

FACT CHECK, GROUND REALITY

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER



At a press conference by protesters in Hong Kong on Wednesday evening. The protesters have not indicated a softening of their stand in response to the concession announced by Chief Executive Carrie Lam. Reuters

CHINA BACKS OFF IN HONG KONG. WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

Extradition Bill withdrawn, question is whether protesters will relent on newer demands

AFTER THREE months of mass protests triggered the worst crisis in Hong Kong since it returned to Chinese control in 1997, the city's Beijing-backed Chief Executive announced on Wednesday the withdrawal of the proposed law at the heart of the people's anger.

While the sudden and unexpected concession met the number one demand of the protesters, it was not immediately clear whether this alone would return peace and orderliness to Hong Kong's streets.

This is because the protests that began this June over the Bill (now withdrawn) that would have allowed the extradition to China of suspects accused of certain crimes has, over the past several weeks, expanded to cover a wider spectrum of demands, including core political reforms and an inquiry into police brutality with protesters.

Is the contentious Bill really dead?

Quite soon after the protests began, Chief Executive Carrie Lam had said she would delay the Bill. But this was not seen as a firm commitment, and on June 16, some 2 million Hong Kongers protested in the streets. Had Lam announced a suspension — rather than a withdrawal — of the Bill from the agenda of the Legislative Council, she would have, under the rules, left open a window for its restoration, and thus reintroduction, after serving a notice of 12 days. However, now that she has withdrawn the Bill, reintroduction would mean going through a longer process.

So, are the protests likely to stop?

No media analysts or commentators expected them to on Wednesday evening. Online, protesters underlined that they had "five demands, not one less". Besides the formal withdrawal of the Bill, the other four were: an independent probe into police actions; amnesty for arrested protesters; direct elections for all lawmakers and Chief

Executive; and withdrawing the referendum to participants in a major protest on June 12 as "rioters".

A section of protesters has become extremely militant and violent, and analysts were waiting for the weekend — when the worst protests have been happening — for an idea of the mood among the protesters. "It may ease anger a little, but it's definitely not going to get people out of the streets... It's too late; the focus of the protests is not on the Bill anymore," an explainer in *The New York Times* quoted Samson Yuen, a professor of political science at Lingnan University, as saying.

But why has Beijing backed off?

Beijing has claims to global leadership, but international headlines about China have not been flattering of late. The messy trade war with the United States continues, and the extended unrest in Hong Kong has not made attempts at a European outreach easy. The financial and psychological costs of the protests have been significant. Several economists have warned that Hong Kong, Asia's premier business hub, may be headed for a recession. Continued protests would likely keep tourists away for longer, and inflict lasting pain on retail businesses, especially the smaller scale ones.

Also, October 1, the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic, looms, and China has planned a series of celebrations across China and among overseas Chinese communities. Bad news about violence and repression in Hong Kong would be avoidable at this time. 2019 is also the year of the 30th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre, when China used tanks to crush a massive pro-democracy movement in the heart of its capital. Beijing is already facing massive global criticism for its policies in the restive Xinjiang province.

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

Afghan deal all but done. Now?

Drafted last week, the agreement sets out a timeline for withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan. It is not a peace deal, the onus for which lies with the Afghan government. What are the challenges it faces?

NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN MUMBAI, SEPTEMBER 4

THE UNITED States and Taliban have reached a deal for American troops to withdraw from Afghanistan. Last weekend, US Special Envoy Zalmay Khalilzad was in Kabul to present details of the deal to Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani.

What have they agreed on?

No details of the draft agreement have been made officially public but Khalilzad told the Afghan media organisation TOLO that the two sides have reached an agreement "in principle" that the United States would withdraw some 5,000 troops within 135 days or five months starting from the signing of the agreement. The top US diplomat, an Afghan American, who has led the talks which began in January this year, said US President Donald Trump had to sign off on the agreement.

The draft agreement, which was reached after nine rounds of talks between Khalilzad and the Taliban in Doha, Qatar, is for the US troops to withdraw from five bases in this period. There appears to be no timeline yet for the withdrawal of the remaining 14,000 troops but a period of 14 months has been mentioned in the past. Trump said at one time that some 8,000 troops would remain.

In return for the withdrawal agreed upon, the Taliban are said to have committed to not allow "enemies of the US" — namely Daesh/ISIS and Al Qaeda — to set up base in Afghanistan. Khalilzad said in the TOLO interview that it will be the Taliban who will now fight against the "enemies of America" in Afghanistan. According to one version, the Taliban have agreed not to attack withdrawing troops.

Is this expected to usher in peace?

Earlier, it was expected that the US would get the Taliban to agree to a ceasefire. But that is not on the cards. Instead, the only expectation now is for a "reduction in violence" in some areas. In the interview to TOLO, Afghanistan's biggest media house, Khalilzad identified those areas as Parwan province, north of Kabul, where the Bagram air base is



US Special Envoy Zalmay Khalilzad (left) with Afghanistan Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah in Kabul on Monday. Afghanistan Chief Executive office via Reuters

located, and Kabul province. Afghanistan has 34 provinces in all.

The deal is, therefore, not a peace agreement. That was driven home by the August 31 Taliban attack on Kunduz, an important north Afghanistan city, which came as Khalilzad was briefing Afghan leaders in Kabul about the agreement. Afghan special forces pushed them back with the help of US airpower, but were not able to prevent the Taliban from attacking a second northern city, Pul I Kumri, where India has undertaken to build power transmission lines to Kabul as part of project to bring electricity from Uzbekistan to Afghanistan.

On Monday night, towards the end of Khalilzad's live interview on TOLO channel, Kabul was rocked by a car bombing and gunfire, an attack that killed at least 16 people and was claimed by the Taliban.

Through the talks, which began in January this year, there has been a spike in attacks as Taliban leveraged violence to buttress their bargaining position at the talks, and tried to take control of as much territory as they could before the agreement with the US was finalised.

How then can a peace deal be struck with the Taliban?

It is now for the Afghan government to negotiate a peace agreement with the Taliban in what are referred to as "intra-Afghan talks". President Ashraf Ghani's government was not included in the US-Taliban talks. This was the Taliban precondition for the talks. The Taliban consider the elected Afghan government a "puppet" or "proxy" of the US. The irony is that for many in Afghanistan, the Taliban are a proxy of Pakistan's military establishment, and are seen as a creation of the ISI.

Even at this stage, the Afghan government remains sidelined. It has become something of an issue in Afghanistan that President Ghani was given a copy of the draft agreement to read at his meeting with Khalilzad, but it was taken away from him at the close of the meeting.

In his interview to TOLO, Khalilzad said the intra-Afghan talks would begin soon after the US-Taliban agreement. But it is unclear if the Taliban have committed to participate in these talks as part of their agreement with Khalilzad. The Norwegian capital of Oslo may

be the venue for these talks if they are held. Recalling the Bonn process of 2001, the intra-Afghan talks are expected to take up the question of a ceasefire and an "interim" set-up as a way of bringing the Taliban into a power sharing agreement.

What does it mean for the Afghan government politically?

The idea of an "interim" set-up almost certainly means that the September 28 presidential elections will not be held. An interim dispensation would do away with the need for elections. In any case, the Taliban have made it clear they do not believe in the electoral process and have said they would want to make changes to the Constitution. This could become the main challenge for the interim dispensation, apart from ensuring that the Taliban commit to a ceasefire and stick to it. The interim set-up has to be headed by an Afghan acceptable to the US, Taliban, Pakistan and the present Afghan government. Names are already being the rounds.

The Afghan government, meanwhile, is apprehensive that the US may have made commitments to the Taliban that will undermine even the modest achievements made by the country towards democracy and human rights over the last two decades. The references in the agreement to "IEA" or Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, the preferred name of the Taliban for itself, and the name by which Afghanistan was known when the Taliban ruled the country from 1996 to 2001, has increased the concern.

That concern was expressed by Amrullah Saleh, a former head of the Afghan intelligence agency, a candidate in the election and who like the rest of his compatriots, but more so, is a strong anti-Taliban, anti-Pakistan voice in Afghanistan: "Clarification: The US talks with Taliban in Doha is about the fate of the Quetta Shura [the Pakistan headquarters of the Taliban], de-linking them with global terror networks, ISI, terror ideologies and prospects of re-integration in future. Doha isn't on fate of Afg. That will be decided in Kabul & through direct negotiations".

India has played no role in the US-Taliban talks, but hopes it may be able to influence some outcomes of the the intra-Afghan talks through its many friends in the Afghan polity who will participate in the talks.

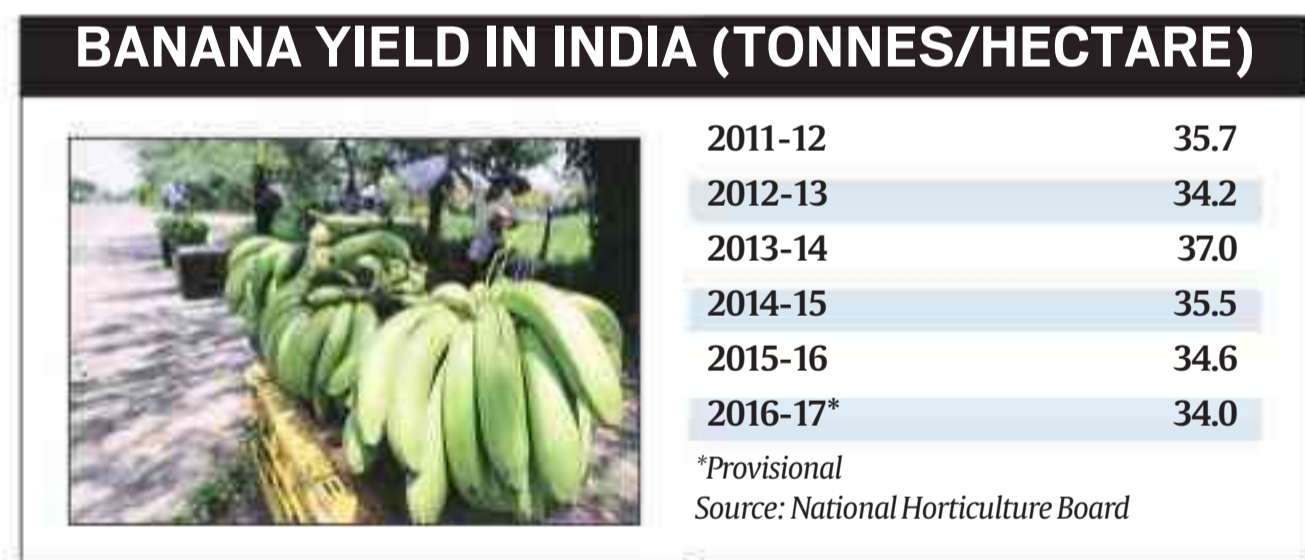
How climate change can help or hurt bananas

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 4

BANANAS THRIVE in warmer climates, and India is the world's largest producer and consumer of the fruit crop. When the planet itself is warming, does it help or hamper production? A new study has found that climate change has benefited bananas over the last several decades but predicted that the trend will reverse, with climate change eventually causing a negative impact.

The findings

The study, led by Dr Dan Bebbler from the University of Exeter and co-authored by research fellow Dr Varun Varma, has been published in *Nature Climate Change*. They have studied both the recent and future impact of climate change on the world's leading banana producers and exporters. They found that 27 countries — accounting for 86 per cent of the world's dessert banana production — have on average seen increased crop yield since 1961 — by 1.37 tonnes/hectare every year — due to the changing climate resulting in more



favourable growing conditions.

In India, data from the National Horticulture Board show broadly consistent yields in six years leading up to 2016-17, when the provisional yield was 34 tonnes/hectare.

The study says the gains in these 27 countries could be significantly reduced by 2050 — to 1.19-0.59 tonnes/hectare — or disappear completely, if climate change continues at its expected rate. The study predicts that 10 countries — including India and the fourth largest producer, Brazil — could see a signif-

icant decline in crop yields.

The study highlights, on the other hand, that some countries — including Ecuador (the largest exporter) and Honduras, as well as a number of African countries — may see an overall benefit in crop yields.

Why it matters

Bananas are recognised as the most important fruit crop, providing food, nutrition and income for millions in both rural and urban areas across the globe. In Britain, for ex-

ample, more than five billion bananas are purchased each year, and the United Kingdom accounts for seven per cent of the global export market, the University of Exeter said in a statement.

Such international trade can play a pivotal role to local and national economies in producing countries. For example, bananas and their derived products constitute the second largest agricultural export commodity of Ecuador and Costa Rica, the University statement said.

"We're very concerned about the impact of diseases like Fusarium Wilt on bananas, but the impacts of climate change have been largely ignored. There will be winners and losers in coming years, and our study may stimulate vulnerable countries to prepare through investment in technologies like irrigation," Dr Bebbler said in the statement.

Dr Varma said: "An open exchange of ideas is going to be critical going forward. We believe practical solutions already exist, but these are scattered across banana producing countries. This knowledge exchange needs to start now to counteract predicted yield losses due to climate change."

Screening all children for leprosy, TB: India's disease burden, mission

ABANTIKA GHOSH NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 4

IN INDIA, screening for disease is usually associated with non-communicable rather than communicable diseases. However, since last month, India has embarked on a large-scale plan to screen all children for leprosy and tuberculosis. An estimated 25 crore children below the age of 18 will be screened for the two infectious diseases, and if a person is suspected to have either of the two, s/he will be sent to a higher centre for confirmation. The existing Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK) infrastructure will be used for the screening.

Why it is necessary

Leprosy is a chronic infectious disease caused by *Mycobacterium leprae*. It usually affects the skin and peripheral nerves, but has a wide range of clinical manifestations. The disease is characterised by a long incubation period that is generally 5-7 years. It is a leading cause of permanent physical disability. Timely diagnosis and treatment of cases, before nerve damage has occurred,

is the most effective way of preventing disability due to leprosy.

Tuberculosis infection, caused by *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, is one of the most common communicable diseases in India, its transmission fuelled by unhygienic, crowded living conditions. It is said that most Indians carry the bacterium and the infection flares up when their immunity levels are low, like when they are malnourished or suffering from conditions like AIDS in which the body's immune system is compromised.

Both diseases are infectious and India has a substantial burden — its tuberculosis burden is the highest in the world. Children tend to be more prone to catching infectious diseases from their peers because of long hours in confined spaces and more bodily contact than in adults. Addressing the problem early would ensure that the infection cycle is broken.

In case of leprosy, it could mean prevention of disability. The programme would also give preventive medication to people who have come in contact with the confirmed cases.

For TB, India's malnutrition burden is an



An rally for awareness of leprosy in Chandigarh in 2014. Express Archive

additional risk factor. As per the National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-4 (2015-16), 35.7 per cent children below age five are underweight, 38.4 per cent are stunted (low height for age) and 21 per cent are wasted

(low weight for height) in the country.

The burden in India

India eliminated leprosy in 2005 — WHO defines elimination as an incidence

rate of less than one case per 10,000 population. All states except Chhattisgarh and the Union Territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli have eliminated leprosy. However, 1.15 lakh to 1.2 lakh new leprosy cases are still detected every year, Health Ministry officials said.

TB kills an estimated 4,80,000 Indians every year — an average over 1,300 every day. India also has more than a million "missing" cases every year that are not notified. Most remain either undiagnosed or unaccountably and inadequately diagnosed and treated in the private sector. The problem in the latter case is that many of these patients do not complete the full course of the antibiotic, thus exposing the bacterium to the medicine without fully killing it. This is trigger enough for the bacterium to evolve into a version of itself that is resistant to that particular drug.

The mission focus

Launched in 2013 under the National Health Mission, RBSK is focused on preventing disease and disability in children. "Child Health Screening and Early Intervention Services" basically refer to early detection

and management of a set of 30 health conditions prevalent in children less than 18 years of age. These conditions are broadly defects at birth, diseases in children, deficiency conditions and developmental delays including disabilities, together described as 4Ds.

Until now, neither leprosy nor TB were a part of the programme.

In 2017, India had set a target of elimination of leprosy by 2018, going by the Budget speech that year. The deadline has passed but leprosy remains a challenge in a country that launched the National Leprosy Eradication Programme way back in 1955.

For tuberculosis, the global Sustainable Development Goal target is to end the disease by 2030. However, there is a new urgency in India's TB control efforts since last year, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi *suo motu* advanced the deadline for India to end TB to 2025. Speaking at the End TB summit in 2018, Modi had said: "A target has been set to end TB globally by 2030. I would like to announce that we have set aim to eradicate it from India five years ahead, by 2025."



OF COURSE IT IS HAPPENING INSIDE YOUR HEAD, HARRY, BUT WHY ON EARTH SHOULD THAT MEAN THAT IT IS NOT REAL? — ALBUS DUMBLEDORE (J K ROWLING)

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

LET IT SLIDE

RBI must not intervene to break the rupee's fall.
A weak currency will help exports

ON TUESDAY, THE rupee fell 1.36 per cent against the dollar, ending the day at a nearly 10-month low of 72.39. On Wednesday, it recovered marginally, closing at 72.12 against the dollar. Day-to-day fluctuations notwithstanding, the rupee has weakened considerably in the recent past, declining by around 4.7 per cent since July 31. Though the fall in the currency is not unique to India — currencies of most emerging markets have weakened after the Chinese authorities allowed the yuan to fall below the psychological mark of 7 per dollar — the rupee has weakened more than the others. This decline in the currency is likely to spur calls for the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to step in to stem the decline.

A weak currency will push up the import bill. It will also be inflationary. But the RBI should resist from intervening in the currency market. It should allow the currency to slide. A weak currency has its advantages in that it makes exports more competitive. Moreover, the rupee's decline over the past month or so is driven by global as well as domestic factors. Globally, the greenback has strengthened. On Tuesday, the dollar index hit a two-year high, rising to 99.37, its highest level since May 2017. Domestically, foreign investors have continued to pull out money, even though the government has reversed its decision on the surcharge levied on foreign investors. A slowing economy will only exacerbate such outflows but there is no reason to panic. The evidence suggests that the rupee is overvalued. According to data from the RBI, the 36-currency export-based real effective exchange rate (REER) stood at 119.54 in July — indicating significant overvaluation. This overvaluation has affected the competitiveness of India's merchandise exports which have remained almost stagnant in the recent past, rising marginally to \$330 billion in 2018-19 from \$310 billion in 2014-15. In comparison, over the same period, exports of countries like Vietnam and Bangladesh have surged.

With China allowing its currency to slide, other countries, which compete with China in the export market are likely to follow suit. Competitive devaluation is a possibility. US President Donald Trump also wants a weak dollar. In such a situation, the RBI should let the currency slide. With private consumption collapsing, investment activity remaining subdued, and the capacity of the government to stimulate the economy by increasing its spending being limited, a weak currency, by improving the competitiveness of exports, could provide much needed fillip to growth. While the RBI's stated policy is that it does not target any particular level, the continued overvaluation of the rupee needs to be attended to. Alongside, the government must address the structural issues that bring down the competitiveness of India's exports.

GIVE AND TAKE

Law that sparked Hong Kong protests has been withdrawn,
opening up space for dialogue

IN JUNE, AS the protests in Hong Kong gathered momentum, the city's chief executive, Carrie Lam, suspended the Fugitive Offenders and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Legislation (Amendment) Bill 2019. As of Wednesday, the Bill stands withdrawn. The proposed law, which would have allowed those accused of criminal activity in Hong Kong to be extradited to mainland China, was the tinder that sparked the protests which have challenged the authority of the Chinese state. Lam addressed another key demand of the protestors — the establishment of an independent commission of inquiry into the use of force by the police against protestors. The question now is whether these steps are too little and have come too late.

Over three months, the protests have grown into an anti-China, pro-democracy movement. The extradition law was seen as an attack on the "one country, two systems" formula that has allowed Hong Kong to maintain its special status and autonomy since it acceded to China in 1997. While the protestors have attacked symbols of the Chinese state — its flag, emblem, etc — the police and Chinese authorities have called them rioters and accused them of showing "signs of terrorism". The authorities have also been accused of brutality by the protestors. Two of the major demands of the protestors — amnesty for those arrested during the protests and direct elections for the chief executive's office — remain bones of contention. What the current concessions by Lam, backed by the Chinese government, provide is an opportunity for the protestors to take their movement from the streets to the negotiating table.

Throughout the current protests, the spectre of the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989 has lurked in the background. Then, as now, the Chinese economy and party-state was in a period of transition, and a popular protest for democracy challenged the government and communist party's dominance. While Beijing has engaged in muscular rhetoric, it has also affirmed its commitment to "one country, two systems". For the Chinese government as well as the leadership of the protestors, it is important to realise the impact of the disruption of the last three months. According to IHS Markit Hong Kong, which tracks private business activity in the city, private sector activity is the lowest it has been since 2009, when the city was reeling from the effects of the global financial crisis. Beijing must now use the subtlety of state-craft, of listening and give and take, not speak the language of force. A sustained dialogue in and about Hong Kong is the only route to normalcy.

EXPELLIARMUS!

An obscure Tennessee cleric fondly hopes to disarm JK Rowling's magic by banning the Potter books from school libraries

TO THE AVERAGE tourist, Nashville, Tennessee, means rye whiskey, Merle Haggard, Johnny Cash, Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix and a hundred other names from the hall of fame of American music — blues, country, folk, rock, the lot. To that august list, the occult tourist may now add the name of the hitherto obscure Rev Dan Reehill. On the advice of exorcists, this school priest in Nashville has banned librarians from issuing Harry Potter books to students, fearing that the young wizard's spells are genuine and can cause real manifestations in the space-time continuum. Such is the power of the internet, that it has transmitted his bizarre story far and wide in a single day.

Reehill could have done it much easier and saved everyone a load of bother by simply yelling Potter's most useful spell: "Expelliarmus!" There, we've gone and uttered it, the word that literally says "expel arms" in a fancy sort of way, disarming opponents. And it has had absolutely no effect on the ongoing arms race. No wonder Reehill didn't use it.

We're treading on eggshells here, but JK Rowling's spells are just dog Latin — classical-sounding constructions of English words, an engaging conceit that school students, bored to death of amo-amas-amat (concerning love) and leo-leonis (concerning lions), have used for generations to revenge themselves on their teachers. Outside the Potterverse, a good Latin declension like dominus-domini (concerning the boss) is more likely to reduce minds to pulp than plain expelliarmus. Declensions are nine words longer and have a hypnotic, chant-like quality. In the old days, Reehill and his exorcists would have been subjected to such things in the course of their education, and would have sought refuge in dog Latin. But now that Latin is really a dead language, they only have the fear of the unknown.

Bank for the buck

Question is not whether public sector banks should be big or small. It is: Do we need public sector banks?



DUVVURI SUBBARAO

THE FINANCE MINISTER'S announcement last week of the merger of public sector banks, coming in the wake of growth sinking to a six-year low, was meant to be seen as a big bang response to arresting the slowdown. On the contrary, it's a needless distraction.

In the short-term, the mergers will contribute nothing towards engineering a turnaround of the economy. Worse still, the administrative and logistic challenges of mergers will divert the mind space of bank managements away from their most pressing task at the moment — of managing the NPAs and aggressively looking for lending opportunities. Down the line, bank staff will be worrying, notwithstanding the finance minister's assurance, about their jobs and career prospects even as their morale will be sapped by the complexity of coping with a new banking culture and new practices at a time when they should be giving their undivided attention to scouting for borrowers and improving service delivery.

A follow-on question is this: Even if the short-term outcome is not promising, are mergers a net positive in the long term? That is not unambiguously clear. While organic mergers of banks motivated purely by business considerations lead to efficiency gains, whether arranged marriages of the type the government is organising are a good thing remains debatable.

On the positive side, large banks will entail cost advantages by way of economies of scale such as centralised back office processing, elimination of branch overlap, eliminating redundancies in administrative infrastructure, better manpower planning, optimum funds management, and savings in IT and other fixed costs. Large banks will also be able to finance large projects on their own even while staying within the prudential lending norms imposed by the regulator.

On the flip side, the biggest argument against big banks is that they can become too big to fail. The financial sector is all interconnected and a risk in any part of the system is a risk to the entire system. If a large bank were to fail, it could bring down the whole financial sector with it, as was evident from the near death experience following the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008, which triggered the global financial crisis. No country can therefore afford the failure of a big bank. The tacit knowledge that the sovereign will be forced to rescue it encourages irresponsible behaviour by big banks.

One of the important reforms in banking regulation following the crisis was to curb this moral hazard by requiring regulators to identify systemically important financial institutions and subject them to higher capital requirements and more stringent regulation. Indeed, the country's largest bank, State Bank of India, was categorised by the RBI as a systemically important bank whose failure can have big negative externalities. The proposed mergers will increase this "too big to fail risk".

It will be tempting to argue that all our public sector banks (PSBs), big or small, operate in any case under an implicit sovereign guarantee with a built-in moral hazard. There is no additional risk from merging many small banks into fewer large banks. On the other hand, there could be efficiency gains.

This point can be debated but I do not want to get into that. What I want to do instead is to use that to segue to a larger debate which is that as far as PSBs are concerned, the issue is not big or small, but whether or not.

Banks were nationalised 50 years ago in a different era, in a different context. In the event, PSBs rendered commendable service to the nation by deepening bank penetration into the hinterland and implementing a variety of anti-poverty programmes. PSB man-

agers, especially at the front end, were entrepreneurial, innovative and committed. There were many factors responsible for India moving from low income to low middle income, and financial intermediation by PSBs has to find a place in that list.

Even as it acknowledges the contribution of PSBs, the government needs to confront a stream of \$5 trillion questions. Do we still need PSBs? Isn't the financial sector wide enough and deep enough to take care of financial intermediation without the government at the steering wheel? Aren't there better uses for the government's mind space and its time?

There is wide consensus that today's economic slowdown is due both to cyclical and structural factors. By way of cyclical response, the RBI has cut rates and the government has announced a few measures like frontloading expenditures and slashing some taxes. Perhaps the RBI will ease further and the government will follow on with some more measures. The most these can do is to lift the growth rate to its potential.

But that will hardly make us a \$5-trillion economy. We will become a \$5-trillion economy not by growing at our current potential growth rate but by raising it. That requires structural reforms. The agenda for structural reforms is now a daily staple of our media discourse and there is no need to rehash that here.

Structural measures will take time to work their way through the system. But even the announcement effect of structural reforms can be stunning. If, for example, the government were to put out a roadmap for giving up its majority stake in PSBs, it will go a long way in shoring up sentiment and getting us off the block to a \$5-trillion economy. An idea whose time has come?

The writer is a former governor of the Reserve Bank of India

CAPTAIN COOL

Arun Jaitley will be remembered for the economic reforms he ushered in



VINOD DHALL

IT WAS a sad day when, travelling overseas, I heard the news of the death of Arun Jaitley. His multiple health issues had already debilitated him for the last few years, and these took his life. The country has lost a political and professional stalwart. Earlier, the government had lost a respected and sobering voice when he retired to his private home in south Delhi, in stark contrast to the many who cling to the post and its perks till their last breath.

I had worked with Jaitley when I was Secretary, Corporate Affairs and he was the Minister for Law and Corporate Affairs. He is one of the best ministers I worked with. Why do I say this? He was honest, both financially and intellectually — somewhat rare in politics. He never once asked me to do anything inappropriate, never even discussed any such thought or proposal.

His sharp mind instantly dived to the core of an issue — that may have led some people to feel frustrated with his "short attention span". He read people and their character insightfully. Earlier, he had early once discussed with me about the weaknesses of a senior officer in my team at the ministry. That officer's habits soon unraveled a few months into my tenure at the ministry, and on one occasion when he reached out to the PMO without permission, the minister and I were compelled to have him bundled out of the ministry.

Sometimes, there was a certain brusqueness to his behaviour which could be misunderstood as rudeness. Even I was appalled when two top partners of a global consultancy came to meet him and I had been asked to be present. He almost ignored the

presence of the number two whom Rajat Gupta had brought along, apparently because he had been a previous acquaintance of Jaitley.

One of the country's top lawyers, Jaitley was nothing short of brilliant on the floor of Parliament; his eloquence and fluency were in a class of their own. On the debating floor, he was a formidable adversary who could demolish in a few pithy, and sometimes sharp remarks, the opposite argument with consummate ease.

One of the pleasures of working with Jaitley was in the way he reposed trust in you and relied on your advice. There was this underlying comfort that if you were in the right, he was with you. He was willing to put his formidable influence and argumentation behind any reform or new idea. Politics never entered into the discussions about policies, though his passionate belief in his political ideas occasionally and momentarily surfaced in informal conversations.

He was the minister when the Competition Bill was introduced in Parliament. Years later, when he returned to the Governor of the Northeastern states L.P. Singh on September 4. Contrary to his earlier declaration, Borbora did not recommend the dissolution of the Assembly and holding of a midterm poll. Minutes after the Assembly, which was discussing the Opposition no-confidence motion against the Borbora Ministry, adjourned for the lunch recess, the chief minister, accompanied by the PWD Minister Dulal Chandra Barua, drove to the Circuit House, where the Governor is camp-

His record as finance minister is to many observers a mixed legacy, mainly due to the fallout from measures such as demonetisation (which damaged the economy in ways that the government apparently failed to foresee) and the government's disagreements with RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan. However, demonetisation was in all probability not a Jaitley initiative or his voluntary decision.

His record as finance minister is to many observers a mixed legacy, mainly due to the fallout from measures such as demonetisation (which damaged the economy in ways that the government apparently failed to foresee) and the government's disagreements with RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan. However, demonetisation was in all probability not a Jaitley initiative or his voluntary decision. On the apparent tiff with the RBI governor, I cannot claim any inside knowledge, but to me it was likely an honest disagreement between the RBI and the finance ministry on what the economy needed at that point in time. Nonetheless, true to his persona, he was entirely civil and discreet in handling the disputes — unlike US President Donald Trump, whose uncharitable remarks about the US Fed Governor Jerome Powell are public knowledge. On the other hand, under Jaitley's captaincy, the finance ministry delivered a host of measures that had otherwise been hanging fire for years — GST, insolvency law, DBT of subsidies, FDI liberalisation, etc. The high regard and respect that he enjoyed across the political spectrum was reflected in his ability to harness all state governments and parties to back reforms such as GST. He will be or should be remembered for many of these bold measures whose long-term benefits to the Indian economy will be visible in due course of time.

Arun Jaitley, statesman, legal luminary, true son of the soil, may your soul rest in peace.

The writer is a former secretary, Government of India and head of the Competition Commission of India

SEPTEMBER 5, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

ASSAM CM QUILTS
PUSHED CLOSELY TO defeat on the floor of the state assembly, Assam Chief Minister Golap Borbora tendered the resignation of his 541-day old Janata Ministry to the Governor of the Northeastern states L.P. Singh on September 4. Contrary to his earlier declaration, Borbora did not recommend the dissolution of the Assembly and holding of a midterm poll. Minutes after the Assembly, which was discussing the Opposition no-confidence motion against the Borbora Ministry, adjourned for the lunch recess, the chief minister, accompanied by the PWD Minister Dulal Chandra Barua, drove to the Circuit House, where the Governor is camp-

ing, and handed over the resignation letter.

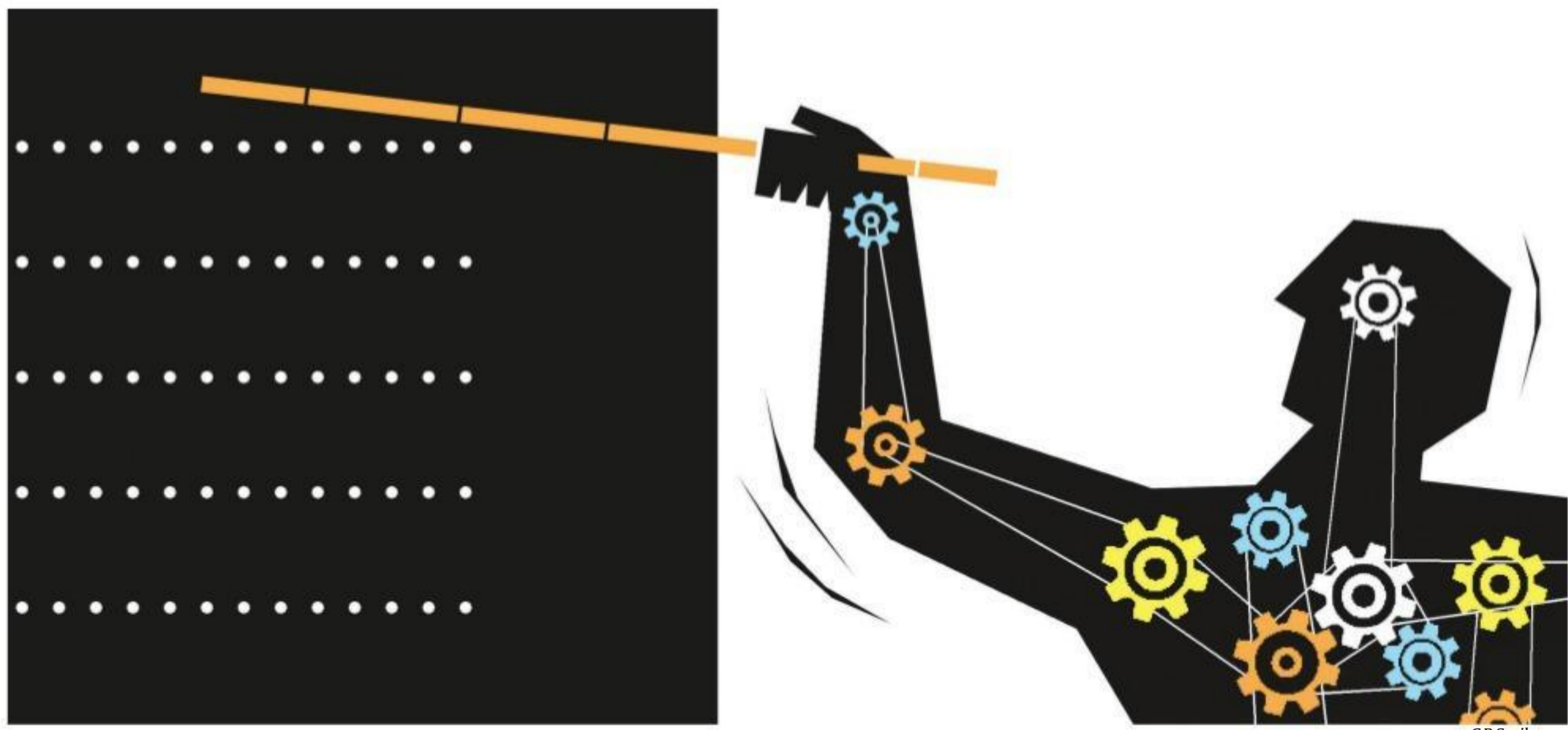
JANATA (S) CONFIDENT
THE JANATA (S) chief, Raj Narain, that if his party came to power, "we will change the Constitution to remove the glaring political, economical and social disparities in the country". He told journalists he was optimistic of his party and the alliance getting a two-thirds majority in the coming poll. "If there are any obstructions in the way of implementing our programme, we will remove them." He said his party would not like to let down those who had given it the responsibility. "We changed the government, created a situation for the dissolution or the Lok Sabha

and a mid-term poll. We will now see that we give a good Government to people," he declared.

TIBET VISIT
FIVE REPRESENTATIVES OF the Dalai Lama, including his elder brother, have met with Chinese leaders and are expected to visit their Tibetan homeland this month. Diplomatic sources confirmed the official Tibetan visit, the first since the abortive Tibetan revolt against China in 1959. The Chinese Foreign Minister has had no comment on the visit. There has been speculation about a visit by the Dalai Lama himself, but it has not been confirmed.



15 THE IDEAS PAGE



CR Sasikumar

Teachers must have their day

They are not loyal soldiers, nor cogs in a bureaucratic machine. They must be free to be wanderers. And poets and philosophers



AVIJIT PATHAK

FROM YAJNAVALKYA CONVERSING with Maitreyi in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad to Rabindranath Tagore seeking to make a difference in a "poet's school", from MK Gandhi evolving with the children in Tolstoy Farm in South Africa to Paulo Freire nurturing the vision of a "dialogic" teacher: The great ideals and practices have always given a meaning to the vocation of teaching. However, ideals fall apart in the difficult times we live in.

Even though on Teachers' Day we will repeat the usual rhetoric ("teachers are our noblest gurus"), the fact is that as teachers we have lost almost everything that is positive about the vocation. Yes, some of us are coaching centre "gurus", or the traders of "knowledge capsules", selling the packages of "success". Some of us are mere "service providers", disseminating the bundles of job-oriented technical skills, and further promoting the commodification of education that transforms young learners into mere consumers. And some of us are just "subject experts", or routinised role-performers "covering" the syllabus, taking the exams and grading the students.

Let there be no illusion. Ours is a society that devalues the vocation of teaching; and no wonder, it also reproduces a system in which quite often wrong people join the vocation. Demotivated teachers, or teachers on election/census duty, or tired/exhausted teachers with poor salary, continually controlled by the principal or the school management — this is the harsh reality.

There could be many reasons for this sad state of affairs. However, I wish to stress on three factors. First, the dominant culture of learning in our educational institutions

negates the possibility of an intellectually enriched and ethically sensitive relationship between the teacher and the student. The recurrence of rote learning in over-crowded classrooms, the ritualisation of non-imaginative examinations and "summer projects", the sole emphasis on the quantification of performance, thereby negating the significance of all qualitative/non-measurable experiences — everything transforms the teacher into a mere mediator between the prescribed "texts" and the learners. Under this system, no flower can bloom, no Nachiketa can emerge, and the ideal of the teacher, as Sri Aurobindo would have imagined, as being a catalyst making the young mind aware of the possibilities implicit in him/her, would be considered as laughable.

Second, in an age that worships technocracy and market-driven solutions, teachers as philosophers, inspirers and life-transformative agents would not be appreciated. Techno-managers come with a discourse of education that privileges the cult of the "measurable outcome" (not the inexplicable ecstasy of the expansion of horizons), "efficiency" (not wonder, or the non-utilitarian quest for learning), and "relevance" as dictated by the market (not any deeper quest). It is, therefore, not surprising if the teacher is reduced to a supplier of "data" — the "outcome" of the courses taught, the identifiable "skills" learned by the student, and the "impact factor" of the papers he/she has published.

Imagine the absurdity. Is it possible to measure the "outcome" or "productivity" of a class in which a professor of literature invokes Saadat Hasan Manto, and recalls the traumatic memory of gendered violence implicit in the ideology of communalism? Is it possible to identify the "skills" a student learns in a history class in which the professor narrates the tales of Gandhi walking through the villages of Noakhali in 1946? It is sad that with the triumph of a techno-managerial orientation to education, teachers would lose the very meaning of their vocation.

Yes, in the coming years, like "disciplined"

The dominant culture of learning in our educational institutions negates the possibility of an intellectually enriched and ethically sensitive relationship between the teacher and the student. The recurrence of rote learning in over-crowded classrooms, the ritualisation of non-imaginative examinations and 'summer projects', the sole emphasis on the quantification of performance, thereby negating the significance of all qualitative/non-measurable experiences — everything transforms the teacher into a mere mediator between the prescribed 'texts' and the learners.

factory workers, they would wear special uniforms, get the structure of lectures approved by the "higher authority", subject themselves to the ever-expanding machineries of surveillance, and obey the instructions and commands emanating from the castle of bureaucrats. This dystopia may not be altogether unreal.

Third, a political culture that seems to be inclined towards a totalitarian discourse would not be conducive to the growth of critical consciousness, creative ideas, dissenting voices and self-reflexive journeys. There is an inherent anti-intellectualism in such politics. With "nationalism", "patriotism" and "cultural pride", we may be asked to be "loyal". Hence, as the message would be conveyed, it is not a good idea if a teacher encourages what Freire would have regarded as a "problem posing education", or if, for instance, she asks her students to write a paper on the social construction of a macho "saviour" through the 24x7 "patriotic" television news channels and instantaneity of Facebook and Twitter. Think of it. The vice-chancellor of a leading central university has already expressed his desire to install a military tank on campus to induce "patriotism" among students. Yet another vice-cancellor has argued in the Science Congress that "Kauravas were test-tube babies". As teachers, we work under the shadow of such "educationists". Who can stop our fall?

Yet, I believe, we have to resist, and with our rebellion as prayer, we have to strive for life-affirming education. We ought to renew faith in the very meaning of the vocation of teaching. No, we are not "loyal soldiers"; nor are we cogs in a bureaucratic machine. We are wanderers. We are explorers. We are poets, philosophers, thinkers, visionaries. And unless we begin to trust ourselves, none can save us, and heal the wound caused by an unholy alliance of techno-managers and practitioners of what Herbert Marcuse would have regarded as "one-dimensional" thought.

Can it be our pledge on Teachers' Day?

The writer is professor of sociology at JNU



SURAJIT NUNDY

No panacea

Law for new medical regulator persists with old tendency of centralisation

ON AUGUST 1, the Rajya Sabha passed the National Medical Commission Bill which seeks to replace the Medical Council of India Act, 1956. This Bill seeks to replace the selection process of the governors of the MCI — currently, by and large, medical practitioners elected by state-level peers — with governors who will mostly be medical practitioners nominated by the Central Government. In its opposition to this bill, the Indian Medical Association has said that "the autonomy of the medical profession and the watch-dog role it should play, will be lost. It will only lead to autocracy in these institutions." Many doctors have also risen up in protest against this Bill because a clause allows work by health professionals. But that is misguided opposition borne of the sense that doctors do special work and, therefore, should regulate themselves autonomously.

I am a doctor licensed and trained at US educational institutions like the Harvard Medical School who, returned to India in 2009 to contribute to his home country. I had started medical practice by volunteering amongst the underserved in rural Chhatisgarh and in Delhi and needed a licence, so I approached the Medical Council of India (MCI). The MCI was then embroiled in a scandal — a massive corruption had been unearthed at its very highest level and a new, temporary board of governors had been installed. I tried as best as I could and, even though I was lucky to be liv-

ing in Delhi, it took me four years and nearly 50 spirit-deadening visits to the MCI office to finally get my licence.

This physician self-regulation harms Indians. Starting with training, being a doctor in the US involved me having to stay up all night ensuring that everything relevant was done for the patient and documenting those activities. The reason was a system of accountability — I could easily get sued for not providing the best care. And crucially, this also ensured that my providing good care was the responsibility of other people. Medical errors are estimated to kill 250,000 people every year in the US, the third largest cause of death in the country. While there is no comparable data in India, it is likely that many more people die here because of the absence of accountability. When errors happen in the US, patients are empowered to seek redress from doctors. But in India, medical services are not under the Consumer Protection Act. This ensures that the patient and their kin can't have their say and the incentive to hold someone accountable dies away. As a result, while nearly 5,000 US doctors have a disciplinary procedure in different state boards every year, in India the centralised MCI reports that only 96 have been blacklisted in the last 60 years (none since 2014). This system of unaccountability has ensured that while there are some extremely good, dedicated doctors in India, most of those I come across act in a manner

more accountable to their own pockets than to the well-being of their patients.

Since Independence, goal-setting by a few at the Centre has hurt us by restricting the number of providers at the periphery. From the Bhore Committee of 1946 to the "High Level Expert Group" of 2010, goals like a 75-bedded hospital per 20,000 people, or increasing spending for universal health coverage have seemed worthy but never implemented. After more than 70 years of Independence, we are still in a position where we have only 1 doctor per 1,700 Indians, far less than the WHO standard of 1 per 1000 people. Even those doctors aren't where the diseases are (in some rural areas the ratio is less than 1 doctor per 80,000 people) and the vast majority of Indians therefore do not have adequate coverage. Many successive committees at the Centre have set other worthy goals while bemoaning the state of Indian health system but have not been held accountable to the implementation and achievement of those goals while people continue to suffer and die. In developed countries, many of the health regulators are not medical practitioners — health is not something special that only experts understand, power and accountability in health need to be devolved.

Healthcare in India is mostly practiced by non-physicians because we will never have enough physicians. Like other developing democracies, we have a shortfall of certified

providers. There is a clause in the NMC bill, strongly opposed by the IMA, that seeks to allow upto 3.5 lakh "community health providers" to carry out some "mid-level" healthcare functions but that number is too small since some surveys estimate that we have as many as 50 lakh uncertified providers, four to five times as many as doctors, that fill the need unmet by certified providers. Accepting this reality, we work to improve the quality of many of these "Bangali doctors" (it helps because I am Bengali and, technically, one too) and have found them to be dedicated to their patients, eager to improve their skills and, importantly, answerable to their patients and local elected representatives.

Ever since Independence, centralised self-regulation of health has resulted in power and the practice of medicine being concentrated in the hands of a certified few. The NMC Bill continues that unfortunate centralisation but has allowed a token few uncertified providers to practice. Some doctors are protesting against even this in misguided self-interest but there are many others who believe that in order to make healthcare work for us all, we must devolve health practice and its regulation to us all.

The writer is the founder of Raxa, an artificial intelligence platform to improve the quality of care in India

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The prime minister (Boris Johnson) intuitively understands that hard-Brexit chaos will sustain his premiership. He must be stopped." — THE GUARDIAN

Escaping the Kashmir trap

India's abrogation of Article 370 is an opportunity for Pakistan to redefine its nationalism



TILAK DEVASHER

COUNTER-INTUITIVE AND strange it may seem, but the events of August 5, 2019, when the Narendra Modi government revoked the special status of Jammu and Kashmir provided by Article 370, could be a game changer for Pakistan. Whatever Pakistan may continue to claim, the fact is that the Indian Jammu and Kashmir is no longer a bilateral issue. As Pakistan gets used to the new reality, it could have a huge opportunity.

Kashmir has been the bedrock of Pak nationalism for decades with slogans such as "Kashmir banega Pakistan", "unfinished business of Partition", "Pakistan's jugular", "core issue with India", reminding Pakistanis of its centrality. Kashmir acquired greater salience after the creation of Bangladesh shredded the two-nation theory. Pakistan needed another crutch and that crutch became the "nazaria-i-Pakistan" (Ideology of Pakistan) of which Kashmir was an integral part. As I Ziring puts it: "All of Pakistan was made hostage to the Kashmir conundrum." The Kashmir card became, and continues to be, an industry in Pakistan and many have thrived on it, developing a vested interest in its continuation. It enabled the Pakistani army to dominate the polity, it allowed the politicians to burnish their nationalistic credentials, the religious lobby could fan anti-Hindu sentiments, and the hapless Pakistani got a break on the various "Kashmir Solidarity Days".

Perhaps the best explanation for Pakistan's obsession with Kashmir was provided by Z A Bhutto in his 'The Myth of Independence' (1969) when he wrote: "If a Muslim majority area can remain a part of India, the 'raison d'etre of Pakistan collapses. For the same reasons, Pakistan must continue unremittingly her struggle for the rights of self-determination." Though hanged by the army, Bhutto's enunciation became the foundation of Pakistan's Kashmir policy. Not surprisingly, Pakistan has spent the last seven decades in revanchist schemes like the "raiders" in 1947, "infiltrators" in 1965, and "freedom fighters" since 1989 and especially in Kargil, in 1999. All of these have borne no fruit except to inject a jihadi culture and radicalise society.

With its nationalist narrative built over decades having been shattered, Pakistan is hitting out in every direction using overt and covert means. Prime Minister Imran Khan's threatening speeches, his article in The New York Times, warning to explore all possible options, moves in the Security Council, re-activating terrorists are just samples.

However, once the dust settles and Pakistan realises that the events of August 5 are a fait accompli and not going to be reversed, it would have a considerable open-

ing to assess the implications of what has happened and reconsider its policies.

For one, its existence will no longer be hostage to the Kashmir issue. For another, there would be no justification for the army to dominate the security and foreign policy architecture or claim such a major chunk of scarce resources. Third, Pakistan would no longer need the jihadi terrorists and their support infrastructures and so eliminate the possibility of being blacklisted by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) or be known internationally as a terrorist hub. Gradually, Pakistani society could even reclaim the moderate space that it has surrendered to jihadi elements.

Due to the centrality of the Kashmir issue in Pakistan for decades, the nature of the state itself has changed. From being a "development state" till the mid-1970s, Pakistan has become a "security state" subsequently. As a result, economic development ceased to be the primary agenda of the state. Thus, during the 1970s, the real rate of growth of development expenditure was 21 per cent per annum and the rate of growth of defence expenditure was 2 per cent. During the 1980s, the rate of growth of development expenditure crashed seven-fold to 3 per cent and the rate of growth of defence expenditure escalated almost five-fold to 9 per cent. As a percentage of GDP, development expenditure has been falling from 9 per cent in the 1970s to 7.3 per cent in the 1980s to 4.7 per cent in the 1990s and to 3.5 per cent in the first decade of the millennium to 1.8 per cent in 2018-19. Expenditure on education and health was a paltry 0.25 and 0.5 per cent of GDP respectively in 2018-19 and has further declined to 0.17 and 0.02 per cent for 2019-20.

That Pakistan's economy is on a slippery slope is well-known and documented. Just by freeing itself of the Kashmir obsession and the resultant financial commitments, Pakistan would be in a position to divert scarce resources to long-term critical development activities. One example would suffice. According to Pakistani experts, the country could become an absolute water scarce country by 2025 (six years from now) when the per capita availability of water will drop to below 500 m3 per annum. To tackle this looming catastrophe, Pakistan needs to provide at least 10 per cent of the federal Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) to the water sector, gradually increasing it to 20 per cent by 2030. The reality is, however, that due to lack of funds only 3.29 per cent of PSDP was provided for in 2018-19 for the water sector.

There is no doubt that for the Pakistani leadership, and especially the army, to reduce the salience of, let alone jettison, the Kashmir cause would be extremely difficult, unpopular and politically dangerous. It would require extraordinary courage, determination and leadership, qualities in short supply at present. Yet, the choice is stark. Without doing so, Pakistan would accelerate its march towards the abyss.

The writer is member, National Security Advisory Board

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MHA SPOKESPERSON RESPONDS

APROPOS THE article, 'On a Shaky Foundation' (IE, September 4) by Gopal Sankaranarayanan — a lawyer for one of the petitions challenging the dilution of Article 370, Soayib Querishi vs Union of India — the spokesperson, Ministry of Home Affairs, says: President's rule was applied under Article 356 on 19/12/18. Original provisions under Article 356 allow it to exist for six months from the date of the second of the resolutions approving the proclamation. The subsequent changes to Article 356 (4) through the 42nd and 44th Constitutional amendments were not made applicable to Jammu and Kashmir. Therefore, the original provision of Article 356 (4) was applicable to Jammu and Kashmir. The proclamation dated 19th December 2019 was approved by Lok Sabha on 28th December 2018 and Rajya Sabha on 3rd January 2019. Therefore, the proclamation of the President's rule was due to expire on 3 July 2019, ie six months from 3rd July 2019. Lok Sabha on 28/6/19 and Rajya Sabha on 1/7/19 approved the continuance of the proclamation of the President's Rule for a further period of six more months beyond 3rd July 2019. Thus this proclamation was within the provisions of Article 356 as applicable to Jammu and Kashmir.

ONE-SIDED BILL

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'The healing touch' (IE, September 4). The draft bill put in the public domain by the Ministry of Health addresses the problem from the standpoint of the doctor.

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

But cases of medical negligence are not infrequent. Doctors often prescribe unnecessary tests. **Ajinkya Pawar, New Delhi**

WHAT ABOUT NAVY?

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'The world's most happening place' (IE, September 4). The Indian Ocean is the theatre of a changed geopolitical situation. But is India ready to take advantage of this? A powerful navy is must to defend our borders and marine trade routes. Unfortunately the navy's budget this year was slashed by about 5 per cent. **Vasant Nalawade, Satara**