



## The Indian EXPRESS

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BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

# Once upon a time

There was another public, another India, reveals a new database of periodicals published between 1857-1947



PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

## A NEW LOW

Growth below 5 per cent indicates slowdown has intensified, calls attention to structural issues, better execution of remedies

**T**HE ECONOMIC SLOWDOWN is deeper than what has been thought so far. Growth has sunk to an over six-year low of 4.5 per cent in the second quarter of the current financial year, falling well below the psychological 5 per cent mark. The headline number, largely propped up by higher government spending, is well below the RBI's estimate of 5.3 per cent, signaling the severity of the slowdown. Nominal GDP growth came in at 6.1 per cent, almost half of what was expected in the Union budget. With high frequency indicators suggesting that the slowdown continues unabated — the eight core sectors contracted by 5.8 per cent in October — meeting even the revised RBI target of 6.1 per cent for the full year will be unlikely, despite the base effect kicking in.

Growth in the second quarter was largely driven by higher government spending. Public administration and defence, which is largely government spending, grew by a healthy 11.6 per cent in Q2FY20. Excluding it, gross value added by the economy grew by a mere 3.2 per cent. Manufacturing activity contracted, while construction and trade, hotels, transport and communication weakened further. The prospects going forward aren't any better. Government spending will come under pressure with its own revenues falling well short of expectations. Its gross tax revenues have grown by a mere 1.2 per cent so far (April to October), while the budget had pegged revenue growth at 18.3 per cent. The stress in government finances is already evident with the fiscal deficit (April to October) standing at 102.4 per cent of the full year target of Rs 7.04 lakh crore. Sticking to the fiscal deficit target would mean cuts in spending, further intensifying the slowdown. However, any deviation, financed by higher borrowings, would lead to a hardening of interest rates, negating the impact of the rate cuts by the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC).

The sharper than expected slowdown restricts the options before the MPC, which meets next week. While retail inflation has inched upwards, largely on the back of higher food prices, given the deviation in growth from its own estimates, the MPC should continue with its loose stance, and opt for bigger rate cuts. On its part, the government has announced a series of measures to arrest the slowdown. But these need to be followed up with quick execution. There is some talk about extending NBFCs a lifeline as was done in 2009. While this would help stimulate credit flow — RBI data attests to the severe slowdown in credit flow in the first half of this year — more needs to be done. Sector specific interventions will alleviate some of the pain, but for steady, and sustainable, growth, the deeper structural issues plaguing the economy need to be addressed.

## HER FREEDOMS

The continuing violence against women is a call for the state to act, reminder to continue conversation about power, patriarchy

**A**LAW STUDENT sits by the roadside with a friend; a vet is on the way back home on her scooter after work; a young woman watches a film and climbs a bus on a December night long ago — some of many humdrum, unexceptionable acts that make up an ordinary day in an ordinary life. But simply going about life can prove hazardous to life and safety, if you are an Indian woman — as two recent incidents show. The gang rape of the law student in Ranchi and the grisly murder and assault of a 27-year-old vet in Hyderabad illustrate how streets and highways turn toxic against women even in a city: How inexplicably often men inflict sexual violence on women as punishment. Both incidents recall the horror of December 16, 2012, when a gang of men brutalised a paramedic on one such ordinary day.

While a raft of legislation followed the upheaval in December — from expanding the definition of rape to lowering the age at which juveniles could stand trial to increasing endorsement of the death penalty as punishment — it is important to remember the rage which forced thousands of women to turn up in protest in Delhi then. They did so to demand an acknowledgment of their near-universal experience of sexual abuse; and to reclaim the public space that is denied to them by the ruse of safety and self-protection. No doubt, similar tactics will come into play for the women of Ranchi and Hyderabad. Worried parents will stop them from going out at night; they will be told to shrink their lives into narrower and narrower circles to pre-empt the actions of possible assaulters.

But as more and more women turn out to work, study and simply occupy public and private spaces with assertion, both governments and the larger society must be forced to a reboot. For law enforcement agencies, that means the culprits must be brought to book, that the process of justice should not doubly punish the Ranchi survivor. For the state governments, it implies that the push to make cities and towns safe for women's mobility, their entertainment, their freedom to simply be becomes the priority. For the larger society, the violence is a reminder to continue the difficult conversation about power and patriarchy, to not just train girls in self-defence but to teach boys empathy. Most important of all is the work that remains unfinished — of re-imagining women's freedoms beyond curfews, dress codes and propriety.

## HIGHWAY BLUES

With the FASTag, travellers on national highways gain in convenience, but lose just a little bit of the travel experience

**F**ROM DECEMBER 1, motorists across the country can zip across national highways, no longer bothered with hunting for change at every toll booth, thanks to the NHAI's FASTag. Using Radio Frequency Identification (RFID), the tag will ensure that the toll is automatically deducted from a pre-paid account or a bank account connected to it. But, as they cruise unencumbered across India, travellers may lose in terms of experience what they will gain in speed and convenience.

Outside big cities and their satellite towns, the "toll plaza" is more than just a spot to collect money. First, around every window are the guards, official and unofficial, to ensure that nobody gets away without paying. In case of jams and long lines, a slew of informal assistants to the money collector crop up, crowding around car windows to "pre-collect" the money to avoid congestion at the window. But, perhaps, most important of all is the mini-economy that crops up at these points — sellers of suspiciously bottled water appear from nowhere as do vendors of cut *kheera* and the local, seasonal fruits. There are roasted peanuts and popcorn to be had as well, and in parts of North India, many varieties of "mashoor shikanji". The only thing missing from the fair-ground atmosphere, unthinkingly defiant of the national narrative, are *pakodas*.

The collection of the under-employed and the small tradesman at the toll booth has been an anachronism for sometime now. The FASTag is a technology whose time was here sometime ago, and in the larger scheme of things, objections to it on grounds of nostalgia will be understandably ignored. Or dismissed as being Luddite. Yet, as they traverse the country, the big city folk ensconced in their air-conditioned cars will experience just a little less of the country. And, more often than not, a good shikanji is worth the wait.

**I**F YOU WANT to resist the will to simplicity, the flattening of public discourse, and the potential slide into barbarism that characterises our times, you could do worse than to turn to an astonishing new resource that has for the first time been made available to the public. Rahul Sagar, an academic at NYU, and his associates have laboriously created the single most comprehensive, and searchable, database of over three lakh articles published in all Indian periodicals published in India between 1857 and 1947. The database is *idea-sofindia.org*. This database is an astonishing act of public service. It conveys the sheer romance of what a love of ideas looks like, and the meticulous care that has to go into preserving access to them. The database is also a reminder of the way in which we have desecrated even our own recent past. Most of the amazing periodicals used in this are not available in India; and most are not accessible. It is almost as if the literal, physical rotting away of our recent heritage, is also a metaphor for the rotting away of our memories and our minds. We are obsessed with history, but not so much to deepen our understanding of how we came to be, but to ransack it for our purposes.

This database will almost certainly transform our understanding of India's past. It is an access to an amazingly vibrant public sphere that is deeply thoughtful and wide ranging. It is contentious but sincere and respectful. It is almost impossible to list the many profound ways in which perusing the lists of articles, let alone digging them up and reading them, will change your perspective on Indian intellectual history. The database is a reminder of the fact that the big contentious debates of Indian spiritual, political, economic and social life are not often accurately reflected in the big, and conventional figures we all study or distilled in books. They surface as powerful undercurrents in a variety of genres and forms. The database will broaden your sense of the ideological perspectives available to Indians, and the idioms in which they were expressed. For example, if you want access to a genuine conservative "Right", you might have to access a periodical called *Hindu Outlook*, *Brahmavadin* or *Arya* rather than Savarkar or Golwalkar. But your sense of the diversity of Left cultural en-

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gagement also will change. The preoccupations of the Indian public sphere are often surprising. You almost get the sense that India was intellectually far more preoccupied with the world than we had imagined: Indians debating everything from US immigration policy to geopolitics. The prehistories of all our debates, from corruption to representative government, from caste to labour, jump out in ways that suggest that we have made fewer advances in these areas than we think. The preoccupation with gender in these periodicals is truly striking. In short, this database gives you access to a society's process of acquiring self-knowledge in all its variety and sophistication. It was this conversation through which new India was stitched.

There is much to learn from this boundless ocean. But often, the most surprising things are the less known ones. Just two randomly chosen instances. The single best thing ever written on the idea of the university in India is Ashutosh Mukherjee's Convocation Address to Mysore University in 1916, and published in the now inaccessible *Dacca Review* (October 1918). It literally anticipates every single debate we have on the idea of the university — from finance to governance, from pedagogy to the romance of research — but with a rigour, insight and generosity that is a reminder of how small we have become. This should be compulsory reading for everyone concerned with higher education. Nothing written on the subject surpasses these few pages.

You will discover something new about the histories of disciplines in India — the early debates over development, the transformation of both Indian philosophy in India and the reception of Western philosophy, and of course, politics. It made it easier to, for example, follow the modern India debate over Sankara, or the reception of Hegel. You will find religion in the process of transformation.

But there are smaller sidelights. Here is a small vignette. One idiosyncratic figure who I discovered is a gentleman called Vasudeo Metta, an astonishing polymath. I had first been directed to him by Isaiah Berlin's *Personal Impressions*. There is an amusing story there about Berlin applying to Oxford.

His admission test required him to write an essay on "Bias in history." Berlin simply says that in his answer he "reproduced" an article with the same title by an Indian that had just been published by T S Eliot in *New Criterion*. It turns out from this archive that Metta wrote powerfully on every subject under the sun from geopolitics to culture, crossing swords with everyone from Eliot to Chesterton (who, in turn, provokes Gandhi). But what strikes you about him is not just his learning, but his confidence in taking on everything from what we now call Orientalism to European history with panache and confidence.

Such an archive is a cautionary tale at so many levels. It will cure you of hubris. Reading through the kinds of debates people were actually having knocks down more preconceptions than you can imagine. Seeing ideas in their full flow will cure you both of nostalgia and despair. Just a search on "corruption" and "communalism", for example, will remind you that human nature in India did not suddenly transform in 1947. It will remind you of how much subtle counter resistance there was to caste reform even as social reform currents were gathering speed. You see traditions, both Hindu and Islamic, being made and remade in front of your eyes.

At this moment, such an archive is of immense importance. Even amidst the disagreements, you will glimpse a right-wing that even as it is being reactionary, at least has some semblance of an argument; it is still intellectual and learned in the best sense of the term. You will see a Left, instead of rehearsing shibboleths, at least trying to understand what adapting radicalism to India means. And there is a whole mass of people, wrestling with liberal institutionalism — from representation to federalism, in all its complexity. And you will see lots of people defying easy categorisation. But most of all you see an intellectual culture that was far more self-confident, despite labouring under the burden of colonialism. It could openly embrace serious debate and act, as if the whole world was its oyster.

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## THE REIGN OF ISIS

Al-Baghdadi's caliphate was the most shameful phase of Islam known to history



KHALED AHMED

**P**RESIDENT DONALD TRUMP declared that on October 27, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the "caliph" of the terrorist organisation Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), killed himself in a hideout with a suicide jacket in the Idlib province of northeastern Syria, next to the Turkish border, when approached by a team of American commandos. His bodily remains were collected and thrown into the sea, a repeat of what was done to Osama bin Laden after he was killed by American commandos in Pakistan in 2011.

Al-Baghdadi created a caliphate in Syria-Iraq in 2014 under an interpretation of Islam that the Muslims had been nursing off and on as a rejectionist-nihilistic worldview: Kill the infidel and enslave their women and carry out a permanent jihad against whatever world order holds sway. He actually believed that Prophet Muhammad himself practiced this evil way of life and got non-Muslims to be looted and raped by his warriors. Al-Baghdadi killed Shias, a majority in his native Iraq, and enslaved an ancient Kurdish sect called Yazidi, using its women as sex-slaves. Around 5,000 "warriors", mostly interested in copulation arrived from foreign lands to join the caliphate, including girls from Europe to offer sex to the Muslim warriors as war-wives. This was the most shameful phase of Islam known to history: Attacks in 29 countries killed 2,043, mostly Muslims.

Look at this sex-fatwa: "Yazidi women and children (are to be) divided according to the Shariah amongst the fighters of the Islamic State who participated in the Sinjar operations (in northern Iraq)... Enslaving the families of the *kuffar* (infidels) and taking their women as concubines is a firmly established aspect of the Shariah that if one were to deny or mock, he would be denying or mocking the verses of the Quran and the narrations of the Prophet... and thereby apostatising from Islam." Many were attracted to the caliphate, including one "commander" from India who was recently killed in Afghanistan. In September 2015, in Pakistan, Khalid Cheema went to the police after his wife, Bushra, and their four children had gone missing from their home in Lahore's Johar Town. In October, Cheema finally heard from her. "I love God and his religion, and I want to die a martyr's death," she said in a voice message: "If you can't join us then at least pray your wife and children die in jihad." A minister in Lahore proudly asserted: "She is one of the 50 Pakistanis who left for Syria. France has admitted that 1,000 of its citizens have joined Islamic State, yet no one is accusing France of allowing ISIS to establish a network there." Many Pakistani cities boasted graffiti and banners from "inspired" citizens ready to go for the new orgy called jihad.

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is dead. And Islam as a religion has taken a beating unless Muslims sit back and rethink their faith after rejecting the exegetes interpreting their faith as jihad of savage cruelty and sex orgy.

had. A number of militant groups and radical organisations, including Islamabad's infamous Lal Masjid, pledged their support to the caliphate and its self-proclaimed caliph. The police in Karachi detained six women thought to be recruiting other women on behalf of ISIS; and police in Sialkot detained eight young men, previously affiliated with Jamaat-ud-Dawah of Hafiz Saeed of Mumbai attack fame, who were recruiting for ISIS. Police found weapons, explosives, and discs with IS literature from these men. A PEW Research Centre survey 2015 found that only 14 per cent Pakistanis thought ISIS was a threat. Around 62 per cent wouldn't give a clear opinion. The women who "defected" to the caliphate or ISIS were formerly members of Al Huda, a women's Islamic organisation, then much favoured by the upper-crust ladies of Pakistan. (Tashfeen Malik, the co-accused in the December 2015 shooting in San Bernardino, California, that left 14 dead and 22 wounded, was also once an Al Huda member.) Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is dead. And Islam as a religion has taken a beating unless Muslims sit back and rethink their faith after rejecting the exegetes interpreting their faith as jihad of savage cruelty and sex orgy.

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## NOVEMBER 30, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

**ALLIANCE WOES**  
THE STATEMENT OF Devaraj Urs that the Congress is not quitting the government is not the last word. Much depends on the outcome of the talks that have begun on the rapprochement between the Congress and the Janata. Some Congress leaders are keen on this. Swaran Singh and Rajni Patel met Jagjivan Ram in this regard. The fact that the Congress has expressed its willingness to leave the government fulfils the prerequisite indicated Jagjivan Ram for heading the party and could persuade him to lead the Congress. The Congress threatened to pull out of the Central government and the alliance if there was no settlement on the allocation of seats

in the forthcoming elections.  
**SEAT ADJUSTMENT**  
THE CONGRESS-LOK DAL alliance, which almost fell apart because of the hardening attitude of Lok Dal leaders, managed to survive after Charan Singh agreed to the Congress demand to revise the Lok Dal list already announced and also honour its claims for seats in North India to the extent possible. The Congress threat to break the alliance and pull out of the coalition government was conveyed to Charan Singh by Congress president Devaraj Urs after a four-hour meeting of the Congress Working Committee. The emergency meeting was held to discuss the grow-

ing strains in the alliance between the Congress and Lok Dal.

**JAGJIVAN WITH JANATA**  
JAGJIVAN RAM ASSURED the Janata Party leaders, including Morarji Desai and Chandra Shekhar, that he would stay in the party. The meeting of the central election committee will be held at Ram's residence on November 30. Party General Secretary Surendra Mohan said that Ram had "specifically asked him to refute all speculation that he was leaving the Janata party or joining the Congress-I. Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Mohan also called on Ram to check on his health. Mohan said he "was much better".



# THE IDEAS PAGE

## A different downturn

This is India's first ever slowdown at a time of political as well as macroeconomic stability



HARISH DAMODARAN

SHARP AND PROTRACTED economic slowdowns aren't new to India. Since Independence, there have been at least eight episodes of significant GDP growth rate declines over two years or more — 1961-62 and 1962-63, 1965-66 and 1966-67, 1971-72 and 1972-73, 1984-85 to 1987-88, 1990-91 to 1992-93, 2000-01 to 2002-03, 2012-13 and 2013-14, and the current one from 2018-19.

The slowdowns till the Eighties were mostly a result of drought-induced agricultural contractions, wars or balance of payments (BoP) pressures. Shortage of foreign exchange for imports, even of essential materials or components and spares used in capital goods, besides austerity measures introduced after the 1962 Sino-Indian War, caused the first growth dip episode. Back-to-back droughts and a BoP crisis leading to the 36.5 per cent rupee devaluation of June 1966, likewise, precipitated the second downturn, while it was a combination of the 1971 Indo-Pakistan War and the 1972 famine in the case of the third. The Eighties saw three consecutive drought years — 1985, 1986 and 1987. Its impact on the broader economy was predictable, given the farm sector had a roughly one-third share in India's GDP even at this point in time.

Only during the past three decades has agriculture's role in bringing down or pushing up overall growth diminished relative to other macroeconomic factors. Thus, both the early-Nineties slowdown and the one in the last two years of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) regime were preceded by "twin deficits" — on the fiscal and external current account fronts. The growth slump of the early-2000s during the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government had mainly to do with the aftereffects of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, the sanctions imposed by the US and other countries following the 1998 Pokhran nuclear tests, and the end of a mid-1990s corporate-driven mini-investment boom.

The current slowdown — GDP growth has dropped in every quarter from January-March 2018 down to July-September 2019 and showing little signs of recovery — is unique by contrast.

Firstly, it has taken place amidst remarkable political stability, with the unquestioned leader of a single-party majority government at the helm. This was not so with the UPA, Vajpayee's NDA or the 1991 minority Congress government of Narasimha Rao. Narendra Modi's popularity is probably rivaled only by Indira Gandhi. But she was a relative novice as prime minister during the 1966 devaluation and emerged as a truly strong leader only after the 1971 general elections, which were held before the economy went into a tailspin. One could similarly argue that Jawaharlal Nehru was well past his prime when India's first major downturn happened. That leaves only Rajiv Gandhi, who took over after his mother in 1984. However, he never enjoyed the cult status or credibility that Modi today commands.

Secondly, this slowdown isn't courtesy the usual "F" suspects — food, foreign exchange and fisc. Not only does agriculture account for hardly 15 per cent of India's GDP now, annual consumer food price inflation,



C R Sasikumar

too, has averaged a mere 1.59 per cent between October 2016 and October 2019. There has been no BoP crisis either; foreign exchange reserves were, in fact, at a record \$448.60 billion as on November 22. The Modi government may have deviated from the original schedule of reducing the fiscal deficit to 3 per cent of GDP, but the average figure of 3.7 per cent for 2014-15 to 2018-19 is much better than the 5.4 per cent during the previous five years under UPA.

The Modi period, if anything, has been marked by both political and macroeconomic stability. Nor has it been witness to "external" disruptions in the form of wars or oil price surges. Even the US-China trade conflict from 2018 is not comparable in its effects on the Indian economy to the 2008 Global Financial Crisis or the 2013 "taper tantrum". In any case, it's not as though India's exports were really booming before 2018.

Unlike all the earlier downturns whose precursors/triggers were supply-side constraints in food and forex, macroeconomic imprudence or external shocks, what we are now experiencing is more of a "western-style" slowdown exacerbated by internal policy misadventures. At the heart of it has been the twin balance sheet (TBS) problem — of debts accumulated by private corporates during the investment binge of 2004-11 turning into non-performing assets of mainly public sector banks. A similar bad loan build-up did take place even in the mid-1990s, forcing the subsequent cleanup of bank balance sheets and deleveraging by India Inc that also impacted growth during the Vajpayee government period.

But the difference between then and now is how the TBS problem, despite being

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flagged way back in December 2014 by the former chief economic adviser, Arvind Subramanian, has been allowed to fester and spread to sectors such as non-banking financial companies and real estate that have far more contagion effect than steel, power or textiles. Even worse is the self-inflicted wounds from demonetisation and the unprepared rollout of the goods and services tax (GST), hitting those who were least responsible for the TBS problem: Farmers, petty producers and MSMEs. Job and income losses in the informal sector has, in turn, depressed consumption demand, including for the products of listed firms and other organised players that were supposed to have benefited from demonetisation and GST.

If indebted corporates, risk-averse banks and the more recent credit crunch resulting from defaults by the likes of IL&FS, Dewan Housing Finance and Altico Capital — these are threatening to spill over to other financial and real estate-linked entities — have come in the way of investment demand picking up, consumption also taking a hit makes for a gloom-and-doom narrative.

The irony, of course, is that all this comes at a time of great political as well as macroeconomic stability. This is, indeed, a first-of-its-kind slowdown in India, where food, foreign exchange, oil, war and other "supply-side/external" factors have had no role. And if economic history is any guide, Western-style slowdowns, which are largely about crisis of confidence, sentiment and "demand", tend to be long-drawn-out affairs. Controlling inflation may be easier than getting consumers to spend and firms to invest.

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## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Given the central role played by army chiefs in Pakistan, and their crucial position within the state structure, parliament must come up with legislation that stands the test of time." — DAWN

## Foul play over water

A report on Delhi's water quality employs faulty methodology, appears politically motivated



JASMINE SHAH

THE LAST WEEK has seen the most bizarre set of events unfold concerning the quality of water in the national capital. This has cast a shadow not just on a reputed institution such as the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) and the office of a Union Minister of India, but also, unfortunately, large sections of the media.

On November 16, the Union Consumer Affairs Minister Ram Vilas Paswan released before the media a water quality report with results of tests carried out on drinking water samples across 21 state capitals of India. In reality, though, the "report" was a euphemism for what was actually a one-page summary of city rankings based on the number of water samples and parameters that have failed to meet drinking water standards. Delhi was listed at the bottom with all its 11 samples failing in all 19 quality parameters.

This was an unprecedented report in the history of the Union food ministry and something that should have invited deep scrutiny from environmentalists and the media. Except, there was nothing in it to analyse barring the one-page table. There was no report per se and, therefore, no information on crucial questions such as on what basis were the locations of the samples selected, where were they tested, and reasons, if any, for deviations from established norms.

At first look itself, the number of water samples collected seemed to violate WHO norms that stipulate one sample for every 10,000 population. But few seemed bothered as to whether any assessing body, let alone the much respected BIS, was right in judging the water quality of a city with approximately two crore population with a measly 11 samples, instead of a minimum of 2,000 required as per WHO norms. The BIS and the Union consumer affairs ministry welcomed this silence by offering no explanation either.

Never to be the ones to let important questions on data sanctity come in the way of fixing the nation, the media lapped up the one-page report in-toto and started debating who to hold accountable with hashtags such as #ToxicTapWater to describe the water quality in Delhi. For most of them, the word of a Union minister was nothing less than the gospel truth. None seemed interested in the fact that just two months prior, the Union water minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, arguably more qualified to talk on the nation's water quality than any other minister, reportedly said that his ministry had tested 20 water samples from Delhi — and all had been found

to have passed Indian as well as European standards.

No one also seem bothered about the much larger, and more credible, piece of evidence released by the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) on its own water quality tests — which had been carried out round the year using a sampling procedure that met WHO norms. From January to September, the DJB had tested over 1,55,000 samples as per BIS standards and found 98.5 per cent passing the test.

The latest "report" also does not reveal the details of the 11 locations in Delhi where samples were purportedly collected from. It was only after persistent demands of the AAP government that the addresses of these locations were revealed on November 20. A scrutiny of these locations blew the lid off the report. For reasons best known to itself, the Union consumer affairs ministry had chosen to junk the random sampling method, a staple of any survey-based study since the late 19th century, to pick samples exclusively from a few parts of north Delhi with two lonely exceptions — the residence and the office of the Union consumer affairs minister.

Subsequent reports by journalists who sought out each of the addresses where water samples were collected has shown that either they belonged to individuals affiliated with Paswan's party, that is, the Lok Janshakti party, or they were collected by workers from his own party, and not the BIS, or they were addresses of citizens who had lodged water complaints in the past but are currently happy with the supply. In the case of Deepak Kumar Roy, the first name in the list, the person reportedly denied on camera that any sample was collected from his house, saying he hasn't faced any problems with water quality.

In such context, therefore, the entire sampling looked politically motivated. Even in a best case scenario, the sampling sought out areas with the worst water complaints in Delhi, and tried to make them representative of all of Delhi.

What is clear though is the crisis of the moment. A practically junk report with no scientific validity was presented by a minister on the floor of Parliament and has been discussed endlessly by the media with little scrutiny, barring few exceptions. The Union government has de-facto maligned its own reputation as well as that of the national capital, instilled fear into the minds of its own people, and diminished the stature of not just a reputed scientific institution such as the BIS but also the DJB and all its hard-working scientists and engineers.

Perhaps the biggest casualty of the great lie unleashed last week is the reputation of the media. It could have been the arbiter of facts of a contested one-page report with no details and scientific validity. But it chose to amplify its contents and presented the legitimate concerns of other parties as part of a political blame game.

The writer is vice chairperson, Dialogue and Development Commission, Delhi government

## The foundation is laid

First six months of Modi 2.0 showcase the PM's vision for his second term



AKHILESH MISHRA

THE SECOND NARENDRA Modi government has completed six months in office. Arguably, these have been the most transformative first six months of any government in recent decades. What are some of the representative attributes and insights that we can glean from the way these six months, and indeed the year 2019, have panned out?

First, the mind of Modi veers from convention. It commits. Most of us are confronted with challenging situations in our daily lives: We are then asked to say yes or no, and face the consequences of our decisions. Some deliberate, some refuse, some procrastinate, some take decisions in despair, some are forced by circumstances or by others to take decisions, most just don't take any decision — which is also a kind of decision. But Modi embraces decision. He does not shirk any responsibility. In fact, the greater the challenge, brighter is the scope for Modi to take the right decision and manage the consequences.

Article 370 is now history and Kashmir is peaceful, the Ram Mandir issue has been settled, Pakistan's nuclear bluff — under which its terror machine operated with impunity — has been called out, economically weaker sections under general category now have reservation benefits without causing any social upheaval in the process; and, the so-called "secular veto" on triple talaq has been neutralised. All of these issues had been

pending for years or decades primarily because decision-making was subpar.

Second, an extraordinary quality of the PM is his ability to keep himself focused on the big picture and goals, without getting distracted by transitory events. Two examples best substantiate this. The big picture idea of how to neutralise the roots of separatism in Kashmir was never lost sight of during the transitory phase of 2014-19. And, the ebbs and flows of elections have not changed the developmental politics of Modi.

Third is Modi's out-of-box-thinking. West Asian politics was almost given up as a lost cause, especially when it came to eliciting support for India's case in Kashmir. However, as Pakistan has realised after August 5, that was a lazy assumption, one which has been fundamentally altered by a determined leader. This breaking away from self-imposed shackles has become visible in many other areas — the way India has dealt with China, the management of the relationship with both Iran and Israel, and, the "Howdy Modi" celebrations in the US.

Fourth, the PM is the ascetic outsider. If there were some who hoped that Modi could be co-opted by Delhi's established elite, or that his ideals could be mellowed by the trappings of power, then these six months would have been a rude wake-up call for them. As some articles published in these pages also attest,

Modi would simply not be co-opted by the dilapidated and rejected power structures of the old system. He is here to build a New India — one which reflects the aspirations of all Indians and is not a mere catapult for a few connected families and their ecosystem.

The growth numbers of the last two quarters are certainly lower than the standards and expectations set by the Modi government. But they have not dented the PM from pushing forward with some of the most ambitious economic liberalisation steps in almost three decades. Take just two initiatives undertaken in recent weeks: One, corporate taxes now compete with the most attractive rates anywhere in the world. Governments for three decades have balked at doing reducing the tax rate for fear of political backlash, and yet, Modi did the right thing by spurring the job-creating Make-in-India investments. The manufacture and exports of iPhones from India is just one example of the success of the Make in India programme. Then, privatisation, which had been on the backburner for a decade, is now firmly back on the agenda. Unlike last time, legal hurdles have also been cleared before kicking off the process.

Sixth, Modi envisioned the future. What are some of the aspirations that we have for the India of 2025? An India which has settled the Kashmir issue for good, in sync with

the aspirations of all Indians; an India which is a \$5-trillion economy; an India where all citizens are governed by the same progressive, gender-sensitive civil laws; an India which has gained its rightful place on the world stage and an India which is the new job-creating, manufacturing powerhouse of the world. These six months are strong testimony to how a firm foundation for all of these aspirations have been laid out.

On May 30, Modi returned to power with an enhanced mandate after being in office for five years. It is a rare phenomenon in the democratic world for governments to return to power with a bigger mandate, despite facing a combined opposition. There is a well-known maxim about repeatedly elected popular leaders' and governments. Their first term is to fulfill the basic needs and the second term is to implement the ambitious agenda promised in the manifesto. These lay the path for fulfilling the aspirational goals of the people, thus creating grounds for sustained years of prosperity. Modi has already piloted this model at the state level, thereby getting reelected election after election. Now, it has been scaled up to a national model.

The writer is CEO, Bluekraft Digital Foundation and was director (content), MyGov

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### A NEW CHAPTER

THIS REFERS TO the article 'On a new footing', (IE, November 29). Sri Lanka's new president, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, seems to have the genuine will and mandate to revisit all contentious issues in the India-Sri Lanka relationship. New Delhi's prompt outreach to the newly-elected leader and Gotabaya's warm response are signals that both sides appreciate each others' respective sensitivities and priorities. The power asymmetry between the countries must not be exploited by powers outside the region.

Sudip Kumar Dey, Kolkata

### LEADERS AND CASTES

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'A new cast' (IE, November 29). The politics of appeasement towards any section of society is harmful for the country in the long run. A Dalit movement must not be limited only to the narrow caste agenda, it should also be amenable to the people among the upper castes who acknowledge historical injustice and espouse the cause of marginalised people. Otherwise, politics will sow seeds of separation.

Vinay Saroha, Delhi

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'A new cast' (IE, November 29). The Rashtriya Janata Dal, or any other non-Brahminical political outfit, opting for an upper caste head would make the party a mirror image of mainstream national parties. It would be interesting if the change at the top would mean expansion in the party's voter base. However, if the RJD's intention is to attract the extremely backward castes and Dalits, giving people from such

### LETTER OF THE WEEK

#### RESPECT IDEALS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, '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 formation. 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

communities leadership opportunities would be more progressive.

LR Murmu, Delhi

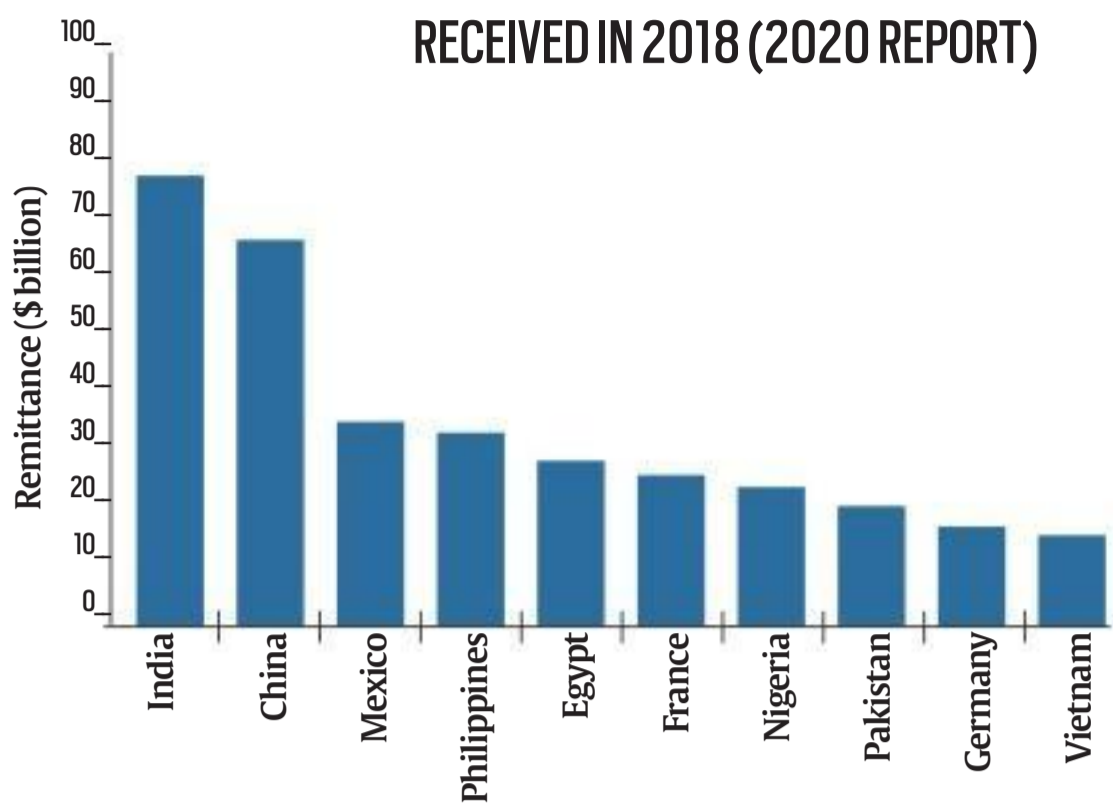
#### ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'After outrage over her Godse remark, BJP drops Pragya from House panel' (IE, November 29). BJP's Bhopal Lok Sabha MP and Malegaon blast accused Pragya Singh Thakur has once again come into the limelight in a negative sense when she said, once again, that Nathuram Godse was a "patriot" — this time in Parliament. She had said the same thing in June 2019. Although the BJP had distanced itself from her statement and Thakur has apologised, this clearly not enough. It is high time that the BJP expels Thakur from the party.

Vandana Chopra, Chandigarh

**TELLING NUMBERS**

**What Indians living abroad have been sending home over the years**



THE GLOBAL Migration Report 2020, newly released by the UN-affiliated International Organization for Migration (IOM) reiterates the key trend of the International Migrant Stock 2019 dataset released by the UN Population Division in September — of the 272 international migrants worldwide (3.5% of the global population), India accounts for the highest share with 17.5 million Indians living outside the country (*The Indian Express*, November 29). India is followed by Mexico (11.8 million) and China (10.7 million). According to the IOM report, roughly two-thirds of international migrants are labour migrants.

Among other details in the new report, the high count of international migrants living abroad also makes India the leading recipient of remittances. International remittances in 2018 (2020 report) reached \$689 billion, out of which India received \$78.6 billion from the 17.5 million living abroad. Remittances received by India have consistently increased between the 2005 and 2020 reports, sharply from \$22.13 billion in 2005 to \$53.48 billion in 2010 and then gradually to \$68.91 billion in 2015 and \$78.61 billion in the latest report. India is currently followed by China (\$67.4 billion), Mexico (\$35.7 billion), Philippines (\$33.8 billion), Egypt (\$28.9 billion) and France (\$26.4 billion). The United States was the top remittance-issuer, at \$68 billion, followed by the United Arab Emirates (\$44.4 billion) and Saudi Arabia (\$36.1 billion).

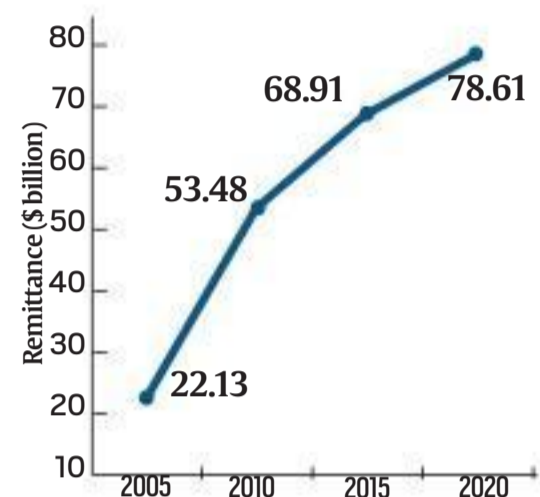
The top destinations for international migrants is the US where, as of September 2019, there were 50.7 million international migrants. The US is followed by Germany, Saudi Arabia, Russian Federation and the UK.

The top migration corridors for Indians are the United Arab Emirates, the US and Saudi Arabia. Conversely, the highest number of migrants entering India come from Bangladesh. The US is also the top choice for migrants from China.

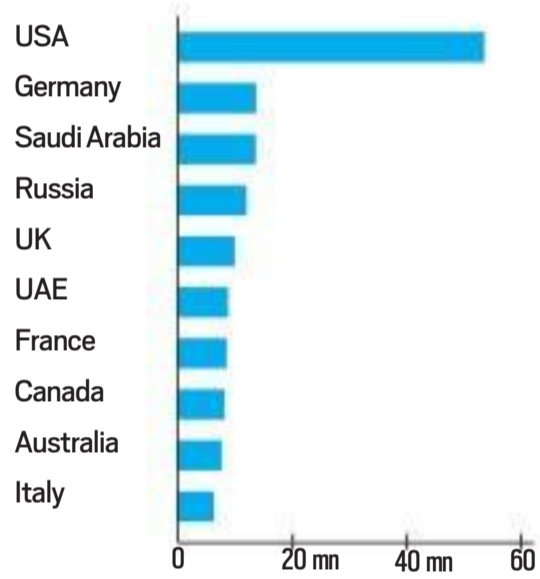
As compared to the 2000 Global Migration Report, the number of international migrants has nearly doubled in the 2020 report, from 150 million to 272 million. While the proportion of female international migrants has only marginally changed between the two reports, from 47.5% in 2000 to 47.9%, the share of international migrants who were children has dropped from 16% in 2000 to 13.9%.

Oceania is the region with the highest proportion of international migrants and the UAE is the country with the highest proportion of international migrants. More than half of all international migrants (141 million) live in Europe and North America. The report also confirmed

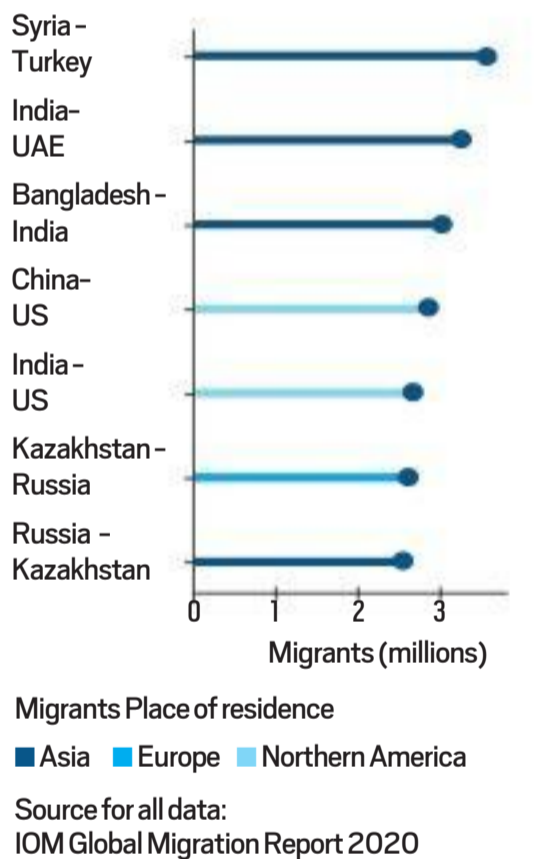
**REMITTANCES TO INDIA**



**RESIDENT MIGRANTS, 2019**



**MIGRATION FROM ASIA, 2019**



other important migration corridors from poorer countries to richer nations such as those to France, Russia, the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

"This pattern is likely to remain the same for many years into the future, especially as populations in some developing subregions and countries are projected to increase in coming decades, placing migration pressure on future generations," IOM said.

In Africa, Asia and Europe, most international migrants stay within their regions of birth, but the majority of migrants from Latin America and the Caribbean and North America do not.

**SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER**

**Climate meet: agenda & beyond**

For the next two weeks in Madrid, COP25 will be held in the shadow of a series of alarming climate reports. Will countries yield to pressure? What shape will rulebook for implementing 2015 Paris Agreement take?

**AMITABH SINHA**  
PUNE, NOVEMBER 29

THE ANNUAL two-week climate change conference, known by the abbreviation COP25, begins in Madrid on Monday amid fresh warnings that the world has not been doing enough to save itself from catastrophic impacts of climate change. A series of reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and other agencies have been reiterating through the year that unless countries scale up their actions significantly, there is little hope of keeping average global temperatures within 2°C higher than pre-industrial trends.

That, however, will not be directly on the agenda of the climate change negotiators, who will be meeting in Madrid with the prime objective of completing the rule-book to the 2015 Paris Agreement so that it starts getting implemented from next year.

**What issues have these reports been highlighting?**

The most dire and recent warning has come from the annual Emissions Gap Report, produced by the UN Environment Programme, that says that the goal of keeping average temperatures within 1.5°C from pre-industrial times, an aspirational target enshrined in the Paris Agreement, was "on the brink of becoming impossible". To achieve that target, global greenhouse gas emissions in 2030 should not be more than 25 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent. But from the current rate of growth of emissions, the total is projected to touch 56 billion tonnes by that time, more than twice what it should be.

Accordingly, the world needs to reduce its emissions by at least 7.6% every year between now and 2030 to reach the 25-billion-tonnes level. Considering that overall emissions are still increasing, such major reductions are extremely unlikely unless the countries do something completely drastic. The World Meteorological Organization, meanwhile, has pointed out that atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases reached new records in 2018. The concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere reached 407.8 parts



Members of European Parliament vote on a resolution in Strasbourg on Thursday, after which they declared a 'climate emergency', symbolic ahead of COP25. Reuters

per million in 2018, compared to 405.5 ppm the previous year. This was 147% of the pre-industrial level of 1750. The concentration of methane was 259% of the 1750 level while nitrous oxide was at 123% above.

On May 18 this year, the daily average carbon dioxide concentration touched 415 ppm for the first time ever. It has come down from that level since then.

Several other reports in the last few months, including three special reports by IPCC, and another major one on state of nature by Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, have all pointed to the deteriorating scenario.

**Will all this not come up at COP25?**

While there would no doubt be pressure on countries meeting in Madrid to scale up their efforts, and some of them can indeed announce some additional measures or targets for themselves, the actual negotiation process is about settling the unresolved issues of the Paris Agreement rulebook.

The rulebook, which contains the processes, mechanisms and institutions

through which the provisions of the Paris Agreement would be implemented, had been finalised in Katowice last year. But some of the issues had remained unresolved and had left for negotiators to settle over the next one year. The most important one relates to the tussle over new carbon markets to be created under the Paris Agreement.

A carbon market allows countries, or industries, to earn carbon credits for emission reductions they make in excess of what is required of them. These credits can be traded to the highest bidder in exchange of money. The buyers of carbon credits can show the emission reductions as their own and use them to meet their own emission reduction targets.

A carbon market already existed under the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, the earlier climate agreement that will expire next year and get replaced by Paris Agreement. In the last one decade, as several countries walked out of the Kyoto Protocol and no one was feeling compelled to meet their emission reduction targets, the demand for carbon credits had waned. As a result, developing countries like India, China and Brazil had accumulated

huge amounts of carbon credits. These credits are now in danger of getting redundant.

**What happens to the carbon credits already accumulated?**

Brazil has been arguing that these accumulated carbon credits should remain valid under the new carbon market to be instituted. But the developed countries have been resisting this, claiming that the weak verification mechanisms under the Kyoto Protocol had allowed dubious projects to earn credits. India, which has accumulated 750 million certified emission reductions (CERs), is backing Brazil's position on this.

Resolution of this tussle is key to the success of the Madrid meeting. But there are other pending issues as well, like those related to ensuring transparency in the processes, and methods of reporting information. Developing countries will also try to ensure that there is greater appreciation and recognition of the issue of loss and damage. They are trying to institute a mechanism to compensate countries that suffer major losses due to climate change-induced events like cyclones or floods.

**What about commitments by countries?**

The conference will be most keenly watched for the resolve that countries show in scaling up their efforts to fight climate change. Over the last few months, there has been growing pressure on countries to do more, especially the big emitters. The pressure has yielded some results with at least a few countries promising to commit to long-term action plans. So far, a total of 71 countries, most of them small emitters, have committed themselves to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050.

It is expected that some more countries would do so at the Madrid conference. However, the most crucial players — China or India — are widely being seen as unlikely to announce any enhanced targets. These countries have been arguing that their current efforts are already much more than what they should have been asked to do, while many other rich and developed countries, which are mainly responsible for creating the climate problem, are doing proportionately less, especially when it comes to providing finance and technology to the less developed world.

**Losing Nemo: His world is changing too fast**

**KABIR FIRAQUE**  
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 29

THE CLOWNFISH, made so popular by the animated film *Finding Nemo* and its sequel *Finding Dory*, cannot be expected to be able to adapt to a rapidly changing environment, a new study has concluded. It does not have the genetic capacity to do so, scientists report in the journal *Ecology Letters*.

**Habitat under threat**

While clownfish are found in various parts of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, including the Great Barrier Reef, only some species are widespread and most of the others have restricted distributions. Clownfish typically live at the bottom of shallow seas in sheltered reefs or in shallow lagoons. It is this habitat that is under threat.

Clownfish breed only in sea anemones, sharing a symbiotic bond. "It is a strong, obligate symbiosis," study co-author Geoffrey Jones said, by email. "Clownfish shelter in the anemone and are the only fish that do not get stung by the nematocysts of the anemone. The anemone benefits because



Clownfish on anemone in lagoon in Papua New Guinea. Simon Thorrold/WHOI

clownfish can defend the anemone from fish that might eat it. They never live anywhere but in the anemone," said Professor Jones, of the Australian Research Council (ARC) Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies at James Cook University.

And now the anemones, like coral reefs in

general, are under direct threat from the impacts of climate change. It works like this: The anemones share another symbiotic bond, with algae. Under stress in warming waters, the algae leave the anemones. If the algae stay away too long, the anemone starve to death. Which leaves the clownfish without a home.

**Clownfish fail test**

What the study sought to find out was whether there are genetic variants of clownfish that can breed faster than others. There aren't, it concludes after 10 years of research on the coral reefs of Papua New Guinea.

Family trees were established for the entire clownfish population at an island in Kimbe Bay. Working with about 280 breeding pairs, the scientists identified each fish individually and sampled its DNA to establish who was related to whom over five generations. It was comprehensive — all individuals including adults and juveniles were sampled; offspring were almost always assigned to both parents who cohabit in the same anemone.

From the family tree, the researchers were able to assess the ability of the population to persist and the genetic potential to

adapt to increasingly rapid environmental change. The potential is almost nil.

"... We find that Nemo is at the mercy of a habitat that is degrading more and more every year. To expect a clownfish to genetically adapt at a pace which would allow it to persist is unreasonable," co-author Dr Serge Planes, a Director of Research at France's National Centre of Scientific Research (CNRS), said in a statement from the ARC Centre of Excellence.

**The home, not the genes**

"There are no particular genetic variants that contribute more offspring to the next generation. The quality of the host anemone contributes most to the ability of the clownfish to renew its population," Prof Jones said in the statement.

"Their future depends on our ability to maintain the quality of their habitat," the authors conclude.

Apart from the scientists from the Australian and French institutions, the team included researchers from the United States (Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute), Saudi Arabia (KAUST) and Chile (Universidad Austral de Chile).

**Interception, defining terrorism: How Gujarat terror law differs from MCOCA**

**SOHINI GHOSH**  
AHMEDABAD, NOVEMBER 29

THE GUJARAT Control of Terrorism and Organised Crime (GCTOC) Act, which received President Ram Nath Kovind's assent on November 5, 16 years after the Assembly passed the first version of the Bill, comes into effect on December 1.

The anti-terrorism law, which three Presidents before Kovind had returned to the state, draws heavily from The Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA), 1999, with two significant differences: the checks on interception of communication that are part of the Maharashtra law are missing in the Gujarat law; and the definition of "terrorist act" in the GCTOCA also covers "intention to disturb public order".

These differences make the Gujarat law tougher and broader in scope than MCOCA.

**Intercepting communication**

**MCOCA**  
Five MCOCA sections (13, 14, 15, 16, and 27) deal with interception of communication.

The law states that the interception, if approved by the competent authority, cannot be for more than 60 days, and that an extension would require permission. The application for extension must include a statement of the results of the interception thus far, or a reasonable explanation for the failure to obtain results.

Extension, if granted, cannot be for more than 60 days. The law provides for a panel to review the orders of the competent authority, and stipulates a prison term of up to a year for unauthorised interception or violation of the rules of interception.

A police officer of the rank of SP or above is required to supervise the investigation, and to submit the application seeking authorisation for the interception of electronic or oral communication. The law specifies various details that the application must mention.

Interception is allowed only if the investigating agency states that other modes of intelligence gathering have been tried, and have failed. The competent authority shall be an officer of the state Home department, not below the rank of Secretary to the government. In urgent cases, an officer of the

rank of Additional DGP or above can authorise interception, but an application must be made to the competent authority within 48 hours of the ADGP's order.

**GCTOCA**

The Gujarat law deals only with the admissibility of evidence collected through interception, and does not mention the procedure for intercepting communication. Its section 14 mirrors a corresponding section of MCOCA, and adds: "Notwithstanding anything contained in the Code (CrPC, 1973) or in any other law for the time being in force, the evidence collected through the interception of wire, electronic or oral communication under the provisions of any other law shall be admissible as evidence against accused in the court during trial of case."

"Any other law" is not defined. The Indian Telegraph Act, 1885 allows for interception, with minimal punishment for misuse. There are no safeguards such as regular review of interception, feedback on outcomes, permissible duration of interception or accountability. The Information Technology Act, 2000 too is vague on such details.

GCTOCA has no provision similar to the annual report mandated in the MCOCA, giving a full account of requests for interception, numbers of applications approved/rejected, prosecutions launched on the basis of such interception, and convictions resulting from them. This analysis of the utility of the interceptions must be submitted to the Maharashtra Assembly within three months of the end of the calendar year.

**Definition of 'terrorist act'**

The Gujarat law's definition of a "terrorist act" is similar to the one in the repealed Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), 2002, but includes "an act committed with the intention to disturb public order". A prosecutor in Gujarat said that the widening of the definition "allows, say, the Patidar agitation to be described as an act of terrorism, allowing stricter punishment".

This prosecutor underlined that The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), 1967, India's main central anti-terror law, "does not allow an agitation of such form or scale (to be called) terrorism", and is instead covered under IPC sections, (and) the law

of sedition, (which) is not effective enough for stringent punishment".

The Gujarat Assembly had re-drafted and cleared the Gujarat Control of Terrorism and Organised Crime (GCTOC) Bill in March 2015, including the term "terrorism", months before Hardik Patel launched the Patidar agitation. The Gujarat law defines a terrorist act as "an act committed with the intention to disturb public order or threaten the unity, integrity and security of the State or to strike terror in the minds of the people or any section of the people..."

**Argument for Gujarat law**

Asim Pandya, Senior Advocate at the Gujarat High Court and a former president of the Gujarat High Court Advocates' Association (GHAA), said the government could, while framing the Rules, introduce the checks and balances that are absent in the Gujarat terror law.

"In case this is not done, there is also the provision where the court can ask the state government to frame Rules to this effect," Pandya said.

Also, Pandya said, the constitutional va-

lidity of the law can be challenged on a "case-specific" basis. "With respect to GCTOC, there is a competing interest of law and order versus privacy. However, only time will tell how communication interception is used, and is interpreted."

The definition of "terrorist act", Pandya said, was "very wide" — however, there were mechanisms built into the law to limit it.

"The first check is the registration of FIR that can be done by an officer of rank SP or above. Ordinarily, if the power to register FIR is given to a sub-inspector or inspector-level officer, it can be misused. Secondly, assuming that the FIR is registered with a political motive, there is the provision that after submission of chargesheet, sanction from the state government is required before the court takes cognisance." Mentioning some other such checks, Pandya said, "Ultimately, the court is the interpreter," he said.

Pandya said that while the GCTOC Act does grant power to the executive with respect to the investigation process, there were similar provisions under previous laws TADA and POTA, both now repealed.