WORDLY WISE

LOOK AND SEE WHICH WAY THE WIND BLOWS BEFORE YOU COMMIT YOURSELF.

— AESOP

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

AT GREAT COST

New citizenship law is taking a toll on ties with Dhaka. Beyond Bangladesh, India's reputation is taking a big hit

AS POPULAR OPPOSITION to the new law amending the Indian Citizenship Act intensifies within the country, the external costs are also coming into view. To be sure, the postponement of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's annual summit meeting with the Japanese prime minister, Shinzo Abe, that was to take place in Guwahati, might only be a temporary setback. It will almost certainly be rescheduled to some other city, or in Guwahati, when the situation returns to normal. But the story on other diplomatic fronts is a lot less reassuring. The biggest negative impact is on India's relations with Bangladesh, which has, in recent years, become one of Delhi's most productive partners. Beyond Bangladesh, India's long-standing reputation as a constitutional democracy is taking a big hit and the loss of goodwill and admiration is not easy to estimate.

The question of illegal immigration has always been a deeply divisive issue between India and Bangladesh. Managing this bitter legacy of Partition and the subsequent movement of people across the long border has been an enduring foreign policy challenge for Delhi. In recent years, Delhi and Dhaka were learning to limit the salience of the issue by deepening their partnership and resolving long-standing issues like the boundary dispute and cross-border terrorism. But in framing religious persecution of the Hindu minority in Bangladesh as one of the motivations for the amendment and repeatedly affirming that Muslim migrants from Bangladesh will be "thrown out", as Union Home Minister Amit Shah has said, Delhi was inviting trouble from Dhaka. Although it deeply resented Shah's statements that put the Sheikh Hasina government in a spot at home, Dhaka has been willing to believe private assurances from Delhi that the issue of the amendment to the citizenship law and the National Register of Citizens were purely domestic issues with no bearing on bilateral relations. Until now. Dhaka's forbearance has finally snapped. That it chose to cancel the visits of two of its ministers to India suggests that Dhaka can no longer keep quiet and will be under increasing pressure to stand up to Delhi.

If the citizenship amendment law and the NRC have pushed India's best partnership in the neighbourhood onto a slippery slope, they have also begun to create problems for India's most important international partnership with the United States. The State Department's reaction, urging Delhi to respect religious freedom and stay with India's constitutional values, was articulated in a polite manner. But US and Western criticism could get a lot tougher as Shah rolls out his plans for an NRC across the nation. The idea of India as a thriving democracy, and its strong commitment to civic nationalism as well as religious pluralism, have been important pillars on which India's strategic partnerships with the US and the West have been built in the last two decades. The government may be seriously underestimating the weight of India's shared political values with the West and the many real and intangible benefits it brings. The costs of that miscalculation could be quite serious and could be evident a lot sooner than Delhi thinks.

A BAND-AID

Raising prices of essential drugs will help ease shortage. Urgency of investing more in R&D remains

LAST WEEK, INDIA'S drug regulator, the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA), used the public interest provision of the Drugs Prices Control Order 2013 to allow manufacturers to increase prices of 21 essential drugs by as much as 50 per cent. Most of these drugs are used to treat critical diseases such as tuberculosis, malaria and leprosy and are crucial to the country's public health programme. The increase in their prices is, therefore, bound to raise concerns. But the decision of the regulatory authority — usually known to slash prices of life-saving drugs — was precipitated by an extraordinary situation. For nearly two years, drug manufacturers have been claiming inability to keep up with the country's healthcare demands due to increasing costs of production. Easing the price ceiling could help the healthcare system tide over the current crisis. It may, as the NPPA has reasoned, "pre-empt a situation where the public is forced to switch to costlier alternatives". But the drug regulator and the Department of Pharmaceuticals need to do much more to address the root cause for the shortage of critical drugs.

India's pharma industry imports more than 60 per cent of active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) or bulk drugs — ingredients that give medicine its therapeutic value — from China. But in 2017, Chinese regulators cracked down on bulk drug manufacturing units for their failure to comply with the country's environmental regulations. The revamped Chinese API industry has raised prices, leading to spin-off effects in India. For instance, the cost of making Vitamin C pills has gone up by more than 250 per cent since 2017. This has reportedly led to a 25-30 per cent shortage of this drug in India. Last month, the pharma major, Abbot, applied to the NPPA to discontinue production of the leprosy drug, Hansepran. The company pointed out that increasing costs of API imports had made the production of Hansepran unviable in India.

The importance of making medicines more accessible to those who need them cannot be overstated. However, drug price control measures in India have not always achieved this objective. The ceiling on prices of 74 bulk drugs in 1995, for example, forced many companies to opt out of API production. The Draft Pharmaceutical Policy 2017 did propose correctives. These included giving preference to drugs produced from indigenously produced APIs in government procurement and taking them out of price control for five years. More importantly, the draft talked about creating research and development facilities for API production. However, the policy has not gone beyond the draft stage. It needs to be revisited in light of the country's current medicine shortage.

FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY

Democratic subversion

A fusion of law and exclusivist ideology is in the making. Brute arithmetic is being used for majoritarian ends

ASHUTOSH VARSHNEY

RIGHT SINCE 1945, up until recently, few democratic polities moved from inclusion to exclusion in their citizenship practices and laws. The big exceptions were mostly authoritarian, the Chinese treatment of Uighurs being the most recent. Some democratic polities might have remained as exclusionary as before, but, by and large, when change came about, democratic polities edged towards larger inclusion. And when new exclusions were proposed, as in Trump's America or in the Le Pen version of France, political battles have been launched by the forces opposed to such curtailments.

By its bi-focal citizenship move — one, excluding Muslim immigrants as citizens while accepting all other communities from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh on grounds of persecution, and two, promising to introduce a national register of citizens, which will render stateless all those Muslims who don't have the documents to prove their Indian ancestry, even if they were born in India and have lived in the country for decades — Delhi is taking two of the darkest steps in the history of democratic citizenship since the European excesses of the 1940s.

The implications are so profound that one should pause to take a larger comparative and historical look. India's strengths and weaknesses are often better understood that way.

Citizenship is basically a legal code for the kind of political community a society is, or would like to be. It says who can be a member of the community — and with what bundle of rights. Since the American and French Revolutions of the late 18th century and the German Unification of 1871, the idea of citizenship has witnessed two models: Birth in a territory (jus solis) and blood-based inheritance (jus sanguinis). Ignoring ethnicity, race or religion, the former is often, if not always, built around the ideals of a society. The latter hooks citizenship to ethnicity or race, sometimes also to religion, especially in societies where religion is not viewed as a matter of choice, but as a blood line, functioning almost like race or ethnicity. India is moving from the former model to the latter.

The voluminous literature on citizenship — and its cousin, nationhood — identifies the US and France as exemplars of the territorial model, and Germany and Japan as the epitome of blood-based citizenship. The consensus is that a community based on ideals is more inclusive — and harder to build — than one based on bloodlines.

Of course, even inclusive polities have their infirmities. The US is the best known. Formally embracing the ideals of freedom and equality in 1789, it kept Black slaves, who were neither free nor equal, and after the 1880s, it excluded Asians from its immigrant pool. It took the US until the 1860s to end slavery — and till the 1960s to de-link citizenship from ethnicity. Similarly, in France, questions about the loyalty of Jews existed right until the 1910s, and controversy has also marked the status of Muslims after the 1970s. But exclusions are challenged in such polities.

> The recent exclusionary steps can only bring India's international image down. India under Nehru was lauded worldwide for its constitutionally enshrined inclusive citizenship. If America's constitutive ideals were freedom and equality, India's founding values were equality, including religious equality, diversity and tolerance. Later, riots would often hurt religious minorities more, sometimes damningly so, but in the eyes of the law, there was no distinction between a Hindu or a Muslim. Even if politics deviated from the basic constitutional principles, the law did not follow suit.

The blood-based models work differently. At the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russian-speaking ethnic Germans, Soviet citizens until then, simply became citizens of Germany, once they demonstrated German ancestry. Non-ethnic members do exist in such polities, but they receive lesser citizenship, or an inferior bundle of rights. For some time, millions of Turks in Germany were "guest workers", and naturalisation of even Germany-born Turks was notoriously hard. But after becoming a member of the European Union, Germany also eventually moved in a more inclusive direction. Japan remains a great exception.

Where did independent India fit in? It was undoubtedly closer to the territorial model. In contrast, Pakistan was conceptualised as a Muslim homeland, where non-Muslims could be citizens, but would have fewer rights. India was never envisioned by Gandhi, Nehru and Ambedkar as a Hindu homeland. Furthermore, Indians in South and East Africa, or Southeast Asia, were not allowed to acquire automatic Indian citizenship. They were citizens of their adopted lands. In those foundational days, even Muslims returning from Pakistan could reclaim Indian citizenship.

The recent exclusionary steps can only bring India's international image down. India under Nehru was lauded worldwide for its constitutionally enshrined inclusive citizenship. If America's constitutive ideals were freedom and equality, India's founding values were equality, including religious equality, diversity and tolerance. Later, riots would often hurt religious minorities more, sometimes damningly so, but in the eyes of the law, there was no distinction between a Hindu or a Muslim. Even if politics deviated from the basic constitutional principles, the law did not follow suit.

Now, a fusion of law and an exclusivist political ideology is in the making. The government's claim that a modern polity must inevitably draw a distinction between sharanarthi (refugees) and ghuspaithiye (infiltrators) is mendacious. For, it is patently clear that if the existing Muslim citizens of India are unable to produce documents of Indian ancestry, the national register later, using citizenship amendments, can easily call them "infiltrators", making them an object of internment or expulsion. In contrast, if the Hindus have a similar documentary deficit, they would neither be interned nor expelled. They can claim they are welcome only in a Hindu homeland, not elsewhere in South Asia, and thus acquire Indian citizenship. Assam is already burning, partly for this reason.

The government's second claim that the citizenship amendment is not anti-Muslim — for it will give refugee status not only to Hindus, but also to Christians and Parsis — is also political sophistry. Why should the refugee status, and therefore the possibility of citizenship, be reserved only for those persecuted in three Muslim-majority neighbours, not in the Buddhist-majority Sri Lanka or Myanmar? Both are India's neighbours and have a record of persecuting minorities. And what about the Ahmediyas, whom the Pakistani state, since the mid 1970s, has declared non-Muslim and oppressed? Is Delhi's heart really bleeding for the persecuted minorities?

After Kashmir, Delhi has yet again used brute parliamentary arithmetic for majoritarian ends. Democracy now urgently requires the judiciary and the streets. The Supreme Court may, or may not, act in a resolute manner — hence, protests are also necessary. Non-BJP state governments can exercise the option of non-cooperation, too. Most of the machinery for implementation of laws is, after all, with state governments. The threat of electorally and legally enabled exclusionary horrors is knocking at the door.

The writer is director, Center for Contemporary South Asia, Sol Goldman Professor of International Studies and Social Sciences, professor of political science, Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, Brown University

REALISTATION, NOT REFORM

There is no restriction on women offering prayers in mosques in Islam

ZEHRA NAQVI

THE SUPREME COURT has referred the Sabarimala case to a larger constitutional bench and also brought under its ambit issues of gender equality from other religions, including the issue of women being "allowed" to enter mosques.

That the right of women to enter mosques should be a matter for the courts to decide upon is ironic, given that there are no Islamic restrictions on women's entry to mosques. The biggest living proof of this is the Masjid al-Haram in Mecca within which stands the Kaaba, the holiest site of prayer for Muslims. Thousands of women pray within the halls of the mosque five times every day— similar to Masjid an-Nabawi in Medina, the second holiest mosque, the premises of which also hold the tomb of Prophet Mohammad.

In countries that have a majority Muslim population, almost every mosque has dedicated sections for women *namazis*. As a practicing Muslim woman, I have had the opportunity to offer *namaz* in numerous mosques in Malaysia, Jordan, Iran and Iraq. In the latter two countries, the grand domed structures constructed around the tombs of the Imams revered by Shia Muslims also serve as mosques from where the call for prayer is made and the faithful congregate to offer *namaz*. Women are present in multitudes every bit as much as the men.

In India as well, we can find numerous instances of women offering prayers in mosques. Perhaps far less so than the aforementioned countries, but the reasons for this are decidedly cultural rather than religious. It also has to do with lack of awareness among women about the fact that they can indeed pray in mosques if they wish to.

Writer and historian Rana Safvi has publicly spoken about and posted on social media her accounts of praying in mosques across the country, from Kashmir to Kolata, Sonepat to Shimla, Bijapur to Barielly. Safvi recounts an experience from a small village in Zafrabad near Jaunpur, at a 13th century Jama Masjid, where she asked the Imam for permission to pray (given that there was no separate area for ladies). The Imam exclaimed that this was the "house of Allah" and where else would she pray if not here?

Asiya Ahmed Khan, a naturalist from Hyderabad, has had similar experiences of praying in congregations at mosques in Hyderbadad, including on Fridays, of praying at the Delhi Jama Masjid, the mosque at Connaught Place, at the Bada Imambada in Lucknow, mosques in Mysore and so on. In fact her list includes mosques in Singapore, Thailand, Turkey and even Russia. Sheba Naqvi, a serving magistrate in the UP government — who also happens to be my mother — has prayed in mosques not just in Delhi and Noida, but also in small towns such as Agra, Nainital, Muzaffarnagar, Bulandshahr and Aligarh.

> Questions have also been raised about women having a separate designated area to offer namaz, which is presented as a discriminatory act. In fact, every fraction of space within the mosque holds equal value in terms of worship.

Questions have also been raised about women having a separate designated area to offer *namaz*, which is presented as a discriminatory act. In fact, every fraction of space within the mosque holds equal value in terms of worship. In Nainital, Muzaffarnagar, Bulandshahr and Aligarh.

Questions have also been raised about women having a separate designated area to offer *namaz*, which is presented as a discriminatory act. In fact, every fraction of space within the mosque holds equal value in terms of worship. In fact, to call it "reform" or "transformation" would not be suitable either, for such a practice finds no space among the tenets of Islam. A more apt word would be "realisation" and "course correction". And it is important to note that course corrections cannot be foisted from above, but are manifested when the realisation emanates from deep within, through heightened knowledge and conciseness.

The writer is a freelance journalist

IN GOOD FAITH

DECEMBER 9, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

INDO-BANGLA TALKS

BANGLADESH IS QUESTIONING the broad framework of the boundary agreement the two countries signed in 1974. The divergent positions the two countries have adopted on the agreement hampered to a great extent the progress of the current Indo-Bangladesh talks. The dispute over 44 acres of land in Muhuri Char area near Belonia on the Tripura-Bangladesh border, it appears, is not posing much of a problem. The delegations from the two countries are likely to come out with a statement providing for an interim arrangement for the disputed stretch of land.

SHAH IN PANAMA

THE DEPOSED SHAH of Iran arrived at Howard Air Force base in Panama from Texas, US, and left shortly before noon by helicopter for an undisclosed destination, a US southern command spokesman said. "He is a guest of the Panamanian government, and we will have nothing more to say on the matter until the Panamanians make an announcement", the spokesman said. A Panamanian government spokesman, Pedro Ureta Jr. said the government had known of the deposed monarch's arrival for two days and that he was likely to stay in a hotel. Teheran has been demanding the extradition of Shah.

1980 OIL IMPORTS

THE UNION PETROLEUM ministry hopes to finalise the arrangements for import of crude and petroleum products during 1980 by the end of next week. An official delegation headed by the petroleum secretary, B B Vohra, is leaving for the Soviet Union. The same delegation will visit Iran and Iraq to complete the oil import deals for the coming year. Official sources say a major portion of the country's crude import requirements during 1980 have already been more or less "tied up". Of the 18 million tonnes of crude import needed, suppliers have agreed to send as much as 14 million tonnes.

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

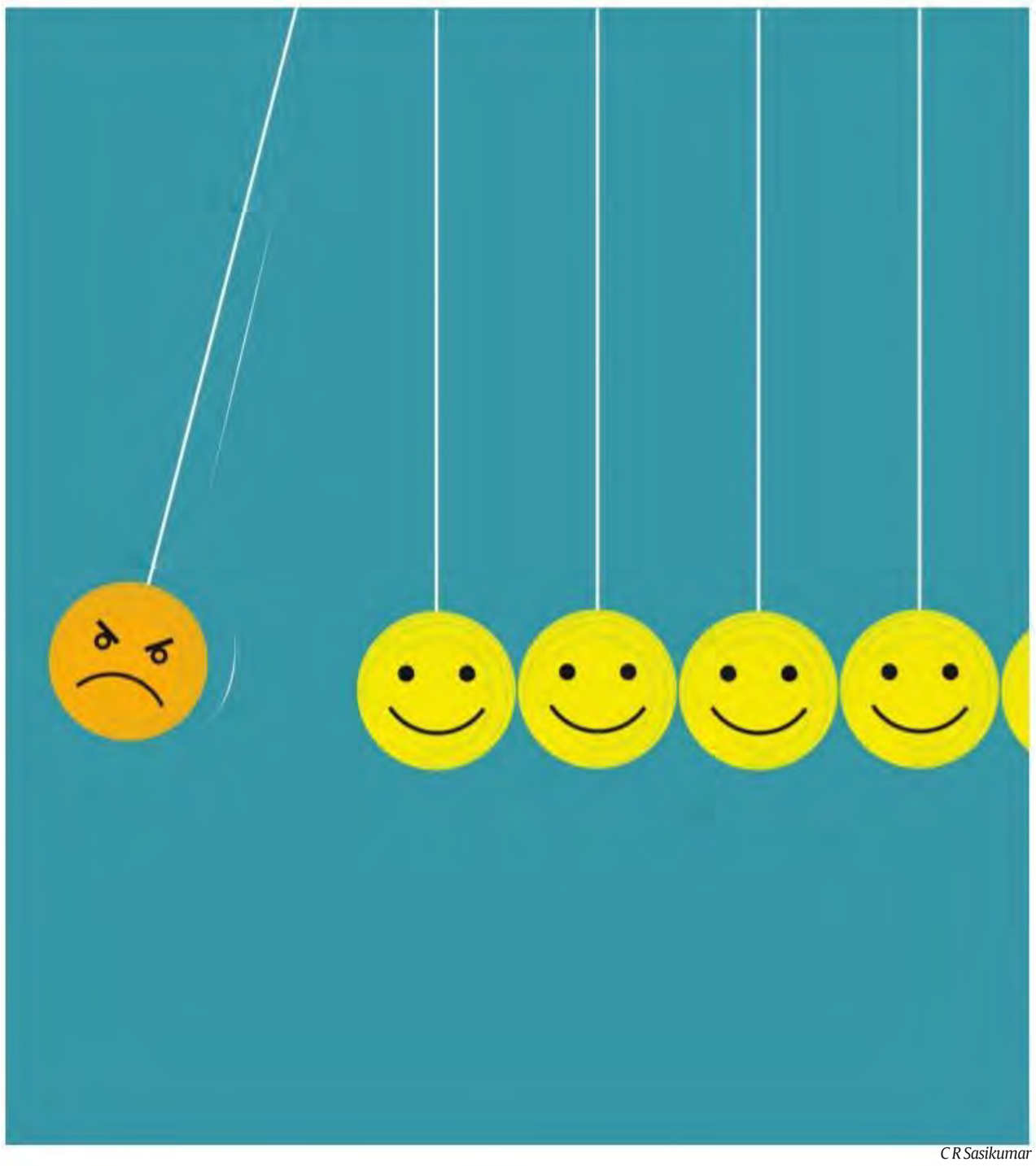
"Does the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB), one wonders, herald the end of a pluralistic and secular India, and the fulfilment of the dream of the RSS and its founders like Savarkar?"

— THE DAILY STAR, BANGLADESH

An unneighbourly act

CAB and NRC threaten to undo the important strides that Bangladesh and India have together taken in the recent past

ASHIKUR RAHMAN



C R Sasikumar

IT IS UNCLEAR why any nation — where its political leadership has the right mindset — will risk jeopardising an international bilateral partnership that is rooted in both historic sanctity and strategic value. Yet, the actions and the political philosophy of the ruling NDA government in India — manifested in the recently passed Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC) — are increasingly threatening the country's friendship with Bangladesh that emerged out of troubled waters.

Bangladesh and India's nearly five-decade old bilateral relationship has been anything but steady. The few early years of positive engagement after 1971, when Bangladesh was being salvaged from its war-torn state under the stewardship of its founding father Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, saw a dramatic reversal with the assassination of Mujib in 1975.

In fact, the resurrection of military leaders and anti-Indian political and Islamic forces within the politics of Bangladesh after 1975 meant that India and Bangladesh could not form an alliance rooted in trust. And this precarious relationship reached rock bottom when the BNP and the Jamaat-e-Islami's coalition government sponsored insurgency activities against the north-eastern states of India between 2001 and 2006 by allowing separatist leaders to use Bangladesh's sovereign territories for their terrorist operations.

It is only under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's leadership — after the electoral victory of the Awami League-led alliance in 2008 — that Bangladesh made a complete U-turn in its approach to India. Further, there is little debate today that the Bangladesh-India partnership has greatly benefited from Hasina's patronage of goodwill-generating initiatives. Bangladesh has also shown an unfettered commitment to India's national security by showing zero-tolerance for all forms of terrorism.

However, recent political developments within India could threaten the friendship that Bangladesh has nurtured, maintained and remains committed to. More specifically, the Government of India's decision to go ahead with the passing of the CAB will now aid the political implementation of the NRC as it gives special status to Hindus and people belonging to other religions but not to Muslims. And while the passage of the CAB was immediately followed by the cancellation of official visits by Bangladesh's home minister and foreign minister, both sides still officially maintain that the NRC is India's internal issue. This is so even though the political rhetoric in India is advocating the expulsion of "Muslim infiltrators" from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan, which contradicts Delhi's official position with Bangladesh.

This is precisely why many in Bangladesh believe that the NRC is blatantly disrespectful and risks undermining the only successful example of the "neighbourhood first policy" that the NDA government coined when they were elected to office in 2014. There are two available strategies the NDA government might opt to pursue in how to deal with the million-plus Muslims in Assam who are now considered infiltrators. These people can either be kept in secured camps or the Indian government can start pushing them back into Bangladesh. And while the first strategy might create an international uproar, the second is likely to completely destabilise the relationship that underpins cooperation between the two neighbours.

But this is not the only front to which the implications of the NRC will be restricted. The CAB and the NRC are instruments that try to facilitate the reconfiguration of India's social fabric into two broad identities — Hindus and the rest — which serves only the narrow interests of the ruling coalition in Delhi, especially because it relies on religious identity-based jingoism as a political tool. Hence, the CAB and the NRC will deepen the communal divide that remains ever-present within the social fabric of South Asia.

It is also essential to underscore that in no civilised country can religion be the basis of citizenship, specifically if the founding principles of such nation states championed secular ideals and equality before the law. In that respect, the political and legal argument of the NDA government that categorises India as the natural homeland for Hindus but not for Muslims is not only an ideological regression, but it champions a philosophy that is inherently anti-Indian. And as this process plays out, it will open the window for new sources of destabilisation in both Bangladesh and India.

After all, if India's right-wing Hindu forces find it justifiable to propagate a second-class citizenship for Indian Muslims and send controversially created "infiltrators" to Bangladesh, then what will stop Jamaat-e-Islami and other right-wing Islamic forces in Bangladesh from proposing similar standards for more than 10 million Bangladeshi Hindus? And how will secular and liberal forces in Bangladesh navigate this communal tension, with its root cause in the systematic persecution of minorities in India? Most importantly, how will any well-intentioned government in Bangladesh build a lasting partnership with India if the population at large becomes deeply distrusting and sceptical of such a partnership?

There is little doubt that one cannot ensure geopolitical stability, security and social harmony by legitimising a political strategy that aims to turn a democracy into a communal, majoritarian political order, particularly when the Subcontinent has navigated a deeply divisive past, culminating in a profound distrust for one's neighbour.

Bilateral ties that overcame such strong historic impediments deserve respect, as they were created with hard work, meticulous political strategies, good intent and visionary leadership. Any political strategy that undermines such accomplishments merits reconsideration. Ties with Bangladesh, in particular, need careful consideration. Any crossing of the Rubicon while executing the NRC will undo the important strides that Bangladesh and India have together taken in the recent past. India, in this context, must prove that it is a respectful bilateral partner.

The writer is a senior economist at the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh, Dhaka

> The CAB and the NRC are instruments that try to facilitate the reconfiguration of India's social fabric into two broad identities — Hindus and the rest — which serves only the narrow interests of the ruling coalition in Delhi, especially because it relies on religious identity-based jingoism to as a political tool. Hence, the CAB and the NRC will deepen the communal divide that remains ever-present within the social fabric of South Asia.

Shifting corridors of power

What image should Rajpath reflect? What should be the shape of a new Parliament House? Major architectural changes demand transparency

GAUTAM BHATIA

IN 1913, EDWIN Lutyens stood on the crest of Raisina Hill, and in the yellow summer light gazed eastwards, across low scrub and kikar trees, down the long plain that would become the setting for his last major work. He stood long enough to envision the grand scheme that he would undertake over the next few decades, a scheme that would become — for the future inhabitants of his great enterprise — the most sacred ground of the Indian capital.

Almost a century on, a new plan has been unveiled to modify Lutyens's grand design of this sandstone acropolis — the axial assembly of North and South Block, the crowning Viceroy's House, the flanking circular Parliament building, the long ceremonial lawn and roadway that ends at India Gate. With radical changes planned, the obvious question is whether they should be altered from their original intent to suit the demands of the 21st century; whether, in fact, Lutyens's time bears any resemblance to Narendra Modi's India.

In reality, very little.

To begin with, the Viceroy's House was designed as a monumental English country house, by an architect specialising in English country houses. Its extensive wings accommodate bedroom suites, interior courts, a grand ballroom, library, state dining halls, a cinema theatre, and quarters for a staff of stewards, valets, housekeepers, barber, tailor, and painter. Not to mention an extensive base floor for the storage of linen, china, glass, carpets and furniture. The architecture reflects the overwhelming formalism of an English country estate and the heightened domesticity of a Mughal palace. Only a minuscule of its formidable space and services are now used by the President. Should then the remaining building be converted into a museum of imperialism?

Flanking its entrance, South and North Block were made as symbolic reminders of the support of the civil service. Structures of no great importance, their architect Baker called them "buildings of dignity that avoided the dreadful Hindoo stuff". Today, the vast stone offices have the air of an abandoned ruin. Built at a time when space was cheap and cooling was done with high ventilators, the structures are barely adequate for an overgrown bureaucracy, and serve more as a convenient home to local pigeons and monkeys. The proposed design scheme suggests their new use as museums of the Indian republic — a convenient ploy that relegates any and all historic structures to galleries or heritage hotels.

Issues about building inadequacies have been raised by the government primarily because of Parliament House. Yet in the ensemble, this is the only building that continues to serve its function admirably. Other than the niggling demands for security, media, and greater levels of communication, the chambers of both Houses are well equipped and easily accessible, with a wide reach of spillover space for informal discussions and meetings. Verandahs, courtyards, and wide galleries are all in keeping with the view that political decisions happen in "the corridors of power". What then is all the fuss about? Citing lack of space as the main reason, the old building will become another museum, this time to democracy. And an altogether new structure will be constructed alongside to accommodate the rising number of MPs.

The primary change is in the ceremonial space of Rajpath itself. Designed with long reflecting pools and a spread of flanking trees, the linear space was meant to be a symbolic appropriation of public space for no reason other than the expression of power. It furthered the cause of monumentalism, and made the pink architecture on Raisina Hill grander, more authoritarian. Lutyens never imagined that a century later the place would become a messy daily bazaar, filled with vendors, ice-cream carts, informal boating — a fair ground for all purposes, his beloved India Gate, a noisy playground.

Yet, in the overall structure of public space, Rajpath still remains an arena of great urban significance, equal to the Mall in Washington, DC and the Champs Elyeses in Paris. In the 100-year history of the site, since its original conception, there have been many additions, as would be expected of any important public arena in the capital of a newly-independent country. Most of the other ministry structures built along the adjacent flanks date back to the 1950s and 1960s. Without exception, each is a poor cousin of its antecedent on Raisina Hill, each a step away from the grand tradition of design, quality and construction workmanship set up by Lutyens.

What image should then Rajpath reflect? What should be the new shape of the Parliament House? The answers will emerge soon enough, now that the work has of design has been awarded. In other parts of the world, any major architectural change is carefully considered, opened for discussion, and formulated after a consensus. In France, every civic intervention is selected after an open design competition, as is so in most democracies. Sadly, in a place where transparency is only a vague concept, critical national decisions are still made behind closed doors.

Does architecture — and Lutyens — deserve a place in Indian history? Why should we care about architects who strayed from "the dreadful Hindoo stuff", but still erected a magnificent sandstone stage set? Perhaps for the same reason that we continue to revere and protect the Purana Qila, the Konarak Sun Temple and the Gateway of India. It is unlikely that such structures can ever be conceived again, let alone, built.

But another school of thought is emerging — one that treats these old buildings like history books, rewritten with fresh untested knowledge. Sometimes it is easier to rewrite or rebuild history, than save it, or learn from it.

Bhatia is a Delhi-based architect and writer

VIEW FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

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

INDIA DISAPPOINTS

USUALLY, AT LEAST in recent times, the English-language press in Bangladesh has avoided being overtly critical of India. Even as the NRC process unfolded in Assam, both *The Daily Star* and *Dhaka Tribune* had, while expressing reservations, continued to state that it is a matter internal to India, and would likely not affect ties between India and Bangladesh. With the passage of the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB), there is a decisive change in that tone.

The December 12 editorial in *The Daily Star* opens with a question, which is also a powerful rebuke to the Narendra Modi government: "Coming on the heels of the controversial National Register of Citizens (NRC) policy in Assam, does the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB), one wonders, herald the end of a pluralistic and secular India, and the fulfilment of the dream of the RSS and its founders like Savarkar?"

The editorial argues that the CAB strikes at the foundation of the Indian republic. And that it will "validate" communal politics, something which the BJP "has no pretensions" about championing. It even addresses the point that as an elected government, the Modi-led dispensation is merely fulfilling its mandate: "Elected leaders do have the right to implement policies which in their wisdom they see as beneficial to the country and its people. But the popular mandate does not allow for the kind of politics where brute majority in parliament is exploited for partisan politics that strikes at the basic ethos of a nation... What we see as even more worrisome is that the CAB directly encourages migration of Hindus from Bangladesh."

"India's soul," says the editorial, "is being jaundiced". And more's the pity, because there was a time when the largest country in South Asia served as an example. "Because, India was cited, not only by Bangladesh but also the world, as an example of a pluralistic, inclusive nation with a syncretic culture and eclectic society. What we see now is the retrogression of a nation which once exemplified 'unity in diversity' to an exclusively Hindu state where only one religion will prevail."

The editorial in *Dawn* on December 11, understandably, grandstands rather eloquently on the end of secularism in India: "Under Narendra Modi's watch, there is little doubt that the country is being transformed into a Hindu rashtra, where minority communities are relegated to the margins of society, if accepted at all."

Dawn calls for international condemnation of the CAB as a conclusion to its editorial: "It seems the RSS ideologues that are running India, who are huge fans of Israel and whose ideological forefathers were smitten by Europe's 20th-century fascists, are now employing the 'best practices' of both influences to do away with India's Muslims. These condemnable actions should be noted by countries around the world. There have always been forces in India struggling to remove the veneer of secularism that previous dispensations there sought to promote. With the BJP's rise to power, it seems that the communal beast has been set free."

A BASIC MISTAKE

AN ARTICLE BY Saleem Ahmed in *Dhaka Tribune* on December 11 takes issue with Rajnath Singh and other members of the Indian government and ruling party characterising Bangladesh (along with Pakistan and Afghanistan) as "theocratic Islamic states" where minorities "are facing harassment" and "the state religion is Islam". The article responds to what it sees as calumny by the defence minister of India. "The top official of the Indian government must have understood that the state constitution is still secular. Since 2009, Sheikh Hasina's ruling Awami League and her government strictly believes in a secular polity. Therefore, it should have been difficult for Rajnath Singh to misread Sheikh Hasina's government's pluralist polity. We are not denying that the Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Adivasis (indigenous people), and also Ahmadiyya Muslims are sporadically attacked by religious zealots, who often slam the minorities for blasphemy. The AL government promptly took action against the perpetrators."

The article makes clear that the NRC, along with the CAB and the rhetoric being employed by the government and ruling party in India will have an adverse effect on bilateral relations: "Bangladesh's government was assured time and again that the controversial NRC, specially made for identification of illegal Muslims from Bangladesh residing in Assam state, would not jeopardise bilateral relations between the two neighbouring countries. The race to table and pass the Non-Muslim Citizenship Bill or Citizenship Amendment Bill by the Indian parliament, allegedly to make a demographic shift, seems to migration experts to be an issue for Bangladesh to be embarrassed about."

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

FARMERS' AID

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'How e-NAM has become an 'inam' for farmers' (IE, December 12). The writer has identified many benefits of e-NAM which can help the government achieve the target of doubling farmers' income by 2022, but many farmers are still unaware or not confident about this platform. The Union government needs to propagate the portal like corporates and should take the support of state governments.

Ravdeep Singh Hundal, *Ferozepur*

GET INTO THE ACT

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'An encounter with injustice' (IE, December 13). People applauding encounters by police is a symptom of justice being delayed. It seems that the public wants results and is not interested in procedures. Its high time there are reforms in judicial process.

Nishant Arun, *Bikaner*

FRAUGHT MOVE

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'A constitutional obligation' (IE, December 13). The purpose of NRC was to expel the illegal migrants from the country as its resources are limited. The CAB in contrast bestows citizenship to migrants from six religious communities from the specific countries. How is it beneficial for a country like India which is already suffering from mass poverty and unemployment? Moreover, the move is particularly fraught in a country where religion-based discrimination is on the rise.

Hala Quamar, *New Delhi*

HURTING FARMERS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'In the farmer's name' (IE, December 13). MSPs have been detrimental to crop diversity. Thanks to it we have only three major food crops — rice, wheat and sugarcane. No doubt India is the diabetic capital of world. Oats and cornflakes have replaced poha, suji, jawar and bajra from the Indian market. The loss of crop diversity has been accompanied by deteriorating water table, bad cropping practices and skewed markets. Private investments in agriculture have fallen.

Kanishka Vishal, *Bettiah*

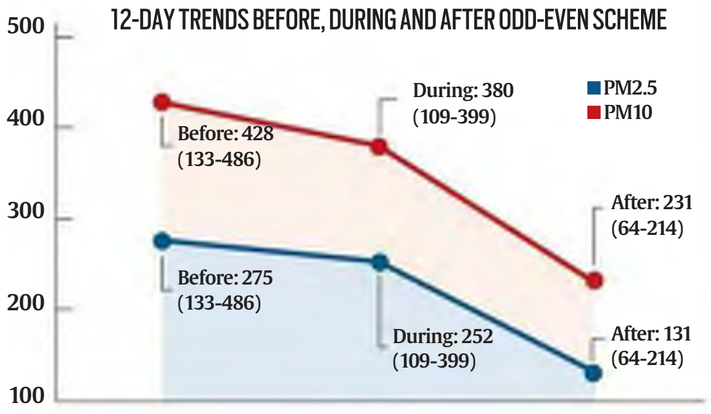
LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

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.

@ieExplained
#ExpressExplained
If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to **explained@indianexpress.com**

TELLING NUMBERS

Drop in Delhi particulate matter in days following odd-even



Odd-even period: November 4 -15, 2019

Figures in micrograms/cubic metre

Figures in brackets signify maximum and minimum concentrations during the period

Source: Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change

FOR 12 days between November 4 and November 15, the Delhi government rolled out an odd-even scheme, based on licence plate numbers, to restrict the number of vehicles on the roads and reduce pollution. Figures tabled by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change recently, in response to a question in Parliament, showed 12-day trends for air pollution before, during and after the scheme.

The average concentration of PM2.5 fell from 275 micrograms per cubic metre before the scheme (October 23-November 3) to 131 micrograms/cu.m. In the 12 days immediately following the scheme (November 16-27). During the scheme the average concentration was 252 micrograms/cu.m. The range of PM2.5 varied between a low of 133 and a high of 486 before the scheme, between 109 and 399 during the scheme, and between 64 and 214 after the scheme.

For PM10, the average concentration fell from 428 micrograms/cu.m. (maximum 289, minimum 592) before the scheme to 380 micrograms/cu.m. (220-582) during October 23-November 27, and then 231 micrograms/cu.m. (127-3622) after the scheme.

The average concentration of sulphur dioxide remained the same before and during the scheme, at 14 micrograms/cu.m, and fell slightly to 13 after the scheme. Nitrogen dioxide concentration dropped from 58 micrograms/cu.m. to 57 to 55.

The Ministry said that according to recent studies, the main contributors to PM2.5 and PM10 for Delhi are transport, industries, agriculture burning, residential and dust (soil, road and construction) along with meteorological conditions such as wind speed, temperature etc.

THIS WORD MEANS

THE CROWN ACT

In US states, law against discrimination over hair colour

IN JULY this year, California became the first state in the US to make discrimination over natural hair illegal. New York followed suit and now New Jersey has become the latest US state to pass such a legislation, called Creating a Respectful and Open Workplace for Women (CROWN) Act.

CROWN aims to protect people of colour from being discriminated against for their natural hair, especially at the workplace. The legislation takes into account discrimination because of traits that are historically associated with a particular race, "based on hair texture and style". It also takes into account the historical norms and societal norms that equated "blackness" and its associated physical traits such as dark skin, kinky and curly hair "to a badge of inferiority, sometimes subject to separate and unequal treatment", the California version of the law states. One of the reasons for such legislation is to separate "professionalism" from features and mannerisms, thereby getting rid of workplace grooming or dress code policies that would deter black people from applying.

A study conducted recently by Unilever-owned brand Dove concluded that black women were 80% more likely to change their natural hair in order to meet social norms or expectations at work. It also said that black women are 50% more likely to be sent home or to know of another black woman who has been sent home from the workplace because of her hair.

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

How cars can run on hydrogen

Supreme Court has asked government to look into the feasibility of hydrogen-based tech to deal with vehicular air pollution in capital. India is looking closely at Japan, which has made progress in this field.

ANIL SASI
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 15

AHEAD OF next July's Tokyo Olympics, Japan is gearing up to put on its roads thousands of vehicles based on a hydrogen cell technology, also known as 'fuel cells'. Japan's lead in the practical application of the hydrogen fuel cycle, and the ongoing research in this field at the International Research Center for Hydrogen Energy at Kyushu University, are being studied closely by the Indian government as it readies a hydrogen-fuelled blueprint. This comes in the backdrop of the Supreme Court directing the government on November 13 to look into the feasibility of introducing such technology to deal with air pollution in the National Capital Region.

How does the hydrogen fuel cell work?

At the heart of the fuel cell electric vehicles (FCEV) is a device that uses a source of fuel, such as hydrogen, and an oxidant to create electricity by an electrochemical process. Put simply, the fuel cell combines hydrogen and oxygen to generate an electric current, water being the only byproduct. Like conventional batteries under the bonnets of automobiles, hydrogen fuel cells too convert chemical energy into electrical energy. From a long-term viability perspective, FCEVs are billed as vehicles of the future, given that hydrogen is the most abundant resource in the universe.

So is an FCEV a conventional vehicle or an electric vehicle (EV)?

While the fuel cells generate electricity through an electrochemical process, unlike a battery-electricity vehicle, it does not store energy and, instead, relies on a constant supply of fuel and oxygen — in the same way that an internal combustion engine relies on a constant supply of petrol or diesel, and oxygen. In that sense, it may be seen as being similar to a conventional internal combustion engine.

But unlike the combustion engine cars, there are no moving parts in the fuel cell, so they are more efficient and reliable by comparison. Also, there is no combustion onboard, in the conventional sense.

Globally, EVs are bracketed under three broad categories:

- BEVs such as the Nissan Leaf or Tesla Model S, which have no internal combustion engine or fuel tank, and run on a fully electric drivetrain powered by rechargeable batteries.
- Conventional hybrid electric vehicles or HEVs such as the Toyota Camry sold in the country combine a conventional internal combustion engine system with an electric propulsion system, resulting in a hybrid vehicle drivetrain that substantially reduces fuel use. The onboard battery in a conventional hybrid is charged when the IC engine is powering the drivetrain.
- Plug-in hybrid vehicles or PHEVs, such as the Chevrolet Volt, too have a hybrid drivetrain that uses both an internal combustion engine and electric power for motive power, backed by rechargeable batteries that can be plugged into a power source.
- FCEVs are widely considered to be the next frontier in EV technology. FCEVs such as Toyota's Mirai and Honda's Clarity use hydrogen to power an onboard electric motor. Since they are powered entirely by electricity, FCEVs are considered EVs — but unlike BEVs, their range and refuelling processes are comparable to conventional cars and trucks.

To what uses can the technology be put?

The hydrogen fuel cell vehicle market is dominated by Japan's Toyota and Honda, alongside South Korea's Hyundai. While the successful development of hydrogen would provide energy for transportation and electric power, an advantage is the wide availability of resources for producing hydrogen.

Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) published a 'Strategic Roadmap for Hydrogen and Fuel Cells' in 2014, with a revised update in March 2016, with a goal to achieve a hydrogen society. Stationary fuel cells — the largest, most powerful fuel cells — are being designed to provide a cleaner, reliable source of on-site power to hospitals, banks, airports and homes. A fuel cell continues to produce energy as long as fuel and oxidant are supplied. Portable fuel cells could find other applications beyond vehicles.

Roger Hertzenberg, CEO of Uno-X Hydrogen, which develops hydrogen stations in Norway, the world leader in green vehicle technology, told *The Indian Express*: "Fuel cell electric vehicles are the most user-friendly zero-emission solution in Norway. Our goal is to provide the necessary infrastructure, securing our customers several zero emission-alternatives to choose from, and to meet the demand for H2 fuel in a convenient way at the lowest possible cost for the consumer."

What are the advantages and disadvantages of fuel cells?

Fuel cells have strong advantages over conventional combustion-based technologies currently used in many power plants and cars, given that they produce much smaller quantities of greenhouse gases and none of the air pollutants that cause health problems. Also, if pure hydrogen is used, fuel cells emit only heat and water as a byproduct. Such cells are also far more energy efficient than traditional combustion technologies.

Unlike battery-powered electric vehicles, fuel cell vehicles do not need to be plugged in, and most models exceed 300 km of range on a full tank. They are filled up with a nozzle, just like in a petrol or diesel station.

But there are problems.

While FCEVs do not generate gases that contribute to global warming, the process of making hydrogen needs energy — often from fossil fuel sources. That has raised questions over hydrogen's green credentials.

Also, there are questions of safety — hydrogen is more explosive than petrol. Opponents of the technology cite the case of the hydrogen-filled Hindenburg airship in 1937. But Japanese auto industry players *The Indian Express* spoke to argued that a comparison was misplaced because most of the fire was attributed to diesel fuel for the airship's engines and a flammable lacquer coating on the outside.

Hydrogen fuel tanks in FCEVs such as the Mirai are made from highly durable carbon fibre, whose strength is assessed in crash tests, and also trials where bullets are fired at it. The Mirai and Clarity have a triple-layer hydrogen tanks made of woven carbon fibre, which the manufacturers claim is completely safe.

The other major hurdle is that the vehicles are expensive, and fuel dispensing pumps are scarce. But this should get better as scale and distribution improves.

Japan is going full steam ahead. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe declared in Davos this year that Japan "aims to reduce the production cost of hydrogen by at least 90 per cent by the year 2050, to make it cheaper than natural gas".

What is the progress in India?

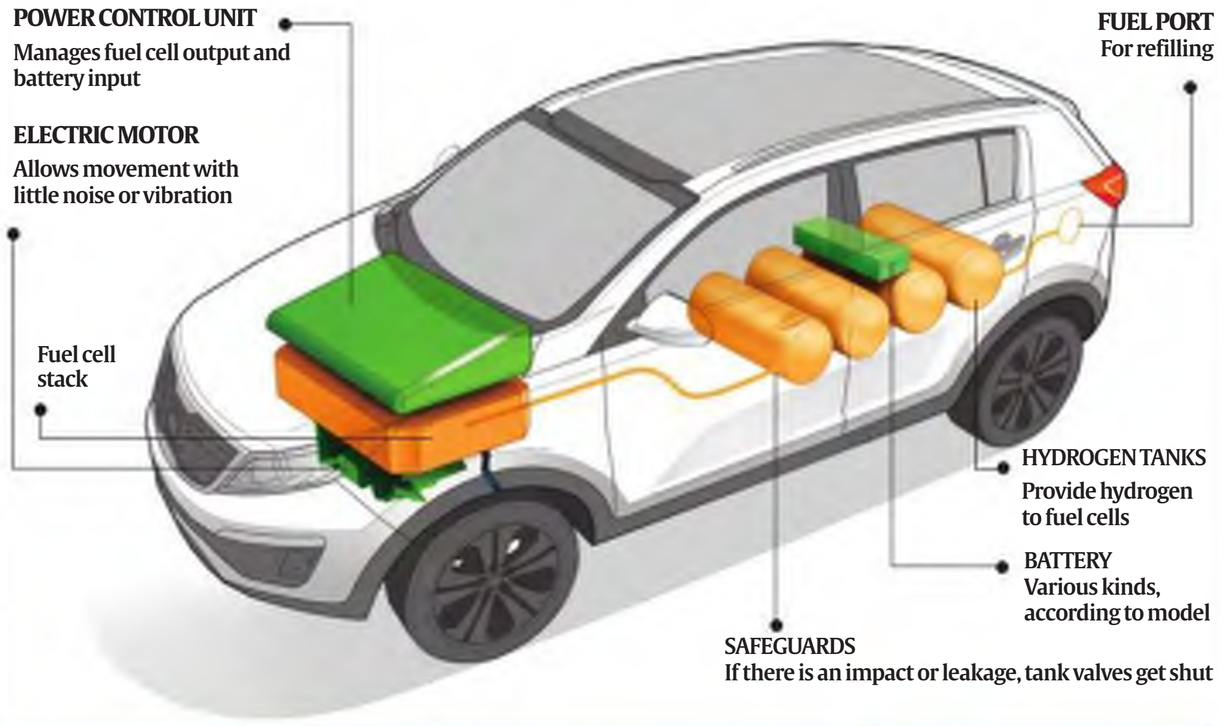
In India, so far, the definition of EV only covers BEVs; the government has lowered taxes to 12%. At 43%, hybrid electric vehicles and hydrogen FCEVs attract the same tax as IC vehicles.

The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, under its Research, Development and Demonstration (RD&D) programme, has been supporting various such projects in academic institutions, research and development organisations and industry for development. Fourteen RD&D projects on hydrogen and fuel cells are currently under implementation with the support of the Ministry. Between 2016-17 and 2018-19, eight projects were sanctioned and 18 completed.

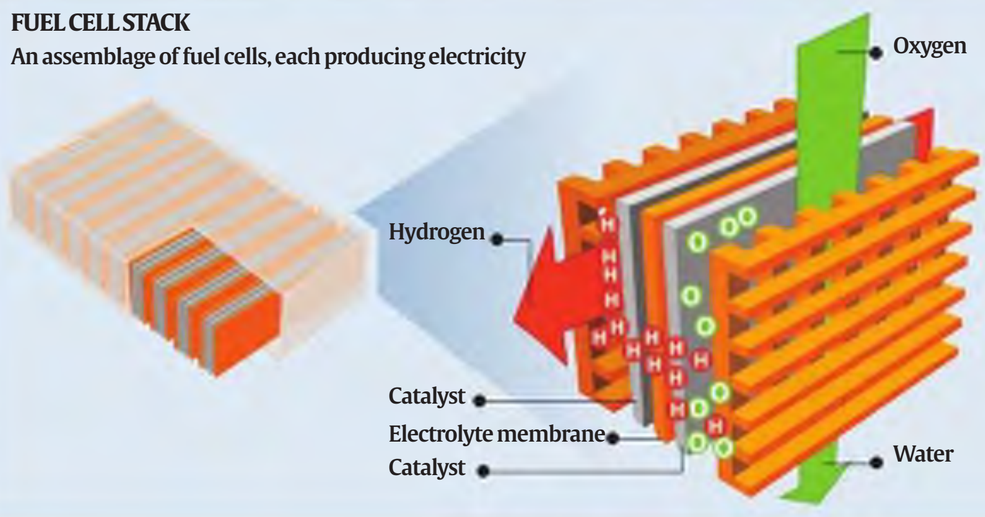
The Ministry of Science and Technology has supported two networked centres on hydrogen storage led by IIT Bombay and Nonferrous Materials Technology Development Centre, Hyderabad. These involve 10 institutions, including IITs, and IISc, Bangalore.

HOW IT WORKS

A fuel cell generates its own electricity through a chemical reaction between hydrogen and oxygen



FUEL CELL STACK
An assemblage of fuel cells, each producing electricity



From hydrogen atoms, catalyst strips electrons, which flow between electrodes, creating electricity. Electrons and hydrogen atoms pass through electrolyte membrane, then combine into water.

What poll result means for Brexit, Scotland, and Johnson's Britain

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 15

LAST WEEK, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson swept an election that left various takeaways, the most important of which is the likelihood of Brexit being put on the fast track. Other takeaways and landmarks include the biggest defeat of the Labour Party since 1935, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn's decision not to lead the party in future elections, a sweep of Scotland's seats by the Scottish National Party, and its implications on the possibility of independence.

Johnson's Conservative Party won 365 seats in the 650-member Parliament. The Labour Party won 203, and the Scottish National Party 48.

Why is it being said that the election was about Brexit?

Because that was the narrative that drove the election. It is too simplistic, however, to read the result as a message that most voters in Britain are in favour of Brexit. With Brexit inevitable, it was a question about how the process should unfold. On this, Johnson's Conservative Party had a more clear plan than the Labour Party.

While campaigning, Johnson not only promised to resolve the long-pending issue but also projected the opposition as likely to keep delaying a resolution. Labour's stance, in fact, did appear to be contradictory. Corbyn is personally inclined towards Brexit, but many in the Labour coalition oppose it. The Labour campaign talked about a revised Brexit plan, but proposed to take that through yet another national referendum.

More than Brexit, it was the prospect of closure that appears to have decided the election. The Conservatives broke votes away from the pro-Brexit section of Labour's base.

So, how will Brexit proceed?

So far, no plan offered in Parliament had won majority support. Now, because of the sheer size of the victory, Johnson's plan is more likely to find support, in spite of the many factions created by opinions on Brexit. Besides, the vote can potentially be interpreted as public endorsement for Johnson's plan, although that is not really the case.

PM Boris Johnson outside 10 Downing Street after his victory. *Reuters*

With Parliament due to sit next Friday, it is expected to try and pass Johnson's Withdrawal Agreement Bill this month itself. After that, Britain has to negotiate the terms of a treaty, including its time-frame, with the European Union. "Brexit day" is on January 31, but the process of implementation will continue long after that.

How does one read the performance of the Scottish National Party?

First, it would be too much to expect that the SNP's performance will eventually lead to Scottish independence. Nevertheless, the SNP's sweep of Scotland is immensely significant, shutting out both Labour and Conservative parties.

In a referendum in 2014, Scotland had rejected independence. But opinion polls have also shown that the Scottish population is by and large in favour of remaining in the European Union. Will Brexit, therefore, lead to calls for independence? Although the SNP is against Brexit, the vote does not necessarily mean a referendum for Scottish independence. It may simply be that the SNP is more popular with Scottish voters than the Labour or Conservative Party.

Even if Brexit, when it happens, revives pro-independence sentiment (which would help the SNP further), independence is a long road with many procedural hurdles.

What does the result mean for Britain, beyond Brexit?

The size of the victory sets the stage for a Britain of Johnson's ideological vision — nationalism, with tougher laws on immigration. Britain will also have to deal with Brexit's effect on its economy. This includes the long process of new bilateral trade agreements with many other countries.

What does it mean for Labour, and Corbyn in particular?

For the party, it is the smallest share of Parliament since 1935: even its minority during the Margaret Thatcher regime was larger. However, the vote is being seen more as a loss of Corbyn than for the party.

While national ratings show Corbyn as being highly unpopular among voters, he led a party whose stand on various non-Brexit issues are popular. The fact that Corbyn failed to capitalise on this indicates that the elections are his defeat. One possible reason, according to analyses in various news publications, is that voters trusted Johnson more than Corbyn in terms of carrying out their respective promises, even though Labour's policies were more popular with dedicated Labour voters. Corbyn is seen as pro-Brexit while Labour voters are largely against it.