

After NRC, what next?

Children born in India should be citizens

The final version of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in the state of Assam has now been released by the authorities. In the new NRC list, 1.9 million people have been left out, including the about 380,000 who were in the previous draft but did not submit claims for inclusion; 190,000 objections were also received against names in the first version. This means that the claims of about 2.2 million people who had been excluded from the earlier draft have been accepted, but over six per cent of Assam's population is now subject to disenfranchisement and loss of citizenship.

Altogether, however, the number of the excluded is considerably smaller than would have been expected by either the leaders of the erstwhile "Assam movement" or by many in the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, which is also in power in Guwahati.

Indeed, the latter is not pleased with the results, with senior leader Himanta Biswa Sarma telling the media that it will not solve the "foreigner" problem that has plagued the state for decades. The NRC process has eventually pleased nobody — neither the Assamese nationalists, disappointed at the low numbers, nor the BJP, angry that many Hindus

have reportedly also been excluded, or people elsewhere in the country such as Bengal who fear that the NRC is being used to justify religious and ethnic divisiveness.

The almost 2 million people not on the NRC are not immediately rendered stateless. They will be able to appeal against the NRC's judgments to special tribunals. However, these tribunals have been severely criticised in the past for violating the principles of natural justice. In the end, the regular court system may have to decide in many cases. The Supreme Court, which has overseen the NRC process for some years, will no doubt take an interest in ensuring that no citizen or resident of India has his or her rights violated. That said, it is far from certain that the appeals process will result in a substantial diminution in the number of people excluded from the NRC. Even if the proportion who did not submit claims for

inclusion — individuals who may well have migrated out of Assam to other parts of India — are ignored, there is still a vast number of people who might be rendered stateless.

The question then is what the next step will be. What rights that Indian citizens have will be denied them? Presumably, they will be disenfranchised. Will they also be excluded from government welfare schemes? Will their children also be so excluded, and how will that exclusion be carried out on the ground? Will their physical freedom be curtailed? There are indeed reports about detention camps being built but surely it is impossible to put between one and two million people into permanent camps. That would be both administratively infeasible and morally repugnant. "Repatriation" to Bangladesh or Nepal is also impossible. Dhaka has consistently refused to take such individuals in — and, in any case, the Indian external affairs

minister has officially stated during a visit to Dhaka that the NRC is India's "internal matter".

The task therefore is to find a way out of this impossible situation. Individuals who cannot be deported or interned will have to be given some appropriate legal status within India. Work permits are a possible option, with rights to access certain government programmes (especially if exclusion would be expensive and inefficient). Nor can a permanently excluded class be created. Clearly, there needs to be a path to citizenship at least for the children of those excluded from the NRC. Given the cut-off date of 1971 for the NRC process, there are children excluded whose parents and grandparents might both have been born in India. Eventually, the children born in India will have to be accepted as full citizens, and both process and law must be amended to reflect this necessary conclusion.

Scaling up municipal bond issuances

A well-developed municipal bond market is a marker of an efficient, transparent and accountable civic services ecosystem, something that India's citizens truly deserve



ANAND MADHAVAN

Despite being one of India's longest-running development finance pilots, India's municipal bond (muni-bond) market has remained shallow. Since the early muni-bond issuances in the mid-1990s, there were over 20 such issuances (including a few pooled bond issuances) that collectively raised nearly ₹1,500 crore, modest relative to India's burgeoning urban investment needs. Even cities that did tap capital markets mostly did so in the form of one-off "testing-the-water" issuances rather than as a resource mobilisation stream to address financing gaps sustainably.

Given this backdrop, the spurt in muni-bond issuance in recent years — over ₹1,400 crore by seven cities since 2015 — is a green shoot that needs to be nurtured a bit differently, to secure dramatically better outcomes in future, compared to what we have to show from the past. Two factors have specifically helped.

First, there has been a concerted policy push by the government of India. Support to credit ratings of cities and interest subsidy incentives to cities issuing muni-bonds have helped. In December 2016, no less than the prime minister emphasised that at least ten cities should access the capital markets within a year's time, reinforcing the strong policy commitment.

Second, there have been positive moves from regulators. In 2015, the Securities Exchange Board of India (Sebi) released its "Issue and Listing of Debt Securities by Municipalities" regulations to provide specific guidance for municipal bodies seeking to tap the capital markets. Earlier this year, foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) have been allowed to invest in muni-bonds. Recent press reports suggest further measures in the offing, including removing the distinction between revenue and general obligation bonds for public issuances, changes to limits on private placements, allowing entities other than city governments (including SPVs and para-statal agencies) to issue muni-bonds, and so on.

Notwithstanding these positives, very few Indian cities still consistently meet creditworthiness thresholds that

hard-nosed capital market investors look for. Of the 94 cities assigned a credit rating until December 2017, only 16 cities secured ratings above A. Three constraints underpin the credit weakness of city governments.

First, barring exceptions, revenue reforms in Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) and civic agencies have been frustratingly slow to come by. Own source revenues are rarely buoyant. Few states have set up effective State Finance Commissions and even where these have been present, their recommendations rarely get implemented in letter and spirit.

Second, the relatively higher flow of government grants in recent years to ULBs has not been backed by commensurate institutional capacity to build infrastructure in a timely manner and to effectively deliver services. Even as cities face financial constraints to borrow to plug larger infrastructure gaps, they paradoxically end up not even utilising funds made available to them as grants.

Third, despite initiatives on accrual accounting for over two decades, many cities have relapsed into cash-based accounting and information disclosures remains poor. Delays in audits of accounts, and poor harmonisation of accounting practices further compound information gaps, effective analysis and targeted problem-solving.

Given that the universe of "near-to-capital market access" cities is a small consideration set, it may be worthwhile for the government of India to direct a transformation effort directed at a few relatively capable cities:

1. Akin to countries identifying better sporting talent and taking it through a rigorous multi-year training effort for Olympic success, the central government should direct its efforts on a select shortlist of about 30 relatively more capable cities that meet minimum fiscal fitness thresholds. City-level credit ratings undertaken recently could be a useful criterion for short-listing cities. With AA being a threshold

level of ratings to successfully tap capital markets in India, cities selected should ideally have a rating of A-and-above and definitely not below BBB.

2. Short-listed cities, with the support of the central government and the respective state governments, should be extended a programmatic multi-year support for structural reforms to better their credit standing, including: (i) Fostering stable and buoyant revenues through tax reforms, rationalisation of user charges and a predictable devolution regime; (ii) shifting from static annual budgets to rolling multi-year investment plans; (iii) strengthening institutional capacity, including dedicated teams/cells for project preparation and debt management; and (iv) implementing robust financial management, accounting and information disclosure standards.

3. Enlisting the support of state governments will be crucial. Apart from states having the decision-making power to operationalise these reforms, they will be critical to replicating this transformation effort in other cities as early benefits from this programme creates peer pressure for other cities to join the bandwagon.

When 20 ULBs are transformed into bankable entities equipped to raise and service a modest ₹500 crore of debt annually, the result is a ₹10,000-crore muni-bond market. Even if five state governments raise an additional ₹2000 crore each through pooled financing entities, a ₹20,000 crore annual muni-bond market can possibly open up in a five-to-eight-year timeframe. The multiplier effect at this scale can be immensely transformational and will drive faster and wider replication.

Many urban infrastructure projects have sizeable viability gaps and require complementary grant financing and financing from other sources, such as private investment, bank loans, non-profits, and development financing institutions. Muni-bonds are thus just one element of financing. However, what sets it apart is that a scaled-up muni-bond market is a sure shot marker of a relatively more efficient, transparent and accountable civic services ecosystem, something that India's citizens truly deserve.

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Why the aluminium industry is having a hard time

SUSHIL KUMAR ROONGTA

Aluminium is a strategic metal for the Indian economy. The aluminium industry, in keeping with the anticipation of rapidly growing demand, has invested more than ₹1.2 trillion to build its production capacity. Currently, the sector is struggling to stay afloat due to an unprecedented spike in power costs.

The aluminium sector is one of the more power-intensive industries, where power accounts for 40 per cent of the production cost. The power cost itself has increased by about \$280 per tonne, triggering a 16 per cent increase in production cost in the last three to four years.

Even the NITI Aayog, the policy think tank of the government, has taken cognisance of the surging power cost. It has conceded in a report that the domestic aluminium sector is struggling due to increasing production cost, which is the highest among all the large aluminium making countries in the world. The cost of power, it agrees, is a key responsible component.

It is worth noting that the burden of renewable purchase obligation (RPO) alone has driven the production cost up by about \$50-60 per tonne, and the continuing shortage of renewable energy certificates (REC) in the market is expected to further aggravate conditions by another \$40-50 per tonne. Along with other tariffs like coal cess and electricity duty, the cumulative cost of production has crossed \$100 per tonne.

Some of the manufacturing and energy-intensive industries are owners of captive power capacities. These captive capacities have been set up keeping in mind the exact requirement of power in these industries. With the mandate of purchasing a portion of the power from renewable sources, these industries are left with idle capacities that currently amount to 30,000 Mw. Moreover, procuring renewable power from other generators entails high cross-subsidy charges. For the aluminium sector, which cannot pass on the additional cost, these factors put them at the risk of becoming unviable.

In addition to these, the ministry of power's recent decision to increase the RPO target to 21 per cent by 2022 and market dynamics triggering a spike in REC prices, is

putting added pressure on the aluminium sector. Surprisingly, while the cost of renewable generation has come down in recent years, the industry is paying a high price to purchase RECs in the skewed market, fraught with faulty regulatory mechanisms.

This condition is not unique to the aluminium sector. It has afflicted almost all industries that are energy-intensive in nature. As a consequence, various industry associations have raised the issue of exorbitant power costs with the government, and have emphasised that the survival of these sectors is at stake.

However, the biggest possible dilemma in this matter is the acute shortage of installed renewable capacity in the system. As per the government mandate, the 225,000 Mw of thermal capacity that exists in the economy requires 120,000 Mw of renewable energy for offset. Yet there is only 80,000 Mw of total installed renewable capacity, which leaves about a deficit of 40,000 Mw. Similarly, the 30,000 Mw of industrial power consumption is obligated to purchase 15,000 Mw of renewable power, which too is not available in the market.

If one takes note of the gravity of the situation, it will become clear that there is an urgent need for the government to intervene and provide specific relief to the power-intensive industries, especially those where renewable energy is not a feasible option.

The industry acknowledges that the recent relief provided by the government to captive power plant-based industries (by pegging renewable obligations to the date of commissioning) is a step in the right direction. They now expect the government to see this through with a slew of policies that will create a facilitative environment for the sector. Specifically, for the aluminium industry, the government needs to take immediate steps to provide a reprieve from multiple carbon taxation to help them remain globally competitive. It needs to be borne in mind that in future, Indian aluminium's role in nation-building will be paramount, and a self-sufficient aluminium industry will propel India to a global leadership position.

The writer is former Chairman of Steel Authority of India Ltd

▶ OTHER VIEWS

Govt does well to relax rules for foreign investment

But reforms that address structural issues hurting the economy are needed

On Wednesday, the NDA government announced a slew of measures aimed at facilitating greater foreign investment in the country. Under the new rules, it has provided for a relaxation of the contentious sourcing norms which have been a major deterrent for foreign investment in single-brand retail. Further, the government has allowed 100 per cent FDI in contract manufacturing and in coal mining and related activities such as washeries, handling and separation. With the trade war between the US and China showing no signs of resolving, foreign companies are increasingly reassessing their operations. So far, India has not been able to take advantage of this ongoing relocation of production facilities out of China. But, these changes in the rules should gradually facilitate foreign firms setting up manufacturing bases in India, providing a boost to both employment and exports.

Allowing 100 per cent FDI in contract manufacturing through the automatic route will also attract global players looking to set up alternate manufacturing hubs — diversifying away from China. Adding exports to the local sourcing norms is also likely to encourage the building of larger production facilities, providing a much-needed fillip to the country's sub-



dued exports. These initiatives are an attempt to create a manufacturing ecosystem, establishing value chains with both upstream and downstream linkages. But they need to be accompanied by reforms, especially factor market reforms, that address the structural issues plaguing the economy. The continuing overvaluation of the rupee also needs to be attended to.

The Indian Express, August 30

J&K case challenging for SC

It must not be swayed by popular mood

The Supreme Court's decision to form a five-member Constitution Bench to examine the validity of the abrogation of the special status given to Jammu and Kashmir puts an end to apprehensions that its response to the Centre's legal measures since August 5 will only be one of quiet acquiescence. The petitions before the court cite many grounds for challenging the President's August 5 Order, by which the Order of 1954, which set out the constitutional provisions applicable to J&K, was superseded. A substantial question is on the validity of the substitution of the concurrence of the Governor for that of the government while under President's Rule; in effect,

the Centre is taking its own consent to alter the status of the State. It does appear that there is widespread popular support for the government's decision to declare Article 370 inoperative and to divide the State into two Union Territories. Yet, the court is duty-bound to examine the legality of the measures taken by the President and Parliament on August 5 and 6. The challenge before the court is to give a reasoned verdict on these questions of constitutional importance, with far-reaching implications for democracy and federalism, without being swayed by the popular mood in J&K or the rest of India.

The Hindu, August 30

Possessing literature no crime

Scanner now on readers, not writers

On Wednesday, during the bail hearing of Vernon Gonsalves and other activists, the Bombay High Court asked Mr Gonsalves to explain why he had "objectionable material" in his house. Initial reports indicated that Justice Sarang Kotwal was referring to Mr Gonsalves' copy of Leo Tolstoy's literary masterpiece *War and Peace* — a classic which captures Russia during Napoleonic wars, and a CD titled *Rajya Daman Virodhi* (in protest against State oppression). On Thursday, subsequent reports suggested that the judge was referring to *War and Peace in Junglemahal*. Mr Gonsalves was arrested along with other activists by Pune Police last year, on the grounds that speeches by them at Elgar

Parishad, a commemorative Dalit conclave, on December 31, 2017, led to subsequent violence in and around Bhima-Koregaon. The "damning" evidence that the police have used to make the case against Mr Gonsalves, are books, CDs and other reading material found in his house. From writers who fear book bans, the scanner is now on readers, with the goal of ascertaining the degree of their patriotism. Citizens in a democracy rely on the judiciary to uphold and protect their basic rights. The State cannot, and must not, decide what citizens read, and possessing literature is in no way a crime.

Hindustan Times, August 30

Opinion

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 2019

Greta Thunberg and the lessons of the sea

A trans-Atlantic crossing by boat can teach us about confronting the global warming crisis

ANDREW C REVKIN

GRETA THUNBERG, THE 16-year-old Swedish climate activist, represents many things to many factions in the fight to slow human-driven global warming.

Some see her as a manipulated totem. Others, as a hero. I'm among those who see great value in Thunberg's sharp prod to the status quo, though I see the greatest value in climate strikes pressing for global action if they are coupled with local efforts for clean-energy progress. (Why not, for instance, call attention to the mostly-fossil-fueled boiler rooms heating and cooling schools, homes and workplaces.)

Perhaps it's worth focusing on some lessons that might be learned from her choice of transportation. Thunberg and her father arrived in Manhattan on Wednesday after a 15-day crossing of the Atlantic from Britain as passengers on a spartan, high-tech multi-million-dollar ocean-racing yacht. She's here to help lead climate strikes on Sept 20 and 27 demanding an end to the use of fossil fuels and speak in between at the United Nations Climate Action Summit and other events. Her decision to make the trip under sail has been both hailed for highlighting low-emissions lifestyle choices and derided as showmanship. Indeed, the aviation emissions of an army of journalists flying to cover her arrival and the summit eclipsed any savings her crossing achieved.

But there are other lessons that can be learned in an ocean crossing like hers. In 1978, when I was 22, six years older than Greta is now, I serendipitously had the chance to sign on as a crew member on a 55-foot-long, partially home-built sailboat, the *Wanderlust*, that was circumnavigating the planet. A "crew wanted" sign on a wharf along the harbor in Auckland, New Zealand, led me to the vessel, which hailed from Sacramento and consisted of an unusual ferrocement hull (cement smeared on a steel frame) and an equally odd assortment of fittings. The mast was a surplus highway light pole.

I left the boat 17 months, 15,000 miles, 15 countries and several close calls later, in what was then Yugoslavia. The intervening experiences shifted my career ambition from marine biology to environmental journalism. Here's a bit of what I learned, lessons that seem applicable to efforts to build wider momentum behind cutting greenhouse gas emissions and reducing climate risks.



Sixteen-year-old Swedish activist Greta Thunberg sails on the Malizia II racing yacht in New York Harbor as she nears the completion of her trans-Atlantic crossing to attend the UN summit on climate change in New York

Tight quarters need compromise

Our first long crossing, from Auckland to Sydney, Australia, was the stormiest. We spent eight out of 11 days on the Tasman Sea pounding into chaotic gale-driven seas. Without GPS or an autopilot, we had taken on extra crew members to handle the night watches. In cramped conditions day after day, everyone aboard felt unfairly overtaxed. But you learn to smooth rough edges, tamp hard feelings and not hoard the Hershey bars. This gets to my first point. In hashing out climate policy, accommodation is vital among those who have the same goal but differ on how to reach it. I'm thinking here, for instance, of clean energy advocates who disagree about the role of nuclear power in reducing emissions. It's vital to acknowledge the inevitability, even desirability, of having a diversity of climate solutions.

Panic doesn't help

When a rogue wave blew in a porthole crossing the Tasman, a piston-like column of green water blasted in every few seconds. A similar porthole incident happened more than a year later in the Red Sea. Each time, the skipper, who had spent years as a handyman in Santa Cruz, California, had an astonishing ability to assess the situation, identify a fix and hand out orders. When his calm demeanour caught my attention, I stopped flailing around and focused on my task.

Many pressing for a Green New Deal of any sort have tried changing the global warming hashtag from #climatechange to #climateemergency. Whatever you call this moment, it took more than a century for the world to become dependent on fossil fuels and, as the Paris Agreement on climate change recognised and Axios just reported, it will take decades to move the global economy to clean energy and cut or collect tens of billions of tons of annual emissions of carbon dioxide. Urgency has to be blended with patience.

Vastness has limits

At sea, I experienced the full sense of the size and depth of the oceans when we were becalmed for several days halfway across the western Indian Ocean. To cool off, wash and pass the time we went swimming — in water 14,300 feet deep. But vastness has limits. Long before today's "planet or plastic" campaigns, we encountered jarring evidence of the activities of man even on isolated island beaches that rarely saw a footprint. Anchoring off a remote beach on Mount Adolphus Island in the Torres Strait between Australia's Cape York and Papua New Guinea, we collected a dizzying array of plastic flotsam.

With the atmosphere, humans could be perceived as a minuscule influence, having raised levels of heat-trapping carbon dioxide from only 280 to 410 parts per million since the industrial revolution. But that increase has had an outsized influence on the global thermostat. It's

been three million years since the planet last hit that concentration and we're on the path toward doubling preindustrial carbon dioxide within decades.

Vastness can deceive

On a fateful night heading through the Gulf of Patras in Greece toward the Adriatic, I was alone at the wheel, with everyone else asleep below, as a violent gale built behind us. I was unsure whether to keep the lighted buoy ahead to port or starboard. I guessed wrong and we ended up aground on a sandbar, pounded by ferocious waves. We were towed to safety, spent a month repairing the cracked cement hull, nervously relaunched and sailed on. The cracks did not re-form. But I was slowly realising that I needed to get home to build a career. Decades later, those powerful memories and lessons from life at sea still shape my life and how I view the path ahead. Greta Thunberg's journey so far has had a rocket-like trajectory. Her voice and those of other young climate activists deserve amplification. They represent generations who will inherit the climate we're shaping today.

But the task of building a sustainable relationship with the climate requires all of us to push off from comfortable shores, respect (if not embrace) the diversity of views of fellow passengers, share our vessel's finite resources and — most important — avoid panic and get down to work.

—NYT



INSIDE TRACK

COOMI KAPOOR

Shah's new role

Amit Shah's responsibilities are increasing. Apart from being home minister, he is also a member of all eight cabinet committees. In addition, he spends around two-and-a-half hours a day handling party affairs. Although party working president J P Nadda is to eventually replace Shah, until now Shah continues to call the shots. Recently, Shah has taken on yet another onerous duty, a fact which has escaped the attention of most. As home minister, he is now in charge of the police force in Jammu and Kashmir. The state has been divided into two union territories and hence law and order comes under the purview of the home ministry in Delhi, as in the case of other UTs such as Delhi and Puducherry.

Egalitarian funeral

At Arun Jaitley's funeral at Delhi's Nigambodh Ghat, the VVIPs, whether chief ministers or central ministers, did not try to pull rank but mingled freely with other mourners. Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman stood throughout the ceremony refusing to take the seat offered to her, as did Smriti Irani. Chief ministers such as Devendra Fadnis, Manohar Lal Khattar, Nitish Kumar and Vijay Rupani came without any escorts and were left to fend for themselves.

A thunderstorm broke out towards the end of the ceremony after the funeral pyre was lit. Amit Shah set an example by refusing to budge from his seat even though he was completely drenched. Rajnath Singh sitting next to him followed suit. Even when the chief ministers and central ministers were leaving the venue there were few umbrellas to hand around. Khattar could be seen manfully holding up his pajamas and trying to wade through the water, while Sushil Modi sat patiently in a spot with overhead cover waiting for the rains to subside. The egalitarianism of Modi's ministers was commendable, although at the same time one could not help wondering whether the lack of any real security was advisable in such sensitive times. Many read the rain shower, which was curiously confined only to the funeral ground and did not douse the flames of the covered pyre, as a good omen.

Grace under fire

Behind every great man there is usually an inspiring wife. Sangeeta Jaitley, known universally as Dolly, was Arun Jaitley's anchor who conducted herself with amazing dignity and grace during his long bout with illness. Despite the trials and tribulations she faced, she

kept a composed front and was even the caring hostess to the stream of visitors who came calling at her house enquiring about her husband's health. Once asked how she coped, she replied simply, "What choice do I have?" In fact, Dolly was trained to take over the responsibilities of running a politician's household early in life. At a young age she served as political hostess for her father Girdhari Lal Dogra, a freedom fighter and an eminent Congress leader who was finance minister of J&K for 26 years.

Missing in action

Though BJP general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya is in charge of the BJP's parliamentary office, it was noticeable that he was missing through much of Parliament's budget session, even though he has his own room next to the BJP's parliamentary office. The buzz in the BJP is that Vijayvargiya has retreated into a shell ever since the Prime Minister, at a parliamentary party meeting in which Vijayvargiya was present, lashed out at the behaviour of his son Akash, who had hit a civic official in Indore with a cricket bat. Modi said pointedly that anyone indulging in such antics should be taken to task no matter whose son he was.

New position?

Expenditure secretary G C Murmu, a Gujarat-cadre IAS officer, is due to retire this November. A favourite of both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and home minister Amit Shah, Murmu is expected to be appointed to the Central Vigilance Commission, the powerful statutory apex body which monitors central government corruption.

Nipped in bud

The nascent rebellion in the BJP's Karnataka unit was nipped in the bud by Amit Shah and the party general secretary (organisation), B L Santosh. Shah made it clear to the five ministers who publicly displayed their unhappiness for not being adequately rewarded with a deputy chief minister's position, that they could be thrown out of the party. Santosh warned that the party was prepared for fresh elections. Anger in the Karnataka BJP is intense over the appointment of Laxman Savadi as a deputy CM. Savadi is not even an MLA and gained notoriety after once being photographed watching porn in the assembly. Since Savadi is a Lingayat, the party seems to feel he can be groomed for an important role when CM B S Yediyurappa retires. Also Savadi is from Belgium where the BJP wants to cut to size two powerful political families.

The special one

With regards to Ben Stokes, the two rivals—Boris Johnson and Jeremy Hunt—are on the same page

RINGSIDE VIEW

Shamik Chakrabarty



BEN STOKES IS the glue that binds Britain at the time of Brexit.

Boris Johnson and Jeremy Hunt are Tory colleagues, who became leadership rivals over how Britain should leave the European Union. Johnson sticks to the October 31 deadline, "deal or no deal". Hunt called it a "fake deadline". Johnson went on to become the Prime Minister, probably much to Hunt's chagrin, after Theresa May stepped down as the leader of the Conservative Party. With regards to Stokes, however, the two rivals are on the same page. Both want the Christchurch-born England allrounder to be Knighted.

Stokes became England's national hero after he anchored his team and helped them win an epic World Cup final on boundary count-back. It was his redemption. Three years ago, in the World T20 final against West Indies at Eden Gardens, he couldn't defend 19 runs in

the final over, as Carlos Brathwaite gazumped England's party with four sixes on the spin. Stokes sat on his haunches and looked distraught.

The affray charge following a fight near a Bristol nightclub in September 2017 was the lowest point of his career. He went through an 11-month ordeal, missed an Ashes series, before being found not guilty. Stokes had a duty to make up for lost time. The Headingley Test during the ongoing Ashes series saw his entry into cricketing folklore.

The *Guardian* called it 'the miracle at Headingley'. His 135 not out in the second innings was indeed once-in-a-lifetime innings. Chasing 259 for victory, England slumped to 286 for nine. Then, the magic began. Stokes added 76 runs for the last wicket with Jack Leach to make the improbable happen. England stayed alive in the series. He enjoyed the rub of the green. Fortune favoured the brave.

Thirty-eight years ago, Headingley had witnessed the batting sorcery of Ian Botham. In 1981 also, England were about to go two down in the Ashes. And staring at an innings defeat, with his team reeling on 135 for seven, the great man scored a magical 149 off 148 balls,



hitting 27 fours. Botham's innings, however, didn't win the game for England, for Australia still needed only 130 runs in the fourth innings to wrap up the Test. Bob Willis's eight for 43 knocked them over.

Little wonder then that Botham's captain in that game, Mike Brearley, gave Stokes's performance a higher rating. "It is hard to believe Stokes' could ever have been, or even ever will be, surpassed," Brearley wrote on *The Times*. The former England captain painted a picture. "Vivid though the images from the distant past are, mental pictures of rampaging bowling and batting by all three iconic all-rounders, it is difficult now to remove from the front of my mind the shock, the exhilaration, of the recent: the sheer improbability of Stokes's performance at Headingley last week."

Stokes evoked the memories of Botham. He, in fact, surpassed it. "It changed my life overnight. I think Ben's life will be the same. He will have no private life. He has to get used to that and so do the family. He is public property but it is a great place to be in for the long term. It will set him up for life. He will reap the rewards which he richly deserves and he is now a world, box-office attraction," the great allrounder told *Telegraph Sport*.

Even Geoffrey Boycott called it "the best I've seen in over 50 years". Bottom line is that English sport got a true special one, not a self-styled moniker. But it would be more logical to savour Stokes's

effort rather than going into comparisons. VVS Laxman's 281 against Australia at Eden Gardens and Brian Lara's 153 not out in West Indies' one wicket win over Australia in 1999 at Kensington Oval, too, will have many backers.

"The next Botham" tag weighed heavy on far too many England all-rounders. The Headingley heroic did a great favour to Stokes. He has now completely emerged from Botham's shadow. Also, his innings came on the heels of the World Cup final and hopefully it has done enough to take cricket back to the English living rooms.

Stokes, meanwhile, has set his sights on regaining the Ashes. "I will only take real satisfaction from the innings if we win back the Ashes. It was an amazing week in Headingley and something that will be very hard to forget, but we still have a long way to go. Momentum is huge in sport and I'm 100% sure when Stuart Broad got out, Australia would have thought they would have the Ashes by the end of the day, so we go into the next match with a lot of confidence," he told *Sky Sports News*.

After three matches, the series is tied at 1-1. The momentum is now with the hosts and if they go on and win the Ashes, Prime Minister Johnson, Hunt and the Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn will all approve an open top bus parade in unison. On a lighter note, the Queen might defer the prorogation of the parliament to allow the MPs hail the triumph.

