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TELLING NUMBERS

Statewise estimated incidence of cancer cases in India

UTTAR PRADESH and Maharashtra, the country's most and second-most populous states, also recorded the highest incidence of cancer by absolute numbers in the three years between 2016 and 2018, the government informed Lok Sabha last week, quoting figures estimated by an Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) report.

The estimated incidence of cancer cases (for both men and women) in Uttar Pradesh were 2,45,231; 2,57,353; and 2,70,053 for the years 2016, 2017, and 2018 respectively. The corresponding numbers for Maharashtra were 1,32,726; 1,38,271; and 1,44,032. Among the lowest estimated incidence was seen in Haryana and Assam, the smaller among the major states.

The projected cancer cases were computed using projected incidence rates and population (person-years), said a note to the table annexed by the government to its reply.

The absolute numbers suggested the fastest year-on-year increase in the incidence of cancer was estimated for Bihar (5.38% from 2016 to 2017, and 5.37% from 2017 to 2018), the country's third most populous state



as per the 2011 Census. The Health Ministry's reply said the central government was "implementing Strengthening of Tertiary Care Cancer facilities scheme to support setting up of State Cancer Institutes (SCI) and Tertiary Care Cancer Centres (TCCC) in different parts of the country".

PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN ESTIMATED INCIDENCE OF CANCER (For selected major states, based on absolute estimates in ICMR report)

State	2016-2017	2017-18
Bihar	5.38	5.37
Madhya Pradesh	4.97	4.96
Maharashtra	4.18	4.17
Uttar Pradesh	4.94	4.93
West Bengal	4.23	4.23

THIS WORD MEANS

PANSEXUAL

How some celebrities describe themselves

IN AN interview to the ABC show *Good Morning America* this week, American actor Bella Thorne (*right*) described herself as "pansexual" — not bisexual, as she had said earlier. Thorne is among several celebrities who have declared that they do not conform to binary labels while defining sexual orientation.

"I'm actually a pansexual, and I didn't know that," Thorne was reported to have said. "Doesn't have to be a girl, or a guy, or a he, a she, a this, or that. It's literally, you like personality, like you, just like a being."

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, pansexuality relates to, or is characterized by "sexual desire or attraction that is not limited to people of a particular gender identity or sexual orientation". The word has also come to mean an attraction that is uninhibited by gender.

Stonewall, the LGBT rights charity in the United Kingdom, defines pansexual as "a person whose romantic and/or sexual attraction towards others is not limited by sex or gender". In the spectrum of gender identities, there is only a small proportion of people who identify themselves as being pansexual.

The term itself is not new, however — having been coined in the early 1900s. It comes from the Greek prefix 'pan', meaning 'all'. The other word for pansexual is omnisexual — derived from the Latin



word 'omni', which means 'all'.

Interest in pansexuality — both the word and the idea — has surged every time a celebrity has come out being as one. In August 2015, Google searches spiked after actor-singer Miley Cyrus described herself as pansexual. More recently, in April 2018, singer-songwriter Janelle Mon e told *Rolling Stone* magazine that she was pansexual.

LEELA MURALI



CHAKSHU ROY

THE POLITICAL crisis that began in Karnataka with the resignation of 15 MLAs on July 6, and ended on Tuesday with H D Kumaraswamy being defeated in a motion of confidence that took five days and multiple missed deadlines to be put to vote, underscored the tortuous working of India's anti-defection law — and threw up a range of associated legal and constitutional questions.

This is how the law — the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution, inserted by The Constitution (52nd Amendment) Act, 1985, when Rajiv Gandhi's government was in power — came to be, and how it evolved over the three decades that followed.

The 1967 elections

The legislative journey of the anti-defection law is long and chequered. It involves the institution of Parliament that designed it, the office of the Speaker of Legislatures that implements it, and the judiciary that interprets the law. MPs, MLAs, and their political parties are the principal stakeholders who are impacted by the anti-defection law. It is a law whose unintended consequences outweigh its purpose — and its journey after its passage in 1985 mirrors the continuing political instability in the country.

The seeds of the anti-defection law were sown after the general elections in 1967. The results of those elections were a mixed bag for the Congress. It formed the government at the Centre, but its strength in Lok Sabha fell from 361 to 283. During the year it lost control of seven state governments as MLAs shifted their political allegiance.

In this backdrop, P Venkatasubbaiah, a Congress MP in Lok Sabha who served in the Cabinets of both Indira and Rajiv Gandhi, proposed the setting up of a high-level committee to make recommendations to tackle the "problem of legislators changing their allegiance from one party to another".

The proposal saw a spirited debate in Lok Sabha. Opposition members suggested renaming the proposal to "save Congress", while the ruling party accused the opposition of inducing MLAs to defect.

The Y B Chavan panel

Despite the acrimony, the Lok Sabha agreed to the setting up of a committee to examine the problem of political defections. The then Home Minister, Y B Chavan, headed the committee. The panel defined defection — and an exception for genuine defectors. According to the committee, defection was the voluntary giving up of allegiance of a political party on whose symbol a legislator was elected, except when such action was the result of the decision of the party.

In its report, the committee noted "that the lure of office played a dominant part in decisions of legislators to defect". It pointed out that out of 210 defecting legislators in seven states, 116 were given ministerial berths in governments which they helped form by their defections.

To combat this, the committee recommended a bar on defecting legislators from holding ministerial positions for a year — or until the time they got themselves re-elected. It also suggested a smaller Council of Ministers both at the levels of the Centre and the states.

AN EXPERT EXPLAINS

The limits of anti-defection

The prolonged political crisis in Karnataka has demonstrated the ways in which the nearly 35-year-old anti-defection law can be used and abused. Here's how the law was enacted, and how it has performed.



Former Karnataka Chief Minister H D Kumaraswamy in the Assembly on Tuesday. Kumaraswamy lost trust vote 99-105. PTI

The committee was in favour of political parties working together to help evolve a code of conduct to effectively tackle disruptions.

Early attempts at a law

Following the report of the Y B Chavan committee, two separate legislative attempts, both unsuccessful, were made to find a solution to defections. The first one was made by Indira's Home Minister Uma Shankar Dikshit in 1973; the second, in 1978, by Shanti Bhushan, Minister for Law and Justice in the Janata Party government of Morarji Desai. The third attempt — which was successful — was made in 1985, after the Congress won more than 400 seats in Lok Sabha in the aftermath of Indira's assassination.

The Tenth Schedule

The Bill to amend the Constitution was introduced by Rajiv Gandhi's Law Minister Ashoke Kumar Sen, the veteran barrister and politician who had also served in the Cabinet of Jawaharlal Nehru. The statement of objects and reasons of the Bill said: "The evil of political defections has been a matter of national concern. If it is not combated, it is likely to undermine the very foundations of our democracy and the principles which sustain it."

The amendment by which the Tenth Schedule was inserted in the Constitution, did three broad things.

■ One, it made legislators liable to be penalised for their conduct both inside (voting against the whip of the party) and outside (making speeches, etc.) the legislature — the penalty being the loss of their seats in Parliament or the state legislatures.

■ Two, it protected legislators from disqualification in cases where there was a split (with 1/3rd of members splitting) or merger (with 2/3rds of members merging) of a legislature party with another political party.

■ Three, it made the Presiding Officer of the concerned legislature the sole arbiter of defection proceedings.

Criticism and passage

worsen, sovereign bonds denominated in domestic currency are preferable.

So, why is India borrowing in external markets in external currency?

There are many reasons why. Possibly the biggest of these is that the Indian government's domestic borrowing is crowding out private investment and preventing the interest rates from falling even when inflation has cooled off and the RBI is cutting policy rates. If the government was to borrow some of its loans from outside India, there will be investable money left for private companies to borrow; not to mention that interest rates could start coming down. In fact, the significant decline in 10-year G-sec yields in the recent past is partially a result of this announcement.

Moreover, at less than 5%, India's sovereign external debt to GDP is among the lowest globally. In other words, there is scope for the Indian government to raise funds this way without worrying too much about the possible negative effects.

Thirdly, a sovereign bond issue will provide a yield curve — a benchmark — for Indian corporates who wish to raise loans in foreign markets. This will help Indian busi-

nesses that have increasingly looked towards foreign economies to borrow money. Lastly, the timing is great. Globally, and especially in the advanced economies where the government is likely to go to borrow, the interest rates are low and, thanks to the easy monetary policies of foreign central banks, there are a lot of surplus funds waiting for a product that pays more.

In an ideal scenario, it could be win-win for all: Indian government raises loans at interest rates much cheaper than domestic interest rates, while foreign investors get a much higher return than is available in their own markets.

The immediate challenges

No sooner was the law put in place than political parties started to stress-test its boundaries. The issue of what constitutes a split in a political party rocked both the V P Singh and the Chandra Shekhar governments. The role of the Presiding Officers also became increasingly politicised. Lok Sabha Speaker Shivraj Patil said in 1992: "The Speaker is not expected to dabble in keeping the political parties week or strong or discipline the Parliamentarians for their party purposes."

The intervention of the higher judiciary was sought to decide questions such as what kinds of conduct outside the legislature would fall in the category of defection, and what was the extent of the Speaker's power in deciding defections. The Supreme Court, while upholding the supremacy of the Speaker in defection proceedings, also held that the Speaker's decisions were subject to judicial review.

The 2003 Amendment

The last step in the legislative journey of the anti-defection law came in 2003. A Constitution Amendment Bill was introduced in Parliament by the government of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to address some of the issues with the law. A committee headed by Pranab Mukherjee examined the Bill.

The committee observed: "The provision of split has been grossly misused to engineer multiple divisions in the party, as a result of which the evil of defection has not been checked in the right earnest. Further it is also observed that the lure of office of profit plays dominant part in the political horse-trading resulting in spate of defections and counter defections."

The one-third split provision which offered protection to defectors was deleted from the law on the committee's recommendation. The 2003 Amendment also incorporated the 1967 advice of the Y B Chavan committee in limiting the size of the Council of Ministers, and preventing defecting legislators from joining the Council of Ministers until their re-election. However, as events in the years and decades since have demonstrated, these amendments have had only limited impact.

The (ab)use of the law

The removal of the split provision prompted political parties to engineer wholesale defections (to merge) instead of smaller 'retail' ones. Legislators started resigning from the membership of the House in order to escape disqualification from ministerial berths.

The ceiling on the size of the Council of Ministers meant an increase in the number of positions of parliamentary secretaries in states. The Speakers started taking an active interest in political matters, helping build and break governments. The anti-defection law does not specify a timeframe for Speakers to decide on defection proceedings. When the politics demanded, Speakers were either quick to pass judgment on defection proceedings or delayed acting on them for years on end.

The long drawn-out events in the Karnataka Vidhan Sabha have shown that even after three decades, the anti-defection law has not been able to stop political defections.

(Chakshu Roy is Head of Outreach at PRS Legislative Research)

What are sovereign bonds, and what are their risks and rewards?

UDIT MISRA

NEW DELHI, JULY 24

IN HER maiden Budget speech earlier in the month, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced something that no previous FM had done. She said that the Indian "government would start raising a part of its gross borrowing programme in external markets in external currencies". According to most reports, this type of borrowing is likely to start by October with the initial amount of \$10 billion. However, this idea has not gone down well with several top economists, such as former RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan, who have underscored the reasons why past governments have stayed away from raising loans overseas in foreign-denominated currencies.

The latest economist to caution the government is Rathin Roy, who is not only the director of the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (a government think tank) but also a member of the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council. "I would pay very careful attention to what several Governors of the Reserve Bank are saying...", Roy said during a public event Monday.

What exactly are sovereign bonds?

A bond is like an IOU. The issuer of a bond promises to pay back a fixed amount of money every year until the expiry of the term, at which point the issuer returns the principal amount to the buyer. When a government issues such a bond it is called a sovereign bond.

Typically, the more financially strong a country, the more well respected is its sovereign bond. Some of the best known sovereign bonds are the Treasuries (of the United States), the Gilt (of Britain), the OATS (of France), the Bundesanleihen or Bunds (of Germany) and the JGBs (of Japan).

And what is the controversial part?

The current controversy relates to India's sovereign bonds that will be floated in foreign countries and will be denominated in foreign currencies. In other words, both the initial loan amount and the final payment will be in either US dollars or some other comparable currency. This would differentiate these proposed bonds from either government securities (or G-secs, wherein the Indian government raises loans within India and in Indian rupee) or Masala bonds (wherein Indian entities — not the

government — raise money overseas in rupee terms).

The difference between issuing a bond denominated in rupees and issuing it in a foreign currency (say US dollar) is the incidence of exchange rate risk. If the loan is in terms of dollars, and the rupee weakens against the dollar during the bond's tenure, the government would have to return more rupees to pay back the same amount of dollars. If, however, the initial loan is denominated in rupee terms, then the negative fall-out would be on the foreign investor.

For example, imagine two 10-year sovereign bond issues by India: one for \$100 in the US, and the other for Rs 7,000 in India. For the sake of simplicity, suppose the exchange rate is Rs 70 to a dollar. As such, at the time of issue, both values are the same. Now suppose the exchange rate worsens for India and falls to Rs 80 a dollar at the end of the tenure. In the first case, the Indian government would have to pay Rs 8,000 (instead of Rs 7,000 that it got initially) to meet its dollar-denominated obligation. In the second case, it would pay Rs 7,000 and the lender would be short-changed as these Rs 7,000 will be equal to just \$87.5 at the end of tenure. That is why, if the exchange rate is expected to





The Indian EXPRESS

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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Much ado about something

Absent any direct dealings with Pakistan, the US insidiously becomes our intermediary



MANI SHANKAR AIYAR

A DISMAL FRAME

Collapse of JD(S)-Congress government raises larger, uncomfortable questions about health of India’s Opposition

WITH THE FALL of the HD Kumaraswamy government following a trust vote on Tuesday, the BJP, the single largest party in the assembly, is expected to form the government. There is still no clarity, however, on the strength of the House, since the Speaker is yet to rule on the resignations of 16 MLAs; their party leaderships have sought their disqualification. It is likely that the Speaker’s action, whichever way he rules, may be challenged in court; the Supreme Court already has a bunch of pleas on the Karnataka crisis to decide. As political parties go through the motions in this bizarre tableau, citizens must endure the embarrassment of watching their representatives duck in and out of resorts and other hideaways.

Beyond the moral dimensions of the crisis and the questions it raises about a host of institutions, including the office of the Speaker and Governor, the events in Karnataka lay out a challenging political predicament, particularly for the Opposition. Karnataka has once again underlined that the BJP’s hunger for political domination is insatiable. Since 2014, the party has been expanding across the country, winning state after state. Under the leadership of Narendra Modi and Amit Shah, the party has come to believe that the winner takes all and has sought to form governments even in the states it failed to win. The Opposition has been slow and clueless in facing up, much less matching or countering, the BJP. In fact, Karnataka was an exception, where the Opposition outwitted the BJP to form a government 14 months ago. The Congress and the JD(S), which fought against each other and finished behind the BJP, joined hands to form government; the Congress’ decision to let the smaller party, the JD(S), occupy the chief minister’s office was perceived to be an indication of the Opposition’s readiness to set aside differences for a larger cause. In retrospect, neither party was willing to make this coalition of unnatural allies work. That it failed to deliver seats in the general election seems to have convinced the Congress that the limited investment it had made in the coalition was not worth it. The BJP’s will to form a government, the contradictions within the coalition and the ambitions of the latter’s legislators seem to have converged in this moment.

The failure of the JD(S)-Congress government to hold up raises larger questions about the Opposition’s capability to put up a united front against an expanding BJP. The glue that held the Opposition together in Karnataka was the fear of the BJP. That no longer seems effective as various Opposition parties, devastated by the May 23 verdict, have moved apart and now seem to act listlessly. Even as the BJP relishes the absence of competition, the unchecked emasculation of the Opposition does not augur well for a robust democracy.

SHARE OF THE STATE

Centre needs to re-evaluate its spending priorities, encroach less on states’ space

LAST WEEK, THE Union cabinet passed an amendment to widen the terms of reference of the 15th Finance Commission. The Commission has now been asked to examine the possibility of setting up a mechanism for funding defence and internal security. As capital spending on defence continues to fall well short of what is required, it is difficult to contest the premise that it needs to be bolstered. But, as the creation of “secure and non-lapsable funds for defence and internal security” may end up reducing the divisible tax pool further, the move could face resistance from states, especially when several of them are arguing for a greater share in tax revenues. While the commission is yet to spell out its views on the subject, this request raises fundamental questions over the spending priorities of different levels of government and the framework that governs Centre-state fiscal relations.

The Seventh Schedule of the Indian Constitution specifies the separate as well as concurrent responsibilities of the Centre and state governments, with defence falling in the Union list. The inability of the Centre to ramp up its spending on defence indicates the limited fiscal space available to it. In large part, this is due to an increase in spending on items in the state and concurrent list, and a corresponding decline in spending on items in the Union list. In 2015-16 alone, the Centre spent 16 per cent of its revenue expenditure on items in the state list, and another 16.4 per cent on items in the concurrent list. Now, some of this spending on items in the state and concurrent list is necessary. In a federal structure, the Centre must address regional imbalances in the delivery of public services. But the bulk of this spending is routed through sector-specific transfers or centrally sponsored schemes that curb the autonomy of the states in deciding their own expenditure priorities. The added fiscal pressures on the Centre have, in turn, contributed to reduced fiscal space for states. Over the years, the Centre has begun to rely increasingly on taxes collected through cesses and surcharges to meet its expenditure priorities. But revenue from these sources does not form part of the divisible tax pool, it is not shared with states — squeezing them from both ends.

While the compulsions of the political economy have ensured greater central government spending on items in the state and concurrent lists, the current juncture may well be an opportune moment to rethink the spending priorities of different levels of the government. There is a need, particularly, to address legitimate concerns of states about increasing encroachment by the Centre.

ANOTHER BLOND

The ascension of Boris, it is widely feared, signals the imminent end of the UK, and all that sort of thing

IN THE 20TH century, “Boris” signified the vodka-powered Yeltsin — “100 proof, 100 per cent in control”, as a cartoon of the era defined the bad-tempered child of perestroika. Exactly two decades after Yeltsin bowed out of office with approval ratings much lower than lunar gravity, allowing Vladimir Putin to become Russian president and prime minister (alternately) for life, “Boris” means Johnson. Of the persistently blond Johnson family, Britain’s answer to the clan Kardashians.

Tory and Whig, Unionist and Green, the gamut of the UK political leadership is secretly of one compact — that Boris grasping the sceptre of the Sceptred Isle at this juncture is simply dreadful. It is so bad that people are wistfully recalling Theresa May, who was being derided just weeks ago. So very bad that if Johnson persists in pushing through a painful no-deal Brexit when the deadline expires in October, his colleagues may pray QEII, to whom the sceptre actually belongs, requests Brussels for another extension. And in the melee, the Scots could finally make a successful bid for freedom.

Johnson’s track record is fairly awful. He was sacked within months of being hired by the *London Times*, for misquoting and getting his history wrong. His stint as Brussels correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* was remarkable only for sparking off a wave of nastily jocular Euroscepticism. The European commissioners he left behind in Brussels hold him in low esteem. But in an age of dangerous comedians (like the other blond across the Big Water) this is not a disqualification. Even his adversaries admit he has an innate capacity for lightening the air. And even his hordes of supporters admit that he fibs a lot. Boris is a fib too. Boris is not his first name. It’s Alexander.

WOULD DONALD TRUMP have really made it up? True, the man is a misguided missile but he has made it to president of the United States and you don’t get there unless you have something out of the ordinary about you. He prides himself on being a “deal-maker”. And he was making the defining deal of his presidency when Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan was visiting with him. The context was getting the US out of the Afghan imbroglio. That could only happen by inveigling the Taliban to the negotiating table. For that, Pakistan’s whole-hearted cooperation is required.

By turning up in Washington DC with both his army chief and his intelligence chief, Imran was signaling Pakistan’s readiness to render such whole-hearted cooperation, presaged by meeting a long-standing American demand — the release of the Pak-American doctor who had led the US to Osama bin Laden.

But what was Imran to get in return? Nothing more than what any Pak PM needs to cover his shame on returning home — something on Kashmir. Trump obliged. His bombshell had three bursts.

One, “I was with Prime Minister Modi two weeks ago, and we talked about the subject”. Talked about Kashmir?

Second, “And he actually said, ‘would you like to be a mediator or arbitrator, and I said, ‘where?’, and he said “Kashmir”. What?!

Third, Modi apparently gave his reason why — “because this has been going on for many, many years”. It has.

There was not one meeting but several between Trump and Modi at Osaka. One, of course, was the 40-minute formal meeting between the two sides at which armies of officials from both sides were present — clearly not the opportunity for “pillow talk”. Then, the two were seated side-by-side at dinner, but that conversation was monitored by a joint secretary who acts as a translator for Modi and keeps a summary record of what is said. Then, there were meetings in the lounge (but in other people’s hearing). And,

When Modi met Trump in Osaka he knew Trump would be seeing Imran within the next few weeks in Washington. It was also clear that the top priority for Trump was pulling his troops out of Afghanistan both to end two decades of a fruitless war the US is incapable of winning, as also to fulfill a major campaign pledge before running for re-election. That required Washington to assiduously appease Islamabad.

finally while walking the corridors together — where no one was around.

So, was it then that the curious conversation took place that Trump has so vividly described? Remember the precedent: It was precisely such a brief chance encounter with Nawaz Sharif (set up accidentally on purpose) at the Paris Climate Change conference that led to the breakthrough in December 2015 which climaxed by Modi dropping in at the wedding of Sharif’s grand-daughter.

Or were there attendant circumstances that created a misunderstanding on Trump’s part of what Modi was attempting to convey? By refusing to engage with Pakistan, Modi has made the India-US relationship the pivot on which India’s troubled relationship with Pakistan swivels: So, oust Pakistan from its traditional position as the principal ally in South Asia of the US by bolstering the India-US “strategic partnership”; ride pillion on the United States’ global war on terrorism to get US support in battling Pakistan-sponsored cross-border terrorism; leverage the US to get the Pakistan authorities to take action against Hafiz Saeed and Masood Azhar; leave it to the US to get the world to swing around against Pakistan to get them moved from grey to black on the FATF listing; clandestinely seek US help to get back our wing commander, restrain Pakistan in its counter-action to our bombing of Balakot; and many other such actions. Absent any direct dealings with Pakistan, the US insidiously becomes our intermediary. Then fulsome praise follows for the US having pulled our irons out of the Pakistan fire. Trump takes this praise as acknowledgement of a beneficiary’s gratitude and feels the way open to doing more “good”.

When Modi met Trump in Osaka he knew Trump would be seeing Imran within the next few weeks in Washington. It was also clear that the top priority for Trump was pulling his troops out of Afghanistan both to end two decades of a fruitless war the US is incapable of winning, as also to fulfill a major campaign pledge before running for re-

election. That required Washington to assiduously appease Islamabad. And the price to be paid was two-fold: Giving a free hand to Pakistan to secure “strategic depth” in a Taliban-run Afghanistan that would keep India out; and giving Imran a Kashmir-related gift to bail himself out of any domestic troubles that might follow upon his US visit.

Imran has thus assured for his country a renewal of the alliance with the US that has been the cornerstone of Pakistan’s foreign policy since before Partition and Independence. If he and the army-intelligence team that accompanied him to Washington succeed in delivering the Taliban to the conference table, it is entirely likely that Imran would be beaming in the Rose Garden with Trump as the agreement delivering Afghanistan from US military operations to the Taliban and Pakistan is signed a few months down the road. Modi will not be there.

And that precisely is why Modi is travelling to Washington in September. To facilitate that last ditch attempt at salvaging something from the end-game in Afghanistan, Modi has been lauding to the skies the US involvement at every crucial turn in Indo-Pak relations resulting in Trump thinking Modi is leading him up to finding a solution to a problem that “has been going on for many, many years”.

What Hindutva would gain from this is giving Amit Shah and his cronies an opening, with no US objection, to get on with their plans of forcibly “integrating” Kashmir with the Union of India by doing away with everything — Article 370 and 35A — that stands in the way of a demographic restructuring of the Kashmir Valley that will extinguish Kashmir’s Kashmiriyat to bring in Hindutva.

Trump’s slip of the tongue has unveiled the nefarious Modi-Shah game-plan of doing to Kashmiris what Modi’s favourite role-model, Israel, is doing to the Palestinians — gnawing away at their rights, piece by piece.

The writer is a senior Congress leader and former Union Minister

A TIMELESS TALE

The enduring legacy and relevance of Satyajit Ray’s ‘Apur Sansar’



AMITABHA BHATTACHARYA

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU, AFTER watching Satyajit Ray’s second film *Aparajito* (The Unvanquished, 1956), had famously turned to Ray to ask, “What happens to Apu now?” Watching *Apur Sansar* (The World of Apu, 1959), the third of the celebrated Apu trilogy, 60 years after its release, one does not fail to understand what made his work so deep, pervasive and sustained in its appeal.

While his first film, *Pather Panchali* (Song of the Road, 1955) appeared magically refreshing in style and content, the next, *Aparajito*, though more prosaic and terse, was, in fact, not a great popular success. And Ray decided to make two more films belonging to different genres, *Parash Pathar* (The Philosopher’s Stone, 1958) and *Jalsaghar* (The Music Room, 1958), before embarking on *Apur Sansar*.

But the Apu trilogy, chronicling with great artistry the growth of Apu from childhood through adolescence to manhood — from a remote village of Bengal through Benaras to Calcutta in the early decades of the last century — struck a sympathetic chord with sensitive men and women across cultures. Discussing Ray’s work in the context of icons of international cinema, *Time* magazine (September 20, 1963) wondered, “Will Ray redeem his prodigious promise and become the Shakespeare of the screen?” What explains such critical and popular acclaim of Ray’s films?

Ray’s biographers from Marie Seton to Andrew Robinson, experts like Chidananda Dasgupta, Satish Bahadur or Robin Wood, renowned film-makers such as Lindsay Anderson, Akira Kurosawa, Martin Scorsese,

Shyam Benegal and Adoor Gopalakrishnan, and the legion who were impacted by Ray’s cinematic ideas in the Indian subcontinent and the West, have sought to explain the features that characterise the originality of this master story-teller, in elevating films to the level of art.

Two novels, by the renowned author Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay, formed the basis of the Apu trilogy. The demands of the cinematic medium made Ray remould the material — selecting and arranging the characters and situations — while remaining truthful to the spirit of the literary text. Here lies a clue to his art creation.

One reason why *Apur Sansar* was both a critical and box-office success was not merely because Ray’s craft had matured more by then, or that the film showed the flowering of tender love between Apu and his friend’s sister whom he marries when the “arranged groom” is discovered to be insane. In the words of Ray, “I concentrated mainly on two aspects. One was the relationship between the struggling intellectual Apu and his unaffected, unlettered chance-wife Aparna brought up in affluence but inspired to adjust to poverty by her love for her husband. The second aspect was even more exciting. Aparna dies in childbirth. Bibhutibhusan, who often reached for the truth below the surface, makes Apu turn against the child — he reproaches him for having caused the mother’s death. The first meeting of father and son takes place after a lapse of several years. A scenarist could scarcely want more in the way of an expressive situation.”

[‘Should A Film-Maker Be Original?’, *Filmfare*, August 28, 1959].

It required the genius of a Ray to visualise the film in terms of these concerns and see the dramatic potential in the story, and, invest his work with poetic sequences and psychological inflections. An intense humanism and empathy for the characters caught in the vortex of life, an uncanny eye for detail and an ability to see the deeper truth beneath the surface of reality, are all evident in the film. A passion for life, an undercurrent of eroticism and the irony of our daily existence, especially when death is juxtaposed on it, have been reflected in its execution.

Merely remembering Ray as India’s great cultural icon after Rabindranath Tagore or as the world’s most decorated film director, would not enrich our mind. Seeing his films may do. His birth centenary in 2020-21 should provide that opportunity: Would the government, that had earlier helped the emergence of new Indian cinema, take some initiative and make Ray’s offerings accessible far and wide?

Finally, *Apur Sansar* may be full of human drama, but there is hardly any theatricality in the film. Ray tried to be “as expressive as possible through action, through objects, through details.” (*Satyajit Ray: A Film by Shyam Benegal*, Seagull Books, Calcutta, 1988). It remains an example of pure cinema and is a wholesome one that has not lost its relevance in the India of today. It carries all the prominent markers of a classic. By world standards.

The writer is a retired IAS officer

JULY 25, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

JANATA RSS TIES

WHATEVER LINK THE Janata Party has with the RSS will be cut off. Members of Parliament and state legislatures and office-bearers of the Janata Party will not be allowed to take part in RSS activities. This was announced by the party President, Chandra Shekhar, at a news conference, paving the way for the return of those who had deserted the ruling party in protest against the erstwhile Jana Sangh members’ continued connections with the RSS. This is also a bid to defuse the dual membership controversy which had led to the resignation of 100-odd members from the Janata Parliamentary Party and the fall of the Morarji Desai government.

PAKISTAN’S ATOM BOMB

WESTERN SOURCES BELIEVE that Pakistan is within three or four years of the capability of producing an atom bomb despite denials in Pakistan and Prime Minister Morarji Desai’s public statements of doubt. Details are now coming in from London indicating a web of international intrigue which permitted a Pakistani physicist, Abdul Gadkar Khan, who worked for one of the joint nuclear projects of the West European governments in Holland, to order machinery for the development of a reprocessing plant in Pakistan. Such a plant could be used to produce weapons-grade plutonium, using the same method that was used in India to produce

India’s first nuclear device in 1974.

SHEIKH DECLINES OFFER

THE JAMMU AND Kashmir chief minister, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, said today that he had declined the offer to become the Vice-President of India as he wanted to devote his full attention to the economic development of the state. Addressing National Conference workers, he described as “unfortunate” the prevailing state of uncertainty at the Centre. He said, “what we want is stability at the Centre”. He announced that “whichever party or group forms the government, it should be able to ensure a stable government to look after public welfare.”



A formula for exclusion

The Citizenship Amendment Bill carries the danger of making discrimination a formal part of India's refugee policy



S IRUDAYA RAJAN, ISWARYA SUBBIAH

THE PROCESS OF updating the National Register for Citizens in Assam is a momentous exercise with huge implications for India's constitutional scheme, especially on issues pertaining to the question of citizenship. Citizenship in India is governed by the Constitution and the Citizenship Act, 1955. While both prescribe the means of acquiring citizenship, they do not define it. A person may be a citizen by birth, by descent or by naturalisation. However, citizenship goes beyond just the act of being a citizen — it conflates complex ideas of nationality and ethnicity. Thus, it would be remiss to talk of citizenship without understanding that it is rooted in exclusion.

The Partition was India's first test of citizenship, leading to large-scale movement of people across the newly-drawn borders, primarily for reasons of religion. India's geographical location, however, ensures that the movement of people are not isolated incidents. There has been a near constant influx of people into India from neighbouring countries.

The recent Citizenship Amendment Bill 2016 seeks to make drastic changes to the existing immigration norms in India by making it easier for certain immigrants to seek citizenship. After the 2004 amendment, an undocumented migrant in India is defined as anyone entering the country without a valid passport, with forged documents, or one who overstays their visa term. The proposed amendment exempts "persons belonging to minority communities" — Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Parsis, Buddhists and Christians — from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh from being treated as undocumented immigrants. In addition, anyone who fulfills these requirements will now only need six years of ordinary residency — as opposed to 11 previously — to claim citizenship by naturalisation.

Interestingly, the Bill refers to persons belonging to minority communities as "illegal immigrants", as they would technically be refugees if they are fleeing from persecution. These definitions are important, as conflating these terms would only hamper India's refugee policy.

While the idea behind this amendment might be noble, the Bill is noteworthy in its exclusions — rather than inclusions. The religious undertone of this exercise is problematic. By explicitly naming the religions getting exemptions, the Bill flouts the fundamental right to equality enshrined in Article 14 of the Constitution.

All this is further complicated by the fact that India currently does not have a refugee law in place, it is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol. However, India's stance on refugees has been, largely, consistent — it has been one of hospitality. It has also been steady since Jawaharlal Nehru said of the Tibetan refugees that they must return to their homeland, once the conflict has been resolved. The proposed law, however, goes against this long-practiced tenet by making the process of availing citizenship much easier.

The exclusion of persecuted Tamils from Sri Lanka is also perplexing. Refugees fleeing the civil war in Sri Lanka did so under the most trying circumstances, where going back was not an option for many. A significant portion of the refugees are Indian Tamils, or Hill Country Tamils. They are descendants of labourers taken from India to work on Sri Lankan plantations. In spite of assurances,



Suvajit Dey

these labourers got neither Indian nor Sri Lankan citizenship after the departure of the British. Thus, an Indian origin worker born in colonial Sri Lanka would have lived through the Independence and the birth of two nations but remained stateless at the end of it.

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs justified this exclusion by claiming that Sri Lankan refugees in Tamil Nadu can avail long-term visas (LTVs). However, refugees do not often have the documents required to acquire a long-term visa. A long-term visa would enable an immigrant in the country to open a bank account, get an Aadhaar card, purchase property and move freely within the country. Sri Lankan refugees, however, lack the documentation required for them to be eligible to acquire an LTV.

Nowhere in India was this Bill more vehemently protested than in the Northeast. Assam, in particular, opposed the amendments introduced through this Bill. The Northeast is often seen as an easy point of entry for those wishing to settle in India. For Assam, the bill seems to be in direct contravention to the Assam Accord of 1985. The Accord specified that the names of foreigners who have entered Assam after January 1, 1966, and up to March 24, 1971, shall be struck off the electoral rolls and they would be required to register themselves under the Registration of Foreigners Act, 1939. Any foreigner who has entered the country after March 24, 1971 shall be expelled.

The Bill also brings into question the process of updating of the National Register of Citizens (NRC). It will legitimise the citizenship of all those who would have been considered foreigners under the Assam Accord and the NRC.

Other Northeastern states have also registered their protest with respect to the Bill. Mizoram is apprehensive of the influx of Chakma refugees from Bangladesh. Most re-

India's stance on refugees has been, largely, consistent and hospitable. It has also been steady since Jawaharlal Nehru said of the Tibetan refugees that they must return to their homeland, once the conflict has been resolved. The proposed law, however, goes against this long-practiced tenet by making the process of availing citizenship much easier.

gional parties, including those from Tripura and Nagaland, have opposed the Bill. The general fear amongst these states is that regional identity will be diluted if this bill becomes an Act. The threat that they may end up being a minority in their own state combined with the anger that they will have to bear the brunt of an influx of refugees has led to protests all over the Northeast.

What is disregarded in this argument, however, is the exclusionary nature of citizenship determination processes like the NRC. Even if there are four million illegal immigrants presently residing in Assam, the State should ideally have formulated a framework for the inclusion of all those already in the country, while simultaneously preventing more refugee influx. The State's lack of transparency on its future plan of action is troubling. To even consider rendering this substantial populace stateless would go against every humanitarian principle India adheres to.

Though India is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, the country is bound by the international principles of humanitarianism. India's commitment to core international human rights instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, combined with its own constitutional ethics, means that the country cannot be exempt of her duty in protecting asylum seekers. This protection must be extended to all those seeking refuge.

The Citizenship Amendment Bill carries the danger of making discrimination a formal part of India's refugee policy — that would be a dangerous precedent indeed.

Rajan is professor at the Centre for Development Studies, Kerala and Subbiah is an advocate at Bombay High Court

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

The Conservative party has finally got a leader it deserves.

— THE GUARDIAN

The BJP I knew

The party is veering away from the political philosophy and ethics it promised to uphold



JULIO RIBEIRO

BJP VETERAN leader Laxmi Kanta Chawla is a woman I greatly admire. I met her in Punjab during my stint of three-and-a-half years fighting Khalistani terrorism. She was always simply dressed in a sari and did not bother about her appearance; she was bothered much more about the country and Punjab.

My view of the RSS was tempered by my acquaintance with people like Chawla and also Hit Abhilashi, the BJP president of Punjab. Abhilashi was one of the finest human beings I have come across and I had the greatest respect for him, especially his ethical standards. When he was shot dead by terrorists, I was personally shattered.

The BJP always prided itself as a "party with a difference". With Chawla and my friend Abhilashi as models, I thought that a different type of politics would be presented to the Indian people. I admit that I never voted for the BJP because the general run of minority thinking is that the BJP is an exclusively Hindu party. My Hindu ancestors in Goa were converted by the Portuguese more than four centuries ago. Since then, we have become a minority in our own country and our vote goes to those who will protect our culture and identity.

But I have no quarrel with the party ideology as long as it confines itself to ethical and moral values — which the RSS, I always felt, represented. The Pune Brahmins, who I was familiar with during my years of service, were models of high thinking and simple living. They fashioned my kinder views of the party most of them supported.

I am now totally disenchanted with the "party with a difference". Its talk of inclusiveness, often spouted by our popular (with the masses) prime minister, is sadly, routinely, discarded when dealing with the single largest minority in the country.

In my own tiny state of Goa, I am disillusioned by the fact that the BJP has inducted 10 MLAs of the Congress party to crossover to their party in one fell swoop. If this is not unethical, I wonder what is. By inducing elected representatives to cross sides, the party has let itself down. The Christians in Goa got disillusioned with the BJP in the first term and they have been sadly let down by greedy MLAs.

I wonder what these turncoats will now do, or not do, in another party which their own voters have voted against. Take the case of Babush Monserrate, who has crossed sides many times in the past. It is hardly likely that the voters of Panaji would have voted for him if they knew that he was going to be won over by the lure of office! They wanted to vote out the BJP. If they knew that Monserrate, who lost his own home constituency in the

general election, was going to abandon their concerns, I doubt if they would have voted for him.

Moreover, people who crossover in this cavalier fashion are swashbucklers who have no ethical or moral values, and will not hesitate to change sides again if in future someone offers them something better. This was quite common during the time of Congress, and the people thought (wrongly, as now seen) that those days were behind us.

It is not only in Goa that the BJP, the "party with a difference", has joined the "mainstream" of Indian politics: They have succeeded halfway in West Bengal and are busy in Karnataka as well. How does it become a party with a difference? And will their new-found followers stop behaving like the followers of the parties which the BJP had sworn to erase from the political scene?

The new BJP lawmakers — poached from the Congress, the TMC and other regional parties, will bring with them their own cultural baggage. The former Congress MLAs from Goa were elected mainly from constituencies which had a majority or sizeable Christian vote. Those voters had a built-in prejudice against the BJP and they will not be amused with their elected representatives who have surrendered to the very party of which they were wary. The pattern of these crossovers will, therefore, be eventually defined by the unhappiness of the supporters at the selfish pursuits of such representatives.

Another development, which was to be expected, has been reported from Goa. Old, loyal BJP cadres are furious with their party leaders for admitting to the party fold a whole lot of politicians who had been the butt of their political attacks. The new entrants will hardly subscribe to the prescribed BJP ideology, and may prove to be a constant headache to those who single-mindedly pursue Hindutva.

This brand of politics which strives for a one-party, one-leader rule in the country is not much different from what we witnessed in Haryana during Mrs Gandhi's time. Over the years, a dimension has been added which is peculiar to India: It is the attempt by all the parties to protect their flock by ensuring for them a compulsory rest in five-star hotels in better climes.

I grieve for my country and its future if ethical and moral considerations are not brought to bear on political machinations. There may be machinations that are required in political life but they should have some connection to moral standards which will then be appreciated by people who think. Wholesale capitulation to Mammon is not what my friends Chawla and Abhilashi would have even dreamt of.

Incidentally, I still value my roots in Goa. My great-grandfather moved to Mumbai two hundred years ago but I still think of myself as a Goan, albeit a Mumbai Goan. And hence my anger with what has happened in my ancient land.

The writer, a retired IPS officer, was Mumbai police commissioner, DGP Gujarat and DGP Punjab

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CRICKET AND WAR

THIS REFERS TO 'Cricketers in Arms' (IE, July 24). The article lists cricketers killed in the Second World War but has not mentioned the fatalities in World War I (1914-1918). Twelve Test cricketers lost their lives in action, notably England left arm spinner Colin Blythe, Australian fast bowler Tibby Carter and South African spinners Gordon White and Reggie Schwarz. Hundreds of first-class cricketers, mainly from England, also died in combat. The late Major General Joginder Singh Rao (1938-94), played one season of first-class cricket for the Services in the Ranji Trophy in 1963-64 in which he claimed a hat-trick on debut and two in one innings in his next match, a unique record for a cricketer in his first season. He saw action in two wars against Pakistan and received the Vishist Seva Medal for "distinguished service of an exceptional order".

Gulu Ezielkel, Delhi

EFFETE MEDIATOR

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Sound and Fury' (IE, July 24). US president Donald Trump's claim that he can play the role of a mediator between India and Pakistan to solve the J&K dispute highlights his impulsiveness. The Middle East peace plan proposed in May 2019 fell flat with major US allies, Israel, Bahrain and the UAE, rejecting it. So much for the US ability to broker peace. The Kashmir dispute is more complex.

Pranay Kumar Shome, Kolkata

FORCED SECULARISM

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Secularism is no spectacle' (IE, July 11) and 'Living Well Together' (IE, July 23). Secularism means respecting each other's custom

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

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

THE WINNER RECEIVES SELECT EXPRESS PUBLICATIONS

and allowing fellow citizens to practice their religion freely. Jawaharlal Nehru never wore a skullcap and Maulana Azad never sported a tilak but both these leaders were unimpeachably secular. We do not need the forced secularism of the adoption of customs of others.

S ZA Hussain, New Delhi

WHY RTI MATTERS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'The right to know' (IE, July 24). The amendment of the RTI Act 2005, is aimed at protecting either the bureaucracy or the political system. The move to create an RTI ministry must be thwarted in the Upper House.

SS Paul, Nadia

Clinging to patriarchy

'Kabir Singh' reminds us that public spaces harbour violence against women



MITHILA BAGAI

FINALLY COMES a popular Bollywood movie that captures the cries and pains of the falling patriarchal structure of society. As Confucius once said, "A seed grows with no sound but a tree falls with huge noise. Destruction has noise but creation is quiet."

With women now demanding, and making, their rightful place in mainstream social life and coming into their own in sports, education and politics, patriarchy has been feeling the jitters. The rise of women has mostly been slow, and quiet, but the diminishing of male dominance has led to some amount of wailing. And, *Kabir Singh* is a perfect example of that. The utter impatience, obduracy, drugs, alcohol, cigarette smoking — not one but two at one go — over-possessiveness, insecurity, violence and self-destruction of the film's central character typify the desperation of men who want to hold on to their patriarchal privileges. Since women have become more confident and assertive about their own rights and space, cinema is a place

where men can fantasise about the benefits they used to once draw from patriarchy.

Director Sandeep Vanga Reddy showcases a loud and violent man who is paired with a silent woman; the execution of unequal authority thus becomes easy. Just wildly wondering, what if the movie had Kabir Singh and Mary Kom as the leading pair? But that would not have earned Rs 200 crore. Alas. But then, Bollywood scripts hardly have the finesse that can make a female-driven narrative enter the Rs 100-crore club.

Cinema's another significant function is to record, preserve and portray history. And, *Kabir Singh* did a good job in recording this story of male dominance in reel life. Perhaps later, the film can be used as a documentary to show our next generation, living in a much equal and fairer world, "hey, this is how stupid patriarchy was".

Vanga Reddy's choice of Shahid Kapoor as Kabir Singh was perfect. An actor who de-

livered stellar performances while essaying cynical characters in *Udta Punjab* and *Haider*, Kapoor was brilliant as the character who typifies male dominance and demands meekness from women. Yes, Kabir Singh is actually the villain of the movie. He is no hero. Combine high-octane music, loud mannerisms, high-action drama and the overdose of drugs and alcohol with a Bollywood star and a beautiful heroine, and voila, a villain becomes a hero in the eyes of the audience. Shahid Kapoor has himself admitted that this flawed character has become an adorable one for the audience.

Kabir Singh is unabashedly brute and rash. But dig a little deeper, the film actually shows that all is not well with women's empowerment — even within educational institutions that are considered safe for women. The increase in violence against women in the "modern and progressive" centres in a city, schools and colleges, is a telling reminder that the regressive forces in

society do not want women to build their own individuality and space.

Today, exploiters do not come in the form of village patriarchs who pass judgments about the lives of women. These neo-exploiters seem to be cultured, educated, English-speaking, with upmarket degrees — Kabir Singh is a surgeon — and drive luxurious cars and bikes. And a large number of women do forgive and forget. So, girls and parents, *Kabir Singh* is a warning — the film shines a spotlight on such neo-exploiters.

Cinema carries such an immense impact on the viewers that after the end of the movie someone from the audience remarked apprehensively, "Now everyone will be Kabir Singh". I smirked and retorted, "But not everybody will be Preeti Sikka".

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