who gathered there.

The bloody crackdown at Tiananmen remains a deep and unhealed scar in the evolution of modern China and the reign of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) that began seven decades ago in 1949. The CCP, under the leadership of the supreme leader, Deng Xiaoping, characterised the protests as a counter revolutionary rebellion, ousted the party secretary Zhao Ziyang and other communist leaders seen as empathetic to the students, and unleashed a wave of political repression.

The Tiananmen protests have endured as a powerful symbol of the popular struggles for political liberalisation and the capacity of authoritarian rulers to crush them. Nothing captures this enduring tension more than the image of the “tank man” — a lone citizen trying to stop a column of tanks in the Tiananmen Square on the morning of June 5. Over the last three decades, that balance appears to have shifted in favour of the state, at least for now.

Accelerating that shift has been the revolution in digital technologies that has allowed states to exercise unprecedented control over their citizens. There seems to be less and less need to deploy massive numbers of troops and tanks to put down large-scale protests as the CCP had to do in June 1989. New technological systems based on mass surveillance, data analytics and artificial intelligence are helping modern authoritarians to prevent the emergence of not just large-scale protests, but stamp out individual dissent. But back to Tiananmen for a moment.

Chairman Deng leavened China’s political repression that followed after the Tiananmen protests with a counter-intuitive initiative. He unleashed a massive economic reform in 1992. Deng blocked the CCP’s return to ideological conservatism by decisively shifting China’s economic orientation to liberalisation and globalisation. Deng’s strategy limited the international opprobrium that followed the Tiananmen crackdown. It opened up expansive possibilities for Western capital in China and renewed political engagement with the US, Europe and Japan.

Deng’s 1992 reforms put China on the path to rapid economic growth. A decade later, China was on its way to becoming the second-largest economy in the world and well on track to overtake the United States. Deng’s strategy seemed to offer Chinese citizens a new compact — economic prosperity in return for political obedience. Rapid economic growth over a prolonged period, to be sure, triggered social turbulence and political discontent.

Some analysts of China were convinced that the contradictions of “red capitalism” — a communist party building capitalism — will inevitably undermine CCP rule. Others hoped that economic prosperity will generate a middle class that will seek greater freedoms and the state in China, as elsewhere in East Asia, will slowly but certainly evolve towards liberalism.

Both would be disappointed as the CCP rule looked far more resilient and stable than anyone had anticipated. One reason, arguably, is the new means of control that the party had acquired. The post-Tiananmen era in China had a third element that reinforced Deng’s model of “open economy and closed polity” — the rise of the all-knowing surveillance state with enormous potential for digital repression.

A quarter century ago, the internet era was heralded with the hope of expanded freedoms — individual and collective. Instead, it opened the door for unprecedented state control over citizenry. No other nation has demonstrated the new possibilities for digital control of society as China has in the last few years.

Beijing employed a number of means — including the erection of a “great wall” of censorship over the internet, monitoring of the physical movement of individuals through omnipresent surveillance cameras, analysing the digital activity of individuals and investment in technologies such as facial recognition. The construction of the surveillance state in China, many believe, rules out any protest movement of the kind we saw at Tiananmen three decades ago.

The Chinese-model of mass surveillance is now being exported to countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. It is, therefore, tempting to frame the debate in terms of authoritarian versus democratic states. But caution is in order. The rise of the “surveillance state” in China and other states has its version in the democratic world — the rise of “surveillance capitalism”. US technology giants, for example, have been accused of collection, manipulation and monetisation of consumer data. Some of them have also been charged with facilitating the rise of the surveillance state in China and its global diffusion.

However, there is a difference. In most democracies, there is a big push back against surveillance capitalism and the search for means to protect individuals and communities against corporate greed and state repression in the digital age. But we are at the very beginning of a challenging project to prevent the emergence of a digital dystopia.

The writer is director, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore and contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

FEDERAL MATTERS

THIS REFERS TO the report, ‘Draft NEP: Elite used English to marginalise large sections of the society’ (IE, June 3). India is not a homogeneous nation and attempts to impose a homogeneous policy is likely to trigger reactions. That means we should re-visit the question of federalism in India. This includes issues such as appointment and powers of governors, central ownership of the IAS and IPS and matters in the Concurrent List.

P Datta, Kolkata

ODE TO RAMADAN

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘On a month to reflect’ (IE, June 3). The piece is a spiritual ode to the fasting month of Ramadan. This Ramadan was spiritually the most moving in recent times. The scorching heat and the anti Muslim election rhetoric posed the ultimate test for our bodies and souls. Muslims appear to have passed that test. The challenge will be to turn the political challenge to the larger good of the country, and of the Muslims, through quality education, business and respect for women’s rights.

J.S.Bandukwala via e-mail

A NEW MINISTRY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘The water test’ (IE, June 3). Like electricity and LPG connections, piped water supply

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.

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to all households is critical for their welfare. The Prime Minister deserves credit for taking the first step towards providing piped water supply to all households. With per capita water availability expected to reduce, water conservation has become non negotiable. Hopefully, the new ministry will work in tandem with other ministries to ensure the same.

Bal Govind, Noida



K P KRISHNAN AND ROOPA KUDVA

For skilling India

It requires tapping of technology and creation of conducive governance

OVER THE LAST 10 years, the Indian government has undertaken significant efforts in improving both the scale and quality of skilling, like setting up the National Skills Development Corporation (NSDC) in 2009, launching the Skill India mission in 2015, and the flagship skilling initiative, the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) in 2016. This, in turn, is expected to drive economic gains and social mobility for individuals as well as trigger a productivity dividend for enterprises.

Despite the progress made so far, today, learners face a multitude of challenges on their skilling journey. Two ecosystem barriers contribute directly to this: Informational asymmetries and limited quality assurance.

As far as the first barrier is concerned, there is a fundamental lack of awareness around why skills matter at the individual level. There is also a paucity of timely and reliable data on the supply of and demand for jobs, which makes it difficult for those seeking employment to identify what opportunities they should pursue. There also exists limited access to impartial and credible sources of information on high-quality service providers and high-potential opportunities, which means that jobseekers and learners end up relying on personal networks or prox-

imate training providers. As a result, they end up training in skills that are not responsive to the local and changing market needs.

Regarding quality assurance, currently, there are three primary overseeing bodies that manage the quality assurance process. The National Council for Vocational Training (NCVT) manages long-term skilling programmes while the National Skills Development Agency (NSDA) and the NSDC regulate short-term programmes. There is also an imbalance at various levels of the process that need correction, for example, incentives for different service providers are misaligned leading to situations where outcome-based disbursement models favour assessment agencies over training providers.

To unlock the potential of the skills ecosystem, these frictions must be smoothened through technology-led change, as well as through market-enabling governance. Until now, technology has played an enabling role in making existing systems and processes become smoother and more efficient (for example, digitisation of course curriculums). Moving to a technology-led transformation will help reach scale, promote inter-operability and create digital public goods for all to use, that is, the internet equivalent for skills.

Automated and scalable forms of interactions can help improve trust and credibility in the ecosystem and enable better decision-making by learners, service providers and employers. Two leading initiatives in this direction are (i) creating and adopting digital certificates that allow consent-based sharing of information in a machine-readable format, to ensure better security and authenticity and ii) open APIs that can enable stakeholders in the ecosystem to tap into large, centralised sets of information (e.g. public registries of trainers, students etc.) and build market solutions (e.g. ratings for training centres).

Consolidated and market-enabling governance can also help create the right incentives for service providers to cater to the needs of learners and employers effectively. A seminal step in this direction has been the creation of an overarching skilling regulator, the National Council for Vocational Education and Training (NCVET) by merging NCVT, NSDA and regulatory functions of NSDC. Over the next year, it is expected that NCVET will develop minimalistic and user-friendly guidelines to recognise and regulate two of the most important stakeholders in the skilling ecosystem — the awarding bodies, who accredit training institutions, and, the assess-

ment agencies, who assess learner performance. In turn, it will be incumbent upon the awarding bodies to monitor and regulate the functioning of affiliated training providers. NCVET will be a forward-looking regulator and will support disruptive innovation in the ecosystem like models that reduce the gap in market-based data between learners and service providers. NCVET will be a presence-less and paper-less regulator: It will take decisions that are rooted in evidence and real-time data driven, and, adopt a spirit of disclosure and transparency in its interactions. Most significantly, NCVET will adopt a learner-centric lens to its decision making.

To push the skilling agenda forward, it is important for the government to adopt the role of an ecosystem facilitator. This can foster informed decision-making by learners and employers, increase employer trust, and, enable upward and horizontal mobility of skilled workers. Technology and governance must work closely together to drive this transformative change.

Krishnan is secretary, ministry of skill development and entrepreneurship, government of India. Kudva is managing director, Omidyar Network India

