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TELLING NUMBERS

QS Rankings: 8 India universities in Asia top 100, IIT Bombay 34th

INDIA TOP 20 (ASIA RANKS)

2020	2019	INSTITUTION/UNIVERSITY
34	33	IIT Bombay
43	40	IIT Delhi
50	48	IIT Madras
51	50	IISc Bengaluru
56	53	IIT Kharagpur
65	61	IIT Kanpur
67	62	University Of Delhi
90	86	IIT Roorkee
112	107	IIT Guwahati
114	106	University Of Hyderabad
136	137	Jadavpur University
139	134	University Of Calcutta
152	167	Institute Of Chemical Technology, Mumbai
169	169	Anna University
175	180	Birla Institute Of Technology And Science
177	156	Banaras Hindu University
177	187	University Of Mumbai
188	241	IIT Indore
191	237	Savitribai Phule Pune University
192	177	Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi

IN THE latest QS World University Rankings for Asia, 96 Indian institutions rank among 550 for the continent. Of the 96 Indian universities ranked, 20 are brand-new entries. Only Mainland China is more represented than India, with 118 featured universities. While Mainland China has four in the top 10 this year, India does not yet have a university among the top 30. The 96 Indian universities featured in the rankings include eight among the top 100, and 31 among the top 250. Of these 31, 18 dropped compared to last year, 12 gained ground and one remained stable.

The best performing institution from India is IIT Bombay, which drops one place to 34th position. It is followed by IIT Delhi at 43rd place and IIT Madras at 50th.

The QS Rankings use a methodology based on 11 metrics. IIT Bombay is the best Indian university in the 'Academic Reputation' indicator, which utilises the insights of over 94,000 academics regarding university quality. It ranks 32nd in Asia in this dimension. IIT Delhi (34th) and the University of Delhi (50th) are next.

In the 'Employer Reputation' indicator, which utilises the insights of over 44,000 employers regarding the quality of a university's graduates, IIT Bombay ranks 21st in Asia. There are four other Indian universities among the top 50 (IIT Delhi, IIT Madras, University of Delhi and IIT Kharagpur).

India dominates the Staff with PhD indicator with seven institutions achieving the perfect 100.00 score and raking No. 1 tied in this metric. All seven are IITs — Madras, Kharagpur, Kanpur, Bhubaneswar, Indore, Patna, and Ropar.

In the research indicators, India boasts five universities among the top 50 in the 'Citations per Paper' metric, and six among the top 50 in the 'Papers per Faculty' metric.

ASIA TOP 10

1. National University of Singapore
2. Nanyang Technological University, Singapore
3. University of Hong Kong
4. Tsinghua University, China (Mainland)
5. Peking University, China (Mainland)
6. Zhejiang University, China (Mainland)
7. Fudan University, China (Mainland)
8. The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology
9. KAIST — Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology
10. The Chinese University of Hong Kong

The National University of Singapore is ranked Asia's best for the second consecutive year. It is followed by Nanyang Technological University, which has risen from 3rd to 2nd; and the University of Hong Kong.

Ben Sowter, Director of Research at QS, said in a statement: "The Indian higher education system has grown exponentially over the past decade. The number of universities has nearly doubled, and the number of colleges has grown by 50 per cent. The sheer scale of this development is awe-inspiring. Nevertheless, the domestic demand for tertiary education of its young population — which is estimated to become the world's largest by 2030 — is growing more rapidly than the expanded provision."

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

Why Russia faces sports ban

World Anti-Doping Agency panel has recommended a 4-year ban, including from Olympics, over alleged doping programme. How was the programme run, and what new revelations have led to the suggestion?

MIHIR VASAVDA

NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 27

A WORLD Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) panel has suggested that Russia be banned for four years from competing in international events, including next year's Tokyo Olympics. The move stems from new revelations in a doping programme that Russia has been accused of. A look at what the alleged programme is about:

How did these allegations unfold?

Over the last five years, whistleblowers and investigators have accused Russia of running a doping programme so sophisticated that it forced international federations to stop its athletes from competing in major events. In September 2018, after multiple investigations, WADA lifted the sanctions on the condition that Russia handover athlete data to doping regulators from its Moscow laboratory, which would help identify hundreds of athletes who may have cheated across various sports.

Now, Russia has been accused of manipulating that database. This is what led to the WADA panel suggesting the four-year ban.

What was Russia originally accused of?

In 2014, 800m runner Yulia Stepanova and her husband Vitaly — a former employee of the Russian Anti-Doping Agency, RUSADA — appeared in a German documentary and lifted the lid on what was later described as one of the most "sophisticated doping programmes" in sports history.

Two years later, another whistleblower — Grigory Rodchenkov, a former head of the RUSADA — told *The New York Times* that Russia ran a carefully planned, state-sponsored doping scheme. Rodchenkov's claims were more damning. He accused a wider conspiracy, in which the country's anti-doping and members of intelligence services substituted urine samples of the athletes through a hidden hole in the wall at the agency's laboratory during the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics. The lab, according to investigations, was guarded by members of Russia's state security services.

Subsequently, the International Olympic Committee (IOC), WADA and other global federations launched a series of investigations.



A Moscow building that houses a WADA-accredited laboratory; Russia's former anti-doping lab chief-turned-whistleblower Grigory Rodchenkov. Reuters, NYT



What did these investigations look at?

WADA launched an independent investigation led by Canadian lawyer Richard McLaren to look into the functioning of the Moscow lab. The IOC commissioned two inquiries — one of which looked into the evidence of manipulation of samples at the Sochi Games, and the other to find out the involvement of the Russian state.

The McLaren report laid out evidence of state-sponsored doping during the Sochi Olympics. One IOC commission, too, found dozens of Russian athletes guilty of being involved in anti-doping rule violations at those Games. The other IOC investigation confirmed that Russian authorities had developed a system that allowed the Moscow-based laboratory to change the test results and tamper with the samples collected during that event.

What happened then?

Immediately after the allegations surfaced, the accreditation of Russia's anti-doping lab was suspended in 2015. After the preliminary investigations, the IOC removed 111 athletes, including the entire track and field team, from Russia's 389-member contingent for the Rio Olympics. Following a deeper inquiry, the IOC suggested a complete ban on Russia's participation at the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea. Ultimately, 168 athletes participated through

special dispensations from the international federations. But the Russian Olympic Committee was barred from attending the event and the country's flag was not officially displayed at any of the venues. Russian athletes, too, were forced to wear neutral uniforms with "Olympic Athlete From Russia" printed on them.

Why did WADA lift the sanctions later?

That was an unexpected decision in September 2018, taken despite an outcry from athletes and anti-doping officials from the world over after negotiations between Russian officials and leaders of international sports organisations. Initially, in an agreement with WADA, Russia was supposed to admit to the wrongdoings and turn over data and samples before it was reinstated. Later, however, WADA backed off on the demand and, according to *The New York Times*, "accepted" the less harsh findings on the government's role" as evidenced by an IOC commission. WADA president Craig Reedie, however, said the reinstatement came with 'strict conditions', that included WADA getting access to the Moscow laboratory that held athlete data.

Did Russia give access to and submit the athlete data?

In January 2019, a three-member WADA team retrieved the 2,262 samples from the

Moscow laboratory through its "various servers, instruments, computers and other electronic equipment", according to a WADA statement. The data were transported out of Russia for authentication and detailed analysis by the WADA.

In July, WADA said its investigators were examining "some differences" between the data retrieved from the Moscow lab and a separate database provided to it by a whistleblower in 2017, thus raising questions about the validity of data Russia submitted.

Will there be a new punishment imposed on Russian athletes?

The WADA panel on Monday recommended that Russia face a four-year ban from global sports, including the Tokyo Olympics. The proposed sanctions include:

- Forcing Russian athletes to compete at a second straight Olympics in neutral uniforms. If they win medals, the country's flag won't be raised and national anthem won't be played.
- Russian athletes be allowed to compete in major events only if they demonstrate that they are clean and meet a number of other strict conditions.
- Preventing Russia from bidding for new championships, and moving the tournaments the country was set to host during this period to other nations.
- Barring Russian government officials and representatives from attending major events or from serving on the board of any organisation that has signed the global anti-doping code.

What happens next?

Russia has denied all allegations. The IOC, in a statement on Tuesday, called for "toughest sanctions" for those responsible for "manipulating the data" and demanded "the Russian authorities deliver the raw data on which this case is based".

On December 9, WADA's executive committee will meet to discuss these recommendations. If these are accepted, a formal notice will be sent to RUSADA. In case Russia rejects the panel's suggestion, the matter will be referred to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS). If CAS upholds the recommendations, they will be binding and must be enforced by all international federations.

How Sebi's new default disclosure norm works

SHAJI VIKRAMAN

CHENNAI, NOVEMBER 27

SECURITIES MARKET regulator Sebi last week asked listed companies to publicly disclose any default in repayment of principal or interest on loans from banks and financial institutions beyond 30 days. "Such disclosure shall be made promptly, but not later than 24 hours from the 30th day of such default," Sebi said in its circular of November 21.

On August 4, 2017, Sebi had issued a similar circular, requiring all listed entities to make such "disclosures within one working day from the date of default at the first instance of default", but had deferred the implementation of that rule before it was to kick in on October 1 of that year.

The new default rule will come into force on January 1, 2020.

Why the new rule

Sebi says the change was necessary to address information asymmetry — or a gap in the availability of information to different classes of investors — on defaults on loans by listed companies. Investors come to know of such defaults much later — whereas a similar default

on repayment of a bond or a similar instrument issued by a company has to be disclosed immediately, in line with Sebi's regulations.

An early disclosure can act as an early warning system, which can help investors make considered decisions on whether to stay on or sell the stock and exit, cutting their losses. In the current scenario, a meltdown such as those at IL&FS, DHFL, or PMC Bank, can leave many investors flustered. It is also expected that the move will lead to greater credit discipline in the banking industry.

How change came

The mountain of bad loans especially with state-owned banks, and their non-disclosure, nudged regulators towards addressing the root cause rather than merely the symptom. In July 2015, the Reserve Bank of India launched Asset Quality Review (AQR) to assess the true state of bank loans. Many lenders — including large private banks — were in the habit of "evergreening" loans, i.e., providing fresh funds to borrowers just before the repayment date in order to ensure that loans were not classified as bad.

For Sebi, the concern was the grant of frequent waivers on its own rules to government-owned banks when they raised money

from institutional investors through Qualified Institutional Placements or QIPs. These weren't genuine placements of securities to investors — rather, it was the LIC or the government putting in money, as many investors remained unaware of the real state of the banks. And there was little incentive for the banks or the government to correct this.

From a day to 30 days

Sebi's August 4, 2017 circular made it mandatory for listed corporates to disclose default within a day of the event. It can be argued that had the circular been implemented, investors would have been made aware of the troubled state of some of India's top corporate groups and firms, which were referred to the insolvency court in 2018. The pushback by powerful groups led to the regulator jettisoning the rule without giving reasons. In internal discussions before the original circular was issued, some Sebi officials had pointed out that 30 days was the norm for corporate bonds.

The other argument in favour of 30 days could be uniformity in regulatory rules. In its famous circular of February 12, 2018, the RBI had directed banks to start the process of resolution or restructuring of a loan even if the

default was for only a day. After the April 2, 2019 ruling of the Supreme Court striking down the circular, the RBI revised its rule in June — offering a 30-day window to classify an account as a Non Performing Account.

Sebi's November 21 circular could be seen either as a sign of regulatory synergy with the RBI, or as a nod to a more pragmatic approach.

The challenge now

In 2017, Sebi backed off at the last minute on implementing the disclosure norms on default. However, 2018 and 2019 have seen the collapse of several storied corporates. Much of what was known before they went into bankruptcy was based on anecdotal evidence with credit rating agencies way behind the curve.

The erosion of faith could be detrimental to fuelling fresh investment. In India, the tightening of rules often happens in the aftermath of a scam or under public pressure, after investors have been short-changed. Last time, the regulator blinked; this time the challenge for both Sebi and the government is to hold firm. If they do that, they will at least be able to tell investors and other stakeholders from January next year that they had been forewarned.

Punjab groundwater crisis: what it will take to move from paddy to maize

ANJU AGNIHOTRI CHABA

JALANDHAR, NOVEMBER 27

AS THE discussion around Punjab's massive groundwater crisis becomes more urgent, there is an increasingly stronger accent on diversification of crops, and a move away from water-guzzling paddy.

At a meeting over the weekend, Punjab Agricultural University (PAU), Ludhiana, decided to strengthen maize — the most important alternative to rice — by working towards narrowing the gap in economic returns between the two crops. The idea is to nudge farmers towards increasing the area under maize.

Over 70% of blocks in Punjab are in the dark zone on underground water stocks, according to central government estimates. At current rates of depletion, Punjab's entire subsurface water resource could be exhausted in a little over two decades.

To conserve the resource, the Punjab government brought a law in 2009 to mandatorily delay transplantation of paddy beyond June 10, when the most severe

phase of evapotranspiration is over. This law has been blamed for creating the bad air crisis of North India — especially Delhi — by delaying harvesting to end-October and early November, when atmospheric and wind conditions cause particulate matter and gases from burning paddy stubble to hang close to the surface.

So how area is under maize cultivation?

Of the 42-odd lakh hectares under cultivation in Punjab, maize was grown on 1.60 lakh hectares this year — just 3.8%. Since 2000, the area under maize has varied between 1.09 lakh and 1.63 lakh hectares every year.

The area under maize in Punjab is only 1.6% of the total area under the crop in India (98 lakh hectares). Nearly 46% of India's maize area is in the peninsular states of Karnataka, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh. Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra too, have large areas under maize.

In Punjab, maize can be grown in three seasons — spring (March-June), rabi (December-April) and kharif (June-October). Kharif is the state's main maize season. There



CM Amarinder Singh looks at maize exhibits at PAU, Ludhiana. Gurmeet Singh

is need to increase the area under kharif maize, which is also the paddy season. Spring maize is grown on around 25,000 hectares, but the crop is not promoted due to its long duration, and because it consumes water during the hot summer days.

And what is the minimum that must be brought under maize if Punjab wants

to effectively diversify from paddy?

Experts say the area under non-basmati paddy must be cut by at least 12 lakh hectares, and maize, basmati, and cotton must be grown on this land — besides increasing the area under agro-forestry and vegetables. Non-basmati paddy is currently grown on 23-26 lakh hectares.

At least 5.50 lakh hectares should pass under maize, the experts say — an addition of about 4 lakh hectares. Under its New Diversification Policy launched in the 2013 kharif season, the SAD-BJP government had, in fact, aimed to bring around 5.50 lakh hectares under maize by 2017-18. However, data from the agriculture department show that the area under the crop has remained largely stagnant. Fluctuating prices of maize have been a disincentive for farmers.

Will the strengthening of PAU's maize programme help in diversification?

Sixteen PAU-recommended high-yield varieties are already sown in Punjab. Long-duration varieties take 95-100 days, and short-duration ones 80-85 days. Farmers also grow several hybrid varieties devel-

oped by various companies.

"All these varieties give high yields of around 25 quintals per acre in the kharif season. More high-yield varieties can be developed, but that won't guarantee an increase in area under maize unless government policy supports the marketing of the crop," a senior PAU scientist said.

Unlike paddy and wheat, which are procured by the government, maize is sold in the open market and is subject to the actions of private players. Maize is one of 24 crops for which the government fixes a minimum support price, but procurement is not its responsibility; this is because maize is primarily a "feed" crop — of the 28 million tonnes produced in India, only 13% is consumed as food.

What can the government do in this situation?

Agricultural scientists strongly feel that along with developing more high-yield and good varieties of maize for which there is a demand in the market, the government must stop free power for paddy in order to disincentivise its cultivation and check the

overexploitation of underground aquifers. A very large number of tubewells (more than 14 lakh in 2015-16) running on free power pump out virtually endless amounts of water across the state.

According to the scientists, the government could also earmark a portion of the MSP budget for maize, so that a fund is created from which farmers can be compensated in case the price of maize falls below what has been fixed by the centre government. "Making such a policy is not a big deal for the government," a senior scientist said. "The budget will remain the same, it will only be apportioned better."

Agricultural economist Sardara Singh Johl, however, argued for creating conditions for farmers to move voluntarily away from paddy rather than the government making policy. "The government does not need to make any policy for diversification if it gets a market for low water-consuming crops, and a good price for such crops. Farmers will themselves go for such crops without the government's efforts," Dr Johl said. Efforts to fix area for diversification have failed in the past, he said.



The Indian EXPRESS

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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

New look BJP, old Congress

Maharashtra shows the BJP is fast becoming that which it claimed to stand in opposition to



GIRISH KUBER

FROM SENA TO PARTY

Shiv Sena comes to power with a lot of unsavoury baggage. Being in power presents it with an opportunity

UDDHAV THACKERAY'S ASCENT to the chief minister's office in the most extraordinary of circumstances marks a moment of rupture in Maharashtra's political history. The mandate in the October election was, arguably, for the Hindutva alliance comprising the BJP and the Sena. However, the two ideological and political allies for over a quarter century could not agree on government formation and the events thereafter forced a realignment of political forces. The contingencies of managing a coalition that includes the NCP and Congress, long-standing foes of the Sena, have propelled its chief, who has no prior legislative or administrative experience, to chief ministership. The Thackeray family has controlled the levers of government in 1995-99 and 2014-19 from the outside. Interestingly, that power this time seems to be vested, most of all, in Sharad Pawar, the architect of the Sena-NCP-Congress government in Mumbai. His presence will loom large over the alliance the Sena leads, a situation the party is not used to. Moreover, as leader of the coalition, the Sena may also have to recalibrate its politics and accommodate the interests of its allies if the government is to last the full term.

It is an irony of the current situation in Maharashtra that the Sena, infamous for using unconstitutional and strong-arm methods, has been seen to speak for the Constitution and its principles in the past few weeks, even as its former partner, the BJP disregarded constitutional propriety in its pursuit of power. Yet, even in this moment and especially in this moment, the Sena's inglorious past cannot be glossed over. Since Bal Thackeray founded it in 1966, it has come to symbolise some of the worst tendencies in Indian politics, including regional chauvinism and anti-minorityism. In its early years, the Sena was seen as a lumpen outfit that championed ethnic pride and targeted the Left trade unions in Bombay. As it grew and Bombay ceased to have an organised working class movement, the party came closer to the BJP, embraced the Hindutva ideology and joined the Ram Janmabhoomi movement. The virulent anti-Muslim edge of its mobilisations and the vanguard role it played in the 1992 Bombay riots, documented extensively in the Justice Srikrishna Commission report, transformed the Sena from being a regional chauvinist outfit to a majoritarian and communal group.

The Sena under Uddhav seems conscious that its nativist agenda is losing its appeal among even its traditional voters and that the Hindutva space is now fully occupied by the BJP. Whether or not it feels compelled to refashion and reinvent itself as a ruling party, it can be said that it now has the opportunity. Both the Sena and its chief will be watched closely for how they use, or misuse, it.

A BLEAK WARNING

UNEP Emissions Gap report is a serious indictment of how little has been done to combat and contain climate change

THE 10TH UN Environment Programme Emissions Gap report, released on Tuesday, is blunt: "The summary findings are bleak", it says. The annual report compares the direction in which global greenhouse gas emissions are headed vis-a-vis where they ideally need to be if the world is to avoid the worst scenarios. Alarmingly, global emissions have been increasing by approximately 1.5 per cent per year for the past decade, the report notes. That means temperature increases of nearly 4°C by 2100 or "wide-ranging and destructive climate impacts". Even if all emissions promises by countries are met, the world will still be warmer by more than double the 1.5 degree-target by 2100.

Many countries across the world can testify to the bleakness that has set in on the issue. Just this month, the regional council in Italy's Veneto region, which includes Venice, reportedly rejected policy amendments that were being introduced to tackle climate change. The same day, the council's chamber was inundated by flood waters, a member, Andrea Zanoni, revealed in a Facebook post. The symbolism would not be lost on countries across the world. California and Australia were ravaged by major wildfires and bushfires a few months ago. Such massive fires have become so rampant that, internationally, countries have started competing for plane and helicopter contracts to douse domestic fires. The EU has developed a reserve fund this year for firefighting aircraft with contracts that allow deployments across international borders. Last month, a study published in Nature warned that the number of people inhabiting low-lying regions that will flood annually — as the world heats up and ocean levels rise — is three times higher than was previously thought: Approximately 300 million people worldwide will be at risk by 2050.

In this backdrop, the findings of the emissions report are yet another stark warning and a serious indictment of how little has been done to contain climate change. Fifteen of the 20 wealthiest nations have no timeline for net zero target GHG emissions. Just three nations — India, Russia and Turkey — are on track to achieving their emissions plans. However, the report notes, this is because the targets they set for themselves under the Paris Agreement were too low to begin with. The role of the US, particularly, assumes significance: It has started the process to pull out of the Paris Climate Agreement, while, reportedly, its energy-related carbon dioxide emissions have seen a sharp spike in 2018 under President Trump. This is after previous years of gradual decline. One silver lining, as the report notes: Climate protests by young people, who are making it an issue beyond politics, in their efforts to secure a better future for all.

PLAYING TO WIN

Even as Russia confronts allegations of doping, the world of sports must know the menace goes deeper and wider

A WORLD ANTI-DOPING Agency committee has recommended suspending Russia from international sporting competitions, including next year's Olympics, over manipulations in an athlete doping probe which started after accusations of Russian state-sponsored doping were first exposed at Sochi Winter Games in 2014. With patience fast running out, the WADA committee has called for a four-year suspension of Russia from international competition and a decision is likely on December 9.

The continuing ban on Russian track and field since 2015 has started wearing down its defiance in the face of damning evidence. Legends like Yelena Isinbayeva have lamented that "there are more honest and clean athletes than lying and irresponsible ones... so why is it that we still can't seem to separate these two groups — the honest from the deceitful?" While Russia hurtles towards a reckoning, global sport is fighting for its credibility with viewer interest dipping as more revelations of cheating get outed and existing sanctions fail to deter Russia. However, no one is deluded into thinking Russia are the only offenders. All the top sporting nations have had their brushes with dope cheats.

The most diabolical one involves investigation into Nike and a programme run by its celebrated coach, Salazar, who guided Mo Farah to multiple Olympic victories. Kenya, a track and field giant, is also under a cloud. Russia can't be faulted for thinking it is also being targeted for unrelated geopolitical grouses, including those related to alleged interference in elections of other countries. But clean bodies are the bedrock of sporting credibility, and that's why WADA is trying desperately to contain the apparent Russian menace.

THE PAST FEW weeks of political upheaval in Maharashtra have two important take-aways. First, that the BJP leadership, which kept projecting itself as an "outsider" to Delhi, has perfectly adapted to the Delhi culture and, second, the BJP's rapid Congressisation.

First, about the BJP's Delhi-centric handling of various states. It was in 1978 that Sharad Pawar broke away from the Congress's Vasantdada Patil government in the state to become chief minister at the age of 37. Pawar, then, belonged to Congress (Urs) which was formed by veteran Congressmen like Yashwantrao Chavan and Devaraj Urs, then Karnataka chief minister, who had left Indira Gandhi after her debacle in the post-Emergency elections. A senior minister in the Patil ministry, Pawar sensed the opportunity and grabbed power with the help of the Janata Party that also had the Jan Sangh — the earlier avatar of the BJP — and socialists together.

Unlike the Janata Party experiment, Sharad Pawar had offered a stable and efficient government in Maharashtra. However, the Janata Party experiment was a failure and Indira Gandhi was back in the 1980 elections as prime minister. The first thing she did was to dismiss the Pawar government in Maharashtra. She couldn't tolerate the young regional leader's challenge to her. That was Pawar's first brush with the Centre.

The second was when Sushilkumar Shinde, Vilasrao Deshmukh and others rebelled against him after Pawar's not-so-strong victory in the 1990 state assembly election. The revolt had the tacit support of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi who wanted to clip Pawar's wings. It served the purpose. Pawar was weakened. The third and final point of friction that Pawar had with the Congress's central leadership was in 1991, as he took a shot at the prime ministership after Rajiv Gandhi's assassination. Narasimha Rao, more experienced in understanding the Delhi dy-

namics, out-manoeuvred Pawar.

In all this, Maharashtra always had a grudge against Delhi — that it tramples upon regional sentiments and ignores, or humiliates, regional leaders. For the Congress, it soon became the template, which was evident in the way it handled various state satraps, be it NT Rama Rao of Andhra Pradesh, Ramakrishna Hegde of Karnataka, Devi Lal of Haryana or Yashwantrao Chavan of Maharashtra. In fact, it was this insensitive, Big Brotherly attitude of the Congress that gave rise to many regional parties all over India.

The saffron party's approach in handling both parties, first the Shiv Sena and then the NCP, was like that of the Congress and its methods were not just unwise but politically incorrect too. The BJP didn't even realise that being dismissive of these outfits has, in fact, resulted in the party blinding itself and offers limited elbow room, necessary in a tightly-strung political atmosphere. This put the process of Congressisation of the BJP on the fast track. The only difference between the two, however, is that while it took the Congress over 60 years to earn the hatred of almost every political outfit in the country, the BJP seems to be reaching there in just around six years.

The BJP's behaviour over the past 5-6 years is the same as that of the Congress of the Eighties and Nineties. The saffron party's approach in handling both parties, first the Shiv Sena and then the NCP, was like that of the Congress and its methods were not just unwise but politically incorrect too. The BJP didn't even realise that being dismissive of these outfits has, in fact, resulted in the party blinding itself and offers limited elbow room, necessary in a tightly-strung political atmosphere.

This put the process of Congressisation of the BJP on the fast track, the second take-away of the just concluded saga. The only difference between the two, however, is that while it took the Congress over 60 years to earn the hatred of almost every political outfit in the country, the BJP seems to be reaching there in just around six years.

The self-goal the BJP scored in Mumbai is nothing short of spectacular. Ahead of the recent assembly elections, the BJP seemed comfortably on its way to a second term. Devendra Fadnavis was certain, it appeared, to retain his grip on the saddle. The stage was set for the continuation of saffron rule in India's richest state. But BJP leaders' Delhi-centric vision changed its fortune.

It began with a slew of mindless defections, a la Congress style, ahead of elections. The BJP imported a number of discredited

leaders from parties hitherto labeled by it as corrupt. Most of the leaders were either from the Congress or the NCP. And some like Ajit Pawar, whom former Chief Minister Fadnavis had relentlessly targeted as someone who deserved to be in jail. Ajit Pawar was at the centre of the BJP's attacks in this campaign. Incidentally, it was the same Ajit Pawar with whom Fadnavis later tried to form the government, displaying all the signs of hubris and brazenness reminiscent of the Congress.

Also coming into question, as of now, though in hushed tones, is the BJP's style of functioning. The Congress had its high-command and powers to take a final decision always rested with its First Family. The BJP may not have either but there are very few individuals — probably less than a handful — involved in the final decision-making. Peeved by the seemingly unstoppable defections into the party, one very senior party functionary, clueless about the goings-on in the party recently, felt so helpless that he thought of staying away from elections.

Another common factor between the new-look BJP and the old Congress is its complete disregard towards the party's local units. Many in the state BJP were averse to some of the things that eventually turned out to be the party's nemesis in the current assembly elections, for example, importing various leaders from other parties or engineering defections in the NCP. But there was no one to take note of these local leaders as the Delhi leadership was busy plotting a power grab through any means possible.

This could be a paradox of our democracy. On the one hand, we have our own GOP in the Congress which is caught in a time warp and on the other is the BJP, which tries harder and harder to look different from the Congress but ends up looking more and more like it.

The writer is editor, LokSatta



AHILAN KADIRGAMAR

IN GOTABAYA'S LANKA

Many fear the rise of majoritarian sentiment

LESS THAN A fortnight after Sri Lanka's November 16 presidential elections, the country is faced with two realities. One, a new regime buoyed by its triumphant support base and eager to consolidate an iron political grip. Second, a political opposition in utter disarray, with some citizens consumed by anxiety.

Gotabaya Rajapaksa's ascent to the presidency has made his supporters euphoric that the country is finally on the path of security, development and prosperity. On the other hand, the UNP, whose candidate Sajith Premadasa lost with over 42 per cent of the votes, is in shambles. Instead of mounting a strong oppositional force, the party has descended to infighting over leadership.

These dynamics of power consolidation and political disarray in the two main political camps and unbridled triumphalism and widespread fear across the voter divide are threatening the significant democratic space gained over the last five years.

In this scenario, critics of the Rajapaksa and more broadly, Sri Lanka's Muslim and Tamil minorities that voted overwhelmingly against Gotabaya, are paralysed by fear, as the majoritarian rule they dreaded is before them.

Following the presidential election, an interim government with a new cabinet of ministers is in place, with the president's brother Mahinda as the prime minister. But it is the upcoming parliamentary elections that will determine the balance of power to rule the country over the next five years. The regime will eye a two-thirds majority in parliament, necessary for major constitutional changes.

At immediate risk after the parliamentary elections are the 13th and 19th amendments to the Constitution — for power-sharing and democratic checks on executive power. Both amendments were rushed into existence for

political expediency, and both are broadly seen to be incomplete.

However, any change to them by the Rajapaksa regime are likely to be deemed regressive.

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka's political economic trajectory is shifting gears, but without considering the many lost opportunities in the post-war decade. And as the country's economic troubles aggravate amidst a global downturn, will the new government learn from previous failures? Or, will they opt to address long-festering political and economic woes by consolidating authoritarian populist power?

In this context, the months ahead are crucial not only for strengthening parliamentary opposition, but also checking the military's role in civilian life and ensuring the independence of the judiciary and media. It is also the time to bolster dissent that can withstand the authoritarian juggernaut.

While a decisive election victory might make a leader seem invincible, much of the strength and stability of his new government will depend on how it addresses the economic crisis. Since the Easter terror attacks, state revenues have dropped drastically, prompting austerity measures and across-the-board cuts on state investment. Sri Lanka's trickling economic growth, rising foreign debt, disregard for domestic production and neglect of the rural economy, are going to be major challenges. Neither the president's technocratic champions nor the prime minister's populist measures are going to solve these problems.

How, then, will the new government consolidate power? It will be a combination of the president's authoritarian moves, veiled in the promise of technocratic efficiency and seem-

ing aloofness from politics, and the prime minister's hard-nosed political moves in parliament, with populist manoeuvring. The dual power centre will try to discipline and disable the judiciary, media and people's movements. They will seek validation from their long-nurtured nationalist social base, may re-activate the security apparatus for surveillance and crackdowns, and lean on the most forthcoming external actors for financial support — be it India, China, the US or the capital markets.

Therefore, the need of the hour is dissent — in parliament, in the public sphere, and within communities. If polarising and dividing form the mechanics of consolidating power, it is through bridging divides and uniting people — across ethnic and religious groups — that resistance can hold.

Ideologically, the first wall of defence should be against the Islamophobic forces that have gained traction among the majority population. Politically, dissident parliamentarians should find the wherewithal to protect the hard-won liberal freedoms. Organisationally, trade unions and movements should prepare to struggle against the neo-liberal transmutation of their social and economic life.

In Sri Lanka, with the longest history of universal suffrage in Asia, every election excites the nation, and that will be the case with the upcoming parliamentary polls. Turning the democratic clock back may not work for even the craftiest authoritarian populist regimes, but that also depends on the reconfiguration of oppositional parliamentary forces and more importantly, galvanising resistance.

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NOVEMBER 28, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

QUITTING CONGRESS UNION INDUSTRIES MINISTER K Brahmananda Reddy quit the Congress Party as well as the caretaker government. Reddy, who presided over the Congress at the time of the 1978 split which occurred because of sharp differences with Indira Gandhi's group in the organisation, is likely to join the Congress (I) in the next few days. Ankineedu Prasad Rao, minister of state for civil aviation, and a staunch supporter of Reddy, also resigned from the party and the government later in the same evening. President N Sanjeeva Reddy accepted the resignations of both Reddy and Rao on the advice of the prime minister.

GODAVARI SHARING MAHARASHTRA HAS BEEN allowed the use of all the waters of the Godavari up to the Paithan Dam site under the award of the Godavari Waters Tribunal. The tribunal's report was submitted to the government, ending the long-standing dispute of the basin states — Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa — over sharing of the waters of the largest river of the South. Maharashtra's share would include Pravara sub-basin and waters up to certain specified dam sites in the other river system in the Maharashtra area. In addition, Maharashtra has been allotted 215 tmc in the various sub-basins for other projects and mi-

nor irrigation schemes. Karnataka has been allocated 17.77 tmc.

US HOSTAGES IN IRAN AYATOLLAH RUHOLLAH KHOMEINI declared that the 49 American hostages will be put on trial for spying in the US embassy in Teheran, where they have been kept for the past 24 days. In a statement broadcast by the state radio, Khomeini said Iran would reject any decision reached by the UN Security Council as dictated by the United States. The Iranian leader's statement came a few hours before the Council was due to meet in New York, to consider the deepening US-Iran crisis.

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"How can a government (in Pakistan) that loses no chance to portray itself as a champion of ordinary citizens rush to Musharraf's defence?" —DAWN

The moral promise of 1989

Velvet Revolution embraced the Gandhian ethics of responsibility and commitment to human dignity. It had far-reaching consequences



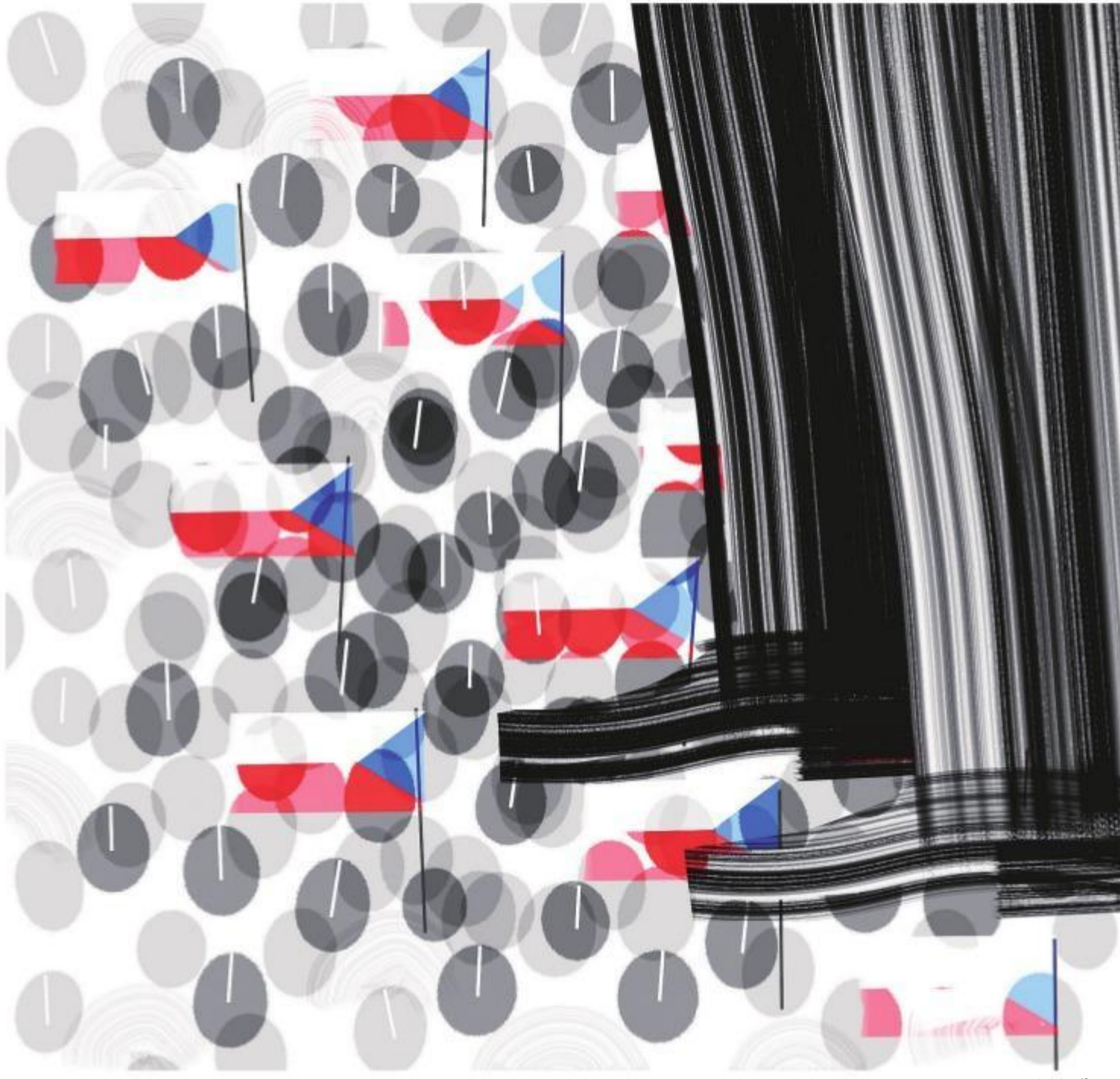
RAMIN JAHANBEGLOO

NOVEMBER 17 MARKED the 30th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution organised by the Czech Civic Forum and the Slovak public against one of the last Soviet-orbit regimes. The Velvet Revolution (sametová revoluce) was a non-violent transition of power in what was then Czechoslovakia. The Czech and Polish experiences of democracy have shown that democratisation in Eastern Europe took place less within the framework of the existing state systems than at the level of civil societies. When the Czech and Polish dissidents of the 1980s were struggling against their communist authoritarian regimes, they returned to the concept of civil society. What Eastern European intellectuals and civic actors understood by civil society was not just the 18th century concept of the rule of law, but also the notion of horizontal self-organised groups and institutions in the public sphere that could limit the power of the state by constructing a democratic space separate from state and its ideological institutions.

Before 1989 and the rise of liberal values in Eastern Europe, many observers argued about the weakness of the civil societies in the region. This perspective forgot two things. First, the sheer ruthlessness of communist regimes that refused civic dissent any room to manoeuvre: No free trade unions, no real opposition, no free press, no tolerance of even a hint of dissidence. Second, the miracle that stubborn civil societies did persist in countries like Poland and Czechoslovakia — even after decades of Stalinist rule, students, intellectuals and artists continued their work and helped to lay the ground for the democratic revolt.

Moreover, the Czech experience showed us that even within a totalitarian society, a basis for "civic pluralism" can be created. Although other forms of civility existed in East European societies, this civic pluralism — with roots in a philosophical reading of pluralism, in opposition to ideological "monism" — offered a rich model for those dissidents seeking to make democratic change sustainable. Not surprisingly, dissidents like Adam Michnik in Poland and Vaclav Havel in Czechoslovakia opened spaces for new civil and democratic politics in Eastern Europe. Charter 77, the Czechoslovak manifesto for human rights, issued in January 1977 by Havel, Jan Patocka and Jiri Hájek, paved the way to the events of the "Velvet Revolution" of November 17, 1989. Havel's political philosophy was marked by notions such as "truth", "conscience", "responsibility" and "civility". His emphasis on the acknowledgment of truth as an essential value arose from his concern with what he called "living in truth" in a post-totalitarian state. Havel insisted in his writings that, "Individuals need not accept the lie. It is enough for them to have accepted their life with it and in it." So, the problem for Havel was to confront political power by inviting people to live in truth and justice, and for decency.

As such, Havel showed brilliantly how the system successfully captures the lived experience of individuals in a post-totalitarian state by giving them the illusion of being part of a silent contract. That is why, for Havel, not becoming a player in the game of a post-totalitarian state was an embryonic act of dissent.



C R Sasikumar

What was important was defending one's dignity and regaining one's sense of responsibility. This was clearly a moral act, which was defined by Havel as "living within truth". Havel analysed the essence of living within truth while examining the various dimensions of what he called "the power of the powerless". He affirmed: "When I speak of living within truth, I naturally do not have in mind only products of conceptual thought, such as a protest or a letter written by a group of intellectuals. It can be any means by which a person or a group revolts against manipulation: Anything from a letter by intellectuals to a workers' strike, from a rock concert to a student demonstration, from refusing to vote in the farcical elections, to making an open speech at some official congress, or even a hunger strike."

In thinking about the Velvet Revolution of 1989, one wonders whether existing paradigms are even adequate, or if new ones are required to make sense of this landmark event. Thirty years later, we still need to ask about the nature of its vision and the scope of its demands. Was it reformist or revolutionary, or perhaps 'refolutionary' as Timothy Garton Ash had suggested. The truth is that Havel and all those involved in the movement of 1989 did not aim to neutralise communist power with a new autocratic power but absorbed the violence of the regime, and then redirected that energy against it.

The Czech protestors of 1989 resuscitated the technique of "political jiu-jitsu", a gentle art of subtlety, which was first popularised

In thinking about the Velvet Revolution of 1989, one wonders whether existing paradigms are even adequate, or if new ones are required to make sense of this landmark event. Thirty years later, we still need to ask about the nature of its vision and the scope of its demands. Was it reformist or revolutionary, or perhaps 'refolutionary' as Timothy Garton Ash had suggested. The truth is that Havel and all those involved in the movement of 1989 did not aim to neutralise communist power with a new autocratic power but absorbed the violent attacks of the regime, and turned them against it.

by Gene Sharp, an American theorist of non-violent activism, who was influenced by the Gandhian satyagraha. Regardless of whether Havel got this tactic from Sharp or directly from the Asian martial art, or invented it on his own, he was very creative in his use of a new grammar of politics.

Let us not forget that the strategies of non-violent resistance, dissent and non-cooperation suggested by Havel were presented by him as different ontological modes of living within truth. They became successful in 1989 by echoing an ethical dimension of politics in all of Eastern Europe. Havel's call to concepts such as conscience and civility, attributed a more ethical foundation to the civic humanist movement of 1989. Though very European in essence, it is undeniable that the democratic movement envisaged by Havel and the members of Charter 77 was born out of a Gandhian grammar of "ethicalisation of politics".

The Velvet Revolution of 1989 embraced the Gandhian ethics of responsibility and his commitment to human dignity, while insisting on the inherent fragility of human existence and the frailty of the human political condition. Therein lies the originality of the Velvet Revolution of 1989 and the work of its moral leaders, both in confronting the realism of political power and speaking the truth beyond the national and the cultural frontiers by picking the right moral and political alternative.

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Misreading the new elite

Tavleen Singh gets it wrong. Prime Minister Modi did not create the parivartan. He is a product of it



ABHINAV PRAKASH SINGH

IN HER SUNDAY column ('India's new elite', IE, November 24), Tavleen Singh raised a pertinent point about the country's elite. But her column descended into rhetoric, betraying the pre-conceived notions of the author and her disconnect with society. The elite that has dominated India over the last century was a product of the colonial era, derived largely from the upper echelons of the society. This elite did not just retain power after Independence — its influence, in fact, was perpetuated during Congress rule. The Congress raj was the hegemony of the urban upper-castes, ruling in alliance with feudal elements in the countryside that belonged to the local dominant castes.

The "failure" to substantially alter agrarian relations, despite both social and economic reality demanding such a change, and instead settling for half-hearted tenancy reforms passed off as land reforms, was aimed at preserving the status quo. On the other hand, five-year plans reinforced the economic and social distance between the lower and upper castes, the latter leaping into the modern economy due to higher social and educational capital.

The focus on heavy industrialisation instead of mass manufacturing and the "failure" to promote mass education made the five-year plans, plans of the elites, by the elites, and for the elites. These "temples of modern India" stood as islands amidst the sea of masses surrounding them, even as the temples of old India were thrown open to them. They had neither the education nor the skills for those industries as the focus was on building elite enclaves of IITs and not mass education. In Nehruvian India, the difference between the upper castes and lower castes was increasingly overlaid with the divide between a highly-productive modern sector and a low-productive traditional sector of the economy.

Nehruvian India thrived by blocking socio-economic mobility of the masses, except in matters of token representation like reservations. It was violent, with agrarian elites running amok enforcing *begar*, grabbing land and capturing booths during elections. Caste violence and discrimination was so endemic that it wasn't even taken seriously except for the occasional political posturing. The urban elites discussed the great questions of the day like "Can the subaltern speak?" while remaining oblivious to the cries of misery sur-

rounding them. All the while perpetuating the same policies and structures that denied India its tryst with destiny.

It was only after the economic reforms in the 1990s that the situation began to change. A new class of people emerged from smaller cities and towns which was not part of the old landed agrarian elite nor of the bureaucratic and political patronage system of "Lutyens". Tens of millions, especially Dalits and Shudras, fled from the villages to the burgeoning urban centres in what was one of the greatest migrations in human history and, simultaneously, an act of liberation. Some of them have done well for themselves and it is not uncommon today to see social diversity in urban spaces, from apartment complexes to offices. This is what is driving the great social flux we see today. This new urban middle class is what Tavleen Singh mistakenly calls the new elites "entirely made of lower origins and caste". And yes, this class is nationalistic because it is not cut-off from its roots. It belongs to "somewhere" and not "anywhere" and thus naturally tilts towards the "Desh and Dharma". There is now an assertion of the pride in religious identity that comes with economic and material progress.

But trapped in the echo chambers of Twitter, Singh derides them as regressive, as those who rage against people who speak English, even though English is the most sought after language by them. She accuses them of rejecting "books that come from foreign lands" when even a cursory glance at the "Hindu nationalist" Twitter reveals that they extensively quote from the Japanese, German and Chinese scholars and not just from the Anglosphere. She accuses them of wanting Hindu supremacy when they are busy celebrating "chhath puja", enjoying the open expression of public religiosity after centuries without fear, and at worst, asking for the same constitutional rights/exemptions accorded to minority religions. That she accuses them of disdain for eating meat and drinking wine only shows further social disconnect.

Singh blames them for being blind supporters of Narendra Modi when they are amongst the first to erupt in outrage against the government on policy and ideological issues. The prime minister didn't create this "parivartan", as she calls it. Instead, he is a product of the "parivartan" that created this class — economic transformation, democratic deepening and social assertion. But, his policies of universal provision of health, electricity, and social security will certainly end up creating the foundations for the rise of this new class from among those who are still at the margins. And there is no reason why it would subscribe to the values and aesthetics of the "good old India".

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MAHA DRAMA

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'A saving grace' (IE, November 27). The rash attempt by Devendra Fadnis to form the government by relying on the support of 54 NCP MLAs offered by Ajit Pawar and the consequent drama displays his political immaturity. Although the attempt was bound to fail, the alternative grouping of Shiv Sena-NCP-Congress does not present a better scenario. It is an unholy alliance of arch rivals. It is a classic example of opportunism where the only aim of rivals joining hands is to deprive the BJP from forming the government. This is political chicanery with the people of Maharashtra.

Ram Mathur, Ghaziabad

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'A saving grace' (IE, November 27). While it is fair to apportion the maximum blame on the BJP in the entire episode, being the largest national party and ruling party at the Centre, one must not forget that the voters of Maharashtra had voted for the BJP-Shiv Sena alliance. It was Shiv Sena's unfair insistence (with about half as many seats as the BJP) on CM-ship that led to the collapse of BJP-Shiv Sena alliance. The Shiv Sena then sought to get support from parties opposed to its own ideology, solely with an eye on the CM's post.

Anoop Srivastava, Greater Noida

SAVING DEMOCRACY

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Checkmated by the Constitution' (IE, November 27). Political parties should stay true to the principles that uphold the Constitution while making any move in the process of government for-

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.

Misuse of constitutional positions like that of the governor was evident in this Maharashtra drama by the BJP. The fabric of Indian democracy must not be shattered.

Pranali Kulkarni, via email

SEBI MUST-DOS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Seize the scam' (IE, November 27). Karvy Stock Broking is a 36-year-old stock broking firm. And when it is found engaged in practices such as siphoning off a client's fund to its real estate business, then it creates a huge trust deficit amongst retail stock investors. What SEBI needs to do is differentiate between a trader and investor — the latter would certainly be invested in the process for a longer period of time, and people should not be asked to give power of attorney rights to their brokers. SEBI must also ensure that investors get their money back at the earliest.

Bal Govind, Noida



REETIKA KHERA

Smarter than Aadhaar

Viable solutions to PDS portability are being ignored in the push for Aadhaar

MIGRANTS' WOES ARE often invoked in making a case for portability of benefits in the public distribution system (PDS). Most recently, an article ('A hundred small steps', IE, September 26) did just that. However, in many cases of short-term seasonal migration (a dominant form in India), only one or two of the household members migrate, leaving the ration card behind for the rest of the family to use. What proportion of migrants would prefer to draw their ration at the place of work rather than in their village is a key piece of the puzzle in understanding the extent to which portability of PDS benefits is valued by migrants.

If the food security of migrants is the motivating concern, this need is probably better met by other initiatives such as Tamil Nadu's Amma canteens or Karnataka's Indira canteens, which provide heavily subsidised meals. Such community kitchens have quietly become popular across the country — Jharkhand's dal-bhaat kendras, Delhi's Jan Aahaar kiosks, and others in Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Chhattisgarh are such initiatives. Of course, protecting migrants from exploitation through stricter enforcement of their rights as labourers will go much further.

Currently, PDS entitlements are tied to

the recipient's place of residence. You can only draw PDS rations from the PDS outlet to which you are allocated. Thus, while a single-member household may be forced to forego her rations if she migrates, others would be able to claim benefits through those family members who stay back. A portable PDS would be a great facility for those who would like to draw their rations at the place of migration.

The promoters of portability make it seem as if it cannot be achieved without integrating Aadhaar with PDS. In 2012, the food department in Chhattisgarh took up the challenge of designing a portable PDS and launched "CORE PDS". Step one was to rejig the supply logistics. The norm today is for each PDS outlet to receive food supplies once a month according to the (fixed) number of ration cards attached to it. In a portable system, where the number of people who draw their grain at a PDS outlet fluctuates from month to month, the government needs to put in place a flexible supply system. The fix was simple: Chhattisgarh allowed more than one delivery of grain in a month. Since end-to-end computerisation had been achieved, stocks could be monitored. An automated system sent a message to the ration dealer as soon as the digitised

records showed that his stocks had fallen below a certain level, asking the dealer if he would like another delivery.

Step two was to give the ration card holders a smart card (like ATM cards) that could be used to draw rations at any CORE PDS outlet using a "point of sale" (POS) machine. Once the POS machine authenticates the smart card, sale can proceed. Offline sales were possible if server or connectivity issues arose. One-fifth of the transactions used the portability option, mostly within the ward. Convenience was the prime reason for switching shops — distance to the PDS, tenants who had moved residence, supplies running out. To cut a long story short, portability was achieved without Aadhaar.

CORE PDS was being gradually scaled up until Aadhaar came along and disrupted the process, even though smart cards are more reliable than fingerprint authentication. Chhattisgarh's CORE-PDS was more promising than the Aadhaar-Based Biometric Authentication (ABBA) that has left behind a trail of hardship, exclusion, even deaths since its integration with the PDS.

In 'A hundred small steps', the authors carefully sidestep the fact that Santoshi's death in Jharkhand was primarily the result of disruption that resulted from Aadhaar's in-

tegration with the PDS, as well as the fact that smart cards (tested in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry among other places) provide a better technology solution for the last mile authentication than Aadhaar. Readers must ask why that is the case.

One of the authors of the article worked with a minister in the UPA-2 government in the rural development ministry that pushed against repeated warnings — warnings that were later vindicated — the use of Aadhaar in NREGA and social security pensions. Before that, he had worked with the World Bank and Monitor Deloitte. After that, he joined Dalberg and is now with Omidyar Network. Omidyar Network's interest in the PDS and Aadhaar — it has funded research worth lakhs of rupees — should also arouse people's curiosity.

Independent research has raised troubling questions. The sugar and tobacco industry have gained notoriety for having done this in the past: Funding friendly research that cultivated doubts in people's minds about independent research that highlighted the harmful health effects of sugar and tobacco.

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