

FACT CHECK, GROUND REALITY

SIMPLY PUT

ARTICLE 35, UN CHARTER: HOW INDIA TOOK UP PAK INVASION OF J&K

Being Greta Thunberg

At 16, the schoolgirl, who has berated world leaders at UN climate conference, is the most recognised face of climate activism. What are the events leading to her cult following? Can her campaign have an impact?

AMITABH SINHA
 PUNE, SEPTEMBER 24

FOR GRETA Thunberg, 16, it has taken just one year to traverse the distance from being a regular ninth-standard student in Stockholm to becoming the most recognised face of climate change activism who can give world leaders a dressing-down at a United Nations summit. Along the way to her widely publicised speech at the UN climate conference on Monday, she has found a cult following, mingled with heads of states, given a TED talk, sailed across the Atlantic to spread climate awareness, been interviewed by countless media organisations, and has a detailed Wikipedia page. Earlier this year, she has also been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

The background

Born to an actor father and a singer mother, Thunberg, then 15, shot to fame in August last year, when she sat against the outer wall of the main building of Swedish Parliament. She carried a sign that read "School strike for the climate" in Swedish. She herself had decided to skip school to demand from her country's lawmakers more concrete and urgent action on climate change. For a child her age in Sweden, attending school is compulsory. She was, in effect, breaking the law by not attending.

By her own account, Thunberg first heard of the climate change problem when she was eight years old, and wondered why no one was doing anything about it, or why fossil fuels were not being made illegal. Then in May 2018, she won an essay competition on climate change organised by a Swedish newspaper. Her essay was published, after which a few climate activists contacted her. One of them suggested to her the idea of a school strike.

"I like the idea of a school strike. So I developed that idea and tried to get the other young people to join me, but no one was really interested. So I went on planning the school strike all by myself," she wrote in a Facebook post in February this year.

Her strike and protest outside Swedish



HOW DARE YOU!

My message is that we'll be watching you. This is all wrong. I shouldn't be up here. I should be back in school on the other side of the ocean. Yet you all come to us young people for hope. How dare you!

You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words... We are in the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you!

...Young people are starting to understand your betrayal... If you choose to fail us, I say: We will never forgive you. Right here, right now is where we draw the line... Change is coming, whether you like it or not."

— GRETA THUNBERG, 16

Parliament brought her instant fame, and a following on the Internet. She became a favourite of the well-networked climate change NGOs, and became the centre of massive campaigns in the run-up to last year's climate change conference in Poland, where she was given the opportunity to address one of the plenaries.

Her message

Thunberg is not saying anything that the world doesn't know of, or has not been said earlier. In fact, she sounds rhetorical in her well-choreographed speeches. But her young age, and the fact that she represents the generation that is likely to experience the worst impacts of climate change, is seen as bringing a moral force to the argument. She presents a stern face, and talks with the seriousness of someone who is helplessly wit-

nessing her future getting ruined.

"If the emissions have to stop, then we must stop the emissions. To me, that is black or white. There are no grey areas when it comes to survival," she said in her TED talk.

In her February Facebook post, she explains why. "When I say that the climate crisis is a black and white issue, (or) we need to stop the emissions of greenhouse gases, and (that) I want you to panic. I only say because it's true. Yes, the climate crisis is the most complex issue that we have ever faced, and it's going to take everything from our part to stop it. But the solution is black and white. We need to stop the emissions of greenhouse gases".

The impact

With her massive following, and support from NGOs and the scientific community, Thunberg has managed to create awareness

about the issue, especially among the young. Her school strike campaign is now held across the world, with students skipping schools for a few days in protest against inaction on climate.

"Why should I be studying for a future that soon would be no more, when no one is doing anything whatsoever to save that future. And what is the point of learning facts in the school system when the most important facts given by the finest science of the same school system clearly means nothing for our politicians and society," she said in her TED talk.

However, it is debatable whether her campaign has brought any change in policy, or forced any country to announce additional climate action. International decision-making is governed by realpolitik and not by moral force or calls to conscience.

Warning signs: warmest ever, emission highs

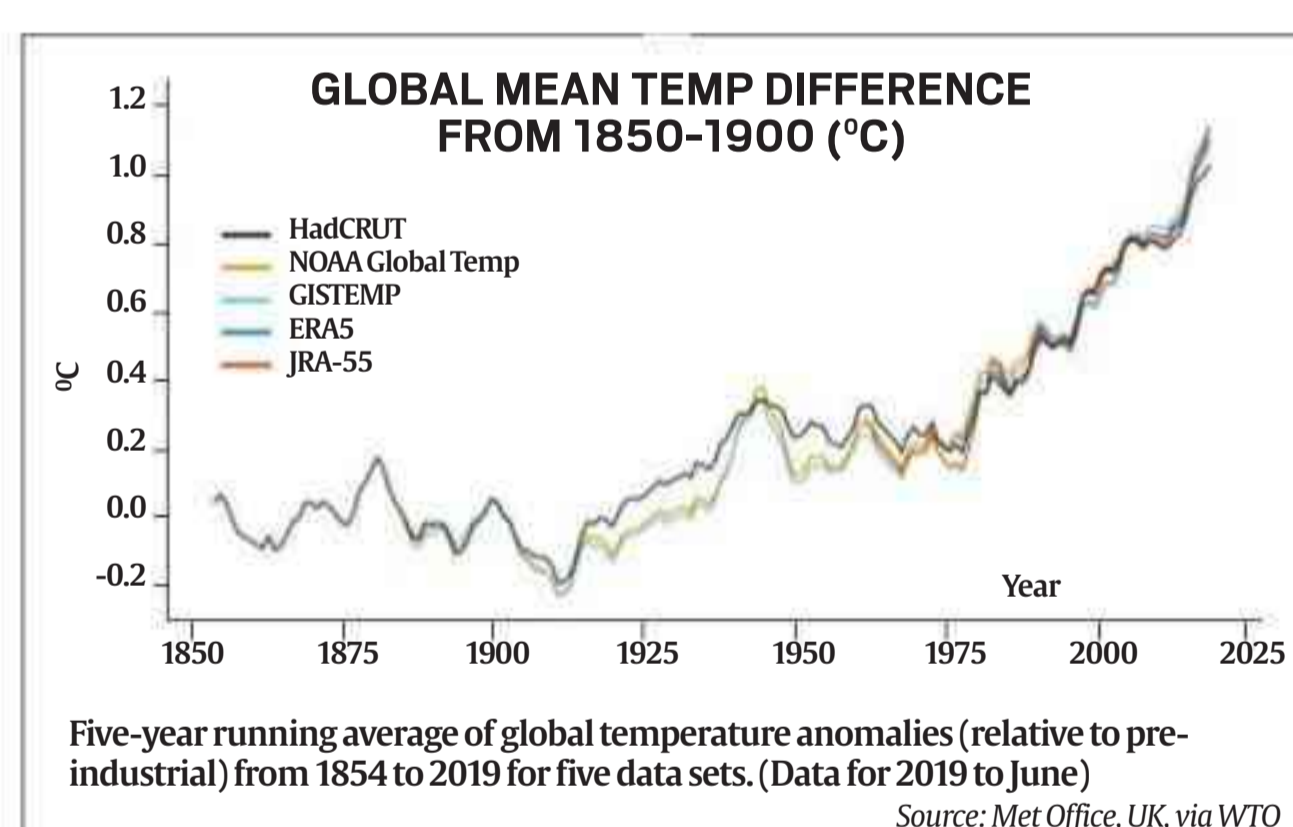
SOWMIYA ASHOK
 BEIJING, SEPTEMBER 24

THE AVERAGE global temperature for 2015-2019 is on track to be the warmest of any equivalent period on record, and July 2019 was the hottest month on record globally, a report released ahead of the UN Climate Action Summit 2019 in New York has found. The warmest five-year trend has especially affected large areas of the United States, including Alaska, eastern parts of South America, most of Europe and the Middle East, northern Eurasia, Australia and areas of Africa south of the Sahara.

The report 'United in Science' is a synthesis prepared by the Science Advisory Group of the summit. It has also found that greenhouse gases have reached "new highs", heatwaves were the "deadliest" meteorological hazard in this period, and tropical cyclones led to the largest economic losses. Among its key findings:

GLOBAL TEMPERATURE: The average global temperature for 2015-19 is currently estimated to be 1.1°C above pre-industrial (1850-1900) times, the report said. Widespread and long-lasting heatwaves, record-breaking fires and other devastating events such as tropical cyclones, floods and drought have had major impacts on socio-economic development and the environment.

GREENHOUSE GASES: Levels of carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide have



reached new highs. The last time Earth's atmosphere contained 400 parts per million carbon dioxide was about 3-5 million years ago. In 2018, the report said, global carbon dioxide concentration was 407.8 parts per million (ppm), 2.2 ppm higher than 2017. Preliminary data from a subset of monitoring sites for 2019 indicate that carbon dioxide concentrations are on track to reach or even exceed 410 ppm by the end of 2019.

In 2017, globally averaged atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide were 405.6 ppm, methane at 1859 parts per billion (ppb)

and nitrous oxide at 329.9 ppb. These values constitute, respectively, 146%, 257% and 122% of pre-industrial levels (pre-1750). The growth rate of carbon dioxide averaged over three consecutive decades (1985-1995, 1995-2005 and 2005-2015) increased from 1.42 ppm/yr to 1.86 ppm/yr and to 2.06 ppm/yr.

However, the report notes that emissions from the US and the European Union have declined over the past decade, while growth in China's emissions have slowed significantly compared to the 2000s. Indian emissions are the fourth highest and are "growing

strongly at annual rates in excess of 5%, albeit starting from a much lower base of per capita emissions."

HEATWAVES: The report notes that heatwaves affected all continents and set many new national temperature records. It also mentions the heatwave that struck the subcontinent in mid-2015 where 2,248 deaths were reported in India, and 1,229 in Pakistan. "The 2019 summer saw unprecedented wildfires in the Arctic region with 50 megatons of carbon dioxide emitted into the atmosphere in June alone," the report says.

PRECIPITATION: The effects of climate change were also seen on precipitation levels in the 2015-2019 period when compared to the five years preceding that. The average precipitation totals were higher in the latter period than in the former in large regions in southern South and North America, eastern Europe and most of Asia. "In contrast, less precipitation fell in large parts of Europe, south-west and southern Africa, northern North America and a large part of South America, the Indian Monsoon region, and northern and western Australia," the report states.

SEAICE: Arctic summer sea-ice extent has declined at a rate of approximately 12% per decade during 1979-2018, the report said. The four lowest values for winter sea-ice extent occurred between 2015 and 2019. Overall, the amount of ice lost annually from the Antarctic ice sheet increased at least six-fold between 1979 and 2017. Glacier mass loss for 2015-2019 is the highest for any five-year period on record.

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
 NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 24

ELEVEN JUDGES of the highest court in the United Kingdom have delivered an extraordinary unanimous judgment, striking down as unlawful a recommendation by Prime Minister Boris Johnson to Queen Elizabeth to suspend Parliament for five weeks ahead of Britain's scheduled October 31 exit from the European Union.

The Justices, sitting on the largest permissible Bench of the 12-judge Supreme Court, gave presiding officers of both Houses of Parliament the freedom to reconvene the Houses immediately.

The court ruled on "whether the advice given by the Prime Minister to Her Majesty the Queen on 27 or 28 August, that Parliament should be prorogued from a date between 9 and 12 September until 14 October, was lawful and the legal consequences if it was not".

It said the PM's action was unlawful and the prorogation of Parliament was "void and of no effect"; it also underlined that the question was "justiciable", clarifying an important aspect of the rules of engagement among the Legislature, Executive, and Judiciary in Britain's unwritten Constitution.

Here are five takeaways from Tuesday's historic verdict.

Courts do have the authority to intervene in 'political' matters

The issue was essentially whether Johnson had the right to prorogue Parliament, and whether Britain's courts had the power to stop him. The government argued that the courts had no business jumping in because the decision to prorogue Parliament lay "in the territory of political judgment, not legal standards".

But the court said it was "firmly of the opinion" that the question of the "lawfulness of the Prime Minister's advice to Her Majesty is justiciable". Courts "have exercised a su-

pervisory jurisdiction over the lawfulness of acts of the Government for centuries", the official summary of the judgment said.

In their full judgment, the Justices reasoned: "Although the United Kingdom does not have a single document entitled 'The Constitution', it nevertheless possesses a Constitution, (which) ...includes numerous principles of law, which are enforceable by the courts in the same way as other legal principles... It is (the courts') particular responsibility to determine the legal limits of the powers conferred on each branch of government, and to decide whether any exercise of power has transgressed those limits. The courts cannot shirk that responsibility merely on the ground that the question raised is political in tone or context."

The prorogation of Parliament was not business as usual

The court asked, according to the summary judgment, whether the prorogation had "the effect of frustrating or preventing

the ability of Parliament to carry out its constitutional functions without reasonable justification". It ruled that "this was not a normal prorogation".

The "prolonged suspension of parliamentary democracy took place in quite exceptional circumstances: the fundamental change which was due to take place in the Constitution of the United Kingdom on 31 October", the summary judgment said. "Parliament... has a right to a voice in how that change comes about. The effect upon the fundamentals of our democracy was extreme."

PM's advice to the Queen to suspend House was unlawful

The court underlined that "the Government exists because it has the confidence of the House of Commons", and asked whether "the Prime Minister's action had the effect of frustrating or preventing the constitutional role of Parliament in holding the Government to account".

"The answer", the Justices said, "is that of

course it did" — and that the action was, therefore, unlawful. The prorogation "prevented Parliament from carrying out its constitutional role for five out of a possible eight weeks... It is impossible for us to conclude... that there was any reason — let alone a good reason — to advise Her Majesty to prorogue Parliament... from 9th or 12th September until 14th October... It follows that the decision was unlawful."

As of now, UK's Parliament is not suspended at all

The summary said: "This court has already concluded that the Prime Minister's advice to Her Majesty was unlawful, void and of no effect. This means that the order in council to which it led was also unlawful, void and of no effect and should be quashed. This means that when the royal commissioners walked into the House of Lords it was as if they walked in with a blank sheet of paper. The prorogation was also void and of no effect. Parliament has not been prorogued."

Parliament can, in fact, reconvene immediately

"As Parliament is not prorogued", the court said, "it is for Parliament to decide what to do next". Also, because it is not prorogued, it need not be recalled; and it has not voted to adjourn or go into recess.

Therefore, the court said in its full judgment, "Unless there is some Parliamentary rule to the contrary of which we are unaware, the Speaker of the House of Commons and the Lord Speaker can take immediate steps to enable each House to meet as soon as possible to decide upon a way forward."

Soon afterward, Speaker John Bercow said the House of Commons would sit at 11.30 am on Wednesday.

Speaking in New York, Johnson said that he would "obviously" respect the verdict, and "of course Parliament will come back" — but "I have to say that I strongly disagree with what the Justices have found."



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

THE TEST AHEAD

Fifty days on, lockdown and detentions persist — zero body count can't be an index of normalcy in J&K

IT IS NOW 50 days since the Centre revoked the special status of Jammu and Kashmir, and announced the decision to bifurcate the state into two Union Territories. In this time, the government has set up a raft of committees to oversee the bifurcation of territory, and material and manpower resources. The bureaucracy in the state is working apace to identify sectors that will receive speedy attention for the government to implement its development agenda. But much else remains undone. Kashmir Valley, where more than half of the state's population lives, is virtually cut off from the rest of the country. A communication blockade imposed since August 5, the day the government announced its decisions, continues to this day. Landlines have been restored but with their penetration not as high as mobile phones, this move has not made a difference to the situation. The markets remain closed as a result of a bandh by members of the public. The government's assertion that militants have imposed a curfew across the Valley contradicts its own justification for keeping the cellphones and internet disabled, which is that it has crippled the communication networks of militants. All mainstream politicians, and anyone else with the slightest ability to mobilise public opinion, remain under detention.

The government's case is that these measures have prevented deaths. But this cannot be the only index by which to assess "normalcy" in Kashmir. As the state's DGP told this newspaper, peaceful yes, but that is not the same as normal. Implicit in the justification of no deaths is the admission that locking up people and cutting off their phones was the only way to implement what the government anticipated would be unpopular decisions, the argument being that there would have been protests and the law enforcers would have been pushed to use strong methods to restore order. In the last few weeks, several government functionaries have made the surprising declaration that the Centre's decisions have the backing of the majority of the people in the Valley. The only test of the popular mood will come when those who have been detained are released, phones restored, and people are allowed to communicate as free citizens do in any democracy.

After the next 40 days, the map of J&K will change, likely irrevocably. There may even be an announcement of elections in the two UTs. But before all that, the government needs to lift the restrictions it has imposed in the Valley, and ready a plan to deal with the consequences that it seems to fear. Good governance, the government's promise for Naya Kashmir, cannot take place in an environment in which people have to be locked up and their voices cannot be heard.

RAISE THE BAR

PM's pledge to raise India's renewable energy commitments should occasion a debate on the challenges faced by the sector

ON MONDAY, AT the Global Climate Action Summit in New York, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, made several announcements that underscored India's commitment towards addressing pressing environmental challenges. He talked about his government's plans to curb plastic use and invited countries to join the Coalition For Disaster Resilient Infrastructure. But the centrepiece of the prime minister's speech was his announcement on upscaling India's renewable energy ambition. "By 2022, we plan to increase our renewable energy capacity to much beyond 175 GW, and later to 450 GW," he said. The prime minister's reiteration of a clean energy path for the country's development is welcome. And, there is little doubt that the country has made big strides in renewable energy (RE) in the last five years. At the same time, however, the PM's speech should also occasion a stocktaking of the challenges faced by the sector.

Increasing the share of non-fossil fuels in the country's energy mix is the bedrock of India's commitments under the Paris Climate Pact. The country pledged an installed electricity capacity of 175 GW by 2022 — a more than five-fold capacity increase in seven years. In the last four years, India has more than doubled its RE capacity. This impressive achievement notwithstanding, the country will need to step up its pace. To meet its Paris Pact target, India will need to add more than 20 GW of RE installation a year, more than double the rate achieved in the past four years. Developments in the solar energy sector give an inkling of the challenges likely to be faced when the RE ambitions are upscaled. According to the clean energy research outfit, Mercom, the country added 8.3 GW of solar capacity last year. This is a 13 per cent dip from 2017. The fall in pace of adding solar installations has continued this year. Land acquisitions are a major worry for large-scale solar projects, the Mercom report noted. The loss in momentum could well be temporary. But policymakers should ill-afford to ignore it given that solar installations constitute nearly 60 per cent of the country's RE energy mix under its Paris commitments.

PM Modi's New York announcement is consistent with India's goal of generating 40 per cent of its electricity by renewables by 2030. When it comes to RE, the gap between installed capacity and actual electricity generation can be large, especially when weather conditions are not congenial. Conversation about REs in the country have largely been about installed capacity. In the spirit of the PM's New York speech, the discourse on RE needs to go one notch higher.

WELCOME, FLEABAG

Emmy awards marked the end of one era of US television, beginning of a new one

THE 2019 EMMY awards marked, in a sense, an end of an era. The so-called "golden age of television" in America began with *The Sopranos*, a show on HBO and has seemingly come to a close — at least in terms of the manner and means of viewer engagement — on HBO as well. The final season of *Game of Thrones* bagged a bunch of awards, including the prestigious one for Best Drama Series. But the up-and-comers that made a strong showing at the awards — *Fleabag* and *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* — signal an era of their own, one at least as promising as the one that has gone by.

Given the fact that the final season of *Game of Thrones* (GoT) was, in no uncertain terms, a dramatic disaster, the honour by the television academy must be seen as representing something more than just its appeal to fans and critics. The show remains the most ambitious, in terms of scale and budgets, in serialised fiction and proved that television can indeed sustain budgets thus far reserved for the big screen. Spin-offs from George RR Martin's fictional universe are now in the offing, as are re-tellings of J.R.R. Tolkien's tales from Valinor, Middle Earth and Numenor. However, *Fleabag* remains the story of the night. Irreverent and funny, the show is by women, and about women. It straddles with brilliance the conflicts of sexuality, identity and love. It is not based on big budgets and big names, but sharp writing and good acting. Phoebe Waller-Bridge, the writer and star of the show, has a bunch of trophies.

While *GoT* is among the last shows that made a name with appointment viewing, *Fleabag*, available on a streaming platform, will be binge-watched. That it has been recognised by the mainstream is a sign that television as we knew it is almost gone. But, more importantly, even a decade ago, an adult comedy with a funny woman character unafraid to be gross would be something appreciated on the edge of popular culture. Now, it is at the centre.

Banking on politics

Bank mergers do not address the crux of the crisis: The nexus between lenders, borrowers and election funding



CHRISTOPHE JAFFRELOT

INDIA'S ECONOMIC CRISIS that is finding expression in low-growth rates and high unemployment rates is partly due to the decline of investments, which is partly due to the fact that companies cannot get access to loans as easily as before. This is a direct consequence of the huge level of the banks' Non Performing Assets (NPAs), which have jumped from Rs 1.2 trillion in 2012 to 9.5 trillion in 2018. Public banks represented 70 per cent of these NPAs. Last month, after a year of reflection, the Centre announced reforms in the banking system, which are mostly about the merger of weak banks. But "reform" could actually be the wrong word if nothing else is done, because last month's decision does not address the crux of the matter.

To understand what is at stake in the NPA story, one needs first to understand why the public sector banks lent so much money to companies which are today unable to pay it back. In the 2000s, when the UPA held office, everybody thought that double digit growth rates were there to stay. But this euphoria was not the only factor and the dubious practice did not stop in 2014.

In 2015, a 57-page report of Crédit Suisse gave a detailed account of the formidable debts accumulated by a dozen big Indian companies. Incidentally, soon after that, the RBI declared 12 Indian companies responsible for 25 per cent of the NPAs — a list that remained secret. The Crédit Suisse report showed that companies facing heavy debts continued to borrow from the banking system. The Adani group's debt, for instance, increased by 16 per cent in 2015.

The piling up of the NPAs has to do with the relationship between the country's rulers and the heads of the public banks. A retired bank CEO, Anjan Basu, has reportedly testified that CEOs of public banks tend to be under structural pressures as members of the Government of India ask them to lend some money to industrialists. Indeed, it is very difficult for the CEOs of public banks to say "no"

to the person who has appointed them — especially if he or she expects from him/her a post-retirement sinecure.

But why do governments in India insist that loans be given to industrialists, even when their projects are not good enough to generate the money needed to repay the bank? This question has much to do with the curse of crony capitalism. As we've shown recently in *Business and Politics in India* (a book I co-edited with Atul Kohli and Kanta Murali), the nexus between businessmen and politicians is based on a classic exchange of favours: The former help the latter to get access to credit in return for funds for election campaigns.

Politics has become a very costly activity in India. According to several estimates — including those by the Centre for Media Studies and the Association for Democratic Reforms — India's 17th general elections were the costliest ever in the history of democracies, with the parties spending \$7.2 billion (more than double what was spent 10 years ago). The BJP spent between 45 and 55 per cent of this — approximately 3.6 billion dollars — while the Congress spent 15 to 20 per cent. Cash, drugs, liquor and precious metals worth nearly Rs 3,500 crore were reportedly seized by enforcement agencies in the run-up to the Lok Sabha polls — nearly three times the amount seized five years ago, with the BJP beating all records in this regard.

Political parties were able to amass money due to a scheme pushed through by the Modi government in 2016, authorising businesses and individuals to make anonymous contributions to political parties — electoral bonds. The BJP reportedly reaped 95 per cent of the contributions through such bonds which former Chief Election Commissioner S.Y. Qureshi, described as "legalisation of crony capitalism".

What was this money for? Mostly advertisements. Between February 7 and March 2, *Alt News* scrutinised the Ad Library Report of Facebook to find out that pro-BJP and pro-central government pages represented 70 per

cent of the total ad revenue made public by Facebook. Of the top 10 political advertisers, eight were related to the BJP and spent Rs 2.3 crore on Facebook ads — the Congress Party coming a poor third, behind the BJD. But many pages supported the BJP without declaring their links with the party. The total amount of money spent on Facebook ads by the BJP and supporting pages was over Rs. 2.7 crore in one month. But even more money was to be spent in the following weeks and months. Between February 20 and April 24, 2019, the BJP spent about Rs 6 crore on political ads on Google platforms, 10 times more than the Congress. On Facebook, the BJP officially spent Rs 1.32 crore between early February and April 20. While this is higher than any other party's expenditure, this figure still conceals some other publicity initiatives. Unofficial BJP Facebook pages, such as 'Bharat ke Mann ki Baat', 'Nation with NaMo' and 'My First Vote for Modi' cumulatively spent Rs 4.50 crore in the same period.

A reform of the banking system worth that name would imply more than the amalgamation of weak banks: A protection of the banks' CEOs from political interferences — which also result recurrently in campaigns of loan waivers. Such an immunisation may be achieved via a dose of privatisation (something compatible with the programme of the BJP, market-oriented on paper) as the private banks are not as badly affected by the NPAs as the public ones. But it can also result from the enforcement of a more rigorous management autonomy under the aegis of a robust regulator. Of course, the objective would be reached more easily if politicians were not allowed to spend so much money at the time of elections. But this change would imply an even more robust regulator!

Jaffrelot is senior research fellow at CERIS-Sciences Po/CNRS, Paris and professor of Indian Politics and Sociology at King's India Institute, London

A NEW APPROACH

Awareness campaigns are needed to deal with climate change



AJAY VIR JAKKHAR

WE ARE DELIGHTED that Prime Minister Narendra Modi made an impassioned appeal for the reduction in the use of chemicals in agriculture. Though, in time, the PM will realise it is easier to announce new approaches than to get the agriculture system to embrace the appeal. This does not have to be. Public policy and allocation of funds can play a critical role and change the trajectory. The biggest threat to India is climate change. Many civilisations disappeared and empires have collapsed due to shifting rainfall patterns or prolonged drought.

In the run-up to the climate change summit, these points were raised by the IPCC. Over 100 million hectares in India is in the process of serious degradation, desertification and salinisation. Situated in the tropics, India has witnessed a many-fold increase in extreme weather events since 1950 and will be severely impacted by production variability. Soils are being lost up to 100 times faster than they can form and high temperatures increase the incidence of pests and diseases. These will necessitate using more chemicals on the farm. Without the active participation of stakeholders and aid of indigenous and local knowledge, we cannot address these issues.

These alternative approaches require a paradigm shift towards principles of agroecology and weaning farmers by repurposing subsidies for ecosystem services. This requires a combination of different kinds of crop planting practices, different forms of mechanisation, aggregation and distribution of commodities. It is not easy and the myopic outlook of policymakers discourages them from believing it is feasible. As a society, we

are not yet ready to commit to lifestyle trade-offs and more significantly, commoditisation of the food systems will impose stiff barriers in changing the status quo.

The bull run in commodity prices ended by 2013. Since then, food prices have generally remained subdued, instilling a sense of complacency amongst the public and those that influence policy. Consequently, there has been a steady but subtle shift in the narrative from agriculture to food, from yield to sustainability, from productivity to prosperity and from quantity to quality. Policies are being formulated where rather than supporting agriculture production, farmer livelihoods are to be supported by schemes like PM Kisan. Additionally, public funding for research and the subsequent deployment of funds for fundamental research and human resources has reduced in real terms. This is worrying as it comes at a time when scientists are warning of impending challenges in food availability arising from climate change.

Policymakers are blissfully unmindful of their own inadequacies. India's population will peak in 20 years and wild claims are being made that it will have a problem of 20 per cent surplus production. The recent surge in surpluses are deceiving and too meagre to justify such smug satisfaction. Ironically, decision-makers are simultaneously targeting an increase in food production by 50 per cent by 2050. Sadly, this has become the cornerstone of our national policy and the metric for measuring farmer prosperity. To expect a system that nurtures the problem to transform itself is as ridiculous a notion as "zero budget farming" demonising "organic farming".

Unrestrained profiteering by agri-busi-

nesses is expediting climate change. Starved of funds, the exhausted public research system has taken a similar and easier path to maximise farm yields by monocropping and use of chemicals, encouraging agricultural practices that emit human-induced greenhouse gases. Economists will disagree but farm-gate prices have to rise substantially to account for the real cost of growing food for farmers to change practices and for agriculture to sequester carbon. Present practices extract a heavy environmental footprint, completing a vicious circle that makes agriculture more problematic while agriculture itself also intensifies climate change, compelling yields to be maximised.

As a result, millions of acres of a few cereal crops are planted. This is at variance with conserving biodiversity, which is essential for safeguarding the global commons. Worse, higher yielding seeds are quickly adopted by farmers — now over 80 per cent of most crop production comes from a handful of varieties in each crop type. Additionally, growing ecologically unsuitable crops in particular ecosystems is literally killing the planet. But policymakers are failing to grasp that food systems are breaching a breaking point of unsustainability. Policies on food production are not reflecting the exigency for change.

It's absolutely essential to invest billions in a decade-long awareness campaign to reduce wastage of food and change consumer behaviour. If not, climate change prophecies will come true.

The writer is chairman, Bharat Krishak Samaj

SEPTEMBER 25, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

ONGC STRIKE

THE OIL AND Natural Gas Commission strike will cause production loss of Rs 3 crore daily as the workmen and officers of the Bombay High offshore project have decided to join the strikers. Production from the wells in Gujarat has been totally stopped. The employees of ONGC have been on strike to press their demand for effective police protection to life and honour of those working in the Sibsagar district of Assam. They stopped work following growing incidence of attacks on non-Assamese by some local elements. Production from the Bombay High offshore will be closed from 6 am in pursuance of the decision of the personnel to join the strike.

CPI REJECTS CONG (I)

THE CPI'S DISENCHANTMENT with the Congress (I) is total despite the party chairman, S.A. Dange's views. The document on electoral tactics now being discussed by the national council lays down that the party should have no truck with Indira Gandhi's party. It is possible that Dange, who is presiding over the national council session, will try to drive home his point of view. But it is unlikely to make any impact on the majority's approach.

SINO-US TACTICS

THE NEW YORK Times columnist, James Reston, claimed that possible military aid to

Peking is one of the options the administration is weighing if the Soviet Union does not get the Carter administration off the hook on the issue of Soviet combat troops in Cuba. Reston said if Moscow insists on causing Washington trouble in Cuba, Washington will step up its propaganda and its economic appeals to the Communist countries of Eastern Europe, to Ukrainians and other nationalities within the USSR. If necessary — though the Carter administration does not want to play this card — they will move to increase US trade with China, and in the extremity, even to give more economic, technological and particularly military aid to Peking.



