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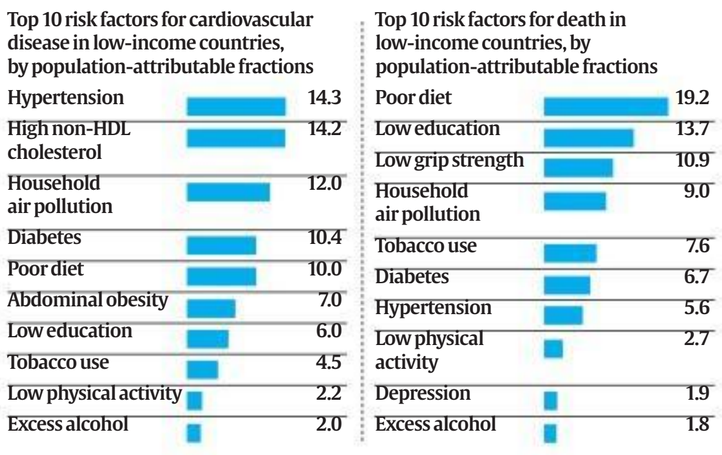
TELLING NUMBERS

Air pollution in Indian homes key heart risk factor: The Lancet



ANURADHA MASCARENHAS
PUNE, SEPTEMBER 3

HOUSEHOLD air pollution has emerged as one of the key causes of cardiovascular diseases (CVDs), and 12% of all CVDs in low-income countries are attributable to it, a new report has said. Hypertension is the largest risk factor for CVD in low-income countries (which include India), followed by high non-HDL cholesterol and household air pollution.

The report is one of two from a study by the Prospective Urban and Rural Epidemiologic (PURE), both published online in *The Lancet* on Tuesday and presented at the European Society of Cardiology 2019. One report looks at common diseases, hospitalisation and death; the other at CVD risk factors in middle-aged adults in 21 countries.

What it means for India

In the report that looked at risk factors for CVD, researchers enrolled 1,55,722 participants between January 2005 and December 2016. These included 35,793 from five low-income countries, including India.

Household air pollution is a greater risk factor for CVD in India than diabetes, tobacco use, low physical activity and poor diet. An earlier report from a PURE study (*Lancet Respiratory Medicine* 2014) showed that Indians had the lowest lung function among the 21 countries studied.

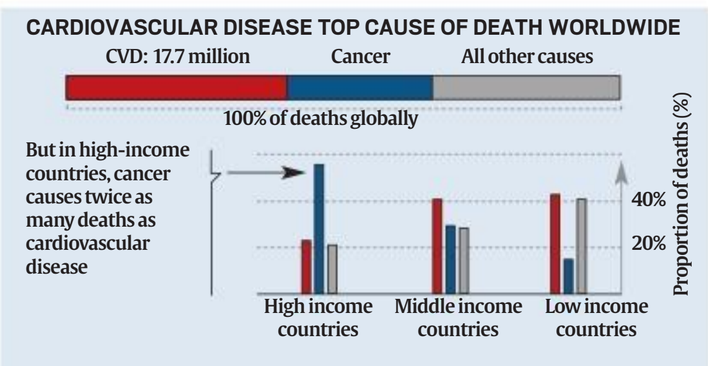
At least 65% of homes in India use biomass fuel for cooking and heating. In urban areas, the use of mosquito coils, *dhoop* sticks and *agarbattis* contribute to high household air pollution.

Dr V Mohan, Director of Madras Diabetes Research Foundation and one of the study authors, told *The Indian Express* that household air pollution is becoming an important cause of overall and cardiovascular mortality in low-income countries. "This is actually a window of opportunity... because if the household air pollution can be controlled, we can see significant decrease in mortality including due to cardiovascular disease in India," Dr Mohan said.

Dr Sundeep Salvi, Director, Chest Research Foundation, and an expert on the national steering committee to prevent air pollution, said the study has highlighted for the first time that household air pollution is also a leading risk factor for heart disease and deaths in India. "The major focus has been ambient air pollution that is pollution rising from motor vehicles and industries. It is now time to wake up and realise that the pollution we generate in our house is also responsible for significant adverse effects," Dr Salvi said.

CVD and cancer

The other report, which followed 1,62,534 middle-aged adults in the 21 countries, found that CVD remains the leading cause of mortality among middle aged adults globally, but this is no longer the case in high-income countries, where cancer is now responsible for twice as many deaths as CVD. It was estimated that 55 million deaths occurred in the world in 2017, of which approximately 17.7 million were due to CVD. Dr Mohan explained that in high-income countries, people have started living longer, so deaths due to CVD have reduced, and more are now dying due to cancers.



Source: The Lancet

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SIMPLY PUT

In ethanol, govt's sugar solution

Government has hiked ethanol procurement price for blending with petrol, allowed conversion of old sugar into ethanol. How is the move expected to address problems of overproduction and unpaid dues?

PARTHA SARATHI BISWAS & HARISH DAMODARAN
PUNE, NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 3

ON TUESDAY, the government approved an increase in the price of ethanol to be procured by public sector oil marketing companies (OMCs) from sugar mills for blending with petrol for the 2019-20 supply year from December 1. The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) also allowed conversion of old sugar into ethanol, which again is expected to help mills deal with the current overproduction in the sweetener and make timely payments to farmers for the cane delivered by them.

Cane being transported to a sugar mill in Shamli, Uttar Pradesh, in January. *Express Archive/ Praveen Khanna*

THE SUGAR BALANCE SHEET*

1. Closing stocks as on September 30, 2018 : 104.11 LAKH TONNES
2. Production in 2018-19 season (Oct-Sep): 329.50 LAKH TONNES
3. Total availability (1+2) : 433.61 LAKH TONNES
4. Domestic consumption : 260 LAKH TONNES
5. Exports : 38 LAKH TONNES
6. Closing stocks as on Sep 30, 2019 (3-4-5): 135.61 LAKH TONNES
7. Likely production in 2019-20: 270-280 LAKH TONNES
8. Domestic consumption: 270 LAKH TONNES
9. Targeted exports: 60 LAKH TONNES
10. Closing stocks as on Sep 30, 2020 (6+7-8-9): 75.61-85.61 LAKH TONNES

**Projections do not factor in diversion of sugarcane juice for ethanol*

What exactly is ethanol and how do mills produce it?

Ethanol is basically alcohol of 99%-plus purity, which can be used for blending with petrol. The normal rectified spirit used for potable purposes has only 95% alcohol content. Both ethanol (also called anhydrous alcohol) and rectified spirit are produced mainly from molasses, a byproduct of sugar manufacture. Mills typically crush cane with a total fermentable sugars (TFS) content of about 14%. Much of this TFS — sucrose plus so-called reducing sugars (glucose and fructose) — gets crystallised into sugar. The uncrystallised, non-recoverable part goes into what is called 'C' molasses. The latter, constituting roughly 4.5% of the cane, has a TFS of 40%. Every 100 kg of TFS, in turn, yields 60 litres of ethanol. Thus, from one tonne of cane, mills can produce 115 kg of sugar (at 11.5% recovery) and 45 kg of molasses (18 kg TFS) that gives 10.8 litres of ethanol.

But rather than produce sugar, mills can also ferment the entire 14% TFS in the cane. In that event, they would end up making 84 litres of ethanol and zero kg of sugar. In between these two extreme cases, there are intermediate options as well, where the cane juice does not have to be crystallised right till the final 'C' molasses stage. The molasses can, instead, be diverted after the earlier 'A' and 'B' stages of sugar crystal formation. Mills, then, would produce some sugar, as opposed to fermenting the whole sugarcane juice into ethanol. If ethanol is manufactured using 'B' heavy molasses (7.25% of cane and with TFS of 50%), around 21.75 litres will get produced along with 95 kg of sugar from every 1 tonne of cane.

So what has the government done?

Given the surplus sugar production in the country, it has allowed mills to produce ethanol from 'B' heavy molasses and directly from sugarcane juice. On Tuesday, the CCEA approved even use of sugar and sugar syrup for production of ethanol; mills can simply add these to the molasses mother liquor for further fermentation. But the real impetus has come from mills getting higher rates for ethanol manufactured from the 'B' heavy and sugarcane juice routes. For the 2018-19 supply year (December-November), the ex-distillery price payable by OMCs for ethanol manufactured from the conventional 'C' molasses route was fixed at Rs 43.46 per litre. This was set higher at Rs 52.43/litre for ethanol from 'B' heavy molasses and Rs 59.13/litre from sugarcane juice. For the new 2019-20 supply year, the prices have been raised marginally to Rs 43.75/litre ('C' molasses), Rs 54.27/litre ('B' molasses) and Rs. 59.48/litre (sugarcane juice). Moreover, even ethanol produced from sugar and sugar syrup will enjoy the Rs 59.48/litre rate.

How will all this play out?

Currently, ex-factory prices of sugar are ruling at around Rs 32 per kg. If a mill were to produce 115 kg of sugar and 10.8 litres of ethanol through the conventional route, its gross realisation at Rs 32/kg and Rs 43.46/litre would be roughly Rs 4,149 from every tonne of cane crushed. But if it were to convert the entire cane juice into 84 litres of ethanol, the gross realisation at Rs 59.48/litre works out much higher at Rs 4,996 per tonne of cane. In other words, there is a huge incentive to produce ethanol today. This has been additionally facilitated by the government mandating 10% blending of petrol with ethanol. Between 2013-14 and 2018-19 (supply years), ethanol procurement by OMCs has increased from 38 crore litres to an estimated 200 crore-plus litres. Out of the latter, 32 crore litres is expected to be made from 'B' heavy molasses and sugarcane juice. If mills are able to divert more of cane juice for ethanol, it would mean producing less sugar. Since the country is producing too much sugar and is importing oil, the ethanol-blending programme is beneficial both for mills and for the country's balance of payments. Ten-per-cent blending requires 330 crore-odd litres of ethanol, which can now be produced through the 'B'-heavy molasses and sugarcane juice routes as well.

What is the present situation in sugar like?

Mills are expected to close the 2018-19 sugar season (October-September) with all-time-high stocks of 136 lakh tonnes (lt), which is equivalent to to six months of domestic consumption. Even if production falls from 329.5 lt to a projected 270-280 lt in the new season and exports nearly double to 60 lt — the country consumes only 265-270 lt a year — stocks will remain at levels where mills will still struggle to pay farmers (*see box*). As of now, they have outstanding cane dues of over Rs 10,000 crore, of which Rs 7,000 crore-plus is in UP alone. These will mount further as crushing for the 2019-20 season begins in a month's time. Ethanol is the only real saviour under the circumstances — both for mills and cane growers.

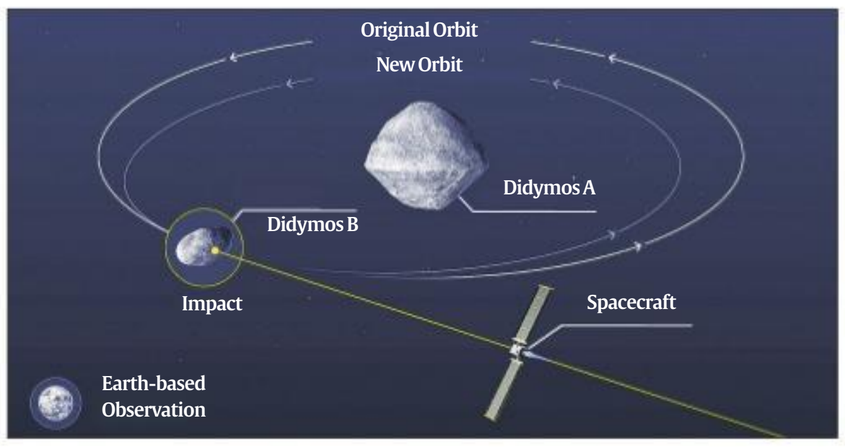
How to deflect an asteroid: plan in progress

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 3

AMONG ALL the causes that will eventually cause the extinction of life on Earth, an asteroid hit is widely acknowledged as one of the likeliest. Over the years, scientists have suggested different ways to ward off such a hit, such as blowing up the asteroid before it reaches Earth, or deflecting it off its Earth-bound course by hitting it with a spacecraft. Now, scientists have embarked on a plan to test their expertise with the second of these two methods.

The mission

It is an ambitious double-spacecraft mission to deflect an asteroid in space, to prove the technique as a viable method of planetary defence. The mission, which includes NASA and the European Space Agency (ESA), is known as the Asteroid Impact Deflection Assessment (AIDA). During September 11-13, asteroid researchers and spacecraft engineers from around the world will gather in Rome to discuss its progress.



Mission profile of NASA's DART mission, which aims to deflect Didymos B — the "moonlet" of the Didymos asteroid system. *European Space Agency*

The target is the smaller of two bodies in the "double Didymos asteroids" that are in orbit between Earth and Mars. Didymos is a near-Earth asteroid system. Its main body measures about 780 m across; the smaller body is a "moonlet" about 160 m in diameter.

The project aims to deflect the orbit of the smaller body through an impact by one spacecraft. Then a second spacecraft will survey the crash site and gather the maximum possible data on the effect of this collision, ESA explained in a statement.

Tools of the mission

NASA is building the Double Asteroid Impact Test (DART) spacecraft for launch in summer 2021. It is planned to collide with the target at 6.6 km/s in September 2022. Flying along with DART will be an Italian-made miniature CubeSat, called LICIACube, to record the moment of impact.

ESA's contribution is a mission called Hera, which will perform a close-up survey of the post-impact asteroid, acquiring measurements such as the asteroid's mass and detailed crater shape. Hera will also deploy a pair of CubeSats for close-up asteroid surveys and the very first radar probe of an asteroid. All this would allow researchers to model the efficiency of the collision. This can help turn this experiment into a technique that could be repeated, as needed, in the event of a real threat, ESA said.

Apache attack helicopters: what IAF's lethal new acquisition can achieve

MAN AMAN SINGH CHHINA
CHANDIGARH, SEPTEMBER 3

EIGHT APACHE AH-64E stealth attack helicopters, among the most advanced military flying machines in the world, joined the Indian Air Force on Tuesday, providing a significant boost to its combat capabilities at a time of complex security challenges.

How do the Apaches enhance the attack helicopter capabilities of the IAF at this stage, since it already has the Russian Mi-24/Mi-35 gunships in its inventory?

One of the major reasons why the IAF decided to go in for the Apaches is their ability to operate at much higher altitudes than the aging Russian attack helicopters and, of course, because of the advanced technical abilities that come with the American-made helicopter.

The Mi-35 could not operate in the Kargil conflict at the heights that the IAF wanted it to be used in support of the Army. While the primary task of the attack helicopter gunship is in support of mechanised armoured formations, yet the adaptability of the inventory to be used elsewhere is also important.

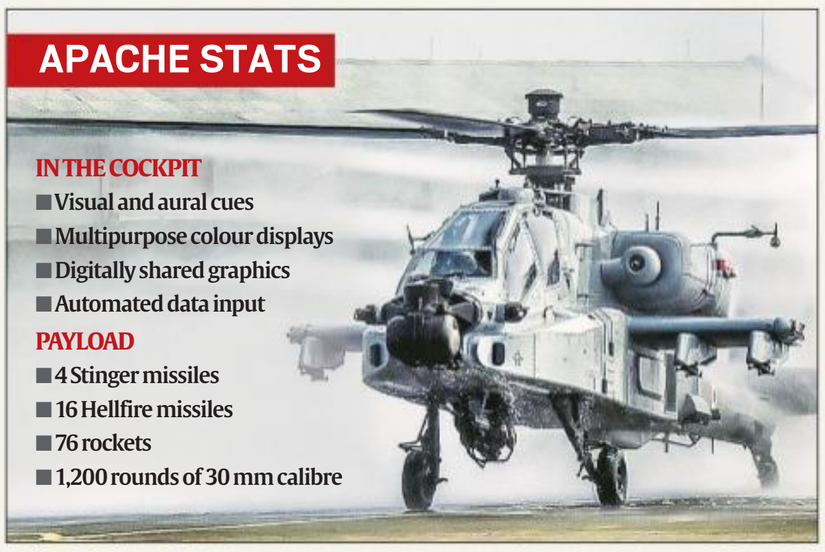
The Russian gunships were made for an era when a dual role was envisaged for them. Thus, in addition to their attack role, they have cabin space for eight soldiers, who can be speedily dropped behind enemy positions. The Apache does not have any cargo role, and is, in comparison, smaller and more nimble.

Among the Apache's modern capabilities are the ability to shoot fire-and-forget anti-tank missiles, air-to-air missiles, rockets, and other munitions. It also has modern electronic warfare capabilities to provide versatility in network-centric aerial warfare.

So, how many Apaches will replace the IAF's Mi-35s?

IAF had signed a contract with aerospace major Boeing and the United States government in 2015 for 22 Apache AH-64Es. The first eight of these attack helicopters have been delivered on schedule, and the last of the choppers is to be delivered by March 2020.

These helicopters will be deployed in the western regions of the country. In addition to these machines, another six helicopters are being procured for the Indian Army, which will enhance mechanised operations comprising tanks and infantry combat vehicles in desert and semi-desert regions.



Will all the Apaches be in flyaway condition, or does the deal involve local production?

The Apaches are being received in a semi-flyaway condition, as were the Chinook heavy-lift helicopters, also manufactured by Boeing. After affixing their rotors, the aircraft are able to fly on their own.

There is an agreement between Boeing and Tata to manufacture the fuselage of the Apaches in India under the joint-venture Tata Boeing Aerospace Limited, Hyderabad. It is not known if any of these fuselages have been used in the eight Apaches delivered so far.

Who is supplying the firepower for the Apaches? What weaponry does an Apache carry?

The firepower in the Apaches is being integrated with the helicopter by Boeing itself in the United States. The helicopter is capable of delivering a variety of weapons, which include air-to-ground Hellfire missiles, 70 mm Hydra rockets, and air-to-air Stinger missiles.

The Apaches also carry a 30 mm chain gun with 1,200 rounds as part of the area weapon subsystem. The helicopter carries the fire control Longbow radar, which has 360-degree coverage, and a nose-mounted sensor suite for target acquisition and night-vision systems.

The weapons and radar systems in the helicopter will enhance the capability of the IAF in providing integrated combat aviation cover to the Army strike corps. These tandem seating helicopters are day/night, all weather capable, and have high agility and survivability against battle damage. These are easily maintainable even in field conditions, and are capable of prolonged operations in tropical and desert regions.

When and where did IAF pilots train on the Apaches before the induction?

The IAF pilots who were to fly the Apaches began their training on the helicopters in the United States in 2018. The US Army provided the training to the fleet's pilots and maintenance personnel at Fort Rucker, Alabama.

Which other countries fly these attack helicopters?

Boeing's global customers for the Apache include Egypt, Greece, India, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Korea, Kuwait, the Netherlands, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom, apart from the United States Army. The company said in a statement that India was the 16th nation to procure the helicopter, and that it was receiving the most advanced variant.

THE EDITORIAL PAGE

WORDLY WISE

YOU NEED A GOOD BEDSIDE MANNER WITH DOCTORS OR YOU WILL GET NOWHERE.
— WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS

The Indian EXPRESS
FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA
BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

THE HEALING TOUCH

A new law will not remove trust deficit between doctors and patients. National Medical Commission must evolve protocols

THREE DAYS AFTER a mob beat a doctor to death at a tea-estate hospital in Assam, the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has placed in the public domain a draft bill "to address the issue of violence faced by healthcare professionals". The provisions of the draft law, uploaded on the ministry's website on Monday, are stringent — they deal with mental and physical abuse targeting doctors, and cover not just hospitals and a radius of 50 metres around them, but also ambulances and home visits by healthcare professionals. The draft proposes a maximum imprisonment of 10 years and a fine of Rs 10 lakh for assaulting doctors, para-medical staff, medical students and diagnostic service providers in healthcare facilities. It addresses a long-standing demand of doctors for a Central law to curb violence against healthcare professionals. Cleaning the unholy mess involving doctors, patients and hospitals will, however, require much more than punitive measures.

The debate on medical ethics in the country has largely been framed by the doctor-patient binary. This has not only come in the way of a satisfactory resolution of the complex problems pertaining to the rights of patients and doctors but has also resulted in doctors becoming the face of the failure of the country's healthcare system. At one government doctor for 10,000 people, India's doctor-patient ratio is far lower than the World Health Organisation's recommended ratio of 1:1,000. Moreover, the atmosphere in most public and several private hospitals is hardly congenial for those suffering serious illness. Tempers often run high when patients have to contend with unhygienic and overcrowded facilities, the waiting time to consult a specialist is painfully long and there are queues for even routine diagnostic tests. With most hospitals lacking grievance redressal mechanisms, patients often vent their frustration on healthcare professionals. A study published in The Lancet in 2017 noted that nearly 75 per cent Indian doctors have faced some form of hostility during their career.

The rising incidents of violence against doctors point to an aspect of healthcare that hasn't received much attention in policy circles: There is hardly any meaningful communication between doctors and patients. The doctor-patient relationship in India is largely paternalistic. A doctor rarely communicates to patients — or their relatives — the complexities of the ailment in jargon-free language or prepares them for long-drawn therapy. The medical school doesn't equip a young doctor with the communication skills to convey bad news to patients' relatives with empathy. Violence in any setting is reprehensible. But the hostility against doctors points to a trust deficit between them and patients. A law against such violence will address, at best, the symptoms of the problem. The new regulator of the medical profession in the country, the National Medical Commission, must evolve protocols to heal the doctor-patient relationship.

FOR CHILDREN'S SAKE

UP government must fix flaws in the mid-day meal scheme, not target journalists for reporting them

THE FIR AGAINST a journalist who called attention to the substandard mid-day meal that was being provided to children in a school in Mirzapur, Uttar Pradesh, reeks of official highhandedness. As the state's Basic Education Minister Satish Dwivedi has reportedly said, police cannot proceed against a journalist for "merely exposing corruption and highlighting reality". The FIR must be withdrawn immediately.

Pawan Jaiswal had shot a video in the last week of August that revealed how children at Seur Government Primary School were fed only rotis and salt in their mid-day meal — as per government guidelines, the meal needs to be freshly cooked and wholesome. Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Awanish Awasthi has alleged that the video was stage-managed and justified the FIR against Jaiswal and two others, including a village pradhan pratinidhi, Rajkumar Pal. Awasthi has claimed that the expose was a conspiracy to malign the image of the education department since the journalist, instead of approaching the authorities, made the information public. The official seems to have confused the role of journalism with that of the government's public relations department. By all accounts, Jaiswal did what was expected of him as a journalist, which is to report the story in the public space. An inquiry by the Child Development Officer, Additional DM and Sub-Divisional Magistrate, Chunar, has confirmed the veracity of Jaiswal's report and action was taken against the errant officials. There seems to be no evidence so far to suggest that the journalist and the panchayat representative had motives other than exposing the negligence of the school officials. The mid-day meal scheme is a pivotal government initiative that has improved attendance and learning outcomes and is helping fight child malnutrition. It needs to be monitored carefully.

The FIR against Jaiswal could have a chilling effect on other journalists in the state. UP's record in delivering public services and goods is far from desirable. Officials concerned about the government's image should fix the flaws in the system instead of targeting those who merely bring them to public notice. As for the UP Police, it should focus on urgent tasks like curtailing crime through legal means, instead of harassing journalists for doing their job.

CAPTAIN'S WILL TO WIN

Virat Kohli's appetite for success, his single-mindedness, make him stand apart

IT SHOULDN'T COME as a surprise that Virat Kohli, the most ambitious and intense modern-day Indian cricketer, has already become the most successful Test captain, notching up his 28th win, one more than MS Dhoni. He now has 13 overseas wins from 27 Tests, while Sourav Ganguly had 11 in 28 games. His job was definitely helped by the fact that he is in command of a far superior pace attack than his predecessors. But it would be churlish to use that as a putdown.

It's in his intensity and will to win that he stands apart from MS Dhoni, who was a good limited-overs captain but who often let the game drift in Tests. Dhoni had a better batting line-up and his bowling attack, too, wasn't toothless. Barring the wonderful Jasprit Bumrah, the other pacers under Kohli had played under Dhoni's leadership. In fact, Ishant Sharma lost his way then and Mohammad Shami, who too has played under Dhoni, has stepped up under Kohli. Unlike Dhoni, Kohli has also shown a greater single-mindedness in his pursuit of wins, even if on the odd occasion it has led to a loss instead of a plausible draw. Dhoni would often play down overseas matches, but Kohli has repeatedly talked about his ambition to win more overseas.

Ganguly had the intensity and the will to win overseas but while his blueprint was built on a fabulous batting line-up — his elevation of Virender Sehwag as an opener was the most impactful factor behind his success as a leader — Kohli's is built around his bowlers. Still, despite his achievements, Kohli isn't yet rated as highly as Dhoni or Ganguly in public perception. Dhoni's aura was built on limited-overs success, in particular the 50-over and T20 World Cup triumphs, and Ganguly would be rightly seen as the man who got India to win overseas on a (relatively) consistent basis. The good thing is Kohli is young and if he continues to improve as a captain, he can leave behind a formidable legacy.

Not without humanity

NRC cannot be the definitive document to prove citizenship. It can provide a base from which to move forward

MITRA PHUKAN

ON AUGUST 31, the final National Register of Citizens, excluding 19,06,657 people from the 3,30,27,661 who had applied, was released in Guwahati. This was a controversial document, much anticipated and dreaded in Assam for the past few years, ever since work on updating the NRC of 1951 started in 2013. The 19 lakh have been given another 120 days to submit documentary proof to the Foreigners' Tribunals.

The issue of identity has been central to Assam for decades. Agitations and movements demanding the ouster of "outsiders" have led to street demonstrations, peaceful processions as well as terrible violence. Students have lost years in academic lives, the economy has suffered greatly. There has been the inevitable lack of development because there is no peace. And yet there has been no satisfactory answer to the fraught question of the number of illegal immigrants in this state. The NRC seems set to be yet another controversial document, its relevance questioned by almost all stakeholders.

The process itself has been perceived, sometimes, to be heartless, as when inhabitants of remote areas reeling under calamitous floods were called, at very short notice, to appear before NRC centres in distant places. People have committed suicide, and many are being treated for depression, after not finding their names in the draft rolls. Strange things — such as one sibling appearing on the rolls, while another is missing, parents' names on it but that of children missing, the name of a soldier serving in another state missing — point to the flaws of the humongous exercise.

There have been doubts about whether the state government machinery was up to this complex task. Was it even practical to have a Register of Citizens in just one state, when both in- and out- migration within the country is common? Many of the respondents would be illiterate, they would not see documentary proof as a necessity. As it turns out, this last has turned out not to be true. People who, by their dress and appearance, are viewed as "foreigners" and "Bangladeshis", with insecurity dogging them for decades, have carefully preserved the documents that would prove their citizenship. Besides, there are people with very "Assamese" names who do not find their names on the NRC. Others could not submit relevant documents and are now living in a state of fear. There are also a large number of people of Nepali origin whose names do not figure, though they have lived here for decades.

> A figure of 50 lakh immigrants residing illegally in Assam has been bandied about. There were fears about being 'swamped' by the language, religion and culture of the 'Other'. Since this figure was about 16 per cent of the total population of Assam, it was certainly unacceptably high. But there is no convincing explanation of how it was arrived at. Even the draft rolls of the NRC had excluded around 40 lakh. And now that 19 lakh is the official figure, arrived at after a time-consuming and expensive process, a figure likely to become even smaller, those who believed in the veracity of the previous number, and who based their thinking and political careers on it, are left insisting that it is flawed.

The All Assam Students' Union, which spearheaded the anti-foreigner movement decades ago, calls it a flawed and incomplete document, because the number of those excluded is too small by their reckoning. The BJP, AGP and Congress are united in their unhappiness about the document, though for different reasons.

For some decades now, a figure of 50 lakh immigrants residing illegally in Assam has been bandied about. There were fears about being "swamped" by the language, religion and culture of the "Other." Since this figure was about 16 per cent of the total population of Assam, it was certainly unacceptably high. But there is no convincing explanation of how it was arrived at. Even the draft rolls of the NRC had excluded around 40 lakh. And now that 19 lakh is the official figure, arrived at after a time-consuming and expensive process, a figure likely to become even smaller, those who believed in the veracity of the previous number, and who based their thinking and political careers on it, are left insisting that it is flawed. Depending on the side they are on, the flaws take on different hues. Meanwhile, almost two million people will need to prove their citizenship status again.

It is nobody's case that Assam does not have illegal migrants. It does, as do many other countries, and states that are better policed, and have less porous borders. The sensitivity of this issue here, though, has been caused by several factors. There is the fact of the visible markers of identity of Muslims of Bengali origin. The bearded, lungi-clad man is called a Bangladeshi and a Mian, derogatively. This is why many people from the Char areas had welcomed the idea of an error-free NRC, since it would prove, publicly, their Indian citizenship. Migrants from Nepal do not face this abuse because they do not have identity markers like the Muslims of Bengali origin do. There is also the fact, unfortunately, of religion — Hindu, non-Hindu.

Assam has been a land of shifting borders. Even after Independence, several states were carved out of Greater Assam. The Brahmaputra and Barak valleys lie in uneasy coexistence.

The creation of Bangladesh in 1971 saw a huge influx of refugees, straining Assam's resources greatly. The topography of the region is such that borders are difficult to define. Chars, the riverine islands that dot the Brahmaputra along its course, rise, and become inhabited. After a few years, they are washed away, and the inhabitants, who live in makeshift homes, move to a newer place. In the vast expanse of the Brahmaputra, with no shoreline in sight, who is to say, as one ekes out a precarious existence, whether one is a citizen of India or not.

There is a need for a valid and accurate NRC. But most people here believe that it cannot be at the cost of humanity. There is also the notion that the demand for the NRC is a product of xenophobia. Events have shown that this is not true. For instance, when many busloads of people from distant Chars in western Assam came, overnight, to provide, once more, their citizenship documents to NRC centres in eastern Assam, they were looked after by volunteers who came together to give them food and shelter. Many had the markers that identified them as Muslims of Bengali origin, while the majority of those who provided succour were not.

One can only hope that this humanism will show the way forward. What will happen to those who cannot prove their citizenship, and yet have their homes here? Not giving them voting rights, while they still keep rights to property and employment, would be one way out acceptable to most, since it was the idea of these migrants becoming vote banks for a particular party that gave rise to insecurities. In this exercise, there can be no place for religious affiliations or bias. But first and foremost, seal the porous borders with all neighbouring countries.

This NRC cannot be the definitive document to prove citizenship. At most, it can provide a base from which to move forward, with humane practicality.

Phukan is a novelist from Assam

A FICKLE FRIEND

Government has laid out red carpet for foreign capital, which is unreliable in long run

BINOY VISWAM

PRESENTING THE BUDGET 2019-20, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman was eager to paint a rosy picture of the Indian economy. But within no time, this show of strength was proved hollow. It was only a matter of a few weeks before the government began to frantically come out with new experiments for strengthening the already strong economy. The latest announcement is the merger of 10 public sector banks to create four entities.

The government believes that big banks will now have enhanced credit capacity. This may be true to an extent. But, that alone will not save the economy. The stability of the banking system is also related to the capacity for recovery of loans. The government has boasted that it recovered Rs1,23,156 crore in the last financial year. But, this recovery rate is to be compared with the volume of bad loans — Rs 8,06,412 crore in March 2019.

Sitharaman was conspicuously silent about the huge amounts of money written off. Bank frauds grew by 84 per cent in the last financial year. A lion's share of bad loans is attributed to the nexus between corporate houses, bank executives and political chieftains. The bigger the banks become, bigger is the risk of fraud. Mergers will only add to that risk. The experience of mergers, as it happened in the State Bank of India group, underline the futility of the exercise. It is ironic, that on the same day as the merger announcement, the government had to announce the lowest GDP growth in the last six years of 5 per cent for the first quarter of 2019-20.

> Their claims of a strong and vibrant economy have been shattered to pieces. The country has plunged into an ever deepening economic crisis. Their statements about "fastest growing economy" and their dreams of a "Five Trillion dollar" economy are now staring at them.

It was unprecedented that during this period, the government had to arm-twist the RBI to transfer to it a record amount of Rs 1.76 lakh crore. Reportedly, the government nominee on the committee for reviewing the RBI's economic capital framework had pleaded for Rs 54,255 crore more from the RBI reserve. It was turned down by the committee. The government nominee, who is also the Finance Secretary, tried to convince the members that the financial stability risk provisions be reduced to 3 per cent of the RBI balance sheet, whereas the "safe range" according to experts is between 4.5 to 5.5 per cent.

This shows that the government is so frantic that it is not concerned about the sustainability of even the RBI. Such kinds of policy clashes between the government and RBI had led to the resignation of former RBI Governor Urjit Patel and Deputy Governor Viral Acharya. The Modi government is not in a mood to pay attention to the basic principles of banking, according to which the stability of a bank is the cardinal concern for all its transactions.

The government's claims of a strong and vibrant economy have been shattered to pieces. About a week ago, the finance minister announced new measures aimed at attaining financial stability and economic growth. It was as though she was presenting a new budget. The thrust of the proclamations was, of course, "ease of doing business". In all the crucial sectors, rules and regulations were relaxed to suit the interests of capitalist greed.

The justification was that only private investments can bring development for the nation. When they talk about an investment-driven economy, again they eye foreign direct investment. All relaxations, concessions and red carpets are meant mainly for them. They are reluctant to learn lessons from the experience of various countries vis-a- vis unbridled foreign capital. Such countries had to mortgage all their national interests and political autonomy at the altar of foreign capital.

On July 28, the Cabinet further came out with new relaxations allowing 100 per cent FDI in coal mining and contract manufacturing, and 26 per cent in digital media. A vast world of unlimited profit is being offered to global barons.

It is well known that foreign capital is eager to enter Indian market in order to maximise profits. But, the moment they see a better playground, this capital will leave. The impact of unconditional dependence on foreign capital would be disastrous for the economy. We are not in a time of stability and growth. But, the government wants to hide the gravity of the crisis.

Viswam is Rajya Sabha MP from the Communist Party of India

SEPTEMBER 4, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

INDIAN EXPRESS
US, China stage a walkout at Havana

NAM IN HAVANA

PRESIDENT FIEDEL CASTRO formally inaugurated the sixth Non-aligned Conference with a hard-hitting anti-imperialist, anti-racist, anti-American and anti-Chinese speech. However, he was equally forthright on the need for developing countries to wage a war against poverty and underdevelopment. He brought into the open the plight of the non-oil producing underdeveloped countries and appealed to the "sense of responsibility" of the oil-producing countries to cooperate with the less privileged countries. With his charismatic personality, Castro dominated the inaugural session with a speech that lasted an hour and 25 minutes.

FAMINE IN MP

A SPECTRE OF famine is looming large over a sizeable part of Madhya Pradesh. Twenty-three of the state's 45 districts are reeling under the impact of the worst drought of the decade. The late arrival of monsoon and meagre rainfall have destroyed kharif, the main crop accounting for above 60 per cent of the total foodgrains production in the state, and created an unprecedented shortage of drinking water in both rural and urban areas.

JANATA'S CHARGES

THE JANATA PARTY charged the "defectors", led by Charan Singh, with frustrating the mandate given by the people in March 1977. But, it gave a solemn pledge to the people that with their cooperation, the party would provide a "cohesive, stable, progressive and dynamic" government led by Jagjivan Ram with his national stature, administrative ability and deep sympathy for the legitimate aspirations of the downtrodden. In its resolution on the political situation, the national executive reiterated its conviction that the Indian polity cannot be identified with religion, language or culture of a section of the people. Any sectarian approach is not only contrary to the philosophy of life but also to the national ethos so painstakingly built during the freedom struggle.

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

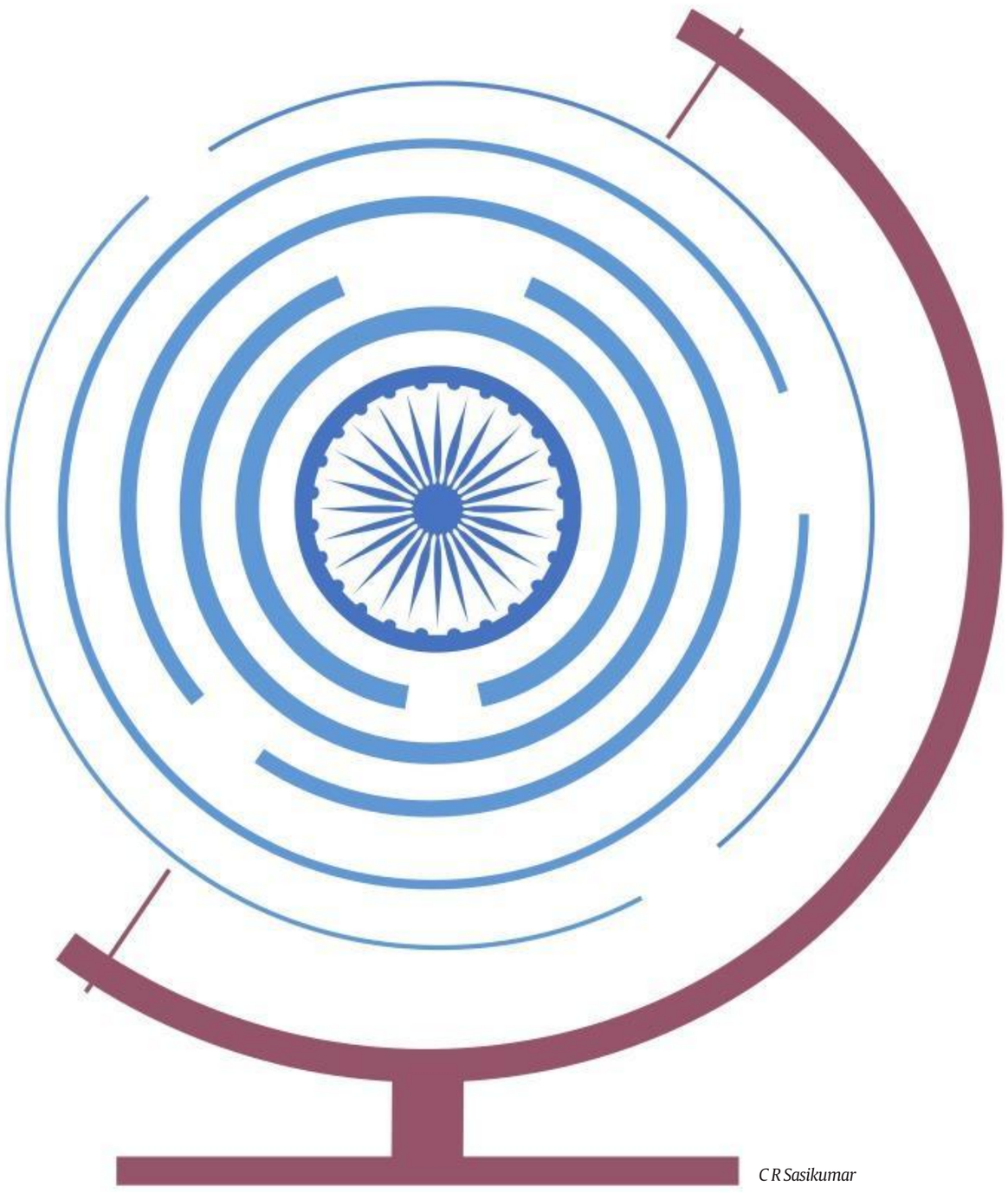
"With the threshold for documentary proof high, and the appeals process long and murky, the process of updating the NRC has been mired in controversy given the BJP's penchant for stoking anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant sentiment."

— DAWN

The world's most happening place

Global power axis is shifting eastwards from the Pacific-Atlantic. India's future lies in the Indian Ocean region

RAM MADHAV



C R Sasikumar

THREE DECADES AGO, when globalisation was the flavour of the season, a big section in India, comprising the conventional Right and Left, was up in arms against it. The argument, broadly, was that globalisation was a conspiracy hatched by the developed West to take over the emerging markets of the developing world, that included India. Some of us, though we shared the concerns about globalisation, felt that this cannot be the sole argument against it. Our scepticism was based on the evolving global power order at that time.

The advent of the globalisation era had coincided with a significant geo-political development. Starting with the late '80s, fissures started erupting in the USSR body politic, ultimately leading to its dismemberment and collapse in the early '90s. The West's aggressive globalisation push started around that time. It had arguably seen the collapse of the USSR and the end of bipolarity in global politics as an opportunity to attempt a West-centric global standardisation.

Scholars in the West were gung-ho over this prospect. Recall Francis Fukuyama's famous article in 1989 in the reputed journal, *The National Interest*, provocatively titled "The End of History?" Later, in 1992, he expanded his theses into a book, *The End of History and The Last Man*. Fukuyama's argument was that with the collapse of the Soviet Union, humanity had reached "not just ... the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: That is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalisation of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government".

The unipolar world that Fukuyama had conceived in his article was the dominant thought in the West at the time globalisation was unfolding. Naturally, the thinking world outside had doubts and scepticism about the real intent of that process. Many scholars in the world questioned the validity and ambition of Fukuyama's argument. History proved them right and Fukuyama wrong.

Three decades into its existence, globalisation is at the end of its tether. Countries the world over are increasingly turning inwards. Global institutions are losing their relevance and influence over large parts of the world.

But the world is not turning nationalist, as some had argued at the time of the emergence of globalisation. Instead, we see a process of the emergence of new power blocs in different parts of the world. These power blocs are hankering to become strategic poles, thus leading to the emergence of a multi-polar world order. Multipolarity is the new flavour of the season in the 21st century, marking a death blow to globalisation and unipolarity.

Under the new pecking order, America continues to enjoy primacy but a much reduced one. The American leadership seems content with its role in global affairs reduced while its priorities seem more domestic than global. The European Union is struggling to find its coherence to emerge as an important pole. But internal contradictions like Brexit and disputes over the entry of East European nations bog it down. The rise of a China-centric Asian power order that has spawned new alliances, both regional and interest-based, is a phenomenon in our neighbourhood. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) have been causing ripples in the world today.

A new Hanseatic League-style arrangement is trying to reemerge on the world stage with the coming together of countries like Ireland, the Netherlands, the Nordic and Baltic states, while the Arab League, with 22 member states, is in complete disarray with war, terror and despotism. Erstwhile superpowers like Russia and the United Kingdom are struggling to find a place of prominence in the new 21st century world order. Leaders of both countries have great power ambitions — the UK leadership talks about "Global Britain" while Putin centered his 2018 campaign around the slogan "Strong Russia". Yet it appears to be a long road ahead for both countries.

Amidst all this, India is quietly building itself as an important power. Vibrant democracy, literate and skilled manpower and a vast middle class with strong purchasing power are its advantages that attract world attention today. Its strong leadership under Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been able to bring the country on par with major powers in the world through proactive diplomacy and global positioning. Yet we still have to travel a long distance before we emerge as a strong pole. We are no doubt capable of it, but for it to happen, we need to do a few things, and do them differently.

The Indian Ocean is where India's future lies. The global power axis is constantly shifting eastwards from the Pacific-Atlantic region, and the Indian Ocean region has emerged as the most influential region today. It is here that the power axis will settle down ultimately in this century; it is here that the emerging new economies come together with strong traditional economies; it is here that populations and markets with purchasing power exist; it is here that strong military powers with massive defence spending exist; it is here that massive energy-guzzlers like India and China are located. It is the world's most happening place today.

> The Indian leadership needs to appreciate the fact that in the emerging multipolar world order, India is a natural leader in the Indian Ocean region. By turning eastwards and focusing on building an Indian Ocean Bloc, it can aspire to rise as a guiding pole for many countries in the region. India has to think and act fast. As an influential region, it is already witnessing major competition among the leading powers. But with its historic, cultural and civilisational linkages with countries in the region and its present standing in the world, India could become a natural gravitational force for countries, mostly the island nations, in the region.

The Indian leadership needs to appreciate the fact that in the emerging multipolar world order, India is a natural leader in the Indian Ocean region. By turning eastwards and focusing on building an Indian Ocean Bloc, it can aspire to rise as a guiding pole for many countries in the region. India has to think and act fast. As an influential region, it is already witnessing major competition among the leading powers. But with its historic, cultural and civilisational linkages with countries in the region and its present standing in the world, India could become a natural gravitational force for countries, mostly the island nations, in the region.

An Indian Ocean Conference of the stakeholder nations in the region is thus an idea whose time has come.

The Fourth Indian Ocean Conference is taking place in the Maldives, with leaders of about 40 countries participating. The writer is national general secretary, BJP and director, India Foundation

On a shaky foundation

Central government did not renew President's rule in J&K, in accordance with Article 356, in time. It is a gaffe that has had dire consequences

GOPAL SANKARANARAYANAN

AS THE MIASMA around Article 370 pervades the public discourse, most conversations appear to revolve around the issues of broken promises, self-determination and lack of legislative consent. Of course, reams of processed wood pulp have attempted to navigate the readers through the jungle that is constitutional law, and for the most part, it appears that while integration of the state of Jammu and Kashmir with the federation may be unexceptionable, it is perhaps the process adopted that has raised questions (and hackles). The object of the present article is to look, not at the presidential orders from earlier this month, but at what formed the foundation of the entire exercise — the imposition of President's Rule in December, 2018.

Article 356 of the Constitution allows the President to impose his rule on a state where he is satisfied that governance is not in accordance with the Constitution. The proclamation he/she issues in this regard can also provide for the vesting of the powers of government in the President, that of the legislature in Parliament and most significantly, the suspension of the provisions of the Constitution that would apply to a body or authority in the state. In our Westminster form of government, this essentially means the central government can abuse Article 356 to impose its will on states where inconvenient opposition parties are in power. All our leaders have been guilty of its abuse, probably none more so than Indira Gandhi who is solely responsible for more than half of all its invocations since 1950.

Anticipating this misuse then, the Constituent Assembly provided two principal safeguards in Article 356: First, that every proclamation would be valid for only twp months; and second, if resolutions approving the proclamation were passed by both Houses of Parliament, then it would be valid for six months, which could be extended up to a maximum period of three years with parliamentary resolutions on each occasion. For the present discussion, it would be pertinent to consider the exact words of Article 356(4): "A Proclamation so approved shall, unless revoked, cease to operate on the expiration of a period of six months from the date of issue of the Proclamation."

As far as Jammu and Kashmir is concerned, the President first issued his Proclamation on December 19, 2018, vesting the powers of the government with himself and those of the legislature with Parliament. This was followed on January 3 by the approval of the Houses of Parliament. Notably, this approval gave the Proclamation a life of six months with effect from December 19, 2018 (not from January 3, 2019). Therefore, if it were not extended before June 18, the Proclamation in the solemn words of the Constitution, would "cease to operate". In 1994, a nine-judge bench of the Supreme Court in the *S R Bommai* case had observed that the necessary consequence of such a lapse of the Proclamation would be that the "status quo ante revives". It emphasises: "The Legislative Assembly which may have been kept in suspended animation also springs back to life".

However, it appears that the government missed the bus.

Imagining that the cut-off date was July 2, resolutions were tabled to extend the Proclamation on June 28 in the Lok Sabha and July 1 in the Rajya Sabha, thereby purporting to renew the six-month period from July 3. This, as Article 356(4) clearly shows, was impermissible, because the Proclamation had ceased to have effect on June 18 itself. The only option now was a fresh Proclamation to be issued by the President on the same terms as the earlier one — imagine your passport or driver's licence, but without a grace period for renewal, thereby requiring you to apply afresh.

Neither the notifications by the President on August 5 and 6 under Article 370, nor the exercise by Parliament to reorganise the state as two Union Territories were carried out with the approval of the J&K state legislature. In fact, both the nation's executive and the legislature proceeded as if the legislature did not exist, singularly on the misapprehension that the Proclamation was still in force. The consequence of this gaffe appears to be grave — gubernatorial privilege has been peculated and the creation of new territories to be directly governed by the Centre has undermined the federal canon. India and its government have had to endure obloquy, both from within and without, and a frustrated neighbour has drummed up visions of nuclear war.

While the integration of the land and its people is necessary, it is cardinal that the world's most resplendent democracy heed constitutional process, because without it, we are back in the dark days of the Emergency.

The writer is senior advocate, Supreme Court of India

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

CHINA'S HYPOCRISY

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Upholding the law' (IE, September 3). The writer asserts that whatever is happening in Hong Kong is purely China's internal affair. The writer also alleges that radicals in Hong Kong have been supported by the Western media and diplomatic agencies of some countries. However, on August 16, China placed the Kashmir issue in front of the UN Security Council and in so doing it openly supported Pakistan. The Chinese government is well aware that the unrest in Kashmir has been caused by Pakistan funding terror. Isn't this a case of double standards?

V D Malviya, Noida

DEALING WITH PAK

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'The Pak muddle'(IE, September 3). There is a lot of confusion in Islamabad and Rawalpindi since the Indian government abrogated Article 370 and changed the status of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. War with India is definitely not an option. The consequences of war will be devastating for both countries. However, it's difficult to talk with Pakistan given that actors in the country speak in different voices.

Vihaan Gupta, *Ujjain*

THIS REFERS TO the editorial 'The Pak muddle' (IE, September 3). Pakistan raising the Kashmir bogey ad nauseam and portraying itself as the messiah of Kashmiris. The Balakot strike was a game changer which rattled Pakistan to its core. India should not respond to Pakistan's provocation, rather concentrate on restoring normalcy in Kashmir.

Deepak Singhal, *Noida*

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

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

THE WINNER RECEIVES SELECT EXPRESS PUBLICATIONS

BANKS AND JOBS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Bigger better' (IE, August 31). The mega merger of public sector banks appears to be aimed at fiscal consolidation and reviving growth. The government feels that this move will help the Indian economy touch $5-trillion mark well in time for the next parliamentary polls. The consolidation may improve economies of scale, leading to greater operating efficiency. But shrinking the number of PSU banks from 27 to just a dozen could also lead to a fall in their employment potential, much like what happened during the SBI's consolidation. There are also apprehensions that while mega loans may increase, the MSME sector could get neglected.

Lal Singh, *Amritsar*

VIEW FROM THE RIGHT

RBI TRANSFER

THE RECENT DECISION of the Reserve Bank of India to transfer Rs 1.76 lakh crore, which has come under sever criticism by the Opposition, is the defended by *Organiser*'s editorial. Titled 'Utilising Reserves for Bharat' the editorial argues that "the real focus of the debate should be the utilisation of this amount and not the transfer of amount".

The editorial starts by saying that the nationalisation of banks by former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1969 was "the biggest infringement on autonomy of not just the RBI but the entire banking system". It then says that the critics of the recent RBI transfer, including Rahul Gandhi, are "considering this fact" and says that certain issues need to be put in context. It argues that the autonomy of RBI's decisions is maintained by its independent directors. It says that the profit earned by the RBI is "not kept with the bank and government, in a way people of the country, has natural ownership over it". Of the Rs 1.76 lakh crore, it says, Rs 1.23 lakh crore is the dividend "that the RBI has earned in terms of profit and in any case Government would have got that". It asks, "if those reserves are meant for Bharat, where's the question of raiding the RBI?"

The remainder of Rs 52,000 crore being transferred to the government, *Organiser* says, is as per the report of the committee headed by the former RBI governor Bimal Jalan.

The editorial adds: "Though the government has announced various policy measures to boost the economy, over-reliance on FDI and FII has been the real problem, as these investments will always be opportunistic, profit-fleecing and antithetical to our domestic supply chain. Not just the recapitalisaion of banks, but also investing in economic and social infrastructure in such a way that small and medium scale industries, which are the natural employment generators in Bharat, will get the boost."

PAKISTAN'S MADNESS

PANCHAJANYA HAS GIVEN its attention to the "madness" of Pakistan when it comes to Kashmir in its editorial. It begins by saying "just like depression makes a person either sleepy or crazy," a similar negativity can be seen "when it comes to issues related to a India" and Pakistan has come to the brink of craziness. It says that it is in this context that Pakistan's fuming — after India has "removed Article 370" and reconstituted Jammu and Kashmir — should be seen.

It adds that even after Pakistan has gone to numerous countries and knocked on the door of the UN four times, the issue of Kashmir has not been internationalised. Instead the editorial says, "Pakistan's madness has definitely become evident to the world for trying to intervene in affairs of other nations".

Talking about the basis for Pakistan's existence, the editorial says that "if the meaning of an Islamic country is Pakistan, then which country would want to become what Pakistan today?".

NOORANI'S POLEMICS

ORGANISER HAS CARRIED a review of AG Noorani's book on the RSS titled, *The RSS: A Menace to India*. Written by BS Harishankar, the article argues that the book is "another addition in the smear campaign against RSS" and is"spineless polemics". As the book was released by former Vice President of India Hamid Ansari, the article first talks about Ansari inaugurating a conference of the Popular Front of India and says that "it shall be untrue if Ansari claims he was not aware of aware of PFI's background" and then says that "now the equations are clear: Why has the PFI been left out from the book by Noorani? It mentions then that the PFI has been accused of various anti-national activities, which include links with various Islamic terrorist groups".

The review then talks about the various parts about the book and tries to counter the assertions made by Noorani. It has several examples of accusing Noorani of not looking at other religions, especially Islam. It says that "Noorani conceals many truths, especially the heavy criticism by Churches against Islamic fundamentalists in India". Later it said that "instead of acknowledging these serious criticisms against Islamic outfits by Churches in India, Noorani accuses Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath of coining the term 'love jihad' for Muslims who marry Hindu girls".

Compiled by Krishn Kaushik