



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Over to the states

With the economic centre of gravity shifting to states, India's growth hinges on cooperative federalism



DUVVURI SUBBARAO

BRICS MATTERS

India's persistence with it speaks about Delhi's strategy to hedge against the great global uncertainties of the moment

THE ONLY THING remarkable about this year's summit of the BRICS forum in Brasilia is that it took place at all. During his campaign for the presidency in 2018, Jair Bolsonaro made no secret of his distrust of China and the strategic enthusiasm for President Donald Trump. If his recent predecessors promoted the BRICS as part of their left-wing agenda for Brazil, conservative Bolsonaro seemed ready to dissociate Brazil from that tradition. That he has chosen, instead, to stay with the BRICS, underlines the power of inertia in the conduct of foreign policy. Each member of the very diverse and geographically dispersed group finds some value — even if it is merely diplomatic — in staying with the BRICS. But the internal contradictions among the five member states — Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa — are real and not easily overcome. None of them are sharper than the contradictions between India and China.

It was Russia that helped develop the forum and sustain it. The Russian objective was to mount international opposition to the United States in the unipolar moment that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. As China rose in the 21st century and found new tensions rocking its ties with the US, Beijing found much in common with Russia in limiting US dominance of the world. Beyond geopolitics, Beijing also found the BRICS a useful forum to promote a global economic agenda that is in sync with its emergence as the world's biggest exporter and the second largest economy all set to replace the US as number one. For both Russia and China, having three large developing nations — India, Brazil and South Africa — as partners in their enterprise makes eminent political sense.

But India's gains from the BRICS are not obvious. Nor is it evident if India's interests are in alignment with the declared policies of the BRICS. Consider, for example, the thundering BRICS declaration on defending multilateralism. Many of India's problems in the multilateral domain are rooted in Beijing's opposition — it stalled efforts to join the UNSC as a permanent member and the Nuclear Suppliers Group. On trade, while it is easy to demonise President Trump's protectionist policies, Delhi's biggest trade deficit is with China. India has cited China's economic threat for not joining the Asian trading bloc — RCEP. On countering terrorism, which is a major foreign policy priority for India, China views the problem through Pakistani eyes. Delhi is also acutely conscious of two other factors. One is the eagerness of Beijing and Moscow to do bilateral deals with Washington. It is also aware of the profound imbalance of power within the BRICS. For, the Chinese economy is twice as large as the other four put together. India's persistence with the BRICS says less about its ideological convictions. It is more about Delhi's strategy to hedge against the many great global uncertainties of the moment.

STEPS TO REVIVAL

Mess in banking and telecom sectors needs to be addressed urgently to pierce economic gloom

LAST WEEKEND, THE Supreme Court approved the resolution plan of ArcelorMittal to pay Rs 42,000 crore to local financial creditors and take over Essar Steel after setting aside a ruling of the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal, marking a closure to an important case under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code. That's a big positive as the Court has made it clear that the decision of the Committee of Creditors or lenders will be final and binding, which should help faster resolution of more such cases. It will also mean the entry of the world's largest steelmaker into one of the biggest markets having agreed to infuse Rs 8,000 crore into the bankrupt company which it is acquiring. But the bigger challenge lies ahead. It concerns one of the most competitive sectors in India — telecom — with a Supreme Court ruling on dues in adjusted gross revenue hitting two major players, Vodafone Idea and Bharti Airtel, leading to the foreign telecom company reporting the highest ever quarterly loss by an Indian corporate of Rs 50,921 crore a week ago, and Bharti Rs 23,045 crore.

The problem is not restricted to just the telecom sector. The latest development is bound to trigger fresh concerns for Indian banks, which had an exposure of Rs 1.15 lakh crore to the telecom sector at the end of September this year. These lenders will be further weighed down because of extra provisions and the need for capital if the issue is not swiftly sorted out by the government. Vodafone, which had indicated its inability to invest more, is no ordinary firm. It is one of India's largest FDI investors and a global telecom player. It has taken a lot of effort, including by the NDA government, to undo the damage caused by the decision of the UPA government to tax the company retrospectively over seven years ago.

What is worrying is the reluctance or failure of the government and policymakers to recognise the inter-connection — the knock-on impact of such decisions on other sectors such as banking. In such a scenario, a good decision, like the reduction of corporate tax, which makes India one of the most competitive tax regimes, will be neutralised at a time when the country is hoping to attract global supply chains shifting from China. The mood among investors is more sombre, compared to the start of this fiscal, especially with indications that growth could well be sub 5 per cent and with little clarity on a global economic recovery next year too. Retaining the trust of investors — be it local wealth creators or foreign entities — is an ongoing process, which is why the government should move quickly on the strategic sell-off of BPL and Air India, address sectoral issues and further strengthen India's dominant state-owned banks to revive lending.

IN THE WORLD Bank's Ease of Doing Business index released last month, India ranked 63, an impressive jump from its lowly rank of 142 when the Narendra Modi government first came into office in 2014. Yet, there is anecdotal evidence of investors being frustrated by venality, indifference and corruption at the operating level.

Now consider this: When the government amended the terms of reference of the 15th Finance Commission a few months ago asking that allocations for defence and internal security be carved out upfront, before determining the pool of resources to be shared with the states, the latter balked at the high-handedness of the Centre.

Also consider this: Early in his tenure, Modi attempted to reform the land acquisition law by tweaking the balance in favour of investors, but quickly buckled down as many states took umbrage. This, even though land is on the concurrent list in the Constitution, and a central law would have prevailed notwithstanding states' opposition.

The three snippets above, seemingly disparate, tell an important story — that of the growing importance of states in India's economic management.

It wasn't always like this. In the early years of our republic, the Centre dominated across all domains — political, economic and administrative — and states, even those led by leaders with political heft, acquiesced to this unequal arrangement. The reaction to central dominance came in the early 1980s when strong regional leaders started agitating against "the hegemony of the Centre". Several of them, for instance N T Rama Rao, built their political careers on an "anti-Centre" platform.

As a consequence, the Centre yielded to the states, but largely in the political space. Much of the economic policy control stayed with the Centre which decided not just public investment but even private investment through its industrial and import licensing policies, leaving the states on the margins of

economic management.

That arrangement started to change with the onset of reforms from 1991. Three trends, in particular, have shifted the economic centre of gravity from the Centre to the states

The first is the change in the content of the reform agenda. The Centre could push through the reforms of the 1990s without even informing, much less consulting, the states because they all pertained to subjects such as industrial licencing, import permits, exchange rate and the financial sector, which were entirely within its domain. In contrast, the second-generation reforms on the agenda now shift the emphasis, to use economic jargon, from product to factor markets like land, labour and taxation, which need, not just acquiescence, but often the consent of states.

Nothing illustrates the increased clout of the states in driving reforms more than the GST negotiations. There was a clash of interests not just between the Centre and states but also between producer and consumer states, large and small states and coastal and inland states. The grand bargain that culminated in the GST, admittedly imperfect, involved all parties making compromises. But the deal could not be clinched until the Centre guaranteed to fill the revenue gap, if any, of states according to an agreed formula.

The second factor driving the economic centre of gravity towards states is the changing dynamics of our fiscal federalism. Ballpark estimates suggest that the Centre collects about 60 per cent of the combined revenue (Centre and states), but gets to spend only about 40 per cent of the combined expenditure. This asymmetry is mirrored on the states' side. Together, they collect 40 per cent of the combined revenue, but spend as much as 60 per cent of the combined expenditure.

More important than the aggregates is the greater autonomy that states now enjoy in determining their expenditure. Gone is the Planning Commission. The states now not only get a larger quantum of central transfers

but also get to decide on how to spend that larger quantum.

And how states manage their public finances matters much more than before. The RBI in its latest annual report on state finances, raised several red flags — states' increasing weakness in raising revenue, their unsustainable debt burden and their tendency to retrench capital expenditures in order to accommodate fiscal shocks such as farm loan waivers, power sector loans under UDAY and a host of income transfer schemes.

As the RBI pointed out, the quality of expenditure at the state level has a multiplier effect on overall development outcomes. Conversely, fiscal irresponsibility will take a heavy toll on our growth and welfare prospects. The market will penalise mismanagement of public finances; it does not much care who is responsible, the Centre or the states, for an unsustainable debt burden or for even the colour of the fiscal deficit.

That segues into the third major trend behind the states' growing importance in economic federalism — their critical role in creating a conducive investment climate in the country. Much of the responsibility for improving the ease of doing business rests not with Delhi but with the states. This highlights the need for coordinated action.

India's prospects, including our aspiration for a \$5 trillion economy, depend on the Centre and the states working together. No one would know this better than Modi who combines over two decades of experience as chief minister and prime minister. Arguably, he has another unique advantage in that more than two-thirds of the states are currently governed by the BJP.

If ever there was an opportune moment for a big push on cooperative federalism, it is now.

The writer is former governor of the Reserve Bank of India, and is currently visiting fellow at the University of Pennsylvania

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IN GOOD FAITH

RAJESH KOCHHAR

SCHOLARSHIP HAS NO RELIGION

Protests in BHU against hiring of a Muslim Sanskrit professor speak of dismal times

IT IS A measure of the hatefulness and narrow-mindedness that has come to permeate the national atmosphere that the appointment of a young Muslim Sanskrit scholar, Firoz Khan, as an assistant professor in the literature department of the Sanskrit Vidyadharma Vijnan at Banaras Hindu University has brought forth protests from his to-be colleagues as well as the department's PhD students, demanding a cancellation of the appointment. The vice-chancellor has clarified that the appointment was made by a duly-appointed selection committee in accordance with applicable rules and regulations.

Rajasthan-born Khan has been educated at the Jaipur campus of the Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, which is a deemed university under the Ministry of Human Resource Development. After completing his studies, Feroze served here as guest faculty for three years. This year, he has been awarded the Sanskrit Yuva Pratibha Samman by Rajasthan government.

The protesters know that the selection committee could not possibly have said that even though Khan was the best candidate for the position, he should not be offered the job due to communal considerations. If the selected candidate was, say, European, nobody would probably have raised any objection.

Admittedly, in an earlier era, access to Sanskrit was severely restricted. Sacred texts were the preserve of select Brahmin groups, while classical Sanskrit could be taught to upper-caste Hindus. That is how Raja Bhoja and Raja Bharthari emerged as Sanskrit scholars

in their own right. It was, however, forbidden to teach Shudras Sanskrit. The Skanda Purana explicitly states that any Brahmin who teaches Sanskrit to a Shudra would lose his caste.

British and European interest in ancient India punctured Brahmin orthodoxy. Brahminical learning became an internationally-marketable commodity. For considerations of money, employment and patronage, Brahmins sold their old manuscripts to Europeans, went to their residence to teach them Sanskrit, admitted them into their homes, discussed sacred texts with them, and collaborated with them to prepare bilingual dictionaries. The very definition of *mlechchha* was modified to accommodate Europeans. The *mlechchha* was now not a despised foreigner as before but one who could not pronounce Sanskrit words correctly.

Brahmins appreciated Europeans' respect for their learning and Hindu society in turn considered European scholarship to be authoritative. When a dispute arose between the Sanskrit professors at Oxford and Cambridge on the correct pronunciation of a particular Vedic *raha*, two experts from Benares Sanskrit College were sent to Calcutta to record their recitation, which was forwarded to England.

Once Brahmins agreed to admit *mlechchhas* into the Sanskrit fold, they could not have kept the Shudras out. Raja Radhakanta Deb emerged as the most celebrated Sanskrit scholar in 19th century Bengal. In the pre-Plassey days, Brahmins would not even have accepted drinking water from his ancestors.

The British opened three Sanskrit Colleges: Benares (1791), Poona (1821), and Calcutta (1824). In 1832, a brilliant former student of Sanskrit College Calcutta was appointed a pro-

cessor. His selection was opposed by the Brahmin professors and students on the ground that he was a Shudrayaji Brahmin (one who administered rituals to lower castes). The colonial administrator who oversaw the college imperiously told the objectors that they could leave if they so wished. Of course, nobody did. To begin with, the Sanskrit Colleges were exclusively meant for Brahmins, but as the British became entrenched they cautiously opened up these institutions.

Even in the Mughal era, Brahmins had compromised on their exclusivity. Taking note of Prince Dara Shikoh's exalted position and love of learning, the learned pandits of Benares instructed him in Sanskrit and sat with him to translate the 52 Upanishads.

If Brahmins could teach Sanskrit to a Muslim, why can't a Muslim teach Sanskrit to Brahmin and other students now? Although Khan is legally safe, questions remain. A quick glance at the list of teaching staff of the Sanskrit literature department shows that most, if not all, members have Brahmin surnames. Will the newcomer find the workplace congenial and conducive to professional advancement? Or, will the atmosphere be made so hostile for him that he is forced to resign?

Classical and sacred Sanskrit texts are a part of world heritage. We take great pride when Europeans take an interest in them. There is a glorious tradition of Muslim musicians' respect for and contributions to Hindu temple traditions. Such respect and contribution should be welcomed and encouraged in scholarly studies as well.

Kochhar is author of The Vedic People: Their History and Geography

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FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



NOVEMBER 18, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

US HOSTAGES FREED AYATOLLAH RUHOLLAH KHOMEINI ordered the release of all women and black hostages at the US embassy in Tehran if they are proved innocent of spying, and said he was acting out of Islamic mercy, Tehran Radio reportedly said. Khomeini's statement said the remaining "professional spies" will be held until the Shah and "all that he has plundered" are returned to Iran. The broadcast said the captors would comply with Khomeini's order to free six or seven American women and several black marines from among the estimated 62 Americans and eight non-Americans held in the embassy since November 4.

CFD MINISTERS RESIGN EIGHT CFD MINISTERS resigned from the Banarasi Das ministry, creating a post-dated political crisis in the state which would make the survival of the Lok Dal government in Uttar Pradesh difficult. One CFD minister of state, Govind Singh Mehra, however, did not resign. According to Chief Minister Banarasi Das, he would forward the resignations of all the eight cabinet ministers to the governor for acceptance.

AMU'S STATUS CHARAN SINGH'S CARETAKER government has dropped its plans to come out with an ordinance to declare Aligarh Muslim

University a minority institution: This decision has already been discussed at various levels in the government, and has been taken mainly because of fears that President N Sanjeeva Reddy, might not agree to sign it. Instead of issuing the ordinance, Singh is now thinking of making a promise in the election manifesto that if his party comes to power it will make a law granting AMU minority character. Even on this issue, there appears to have developed a difference between the two partners of the ruling alliance — Lok Dal and Congress. Lok Dal wants to amend the AMU 1920 Act, while the Congress fears that in this form it would be struck down by the Supreme Court.

THE IDEAS PAGE

A jan aandolan for nutrition

Poshan Abhiyaan promises to revive traditional food systems across the country while addressing malnutrition



SMRITI Z IRANI

THE PAST CENTURY has seen impressive growth in agricultural productivity in India and across the world, fuelled by systemic and scientific improvements in farming practices — the Green Revolution, and globalisation and industrialisation of the food sector.

Malnutrition among children, in particular, has long-lasting and critical effects on our nation's progress and future. For example, in the 1990s, it was found that 46 per cent of the children in India were stunted due to malnutrition and today, they form the country's workforce, designing and directing the nation's economy and health.

The awareness of the extent of malnutrition despite agricultural growth has led to a need to converge agriculture and nutrition. While the two areas share a common foundation, "food", which reinforces the intimate relationship between them, there has in reality been a significant disconnect in recent times, due to the demands on quantity rather than quality, driven by exponential population growth and needs.

Missions to tackle nutrition from farm to table involve multiple stakeholders, with the government at one end and individuals who can influence consumption patterns at the other end of the agri-nutrition chain.

Building on existing strengths and capitalising on unexplored possibilities, the Government of India has embarked on an unprecedented initiative, the POSHAN Abhiyaan (the Prime Minister's Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nutrition) since 2018 to tackle malnutrition, through a multi-sectoral results-based framework.

The novelty of the Poshan Abhiyaan is twofold — at the agricultural level, it aims to amalgamate knowledge of regional food systems and at the consumer level, to foster social and behavioural changes among individuals, especially parents. The mission also seeks to improve linkages between communities and health systems, thus paving the way for a mass movement to promote a transformative change, referred to as the jan aandolan.

However, food and crop diversity need to be linked with agro-ecological patterns like soil, groundwater, etc. We need to know what was traditionally grown across the country, what were the nutrition and micro-nutrient content, how can we move away from monocropping and increase crop diversity to increase diet diversity.

Without understanding social, behavioural and cultural practices, we cannot promote healthy dietary practices and reinforce healthy dietary behaviours both at individual and community levels keeping in mind wide regional variations.



C R Sasikumar

As part of the Poshan Abhiyaan, the WCD, in partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is developing India's first Poshan Atlas, to create a repository of diverse crops across 127 agro-climatic zones of the country that would be accessible to policy-makers, administrators, experts and communities to help meet nutritional outcomes.

Named Bharatiya Poshan Krishi Kosh, the initiative is particularly relevant in this age of globalisation because the advent of modern food systems has resulted in a loss of knowledge on and consumption of traditional and local nutrient-rich foods in favour of less nutritious industrialised and processed food products.

The information gained through the Atlas will be disseminated at the district level for implementation through cooperative tasks among all the stakeholders — farmers, food supply intermediaries and consumers. The Poshan Culture Atlas will create a repository of traditional foods/crops and cultural practices associated with them, such as seasonal folk songs, theatre and art forms. These tools will be employed to disseminate food and nutrition-related information among the people, thus forging closer ties between the agricultural and nutrition sectors.

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VIEW FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD



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

SRI LANKA POLLS

ON SUNDAY AFTERNOON, Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated Sri Lanka's president-elect Gotabaya Rajapakse on his victory. Rajapakse, brother of former president Mahinda, is known for his hardline outlook during the civil war in the country.

The Sri Lankan Press, of course, has been following the election closely, and almost exclusively. And, as is the case in India, it is likely that the drama and euphoria of the change of guard in Colombo will be the subject of editorials and opinion articles for some time to come.

On November 15, however, as the campaign was winding down, the press in Sri Lanka was critical of the principal political players. In its editorial, The Island remarked on the tall promises that political parties make while campaigning: "Perhaps, the only thing the presidential candidates did not promise us, during the last few weeks, was rice from the moon or handen haal. They pledged to give us virtually everything else free of charge so much so that one may have wondered whether they had found Aladdin's magic lamp. Fulfilling all these promises is a task that only Sakka or the King of Gods may be equal to, given the huge amount of funds

and the superhuman effort it requires."

But the one thing political parties did not pay attention to was the question of intimidation, and the fairness of the election process. "During the last several decades, there have been many instances of goons chasing voters away, storming polling booths and stuffing ballot boxes, under successive governments. The situation seems to have improved somewhat, but precautions have to be taken," the editorial remarks.

The editorial in The Daily Mirror on the same day addresses a different issue — the presidency of Maithripala Sirisena.

The newspaper calls Sirisena a lucky man, since "there was no talk of a Maithripala Sirisena presidency even a few days before presidential aspirations were announced in late 2014. He did not express such intention and no one considered him to be a possible contender. And yet he became the president."

The thrust of the assessment of Sirisena, who has not contested for a second term, as president is this: He was, at times, a convenient scapegoat for the UNP leaders (earlier opposed to his party, the SLFP, but part of the erstwhile ruling coalition) who had never fully forgone their loyalty to Mahinda Rajapakse. For his part, the compulsions of keeping a coalition together meant the pres-

ident had to swallow his pride.

MYANMAR IN FOCUS

The November 17 editorial in The Daily Star is on a familiar subject — Myanmar and the international community's reaction on the Rohingya issue. However, unlike its usual lament that not enough is being done to hold the country's government to account for the genocide of the Rohingya, the newspaper expresses hope.

Four recent developments, it says, may indicate that officials responsible for atrocities in Rakhine State may be punished: "First, The Gambia filed a case with the UN's International Court of Justice (ICJ) accusing Myanmar of committing genocide against the Rohingya. Two days later, several rights bodies filed a lawsuit with an Argentine court against Myanmar State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and several other top officials. On Thursday, the International Criminal Court (ICC) at The Hague approved a full investigation into Myanmar's crimes. The same day, in New York, a resolution was adopted at the third committee of the 74th UN General Assembly, which is expected to exert significant pressure on the Security Council to take action."

According to the editorial, the ideal situation would be if international pressure also creates a situation conducive to the repatriation of Rohingya refugees back to Myanmar.

100 DAYS

On November 14, Dawn had an editorial marking 100 days of the clampdown on communications and the arrest of political figures in Kashmir. Much of the editorial is either rhetorical or attempts to pull on heartstrings by talking of the suffering of the Kashmiri people.

The editorial asserts that Pakistan "will continue to support" Kashmiris in their struggle, while pointing out the ill-effects of media censorship and prolonged detention without trial.

The editorial does make a point that merits consideration in terms of how state might may not be effective while dealing with a political issue: "India can continue its brutal approach in the region for another 100 days but the result is unlikely to be different, as Kashmiris will not start treating their oppressors as their benefactors. Instead of this failed approach, India must immediately lift the siege of Kashmir and listen to what its people have to say."

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Washington indulges in the mobs' vandalism to destroy Hong Kong and views efforts by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government as suppression on democracy and freedom. How ruthless and hypocritical it is." — GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA

A Lincoln moment

What PM Modi has in common with the former US President



RAM MADHAV

ABRAHAM LINCOLN PUT an end to slavery in the American South through the historic Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. He had always believed that slavery was against the basic tenets of the American Constitution. His resolve to end it was fortified by an open letter published by eminent thinker Alexis de Tocqueville in 1856 in the pro-abolition paper Liberty Bell. "I am pained by the fact that the freest people in the world maintain slavery", Tocqueville had written.

It was not an easy journey for Lincoln. He was severely criticised not only by the pro-slavery leaders of the South, but also by a number of others including prominent liberals in the US and Britain. Even the Papal establishment was against his decision. Civil war had erupted, forcing Lincoln to resort to strong measures like the declaration of emergency, deployment of army and the censorship of media. Liberals had a good opportunity to accuse him of degenerating American democracy into a military despotism. He was called an aspiring tyrant, a hypocrite who used slavery as an excuse to exert the North's authority over the South. Lincoln was also accused of provoking civil war, violating civil liberties and even destroying the Republic.

Laboulaye, who was credited with the conception of the famous Statue of Liberty, was one scholar who had analysed Lincoln's actions very well. Historian Helena Rosenblatt, in The Lost History of Liberalism, writes about Laboulaye's analysis of Lincoln: "Lincoln's use of emergency authority, he [Laboulaye] concluded, was the very model of crisis government. Lincoln had responded to the emergency without undermining the Constitution or the rule of law. He had suspended habeas corpus, but only to save the Constitution. Most importantly, Lincoln had engaged in moral uplift. In all these ways, then, Lincoln was a great leader of liberal democracy. In making such a man president, the United States had vindicated not only the Constitution, but liberty, democracy, and humanity itself."

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's actions in Kashmir will be seen in similar light in the future. In ending a constitutional provision that was coming in the way of civil rights, political rights and dignified living of the ordinary people of Kashmir — and one that was promoting terrorism and secessionism — Modi, like Lincoln, had to demonstrate some toughness.

The slave system was being exploited by the aristocrats of the South. They used everything, including the Jesuit religion, to whip up sentiments of the commoners against the more modernised and liberal North, and waged a civil war. Article 370

was benefitting a few hundred political, aristocratic families in Kashmir. They were using the ordinary Kashmiris as cannon fodder to uphold their family feudalism.

The liberal attacks on Modi for his Kashmir decision are particularly ferocious. Liberals, whose great-grandfathers had attacked Lincoln as a despot, paint a dark picture of Kashmir today. While the Papal establishment had joined hands with the liberals in Lincoln's times, it is the Islamists who are the partners with the frustrated liberals now. The European liberals had stood by Lincoln on the principle of liberal equality then. Today, when a number of MEPs, after visiting the Valley, have reiterated the same principle in extending their support to the Modi government's action, Indian liberals fulminate and brand them as right-wingers.

Unlike in Lincoln's America, no civil war has erupted after Modi's decision. Three months down the line, the Valley has been absolutely peaceful. There are no restrictions on people's movements. One encounters traffic jams on a daily basis in Srinagar and other cities. Business and educational establishments have reopened. Offices are running normally. The newly born Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir is reinventing itself as a full and integral part of India.

"Human rights" is a bogey that the liberals flaunt easily. Placing a couple of hundred politicians under preventive detention on a temporary basis can't be called human rights violation. Hundreds of other political activists are free and engaged in political and electoral activity in the state. The Block Development Council elections, held after the historic decision, saw the participation of 98 per cent of the electorate. Those under detention, too, would be able to resume political activity at an early opportunity.

Raising the bogey of internet disconnection as another human rights violation is superfluous. An increasing number of people are getting their broadband connections restored. Internet cafes have been reopened. The state administration has promised that full internet services will be restored based on the security assessment. But, the internet cannot be categorised as a fundamental right. It is a civic right no doubt, the denial of which for the larger social good will always be in the domain of the state. Vint Cerf, often called the "father of internet", also categorically rejects the rights argument. "Technology is an enabler of rights, not a right itself", he had written in 2012. Kashmir had witnessed internet blackouts many times in the past. While the whole country got the internet in the 1990s, Kashmir got it after a decade or so after that.

Like Lincoln, Modi too needed an iron-will. Lincoln had to be ruthless with racial fascism in his time. For Modi, it was, to quote Bashir Assad in his book K File, masla-e-Kashmir is no longer political; it is about Nizam-e-Mustafa; it is a pan-Islamic movement now. Lincoln didn't have any choice. Neither did Modi.

The writer is national general secretary, BJP, and director, India Foundation

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

INFLATION MATTERS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'RBI's choice' (IE, November 15). The reason for the spike in inflation needs to be examined carefully. It could be due to the much awaited rise in aggregate demand in the economy as a result of successive interest rate cuts by the Monetary Policy Committee. Hence, tweaks to the monetary policy by RBI will not suffice. Alternatively, it may well be an outcome of supply side disruption due to the decline in investments and production. In this case, the government, not the RBI, needs to act through appropriate fiscal policies. SB Bhalerao, Mumbai

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.

RESPECT HISTORY

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'A verdict, a test' (IE, November 15). Why must we view the Babri structure as a symbol of "invasion by an intruder"? Why cannot we, as citizens of a modern democracy, view it as a historical event in an ancient country, and accept the historical significance of the structure. The article suggests a grotesque othering of Muslims. There are several narratives of the Indian nation, and they often intersect with one another. It is wrong, both morally and politically, to assert one's political beliefs by attempting to erase the events of history. Shuchi Shah, Ahmedabad

cause the policymakers have displayed both a lack of vision and self belief. To claim its rightful place on the international high table, the country has a lot of catching up to do. Vijai Pant Hempur

WITHOUT A VISION

THIS REFERS TO the news, 'Real obstacle to India's rise not barriers of World Bank dogmas of Delhi: Jaishankar' (IE, November 15). The Minister for External Affairs's observations are correct. India has not been able to seize the crucial moments in history be-

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Who's afraid of RCEP?' (IE, November 14). India's recent decision to opt out of the RCEP has been criticised by a large section of economists, many of whom has said that the country has missed a great opportunity. We, however, need to understand the current state of our economy and the trajectory of our development path. The country's GDP growth rate has fallen, many sectors are facing an economic crunch and the rupee has fallen against the US dollar. The decision to not join the RCEP was, therefore, backed by the desire to protect the economy from further shocks. Gracy Singh, Delhi