



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Free together, or not at all

South Asia needs a culture of commitment to human rights, not human rights as communal props



PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

ELECTION, RESTRICTION

Holding local body elections in J&K amid lockdown and detentions could only deepen the distrust

THERE IS SOMETHING of the surreal about Sunday's announcement by the Jammu and Kashmir State Election Commission: Block Development Council elections will be held on "party lines" on October 24. According to this plan, the BDC polls will take place — for the first time in the state — at a juncture when restrictions imposed on citizens by the Centre since August 5 remain largely in place and political leaders continue to be detained, bringing to a standstill all political activity that calls for, and depends upon, the freedom of expression, movement and association. The panchs and sarpanchs, who form the electorate for the BDC polls, are also inhibited by these curbs. In fact, they have been especially affected, for longer. As this paper has reported, almost a year after the last round of J&K panchayat polls, many of these representatives of the people at the bottom-most tier of electoral democracy from different parts of the Valley continue to seek refuge in a hotel in uptown Srinagar as they are fearful of visiting their villages. Even before the current lockdown and communication blockade, this persistence of fear has served to underline the many questions of legitimacy that afflicted the electoral exercise at the end of which many seats of panch and sapanch in the Valley lie vacant, and most of those elected were elected unopposed.

Given that there has been little progress since then in empowering and enabling panchayati raj institutions, and in view of the heavy pall of anxieties and insecurities that has descended over the people and politicians in Kashmir now, the move to push ahead with the BDC polls raises serious questions about what that exercise could possibly achieve. But these questions are being stonewalled by the top echelons of government and the bottommost. The J&K Chief Electoral Officer, Shailendra Kumar, has sought to sweep the political questions under the administrative carpet. The state election commission, he said, is ready and willing to "facilitate" a level playing field, "whenever any candidate or political party approaches us". The BDC polls cannot be preceded by bypolls to fill the vacant panch and sarpanch seats, he said, because that would require electoral roles to be prepared afresh. It is important to go ahead with the BDC polls because "at block level many development works have stopped and are not moving ahead". And Union Home Minister Amit Shah has countered the questions about continuing restrictions in Kashmir by targeting the Opposition for the decades-old militancy in the state and the long imprisonment of Sheikh Abdullah, by invoking the deaths of jawans, and of course, by blaming the "Himalayan" blunders of Jawaharlal Nehru.

In just over a month, the map of J&K is about to change. It is still not known to what extent the move has sparked opposition among the people most affected by it — that assessment can be made only after the restrictions on them are completely lifted. Undoubtedly, what is needed in J&K is a genuine political process with politicians on the ground, not in detention. The push to hold elections when the basic conditions of democracy are not met could only deepen public distrust.

THERE IS, NO doubt, a stunning irony in Pakistan positioning itself as a champion of the rights of Kashmiris and human rights more generally. India's biggest asset diplomatically is that it is dealing with a state whose commitment to self-serving violence and the persecution of its minorities is so evident that it will taint any human rights cause it touches. But the superficial satisfaction that a diplomatic victory might yield for India should not blind us to one practical danger, and one deep moral truth. The practical danger is this: We can dismiss the current rhetoric as mere words. But two things stand out: India and Pakistan are now not just accusing each other of specific actions that are evil. They are impugning the core character of each other. Pakistan's charge against India is now not that India is a state that illegally occupies and oppresses Kashmir; it is that the nature of the Indian regime has changed to a majoritarian racial ideology. For India, Pakistan is not a state that uses terror; the core of the state is terror incarnate. These mutual accusations have been implicit in India-Pakistan relations. But now they are explicit positions, an attack on each other's core identity.

Combine this with another fact. The heightened rhetoric has raised expectations of action in both countries. Imran Khan incoherently oscillates between expressing helplessness and warning of nuclear apocalypse. But it is difficult to see the current political establishment in Pakistan not losing face, if it is not seen to do something. India, for its part, has clearly announced an intention to now "solve" the Kashmir problem and make sure Pakistan is taught enough lessons that it cannot get away with its characteristic perfidy. After the misinformation in India on what Balakot achieved and the constant need to drum up nationalist frenzy, there is also heightened domestic expectation in India's capacity to now take this fight to the finish. Whether this signal gets Pakistan to back down or increases the risk of conflict is an open question. There is also a leadership vacuum in the international system. The conflict has become a lot more existential on both sides. The room for clawing back is less, the prospect of a violent dénouement high. It would be complacent to deny this im-

pending danger. But here is another moral issue. It is touching to see Pakistan express a love for India's minorities. India, quite legitimately, in turn used Pakistan's treatment of Ahmadiyas, Shias, and Balochis, as props in its own ideological defence while minorities in both countries say, "Don't use us. You will delegitimise us. We will deal with our own oppressors, thank you very much." But implicit in these rhetorical invocations is a clue to what went wrong in ideological thinking in South Asia. Rather than a general commitment to human rights, or the dignity and inviolability of the individual, rights were always invoked in the context of one community or the other. The problem of human rights was framed as the problem of distribution of power in particular communities: Muslim against Hindu, Hindu against Muslim, Shia against Sunni, Kashmir against India, Balochistan against Pakistan. The list could go on. In part, this was understandable since groups were often targeted in virtue of particular identities. But this framing had two unfortunate consequences.

We invoke the rights of our favourite group as and when we want; often those of our co-ethnics at the expense of others. So, rights are tied to communal sympathies. They set up a competitive dynamic over whose human rights matter. Human rights are, paradoxically, used to divide, not unite. In the South Asia context, we also have the challenge of endless minorities within minorities. If one group gets self-determination, for instance, chances are you will land up with another minority to protect within that group. In short, group-based rights don't work if there is no commitment to human rights and freedom within those groups. But if there is a general commitment to freedom and human rights, the claims of group-based rights become less necessary.

This paradox can be seen in the relation between nationalism and subnationalism. It is a truism that in the modern world a nation state is the political form under which rights can be claimed. But the process of consolidation of nation states can also become exclusionary, and often spawn counter resistance in the form of subnationalism. But if nationalism is, by virtue of its exclusions, illegitimate, so should subnationalism be (un-

less purely defensive), which often produces the same logic in miniature. It should be subject to the same suspicion. In a way, both need to be held to a human rights standard.

If South Asia wants to get out of the morass of deadly identity politics, it will have to make a commitment to human rights in general, not align them to a communal imagination. If individuals have freedom and dignity, identities will flourish and proliferate anyway. But these will be freely chosen, not scripted by exclusionary nationalisms. No matter how presumptuously a community might feel it can get away by denying other communities their rights by virtue of its power or numbers, eventually the culture of impugning rights comes and bites back.

India is right: Pakistan's persecution of its minorities has deeply distorted its nature and character. But India is being complacent if it thinks that the decimation of law, the suspension of habeas corpus, and the near permanent state of emergency we have practised in Kashmir is not coming to imperil the liberties of all of us. In some ways, it already has. Whichever way we look at it, there is no way out for South Asia unless there is a culture of commitment to human rights, not human rights as communal props. The challenges of both India and Pakistan can be solved only if we re-imagine ourselves, internally, as a zone of freedom, not warring identities.

It is easy to hear the utter derision human rights evokes. They can be conceptually complicated. But we have a good start. It looks like we understand the rights of individuals in particular groups. All we need to do is extend the same courtesy to everyone else. But in a week when we will be drowned in Gandhian piety, it is worth going back to first principles and asking: Even with these bombastic diplomatic victories, and full arsenal of force and repression at our disposal, can we imagine an enduring peace in South Asia, without reorienting its culture to individual dignity and freedom?

As Gandhi knew: We can either be free together or not at all.

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AT HOT SEA

IPCC report on oceans underlines urgency of upscaling GHG reduction targets, building resilience to climate change

BY 2100, OCEANS all over the world will absorb five to seven times more heat than they have done in the past 50 years, if we do not reduce our emissions trajectory," notes a report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released last week. This, the report warns, will lead to global sea-levels rising by at least a metre, submerging several coastal cities, including Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai and Surat. Marine heatwaves are projected to be more intense, they would last longer and occur 50 times more often. Sea-level rise could also lead to an increase in the frequency of extreme weather events, which occur, for example, during high tides and intense storms.

Oceans cover more than 70 per cent of the earth's surface and provide critical ecosystem services such as soaking up heat and distributing it evenly. So, as the planet warms, it's the oceans that get most of the extra energy. But hotter oceans also mean stronger cyclones and storms. This could mean unprecedented volatility in several coastal regions. For instance, in 2014, Cyclone Nilofar was the first extremely severe cyclone to be recorded in the Arabian Sea in the post-monsoon season. Earlier cyclones impacting the country generally originated in the Bay of Bengal and made their landfall on India's eastern coast. Cyclone Nilofar did not make a landfall but it led to heavy rains in the country's west coast. And in October last year, a higher than normal surge in sea-level due to the dual impact of Cyclone Luban and high tide swamped several beaches in Goa. Some of them, in fact, went completely under water for a few hours. Warming seas have changed cyclone behaviour in other ways as well. In 2017, Cyclone Ockhi, which originated in the Bay of Bengal, travelled more than 2,000 km to wreak havoc on India's western coast — the first cyclone to do so in 30 years.

The IPCC report warns of more "frequent El Nino and La Nina events". These events in the Pacific Ocean are critically linked to the southwest monsoons in India. In fact, a El Nino caused a severe drought in the country in 2015. This means that countries will not only have to upscale efforts to check GHG emissions, they will also need to ramp up investments in infrastructure and knowledge systems that help build up peoples' resilience against extreme weather events. However, after the Paris Climate Treaty, progress on both counts has been patchy at best. The latest IPCC report should serve as a wake-up call.

THRESHOLD IN ORBIT

Elon Musk ups the ante in the space race, and this time it is a target worth shooting for

SPACE ENTREPRENEUR ELON Musk, long criticised for setting unrealistic deadlines, and then criticised some more for trying to meet them with an inhuman work schedule, has done it again. He threatens to put a prototype of his heavy and reusable rocket Starship into orbit in six months. It's a deadline that even the engineers of the Apollo 11 mission, who won the race to space, would have balked at, and they had a government budget and a huge space industry at their command. But a reusable rocket system — rather than single-use rockets for every flight — is the Holy Grail of space exploration.

A rocket system that can ferry people back and forth between earth and orbit is the threshold for the leap to the planets and the stars. It is speculated that craft with other propulsion modes unsuitable for use near planets, like ion drives, could take over from there, propelling crews at tremendous speeds to distances now unimaginable. The existing transport system on earth works efficiently because people can easily change modes — bus to train or plane, then bus or taxi to the final destination. Space mass transport would probably be similarly variegated and interconnected.

But why is Musk in such a hurry to "extend consciousness beyond earth", in his words? Perhaps it's because he believes that consciousness is up to no good down here. Musk has repeatedly sounded warnings about artificial intelligence, currently the Holy Grail of communications technology, running wild. Even if the AIs don't get us, climate change will. It appears certain that extreme events at shorelines will be experienced by people alive today. Against this grim backdrop, the sands of Mars as depicted by Edgar Rice Burroughs may seem inviting, and reaching earth orbit would be the first leg of the journey to safety.

BAD AIR, BUT HOW BAD

Smog does affect health but there is no data on the problem's magnitude



SOUMI ROY CHOWDHURY AND SANJIB POHIT

IN THE PAST three years, several studies have linked air pollution with health effects. For instance, the State of Global Air 2019, published by the Health Effects Institute (HEI), claimed exposure to outdoor and indoor air pollution contributed to over 1.2 million deaths in India in 2017. Another study conducted by researchers at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and partner institutes peg the economic cost of exposure to air pollution from crop residue burning at \$35 billion, or nearly Rs. 2.35 lakh crore annually, for the three north Indian states of Punjab, Haryana and Delhi.

While we do not question the basic premise that air pollution has adverse health impact, we are sceptical about the figures quoted and the methodology adopted in estimating the cost.

First piece of the jigsaw of such studies relates to the availability of data on measurement of air pollution levels, notably mean concentration on particulate matter (PM)10 (particles smaller than 10 microns) and PM2.5 (particles smaller than 2.5 microns, about 25 to 100 times thinner than a human hair). The availability of data has no doubt improved significantly in recent years, with an increase in number of nodes where such data is now being collected 24x7. However, while the discourse on air pollu-

tion in the Indian context centres around PM10 and PM2.5, there are other pollutants in the atmosphere which are more harmful — nanoparticles, for example. Soil erosion, dust storms, burning of unprocessed fuel and industrial and mechanical processes also cause air pollution. The lack of data on these implies that research excludes an important aspect of the health implications of pollution. This may mean that the total economic cost of exposure can, in fact, be higher than what is reported. But is it really so?

This brings to us the second piece of the puzzle: Estimating the impact of pollution on health. There can be two ways to understand it. For instance, IFPRI has used India's fourth District Level Health Survey data to correlate pollution with health impact. However, it is a general health survey and does not cover all diseases linked to air pollution. Moreover, the information is collated from households. Resource constraints preclude any attempt to collect clinical and biometric information of individuals exposed to air pollution. Health assessment based on respondents' perceptions may not provide a real picture unless a medical examination on the subjects captures the residues of such pollutants in the blood. Only then can the extent and severity of pollution impacts be ascertained.

In India, the general approach is to get the cost estimates from developed countries and then deflate the numbers using the purchasing power parity (PPP) conversion approach to arrive at economic costs of pollution. However, there could be a major flaw in this approach. For example, it overlooks how human immunity develops in polluted and non-polluted areas. To completely overlook this fact may lead to an overestimation of pollution's adverse impacts.

While the severity of the air pollution problem is a fact, its magnitude can only be judged when, apart from scientists measuring air pollution and social scientists assessing economic values, medical practitioners are also involved in collecting clinical and biometric information. It appears that the last part is missing in most studies. Of course, given the shortage of doctors in India, it would always be costly to involve the medical profession in such studies. But then, researchers should acknowledge that they may be off the mark. As of now, the true picture remains shrouded in the smog that prevails over our cities.

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OCTOBER 1, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO



RSS-STATE EQUATION BALASAHEB DEORAS SAID in Nagpur that the RSS considered politics to be only a part of the total national life and "our relationship with politics is to the same extent and of the same nature as we have with other aspects of life". He added that the "Sangh does not believe that the state is the chief or the sole instrument for achieving social good". Addressing an RSS rally on the occasion of the 54th anniversary of the founding of the organisation, The RSS sarsanghachalak explained at length the character and objectives of the organisation which, he said, believed in the secular character of the state and was dedicated to the rejuvenation

of Hindu national life. MEDIA CRITIQUE RAJ NARAIN, LOK Dal leader, has alleged that mass media was being systematically exploited by capitalist forces. "I will take the department of mass media in my own hands if this situation continues," Narain told newsmen in Varanasi. Narain said that the peasants and common people of the drought-affected region of eastern UP had strongly demanded postponement of the mid-term poll till the middle of February 1980. "I will convey this message of the people to the Prime Minister and to the Chief Election Commissioner," he said.

JANATA MANIFESTO A DRAFT OF the first part of the Janata Party election manifesto circulated among national executive members contains a strong denunciation of President Sanjiva Reddy, defectors led by Charan Singh, the CPI and CPM. It is a review of the developments that led to the fall of the Janata government, the dissolution of the Lok Sabha and the announcement of the mid-term poll. The second part, a review of the Janata government's achievements, would be circulated among the national executive next week. The third part, listing the policies, if the party returned to power, would be drafted after a discussion on the suggestions by the national executive.

An illusion of parity

India must reflect frankly upon China's extraordinary transformation as it celebrates the 70th anniversary of the founding of PRC



C RAJA MOHAN

AS CHINA CELEBRATES the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic with much military pomp and nationalist pride today, India must reflect upon the extraordinary transformation on its northern frontiers. China's internal and external trajectory has enthused, puzzled and troubled India since the early 20th century. The PRC's fascinating evolution presents four broad themes for any Indian contemplation.

The first is China's awe-inspiring economic miracle. This demands a deep Indian admiration for China's success in improving the lives of the largest number of people in the shortest period ever. While Mao's economic experimentation turned out to be disastrous, the era of reform and opening up launched by Deng Xiaoping at the end of the 1970s transformed China into the world's second largest economy. It's a matter of time that China will overtake the United States in terms of the aggregate size of the economy. China is not the first country to move from underdeveloped to developed status. It is the first country to compress that journey into just four decades.

Many in India tend to minimise the significance of this growth by pointing to the nature of the political system under the Chinese Communist Party. They invoke the excuse that India has had to pay a democracy tax that slows its development while China had an authoritarian dividend. The denial of China's economic miracle, however, is also often accompanied by an envy of China's rise. A more balanced Indian judgement would underline the possibilities for rapid and productive change that China has demonstrated to other developing countries.

In the middle of the 20th century, the dominant sentiment about Asia's economic future was of pessimism. Many were convinced that it was impossible for late entrants into the world economy, dominated by Western imperial powers, to develop rapidly or successfully. China, in spectacular manner, proved that assumption wrong. India's own reforms at the turn of the 1990s generated similar optimism that it too could rise within a short period. One difference, though, is in the comprehensive and sustained nature of China's reforms — from education to diplomacy and from military to municipal governance. India's reform strategy in comparison has been tentative, episodic and limited.

One exception to China's story of sweeping reform, though, has been in the arena of political modernisation. That takes us to the second theme. The CCP deserves much praise for stitching a diverse set of people and territories into a single nation-state. But the CCP's continuing challenges are evident in the problems it confronts today in regions with ethnic as well as religious minorities such as Xinjiang and Tibet.

China is also having difficulty in bringing Hong Kong under full sovereign control. Protests have continued for weeks against Beijing's efforts to turn Hong Kong — that has enjoyed the benefits of the principle "one country, two systems" — into just another city in China. The developments are a reminder of



CR Sasikumar

the unending and uphill task of generating national coherence in a large state. The Hong Kong protests might also make it even harder for the CCP to complete Taiwan's unification with the PRC.

Meanwhile, hopes that China's economic growth will eventually lead to the emergence of a middle class and the democratisation of its polity have been dampened. The Xi Jinping era has seen a vigorous crackdown on dissent and the emergence of a surveillance state that has deployed emerging digital technologies in asserting unprecedented control over its population.

India has rightly avoided telling China how to govern itself. For, India has many problems of its own in building national unity and consolidating territorial sovereignty. But India can certainly learn from the ancient Chinese wisdom that governing a large nation is like cooking a small fish. They are easily overdone.

Deng Xiaoping's emphasis on "one country, two systems" and letting some of China's regions grow first and then pulling others forward brought great sophistication and subtlety to administering China. But Xi's harder line could turn China into a strong but brittle state. India's strength, in contrast, lies in its soft but supple structure that can absorb the inevitable tensions of nation-building. It is easy to forget this.

Third is China's huge commitment to building national capabilities in science and technology. Exactly a century ago, the May Fourth Movement in China defined the goals of the nation's modernisation as replacing "Mr Confucius" with "Mr Democracy and Mr Science". Nationalists and communists alike recognised that breaking free from the chains of inherited religious and social custom was critical for China's modernisation. While Mr Democracy has been elusive, Mr Science has found a thriving home in China. Unlike China's economic rise, its emerging impressive credentials on science and technology have been less recognised in India.

China has begun to take the pole position in a number of emerging areas like artificial intelligence, robotics, data analytics, synthetic biology, new materials and space sciences. The size of investments in research and development, modernisation of the higher education system, opening China up for foreign faculty and talent, and making the People's Liberation Army a major stakeholder have all propelled China to the highest ranks of scientific power. But, without a successful battle

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against feudalism, China's technological progress would not have been so dramatic.

To be sure, the fight against Confucianism took extreme forms under Mao, including the vandalism of China's rich cultural heritage. Under Mao's successors though, China has found a better balance between preserving the rich past and embracing the spirit of science and technology. Meanwhile, India's battle against feudal legacy is incomplete and might be losing steam. Delhi has also much ground to cover in catching up with China on science and technology.

Finally, there is the question of power in China's world view. Nationalists and communists were one in their determination to restore China's "wealth and power" (fuqiang in Chinese) that eroded so quickly in the encounter with the West during the colonial era. The CCP can rightly claim the redemption of that ambition in good measure. While many in the West admired and promoted the economic rise of China, they seem utterly surprised by Beijing's current assertion as a great power.

The expectation that China will play by the rules devised by West and accept a status designated for them has turned out to be a delusion. China is now a great power in its own right and wants to deal with the world on its own terms. But the CCP, too, has been surprised by the pushback from the West and the rapid escalation of conflict with the United States. The nature of the increasingly unpredictable relationship between China and the West will shape international relations in the decades ahead.

Like the West, India, too, underestimated China's entirely legitimate aspirations to be a great power and the speed with which it has got there. This has been compounded by a persistent Indian temptation to romanticise the relationship with China and hope that declarations of solidarity will overcome contradictory interests. To make matters worse, the illusion of parity with China has prevented Delhi from coming to terms with the rapidly widening power gap with Beijing and its impact on India's world. Overcoming the consequences of that gap, which is likely to persist for long, will be India's greatest national challenge in the coming decades.

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WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"It is a tragedy that he (Boris Johnson) can get away with his fabrications and exaggerations whatever the cost to the country." — THE GUARDIAN

Her way of seeing

To target Romila Thapar is to target a new way of asking questions and writing history



VIJAY SINGH

BEFORE HEADING BACK to Paris, I decided to visit Romila Thapar who had been in the news for the insidious interrogation of her status as professor emerita at JNU. She referred then, with a certain distraughtness so rare to spot in her, to an ancient formula that sets out the pattern of debate — Purvapaksh-Pratipaksh Siddhanta. According to it, one first spells out the opponent's position as truthfully as one can, and then refutes it point by point before setting out one's own position. This principle was put forward in an ancient Indian text as a methodical way of reaching an intellectual resolution and ensuring further progress. The immediate context for referring to this principle was our conversation about the spate of ill-informed and foul comments she has been receiving, and how far their writers could be from the debating siddhanta of ancient India. I was outraged to hear about such language, insulting as they were to one of our most eminent intellectuals in the world.

When I reached Paris, I reached out to Charles Malamoud, an honorary professor of history at L'Ecole of Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales and a very respected historian of ancient India. It was Malamoud who first translated DD Kosambi's work into French. "I was outraged to hear about Romila being asked for her CV," he fumed. "It's an act of hostility against independent science, against Romila and all that she represents..."

The conversation with Malamoud led me to speak to Gérard Fussman, the renowned Sanskrit scholar and professor emeritus at the Collège de France, the most prestigious research school here which boasts of 21 Nobel Prizes (Romila Thapar has been a guest lecturer at the Collège). Visibly upset with the JNU administration, Fussman remarked: "Questioning her status is an act of pettiness and jealousy."

Fussman, who has worked closely with Indian scholars on historical and archaeological projects, wondered if people seeking Thapar's credentials realised what her contribution to Indian history, and to India, has been. "She is an excellent historian — and much more. She is a towering intellectual in India and abroad. And her greatest contribution is to have Indianised Indian history."

Fussman, who has devoted a lifetime to a study of the Indian civilisation, reminisced insightfully about an archaeological project undertaken in Chandert (Madhya Pradesh). "At the end of the day, when we would sit down to discuss our research with the Indian colleagues," he recollected, "I found there were questions that the Indians were raising, but which had escaped me. Similarly, there were things that had intrigued me, but the Indians hadn't even thought of them... But in the case of Dr Thapar, this was not the case because she was at home with both the perspectives — Indian and foreign. This is an

extremely rare inter-cultural quality in an intellectual, and it is such qualities that have permitted Romila and her colleagues to take a university like JNU from scratch and build it into a great institution."

In fact, I myself was witness to the nascent years of this university. I wonder whether it was the intellectual stature of our teachers (Thapar, Bipan Chandra, S Gopal, Sabyasachi Bhattacharya) or their manner of inspiring a handful of young minds that turned JNU into a vast, turbulent sea of intellectual passion. Libraries overflowed with students. There was no place to sit in them, they looked like railway platforms. It wasn't uncommon to see students taking a nap between book racks in the library, while they waited for their next book. People skipped meals as dhabas ran virtually round the clock to cater to their insomniac clientèle. There were passionate discussions everywhere — on buses, at dhabas, in rooms and dining halls.

When I look back at those times with envy or nostalgia, three "teachings" from that era seem to have left an imprint on the mind. The first is a spirit of inquiry — a deathless devotion to the truth and an inner necessity to dig down to the root of the problem. Second, that period of learning infused in us a certain intellectual confidence to stand up to the world. Finally, perhaps the most important, we learnt a new way of perceiving history, a new way of reading our colonial and human experience, a new way of asking questions and writing history. This is "history from below", written from the perspective of those who live or suffer it.

The truth is that, regardless of the governments in power, universities need academic freedom to flourish, they need fresh air. Intellectual and creative milieux anywhere in the world will always pose awkward questions to the state. They will say and do things that will please or displease the powers that be. But freedom of expression, and of learning, constitutes a sacred space that needs to be guarded as, in the long term, it teaches us — as individuals and as a society — to swim through the enigmas of life and history.

To cite an example that illustrates the sad predicament facing intellectual professions, I once made a film called "India by Song" on the post-1947 Indian history. I thought Doordarshan would be a good platform for its airing, so I proposed it to them. A senior official, who viewed it, liked it and wanted to air it on Republic Day. The film was sent to the in-house review committee which, incidentally, re-censors films which already have a censor certification! One of the committee members called me and said: "It's such a beautiful film. But why did you have to include Romila Thapar's interview where she speaks of the Emergency being like a dictatorship? Sorry, we can't air it." At that time, the Congress was in power. One year later, the government changed and I spoke to Doordarshan for an airing. This time around, it was someone else who said: "It's such a nice film but why did you have to speak of the Babri Masjid demolition and the riots?"

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SUNANDA VASHISHT

Man in the arena

'Howdy, Modi' showcased that India, US have shed Cold War baggage

I WAS AMONG the 50,000 people who watched Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Howdy, Modi event in Houston on September 22. Along with him on the stage were US congressmen and senators, Republicans and Democrats. The Mayor of Houston was on the stage. And then the President of the United States joined him. Other than when they congregate in the US Congress, I have not seen that many American lawmakers of both parties on one stage, and that too with 50,000 people cheering them in a football stadium. None of this was familiar ground for Modi, except perhaps 50,000 deliriously cheering crowd. Yet he stood there, owning every moment of that event. He played the host and the guest both, with remarkable finesse.

As I watched Modi, the immortal words of Theodore Roosevelt played in my head. "It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly." Modi that morning was the man in the arena — one who leads from the front and never shies from a good fight. The stakes at Howdy, Modi were so high that if even one little thing went wrong the entire

event would be derailed. No US president has ever appeared on the stage with a foreign leader in a rally in a football stadium. Houston City had never previously handled logistics and security for such a high profile event. Khalistani and Pakistani protesters had threatened to sabotage the show. Torrential rains had flooded the city of Houston just a day before the event and 50,000 people had to be ushered inside the stadium with proper security protocol. Yet that morning in the NRG Stadium, everything neatly fell in place and history was made.

To my left sat an elderly lady who had flown all the way from Atlanta. Her feet were swollen after standing in the security line for few hours. "I can barely fit my feet in my shoes," she pointed towards her shoes. Originally from Ludhiana, she told me she would not have missed the event for anything. "What do you like about Modi," I asked. "I haven't seen a politician like this in my life. He does what he says," she said, and before I could ask her another question, she was cheering and screaming like a teenager at a pop concert. To my right sat a young IT professional originally from Telangana, who was continuously charging his two phones with his power bank and furiously WhatsApping photos and videos. "I am waiting to see what he will say about Pakistan and Article

370," he told me. "I doubt he will say anything much," I said, and he looked at me with disbelief. When Modi asked the audience to give Indian lawmakers who had helped pass the legislation to abrogate Article 370 a standing ovation, he stood up and cheered wildly, but not without giving me a look that said "Modi never disappoints".

There was a bunch of giggling teenagers with popcorn tubs in front of me. Most of them were born and raised in the US. Why are they here today, I asked. "To watch India's prime minister and cheer for him," they said. "Can you recall the name of any previous prime minister of India," I asked. They looked at each other and shrugged their shoulders. "Not really," they said almost in unison. "My parents talk about Modi all the time at home," one of them told me. "India and United States are friends, it makes sense for them to tell the world that," another teenager told me.

Standing in the NRG stadium it was hard to believe that just two decades ago, then US president, Bill Clinton, had imposed economic sanctions after India announced completion of a series of underground nuclear tests. That morning, as Indian and American flags were being waved together, it was clear that the cold war baggage had finally been thrown off. What was ignited by P V

Narasimha Rao, carried forward by Atal Bihari Vajpayee, solidified by Manmohan Singh had now been given new wings by Modi.

India and the US are not allies. The two countries will, perhaps, never be allies given how the US defines its allies and non-allies. However, the largest and oldest democracies have found a unique way to work with each other, collaborate with each other and promote shared interests. As US President Donald Trump addressed the charged audience in the NRG stadium, he saw Indian flags and American flags being waved together and chants of Modi, Modi along with USA, USA. I was wondering if the US president would be comfortable seeing so many flags of any other country besides India in his audience. That Trump appeared in an event called Howdy, Modi was a testament to the comfort level both countries have achieved with each other. There will be bumps going forward because all developing relationships face those, but bumps will never slow down the progress the two countries continue to make. The credit goes to the Man in the Arena because he "dared greatly".

Vashisht is a columnist and author based in Houston

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

HINDI AND OTHERS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Much ado about language' (IE, September 30). Article 351 of the Constitution bestowed the responsibility on the Centre to encourage the growth of Hindi and develop it as a medium of expression in the country. The Article calls for enriching the language by assimilating elements from other languages mentioned in the eighth schedule and drawing vocabulary from these languages. The idea perhaps was to make Hindi an inclusive language, encompassing the linguistic diversity of the country. But over the years standardisation of Hindi has Sanskritised it further making it unintelligible even to the native speakers.

Sudip Kumar Dey, Kolkata

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Much ado about language' (IE, September 30). The writer has rightly highlighted the crux of the issue related to the controversy over Hindi. It is merely a mode of communication between the people of north India. The beauty of this country lies in its diversity and plurality. An annual furore over the Hindi Divas is often a red herring used by the government to distract people's attention from many other serious issues.

Chinmay Jain, Delhi

RAY OF HOPE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'A win for diplomacy' (IE, September 30). It's true that normalcy has to be restored in the Kashmir Valley as early as the circumstances permit. A ray of hope lies in the recently announced local body polls. India being the world's largest democracy doesn't need lessons in human

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

rights from Imran Khan. He should focus more on setting things right in his country where the condition of minorities is deplorable.

Vinay Saroha, Delhi

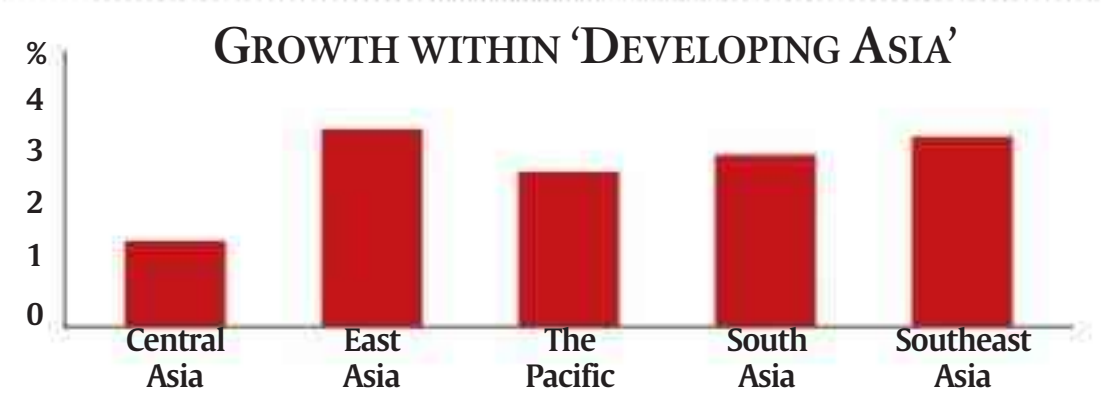
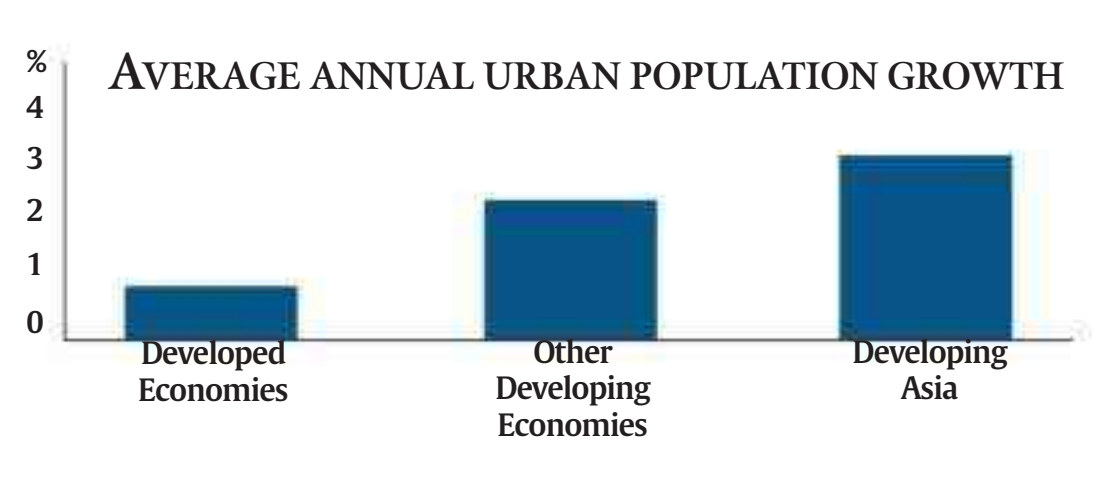
ONUS ON RBI

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Who pays' (IE, September 27). The rising NPAs in the public sector banking units is a threat to the sector. This was the main reason for merger of public sector banks. The RBI should examine the long-term feasibility of the business model of public sector banks and monitor their activities more frequently.

Aayush Sapra, Ujjain

TELLING NUMBERS

China and India lead global urbanisation shift



THE ECONOMIC outlook update released by the Asian Development Bank last week highlighted that, according to World Urbanization Prospects data, "the number of urban inhabitants in developing Asia has increased almost five-fold since 1970". "Developing Asia" refers to a group of 45 countries that are members of the ADB. As such, between 1970 to 2017, the urban population in this group of countries grew from 375 million to 1.84 billion. The region led the global increase in urban population in this period and accounted for 53% of it. Two-thirds of the nearly 1.5 billion additional city dwellers in Developing Asia belong to China and India.

Developing Asia urbanised faster than the rest of the world not only in terms of absolute growth, but also in terms of growth rate. The urban population in this region increased at an average 3.4% per annum from 1970 to 2017. This was much faster than the 2.6% in the rest of the developing world — mainly Africa and Latin America — and 1.0% in the developed world. Within the Developing Asia region, East Asia, at 3.7%, had the highest annual growth rate. It was followed by Southeast Asia at 3.6%, and South Asia at 3.3%. The Pacific saw an annual growth rate of 2.9% in the urban population, and Central Asia witnessed a 1.6% annual growth.

THIS WORD MEANS

STARSHIP

Elon Musk has unveiled the prototype spaceship that he believes will take humans to Mars

ROCKET COMPANY SpaceX has unveiled a prototype design of the 'Starship' — the spacecraft that it is building at its facility outside Brownsville, Texas, which the company's founder Elon Musk says will take humans to Mars within the next few years. The Starship, made of stainless steel, looks like a giant, shiny grain silo, stands 164 ft tall, and is 30 ft in diameter. It will be paired with a behemoth booster stage called Super Heavy; the full rocket will be 387 ft tall and will be able to lug more than 100 tonnes of payload weight into orbit. Musk provided the update to the rocket on September 28, the anniversary of SpaceX's first successful launch 11 years ago. That rocket, Falcon 1, was 68 ft high, five-and-a-half feet in diameter, and could lift payloads up to 180 kg. Since then, SpaceX has developed a steady business of putting satellites in orbit and carrying cargo to the International Space Station.

An orbital test flight of a refined Starship prototype and the Super Heavy booster could be carried out in less than six months and, according to Musk, "we could potentially see people flying next year". Building a reusable rocket is critical to making space flight viable. Musk switched from his original choice of carbon fibre to stainless steel because it is cheaper, easier to work with, becomes stronger in the ultracoldness of space, and has a melting temperature that can more easily withstand the heat of re-entry into Earth's atmosphere. The Starship will belly flop in the upper atmosphere at a 60-degree angle, Musk said. Then, as it slows and nears the ground, it will rotate to vertical and land. Musk has repeatedly revised the design over the last three years, fixing the size of the spacecraft, changing the heat shield, and adjusting the shape of the fins, etc.

THE NEW YORK TIMES

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

How to read corporate tax cut

A cut in the corporate tax rate announced earlier this month makes India a more attractive destination for future investments, but the move may not provide a massive boost to growth in the current financial year

UDIT MISRA
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 30

SPEAKING AT the Bloomberg global business forum last week, Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a strong pitch before global investors to come to India. Back home, the government has initiated a slew of reforms to arrest the slowdown in economic growth. The cut in corporate tax rate has been the biggest change; inclusive of cesses and surcharges, the rate has come down from roughly 35% to 25%, and without the cesses and surcharges, to 22% from around 30%. The government has also nudged public and private banks to look at providing new loans to businesses, and has been working with RBI to bring down the cost of such loans by improving monetary policy transmission and reducing interest rates. From a policy perspective, the situation looks primed to benefit the "wealth creators", as the PM referred to business entrepreneurs in his Independence Day speech.

Why has the government cut tax rates?
A corporate tax cut works a lot like an income tax cut for individuals. In essence, a lower corporate tax rate means businesses have more money left with them; in other words, it increases their profits. As charts 1 and 2 show, India's corporate tax rates were quite high in comparison to neighbouring countries. A lower tax rate not only improves corporate profitability but also makes India a more competitive market for investments.

How does this affect economic activity?
The cut has three broad impacts. One, in the immediate term, it leaves corporates with more money, which they can use to either reinvest in existing firms or invest in new ventures if they think doing so would be profitable. But it is also possible that they may simply use this money to pay off old debts or pay higher dividends to their shareholders. Whether or not companies invest will depend on the prevailing economic conditions.

Investments crucially depend on the consumption levels in an economy. If there is high consumer demand for, say, cars, firms in that sector would happily invest — but if there is no demand for, say, chocolates, firms in that sector would not invest. However, if the consumption level is depressed because incomes are low across the board, and companies have high unsold inventories (cars and chocolates, etc.), the impact on fresh investments would be muted.

Two, in the medium to long term, that is anywhere between one or two and five years or more, a corporate tax cut is expected to boost investments and increase the productive capacity of the economy. That's because regardless of a slump in demand in the short term, investment decisions are taken after considering long term demand projections. If demand is expected to grow, investments will bear fruit and with lower taxes, profits will be higher. These investments will also create jobs and increased earnings in due course. However, a corporate tax cut also depresses economic activity to the extent that it reduces the money in the hands of the government in the form of tax revenues. If this

CHART 1: EFFECTIVE TAX RATES HAVE COME DOWN SHARPLY

	Old effective tax rate	New effective tax rate
TURNOVER LESS THAN Rs 4,000 cr		
Taxable income less than Rs 1 cr	26	22.9
Taxable income more than Rs 1 cr	27.8	24.5
TURNOVER MORE THAN Rs 4,000 cr		
Taxable income less than Rs 1 cr	31.2	22.9
Taxable income more than Rs 1 cr but less than 10 cr	33.4	24.5
Taxable income more than Rs 10 cr	34.9	25.6

Source: Union Budget, PIB, Kotak Institutional Equities

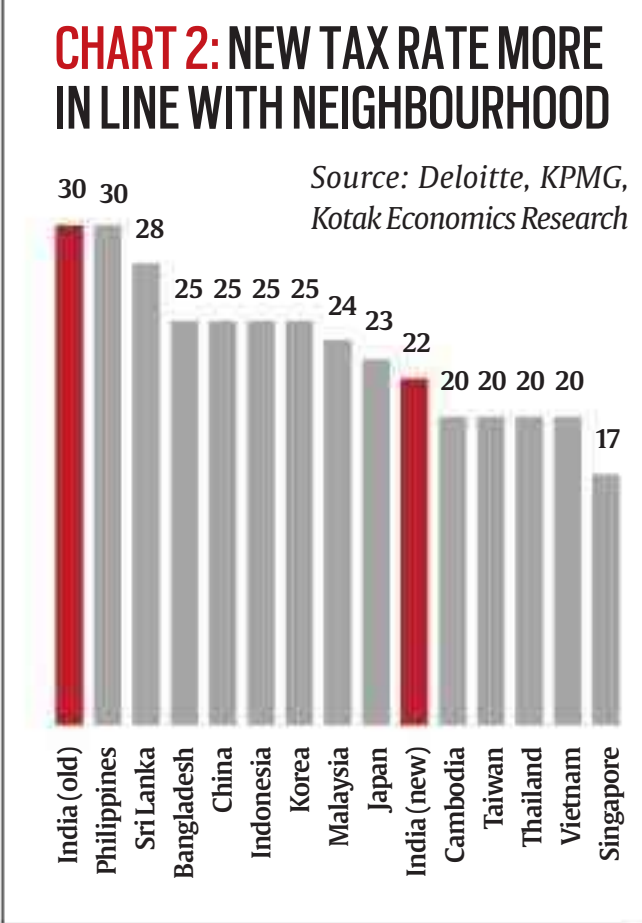


CHART 3: BANKING, FINANCIAL FIRMS GAIN THE MOST

Industry	Share in tax saving (in %)
Banking, Finance & Insurance	42.5
Iron & Steel	6.1
FMCG	6
Mining	5.7
Auto & Ancillary	5
Capital goods	4.3
Crude oil	3.8
Chemicals	3.1
Power	2.8
Infra	2.6

Source: AceEquity, CARE Ratings

money had been with the government, it would have been spent on either paying salaries or creating new productive assets such as roads — either way, this money would have gone straight to the consumers, instead of the investors.

So, will the tax cut boost growth this year?
It is difficult to argue that it would. There are greater chances that India's GDP growth will continue to struggle in the current financial year despite the corporate tax cut. This is because of a variety of reasons. One, official statistics show that workers in several key sectors of the economy such as agriculture and manufacturing, etc. have seen their incomes stagnate. There is also in-

vestments would be muted. Two, in the medium to long term, that is anywhere between one or two and five years or more, a corporate tax cut is expected to boost investments and increase the productive capacity of the economy. That's because regardless of a slump in demand in the short term, investment decisions are taken after considering long term demand projections. If demand is expected to grow, investments will bear fruit and with lower taxes, profits will be higher. These investments will also create jobs and increased earnings in due course. However, a corporate tax cut also depresses economic activity to the extent that it reduces the money in the hands of the government in the form of tax revenues. If this

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FACT CHECK, GROUND REALITY

How did minor planet 'Jasraj' get its name?

AMITABH SINHA
PUNE, SEPTEMBER 30

A MINOR planet between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter has been named after the legendary vocalist Pandit Jasraj.

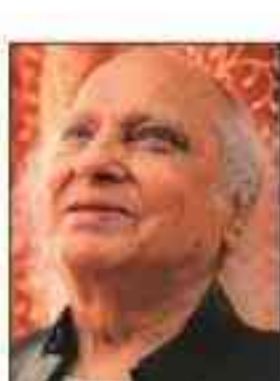
What is a 'minor planet'?
Minor planets are celestial objects orbiting the Sun that are not large enough for their gravity to pull them into a spherical shape. This distinguishes a minor planet — or a "small Solar System body", which is now the preferred term — from planets or "dwarf planets", which are almost spherical. Small Solar System bodies include asteroids,

comets, and several other celestial objects that go around the Sun.

How are they named?
Names of celestial bodies are finally approved by a committee at the International Astronomical Union (IAU), a global organisation of professional astronomers, which also decides on definitions of fundamental astronomical and physical constants. In the case of small Solar System bodies, the discoverer has the privilege to suggest the name. The discoverer holds this privilege for 10 years since the discovery. But there is a process to be fol-

lowed, and not all names are acceptable. Once it is determined that a celestial body is indeed new, a provisional name is given. This name has the year of discovery, two letters of the alphabet and, perhaps, two numbers. The minor planet that has been named after Pandit Jasraj was initially called '2006VP32'. Once more information is available about the body, particularly its orbit, and after it has been sighted on at least four occasions, it is entitled to have a permanent number. In this case, the number allotted was 300128. Only after this

the discoverer invited to suggest a name. **What are the requirements of the name?** There are rules for nomenclature, and restrictions on the names that can be suggested. The proposed name must have 16 characters or less, it must be "non-offensive", and not too similar to an existing name. Names of political or military leaders can be suggested only 100 years after their death. The same applies for a political or military event. Names of pets, and names of a commercial nature are "discouraged". There can be restrictions depending on where the body is located — for example, new objects discovered beyond Neptune are supposed to be given names of creation deities.



A shining star, a celestial body

China @ 70: Why National Day military parade in Beijing today matters

SOWMIYA ASHOK
BEIJING, SEPTEMBER 30

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 1, marks the 70th anniversary of the People's Republic of China, which Beijing will mark with the "biggest ever" celebrations and a "joyful atmosphere". The celebrations will be an affirmation of national pride. President Xi Jinping has repeatedly articulated a vision of national rejuvenation and China's economic transformation into a developed country. Beijing has been transformed into a sea of red. Red flags have been lined atop buildings, and red lanterns and banners with the logo of the 70th anniversary have been fastened across streets and draped over foot overbridges. The celebrations, which will go on through the entire day and night, will include a military and civilian parade. Close to 300,000 people took part in rehearsals for the parade, which included performances and a fireworks display.

portedly on weapons developed since Xi came to power in 2012. The parade — the 18th of its kind and the "biggest ever", according to the organisers — will continue for 80 minutes, and will involve 15,000 personnel of the People's Liberation Army, the People's Armed Forces, as well as China's militia and reserve service. Fifteen units will march down the Avenue, and 32 units displaying 580 weapons and equipment will show China's "prowess" in land, sea combat, air and missile defence, informational operations, unmanned tasks, logistic support and strategic strikes, according to the Office of the Parade Leading Group. Also, 160 fighter jets, bombers, early warning and control aircraft, and attack helicopters in 12 units will display the country's air power, a senior official from the Central Military Commission's Joint Staff Department, said at a press conference last week. Chang'an Avenue will be locked down, and only a handpicked audience will witness the parade. Intensive rehearsals have led to early closures of subway stations in central Beijing over the past three weekends. The city's residents have spotted tanks rolling down the roads, and there has been speculation that the machines have been



At Tiananmen Square, Beijing, on Monday. Reuters

parked at the heavily boarded Beijing Workers' Stadium. Some video clips on social media have shown several types of aircraft, apparently rehearsing. The South China Morning Post reported that KJ-2000 airborne early warning and control aircraft and J-10 and J-11B fighters have taken part in rehearsals over the countryside surrounding the capital. The SCMP report also quoted an unnamed military insider as saying that China's first stealth fighter jet, the J-20, had been "rehearsing over the western suburbs

of the capital since April". The Defense Ministry spokesperson has underlined that China has "no intentions to flex its muscles" through the parade. "Some people are fond of playing up the Chinese military's development. In their mind, there exists a weird logic: If the Chinese military displays its weapons, then it's a 'show of force', and if it doesn't, then it 'lacks transparency'," he told reporters. But an editorial in the state-run China Daily said: "The parade will show people that China is no longer the 'sick man of Asia'. It has the ability to stand up for itself should the need arise. It will show the world that the Chinese nation has the means to safeguard its rejuvenation."

President Xi's show
The 70th National Day celebrations carry an important message on the way in which Xi is perceived within China and outside. Over the last several months, state-run People's Daily has published the President's quotes above articles on its front pages, and there have been reports that journalists in state media will be expected to take part in pilot tests to assess their loyalty to Xi. Former SCMP editor Wang Xiangwei wrote in an opinion piece recently: "It goes

without saying that the People's Republic has much to celebrate on its 70th anniversary... The occasion will also be Xi's show as the celebration aims at further elevating his political authority and stature. He is already described as the most powerful Chinese leader since Mao Zedong, founder of the People's Republic." Chen Dingding, associate dean and professor at the Institute for Silk Road Studies in 21st Century told The Indian Express: "After four decades of rapid development, China is now the second largest economy but it is still a developing country with large population and myriad problems. Meanwhile, China is a responsible actor in the international community, playing a significant role in global governance. In the near future, the main issues for the government is to explore a sustainable way of maintaining economic growth and promoting people's welfare."

Celebrations and concerns
The grandest ever National Day celebrations come at a time of multiple challenges for China. The turbo-charged growth of the past decades has slowed in recent years, and the prolonged trade war with the United States has hurt the economy. In August, China saw industrial output grow at its slowest pace

since 2002, and soon afterward, Premier Li Keqiang said it wouldn't be easy for the country to sustain growth rates above 6%. "We are in the face of the conflict between economy growth and sustainable development, pressure from trade disputes with the US, and other societal issues such as aging population, urbanisation, etc.," Prof Chen said when asked to highlight the challenges before the country. A massive shortage of pork, the nation's staple meat, has dampened spirits for a few months now, and officials have been worried it would ruin the "happy and peaceful atmosphere" required during National Day. A sweeping epidemic of African swine fever has left 40% of China's pigs dead or culled, and pork prices have risen over 50% compared to last year. Vice Premier Hu Chunhua warned last month that rising prices would "seriously affect the lives of urban and rural residents, especially low-income people, and affect the joyful atmosphere...". Beyond the borders of the mainland, the violent anti-government protests in Hong Kong present a formidable challenge. A possible intensification of the police crackdown has probably been held in check due to China's concerns over its international image ahead of the National Day celebrations.