



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

KARTARPUR MILESTONE

Both India and Pakistan show good sense in delinking it from the rest of the relationship and pressing ahead

THE SIGNING OF the India-Pakistan agreement on the Kartarpur Corridor, providing visa-free access to a revered Sikh shrine from the closest point in India, is a historic moment in relations between the two countries. It has come at a time when they have little else to show between them except accumulated hostility. The year has been extraordinarily bad in this respect, starting with Pulwama, the IAF operation inside Pakistan, and the war of words over the government's decisions in Kashmir. Against this background, the Kartarpur Corridor agreement is the only positive development. It came to fruition because both sides showed the good sense to delink it from the rest of the relationship. Of course, in so doing, both were driven by their own self-interests. With so many important Sikh shrines on its side, Pakistan believes it can forge a special relationship with the Sikh community and has done so pro-actively. India, on the other hand, cannot afford to be seen as lagging behind on this, given Punjab's complex post-Partition political history. The agreement is a boon to the Sikh community in India, who now have the opportunity, starting with the 550th birth year of Guru Nanak, to visit Gurdwara Darbar Sahib in Kartarpur, directly through a road from Dera Baba Nanak in Punjab to the shrine. It heals one of the wounds of Partition for the Sikh community.

Much has been made over the US\$20 fee that Pakistan will levy per pilgrim. Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh went to the extent of calling this a jazia tax, invoking spectres of the medieval oppression of Sikhs by Mughals. This is playing to the gallery. The Indian claim that such charges are not in keeping with the religious-cultural ethos of the country is not even accurate. Big Indian temples charge worshippers for "special darshans" or "quick darshans", and pilgrims pay these fees without complaint. China levies charges on pilgrims visiting Lake Mansarovar and India has never objected, even when the fee was hiked a few years ago. Sensibly, India has dropped the demand that Pakistan not levy this charge. The amount is protected by the agreement, and any hike will have to be re-negotiated by the two governments.

In some ways, the Kartarpur agreement is comparable to the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty, which was negotiated and signed by the two countries despite the bad blood over Kashmir, though the World Bank played mediator. That, too, was a standalone agreement of its time, and has withstood the repeated shocks it has been subjected to by the bilateral ups and downs. Hopefully, the Kartarpur Agreement will remain as enduring as the IWT. It may be unrealistic to hope at this moment that this agreement will pave the way for a wider constructive engagement between the two countries, but what it shows is that the two sides are not entirely without the capability to do this.

EASIER DOES IT

India jumps 14 spots on Ease of Doing Business. Bringing more cities into the ranking's ambit will spur more reforms

THE LATEST EDITION of the World Bank's Doing Business rankings saw India move up by 14 spots in 2019. Cumulatively, in the first five years of the Narendra Modi government, India's ranking on this index has improved by 79 places to 63 in 2019, from 142 in 2014. This is an impressive achievement.

With this, the country has moved ahead of its Asian peers, notably, Indonesia (73), Vietnam (70), and Bangladesh (168) — countries with whom it is competing to attract firms that are moving out of China. India has also been placed on the list of economies with the most notable improvements on this index for the third year in a row. Further, this jump in the ranking, while it comes at a time when economic activity has slowed down sharply, moves India closer towards the target of being in the top 50 economies on this index.

Much of India's performance over the past year can be traced to significant gains made on four parameters, namely, resolving insolvency, dealing with construction permits, trading across borders, and registering property. On resolving insolvency, where India has seen the biggest gain this year, its performance has improved on both the time taken for the insolvency process to culminate, which has fallen from 4.3 years to 1.6 years, and on the recovery rate, which has risen from 26.5 to 71.6 cents on the dollar. But despite this jump in rankings, the government has its task cut out. Much more needs to be done on enforcing contracts, where it ranks 163, and on registering property, where, despite recent improvements (its ranking has improved from 166 in 2018 to 154 in 2019), India's performance is nothing to write home about. Easing compliance costs of GST, and of paying tax in general, will also help improve the country's ranking on the parameter of paying taxes where it ranks an abysmal 115.

Since these rankings are based only on the performance of a few select cities, they are unlikely to reflect the ground realities of large swathes of vast economies like India. By all accounts, there is a wide divergence in the ease of doing business indicators across states in India. Thus, expanding the list of cities covered by this report beyond Delhi and Mumbai, to include Kolkata and Bengaluru as well, is a welcome move. And, as some of the areas which impact these rankings fall under the purview of state governments, this move could incentivise states to step up their reforms.

FRANCO'S GHOST

Spanish dictator's corpse stirs the country. Confronting his legacy, the many complicities in it, is a task that must be undertaken

THE AAM AADMI is a curious formulation. In most cases, it is the nameless everyman, the victim of crime, a subject of the state, one among a billion votes. It is precisely because the common man is an empty signifier and a polemical generalisation, that it is so amenable to being a political category, even an empowering one. But every so often, the everyman must answer for his silences. After a bitter political and legal battle, the Socialist government in Spain has exhumed the corpse of Generalissimo Francisco Franco, dictator of Spain from 1939 to 1975, and transported it from the basilica at the Valley of the Fallen to a family vault in a cemetery in Madrid. In the last four decades, Spain has established its democratic credentials. But Franco's ghost has never quite been exorcised.

Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's rationale for moving Franco's body is two-fold. First, his massive tomb, built in part by political prisoners, was in the midst of thousands of unmarked graves of those killed by Franco's regime. Second, Sanchez said the exhumation was "another step in the reconciliation" among Spaniards. Whether the latter aim will be fulfilled is an open question: Graffiti proclaiming "death to communists" (one of Franco's prime targets), adorned the statue of Pablo Iglesias, founder of the Spanish Socialist Workers Party.

Sanchez has been accused of trying to politicise Franco's legacy. True as the charge may be, the fact is that in this case, history is intensely political. Unlike in Germany and Italy, Spain has not confronted the complicity of so many of its people — common people — in Franco's violence. His erstwhile mausoleum was a grand monument, one that many in the country continued to flock to. As majoritarianism rears its head in Europe and beyond, the divisive moral conundrum in Spain today is well worth confronting: Do those that stand unquestioningly behind leader and country, or even stay silent as republicanism is replaced by repression in their name, bear responsibility for their acts?



SUHAS PALSHIKAR

TYPICAL OF SITUATIONS of single-party dominance, the first reactions to the outcomes of two state assembly elections are justifiably marked by some relief and considerable expectancy. The outcomes hold significance in the light of three crucial assembly elections scheduled for next year, and beyond. They also would be read as a major handle to understand how political competition is likely to take shape.

The new normal of Indian politics characterised by the ever-growing clout of the BJP had us believe that a national-level leader would be in a position to sway the electorate even when state elections were happening. This new normal also cautioned us against relying too much on ordinary electoral calculations producing a complex set of outcomes. After all, wasn't it the prime minister himself, who in his victory speech in May, exhorted analysts to give up outdated ways of analysis? He had then said, "Hindustan ke political pandit ko apni peechli sadi ki soch ko chhodna hoga" (India's political analysts need to cast away their thinking from the past century).

Indeed, the rise of the Narendra Modi phenomenon and its continuation over the next round of parliamentary elections as also the following his ideas and actions received, made political scientists wonder how this can be reconciled with democracy and India's claims to being an inclusive nation.

In fact, since 2014, the single most important factor in explaining election outcomes over and above everything else has been the leadership skill, personality and image of PM Modi. Modi undoubtedly played a critical role in winning elections for the BJP not just at the Centre, but in Maharashtra, Jharkhand and UP (2014-2017). Thus, a new framework for electoral analysis was about to settle in. The only question was the longevity of this personalised route to crafting electoral successes.

Indira Gandhi could single handedly sway the electorate until she stumbled with the Bihar and Gujarat agitations. She repeated electoral success in the early Eighties once again, but the swiftness and the populist appeal were both absent. In Modi's case, till last week, it appeared as if he was going to defy the electoral logic of democracy and survive the second electoral cycle at state level in view of his extraordinary victory of 2019.

The latest outcomes have a sobering effect

If you listen to the states

We may be looking at voter fatigue with the Modi model amid continued voter endorsement of Modi

on the Modi model, or the Modi magic, if you wish to call it so. This model hinged on certain specific elements: An exclusive focus on one person and on the leadership factor as the driver not only of campaigns but of governance; shift of popular attention to national or abstract all-India issues; a rhetoric of nationalism; resort to the combined polemic of anxiety and hope; complete rejection of the entire democratic past and superimposition of perception over performance — these are core factors of the Modi model.

The Haryana and Maharashtra assembly outcomes have shown that this model may be just about reaching its plateau. Of course, obituaries to the Modi model may yet be premature. Both verdicts draw attention to a possible voter fatigue with the model. But it is necessary to also note that the verdicts are quite indecisive. It would surely be said now that voters have expressed their dissatisfaction with two state governments, probably in proportion to their respective governance records. However, if victories were credited to the supreme leader over the past six years, in defeat also, the limits of the leadership factor need to be recognised. Voters have not only warned the BJP of its governance record in these states, they have equally warned the BJP of their exasperation with the Modi model.

At the same time, a careful reading of the electoral outcomes would caution us against exaggerating the strength of the anti-BJP sentiment. Besides the fact that the BJP has not quite been defeated in either of the two states, it remains a sobering reminder to opponents of the BJP that its core base is intact. In electoral democracy, losing power or losing seats does have significance. But a better reading of the electoral outcome requires that we take note of the overall social base of the parties. In Haryana, despite losing seats, the BJP has improved its vote share and in Maharashtra, despite contesting less number of seats, it has shed only a small share of its vote from 2014. The reason why these two outcomes are making headlines, apart from the fact that in these states the BJP would now be holding on to power only by a whisker, if at all, is that they have brought politics back into the realm of realistic contestations rather than exaggerated benefits to one party.

Both Haryana and Maharashtra were not traditional bastions of the BJP. It annexed these states during the first round of the Modi as-

sault. These latest results have probably reminded the BJP of that. Furthermore, the parliamentary elections of 2019 added to the vote inflation of the BJP beyond a realistic limit. That created a false sense of security and success within the BJP. These elections have taken it back to where it was in 2014. They have also ensured that the unrealistic ratio of conversion of votes into seats has now receded. This has suddenly opened up the political competition and allowed ordinary electoral dynamics both at the constituency level and at the level of vote-seat conversion more generally to steer a more competitive outcome.

It would be an overstatement if we read into the latest electoral outcome a rejection of the BJP or the Modi model. We would need much more evidence to claim that the Modi model is on the backfoot. First, its fate will depend on whether the BJP can actually acquire new territory — Delhi, Bihar, and later, West Bengal. Second, it can be safely said that the popularity of Modi and the acceptability of his government at the Centre, is probably adequately high even now. Three, the popular acceptance of its key initiatives, such as the move on Article 370, suggests that the purchase of a certain variant of nationalism and placing that idea of nation above democracy, continue to be attractive propositions.

This complication — the possible voter fatigue with the Modi model and, at the same time, a possible continuation of voter endorsement of Modi — allows multiple readings of the outcome. The BJP can and does still claim that the people are with it and at the same time the outcome allows the Opposition to say that people have refused to uphold the BJP governments wholeheartedly.

For the BJP, this round of assembly elections has brought a first signal that electoral victories can be crafted on surreal bases but long-term politics requires more than rhetoric. For non-BJP parties, the outcomes may seem to bring hope, but they should be understood as lessons: That governance matters, that people matter, that politics is about engaging with the people and that in the time of Modi, it requires more astute, out-of-the-box thinking if one does not want to stop at contingent and indecisive verdicts.

The writer taught political science at Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune, and is chief editor of 'Studies in Indian Politics'

AFGHAN REDUX

Pakistan now fears influx of Afghan refugees, as during the Soviet invasion



KHALED AHMED

IT IS ANOTHER cut-and-run moment for America in Afghanistan, this time after the longest war in its history. Will Donald Trump repeat in 2019 what Richard Nixon did to south Vietnam in 1973 — leaving when 1,50,000 men of the north Vietnamese army were in occupation of parts of south Vietnam, where people knew they would be massacred at the hands of the "conquerors"?

Trump will take no "refugees" as Nixon did who got over a million south Vietnamese to settle in the US. Who will get the consequent population spill from Afghanistan?

Of course, Pakistan. It doesn't even know precisely how many refugees it got over the past 18 years of the Afghan war. It usually says "three million after the Soviet invasion" but hasn't kept count of those who didn't live in the refugee camps and were "absorbed". The Afghan refugees subsequently saw Pakistan succumb to religious terror instead of fighting it. Defeating the Soviet Union meant defeating whatever progress Pakistan had made as a liberal democracy. Today, no one loves Pakistan in Afghanistan, Pakhtuns least of all.

The Soviets never got a chance to "reform" a state destroyed by religion, but the Americans have tried. According to a BBC survey, no girls attended Afghan schools in 2001 but a million boys did, and, by 2012 there were 7.8 million in schools out of which 2.9 million

were girls. The Ghani government in Kabul is "reformist" and wants to protect the change of the past 18 years; but it doesn't get along with Pakistan. It believes its ex-chief spy Amrullah Saleh telling the world that Pakistan actually directs the various Taliban warlords from their hideout in Quetta, and is embroiled in the violence the Taliban perpetrate on innocent Afghans.

Pakistan once thought it could have "strategic depth" in Afghanistan against India. Now, it is uncomfortable about India getting close to Iran and Kabul and building up the resistant-to-Taliban Tajik elements in northern Afghanistan. Pakistan fears not only more refugees coming down from Afghanistan but also fighters who will "reconvert" Pakistan to what it was when the Soviets were in Afghanistan. It is laying a fence along the Durand Line — which Afghanistan historically never accepted — to stop the invaders.

Islamic radicals aligned with al Qaeda want Pakistan to get al Qaeda agent Afiya Siddiqui back from an American prison or face attacks like the attack on Pakistan army's GHQ in 2009. The fence is thus being opposed and Pakistani troops laying it are killed daily by fire coming in from the Afghan side — all this while India kills Pakistani troops in cross-LOC fire on the eastern border.

Pakistan is vulnerable because some parts of its frontier with Afghanistan simply can't

be secured against infiltration. Its own tribal people, whom it allowed to get mauled by Pakistani Taliban cozy with the Pakistan-hosted Haqqani group, are angry and out of favour in Islamabad these days. Pakistan doesn't get along with Iran either because of Pakistan's Arab patrons. It will find Iran siding with India, which has also been the big helper of the Tajik community in the north, traditionally linked to Iran because of shared language.

An economically broken Pakistan is busy facing the challenge of a hostile but economically strong India on the eastern border. It keeps talking dangerously of a nuclear armageddon which will destroy both countries because it has not yet realised that it has to think laterally about dealing with Delhi. Nationalism bars it from coming to the help of Kashmiris through a "normalisation" of relations with India.

Unfortunately, "bilateral talks" under the Simla Agreement still mean talking about Kashmir, which in turn means endless deadlocks and more hostility. What is needed is normalisation under the auspices of the World Trade Organisation, which went in the right direction when Pervez Musharraf ruled in Pakistan and the BJP ruled in India, but then got stuck in Agra in 2001.

The writer is consulting editor, Newsweek Pakistan



OCTOBER 26, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

RAM REJECTS OFFER

JAGJIVAN RAM FIRMLY rejected suggestions that he should come out of the Janata Party and lead the Congress. Ram has in fact offered electoral understanding with the Congress party in case it breaks away from the alliance led by Charan Singh. Uncertainty about the Congress-Lok Dal alliance continued most of the day despite hectic political activity in which Devaraj Urs was the key figure. Urs was busy negotiating in Delhi with the rival contenders for power.

AMU BLAMED
TWO MEMBERS OF the Minorities

Commission have held the vice-chancellor, faculty members and students of the Aligarh Muslim University responsible for the violence in early May in which five persons were killed in the university precincts and 36 shops of a nearby market burnt down. In their joint report on the incidents, professor VV John and AJ Dastur have warned that the AMU is "becoming a purely regional and even parochial establishment and of youth developing frankly communal obsessions".

TN STRIKE OFF

THE TEN-DAY-OLD strike by a section of the policemen in Tamil Nadu was called off "un-

conditionally" tonight. Nainar Das, president of the Tamil Nadu Police Subordinates Association, who spearheaded the agitation demanding recognition of the association, made the announcement calling off the strike in a written statement to the superintendent of Vellore Jail, where he was lodged after being remanded to custody in Madras in the morning. Das has appealed to the striking policemen to immediately report for duty. He has also appealed to the government to release all arrested persons. "The work is over," a spokesman commented and hoped there would be some favourable impact.

15 THE IDEAS PAGE

Gandhi and the poetry of fearlessness

The new generation has to experiment with the Mahatma, and his art of resistance. It must evolve its own praxis of emancipation from the cycle of violence and counter-violence



AVIJIT PATHAK

TRUTH, JIDDU KRISHNAMURTI said at the finest moment of his self-realisation, is a pathless land. Yes, no dogma, no sect or no organisation can take us to the realm of truth because fixed ideologies often condition the mind, and limit our horizons. Hence, I have no hesitation in saying that I am not a Gandhian — the way I am neither a Marxist nor an Ambedkarite. Yet, as a wanderer, I keep the windows of my mind open, and converse with all these thinkers; and these days, I feel, my engagement with Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi has acquired a new meaning.

Well, I am deeply aware of the politico-intellectual tradition that evolves a sharp critique of Gandhi, particularly with reference to the caste question. I am aware of the Ambedkarite anguish, or even the feminist critique of Gandhi's engagement with body and sexuality. Yet, I see many other positive and life-affirming possibilities in Gandhi: The way I see Marx beyond merely the parameter of a spiritually impoverished and deterministic doctrine of historical materialism; or the way I see Ambedkar beyond harsh words against Gandhi, or his modernist constitutionalism, and find a new possibility in his deep engagement with the *Dhammapada*. The point I am trying to plead for is that no thinker, be it Gandhi or Ambedkar, and Marx or Phule, is infallible. Hence, I need not be an absolutist Gandhian to walk with the Mahatma.

Yes, I rediscover him as I begin to reflect on the fate of modernity. My "academic" self has already mastered the texts of Max Weber, Theodor Adorno and Zygmunt Bauman. The crisis of the Enlightenment, the violence implicit in the positivistic duality between science and ethics, the aggression of the instrumental/technocratic rationality, the seduction of consumerism and new forms of social control, and the eventual rise of a "risk society" — the experience of being "modern" is not merely about freedom and prosperity. It is also about pain and loss, disenchantment and meaninglessness. And it is at this juncture that I transcend my academic self, and begin to walk with Gandhi.

His remarkably "simple" and meaningful words as communicated through a conversation between the "Editor" and the "Reader" in the *Hind Swaraj* appeal to me, and touch my soul. I see this "satanic civilisation" characterised by "brute force" — a civilisation that tempts us to "indulge" with ever-expanding desire and greed, and continually disempowers us as we lose the spirit of "soul force", and become heavily dependent on the "outer" realm governed by the statist bureaucracy — its "courts, lawyers and parliament". No, for Gandhi, it was not swaraj or "self rule". Freedom would mean the activation of the "soul force" — the moral power of the "self", and the ability to restore moral communities with egalitarian/decentralised "oceanic circles". What further awakens me is that I see the possibility of redefining myself. I begin to believe that I am not a restless consumer, that I am not a slave of techno-spectacles; instead,

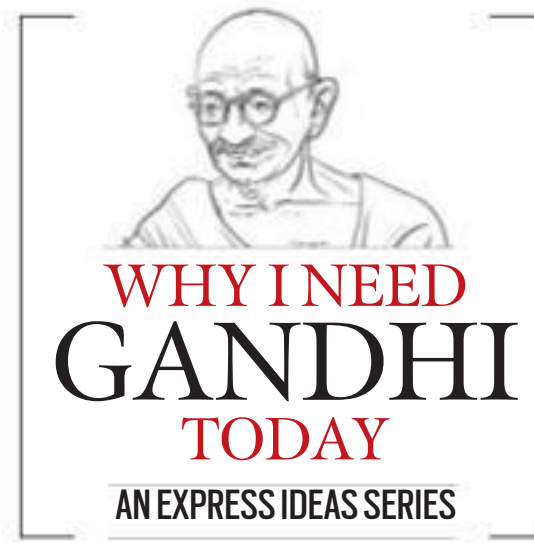


C R Sasikumar

I can become truly rich — ethically and spiritually — by reducing myself to "zero". Austerity, I realise, is not the romanticisation of poverty; it is a move towards non-possessiveness, the fundamental condition of being a socialist.

Yes, in this age of militancy and religious nationalism, Gandhi begins to surprise me. I ask myself: How was it possible for him to be religious, yet so elastic, dialogic, open and inclusive? Even though he chose the political domain as his field of *sadhana*, never did he allow religion to be reduced to an ideology of hatred and division — a manipulative strategy to generate herd instincts. Instead, his cross-religious dialogue, his nuanced engagement with the principle of *niskam karma* implicit in the *Bhagavad Gita*, and his ability to transform the *Sermon on the Mount* into a delicate prayer leading to satyagraha as an act of non-violent resistance against evil forces, religiosity as love, as a delicate exercise in the process of self-purification and as an inspiration for nurturing the dream of an egalitarian society distinguished Gandhi. Once again, he whispers into my ears: "Religion has to be saved from its self-proclaimed protectors — the bunch of zealots and hyper-masculine nationalists."

Is it ever possible to overcome the "structural violence" — the violence implicit in a



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bureaucratic/technocratic state, the violence in the possession of social/cultural/economic capital by the select elite, or the violence of asymmetrical globalisation? I have no easy answer to this question. Yet, one thing I know: No amount of counter-violence can help us in our pursuit of justice. Possibly, this is the reason why McDonaldisation and Talibanisation are the two sides of the same coin, and why suicide bombers would further intensify the militaristic gaze in the "disturbed" territories. Possibly, the new generation has to experiment with Gandhi, and the art of resistance he offered to evolve a praxis of emancipation from the vicious cycle of violence and counter-violence.

Well, at this juncture of history, when through the magic spell of some authoritarian personalities, we seem to have fallen in love with militarism, one-dimensional nationalism and culture of narcissism, the psychology of fear is all-pervading. I close my eyes, and begin to see Gandhi at Shantiniketan, and conversing with Tagore. And with a flash of truth, I begin to walk with Gandhi at Noakhali in 1946, and realise his fearlessness, and the meaning of Tagore's poem: *Where the mind is without fear, and the head is held high...*

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WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Global migration will not be controlled merely by raising the drawbridge at the white cliffs of Dover. This is an international problem. It requires international action." — THE GUARDIAN

A glimmer of an alternative

Modi is still popular, but political space has opened up for the Opposition



NEERJA CHOWDHURY

THE WORM IS turning, finally, though slowly. Economic hardship has almost trumped political hype. The Opposition has gained, but it also failed to knit the public angst into a coherent poll narrative and take full advantage of the situation. The October polls results, surely, have provided the decimated and demoralised Opposition an opening to regain its voice.

It would be inaccurate to conclude that the outcome in Maharashtra and Haryana point to a weakening of Narendra Modi. Modi continues to be a supremely popular leader. Yet, it does raise the question: Has Modi peaked?

It would also be wrong to read the results as a rejection of the abrogation of Article 370, an issue flogged by the BJP. A large mass of people continues to endorse the decision. Farmers' suicides and rural distress, which have influenced voter choice, were a reality even five months ago, when Modi won 303 Lok Sabha seats for the BJP.

But the worm began to turn essentially because of a combination of factors. Rozi roti issues have begun to take their toll on the ruling party more than they did five months ago. Economic hardships are increasing, with an increasing number of people being thrown out of jobs: The unemployment rate in Haryana has risen to an all time high of 28 per cent.

The law of diminishing returns seems to be setting in as the BJP resorts to the nationalistic rhetoric. But for the party's campaign pitch — "Is baar Pachatar Paar" in Haryana and "Upwards of 220" in Maharashtra — the poll outcome might not have been seen as a comedown for an incumbent government.

Equally important was the backlash from dominant communities in both states. The Jats in Haryana and the Marathas in Maharashtra have started to look away from the BJP. They had been chafing against their loss of power since 2014, since Manohar Lal Khattar, a Punjabi in a state ruled by Jats, was appointed the chief minister in 2014. Eleven of Maharashtra's 18 CMs have been from the Maratha community, which makes up 34 per cent of the population, and Devendra Fadnavis, a Brahmin (a community that constitutes a mere three per cent of the state's population), was called to head the government. Both belonged to "politically wrong" castes. Another term for Khattar would have meant the Jats (comprising 27 per cent of the state's population) would be out of power for the longest ever period since the formation of the state. The Marathas have been trying to reassert their identity and clout in politics by organising massive rallies for reservations in education and employment.

The third factor was that these communities rediscovered leaders who they felt

could take up cudgels on their behalf. There was suddenly Sharad Pawar taking on Narendra Modi and Amit Shah frontally, and B S Hooda giving voice to the anger of the Jats. These were leaders who their respective communities knew and identified with. Suddenly, they saw the glimmer of an alternative.

Fadnavis and Khattar had managed to quell many a Maratha and Jat protest. However, the communities had continued to nurse a sense of loss of power. They also felt they were being taken for granted. A Jat expressed this feeling to this writer while talking about the "arrogance" of the BJP's "Pachatar Paar" slogan, as if "nobody exists on the other side".

Pawar started the fight back after he was named by the Enforcement Directorate in the MSCB scam. When Pawar, 80 years old and a cancer survivor, helped on to the dais, started addressing six to seven meetings daily, he won the sympathy of many. The photo of him, drenched in rain, addressing a rally in Satara was a seminal moment. The candidate, Udayan Raje Bhosale, lost the election, despite being the descendent of Chhatrapati Shivaji. It was Pawar who connected emotionally with the Marathas.

Hooda, a former CM, had fought and lost the Sonapat seat in the May general election. A month before the assembly election he was made Congress Legislative Party chief and given charge of the campaign, but only after he hinted that he may launch his own regional outfit. Paradoxically, Hooda went up in public esteem for "cocking a snook" at the High Command. This is something Punjab CM Amarinder Singh had done to great effect before the Punjab elections, winning the respect of the Jat Sikhs, for being autonomous of the High Command. We can only speculate what the poll outcome might have been had these leaders got their act together in time and hit the road.

For the moment, a little space has opened up once again for the Opposition. The Congress has improved its performance without the Nehru-Gandhi family leading from the front or campaigning for the party, which may well lead to a further weakening of the family. Sonia Gandhi did not address a single rally due to ill health. Nor did Priyanka Vadra Gandhi. Rahul Gandhi stepped in for his mother and addressed just five meetings.

The message of the "Ma-haryana" elections for the Opposition is unambiguous. It may have to consider a model that is the antithesis of the BJP's "two leaders and a centralised command" structure. The Congress may have to rework its High Command-centric functioning and opt for a decentralised structure — for example, Sonia Gandhi helming the party while allowing state leaders the autonomy they wish.

The Opposition could also explore a federal front of regional and national parties, in which the Congress agrees to be one amongst equals. A newly-emergised Sharad Pawar, with his vast network of cross-party relationships, is well-placed today to facilitate it.

The writer is a senior journalist

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ELECTION LESSONS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'A crack, an opening' (IE, October 26). The BJP has emerged as the single largest party in the election to the Haryana and Maharashtra assembly but many of its ministers have lost. This shows that people are not happy with the party's governance. The Congress has improved its tally in Haryana but does not seem to be in a position to form a government. This shows that the Congress has not played the role of an effective opposition — a lot for both to reflect on.

Suchak D Patel, Ahmedabad

THIS REFERS TO the edit, 'A crack, an opening' (IE, October 25). Despite fighting the Maharashtra assembly election without an acknowledged state leadership and without much campaigning by the Gandhi the Congress marginally increased its tally in Maharashtra and doubled it in Haryana. There are still a sizable number of committed Congress voters. What the party should do is to discover capable state leaders and support them. These leaders should then strengthen party organisation at the district and lower levels. Second, the direct influence of dynastic leaders is declining as far as the impact on election outcomes is concerned. The Congress party high command should yield place to young elements with the veterans guiding them from time to time.

Y G Chouksey, Pune

PEACE MATTERS

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'JCO killed in Pak shelling in Nowshera' (IE,

LETTER OF THE WEEK

SANCTITY OF SPACES

THIS REFERS TO the article "Dont sing in Pilibhit" (IE, October 22). The society seems to have normalised bringing Hindu practices into what are supposed to be secular systems. Performing pujas for Hindu gods in government offices is a normal practice. We see photos of Hindu gods in government offices just like the ones of Gandhi and Ambedkar. I work in a government office in rural Karnataka. On Gandhi Jayanti this year, I was astonished to see puja being performed to a Gandhi photo. Kumkum, agarbattis and coconut were being used in much the same way as in a Hindu festival.

Rajiv M V, Chitradurga

October 23). The Indo-Pak border has seen a lot of action since last week. Every Diwali, the situation is same on the Indo-Pak border. The festive season turns into grief for several families of the armed forces due to failed diplomacy. The two governments should resolve the issue with bilateral talks. Former President A P J Abdul Kalam rightly said, "War is never a lasting solution for any problem."

Ishan Hastir, Chandigarh

A health warning

India's TB report must be seen in light of the country's slide in Hunger Index



SHAH ALAM KHAN

OVER THE LAST month or so, we saw some important documentation on India's public health. The Annual India Tuberculosis (TB) report was released by the government on September 26. India is now home to about a quarter of the total global TB patients. The current government is committed to ending TB in India by 2025.

On October 2, Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared that rural India was open defecation free (ODF). On October 16, the Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2019 was also released; it put India at 102 in a list of 117 countries. Unfortunately, India's ranking was below Nepal (73), Bangladesh (88) and Pakistan (94). Over the last century or so, it has been established beyond doubt that TB is more of a social disease owing its roots to poverty, malnutrition and poor sanitary conditions.

It is thus important to evaluate India's TB report in the context of these two developments — India's continuing downfall in the GHI and the declaration of our villages as ODF.

The TB report should reveal the progress on the government's action plan on combating TB. Any evaluation of the report will be a reality check of the government's re-

solve to end TB by 2025. As per the report, 21.5 lakh TB cases were reported in the country in 2018 — the highest number of TB cases registered in any country. The report says that with the introduction of Nikshay, the computer-based surveillance programme for TB patients, the reporting of TB cases has improved dramatically. The working of such a surveillance programme in an unequal country like India should, however, be taken with a pinch of salt. In a paper published in the *BMJ Open* in February, a qualitative analysis of the barriers to TB notification was evaluated. This study, conducted in a private tertiary hospital in South India, concluded that despite a national notification system — of Nikshay — other factors like patient confidentiality issues, poor knowledge of notification system, etc, prevented notification of TB patients in a hospital setting. These factors are social and without intervening at that level, it is hard to believe that the notification of TB cases can reach a significant number vis-à-vis ending TB by 2025.

The report also reveals that of the total notifications, 5.4 lakh cases were from the private sector, an increase of 40 per cent

from last year. The report appears to mention this fact with a degree of pride. A closer look, however, should make us sit up and take note. Over the last decade or so, there has been a near-complete takeover of India's health sector by the private players. Data shows that more than 80 per cent of health-care is now being delivered by private health enterprises — something is evidently not right with the public health system.

With a virtually unregulated private health system, an increase in notification of TB patients could be heartening for the government. But for the public health system, it is bad news.

The GHI report is another stark reminder of what else is wrong in claiming that TB can be ended by 2025. A hungry India cannot be free of TB. Dietary deprivation is a direct indicator of inequality. Unequal societies cannot be made free of disease and infirmity. In an important study on nutrition and TB published this month in the *BMC Pulmonary Medicine* journal from Ethiopia, the researchers clearly show that the proportion of malnutrition in TB patients was nearly 60 per cent. The authors conclude that even a very distal reason for malnutrition in the

community became a proximal cause for TB.

Finally, we are told that rural India is now ODF. The truth of this statement awaits documented validation through well-planned studies. However, TB and sanitation have a direct causal relationship. The Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme run by the National Centre for Disease Control maintains a web portal that details the outbreak of epidemics. Since 2009, all outbreak are reported on a weekly basis.

We evaluated the validity of the claims of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (SAB) through the data on this website. It was seen that there was no statistically significant reduction in the occurrence of vector-borne epidemics in the country, two years after the launch of SAB.

An end to TB is not possible till we end malnutrition, poverty and poor sanitation. We need a paradigm shift in the response to TB. This should include a more sensitive approach on gender and towards the underprivileged.

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