

## TELLING NUMBERS

### Teachers in higher education: gender skew highest in Bihar

THE NUMBER of teachers in the country's higher education institutes was 14,16,299 in 2018-19, according to the All India Survey on Higher Education 2018-19. The survey, other aspects of which have been reported in The Indian Express, also looks at the gender and socio-religious breakup of the teaching community in these higher learning institutions.

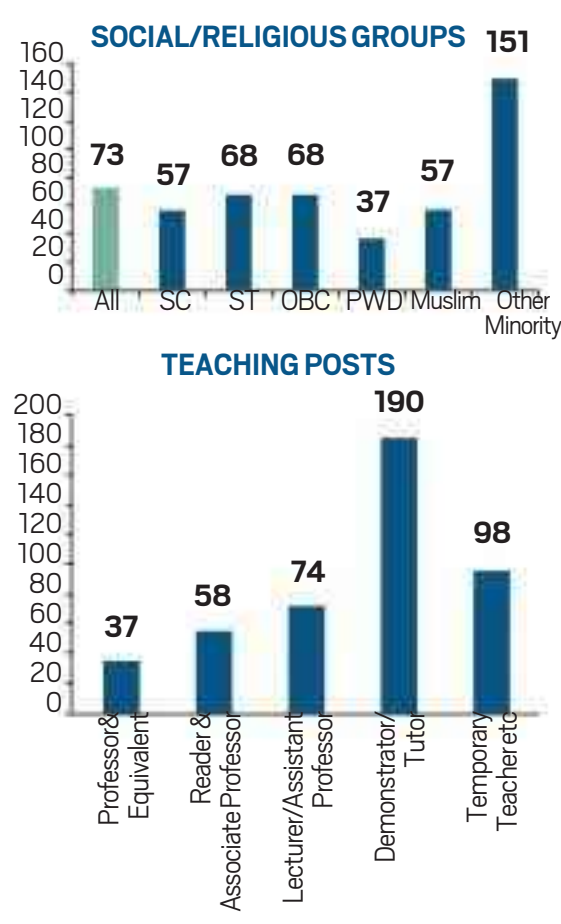
Of the 14.16 lakh teachers, 57.85 per cent are male and 42.15 per cent are female. The skew is highest in Bihar, where the female-to-male ratio among teachers is 1:4, or about 21:79 in percentage terms. Jharkhand comes a close second with a ratio of roughly 30:70. In Uttar Pradesh, less than a third (32.3%) of teachers are female.

On the other hand, there are a few states such as Kerala, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Delhi and Goa, where the number of female teachers is more than that of male teachers.

At an all-India level, teachers belonging to the general category represent more than half (56.7 per cent) of all teachers in India. OBCs follow with 32.1 per cent, with the rest being Scheduled Castes (8.8 per cent) and Scheduled Tribes (2.4 per cent). Again, 5.4 per cent of the teachers belong to the Muslim minority group, and 9.2 per cent to other minority groups. Among major states, those with the highest SC/ST proportions among teachers are Andhra Pradesh (13.83 per cent SCs and 1.6 per cent STs), Maharashtra (11.39 per cent SCs and 1.52 per cent STs) and Telangana (11.17 per cent SCs and 3.5 per cent STs).

Another significant representation in terms of gender distribution is the number of female teachers per 100 male teachers. At an all-India level,

### GENDER RATIO IN TEACHERS (FEMALES PER 100 MALES)



there are 73 female teachers per 100 male teachers. This ratio is 57:100 among SCs, and 68:100 among both STs and OBCs. For Muslims, it is 57 female teachers per 100 male teachers; for other minorities, female teachers outnumber male teachers in the ratio 151:100.

In post-wise gender distribution, male teachers heavily outnumber female teachers in most senior positions. On the other hand, the ratio among demonstrators and tutors is 190:100, meaning that there are nearly two females in such posts for every male counterpart. Among temporary teachers, the breakup is almost equal, at 98 females per 100 males.

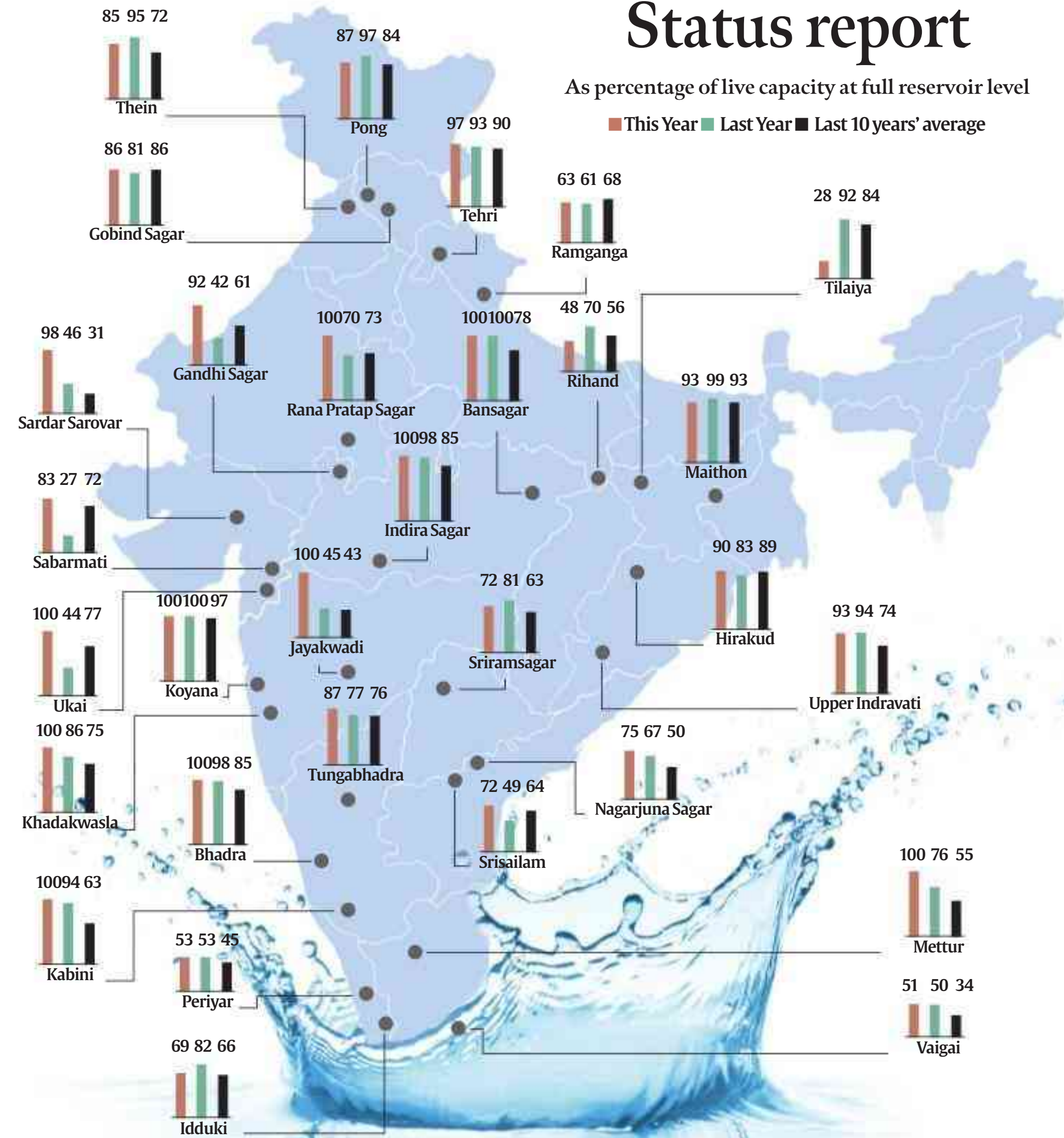
Source for all data: AISHE 2018-19

## SIMPLY PUT

# Season of plenty for reservoirs

June-September monsoon ends with reservoirs holding 21 per cent more water than 10-year average for this stage, 33 of 113 reservoirs at full capacity, and all river systems with higher storage than normal

## Status report



### STORAGE STATUS

How full are reservoirs (percentage of capacity)

Current	Last year	10-yr avg
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### NORTHERN REGION

(Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan)  
8 reservoirs  
89 | 85 | 82

### EASTERN REGION

(Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Tripura)  
17 reservoirs  
83 | 84 | 75

### WESTERN REGION

(Gujarat, Maharashtra)  
39 reservoirs  
91 | 61 | 68

### CENTRAL REGION

(Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh)  
16 reservoirs  
86 | 79 | 75

### SOUTHERN REGION

(Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu)  
33 reservoirs  
84 | 74 | 66

### ALL INDIA

113 reservoirs  
87 | 75 | 72

\*Live storage as of September 26, 2019. Checks and crosses compare current figures with last year's & 10-yr average figures for corresponding period.

## THIS WORD MEANS

### PORTAMENTO

A musical effect, now achieved with maths framework

IN MUSIC, we often hear a singer — or certain musical instruments — gliding seamlessly from one pitch or tone to another, with a smooth progression. Nearly all musicians know this as "portamento", a term that has been used for hundreds of years. Not everyone or everything can achieve it, however; this continuous varying of pitch is possible only for the trained human voice, besides string and some other instruments.

Now an MIT student has invented an algorithm that produces a portamento effect between any two audio signals in real-time. Trevor Henderson is now a graduate student in computer science, MIT said in a statement. In experiments, the algorithm

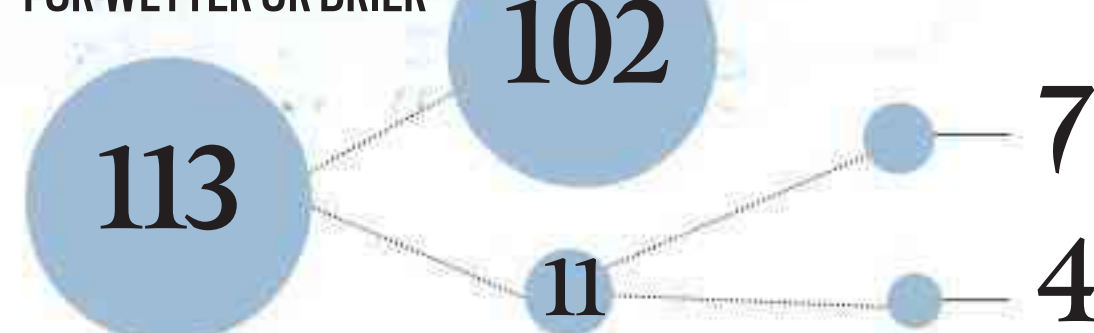
seamlessly merged various audio clips, such as a piano note gliding into a human voice. His paper describing the algorithm won the "best student paper" award at the recent International Conference on Digital Audio Effects, MIT said.

The algorithm relies on "optimal transport", which is a centuries-old geometry-based framework that determines the most efficient ways to move objects — or data points — between various configurations. It has been applied to fluid dynamics, 3-D modelling, computer graphics, and more. Now, Henderson has applied optimal transport to interpolating audio signals, or blending one signal into another, MIT said.

### RIVER BASINS, TOP & BOTTOM 3

River Basin	Percentage departure from 10-yr average
Cauvery & neighbourhood	69.68
Narmada	36.54
Tapi	32.21
Mahi	5.50
Mahanadi & neighbourhood	4.91
Indus	4.01

### FOR WETTER OR DRIER



■ Out of the country's 113 reservoirs, the storage in 102 on September 26, 2019 was more than 80% of normal for this period  
■ Among the 11 reservoirs with storage below 80% of normal for this period, 7 had storage over 50% of normal, with only 4 stocking under 50%

Source: CWC

### ANJALI MARAR

PUNE, SEPTEMBER 29

AT THE end of monsoon season this year, the water stored in the 113 reservoirs monitored by the Central Water Commission (CWC) is better than it was at this time last year and also better than the last 10 years' average, the CWC's latest reservoir storage bulletin shows.

The total live storage capacity of these 113 reservoirs is 168.77 billion cubic metres (BCM) and their live storage as of September 26 was 146.2 BCM, or 87 per cent of this capacity. At this stage last year, the live storage was 127.23 BCM (75 per cent), while the 10-year average for this period is 121.18 (72 per cent). Put another way, the live storage avail-

able in the 113 reservoirs was 115 per cent of that at this time last year, and 121 per cent of the average storage over the last 10 years.

In 33 reservoirs, water was at full reservoir level (FRL) on September 26. Levels ranged between 71 per cent and 99 per cent of FRL in 56 other reservoirs. Only in 10 reservoirs were levels at 40 per cent or below.

In nearly every region, the available storage was higher than last year's corresponding storage and the 10-year average. The only exception was in the Eastern region comprising Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Tripura and Nagaland, where the available storage of 83 per cent (16.10 BCM) in 17 reservoirs was just below last year's 84 per cent, but way ahead of the 75 per cent average of the last 10 years.

The Western region has 39 reservoirs mon-

itored by the CWC, in Maharashtra and Gujarat. These had 91 per cent storage (30.95 BCM), as compared to just 61 per cent at this stage last year, and a 10-year average of 68 per cent.

In the Northern region (Himachal Pradesh, Punjab and Rajasthan), the available storage in the eight CWC-monitored reservoirs was 17.13 BCM, or 89 per cent, as against the 10-year average of 82 per cent for the corresponding period. Last September, the available water storage here was 85 per cent.

In Central India, which has had excess rainfall during the last one month, the 16 reservoirs of Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh held 37.6 BCM together, or 86 per cent of capacity. This time last year, the reserves were 79 per cent, while the 10-year average is 75 per cent.

In the Southern region (Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu), where the CWC monitors 33 reservoirs, their stocks added up to 44.2 BCM, or 84 per cent of their total live capacity, up from 74 per cent at this stage last year, and much higher than the 10-year average of 66 per cent.

In Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Jharkhand, West Bengal, UP, Tripura, Uttarakhand, Kerala and Chhattisgarh, the water in reservoirs was lower than the stocks at the same stage last year. In Rajasthan, Odisha, Nagaland, Gujarat, Maharashtra, MP, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, this year's storage exceeded last year's, owing to good rain throughout the season.

All river basins in the country have storage above normal this year.

## EXPERTS EXPLAIN

# Remembering VP Menon's role in accession of J&K and other states

ARGHYA SENGUPTA & JINALY DANI

MONDAY MARKS the 126th birth anniversary of VP Menon. Born on September 30, 1893, Menon was the Secretary in the Ministry of States which was established by the Government of India in 1947 to deal with the accession of princely states. While the nation rightly remembers Sardar Patel's herculean efforts in ensuring that over 500 princely states seamlessly joined the Union of India, few know that it was Menon working in the background, travelling across the country and persuading different Maharajas and Nawabs to accede.

Perhaps Menon's greatest contribution was coming up with the original policy on accession that required the princely states to accede only in the three matters of defence, external affairs and communications. Since these matters were fairly non-controversial, Menon believed they would be readily accepted by the rulers. In his book *Integration of the Indian States*, Menon recounts approaching Sardar Patel and pointing out the advantages of this policy: "The basic unity of India would be achieved and, when the new constitution was framed, we could thrash out the necessary details."

It was Menon's policy piloted by Sardar Patel that was finally reflected in the Instrument of Accession (IoA) executed by the

states becoming a part of the Union of India in 1947 and their seamless integration thereafter.

One of the states to which Menon travelled to secure its accession was Jammu and Kashmir. By October 25, 1947, an attack by Afriidi tribesmen had reached the outskirts of Srinagar, forcing the Maharaja of J&K to escape the city and relocate to Jammu. On October 26, the Defence Committee of the Indian Government held a meeting to discuss the viability of a military intervention in J&K. Lord Mountbatten, who was part of this meeting, observed that since J&K had not acceded to either India or Pakistan, it was an independent country. According to Mountbatten, if the Maharaja acceded to India, troops could be sent to rescue the state. Subsequently, it was Menon who immediately flew to Jammu and secured the Maharaja's signature on the IoA.

Recounting that day in his book, Menon states: "The Maharajah was asleep; he had left Srinagar the previous evening and had been driving all night. I woke him up and told him of what had taken place at the Defence Committee meeting. He was ready to accede at once. Just as I was leaving, he told me that before he went to sleep, he had left instructions with his ADC that, if I came back from Delhi, he was not to be disturbed as it would mean that the Government of India had decided to come to his rescue and he should



VP Menon with Sardar Patel and the Maharaja of Cochin. Wikimedia Commons

therefore be allowed to sleep in peace; but that if I failed to return, it meant that everything was lost and, in that case, his ADC was to shoot him in his sleep!" Menon returned to Delhi with the executed IoA which was then accepted by the Government of India.

With accession secured, the next challenge for Menon and his team in the Ministry of States was to ensure complete integration. While this was a legally complex but politically straightforward matter in respect of

most princely states, negotiations between representatives of the Government of India and Sheikh Abdullah, the Prime Minister of J&K, in relation to J&K's status in India failed to produce a mutually acceptable result.

It was thus decided that the Constitution of India would reflect the position under the 1947 IoA. In a letter dated September 29, 1949, Menon writes to Sheikh Abdullah proposing an initial formula for the draft Article 370. He states: "The State of Jammu and

Kashmir is an Acceding State and ordinarily the State would have been treated like other Part III States. In view, however, of the special problems arising in connection with this State it seems desirable that the constitutional relationship between the State of Jammu and Kashmir and the Union of India should, however, under the new constitution, approximate, for the present, to that subsisting under the Instrument of Accession, already executed by His Highness the Maharaja."

The final text of Article 370 introduced in the Constitution of India is based on this understanding. Sheikh Abdullah however had reservations regarding Menon's letter. He proposed an alternative formulation which simply stated that the Indian Parliament would be entitled to legislate only on defence, external affairs and communications. Seemingly making light of Abdullah's objection, in an internal correspondence between Vishnu Sahay, Secretary, Kashmir Affairs to V Shankar, PS to Sardar Patel, Menon asked that the following be conveyed to Shankar (and presumably Patel):

"Parts II (citizenship), III (fundamental rights) and IV (directive principles) of the Constitution would apply automatically to Kashmir unless the position is expressly saved... What is worrying Sheikh Abdullah and the Working Committee of the National

Conference is that if these general provisions become applicable to Kashmir also, their legislation against other citizens of India in respect of acquisition etc. of property will become invalid. The Kashmiris are perhaps worried about the occupation of their country by the Punjabees!!"

Thus overriding the Sheikh's objections, but in deference to his principled disagreement, the Ministry of States sent a draft proclamation to the Yuvraj of Kashmir, Karan Singh, for signing. This was the final step towards complete integration in the Union of India by which all princely states that had acceded to India were required to accept the Constitution of India as their own through a public proclamation. It is significant to note that J&K's proclamation was worded differently from the others. This proclamation, issued on November 25, 1949, did not accept the Constitution of India as J&K's own. Instead, it stated that the Constitution of India, "in so far as it is applicable to [J&K]" would "govern the constitutional relationship between [J&K and the] Union of India". This was a reference to Article 370 of the Constitution of India. The rest, as they say, is history.

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The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Let the farmer earn



HARISH DAMODARAN

Government must not sacrifice rise in farm incomes at altar of short-term consumer interest or to save RCEP

"WHEN MONEY IS bad, people want it to be better. When it is good, they think of other things".

One needs to simply replace "money" with "onions" to appreciate how the above observation on inflation by John Kenneth Galbraith still rings true. When onion is today retailing at Rs 55-60 per kg, Twitter handles and WhatsApp forwards are littered with clichés about the bulb bringing tears, making people cry, and so on. But when growers were realising Rs 3/kg a year ago, the same concerned folks had "other things" to think of.

The public cannot be blamed, though. Contrary to the 1974 Kishore Kumar song, it does not know everything. The problem comes when governments, too, take the same shortsighted approach. The average modal price of onion from January 2016 to May 2019 at Maharashtra's Lasalgaon market was Rs 9.92/kg, which just about covered the basic cultivation cost of Rs 8 or so. That rate rose to Rs 12.22/kg in June, Rs 12.52 in July, Rs 18.80 in August and Rs 33.15 in September (till Friday). But in June itself, the Narendra Modi government withdrew a 10 per cent export incentive given on the free-on-board (FOB) value of shipments. And on September 13, it virtually banned exports by imposing a minimum FOB price of \$850 per tonne (Rs 60/kg), below which onions cannot leave the country. In addition, the state-owned MMTC was asked to import, if necessary from Pakistan.

This policy — of doing little when producer prices are low for extended periods, but jumping into action at the slightest hint of consumer despair ("tears") that is often temporary — translates into a one-sided bet against the farmer. Last year, the three-acre Nashik grower who harvested 300 quintals of rabi onions in April, and stocked it in his low-cost kanda chawl storage structure for offloading through the summer and monsoon months, would have lost his shirt: Lasalgaon prices averaged just Rs 7.67/kg in September, hardly an increase over the Rs 6.70 in April. This time, there was a chance to make some money that comes, maybe, once in three years. That possibility has been

scuppered by the government's actions and admonishments. Since September 19, Lasalgaon rates have already fallen from Rs 45 to Rs 36/kg.

The costs of government shortsightedness aren't small. India, in 2018-19, exported 21.83 lakh tonnes (lt) of onions, which was a tenth of its production and valued at Rs 3,467.36 crore. Bureaucrats and ministers have no idea what it takes to build export markets and the damage that a single Directorate General of Foreign Trade notification can do. Nor do they know what low retail food inflation — this has averaged 1.38 per cent year-on-year from September 2016 to August 2019, as compared to 3.50 per cent for overall consumer price inflation — means for producer incomes and incentives.

Unfortunately, it isn't onions alone. Even more dangerous is the proposed signing of a free trade agreement with the 16-country Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership or RCEP bloc, which could open India's market to cheap milk powder and butter fat imports from New Zealand and Australia. Currently, India allows only up to 10,000 tonnes of powder imports annually at 15 per cent duty, with quantities beyond this limit attracting 60 per cent rate. There is talk of the Modi government not being averse to significantly raising the quota for imports at the concessional duty, while bringing down the rate itself from the existing 15 per cent. India apparently does not want to be seen as stalling the RCEP deal that is to be concluded by November.

One indication of the official mood is a presentation made at a stakeholder consultation meeting called by the commerce ministry on September 18, in which it was claimed that India's likely milk production of 170.93 million tonnes (mt) in 2020-21 would fall short of consumption at 204 mt. This, when the animal husbandry and dairying department's own output estimate for 2017-18 was 176.35 mt! Further, the gap between production (238.48 mt) and consumption (341 mt) was expected to widen by 2033-34, thereby strengthening the case for imports. These pre-

dictions were supposedly made using data from the National Dairy Development Board, which the latter has not only denied, but also gone on to cite a Niti Aayog report that had projected India's milk output of 330 mt in 2033 to exceed demand at 292 mt!

Again, the context matters. Last year at this time, dairies were selling skimmed milk powder (SMP) at around Rs 140/kg and ghee at Rs 320/kg. The gross revenue from processing 100 litres (103 kg) of cow milk containing 3.5 per cent fat (ghee) and 8.5 per cent solids-not-fat (SMP) would, then, have been roughly Rs 2,380. After deducting chilling, transport and processing costs of Rs 500-600, the maximum that farmers could be paid was Rs 1,800-1,900 or Rs 18-19 per litre. But today, SMP and ghee rates have recovered to Rs 280 and Rs 390/kg, respectively. As a result, farmers are getting Rs 29-30 per litre.

What will the inclusion of dairy products under RCEP's purview do? India's yearly SMP production is 5-5.5 lt, of which 2-2.5 lt is used by dairies themselves for reconstitution into milk during the "lean" summer months. If, say, 1 lt of powder from New Zealand were to come in, it would depress the market. Indeed, the very prospect of a deal is enough to create a negative sentiment, when we are entering the "flush" winter season. Milk producers, like onion growers, have suffered low prices for much of the last 3-4 years, forcing them to reduce herd sizes or underfeed their animals. It would be a tragedy if, just when prices are improving from lows, their interests have to be sacrificed at the altar of short-term consumer interest or saving a trade deal.

The Modi government should actually take heart from the price recovery now being seen in onion, milk or even maize, jowar, pulses and soyabean. With the surplus monsoon rains delivering a bumper harvest — if not in kharif, definitely in rabi — it is farm incomes that offer the best hope for an economic turnaround. The consumer's real friend is the producer. And we shall also keep our jobs if he starts earning and spending again.

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A WIN FOR DIPLOMACY

Political and security establishment has to turn things around in Kashmir to build on the gains of PM Modi's US visit

PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA Modi's visit to New York to participate in the annual session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) had two important objectives. One was to convince the world of India's case on changing the constitutional status of Jammu and Kashmir and the other was to showcase PM's new and purposeful commitment to multilateralism. But the challenge was to keep the pursuit of the two diplomatic goals on separate tracks. Pakistan's premier, Imran Khan, also in New York to address the UNGA, kept up a relentless attack on Modi personally as well as the BJP-RSS on Kashmir. Pakistan's strategy was about getting the world to intervene in the contestation over Kashmir with India. The PM rightly refused to be drawn into a futile public argument with Pakistan. This is not easy for Indian diplomacy that in the past could not resist the temptation to wrestle in the mud with Pakistan. Modi concentrated, instead, on getting his own message across on the global issues of the day, including the dangers of violent extremism and the need to urgently combat climate change.

Under Modi, India's multilateralism has taken a distinctive character; the PM has turned it into an interest-driven exercise. Modi's mobilisation of global support against cross-border terrorism for succeeded in putting Pakistan in the dock before the Financial Action Task Force that seeks to choke off funding for terror groups worldwide. If the PM's campaign on terrorism was about aligning India's concerns with those of the world, Modi's commitment on combating climate change is about accepting national responsibility and demonstrating international leadership. Before Modi, India claimed that it had no reason to address the climate change that was caused by the industrial countries. Modi flipped that around into a policy that actively tilted India's energy mix towards renewables and unveiled the International Solar Alliance. This year, Modi invited UN member states to join a coalition to promote resilient infrastructure that can cope with climate change and disasters.

Taking the high global road does not mean the Kashmir question is going to disappear from the international discourse. Modi and external affairs minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar embarked on an intensive bilateral diplomacy on the margins of the UNGA to generate understanding of India's Kashmir move. Barring China and Turkey that extended open support for Pakistan, the rest of the international community seemed willing to give India the benefit of doubt. But the world is unlikely to hold its peace forever. If Delhi fails to quickly normalise the situation or if Imran Khan's promised "bloodbath" unfolds in Kashmir, India may find itself in an indefensible corner. At New York, diplomacy has won valuable political breathing space for Delhi on Kashmir. It won't last forever. It is now up to Delhi's political and security establishment to turn things around in the Valley.

MONSOON BOUNTY

Excess rain and the extended season may upset harvest predictions. Government must not artificially suppress prices

EVERY MONSOON IS different. This one's been even more so. In June, the country registered an average area-weighted rainfall deficiency of 32.8 per cent and it seemed this season would conform to the textbook case of an El Niño year, similar to 2002, 2004, 2009, 2015 and 2016. All those years had witnessed the abnormal warming of the equatorial eastern Pacific Ocean waters, known to impact rains in India during the monsoon season from June to September. With most global weather models predicting El Niño conditions, which had set in from roughly September 2018, to last at least till the first half of this monsoon season, a drought looked inevitable. And coming on top of an extended dry spell right from October through an excruciatingly hot summer, the return of food inflation appeared to present the re-elected Narendra Modi government with its first major challenge.

Then the tide turned. In July, the rainfall was 4.6 per cent higher than the historical long-period average. In August, the surplus was even higher at 15.3 per cent. And in the current month, not only has rainfall been a whopping 44.6 per cent above normal so far, but it may also end up being the wettest September in 102 years! The Meteorological Department, which had forecast a just-about "normal" monsoon while suggesting a 47 per cent probability of below normal/deficient rainfall even as late as on May 31, is now saying that its withdrawal phase may commence "only in the second week of October". Meanwhile, there are reports about large-scale damage to the standing kharif crop that is in late-maturity stage, if not ready for harvesting. Farmers, in other words, are suffering this time from too much rain. Worse, they aren't stopping when clear skies are what farmers would want at present. In all likelihood, the kharif harvest will be a less than a bumper one.

The big consolation, however, is the excess rains have helped substantially recharge the groundwater table and aquifers. Moreover, water levels in the country's 107 important reservoirs are 86.6 per cent of their full capacities, as against their 10-year average of 71.80 per cent at this time. So, even assuming some setback during kharif, a bumper winter-spring rabi crop is definitely in the offing. That would be great news, especially when there are indications of a price recovery in many crops from their lows. One hopes the government does not do things to artificially suppress prices, like the recent onion exports ban. Rather, this is the time to dismantle all controls on marketing, movement, stocking and exports of farm produce that are an anathema to liberalisation. There's no better antidote to the economic slowdown today than higher farm incomes.



SOURAV ROY BARMAN

PRAMOD DA'S WAY

An ordinary person stood up to protect the university as a space of free expression

ANTI-NATIONALS, URBAN NAXALS — these epithets are recent additions to our public discourse, but the tendency to pigeonhole voices of dissent and resistance as "leftists" or "Maoists" predates the Narendra Modi government. Much before Babul Supriyo heaped scorn on the vice-chancellor of Jadavpur University, Mamata Banerjee had called my friend, a student of Presidency College, a "Maoist" on national television, for questioning her government's track record on women's safety.

The disdain for critical thinking coming out of our universities aside, such statements advance the notion of a society besieged by inimical forces, in desperate need of a decisive and strong leader to tackle the imagined adversary. The project to demonise students of public universities as rootless elites falters on one count though. It fails to factor in the capacity of seemingly ordinary individuals, an intrinsic part of those ecosystems, to pull off extraordinary acts. Like one Pramod Sain did, nearly eight years ago. This is his story.

Having been elevated to university status in 2010, Kolkata's Presidency College, founded in 1818, was then struggling to deal with the pangs of transition. The institution's students' union was dissolved during the upgradation, and the Trinamool government was in no hurry to hold fresh elections.

On January 29, 2012, the Kolkata edition of *The Hindu* carried on its front page the news that Pune's Symbiosis University has cancelled the screening of *Jashn-e-Azadi*, a documentary on Kashmir, bowing to threats



ONE OF 800 MILLION  
A VOICE, UNDER 35

The vice-chancellor asked us to defer the screening by a week. Just when the institution of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, one of the principal forces behind the Bengal Renaissance, was beginning to fail us, Pramod Sain, simply Pramod-da for generations of Presidencians, stepped forward.

from the ABVP. Then a second year student of Political Science at Presidency, I saw the story and immediately alerted my classmate Pratim Ghosal and Waled Aadnan, who was in the final year of BSc Economics. Driven by sheer impulse, we decided to screen the Sanjay Kak documentary on our campus.

But the challenges were many. If you think the news sparked protests, prompting students in crumpled kurtas, torn jeans, worn-out chappals to hit the streets with daffis, chanting the anthem of liberation — azadi — you must consign these assorted stereotypes to the nearest bin. Moreover, despite being intensely political, the three of us were somewhat disillusioned with the nature of campus politics prevailing then, featuring the CPM-backed SFI and the Independents' Consolidation, which is essentially a campus-born platform. To spread the word, we created an event page on Facebook announcing our resolve to "protest thought control" and arrest the country's "slide towards fundamentalism" and carried out a low-key signature campaign. Our objective was not to make a splash, but to register a small act of dissent.

Upon approaching the authorities for a space to screen and projectors, we were greeted with a wave of rejections. The vice-chancellor asked us to defer the screening by a week. But we could not afford to wait as the campus would soon empty out with the annual exams little more than a month away.

Just when the institution of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, one of the principal forces

behind the Bengal Renaissance, was beginning to fail us, Pramod Sain, simply Pramod-da for generations of Presidencians, stepped forward. Sain, who ran the college canteen, had come to Presidency as a 13-year-old during the peak of the Naxal movement.

He unlocked the dingy anteroom of the canteen for us. On February 8, 2012, a hired projector played out the story of the Valley, its rage and sorrow, its endless twilight, in front of a group of around 50, seated on rickety benches. Meanwhile, Pramod-da was his usual self behind the counter, taking an occasional nap, updating himself with crucial campus gossip.

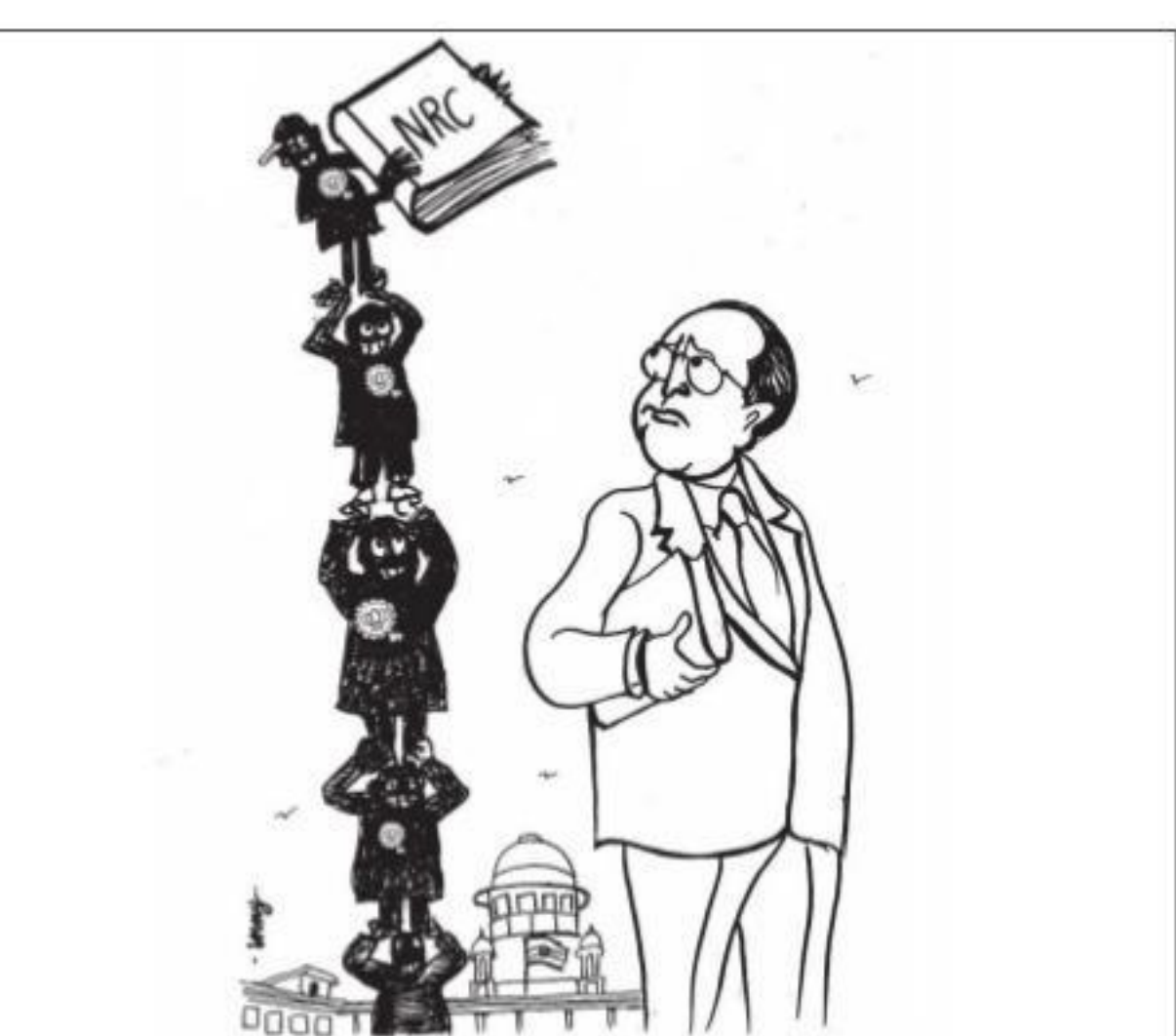
The next day, the event made it to the front pages of national dailies, complete with photographs, prompting the stunned authorities to issue show-cause notices to every single individual associated with it, including Pramod-da. The students defended their action on the ground of free speech, Article 19, the idea of university as a free space.

Pramod-da had a more compelling argument. Did the university not argue, when he was trying to install a cola vending machine, that he mustn't forget that he was running the canteen on lease? "Then why am I being held accountable for something that does not even come under my jurisdiction?" Point made, he coolly walked out. Perhaps even Pramod-da is a closet leftist. We never got to ask. The Right Honourable Minister Supriyo can shed some light, perhaps?

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FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



SEPTEMBER 30, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

STOPPING DEFECTIONS SHEIKH MOHAMMAD ABDULLAH, chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir, urged the Union government to promulgate an ordinance preventing political defections to provide political stability. Speaking to newsmen, the chief minister said the bane of Indian political life was the tendency of legislators to defect and re-defect to serve their short-term interests. The electorate had no control over their representatives. They had to be mute spectators. In this connection, he referred to the passage of a bill by Jammu and Kashmir Assembly preventing defections. The President should issue an ordinance on similar lines applicable to the country as a whole, he added.

NO COMMON SYMBOL THE CONGRESS WORKING Committee decided that the party would fight the coming elections on a separate symbol. The CWC also decided that the party would have a common manifesto with the Lok Dal, the major partner in the Congress-Lok Dal alliance. Devaraj Urs said there were some legal difficulties about having a common symbol. One of them was "the possibility of losing our identity." Answering a question, he said the party did not have talks with the Lok Dal on the decision to fight on a separate symbol. But, he pointed out, the Lok Dal had also taken a symbol for itself without having any talks with the Congress.

BURMA NO TO NAM BURMESE FOREIGN MINISTER, Myint Maung, told the UN General Assembly that "Burma has ended her participation in the non-aligned movement" because the Havana conference ignored a motion he submitted. Speaking in the assembly's policy debate, he said, "Burma went to Havana with hopes that the principles which had inspired the founding of the movement could be preserved", but "what happened at the conference only disillusioned us". He said Burma's "urgent motion" would have had the conference name a drafting committee to define the "inviolable principles" of the movement and qualifications for membership.



# 13 THE IDEAS PAGE

## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The end of the INF nuclear treaty is a bad step that could be followed by a worse one." — THE GUARDIAN

## Much ado about language

It is, after all, a mode of communication between people. Whether Hindi or any other tongue, there has to be a strong practical reason to learn it



M RAJIVLOCHAN

"NAN NINNE SNEHIKKUNNU", says the wife to her migrant husband who has remitted her some money. To know what this means you will have to look at the PhonePe advertisement that came out in 2018. It is still available on YouTube. What the advertisement does indicate is that north Indian, Hindi speakers, are just as adept at learning a language other than Hindi given the right incentive to do so. The wife in this advertisement probably learnt Malayalam on her own in order to communicate with her husband privately, even in the presence of her mother-in-law.

Then there is the unseemly spectacle of the annual language war which starts on every Hindi Diwas. Soon it transforms into a discussion on the essential characteristics of nation and nationhood. Fortunately, nowadays, like a viral fever, the agitation dies down on its own after a few days.

It all starts with the department of Hindi in the Central government, which has been given the responsibility of spreading Hindi across the country. It recruits only those who have done an MA in Hindi. It is officially called "Rajbhasha Vibhag" and is under the control of the home ministry. You would recall that English too is a rajbhasha of India but there is no department to promote it. No effort is made to recruit MAs in English to help out in drafting laws, rules, regulations and directives from the government in a comprehensible language.

In the absence of an English rajbhasha vibhag, the language of the laws of India remains incomprehensible, even to those who draft it. The intention behind the law may be good but, frequently, it requires the wisdom of the honourable courts of justice to make sense of whatever was written in the law. The latest such example concerns the historic law, written in English, which the Parliament discussed in August, to partially modify Article 370. It was full of horrific spelling and grammatical mistakes. It took almost a month for the government to issue a corrected version of the law which Parliament had passed.

Central government offices, in non-Hindi areas, also have a "Hindi" officer, once again an MA in Hindi, whose sole task is to promote the Hindi language within that office. In many such offices, where the Hindi officer is a bit conscientious, there is also a Hindi board, alongside the one which announces the name, address and phone number of the officer to contact in case of corruption complaints. The corruption board is some sort of a quasi statutory thing because of directions from the Central Vigilance Commissioner. The Hindi board is more of a voluntary effort. The offices of the Panjab University, for example, have no such Hindi board.

The Rashtrabhasha department in the Central government initiates the process

of promoting Hindi a few days before Hindi Diwas. No one notices its efforts and there is no visible consequence of its efforts or at least none that has been researched or documented. On Hindi Diwas that follows, someone makes what they consider an uplifting remark in the context of Hindi. This year it was the turn of Union Home Minister Amit Shah to make that remark. Earlier P Chidambaram, PV Narasimha Rao, R Venkataraman and other home ministers have made similar remarks. The only reason why they do so is that the department falls under their charge. Mostly, the remark is ignored by everyone, especially when the minister is a south Indian, connected with a Dravidian language.

Then there are times when the remark is followed by furore all over the country. In the mid-1960s, when Gulzarilal Nanda was the home minister, it even resulted in riots in many parts of the country when he announced, in 1965, the departure of the English language from government and the arrival of Hindi as the official language of governance in India. The opening scenes of the first film in which Amitabh Bachchan stars, *Saat Hindustani*, feature one such riot. The anti-Hindi riots in south Indian cities used to be paralleled by anti-English riots in the markets of Bihar, UP and Madhya Pradesh. The eagerness to burn property was common to both sets of rioters. There was no reported desire to learn any language.

Fortunately, nowadays the acrimony that Hindi Diwas generates is limited to some slogan shouting and once in a while, as it happened at Patiala, a few Hindi acolytes being asked to apologise for having heaped insults on non-Hindi languages. In the Patiala episode, it was said that Punjabi was insulted.

A few weeks later, everyone forgets about Hindi. Those who wish to use it, use it; those who wish to ignore it, ignore it. No one really cares one way or the other. A language, after all, is a device for communication between people. This is a point that we need to remember, always. As in the case of the Phonepe advertisement, and in the context of the annual war that erupts in India because someone in the government promises to impose Hindi on everyone else, the point is simply this: There has to be a strong reason to learn a language. Otherwise, no one other than the learned types are willing to waste time learning a new language. In the past, a common Indian was said to know at least three languages. Most Indians, even today, do. Mahatma Gandhi knew five. Narasimha Rao, knew as many as 10 languages.

As for the language of Bharat Sarkar, whether it uses Hindi or English, there is an urgent need for it to appoint a "Simple Language Commission". No rule, law, directive should be issued by the government unless it is written in a simple, commonsensical language with no convolutions and legalese, one that even a 10th-pass can comprehend, which by the way is 90 per cent of the all the workers in the organised and unorganised sector in India.

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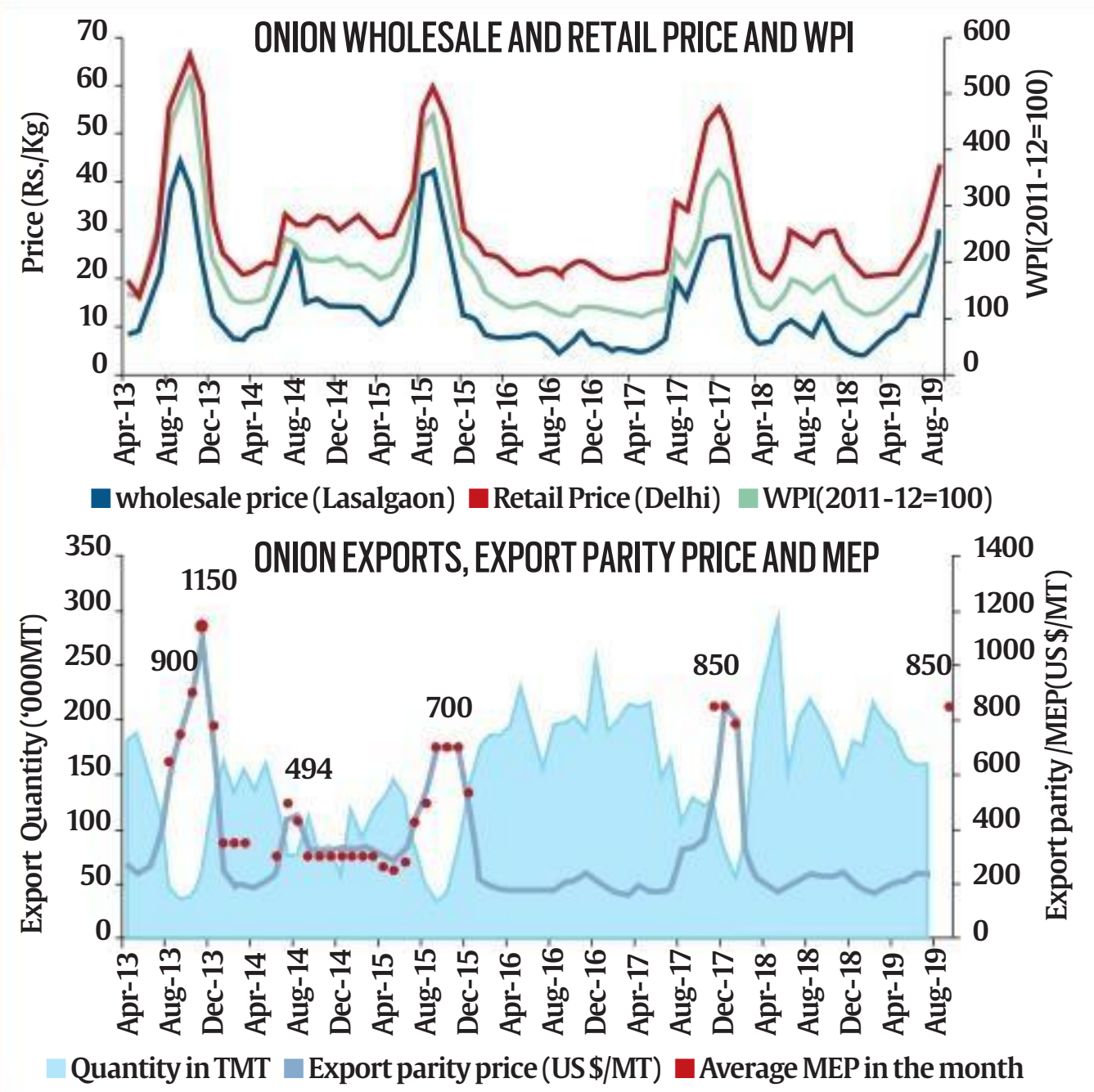


Illustration: C R Sasikumar

## Wipe away the onion tears

The government's concern over spike in onion prices is justified. But the policy instruments it is using won't solve the problem



FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH  
BY ASHOK GULATI AND HARSH WARDHAN

as it is today to save the consumers, perhaps these spikes would have been avoided. But there is an inherent "consumer bias" in our agri-price policies. This would be even more so when MMTC imports onions and "dumps" at below their import parity prices to "tame" domestic prices. This is likely to happen in late October-November, when the kharif crop will start arriving in the market and prices would be nose-diving in any case.

It may be noted that both these policy instruments — restricting exports through high MEP and dumping imported onions at below cost — are not only anti-farmer, but also anti-agri-exports and contrary to the prime minister's vision of doubling farmers' incomes. This must be avoided at all costs.

Figure 2 shows that whenever high MEP is imposed, such as \$850/tonne, which translates to roughly Rs 60/kg, exports dropped sharply. The export parity price from October 2018 till date has remained below \$300/tonne (see Figure 2). So this MEP of \$850/tonne will deprive farmers of whatever little benefits they were getting from onion exports. India has emerged as the largest exporter of onions in the world, having exported about 2.4 million tonnes in 2018-19 out of a production of 23.5 million tonnes. Remember, it takes years to build export markets but with such abrupt export restrictions, India becomes an unreliable exporter, which adversely hits its unit value of exports. This damage is far greater compared to the short-term gains the government is eyeing.

So, what could be the best possible solutions? First, one needs to remember that price stabilisation does not come free. NAFED, which is entrusted with price stabilisation, should procure at least 2-3 lakh tonnes at the rabi harvest time (April-May), ensuring that farmers get at least Rs 12-15/kg, when they were getting Rs 4-8/kg. This will save onion farmers from a price-crash and give them reasonable profits, incentivising production and exports. But these stored onions will incur storage costs. Storages at farm level suffer losses of about 20-25 per cent, which can be brought down to 5-10 per cent with modern cold storages. But cold stores will cost about Rs 1.5/kg/month. These stored onions can then be released during August through first half of October, before the kharif harvest starts arriving. If NAFED incurs,

let us say, five months storage cost at about Rs 75/kg, and if the procurement is at Rs 12-15/kg, they can still offload at say Rs 20-23/kg, and the retail price in September-October can be tamed to below Rs 30/kg.

Second, our analysis of onion value chains for three years average, ending 2018-19, with season-wise weighted average of wholesale prices from major mandis in Maharashtra, MP, Gujarat, and Rajasthan catering to Delhi's onion demand, reveals that onion farmers get a mere 29 per cent share of the consumer's rupee. The rest constitutes costs and margins of middlemen, with retailers apportioning the highest share. With the majority of onions traded through the APMC markets, the auctioning procedure is controlled by powerful traders and commission agents with much less bargaining power for farmers. Layers of mandi fees and commissions escalate prices further without much value addition or benefit to farmers. Our field visits to major mandis (Azadpur, Lasalgaon, Pimpalgaon, Mahuva) revealed that actual commissions are way above the prescribed charges. Officially levied on buyers, ultimately it is farmers that bear the burden. What all this indicates is that an overhaul of the APMCs is overdue.

Third, the Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI) should be at the forefront to extensively promote the use of dehydrated onions (flakes, powder, granules) among domestic households and institutions like the armed forces, hospitals, restaurants and schools (mid-day meals). This will take the pressure off fresh onions during the lean season. Currently, India exports 85 per cent of its dehydrated onions, and is the largest exporter of dehydrated onions in the world. Dehydrated products are much cheaper to store and are more durable. They can help check the spikes in onion prices. This will reduce wastage and help farmers get a fair price and consumers can switch to these dehydrated onions in the lean season at affordable prices.

If the government can take these steps, it will not only know its onions but also farmers.

Gulati is Infosys Chair Professor for Agriculture and Wardhan is consultant at ICRIER

Onion price rise in September is not new. Prices rise in September almost every year due to seasonality, but every alternate year there is an accelerated spike (see Figure 1) due to 'some other factors'. This shakes any political party in power. The standard response is imposition of MEP, stocking limits on traders, and sometimes even income tax raids on onion traders. These crude measures don't provide sustainable solutions.

## VIEW FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD



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

### LEADER AND DIPLOMACY

MUNIR AKRAM, former Pakistan ambassador to the UN and columnist for *Dawn*, displays in his article on September 29 a growing trend across South Asia. He praises Imran Khan's speech and diplomacy at the UN General Assembly, in terms that could be described as sycophantic: "In the person of a bold, honest and dedicated leader, Pakistan has been offered a historic opportunity to address its multiple external challenges, play a constructive role in resolving regional disputes and promote critical global objectives." Akram, a career diplomat, appears to believe that a "charismatic" leader offers a historic opportunity. This is how he describes Khan's speech and what he said about Kashmir: "India's unilateral and brutal attempt to annex occupied Jammu and Kashmir is what took the prime minister to the UN. His much-anticipated address to the UNGA was impassioned, eloquent and substantive, forcefully projecting the real nature of the BJP-RSS government, the grave human rights violations it is perpetrating in Kashmir, and the danger of a potentially catastrophic war between two nuclear-weapon states." But the real question is whether the Pakistan PM's words yielded tangible diplomatic gains. On this, even Akram is unable to provide a clear answer — or at least one

that can reconcile his high praise for Imran Khan with the lack of international opprobrium over India's "unilateral actions" and "gross human rights violations" in Kashmir: "Even though the conscience of the global champions of human rights appears to be dulled by the promised profits in India's large market, and most of the world's chancelleries have yet to publicly acknowledge the impending threat of genocide and war between Pakistan and India, most states are concerned and desire a peaceful resolution of the crisis created by India's actions." Akram also describes how Khan addressed Pakistan's other diplomatic challenges — in Afghanistan, Iran, with the US, etc — and asks for the national and government to support the country's foreign policy establishment.

### SLOWDOWN AND NEPAL

As a regional economic powerhouse, India's fortunes have a ripple effect beyond its borders, as highlighted by the September 26 editorial in the *Kathmandu Post*. The editorial expresses deep concern over the dependence and, so, negative effects in Nepal from the slowdown in India. "With the southern neighbour in the midst of an economic slowdown, Nepal can expect to experience far-reaching impacts. The reason is simple: Our

trade is heavily dependent on India. We import everything — from agricultural products to fast-moving consumer goods — from the southern neighbour," it says. Nepal is also going to be affected in terms of imports: "India also happens to be Nepal's largest export partner too. With the Indian economy hitting rock bottom, Nepal needs to diversify its export market and the market for services alike. Products like cardamom, polyester yarn, jute goods and so on are among the major exports from Nepal to India. What's more, many tourists come to Nepal with the purpose of visiting temples or getting respite from the scorching heat. Undeniably, India's ailing economy will impact Nepal's export and its economy too." Frustrated, the editorial hints at less dependence on an unreliable neighbour.

### NPAs IN BANGLADESH

The editorial in the *Daily Star* on September 28 expresses alarm at the recent IMF report that has found that the country's bad loan crisis is far worse than previously anticipated "According to a report published by the international money-lender, the amount of bad loans is actually double the figure presented by the Bangladesh government. This is in part the result of policies and practices that not only enable banks to mask

their default loans as rescheduled loans and 'special mention' loans but also allow big loan defaulters to go about their business unfettered. The large borrowers have exploited the stay order by the court which has caused a large amount of this money to disappear from the CIB database, and the banks can also report them as non-classified." Like has been reported in India, "what is even more alarming is the fact that most of these defaulters are well-connected and influential businessmen" who believe that they won't have to face any consequences. The state is also sending capital mixed signals, according to the editorial: "Bangladesh Bank has issued NOCs to banks on a case-by-case basis to reschedule defaulted loans. This has sent a very wrong message to the defaulters. Moreover, the central bank's backtracking on the principle of imposing strict discipline on distressed borrowers is sending out the wrong signal to these unscrupulous businessmen — that the banks are rewarding financial malpractice, or at the very least, bad credit decisions are being encouraged." The editorial asks the government to act on the recommendations of the IMF. Unscrupulous businessmen, it suggests, must not be allowed to derail the country's impressive growth record.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### FAIR, UNFAIR

THIS REFERS TO the article, "Why property rights matter" (IE, September 27). Whenever development projects like the construction of national highways or a metro railway comes up, many people have to sacrifice their private property for the larger public good. But they are not adequately compensated. The amount given to them is most often not enough to buy similar property nearby.

Manish Tailor, Jaipur

### LISTEN TO GRETA

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Being Greta" (IE, September 27). A young girl has shaken our conscience. Her concern about climate change and its effects on her generation is noteworthy. We all owe it to our younger generation, we have done them wrong. In the name of technology, power and superficial goals, we've forgotten that what our children really need is a cleaner and healthier world to live in. Greta Thunberg's has raised valid points. If the politicians do not pay heed, individual citizens should rise to the occasion.

Samita Kaur via e-mail

### TRUST MATTERS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial "Cop out" (IE, September 27). The case of alleged sexual exploitation of a student

### LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

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

THE WINNER RECEIVES SELECT EXPRESS PUBLICATIONS

by the politically powerful Swami Chinmayanand needs foolproof investigation by the Special Investigation Team. A questionable verdict will shake the faith of the people in the justice delivery system. More worryingly, this investigation could be a reference point for future probes.

Tarsem Singh, Mahilpur