



I SWEAR BY MY RELIGION. BUT IT IS MY PERSONAL AFFAIR. THE STATE HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH IT.
— MAHATMA GANDHI

The Indian EXPRESS

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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

The politics of numbers

Government data always come with limitations.
Now, they have a political dimension



P C MOHANAN

CONGRESS & SAINIKS

By propping up Sena, Congress plays fast and loose with the mandate — and its projection of itself as secular and inclusive

AS THE CONGRESS moves towards sealing an alliance with the Shiv Sena, talks to it about a possible power-sharing arrangement in Maharashtra, along with Sharad Pawar's NCP, it is a significant moment in its career which sends out consequential signals. Regardless of its own several compromises with the principle and practice of secularism, notwithstanding its many flirtations even with the Sena in different forms and levels in the past, an alliance with the Sena to rule Maharashtra now would be the Congress's first major coalition with an openly saffron force. And the Sena is not just another party. Down the years, its politics has constructed the "Other" in belligerent ways, always picking on the vulnerable, the migrant now and then the minority. It has stood for a brand of politics that combines chauvinism, bigotry and intolerance with vigilantism and violence. By thinking of allying with the Sena, the Congress signals a willingness to be counted in the same frame with a political force it has, as a self-professedly inclusive party, defined itself in opposition to — after an electoral verdict, moreover, which relegated it to fourth place, and one, therefore, that scarcely gives it a mandate to rule.

Of course, the Congress might rationalise this moment by pointing to those same depleting numbers, and the realpolitik compulsion to keep the BJP out of power in a state that is home to the financial capital of the country. A government in Maharashtra in which the Congress participates with the Sena would not only twist the knife deeper between the Sena and BJP, but arguably also make an important dent in the BJP's winning streak. At the same time, it would hold out the promise of spoils of power for its own demoralised workers. Yet, the Congress needs to weigh the costs of cosyng with an outfit that has treaded a thin, grey edge in a polity governed by an inclusive constitution and the rule of law ever since it made attacks on South Indians and Communist cadres its calling card in the 1960s and '70s. Since then, it has been cited and indicted for its instigation of, and involvement in, communal violence by impartial probes, most notably in the conflagration that consumed hundreds of lives in December 1992-January 1993, its role in which was recorded by the Srikrishna Commission report. The Shiv Sena owned up to its role in the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992. It has been known to dig up the cricket pitch to prevent the Pakistani team from playing in Mumbai. It has aggressively and brutishly targeted the media when it has been criticised, and shown no compunction in violently turning on its own, in case of disagreement or dissent.

It is no secret that the Congress is beset with a grave crisis in a BJP-dominated polity, in which it is called upon to redefine what it stands for. At a time like this, an alliance with the Shiv Sena, no matter what the common minimum programme may be, raises serious questions for political stability and governance in Maharashtra. It will also resonate beyond in other states where elections are due.

OLD IN THE NEW

The Rajapaksas return to power in Colombo in a polarised election. A stable and united Sri Lanka is in India's interest

GOTABAYA RAJAPAKSA'S ELECTION as President of Sri Lanka was foretold on Easter Sunday this year, when suicide bombers professing loyalty to the Islamic State blew themselves at churches and hotels killing hundreds of people. That horrific day rekindled Sri Lanka's collective memory of the years of terrorist violence by the LTTE, and the long military failure to defeat the Tamil insurgency — until in 2007, when then president, Mahinda Rajapaksa, gave his brother Gotabaya carte blanche against the Tigers. In two years, a freshly armed, retrained, and self-believing Sri Lankan Army, had crushed the LTTE. "Gota" was seen as the architect of that victory. Ten years later, when Sri Lanka faced another national security crisis, nostalgia for the Rajapaksas touched a new high, especially after it became clear that the "national unity government" that replaced the Rajapaksa regime in 2015 had failed to prevent the bombings.

Even before this, as the president and prime minister fought each other for supremacy, almost from the get-go and the work of governance ground to a halt, Rajapaksa's authoritarian ways began to be compared favourably. This was evident from his sweep of the local bodies elections in 2018. To be sure, there was no pan-country longing for the Rajapaksas. It was a majoritarian Sinhala-Buddhist sentiment, and this is clear from the election results too. Indeed, this is possibly the most ethnically polarised result in Sri Lanka over the last three decades, other than the Tamil boycott of the 2005 presidential contest enforced by the LTTE. Post-war Sri Lanka's failure to address allegations of war crimes against Tamils, blame for which was laid at Gotabaya's door, as well as the paralysis on constitutional reform, meant the Tamil community preferred to vote for the rival candidate, Sajith Premadasa of the United National Party. The new president's well-known and documented association with a Buddhist extremist organisation, which has been held responsible for fomenting violence against Muslims, meant that Muslims too did not vote for him.

There is little doubt that Gotabaya is the only new face for Rajapaksa family rule. India, whose relations with Sri Lanka went through a troubled patch during the Mahinda Rajapaksa presidency due to his proximity with China, now faces the challenge of rebuilding ties with the brothers. While doing so, Delhi should not lose sight of the reality that an ethnically divided and unstable Sri Lanka is not in India's interest.

MAKING THE BALL TALK

Mohammad Shami is that rare fast bowler who can surprise batsmen with speed, bounce and movement

THERE ARE FEW thrilling spectacles in cricket than the sight of a devilishly quick ball sneaking through the batsman's defence and cannoning onto the stumps. There may be more cerebral modes of deception, like making the batsman nick after an elaborate set-up or hustling him to top edge a pull. But nothing pumps the adrenaline like an inswinger rattling the stumps. It's like a slap on the batsman's technique, judgement, competence and ego. Few contemporary bowlers excel in this art like Mohammad Shami.

Shami can occasionally drift into obscurity on the field, sleep-walking through his delivery strides. But, without any forewarning, he could also make the ball seam at vicious pace, beat the batsman with speed and bounce. He may look ineffective on the first day morning of a Test match, when conditions supposedly help the fast bowlers, but he can scythe through the batting when the surface is expected to aid the spinners. It's this ability that makes him Virat Kohli's prized asset, as precious as Jasprit Bumrah. His third and fourth inning exploits have fashioned some famous wins for India in the past two years. For instance, the 5 for 28 in Johannesburg and the 5 for 34 in Vizag, both versus South Africa.

Shami's success owes to his ability to land the ball on the seam, a skill wizened fast bowlers say is difficult to master. It enables him to reverse, when the ball gets older and make the heavy ball skid. All this as the third or fourth change bowler, bowling with the wind or against it, up the slope or down, with the new ball or the old. And that disarming smile disguises a sharp cricketing brain. In all, Shami is a package that makes him as masterful a seam bowler as India ever had.

A NEW DATA-related controversy has erupted after the government aborted the publication of the report of the household consumer expenditure survey (CES) conducted by the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) during 2017-18. This survey is one of the oldest series of surveys — undertaken by NSSO since the 1950s — and is the precursor to the present Living Standard Measurement Surveys, highly favoured and supported by international agencies like the World Bank for estimating poverty. In India, the data from this survey has been the basis for estimating poverty numbers ever since the topic of poverty took centre stage in our political and economic discourse. Most Indian economists will be familiar with the CES data and its limitations. All along, there were also concerns about the potential under-reporting and reliability of the consumption data due to the increasing divergence between the household-level data and the corresponding consumption data provided by the national accounts. It appears from the government's press note that it has also checked the report with the actual production of goods and services. The late B S Minhas, who was chairman of the NSSO governing council, was the first to explore these divergences. His findings did show that the divergences were not entirely due to under-reporting in the surveys.

That the collection of data to arrive at the monthly household consumption expenditure estimate on all goods and services is not an easy task is well recognised. Economists and survey experts have spent considerable time to understand the data limitations and to improve the data collection procedures. In fact, the CES data and the survey methodology have generated a large amount of literature, some of which is documented in *The Great Indian Poverty Debate* edited by Angus Deaton and Valerie Kozel. The under-reporting of consumption due to a lapse in recall and the adoption of an appropriate recall period was also studied in great detail by NSSO. This writer was once part of a large pilot study where the respondents were provided with

containers to measure cereals, pulses and milk consumed by them and a notebook to write down the quantity consumed on a daily basis. Households were also given a packet of salt considering that salt consumption was invariant to income levels. The salt remaining at the end of the week was measured to get the most accurate estimate of salt consumption as a control variable. These were genuine efforts to understand the reporting limitations raised by data users that peaked after the 1999-2000 survey when the NSSO used two recall periods.

Now, fast-forward to the present. The CES report for the year 2017-18 has been kept pending since June 2019 for what now transpires to be an internal examination of the divergence with other sources. This examination has purportedly led to recommendations for several refinements in the survey methodology for implementation in future surveys. The ministry has, therefore, decided not to release the survey results pending these refinements. We now have to wait till possibly 2023 to know changes in the living standards since 2011-12.

The NSSO surveys are designed under the guidance of external and internal experts. The field work and data processing are done by professionals and the reports are prepared following well-established procedures for data checking and cleaning. If there were data quality issues, it would have been discovered long before the report was drafted. Even assuming severe inconsistencies in the data collected, the right course would have been to publish a report with the findings and the perceived limitations, which could have been of use to researchers.

The junking of the NSSO survey also raises another question. Usually, all regular NSSO surveys are repeated by the state/UT governments following identical survey instruments and survey designs, using their own resources. The idea is that, by using the combined pooled samples, we can get estimates at the district level. In this case, it is not clear if the surveys done by the states/UTs have also been junked. Hopefully,

some state governments will come out with their reports in due course.

Government statistics always come attached with conceptual limitations, data collection problems, sampling and non-sampling errors and issues of comparability with other sources. But, now, a political dimension has been added. We have become painfully aware of this extra dimension in recent times starting with the GDP data, the employment data and now the consumption data. The statistical and economic aspects of data that can be researched and debated openly are now being relegated to the background. Researchers are denied access to the data. We now see discussions aided by leaked reports and quick-fix social media comments in place of scientific data analysis. The once credible and open Indian statistical system is now turning away from objectivity and introspection. The institutions that were set up to safeguard its autonomy and independence are becoming insignificant.

The collection of data through surveys and census are publicly-funded exercises. Data collection costs and respondent fatigue, from intrusive data gathering, are on the rise. While the new census and surveys are announced with alarming ease, no proper statistical audits are ever done for these publicly-funded projects. Further, though we were an early votary of open government data, the types of data to be kept in the open remain the prerogative of the data collecting agency. We have seen no reports from the ongoing Periodic Labour Force Surveys (PLFS) since May.

These are challenging times for official statisticians. They are told that data is the new oil. But, the rising reluctance of respondents, a data guzzling media on a 24-hour watch, the data demands for international commitments like SDG monitoring, make the effort in digging for this new oil extremely difficult. That this oil should be acceptable to the government makes it a bigger challenge.

The writer is former acting head of the National Statistical Commission

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MEDIUM CAN'T KILL THE MESSAGE

Banning political ads on social media is a technological solution to a political problem



RUCHI GUPTA

THE CENTRAL PROBLEM at the heart of all electoral politics is the challenge of mass communication. Social media offers the ability to communicate with the masses with a hitherto impossible specificity. This has thrown up hotly-contested issues, especially after Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential election.

One issue is the organised dissemination of misinformation, either as "fake news" or as paid political ads with false information. While there is consensus on the need for action against fake news, there is an interesting divergence on political ads. Facebook has carved out an exception for paid political ads from its fact-checking programme on the grounds that it is not the role of Facebook to adjudicate political speech in a democracy. On the other hand, Twitter has declared that it will stop all political advertising arguing that "political message reach should be earned, not bought". Twitter's stand may seem like it has the moral high ground but some concerns bear discussion.

The position of the two companies neatly sets up the policy framework and the choices therein: To carry political ads or not; to regulate political ads or not. Banning political ads will increase barriers to entry for smaller/newer entities, who require support to cross the initial threshold for visibility. Paid targeted advertising offers a cost-effective way to jump over this primary barrier and its banning will hurt new entrants. Well-funded and organised political entities will simply substitute paid advertising through employ-

ees and influencers to increase their reach.

Moreover, what is or isn't political is subjective. Consumer companies are increasingly making political pitches as a marketing tactic: A clothing company advertising that it pays fair wages; a company promising not to outsource jobs; big tech companies promising to invest in local housing; newspapers promising to report the truth. Are these ads political or apolitical? If we restrict "political" to only those ads aimed at public office, then how would we view the response of various companies to Donald Trump's immigration ban? A citizens' group mobilising for a candidate? How will we distinguish between candidates and proxies? Twitter may have decided that the conflict associated with political ads is not worth the trouble but the determination of what is political is itself conflicted.

If banning political ads is not possible, then some argue that political ads be fact-checked to ensure that voters are not fed targeted misinformation. This is reasonable. However, we may end up ceding democratic space to private companies. Political rhetoric often relies on exaggeration and spin. When spin and/or exaggeration shades into falsehood, it is personal and cannot be supplanted, wholesale, by private companies. In a polarised environment, private adjudication is likely to be arbitrary or seen to be so and it is certain every ruling will be challenged irrespective of merit. The logic of fact-checking if extended to other mass media will quickly get out of hand. Would a television or radio station carrying a live political speech be ex-

pected to stop transmission the moment a falsehood is uttered?

The real issue with online political ads is the ability to deliver (mis)information to targeted groups allowing the political entity to escape public scrutiny. A political party could conceivably target Dalits promising them social justice while simultaneously mobilising upper caste Hindus against reservations. If politics is ultimately about the collective and commons, then an argument against micro-targeting could be made. However, governance by definition encompasses multiple issues and it is difficult to argue that voters with different concerns be fed the same message. Perhaps a viable way forward could be transparency on all political ads along with associated targeting. This would expose hypocrisy and allow the Opposition to counter politically, as expected in a democracy. Other measures include clear labelling of political ads and spending caps to ensure that the smaller guys are not drowned by opposition content.

The rise of right-wing populism and the organised use of misinformation are political problems. A technological solution will necessarily be rule-based or algorithm-based and it is difficult to see how that could possibly address the essentially dynamic nature of politics. While some regulation is indeed desirable, it is important to ensure that we do not cede control over our democratic processes to private platforms.

Gupta is AICC joint secretary in charge of Congress' Student Wing. Views are personal

NOVEMBER 19, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

WHO IS THE CIA SPY?

RAJ NARAIN, WORKING president of the Lok Dal, broadly hinted that Jagjivan Ram might have been the cabinet minister who leaked out secrets to the CIA during the Bangladesh war. Asked point-blank whether Ram was the cabinet minister in Mrs Indira Gandhi's cabinet who was alleged to be a CIA agent, he said: "Jagjivan Ram may be that cabinet minister." Narain said the identity of the minister who was leaking important decisions to the CIA was known only to two persons — Indira Gandhi and the then CIA chief. The only circumstantial evidence that Narain put forth to substantiate his allegation was that after India won the war in Bangladesh,

the then defence minister, Ram, was stripped of his portfolio.

CHARGE REFUTED

JANATA PARTY CHIEF Chandra Shekhar dismissed Raj Narain's "irresponsible charge" against Jagjivan Ram with "all the contempt it deserves", but the party general secretary, Surendra Mohan, suspected "a method in Raj Narain's madness". Asked for his reaction to the Lok Dal working president's allegation during a press conference at Lucknow that "Jagjivan Ram might have been the CIA agent" in Mrs Indira Gandhi's 1971 Cabinet, Shekhar said: "This type of irresponsible statement only deserves contempt. Does it

deserve any comment? Nobody takes Raj Narain seriously".

IRAN HOSTAGE CRISIS

ISLAMIC MILITANTS OCCUPYING the US embassy in Tehran announced on Sunday that they would try their hostages as Iran put to sea some 40 warships after the start of American naval manoeuvres, AP reports. Reports by CBS News, and at least one other news agency, said the announcement about the trial was made at a news conference hours before the 12 hostages were to be freed. The CBS report said the militants planned to put "those who are spies" on trial.



13 THE IDEAS PAGE

A disconcerting verdict

Supreme Court has always upheld and strengthened secularism — but its Ayodhya ruling is problematic on that score



MADHAV GODBOLE

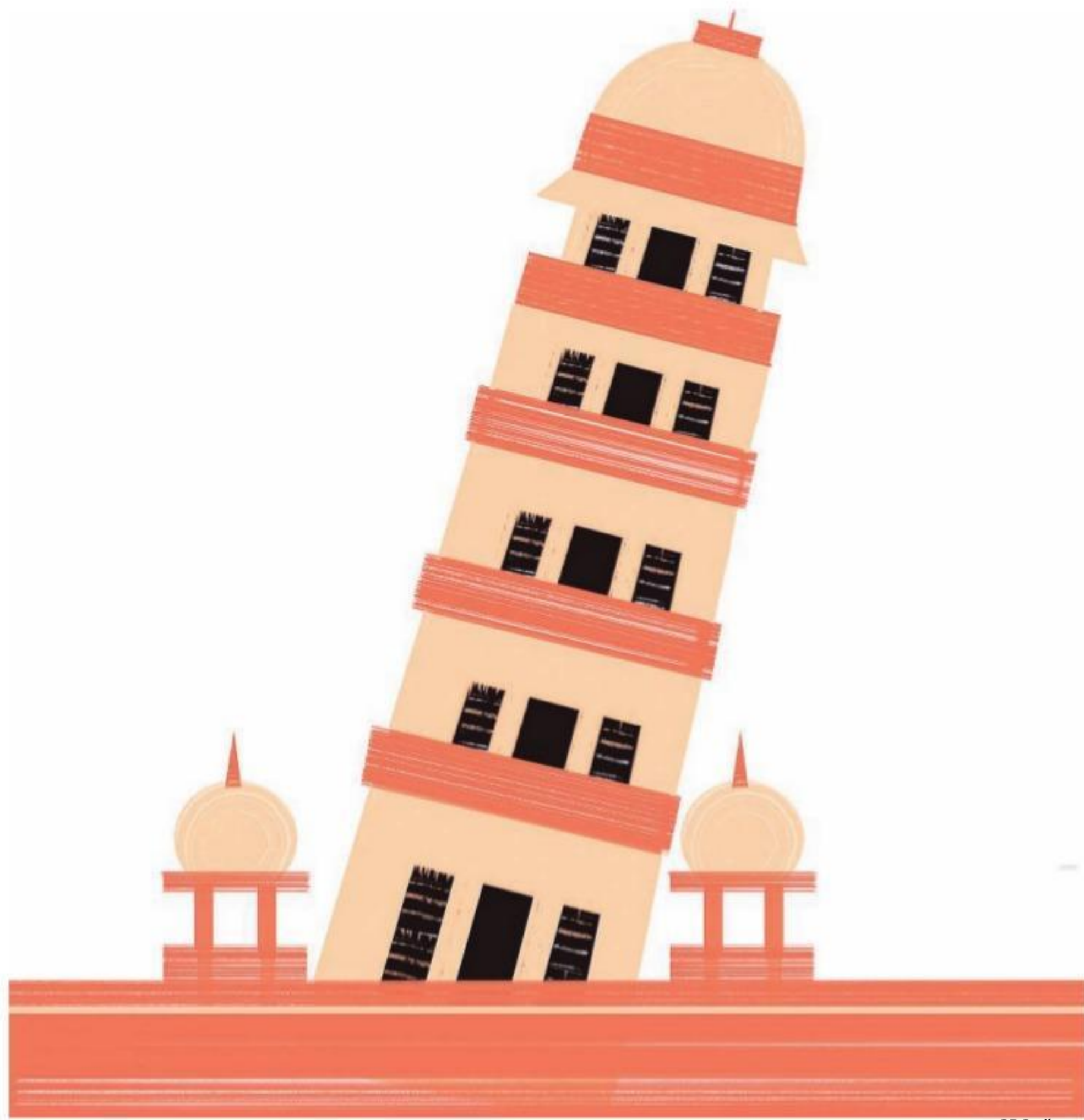
INDIA'S SUPREME COURT is acclaimed as the most powerful among its counterparts in the world. It has rewritten the Constitution of the country on several major issues. It has even become the third chamber of Parliament. Its verdict in the Ayodhya case must be evaluated in this light.

The founding fathers of the Constitution gave us an enlightened, forward-looking basic law, which is not just a legal document but is aimed at bringing about socio-economic transformation in the country. Secularism is an important precept underlying the framework of fundamental rights. But, as in several other areas, there is considerable divergence between the precept and the reality. Significantly, the Constituent Assembly failed to agree on the definition of the word "secular". It also could not agree on calling the Constitution secular. It was only during the Emergency in 1976 that the word secular was introduced in the preamble to the Constitution by the highly controversial 42nd amendment. Secularism acquired a new status when the Supreme Court declared it as a part of the basic structure of the Constitution. Whenever the concept of secularism is under threat, this injunction of the Court is invoked.

The Supreme Court gave a further boost to secularism by its rulings in cases pertaining to the governance of the country. Particular reference may be made to the decisions of the Court on Article 356 of the Constitution, which have totally stopped the widespread and continuous misuse of this article by successive central governments. After the demolition of the Babri Masjid, in the *Bommai* case (1993), mere apprehension that the BJP-ruled states in Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan would not conduct themselves according to the dictates of secularism, was considered justification enough for their dismissal. The Court had gone to the extent of declaring that "in matters of state, religion has no place". It said: "No political party can simultaneously be a religious party. Politics and religion cannot be mixed. Any state government which pursues unsecular policies or unsecular course of action acts contrary to the constitutional mandate and renders itself amenable to action under Article 356."

Against this background of upholding and strengthening secularism, the Supreme Court's Ayodhya verdict is disconcerting. A question needs to be asked, and answered, whether the decision will go to even sustain, leave aside strengthen, secularism in the country. This is particularly important in the context of the majoritarian ethos increasingly evident in the last few years.

The court has held that clandestinely keeping Ram Lalla idols in the Babri Mosque on December 22, 1949 was wrong. It has also held that the wanton destruction of the mosque on December 6, 1992 was unlawful. Both these actions showed flagrant disregard for secularism; in fact, it was a total negation of secularism. Is giving five acres of alternate land to Muslims for construction of a mosque, as the court has done, then the most appropriate or adequate compensation? What about the psychological hurt caused to the Muslims by destruction of



CR Sasikumar

their place of worship? The Court should have at least asked the state and central government to rebuild the mosque. Narasimha Rao, who was prime minister when the mosque was demolished, had made such an announcement in Parliament. He later said that he stood by the statement and wanted it fulfilled. In recent years, several churches too have been damaged in communal violence. I have, therefore, been advocating that a law must be enacted to provide that when any place of worship is damaged or destroyed in communal violence, the government should take the responsibility of repairing, reconstructing and even rebuilding such places of worship. This will be one way of translating secularism into reality and creating a sense of confidence among the minorities.

Particularly disconcerting is the unanimity among the five judges in this decision of the apex court. Does it mean that the boundaries set by this judgment are the limits to secularism in India? The Supreme Court decision leaves one with an impression that even if the majority community takes the law into its hands and destroys and damages a place of worship of any minority community, it can be rewarded, and the state can just wither away! This is most unnerving. The affected minority community becoming dejected and despondent in such circumstances can have dangerous portents for the future.

In any civilised country, protecting the interests of minorities must be accepted as the

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special responsibility of the majority community. Communal riots in Mumbai in December 1992-January 1993, following the demolition of the Babri Masjid, and the Gujarat riots in 2002 have shown this convincingly. The resultant sense of insecurity created among the minorities goes to increase their ghettoisation and strengthens the forces of identity politics.

Under the distribution of powers between the states and the Centre, all these matters fall within the purview of the state governments. But, there must be a national policy to address these vital concerns, which would lay down legal and institutional framework for the purpose. Unfortunately, in the name of federalism and safeguarding the rights of state governments, it is becoming increasingly difficult to address these concerns. Even the constitutional forum of the inter-state council, comprising the prime minister, concerned central ministers and state chief ministers, has fallen into disuse.

In spite of infirmities, the judgment must be accepted by all parties to end this longstanding, explosive dispute. But, the implications of the judgment will be debated for years to come. For, what is at stake is the stability and integrity of the country and communal peace and harmony.

The writer, a former Union home secretary, is the author of *The Babri Masjid Ram Mandir Dilemma: An Acid Test for India's Constitution*

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The central issue over the coming weeks is not whether Mr Trump is a disgraceful president. The verdict on that is already in - and he is guilty. The issue is whether he has committed what the US constitution describes as 'treason, bribery or other high crimes and misdemeanours'."

— THE GUARDIAN

Towards a Colombo reset

Delhi needs to engage with the Tamil question and Chinese interests in Sri Lanka with an open mind



RAJA MANDALA

BY C RAJA MOHAN

EVEN BEFORE the new president of Sri Lanka, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, was sworn in, the narrative about Colombo's renewed "tilt" towards China and against India had taken root. The headline, however, misrepresents the complex power play involving Beijing, Delhi and Colombo.

The Great Game in the Subcontinent is not limited to just India and China. It is quite easy to forget the considerable interests and influence of many other powers in the region, including the US, European Union, Japan and Russia. Meanwhile, the exclusive focus on major power rivalry, masks the agency of South Asian political elites and their capacity to manoeuvre among the major powers.

In coping with the fluid geopolitics around India, Delhi has no reason to be taken in by the media's definition of the Rajapaksa — Gotabaya and his brother Mahinda, who ruled Sri Lanka as a president during 2005-15 with a strong hand — as inherently "pro-China".

Although the Rajapaksa has blamed India for their defeat in the 2015 elections, they have sought to make up with Delhi in recent years. South Block too has rightly put aside its reservations about the Rajapaksa and has been engaging all the major political formations in Sri Lanka. The stage, then, is ready for a reset in the bilateral relations between the two strong governments in Delhi and Colombo.

That reset involves addressing the structural factors that have complicated the relationship between Delhi and Colombo. One of them is the China question. India is acutely aware that China's economic and strategic salience in the Subcontinent will continue to grow and is not tied to the regime leadership in its neighbourhood.

Consider the case of the outgoing coalition led by President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe that proves the irrelevance of labelling governments in Colombo as "pro-China" or "pro-India". It came to power criticising the Chinese projects in Sri Lanka as financially unsustainable. Two years into power, the coalition extended full backing to the Chinese projects. It was this so-called "pro-India" regime that offered China a 99-year lease on the Hambantota project. To add insult to injury, the "pro-India" government stalled key projects of interest to Delhi.

In any case, Delhi can't expect its neighbours to shut down economic and commercial engagement with Beijing, notwithstanding the many questions about the terms of China's assistance on projects, including those under the Belt and Road Initiative. But Delhi will be right to ask Colombo not to take steps with Beijing that threaten India's security. Delhi and Colombo need a clear understanding on mutual red lines relating to national security and a political comfort level to discuss

cases that fall within the orange zone. That should help prevent the recurrence of the controversy over Chinese submarines in Colombo port that generated so much bad blood between the two nations in 2014.

On Monday, *The Indian Express* reported on the new Lankan leadership's eagerness to signal goodwill towards India. The report quoted sources close to the Rajapaksa as saying that China is a "trade partner" while India is a "close relative". That perhaps is as good a description as any. Other terms used to describe the new policy include "neutrality" and "non-alignment" between major powers.

As the world rediscovers the geopolitical value of Sri Lanka at the heart of the Indo-Pacific, Colombo has huge opportunities to leverage its location for national benefit. A prudent and important part of that strategy would be to avoid provoking India. Delhi too would be wise to be mindful of Colombo's security concerns and find ways to develop long-term strategic cooperation with Sri Lanka.

Delhi needs to invest some political capital in resolving problems such as the longstanding dispute over fisheries. Beyond its objection to China's BRI projects, Delhi, either alone or in partnership with like-minded countries like Japan, should offer sustainable terms for infrastructure development. Delhi also needs to contribute more to the development of Colombo's defence and counter-terror capabilities.

The second structural factor shaping India's relations with Sri Lanka is the Tamil question. India's involvement in Sri Lanka's tragic civil war has been far more consequential than the China factor in complicating Delhi's relations with Colombo. Delhi has certainly learnt the dangers of being drawn too deep into the domestic conflicts of neighbouring countries.

Successive coalition governments in Delhi from 1989 to 2014 struggled to balance the pulls and pressures from Chennai and Colombo. The strong mandate in 2014 had given Modi greater room to manage the competing imperatives on the Lanka policy.

But the Tamil question has not gone away. If the new government in Colombo can advance reconciliation with the Tamil minority, it will be easier for Modi to strengthen ties with the Gotabaya government. But the Tamil issue is no longer a bilateral one between Delhi and Colombo. The Western powers have expressed deep concerns about the war crimes in the military campaign against the LTTE and the need to bring those responsible to book.

The Rajapaksa have declared that they will not bend before foreign pressures. India knows that too much heat from the West will automatically increase China's leverage in Colombo. If the Tamil question continues to have a big impact on Sri Lanka's foreign policy, Delhi needs to look beyond old formulae to try and encourage reconciliation within Lanka and across the Palk Strait with Tamil Nadu. With a strong government in Sri Lanka, it is time for Delhi to think boldly about its relationship with Colombo.

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A betrayal in the offing

Congress should give a second thought to allying with Shiv Sena



APOORVANAND

VINAYAK DAMODAR Savarkar must be smiling. It can be said that the Congress has seemingly turned its back on the legacy of Jawaharlal Nehru and Gandhi. The news of the party being close to sealing its pact with the Shiv Sena came on the eve of Nehru's birthday. It is the most cruel tribute the party could have paid him. This is also Gandhi's 150th birth anniversary. The Congress has shaken hands with the Shiv Sena, a party which demanded a Bharat Ratna for Savarkar, who is often seen as complicit in the conspiracy to assassinate Gandhi. Even if we ignore this, Savarkar certainly led the ideological opposition to the Gandhian idea of co-living and nation building. By considering aligning with his followers, the Congress has shown that his viewpoint can be accommodated.

The Congress party seems to have succumbed to the temptation to somehow keep the BJP out of power in Maharashtra, persuaded by the seasoned "negotiator" Sharad Pawar, by considering being the junior most-partner in a prospective three-party alliance with the Shiv Sena and NCP.

The Congress, despite its unparadigmatic ideological vacillations and its use of majoritarian sentiments many times for electoral purposes, could at least claim that it was the

one party which had never compromised either with the Jana Sangh or the BJP for power. After all, all other political parties, including the Left, have compromised with the Jana Sangh or the BJP. Tall leaders like Ram Manohar Lohia or Jayaprakash Narayan (JP) gave up their secular inhibitions to ally with the political wing of the RSS with the sole aim of wrecking the Congress system. Lohia had famously said that to do so, he was ready to shake hands with the devil. We have seen the devil sucking the life out of that school of politics and turn its actors into playthings. And the Congress kept accusing all of them for having forsaken the most sacred principle of secularism, foundational to the project of nation building.

Political analysts are applauding this "masterstroke". To deprive the BJP of a state, that too one flush with money, is being seen as a double gain. It is said that it would give a boost to the sagging morale of the party's workers, who were feeling lost after having remained out of power for so long. There was a fear that the victorious MLAs would break ranks with the party if it decided to sit in the Opposition for the next five years.

It is also being argued that allying with the Congress — with its inclusive nature — and the compulsions of holding on to power

will soften and mellow the Shiv Sena and force it to abandon its anti-migrant, anti-minority platform. The record of the Shiv Sena, however, provides no such reassurance.

JP was proven wrong by history. To those of his followers who were uncomfortable with his friendship with the RSS, he had said that he was on a mission to de-communalise the organisation. He died with his hopes shattered. But the RSS, with each such compromise, gained in strength and stature.

To see the Congress's compromise with the Shiv Sena, which was the first to have proudly claimed responsibility for the demolition of the Babri Masjid, was the last thing one could have imagined. By considering doing so, it has made it clear that the language of Hindutva will now be the common political language.

One might call it foolish sentimentalism but Nehru's words keep reminding us of the values for which Gandhi had died. The nation was going to the second general elections. Addressing the leaders and workers of the Congress, Nehru said that he was ready to lose election after election but he would never compromise with communal elements.

There was always a stream in the Congress Party — leaders like Govind Ballabh

Pant, Pandit Sampurnand, Purushottam Das Tandon — which harboured majoritarian tendencies. Nehru had threatened to resign when Tandon won the presidency of the party and the latter had to bow out. Nehru has been criticised for this "undemocratic" act but one must understand that he was not ready to run the government of a party which was, in terms of ideas and practice, against his values. It would have been much easier for Gandhi and Nehru to assuage "Hindu" feelings and be the unquestioned leaders of the majority. After all, both of them had battled against M A Jinnah in the last phase of the freedom struggle. But they knew that they were fighting for a vision of a nation where minorities could always feel wanted and welcome and live a full life.

Indira Gandhi in a letter from Lucknow had complained to Nehru in 1949 that the Congress was full of people with an RSS mindset. She said that she was feeling suffocated in such a party. I got a call from an old Congressman during the discussions about the alliance in Maharashtra. He sounded broken and said that he did not see a reason to be in politics anymore. One need not guess that he was a Muslim.

The writer teaches Hindi at Delhi University

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BUSINESS INTEREST

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Steps to revival' (IE, November 18). A revamp of the telecom policy is long overdue. The government has doled out handsome VRS packages for BSNL employees. However, the question remains: Why are industries collapsing? The interests of companies need to be safeguarded. This could encourage foreign investors in bidding aggressively for BPCL and Air India. The government also needs to fast forward disinvestment.

Deepak Singhal, Chennai

BIGOTED VIEW

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Scholarship has no religion' (IE, November 18). It's unfortunate that students of Banaras Hindu University (BHU) have staged demonstrations over the appointment of a 29-year-old Muslim professor in the Sanskrit literature department. The idea behind the establishment of the university is to contribute in nation-building efforts by providing equal opportunity of study and teaching to all deserving people. A university cannot reject an application on the basis of caste or religion.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

TREAD CAUTIOUSLY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Fraught course' (IE November 16). By asking a

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.

larger bench to review its 2018 verdict on the entry of women to Sabarimala, the Supreme Court has made the matter more complicated. The primary issue of review before the Court was only to seek a balance between the tradition of the temple trust to bar entry of women folk in the temple on religious grounds and the constitutional mandate of equality, freedom and right to practice one's faith. The Court has enlarged the scope of the enquiry beyond the narrow remit of the review. There is no doubting the apex court's intention but it should have refrained from enlarging the scope of review in a matter that pertains to religious sentiments.

Ravi Mathur, Ghaziabad

TELLING NUMBERS

Pregnant, nursing women's health: Himachal best, UP worst in survey

A NEW survey, called the Jaccha-Baccha Survey (JABS), conducted in June in six states (Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh) to map the state of pregnant and nursing women has found that a high proportion of women do not eat enough during pregnancy.

The survey was conducted under the guidance of development economists Jean Dreze and Reetika Khara.

Within the six states, which the survey divided into laggard and leader states, Uttar Pradesh, which is India's most populous, performed the worst, while Himachal Pradesh, on average, performed the best.

UP also threw up the worst numbers on pregnant women not getting adequate rest — either because they had no one to help out at home, or because they had to actually go out and work on the farm in their condition.

The proportion of women who had to borrow or sell assets just to meet child delivery expenses too, was quite high, especially among the laggard states.

On access to basic healthcare facilities, the survey found that 36% women in UP did not get a single check-up at a primary health centre across different schemes.

The poor health of pregnant and nursing women, as well as inadequate healthcare infrastructure, lie at the heart of India's child nutrition crisis. The latest Global Hunger Index re-



Special needs of pregnant women were widely ignored, the survey found. *Archive/For representation*

leased in October pegged India at a lowly 102 out of a total of 117 countries. One of the key findings of GHI was that 'child wasting' (that is, children having low weight for their height) — which essentially shows the extent of acute malnutrition — had gone up over the past decade. At almost 21%, India's child wasting level is the highest in the world.

Combined with almost 38% of child stunting (that is, children who have low height for their age), India has the highest number of undernourished children in the world.

FORETELLING INDIA'S CHILD NUTRITION CRISIS

Parameters	Uttar Pradesh	Laggard states*	Leader states**	Himachal Pradesh
Proportion of respondents who were eating less during pregnancy (%)	74	59	35	21
Proportion of respondents who worked on family farms during pregnancy (%)	39	28	13	18
Proportion of respondents who had no one around to help with household work during pregnancy (%)	28	25	17	4
Proportion of households who had to borrow or sell assets to meet delivery expenses (%)	51	43	19	13
Proportion of respondents who received at least one health check-up at a PHC (%)	64	80	91	88

*Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh. **Chhattisgarh, Himachal, Odisha. Source: JBS 2019

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

Understanding space Internet

SpaceX shot 60 satellites into orbit last week, and will keep doing so until it has a 12,000-strong constellation in place. In 2 years, it hopes to supply non-stop, low-cost Internet everywhere on Earth

SOHINI GHOSH & AMITABH SINHA
AHMEDABAD, PUNE, NOVEMBER 18

SPACEX, the world's leading private company in space technology, last week fired a spray of 60 satellites into orbit, the first operational batch of what is intended to eventually evolve into a constellation of nearly 12,000 satellites aimed at providing low-cost and reliable space-based Internet services to the world. The Starlink network, as the project is called, is one of several ongoing efforts to start beaming data signals from space, and also the most ambitious.

The first batch of Starlink satellites — also numbering 60, and similar in configuration to the ones launched on November 11 — went up on May 24, but they will not be part of the network. SpaceX announced the satellite Internet constellation in January 2015, and launched two test satellites in February 2018. Following last week's launch, the company has now deployed 122 satellites in orbit.

In October, SpaceX appeared ready to scale up its ambition, telling the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in filings through the United States Federal Communications Commission (FCC) that it intends to deploy another 30,000 Starlink satellites in Low Earth Orbit (LEO) in coming years.

The ITU is the United Nations specialised agency for information and communication technologies, with a membership of 193 member states, some 900 companies, universities, and international and regional organisations. The FCC is the statutory communications regulator of the US.

Why is it necessary to launch satellites in order to provide Internet services?

This is mainly to ensure that reliable and uninterrupted Internet services — now part of humanity's basic infrastructure and an important means of delivering a wide variety of public services to the world's peoples — are universally available in every part of the globe.

Currently, about 4 billion people, more than half the world's population, do not have access to reliable Internet networks. And that is because the traditional ways to deliver the Internet — fibre-optic cables or wireless networks — cannot take it everywhere on Earth. In many remote areas, or places with difficult terrain, it is not feasible or viable to set up cables or mobile towers.

Signals from satellites in space can over-



The SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket with 60 mini satellites lifted off on November 11. AP

come this obstacle easily.

How old is this idea of space Internet?

Space-based Internet systems have, in fact, been in use for several years now — but only for a small number of users. Also, most of the existing systems use satellites in geostationary orbit. This orbit is located at a height of 35,786 km over the Earth's surface, directly above the Equator. Satellites in this orbit move at speeds of about 11,000 km per hour, and complete one revolution of the Earth in the same time that the earth rotates once on its axis. To the observer on the ground, therefore, a satellite in geostationary orbit appears stationary.

So how will placing satellites in lower orbits help?

One big advantage of beaming signals from geostationary orbit is that the satellite can cover a very large part of the Earth. Signals from one satellite can cover roughly a third of the planet — and three to four satellites would be enough to cover the entire Earth. Also, because they appear to be stationary, it is easier to link to them.

But satellites in geostationary orbit also have a major disadvantage. The Internet is all about transmission of data in (nearly) real time. However, there is a time lag — called latency — between a user seeking data, and the server sending that data. And because

data transfers cannot happen faster than the speed of light (in reality, they take place at significantly lower speeds), the longer the distance that needs to be covered the greater is the time lag, or latency.

In space-based networks, data requests travel from the user to the satellite, and are then directed to data centres on the ground. The results then make the same journey in the reverse direction. A transmission like this from a satellite in geostationary orbit has a latency of about 600 milliseconds. A satellite in the lower orbit, 200-2,000 km from the Earth's surface, can bring the lag down to 20-30 milliseconds, roughly the time it takes for terrestrial systems to transfer data.

The LEO extends up to 2,000 km above the Earth's surface. The Starlink satellites — the 12,000 for which SpaceX has permission, as well as the other 30,000 that it wants to launch — will be deployed in the altitude band of 350 km to 1,200 km.

But lower orbits have their own problem. Owing to their lower height, their signals cover a relatively small area. As a result, many more satellites are needed in order to reach signals to every part of the planet.

Additionally, satellites in these orbits travel at more than double the speed of satellites in geostationary orbit — about 27,000 km per hour — to balance the effects of gravity. Typically, they go around the Earth once every few hours. To compensate for the fact that

they cannot be seen from a terrestrial location for more than a few minutes, many more satellites are needed in the networks, so that there are no breaks in the transmission of data. That is the reason why the Starlink network is talking about 42,000 satellites.

By when will Starlink be able to provide its space-based Internet service?

Starlink aims to start service in the northern United States and Canada in 2020, and expand to cover the whole world by 2021. The current plan is to deploy satellites in two constellations of around 4,400 and 7,500. Launches — 60 satellites at a time — will take place at frequent intervals now onward. SpaceX says it can start services on a small scale once 400 satellites join the network.

Several other private companies too, have plans for space-based Internet services. These include Amazon, OneWeb and O3B (apparently named for the 'Other Three Billion'), each involving large constellations of satellites in lower and middle Earth orbits — but these projects are very small compared to Starlink.

Once operational, space-based Internet networks are expected to change the face of the Internet. Services such as autonomous car driving are expected to be revolutionised, and the Internet of Things (IoT) can be integrated into virtually every household, whether urban or rural.

Is there a downside to this projection?

Three issues have been flagged — increased space debris, increased risk of collisions, and the concern of astronomers that these constellations of space Internet satellites will make it difficult to observe other space objects, and to detect their signals.

To put things in perspective, there are fewer than 2,000 operational satellites at present, and fewer than 9,000 satellites have been launched into space since the beginning of the Space Age in 1957. Most of the operational satellites are located in the lower orbits. On September 2 this year, the European Space Agency (ESA) had to perform, for the first time ever, a "collision avoidance manoeuvre" to protect one of its live satellites from colliding with a "mega constellation".

Astronomers and scientists have also complained about increased "light-pollution", a reference to light reflected from the man-made satellites that can interfere with — and be mistaken for — light coming from other heavenly bodies.

THIS WORD MEANS

DEPOSIT INSURANCE

Rs 1 lakh is all that a depositor can expect in the unlikely event of her bank failing. But this could change

SUNNY VERMA
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 18

WITH THE failure of the Punjab and Maharashtra Co-operative (PMC) Bank reigniting the debate on the low level of insurance for deposits held by customers in banks in India, the central government now plans to raise the cover. A legislation in this regard is likely in the ongoing Winter Session of Parliament.

Currently, in the (unlikely) event of a bank going bust in India, a depositor has claim to

a maximum of Rs 1 lakh per account as insurance cover — even if the deposit in their account far exceeds Rs 1 lakh. Depositors holding more than Rs 1 lakh in their account have no legal remedy in case of the collapse of the bank.

This amount is termed 'deposit insurance'. The cover of Rs 1 lakh per depositor is provided by the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC), a fully owned subsidiary of the Reserve Bank of India. The Rs 1 lakh-cover is for deposits in commercial banks, regional rural banks (RRBs), local area banks (LABs), and coop-

erative banks.

Over the years, the level of insured deposits as a percentage of assessable deposits has declined from a high of 60.5% in 2007-08 to 28.1% in 2018-19, as per DICGC data.

At the end of March 2019, the number of registered insured banks with DICGC stood at 2,098 — comprising 103 commercial banks, 1,941 cooperative banks, 51 RRBs, and three LABs.

DICGC last revised the deposit insurance cover to Rs 1 lakh on May 1, 1993 — raising it from Rs 30,000, which had been the cover from 1980 onward.

DICGC charges 10 paise per Rs 100 of deposits held by a bank. The premium paid by the insured banks to the Corporation is required to be borne by the banks, and not be passed on to depositors. As per DICGC data, commercial banks paid a total premium of Rs 11,190 crore in 2018-19, while cooperative banks paid a premium of Rs 850 crore to cover deposits against the risk of default.

As for cooperative banks, only 44.5% of their assessable deposits were covered in 2018-19, while for commercial banks this ratio was 25.7%. Commercial banks account for the largest share of bank deposits in India.

Once 'king' of Karachi, he now wants asylum in India. Who is Altaf Hussain?

NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN
MUMBAI, NOVEMBER 18

A TYPICAL Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) rally in Karachi in its heyday would be like this: party members and activists, both men and women, seated in disciplined rows awaiting the main speaker, the party leader, a balding, bespectacled man; his image emblazoned on banners on the stage and at other vantage points; the entire Rabita Committee (the MQM's central committee) lined up respectfully on stage next to a telephone.

At the appointed minute, one of the men on the stage would lift the receiver reverentially, and the voice of Altaf Hussain would crackle over the public address system from his home in Mill Hill, London, where he fled in 1992 after a violent internal feud in the party, and pre-empting a huge crackdown by the Pakistani military.

Hussain's appeal Sunday to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to give him and his colleagues asylum, makes him perhaps the first British citizen to seek refuge in India. Hussain is seeking to flee a country that acted blind to his presence for over two decades. But now he is due to stand trial under British anti-terrorism laws, for inciting largescale violence in Karachi on August 22, 2016, through one of his telephone speeches.

What happened that day

Two media houses were vandalised, and

there was fighting and arson on the streets of Karachi that left one person dead and several injured. The MQM leader had addressed his workers who had just ended a hunger strike to protest alleged disappearances of their colleagues in an operation by the Pakistan Rangers since 2013. It was an "anti-crime" operation — a veiled reference to the much feared MQM, with its thuggish street presence and mafia-like operations.

Hussain described Pakistan as a "cancer for the entire world", a "headache for the entire world". Pakistan, he said, "is the epicentre of terrorism for the entire world. Who says long live Pakistan... it's down with Pakistan." He then suggested that the protesters move on to two media houses.

"So you are moving to ARY and Samaa [TV channels] from here...right?" he asked. "So you go to Samaa and ARY today and then refresh [yourselves] tomorrow for the Rangers place. And tomorrow we will lock down the Sindh government building which is called Sindh Secretariat."

The violence brought the full force of the Pakistani state crashing on the MQM's head. The dreaded party office, Nine Zero, which was at one time rumoured to have underground torture chambers, was shut down by the Rangers. It was the beginning of the end of MQM, and of Hussain's four-decade-long political career.

The following day, the entire Karachi-based leadership of the MQM distanced itself from the words of the leader. But the party



MQM founder Altaf Hussain in London in 2016. Reuters

never recovered, and on the eve of the 2018 elections, a breakaway faction called Pakistan Sarzameen Party (PSP) put up its own candidates. Its ties to the Army were apparent.

The MQM won just seven seats, a historic low. It had won 18 seats in 2013, and 25 in 2008. The PSP did not win any seats. Meanwhile, acting on a complaint from the Pakistani government, Scotland Yard charged Hussain under British anti-terror laws for "encouraging terrorism" through the 2016 speech. He was arrested in June this year, and is currently out on bail.

The man and his party

Hussain entered Pakistan's political scene as a student leader heading the All

Pakistan Mohajir Students' Organisation in the mid-1970s. At a time when all democratic forces were rallying against the military dictatorship of Zia ul-Haq and behind the Pakistan People's Party, the APMSO grew rapidly to challenge the PPP's hold in Karachi, and other cities in Sindh province.

Among the APMSO's demands were that Karachi should be carved out of Sindh into a Mohajir subah. Mohajir is the term for Muslim migrants to Pakistan from UP, Delhi, and other parts of India. The MQM was in the beginning called the Mohajir Qaumi Movement.

Even though the MQM started out as a creature of the establishment, its independent-minded leadership, and the party's popularity among Karachi's Urdu-speaking mid-

dle class and youth, set alarm bells ringing in the military establishment and political parties. The PPP and MQM fought each other on the streets of Karachi. Through the 1990s, the MQM was targeted by the military, leading to violent crackdowns and bloodbaths.

During this period, the MQM was accused of being secessionist, and conspiring to break Karachi away from Pakistan at the behest of India's Research & Analysis Wing. The "Indian" ethnicity of MQM members and followers was used to taint them. Adding to the suspicion, some of its leaders had escaped to India during the military operations, and were suspected to have been in touch with the Indian intelligence agency.

The party's fortunes, however, changed dramatically in 1999 when General Pervez Musharraf, an Urdu speaker and Mohajir from Delhi, took power through a coup against Nawaz Sharif. Its elected representatives were key to Musharraf's plans. The party came out strongly against the lawyers' movement in 2007. Over 20 people were killed in clashes in Karachi after MQM cadres prevented the Chief Justice of Pakistan deposed by Musharraf from entering the city to address a meeting of the bar association.

It was during this time that the MQM fashioned itself as Pakistan's only secular party, and came out strongly against the "Talibanisation" of Karachi, which has a huge Pashtun population. Altaf Hussain travelled to Delhi for the first time, and was feted as an emissary of India-Pakistan peace. Syed

Mustafa Kamal, an MQM politician and the youngest mayor of Karachi, won praise in the West for his attempts to improve the city.

Luck over, clutching at straws

The MQM's fall began in 2010, two years after Musharraf's ignominious exit from the Pakistani political scene. Imran Farooq, a senior party leader, was killed outside his home in London. The investigation into the murder led British authorities to a huge stash of currency at Hussain's home and office, which set off a money laundering investigation. The BBC aired fresh allegations of Hussain's links with R&AV.

In Karachi, the Rangers, Army, and Pakistani intelligence agencies began another "anti-crime" operation, which the MQM alleged was intended to split the party and end its political dominance over the city.

The party did split many times over. Hussain mistakenly believed that he would be able to regain control, and the 2016 speech inciting violence was part of the plan.

Since then, Hussain's health is said to have deteriorated, and absent the control over Karachi, he and the MQM have run out of funding. He is desperate to avoid the UK trial.

This is not the first time he has appealed to Modi. In 2015, as his troubles mounted in the UK, and the Karachi crackdown entered its third year, he had asked Modi to speak up for Mohajirs. But even if India did find him useful at one time, it is unlikely that is still the case.