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## TELLING NUMBERS

## Delhi ozone level went beyond limit for 95 days in last 3 years

DURING THE last three calendar years, ozone was reported as prominent pollutant for 95 days in Delhi and 11, 48, 8 and 49 days in Faridabad, Gurugram, Ghaziabad and Noida respectively, the government said in Lok Sabha during the current session of Parliament. These numbers were based on the Air Quality Index of the Central Pollution Control Board. Replying to a question on ozone levels in Delhi-NCR, Environment and Forest Minister Prakash Javadekar tabled AQI figures on ozone status for 2016, 2017 and 2018 as well as for the first five months of 2019. The figures showed that until May 31, Delhi has already had 23 days with ozone levels over the prescribed limit, while Faridabad has had 55.

About steps taken to control the rise, the minister noted that ozone is a secondary pollutant formed through atmospheric reactions and the factors responsible are high temperature and



AQI monitoring station in Delhi.  
Abhinav Saha/File photo

emissions from vehicles, power plants and burning of waste. He listed several measures to control such emissions, including a shift from BS-IV to BS-VI fuel standards since April 1, 2018 in NCT of Delhi and from April 1, 2020 in the rest of the country which he said will reduce emissions of oxides of nitrogen of heavy duty diesel vehicles by 88.5% in comparison to BS-IV vehicles.

## NUMBER OF DAYS WITH OZONE REPORTED AS PROMINENT POLLUTANT

CITY	2016	2017	2018	2019 (TILL MAY 31)
Delhi	36	14	45	23
Faridabad	3	0	8	55
Gurugram	43	0	5	6
Ghaziabad	—	0	8	3
Noida	—	33	16	0

Source: Central Pollution Control Board via MoEF

## TIP FOR READING LIST

## WILL AI PARTNER WITH HUMANS?

JAMES LOVELOCK, chemist and environmental thinker, is best known for formulating the Gaia hypothesis, also known as Gaia theory or Gaia principle, which proposes that all organisms and their inorganic surroundings on Earth are closely integrated to form a single and self-regulating complex system, maintaining the conditions for life on the planet. Lovelock, who turns 100 on July, has now come up with a new theory about life on Earth — or its future. He argues that the anthropocene — the age in which humans acquired planetary-scale technologies — is coming to an end after 300 years. Lovelock describes the new age, which has already begun, as the “novacene”.

*Novacene: The Coming Age of Hyperintelligence* proposes that new beings will emerge from existing artificial intelligence systems. They will think 10,000 times faster than we do and they



will regard us as we now regard plants — as slow acting and thinking creatures. However, machines will not violently take over the planet as suggested in science fiction, because these beings will be

as dependent on the health of the planet as humans are. As *The Guardian* writes in its review, “... for Lovelock, the Gaia hypothesis will save us, because the machines will realise that they need organic life to keep the planet at a habitable temperature. (Even electronic life could not survive on an Earth that veered into runaway global warming.) So, Lovelock argues, it will suit the robots to keep humans around.”

It is crucial, Lovelock argues, that the intelligence of Earth survives and prospers. He does not think there are intelligent aliens, so we are the only beings capable of understanding the cosmos.

The book is co-authored with journalist Bryan Appleyard.

## AN EXPERT EXPLAINS

## Reading Maratha quota verdict

Among the factors taken into consideration were the question of backwardness, and justification of taking total reservation beyond 50%. How Bombay High Court judgment addressed these and other issues



FAIZAN MUSTAFA

IN A landmark judgment in the case of *Dr Jishri Laxmnarao Patil*, a two-judge Bench of Bombay High Court has upheld Maratha reservation in Maharashtra. The judgment, reserved on March 26, was delivered on June 27 by Justices Ranjit More and Bharati Dongre. Since the Second National Backward Classes Commission, popularly known as the Mandal Commission, and two State Backward Classes Commissions had refused to recognise Marathas as a backward class and as many as 12 chief ministers belonged to the Maratha community, upholding of reservation in favour of Marathas has surprised many constitutionalists. Moreover, in the past, reservation on the basis of similar recommendations in favour of Jats, Gujjars, Patidars and Muslims had failed the judicial test.

In the very first statement of 482-page judgment, the court talked of the challenge before modern democracies — “complex task of providing social justice to sections that have been traditionally discriminated against, while affirmative action does not hinder opportunities offered to the rest of the population”.

## Issues involved

The case involved several constitutional issues such as determination of Marathas as a backward class on the basis of quantifiable data; constitutional validity of the Act providing for their reservation; validity of extraordinary circumstances that justify going beyond the judicially created 50% reservation rule; limits of judicial review in examining affirmative action policies of the state and the effect of powers given to the National Commission for Backward Classes in 2018 after its conversion from a statutory authority to a constitutional body; legality of creation of a new socially and educationally backward class and inclusion of just one caste in this class; and, assuming Marathas are backward, their non-inclusion in the existing OBC category.

## Backward or not

The Mandal Commission, which listed 128 communities as backward, identified Marathas as ‘forward’. The Khatri Commission (1995) constituted by the Maharashtra government held by majority that Marathas may not be included as Kunbis in the list of OBCs, but recommended that people entered as Kunbi-Maratha or Maratha-Kunbi may be given the same benefits as the Kunbi caste. The request of treating Marathas at par with Kunbis was not accepted even in 2000 and Marathas were not included in the central Backward Classes list. In 2008, the Bapat Commission by a 4-2 majority recommended that it would not be proper to include Marathas among OBCs from the viewpoint of principles of social justice.

The state government constituted a non-statutory committee under Narayan Rane, which concluded that the Bapat Commission's findings were not based on quantifiable data and should not be accepted. The Rane Committee independently collected data and



CM Devendra Fadnis and MLAs in the Maharashtra Assembly in November 2018, after the government tabled the Maratha quota bill. Ganesh Shirsekar/File photo

concluded that the Maratha community is socially, educationally and economically backward, and recommended its inclusion among OBCs with separate 16% reservation.

The Governor of Maharashtra on July 9, 2014, promulgated the Maharashtra State Reservation (of seats for admissions in educational institutions in the State and for appointments or posts in the public services under the State) for Educationally and Socially Backward Category (ESBC) Ordinance, 2014. This was replaced with the ESBC Act of 2014 (Maharashtra Act No. 1 of 2015). The Bombay High Court in 2015 stayed implementation of this Act, which has now been upheld.

## Quantifiable data

In 2017, a reference was made to the Maharashtra Backward Class Commission. When its chairman Justice S B Mhase passed away, he was replaced with Justice M G Gaikwad in November 2017. The Gaikwad Commission report submitted on November 15, 2018, found that Marathas are socially, educationally and economically backward and eligible to be included as a Backward Class.

The High Court expressed its satisfaction on the authenticity of the data in the report. The court also discussed at length through comparative tabular analysis why denial of Backward Class status to Marathas by earlier Commissions was wrong.

In social backwardness, the Gaikwad Commission found that 76.86% of Maratha families are engaged in agriculture and agricultural labour, around 70% live in *kachha* dwellings, and only 35.39% have personal tap water connections. In educational backwardness, it found that 13.42% of Marathas are illiterate, 35.31% primary educated, 43.79% HSC and SSC, 6.71% undergraduates and just 0.77% postgraduates and professionally qualified. In economic backwardness, the Commission found that 93% Maratha families have an annual income of Rs 1 lakh; 37.38% families are Below Poverty Line against the state average of 24.2%, and 71% own less than 2.5 acres land.

## Share in population

Based on its estimate of the Maratha population at 30% of Maharashtra's total, the Commission had suggested for 12% and 13% reservation to Marathas but the state government of its own adopted 16% reservation.

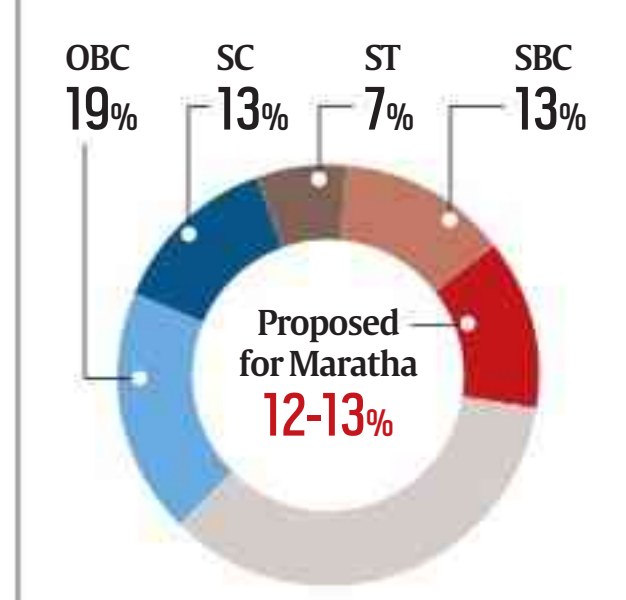
## MAHARASHTRA BREAKUP

52%

Existing reservation

64-65%

Reservation once Maratha quota is implemented. Government proposed 16% but HC saw merit in panel report that recommended 12% for education and 13% for jobs.



The Commission found that Marathas are about 30% of the state's population. The court rejected the argument of the petitioners who had argued that 30% is not mathematically correct. If the population of SCs is 13%, that of STs is 11%, and that of OBCs as per Mandal Commission is 52% and if Maratha is added as 30%, it would take the total population over 100%, the petitioners had argued.

## Breach of 50% ceiling

Though B R Ambedkar said in the Constituent Assembly that reservation must be confined to a minority of seats, the Constitution does not mention such a ceiling. The judgment quoted *Indira Sawhney* (1992) and other judgments to say that the Supreme Court permitted going beyond 50% in extraordinary circumstances, and this limit is not exhaustive of all categories of reservation. The High Court relied on *Indira Sawhney* which had laid down that “while 50% shall be the rule, it is necessary not to put out of consideration certain extraordi-

nary situations inherent in the great diversity of this country and the people. It might happen that in far-flung and remote areas the population inhabiting those areas might, on account of their being out of the mainstream of national life and in view of conditions peculiar to and characteristic to them, need to be treated in a different way, some relaxation in this strict rule may become imperative. In doing so, extreme caution is to be exercised and a special case made out.”

In some cases, the courts have not permitted even 1% reservation in excess of 50%, for example Muslim reservation in undivided Andhra Pradesh. Neither is Maharashtra remote or far-flung, nor are Marathas seen as being out of the national mainstream. This portion of the High Court judgment will be challenged in the Supreme Court.

Here the court accepted the Gaikwad Commission's recommendation that 85% people of the state have now become backward with the inclusion of 30% Marathas and thus are entitled to affirmative action. If the 50% rule is followed, the miniscule forward classes will benefit and their domination will continue.

## Separate Backward Class

Since 346 castes are already in the OBC list and entitled to 19% reservation, the court held that adding Marathas with 30% population will not be appropriate. Marathas will then take away the major chunk of seats, and it will adversely affect the interests of existing OBCs. Relying on *Indira Sawhney* where the Supreme Court had permitted classification between ‘backward’ and ‘most backward’, the High Court approved the creation of a new class for Marathas.

The court also rejected the argument that Socially & Educationally Backward Class is now at par with SC and ST and comparison of Article 341 and 342 with Article 342A, inserted with effect from August 15, 2018, means that this particular class will receive recognition only in the manner set out in the Constitution i.e. Article 342A. The court observed that the 102nd Constitutional Amendment has not taken over the powers of the state to set up its own Backward Classes Commissions and states may validly make reservations without the concurrence of National Commission for Backward Classes or Presidential order for inclusion of any caste.

## The interim order

The court rejected the argument that the Maratha reservation is an overruling of the interim order by Bombay High Court in the case of *Sanjeet Shukla* which had held that in the absence of quantifiable data before categorising the Maratha community as a backward class, the increase in reservation was not justifiable. The latest judgment upheld the reservation as a legitimate exercise of legislative power as the government has now collected quantifiable data and analysed it. With this exercise, the judgment concluded, the very basis of the interim order had been validly removed.

The judgment will open the floodgates for reservation in favour of dominant castes in other states. If at all there was a legitimate reason to go beyond 50% reservation, as in the case of Tamil Nadu, it could have been inserted in the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution.

*The writer is a well-known expert in constitutional law*

## The geopolitics of Indo-Pacific: how India and others interpret the term

NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN  
MUMBAI, JUNE 30

THE TERM “Indo-Pacific” has featured during the just-concluded G20 summit as well as during US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo's recent visit to Delhi. Geographically, the Indo-Pacific refers to the Indian and the Pacific Oceans between the east coast of Africa and the American west coast and their several littoral countries. As a term to denote an economic and strategic community, it has been in use among scholars of international relations and geopolitics since the first decade of this century, around the same time as China's rise. The earliest it was noticed was in a paper written by Gurpreet Khurana, an Indian naval officer, on the congruence between Japanese and Indian strategic interests in protecting sea routes for energy security. On a visit to India in 2007, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe did not use the exact term, but spoke of a “broader Asia” in the “Confluence of Two Seas”.

“The Pacific and the Indian Oceans are now bringing about a dynamic coupling as seas of freedom and of prosperity. A ‘broader Asia’ that broke away geographical boundaries is now beginning to take on a distinct form. Our two countries have the ability — and the responsibility — to ensure that it broadens yet further and to nurture

and enrich these seas to become seas of clearest transparency,” Abe said then.

## Gaining currency

It was as Australia began reimagining its security and trade policies through a new regional lens in 2011-2012, that Indo-Pacific became its way to position itself to play a larger role in Asia, as an ally of the US and Japan, and as a country with friendly ties with China, India, Indonesia and South Korea among others. At the end of 2012, the Julia Gillard government brought out a White Paper on ‘Australia and the Asian century’, following it with a national security policy document, ‘Strong and Secure — A Strategy for Australia's National Interest’ at the beginning of 2013. Both dealt in detail with the term Indo-Pacific. This is what the White Paper had to say about it: “Some observers have raised a new ‘Indo-Pacific’ conception of the Asian region. Under such a conception, the western Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean would come to be considered as one strategic arc. This conception is being driven by the increased economic interaction between South, Northeast and Southeast Asia and the importance of the lines of energy supply to Asia from the Middle East.”

Though Australia embraced the term wholeheartedly, its widespread use in international diplomacy came five years later, after an October 2017 speech on US-India relations by former US Secretary of State



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar with visiting US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in Delhi on June 26. Jaishankar said the point he made was that the Indo-Pacific is ‘for something, not against somebody’. Reuters

Rex Tillerson, who spoke of a partnership between the two countries in the interests of a “free and open Indo-Pacific”. He spoke of India as more reliable than China: “We need to collaborate with India to ensure that the Indo-Pacific is increasingly a place of peace, stability, and growing prosperity—so that it does not become a region of disorder, conflict, and predatory economics.”

India lavished praise on the speech, delivered at the height of the Delhi-Beijing tensions over several issues — the Doklam mil-

itary standoff, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor running through Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir, and more generally over the entire Chinese Belt and Road Initiative.

By the next year, Indo-Pacific was being used more frequently by the Trump Administration, entirely replacing the earlier “Asia-Pacific”, a move recognised by analysts from Delhi and Beijing to Tokyo and Canberra as redefining the region away from China's economic and strategic dominance.

Already in the US National Security

Strategy of 2017, the Indo-Pacific had been described as a region where “geopolitical competition between free and repressive visions of world order is taking place” — China and North Korea on one side and all others on the other.

## Cautious India

The move away from Asia-Pacific also seemed to elevate India to a position of prominence in the region, as a US ally that would help to contain China's dominance. Towards this end, the adoption of the term also appeared to challenge India to play a larger role in the region, for instance in the Quad, or the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue that informally brings together for strategic talks and military exercises, the US, Japan, Australia and India.

But India, quite aware of the inherent dangers of posturing in the region, has sought to bring its own vision to the definition of Indo-Pacific.

In June 2018, at the Shangri La Dialogue in Singapore, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said: “The Indo-Pacific is a natural region. It is also home to a vast array of global opportunities and challenges... The ten countries of South East Asia connect the two great oceans in both the geographical and civilisational sense. Inclusiveness, openness and ASEAN centrality and unity, therefore, lie at the heart of the new Indo-Pacific. India does not see the Indo-Pacific Region as a strategy or as a club of limited members.





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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

THE G-20 OUTING

PM Modi's engagement with world leaders underlined pragmatism and resilience of ties, disproved narratives of crisis

This year's annual G-20 summit held in Osaka, Japan, offered an expansive stage for Prime Minister Narendra Modi to kickstart his second international innings. If his first outing after the general elections — which gave him a massive mandate — to Maldives and Sri Lanka was about India's maritime neighbourhood, the three-day sojourn in Osaka provided an occasion to engage many of his global peers in multiple formats and address burning international questions. Launched in 2008 to cope with the global financial crisis, the G-20 has now become a forum for the discussion of all major international issues and a venue for bilateral exchanges between the world's top leaders.

Modi's meeting with the US President, Donald Trump, underlined the essential resilience of India's strategic partnership with the United States. It disproved the recent narrative that the relationship is in a crisis amidst a large number of contentions including trade, 5G, Iran and Russia. Trump's tweet, hours before he met Modi, demanding that Delhi withdraw its retaliatory tariffs against American duties on steel and aluminium imports, seemed to confirm the new volatility in bilateral relations. Official readouts from Modi's meeting with Trump suggested a more business-like discussion. The two leaders agreed to initiate high-level talks to resolve trade disputes and discussed potential collaboration on 5G technologies. The discussion on the Gulf offered the PM an opportunity to lay out India's interests in oil price stability and its contributions to regional security. Besides the bilateral meeting with Trump, Modi also sat down for a brief trilateral chat with the US President and the Japanese PM, Shinzo Abe.

Even as he sought to institutionalise the trilateral engagement with the US and Japan, Modi met with Presidents Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin in a trilateral format and again, in a broader BRICS format, with the presidents of Brazil and South Africa. This must not, however, be seen as some kind of a return to non-alignment. It merely reflects India's necessary pragmatism amid the current fluidity in great power relations. This was reflected in the effort by Xi and Trump to pause their trade war. Equally important was the fact that Russia, China and Brazil were happy to thunder against the US at the BRICS forum, but had no problem joining the Osaka Declaration on cross-border data flows sponsored by Japan. India decided to absent itself at the discussion on data along with Indonesia and South Africa. India's sherpa to the G-20, Suresh Prabhu, would not explain the decision except stating that the reasons for India's abstention had been conveyed to the Japanese leadership. On the face of it, the abstention is of a piece with India's recent drift to so-called "data nationalism". However, given the growing centrality of the digital economy for India's growth and Modi's visible isolation at Osaka, Delhi must take a fresh look at the assumptions behind its current approaches to data governance.

IMPUNITY IN INDORE

Akash Vijayvargiya's attack on a municipal officer, local BJP's celebration, high command's silence, send out disturbing signals

Akash Vijayvargiya, the 34-year-old MLA from Indore, and BJP general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya's son, says he does not feel either guilty or embarrassed for assaulting, in public view, Indore Municipal Corporation officer, Dharendra Bayas, with a cricket bat. For Akash, the attack was "in the public interest". There is more than one reason why this incident and its aftermath is scandalous and should be seen to be so. First, an elected official assaulting a municipal officer shows, at its core, a disrespect for the administration, the front-line officials who form the backbone of governance. Second, that the local BJP unit has chosen to brazen out the assault, even celebrate it, indicates a disturbing mindset in a constitutional democracy: An elected legislator can flaunt the people's mandate to take on the rule of law, hit it out of the park with a cricket bat.

Out on bail, the MLA's justification has been that municipal officials "dragged women by their feet" from a building that was set to be demolished. While the attack has been caught on camera, Akash's allegations have not been proved. And even if they were true, a person holding constitutional office must know that it is for the police and the judiciary to investigate and pass judgment on criminal matters. His actions also betray a lack of confidence in his own party — the Indore Municipal Corporation is controlled by the BJP and the matter could surely have been looked into without resorting to violence. The building in question had been marked for demolition more than a year ago, as the dilapidated structure has been assessed as too fragile and dangerous for human habitation. By attacking an official for doing his job, the BJP MLA has further derailed the already fraught exercise of urban governance. In May 2018, for instance, an assistant town planner in Himachal Pradesh was shot dead for enforcing the demolition of buildings flouting construction laws. Now, after the assault, Bayas has received threats and asked for police protection.

The local BJP's celebration of the lumpenism on display in Indore is at odds with its outrage at political violence in West Bengal, where it made remarkable gains in the Lok Sabha elections. There, Kailash Vijayvargiya, as the party official in charge of the state, has led the charge against the Trinamool Congress for allegedly subverting the rule of law. The first principles behind that argument also apply to Madhya Pradesh and Indore. When elected representatives, leaders of their party, place themselves at odds with the administration in a violent manner, they send a message that trickles down to the grassroots political worker — that the instruments of the state can be subverted for political mileage. And that civil behaviour and basic public morality can be discarded with impunity.

FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



VIKRAM S MEHTA

"THE MOST COMMON form of human stupidity is forgetting what one is trying to do." This Nietzschean aphorism finds sharp affirmation in the behaviour of the leaders of the US and Iran today. Both have forgotten what they are trying to achieve but both are engaged in verbal, economic and physical jousting that is generating sparks that could light up a regional bonfire. India would be severely impacted in such an event. Our leaders face a policy dilemma. Should they use their "soft" power to try and snuff out the sparks but risk an embarrassing rebuff? Or should they stay on the sidelines in the hope that disaster will not prevail? It is my view that the Indian government should do the former. It should deploy the "quiet" power of diplomacy to pre-empt the consequences of human stupidity.

The signals emanating from Washington DC and Tehran are confusing and blurred. They suggest that the leaders in these two cities have lost sight of their vital objectives.

Donald Trump says he does not want war; that he is not looking for a regime change but only a tighter nuclear agreement. He says his objective is to ensure Iran will never acquire the capability to develop nuclear weapons. But he has also tweeted the word "obliterate" to define the range of options that remain on his table and his National Security Advisor, John Bolton, and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, have stated that war is an option. And that their preferred outcome is indeed regime change.

The Iranians are also conveying mixed messages. Their elected leadership wants to exercise "strategic moderation" and remain compliant with the JCPOA. They are hopeful that with the support of the Germans and the French, the crisis can be settled through negotiation. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), on the other hand, wants the government to breach the uranium stockpile limits agreed to in the JCPOA (the 2015 Iran nuclear deal) and to enrich uranium to 20 per cent purity (which is just one step away from weapons grade material). They also want to

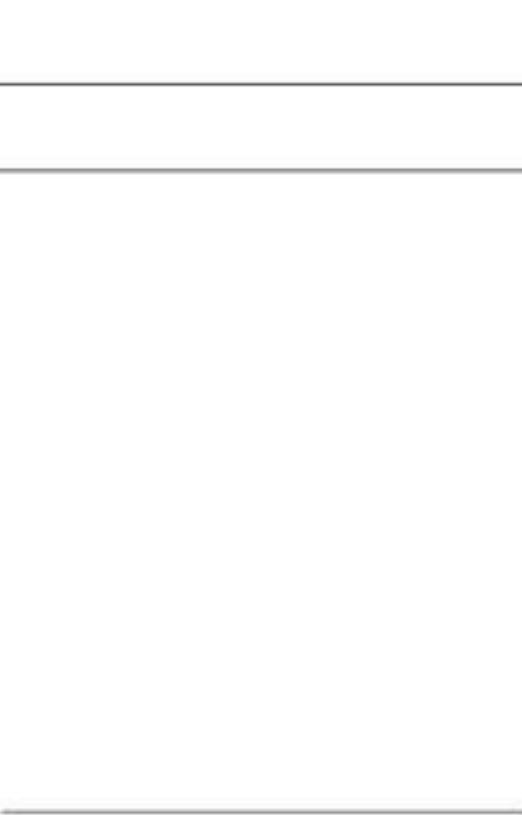


M RAJIVLOCHAN

RESERVATION HAS PROVED to be one of the most useless of strategies to provide social equality, justice and opportunity. Indians remain bound to each other in mutual contempt in the name of caste. Reservation was supposed to provide more equitable access to scarce resources in education and employment. However, the lack of educational and employment resources was, and remains, so intense that instead of reducing caste discrimination it has unintentionally sucked out hope. Everyone feels cheated. Those who benefit from it and those who do not.

If the research of professors Sukhadeo Thorat, Gopal Guru, Jean Dreze and their associates is anything to go by, then one of the consequences of reservation has been that far from being empowered, those who use reservation to enter the portals of higher education and corresponding employment, continue to suffer from low self-esteem, and, problems of asserting themselves in public life. People have even succeeded in replicating the same inequalities, indignities and unfairness, to fight which reservations had been provided in the first place. Privileged groups have come into existence which corner all the benefits of reservation. Women continue to be doubly disempowered within the reserved category, and targeted by families for marrying into a lower caste. Reservation seems to have done little to make society more equitable and fair, or in providing people with enough opportunities to grow out of the pernicious system of mutual contempt that goes by the name of

India should use the diplomatic tools at its disposal to help de-escalate US-Iran tensions



The question, then, for India is: Should it allow history to repeat itself? Or should it make an effort to stave off disaster beyond the opportunistic bilateral discussions that it has already had with Pompeo and Trump. In my view it should take that extra step. This is not simply to safeguard its economic interests. It is also because it is strongly placed to arrest this dangerous drift. India has long-standing historical and cultural links with the Middle East and in particular with Iran. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has enhanced international stature because of his massive electoral victory and strong personal relations with his counterparts in the area.

signal through direct and indirect action that they will not be bullied by the Americans. The Ayatollahs generally keep their cards close to their chest but given that the Iranian economy is in free fall — the GDP fell by 4 per cent last year and an additional 6 per cent this year; inflation is running at 30 per cent; food is in short supply; the currency is on skids and unemployment is at record highs — they too are inclined to play the US "Satanic" card to divert public attention from the domestic crisis.

There is an explanation for this political amnesia. The leaders are wrestling to reconcile their international priorities with their domestic constituencies. The problem is that in the process, they are pushing the region towards large-scale conflict. And that is why their actions fit so neatly into the Nietzschean mould of stupidity.

Students of military history will not be surprised by this drift towards war. Trump is, alas, no such scholar. Had he been so, he might have remembered the forewarning contained in the unfinished magnum opus of the Prussian General Von Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege* (On War), that "three quarters of the factors on which war is based are wrapped in a fog of greater or lesser uncertainty". He may have noted the mind-boggling confirmation of this observation in the memoirs of the former Defence Secretary, Robert McNamara, who wrote "President Johnson authorised the bombing (of North Vietnam ) in response to what he thought had been a second attack that had NOT occurred". The "attack" referenced was on the US Destroyer *USS Maddox* by North Vietnamese patrol boats on August 4, 1964, in the international waters of the Gulf of Tonkin. Two days earlier, the Maddox had been attacked by the North Vietnamese. The report of a second attack inflamed the US Congress, which then passed the Gulf of Tonkin resolution — a de facto declaration of war against the North Vietnamese. It was later established that the report of a second attack was erroneous. This is difficult to believe but this means that the US went to war in Vietnam on the basis of erroneous intelli-

gence.

The US-Iran stand-off is wrapped in a "fog of uncertainty". No one really knows what will happen but what we do know, based on our reading of Clausewitz and understanding of history, is that it could take no more than a false report, a miscalculation or simply an accident for the region to conflagrate into violent conflict.

India would be severely impacted in such an event. It imports 65 per cent of its crude oil from the region. Conflict would disrupt its oil supply lines and harden oil prices. Moreover, there are approximately eight million nationals living and working in the area. Many of them would need to be evacuated. This would present a major logistical challenge. But most worrying, and beyond these immediate ramifications, is that India and Indians would feel the tremors of the aftermath of such a conflict for a long time.

The question, then, for India is: Should it allow history to repeat itself? Or should it make an effort to stave off disaster beyond the opportunistic bilateral discussions with Pompeo and Trump. In my view it should take that extra step. This is not simply to safeguard its economic interests. It is also because it is strongly placed to arrest this dangerous drift. India has long-standing historical and cultural links with the Middle East and in particular with Iran. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has enhanced international stature because of his massive electoral victory and strong personal relations with his counterparts in the area. And Foreign Minister S Jaishankar is a superb and world-class diplomat. Together, this makes for a rare combination of "soft", "smart" and "quiet" power. India should deploy this combination towards one objective. To persuade Iran to revert to its original position of remaining within the framework of the JCPOA and to deny the hardliners on the American side the *raison d'être* for escalation.

*The writer is chairman and senior fellow, Brookings India*

THE WEAKEST LINK

Reservation has failed to address social inequities, create opportunities for all



Those who use reservation to enter the portals of higher education and corresponding employment, continue to suffer from low self-esteem, and, problems of asserting themselves in public life. People have even succeeded in replicating the same inequalities, indignities and unfairness, to fight which reservations had been provided in the first place. Privileged groups have come into existence which corner all the benefits of reservation.

the caste system in India.

It was in October 1951 that Babasaheb Ambedkar had included the promise of reservation in institutions of higher education in the manifesto of his All India Scheduled Castes Federation. He had argued that "advanced education of (a) high order, both in this country and outside, will enable these classes to fit themselves for taking hold of administration". He promised to provide reservation in government appointments since "the services have become the monopoly of a few communities". This, Ambedkar said, had created great enmity between the "higher classes" and the "lower classes" which resulted in "murders, arson and loot that were committed by members of the lower classes against members of the higher classes in 1948 in certain parts of India after the murder of Mr Gandhi."

Giving "the lower classes higher education and to open to them the door of services is the only solution of this problem," Ambedkar would say as he laid out his scheme to raise "the lower classes to the level of the higher classes in the matter of education". This was in sync with the spirit of Articles 340, 341 and 342 of the Constitution that enjoined upon the government to make special efforts to "improve the conditions of the socially and educationally backward classes" in India.

It is a matter of fact that Ambedkar's party was comprehensively defeated in the elections that followed. Nevertheless, noticing the misuse to which caste could be put

by the existing power holders in India, on August 21, 1955, the meeting of the Working Committee of the All India Scheduled Castes Federation unanimously passed a resolution that "the provision for the reservation of seats for the Scheduled Castes in Parliament, in State Assemblies, in Municipalities and District and Local Boards be done away with immediately even before the next election".

The Congress government which came to power implemented reservation in government employment and in higher education, and decided to ignore Ambedkar's opinion on abolishing reserved seats in elected bodies. Seventy years have passed since then. Cases of murder, arson and loot by those whom Ambedkar called the lower class against the upper class have not been heard of. Rather, the opposite. There has been considerable empowerment of those from the lower castes. So much so that the successful among them have even created a Dalit Chamber of Commerce to help Dalit businesses understand and navigate the complicated and inefficient system of laws and regulations that hampers India. But this empowerment was not the result of reservation but of individual effort and opportunities. Creating more opportunities for everyone continues to remain the weakest link in India's journey towards becoming a more equitable society.

*The writer is professor, Contemporary History, Panjab University, Chandigarh*

JULY 1, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

DEFENCE PACKAGE  
THE GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED a package of decisions to improve the terms and conditions of service of the members of the three armed forces. These include a longer tenure of service for jawans, airmen and sailors, broadening avenues of promotion for jawans, NCOs, JCOs and commissioned officers of the rank of majors and squadron leaders, and liberalisation of "two years" rank rule benefiting the armed forces personnel in the matter of pension, rehabilitation and welfare measures In March last, Defence Minister Jagjivan Ram had announced that in order to deal with problems of congestion in the ranks of majors and squadron leaders, a spe-

cial exercise had been undertaken to devise appropriate and urgent solutions for these and some related problems.

DEMONETISATION  
DEMONETISATION OF RS 100 notes was widely rumoured in New Delhi on June 30. Anxious enquiries poured in from Bombay too. The possibility of such a step by the government to contain the price spiral and bring out black money could not be discounted. The present situation is such that palliatives like credit squeeze or controls would not do. The government cannot escape further increases in prices of coal and petroleum products. In these circumstances, demonetisation of Rs

100-rupee notes would substantially curtail liquidity of money in circulation. However, the measure could pose a tremendous administrative task for banking agencies.

INDIGENOUS SATELLITE  
A COMPLETELY INDIGENOUS satellite, "Apple", will be launched in the middle of the next year, according to the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) chairman S Dhavan. In a congratulatory message on the completion of the two-year Satellite Telecommunications Experiments Project (STEP) in Ahmedabad, Dhavan said the experiment had been an important landmark in satellite communications.





# THE IDEAS PAGE

## A digital power

Creating a digital interface between government and citizens has helped curb corruption, delays in service delivery. The next step involves digitising internal processes of government



RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD

THE VISIONARY INITIATIVE of Digital India was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on July 1, 2015. Digital India strives to bring inclusive growth and bridge the digital divide by leveraging technology solutions that are low cost, developmental, transformative and designed to empower ordinary Indians. Four years down the line, the success of Digital India is finding global resonance and its transformative character is being appreciated.

One of the largest digital infrastructures of the world was conceived to connect all the 250,000 gram panchayats by a high-speed optical fibre network. Today with 3.40 lakh km of optical fibre laid, Bharat Net has reached 1.29 lakh gram panchayats. India of 2019 is recognised as a country with the second largest internet user base, and which offers internet access, data and mobile at the cheapest tariffs in the world.

Digital services being offered by the government as well as the private sector have improved the life of every citizen. Gone are the days when getting a mobile phone SIM would require filling up forms, giving photocopies of documents and then awaiting activation after the KYC process. Aadhaar-based eKYC has made it easy to open bank accounts or to get instant mobile SIMs without any paperwork. There was a time when working professionals used to struggle to get their employee provident fund deposit transferred while switching companies for better prospects. The Aadhaar-linked universal account number (UAN) has made it a hassle free experience. The eHospital services have made it easy to take online appointments in 322 major hospitals. The UMANG mobile app has created a mega digital mobile platform where 362 services of 18 states and the union government can be accessed in 13 Indian languages. Online scholarships, e-Visa, soil health cards etc. have made the delivery of services faster.

The trinity of Jan Dhan, Aadhaar and Mobile (JAM) has facilitated direct benefit transfers of financial entitlements of various government schemes directly into the bank accounts of beneficiaries. In the last five years, a total of Rs 7.44 lakh crore have been disbursed to beneficiaries of 439 schemes. This has resulted in saving of Rs 1.41 lakh crore of tax payers' money by plugging leakages, curbing corruption and eliminating fake beneficiaries.

The world's largest digital literacy programme, the Pradhan Mantri Grameen Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA), which aims to train six crore rural adults, has trained 2.21 crore beneficiaries. During a digital interaction with the prime minister, Poonam Sapera from Alwar district of Rajasthan, who comes from an economically and educationally backward community, spoke confidently about her ability to send emails and SMSs. This speaks of the profound impact of Digital India on inclusive growth and transformation of lives.

As a retired soldier, Brahmanand living in Dhanauri Kalan village of Gautam Buddha Nagar of Uttar Pradesh had never thought he would get rid of the cost and inconvenience of visiting a bank branch in town every month to withdraw his pension. Today Brahmanand and many others withdraw their pensions from common service centres in villages by making a simple biometric authentication. From merely 83,000 centres in 2014, common



Suvajit Dey

services centres have not only grown to reach 3.76 lakh, but have also started offering a wide variety of digital services like banking, insurance, utility bill payment, pension, MGNREGA wage payments, ticket booking, digital skilling, public Wi-Fi in villages, tele-medicine services and are playing a key role in developing digital villages. This has created a new breed of rural digital entrepreneurs across the country, and have created 12 lakh jobs locally.

Digital payments have grown at a staggering pace. The total number of digital payment transactions made through various modes in October 2016 was 79.67 crore. In March, 2019, the total number of digital payment transactions hit an all-time high of 332.34 crore. India's home grown fin-tech innovation, BHIM-UPI, whose humble beginning in December, 2016, is scaling new heights of popularity, and has registered 79.9 crore transactions in the month of March, 2019.

To promote the IT industry beyond a few big urban clusters, and to provide IT jobs to youth in semi-urban areas, a humble beginning was made under the BPO promotion scheme. Today 202 BPO centres at 100 locations across India are working from towns like Imphal, Kohima, Guwahati, Srinagar, Jammu, Bareilly, Unnao, Muzaffarpur, Patna, Sangli and Guntur giving jobs to thousands of young men and women.

Electronics manufacturing in India has doubled in last few years. India was home to only two mobile phone manufacturing units in 2014. But today, it stands tall in the global community as the second largest mobile phone manufacturer, with 268 mobile handset and accessories manufacturing units having started functioning in last five years.

Building on the achievements of Digital India in the last five years, the government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi aims to scale up the digital revolution to a new level in the coming years. The PM has already expressed his vision to develop India into a \$5 trillion economy by 2024. The Ministry of Electronics and IT has also prepared a road-map to develop India as \$1 trillion digital economy.

Digital initiatives like smart cities, digitisation of governance, digital villages, high speed internet in every part of India, digital inclusion and digital empowerment shall be fueled by emerging technologies like the internet of things, data analytics and artificial intelligence.

Creating a faceless, paperless, cashless and digital interface between government and citizens has immensely helped in curbing corruption, delays in service delivery and leakages. The next level of digitisation in governance will strive to digitise internal processes of the government. The use of data analytics and artificial intelligence will

also help in effective monitoring of performance and develop system automation for future.

We aim to set up one lakh digital villages in the next couple of years. Digital villages will offer various citizen centric services in villages and reduce the need for visiting towns for their needs. For providing easy, economical and reliable internet access to citizens the government is also working on a model to liberalise public Wi-Fi hotspot services, which may revolutionise internet access in India.

The government led by the Prime Minister Modi, has recognised the great potential of startups in transforming the economy and unleashing tech-driven transformation. Besides friendly policies, the government shall strive to explore more ways to improve participation of India's startups in the digital transformation. Today there are close to 19,000 startups in India, of which about 7,000 are technology startups. Many of these are unicorns, having a valuation of over one billion dollar.

India's growing digital profile has made it a data powerhouse. Our government understands the potential of data for creating a vibrant data economy and is using it for empowering people while giving due respect to privacy concerns. Soon we will bring a personal data protection law that will not only address the privacy concerns of individuals, curb misuse of personal data, but will also be an enabler for creating a vibrant data economy. Data centres, data value addition, data startups, data exchanges, data anonymisation would be some of the crucial elements of the data economy, along with safeguarding the data sovereignty of India.

Changes in the economy due to growing digitisation is leading to changes in job roles, skills and human resources. The digital economy will also require frequent training and retraining of human resources. Keeping this in mind, the prime minister has launched the Future Skills online platform for training and retraining the country's IT workforce. Our government is working towards developing a more effective ecosystem for continuous skill development and upgradation of our workforce.

India has taken a leap towards digital transformation. Its successes in leveraging digital technologies for transforming governance and lives of ordinary Indians is being appreciated by the world. Building on this success, we will take this digital revolution to a new level for creating a strong, transparent and vibrant economy with rapid growth that is inclusive and empowering.

*The writer is Union Minister for Communications, Electronics and Information Technology and Law and Justice*

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## VIEW FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD



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

### JUDICIARY AND ARMY

WHILE MUCH of the conversation in and about Pakistan's curious de facto state structure has centred around the relationship between the civilian government and the army — whether through coups or "remote controlling" the government — there is little discussion about the relationship of the Pakistan "deep state" and the country's judiciary. An article by Faisal Siddiqui in *Dawn* asks whether there are now the beginnings of "judicial-military" conflict in Pakistan. Siddiqui writes: "The judicial side of this civil-military conflict has either been denied by contending that the judiciary has been the alleged 'B team' of the military or, if acknowledged, the judicial-military conflict has been perceived more as an aberration and less as an emerging trend. But is the judicial-military conflict an emerging trend? And are there any ways to mitigate this conflict?"

Till 1971, argues Siddiqui, Pakistan had a "colonial minded but independent" judiciary. With bouts of military rule, the structural conflict between the army and judiciary came to the fore: "On one side, protection of democracy and a democratic constitution guaranteed the tremendous power of the judiciary; on the other, the de facto power of the military elite was fundamentally threatened by both democracy and democratic constitutionalism."

With the "judicial murder" of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and the Islamic-military dictatorship of Zia-ul-Haq, collusion between the judiciary and military became the norm. But since the "judicial movement" of 2007-2009, this has been changing. And lately, it seems the bench is standing up again: "The Faizabad dharna judgement dated Feb 6, 2019, authored by Justice Isa, contains a summary of what he thinks is wrong in Pakistan — violation of citizens' fundamental rights, illegal tactics used to achieve political agendas, lack of security mechanisms to protect citizens, violation of their constitutional role by the military and intelligence agencies, violation of media independence and inaction of Pemra, the weak role of the Election Commission and the misuse of Islam."

The judiciary, with Justice Khosa, has been arguing for a "dialogic approach" with the military. And this could bode well for Pakistan because "the underlying purpose of this inter-institutional dialogue is to bolster constitutionalism and the rule of law, strengthen democracy and create conditions for inter-institutional working towards the real issues of the citizens of this great country".

While such an approach may not make sense to those from countries where the independence of the judiciary is taken for granted, it is rooted in Pakistan's case in "legal realism, which realises the destructiveness of an all-

out institutional conflict between different state organs as well as the need for dialogue in order to ensure judicial independence, constitutional democracy, human rights and effective state authority."

### GENERAL ECONOMIST

The June 30 editorial in *Dawn* takes umbrage at Pakistan Army Chief General Qamar Bajwa's remarks about the economic (mis)management of the country by previous civilian governments and his endorsement of the PTI government led by Imran Khan.

In a subtly-worded, but unmistakable indictment, the editorial first gives credit to the armed forces for dealing with extremist violence since the horrific Peshawar attack, and securing in the last few years a "relative peace". But "nevertheless, recent terrorist incidents point to the tenuous nature of those gains". It adds: "The military leadership should not allow itself to be sidetracked from its core responsibilities — which include keeping the eastern and western borders secure — and instead apply its energies to its area of expertise. Maintaining the separation of powers as defined in the Constitution strengthens institutions and, in turn, the overarching governance framework. However, by endorsing the PTI government's

actions, the army chief is expressing an overt political opinion."

By appearing to be politically biased, Bajwa has diminished the military, which must be seen as above the political fray. Second, the armed forces play an important role in the conduct of elections in Pakistan, and as such much appear and be impartial.

### MIGRATION QUESTION

The June 27 editorial in *The Daily Star* deals with a fundamental issue in Bangladesh's political economy, one which is pertinent across South Asia, including India. On the one hand, it argues, the remittances from citizens working abroad provide an important economic resource, especially foreign exchange. On the other hand, "the plight of those engaged in back-breaking labour" overseas "remains overlooked".

The problems of migrant workers include being duped by agents, racism and economic exploitation.

As a first step, the editorial proposes that government step in regulate the out-migration sector to secure the rights of such workers. It must do so because it cannot "turn a blind eye to the sufferings of the expatriate workforce while continuing to be a beneficiary of their hard work and sacrifices".

### WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The Istanbul vote should bring Erdogan up short and cause him — and his supporters — to ask whether they have created a viable path for the future."

— THE WASHINGTON POST

## Ecological dharma

Religious notions of indigenous communities in India provide an understanding of the natural order, and resources to resist its degradation



### IN GOOD FAITH

BY NAVINA JAFÄ

ASSERTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL citizenship by the people of India is the need of the hour. And it is the original citizens of India, the Adivasi (first citizens), who have had the courage to assert environment citizenry, and deliberate Rta (Sanskrit for "truth" or "order") dharma. To protect their forests and sacred hills, the indigenous forest communities organised protests initiated by the Sanyukt Jansangraha Samiti against the mining of Deposit 13 of the Bailadila iron ore mine in Chhattisgarh's Dantewada district. It is similar to the uprising a few years ago of the Dongria Kondhs of Odisha who eventually won a David-and-Goliath battle against mining giant Vedanta Resources.

The Hindu Vedic principle of Rta dharma — and similar principles in Sikhism, Sufism and religious thoughts of other indigenous communities in India — provides guidelines to counter the irresponsible decisions made in the name of development by governments and private stakeholders benefiting from environmental clearances. In the book *The Work of Nations*, author Robert Reich states that the nation that judiciously manages water, soil and other natural resources will be the global success story.

The Hindu concept of Rta dharma, explained by Kapila Vatsyayan in her essay 'Ecology and Indian Myths', states that the moral duty of communities is through karma towards sustaining and maintaining Rta (cosmic natural order). The same thought is reiterated in the Guru Granth Sahib: The book enunciates a concern for the environment as an integrated approach to life and nature by stating that air, water, earth, and life — all originated from the True Lord who resides in each one of us and requires protection. Islamic scholar Sigrid Nökel offers similar ideas through terms such as *fitra* creation as natural order; *tawhid* — that all things in the world are related to one another and are, as aspects of God, valuable and worthy of preservation; and, that *khilafa* refers to the role of mankind as the trustee of creation.

The inherent culture of entrusting sacred identities through the articulation of beliefs, rituals, art and myths form collective memories and ownership to protect the environment. The myth of Krishna punishing the serpent Kaliya, who polluted the river Yamuna, is one example. This traditional wisdom in the semantics of development is marginalised — building roads,

setting up industries, creating infrastructure spell short-term gains for the few an apocalypse for humanity as a whole.

Culture is the human response to a geographical context that dictates the way communities dress, eat, design houses, and celebrate. Even the manner in which language — sounds evolve — is inspired by natural environments. Social groups, traditionally, create livelihoods by harnessing available natural resources. Not factoring cultural wisdom to conserve natural environment impacts geographies and, in turn, reconfigures cultural responses.

Consider the importance given to the elements such as earth, water, air, and fire, in Vedic hymns, and in *gaathas* or myths. The tribal rising to protect their sacred mountains in Chhattisgarh or Odisha, is a recollection of the metaphor of the mountain that symbolises the mythical centre and the axis of the world as represented in the idea of Meru and Kailash; it is a physical form that harbours water, soil and vegetation. "The disturbance in water, earth, vegetation, river and mountain ecology system has threatened all manner of life. mythically, Seshnaga (the cosmic serpent in the sea) upholds the earth. which is threatened," writes Vatsyayan.

The community ownership expressed in the protests in Chhattisgarh requires duplication in many more areas. The approaching national water emergency "is not because of lack of rains or water bodies, but mismanagement of resources on the ground," says water warrior Farhad Contractor. The Rta dharma towards water, for instance, is expressed in rituals to clean waterbodies in Rajasthan and to appease water spirits in Uttarakhand. Air pollution defies the concept of Vayu, the god of pure air, in the Vedic ethos. Cutting of trees, escalating construction without consideration to secure water catchment areas or aquifers, is letting loose the tamsic energies: Tamas, in Samkhya-Hindu philosophy, refers to a proclivity to generate sickness, dullness and inertia. These *gaathas* needs to be retold and understood by the community to assert environmental citizenry.

Citizens can no longer afford to wait for governments to address these life-changing issues. To counter government schemes which may create short-term jobs but lead to long-term and permanent damage to soil, water and land, there is only one alternative: Citizen action leading to community governance through "prakriti panchayats". There are precedents — in 2009, the Eco-Sikh Conclave strategised ways to address individual responsibility through groups. One-time protests such as the Chipko Movement or individual groups' uprising cannot be a permanent solution. A systematic citizens' network of environmental panchayats to promote Rta dharma is required. What is needed is the will to support, and to ensure, environmental protection for and by the people of India.

*The writer is a cultural activist, an academic and a performing artist*

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### RURAL LEAP

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'The right convergence' (IE, June 28). As per Census 2011 data, an overwhelming 68.84 per cent of India's population lives in rural areas. The rural economy has its own dynamics. Agriculture and allied industries thus acquire utmost significance. A functional synchronisation between all agriculture-related administrative departments would result in a better understanding of not just the agricultural supply chain but also the whole rural ecosystem. A thriving rural economy can create employment opportunities not just for the rural areas but also in the urban centres.

**Sudip Kumar Dey, Kolkata**

### PAKISTAN'S PLOY?

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Past & present' (IE, June 28). Everyone knows how Sikhs admire Ranjeet Singh and take pride in his legacy. Pakistan first started luring Sikhs with the opening up of Kartarpur corridor and now a bust of Ranjeet Singh has been unveiled in Lahore. While it may be a cynical approach, Pakistan's moves must not be taken at face value. With the Pakistan government under fire from the FATF over its terrorist training centres, the courting of Sikhs may be meant to confuse India.

**Bholey Bhardwaj, Mumbai**

### BUDGETING GROWTH

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'A budget wish list' (IE, June 28). The forthcoming budget will be keenly watched to see if it suggests a roadmap to revive the economy and address unemployment. The writer has suggested a great idea — linking fresh employment with tax

### 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](mailto: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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soaps to companies.

**Bal Govind, Noida**

### TONGUE TIED

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Speaking in many tongues' (IE, June 27). Students of states where neither Hindi nor English is the mother tongue have been disadvantaged. In Gujarat, we have been taught four languages and the result is we do not have mastery over a single one. In addition, such a curriculum leaves little space to learn maths and science in school. Instead, students should learn in their mother tongue and be able to choose another language — either English or Hindi.

**Suchak D Patel, Ahmedabad**