



The IndianEXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

THOU SHALT

Shifting burden of proof on citizens, telling them that rights are bounded but duties are not — this isn't sabka vishwas

THE GOVERNMENT ASKS the people to believe it when it says that the new Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) is not discriminatory, that the unsettling National Register of Citizens (NRC) process has nothing to do with the CAA and the National Population Register is not a precursor to the NRC. But even as the government asks for the trust of its citizens, it simultaneously makes clear that it does not trust them. And that the onus of proving trustworthiness is, primarily, not on government, but on the people. This shifting of the burden of proof lies behind many of the statements and assertions emanating from the top echelons of government in recent days. In Lucknow this week, for instance, in a state which has seen the maximum number of incidents of brutal police action and the heaviest death toll during the anti-CAA mobilisations, Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke only of the alleged damage to public property by protesters. He exhorted those responsible for it to “ask themselves if their path was right”. And described citizens as bearers not of rights, but duties — “kartavya” and “dayitva” over “adhikar”. Rights are bounded and constrained, “Haq ki ek maryada hai, ek dayra hai, sama hai”, he said, but duties are not, “lekin dayitva, kartavya ki bhavna bahut vyapak hai”.

This change of emphasis, this inversion, is significant and consequential. With the burden of accountability placed squarely on the shoulders of the citizen, it lets the government off the hook. While the citizen squirms in the spotlight, the government, quite literally, gets away with it. For, it is the citizen who must be always on test, who must prove herself constantly. If in the current moment, she is being asked not about her anxieties and apprehensions about the government's new law, but to account for the purported damage to public property instead, she has been similarly challenged to prove good citizenship and patriotism in earlier times — by demonstrating she is not a hoarder of black money (demonetisation), by despite-it-all compliance with tangled tax laws (GST), or by showy solidarity with the Indian army, no questions asked (Balakot). The National Register of Citizens process, which demands proof of belonging from citizens, is a culmination of this larger paradigm shift.

As citizens scramble to make the cut, present documents, do their duty, the government evades the questions on a deepening economic slowdown, on the dwindling of jobs, on the rise of anxiety and waning of optimism, or on a law that violates the letter and spirit of the Constitution by introducing religion as a criterion for citizenship. It was another country and a different time, but the last regime that sought to talk up fundamental duties over and above fundamental rights, was the one that inserted the former in the Constitution as an attempt to subdue citizens and distract attention from its own attempts to curb their rights and freedoms — the government of Indira Gandhi, during the Emergency.

UNCERTAIN STILL

Recently declared results of Afghan elections are not the last word. There is more to come

PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA Modi tweeted congratulations to President Ashraf Ghani of Afghanistan for his election victory, but the Ministry of External Affairs has rightly been more cautious. The recently declared results of the September 28 Afghan elections are only preliminary, and there is a long way yet to go for the final results. Ghani has polled over 50 per cent of the 1.86 votes counted, but has crossed the half-way mark by an extremely thin margin of some 11,600 votes. The results have been contested by his nearest rival Abdullah Abdullah, who polled 39.5 per cent of the votes and has questioned the validity of the counting. He wants 3,00,000 votes invalidated for various irregularities, including that at least a third of them seem to have been cast after voting hours. Protests by his supporters stalled the counting for days, one of the reasons for the delay in announcing this tentative result. The Independent Election Complaints Commission will look into all the complaints, and it could be another month by the time final results are declared. If it takes on board Abdullah's demand for invalidating a substantial number of votes, a second round run-off between the two top candidates is not ruled out.

With the votes divided on ethnic lines — the Pashtun south seems to have voted with Ghani and the non-Pashtun north with Abdullah — the stability of any new government will need the co-operation of all political actors, especially as they all have to deal eventually with a force that has been inimical to the election process and the idea of a democratic Afghanistan. Even as it engaged in talks with the US for the withdrawal of American troops, the Taliban carried out violent attacks in the run-up to the election. The fear of bombings and violence on election day had an impact on the turn-out, the lowest for any election, post 9/11, and in many areas under Taliban control, polling stations could not open. The recently resumed US peace talks with the Taliban, after they were called off abruptly by President Donald Trump just ahead of the election, bring more uncertainty into the mix.

But with weeks to go, if not months, before the tortuously slow election process comes up with the final results, it would be no surprise either if the US announces that it has reached an agreement with the Taliban — the two sides were close at the time of Trump's cancellation — even before a government has taken office in Kabul. At this point, it is difficult to be optimistic about Afghanistan.

UP AND AWAY

The Mig-27 flies into the sunset, bringing a bitter-sweet career to an end

CHAPTER IN the history of the Indian Air Force (IAF) came to an end with the last of the Mig-27 fighter aircraft flying into the sunset at Jodhpur on Friday, 35 years after they were first inducted. Not only will it be the last of the Mig-27s, it will also be one of the last aircraft from the Mig family of fighter jets with the IAF. The first Mig, which stands for the tongue twisting Mikoyan-Gurevich, came from the erstwhile Soviet Union, in the aftermath of the 1962 Chinese debacle — selected over competing aircraft offered by the United States — and soon to be made in India.

The Migs went on to be the major warhorse of the IAF, serving with aplomb in the 1965 and 1971 wars against Pakistan, and the Mig-27 particularly rendered yeoman service during the Kargil conflict, where it flew under strict operating limitations imposed by the political leadership. Its performance surprised the Pakistanis, but it perhaps equally surprised the IAF which had worried about the moniker of “flying coffins” attached to Mig aircraft after multiple crashes. The Migs again proved their mettle in the short aerial combat after the Balakot strike, where the IAF claimed that Wing Commander Abhinandan had shot down a Pakistani F-16 even though he was himself shot down and taken captive in the bargain.

The Mig-27 will go but no obituaries will be written for it, as it leaves the IAF with a severe shortage of fighter jets in its fleet. Authorised 42 squadrons, it has two-thirds that number in its kitty. If India faces a military crisis in the near future, along with “God and the soldier we adore”, the much maligned Mig-27 aircraft will be remembered as well.



CHRISTOPHE JAFFRELOT

WE DON'T KNOW if India invented non-violent civil disobedience — sometimes, mistakenly referred to as passive resistance. But India is certainly the first country where this form of protest was practised on a large scale under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, who ascribed it to the Hindu/Jain notion of *ahimsa*. Exactly a hundred years ago, the Non-Cooperation Movement to protest the Jallianwala Bagh massacre set the tone for the satyagrahas that marked the freedom movement. This method of protest became the hallmark of several movements against oppression in post-independent India. The JP Movement, which precipitated the declaration of Emergency in 1975, is a case in point.

Today, the Subcontinent is returning to this peaceful mode of popular protest. In Pakistan, the Pashtuns have reactivated the legacy of Abdull Ghaflar Khan, also called Bacha Khan and Frontier Gandhi because his stronghold was located in the North West Frontier Province. The Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (Pashtun Protection Movement or PTM), formed after Nageebullah Mehsud — originally from Waziristan — was killed in a police encounter in Karachi on January 13, 2018, draws inspiration from Frontier Gandhi's movement. The extra-judicial killing has led to rallies in support of the human rights of Pashtuns. But these spontaneous protests have also been precipitated by other problems that the Pashtuns in the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) are facing. The merger of FATA with the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province hasn't mitigated the area's problems, including that of the landmines left behind by the Taliban. The peaceful protests by PTM followers have been met by repression. The army and paramilitary forces have allegedly forced dissenting voices to “disappear” (hence the “missing persons syndrome”); they have also killed dozens of peaceful demonstrators. Even then, the PTM has been steadfast about protesting in a non-violent manner.

This is also the attitude of most of the Indian demonstrators who have marched against the Citizenship Amendment Act and the National Register of Citizens which they

Subcontinent is witnessing revival of non-violent movements, to protect constitutional values

Ahimsa 2.0

consider as unconstitutional. This non-violent movement has been subjected to intense repression. More than 24 people have been killed so far, most of them in BJP-ruled Uttar Pradesh. The violence by police in the BJP-ruled states against students on university campuses or against peaceful demonstrators has been recorded on videos made on mobile phones — so has the alleged destruction of private properties, including cars, by the custodians of law. This is the era of Ahimsa 2.0, where social media makes it impossible for the state to escape testimonies of committed eyewitnesses, even when there is an internet shutdown. Something similar is happening in the case of the protests by the Pashtuns — those who want to know what is happening do remain informed, irrespective of how the mainstream media engages with the protests.

In Pakistan, PTM leaders have been presented as traitors working for foreign powers. And, in India, several TV channels have characterised non-violent demonstrators as hooligans by repeatedly screening a select number of incidents.

The first challenge that a non-violent protest faces, always, is to remain non-violent in the face of repression and activities of agents provocateurs. Mahatma Gandhi suspended the Non Cooperation Movement in 1922 after Chauri Chaura for that reason. The second challenge pertains to the sustainability of such a movement. As Gandhi used to say, non-violence is not for the coward. It demands a lot of physical courage — a resolve that may weaken gradually in the face of incessant repression. If ahimsa took India to freedom and helped Nelson Mandela defeat apartheid, it failed in China where the Dalai Lama could not stop Beijing from repressing Tibetans and annihilating their culture. Non-violence can work only when states and societies are amenable to moral pressure and likely to develop feelings of guilt. It is bound to fail when the rulers and/or the majorities that support them dehumanise the protesters — whether they are ethnic groups, religious communities or political movements. If moral pressures are a key factor, exter-

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WARS AND PEACE

Imran Khan makes distinction between ‘our’ wars and ‘theirs’. All have taken high toll



KHALED AHMED

ON NOVEMBER 14, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan talked about the unwisdom of “fighting others' wars” — instead of, presumably, Pakistan's own wars. He said that “Pakistan would no more join any alliance for any other country's war” but “rather play the role of a bridge-builder”. PM Khan referred to the Afghan jihad of the 1980s and the American “war on terror” following the 9/11 crisis. He regretted that the “foreign funding” that flowed into Pakistan's coffers in return for fighting these wars was nothing compared to the cost paid by the country.

Khan is right in saying that no state that is serious about its developmental targets should ever think of war — this requires limitless realism and rejection of nationalism and its adjuncts of pride and conquest. But the truth is that Pakistan has fought certain wars as an “aligned” state when it was in dire need of financial help. It has also fought wars that its allies in the West didn't like. Yet, it failed to avoid the kind of fallout that Khan wishes to avoid. The question is which wars were more damaging for Pakistan.

The practical truth is that when Pakistan fought “others' wars”, it got some money for the material and spiritual damages it suffered but when it fought its own wars it didn't get any money. Moreover, it never really recovered from the damage suffered during these wars. Khan opposes Pakistan's decision to take part in the post-9/11 war in Afghanistan in 2011 which took place under a Chapter 7 resolution of the UN Security

Council on which India, like the rest of the world, had consented to become an ally.

An “international army” of “terrorists” was prepared with American and Saudi funds, and Pakistan, in Khan's words, “trained” this army in terrorism. The irony is that when Pakistan finally turned on its own terrorist outfit called Taliban, Khan and his party sided with this outfit. Khan was “chosen” by this group as its “vakil” (legal representative). At that time, Pakistan was getting out of a “war of others” by getting rid of the Taliban, but that wasn't palatable to Khan.

Then there were wars fought by Pakistan as “Pakistan's own wars” with disastrous results and no international support. It fought the 1965 war against India based on its “moral” stance on Kashmir. It used the weapons it had got from the Western allies for fighting the Soviet Union and thus lost international support. There is no evidence that this “national” war against India gave Pakistan any advantage in its internal development. There is, however, evidence that the 1965 war actually sowed the seeds of disagreement between its two wings leading, in 1971, to the fall of East Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh.

The ironies springing from Pakistan's “own wars” are hard to stomach as we blame “other states” for what happened even in this case. The common denominator in the military defeats suffered by Pakistan is dominance of the country's army and a succession of martial laws. This dominance continues and PM Khan will have to rethink his wisdom about wars in 2019.

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The last war which Pakistan fought as its own war, and not “for American money”, was the Kargil war of 1999. It suffered a defeat more humiliating than the 1971 war. But instead of stock-taking, this “national war” strengthened the very elements who had undertaken this stupid misadventure. Its planner-executioner, then Army chief General Pervez Musharraf, staged a coup against the democratically elected government of Nawaz Sharif, grabbing the reins of power for nearly a decade. An already crippled economy, struggling under the weight of sanctions imposed by the US after the previous year's nuclear tests, had to cough up \$2 billion for the botched war. And, in the eyes of the world, Pakistan was now a dangerously unstable state led by military officers with little or no accountability.

In conclusion, fighting any war in this day and age is disastrous for the state but fighting others' wars still comes out better than fighting the “patriotic” ones. PM Khan has, though, turned a new leaf by calling out to India to start cross-border trade and embark on a “normalisation” of relations. This means eschewing all kinds of wars — even though fighting “others' wars” still looks a bit more attractive than Pakistan's “own wars”.

The writer is consulting editor, Newsweek Pakistan

DECEMBER 21, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

COUP IN KABUL
AFGHANISTAN PRESIDENT HAFIZULLAH Amin was overthrown in a coup by Babrek Karmel, a former prime minister, Kabul Radio reported. The coup came as Soviet troops and equipment poured into the country to aid in an offensive against anti-communist rebels by the government, now reportedly overthrown. There was no word on Karmel's position on Soviet-Afghanistan relations. The Iranian news agency, Pars, said Karmel announced he had taken power in a broadcast. In his message, Karmel promised “democratic freedoms for all the masses, the release of all political prisoners, and the creation of jobs for the unemployed.” A curfew until

dawn was ordered and people urged to stay indoors. BBC, quoting sources in Washington, said street fighting was underway in Kabul between government forces and insurgents. US officials said reports from Kabul indicated “some involvement of Soviet military personnel” in street fighting in the capital. These officials said they did not yet have “solid information” but Soviet military personnel were reported to be moving about the city.

SOVIET-IRAN TIES
THE SOVIET UNION has assured the Iranian ambassador in Moscow, Mohammed Mokri, that it “will not remain idle” if the US attempts “armed aggression” against Iran. This

statement has been accompanied according to intelligence reports by Soviet troop movement in the area.

RIOTS IN HYDERABAD
OVER 15 BUSINESS and residential premises and a place of worship were set on fire in a fresh outbreak of communal violence in the old city area of Hyderabad. At least 20 persons were injured. The trouble was sparked off by a clash between workers of the Majlis Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen and the Janata Party. Police lobbed teargas shells to disperse a stone-throwing mob of about 1,000 persons. Thirty persons have so far been arrested and 29 cases of arson and looting registered.



The difficulty of being honest

The honest go on, driven by an inner force that borders on recklessness. A society that creates hurdles to exhaust the honest or wound them, paves the path for its own perdition



ASHOK LAVASA

“HONESTY IS THE best policy” was a favourite topic of debates in school. It is another matter that both sides — for and against — ended up supporting the motion; the only point of difference being whether honesty was its own reward or it came with an avoidable cost.

One could wonder at the wisdom in this dictum. A policy by definition is something that is adopted after weighing the pros and cons of various alternatives. It is defined as “a way of behaving that you think is best in a particular situation”, or as “prudent or expedient conduct or action”. In either case, it is a well-considered approach, not merely the ingrained response of an individual based on inherent values.

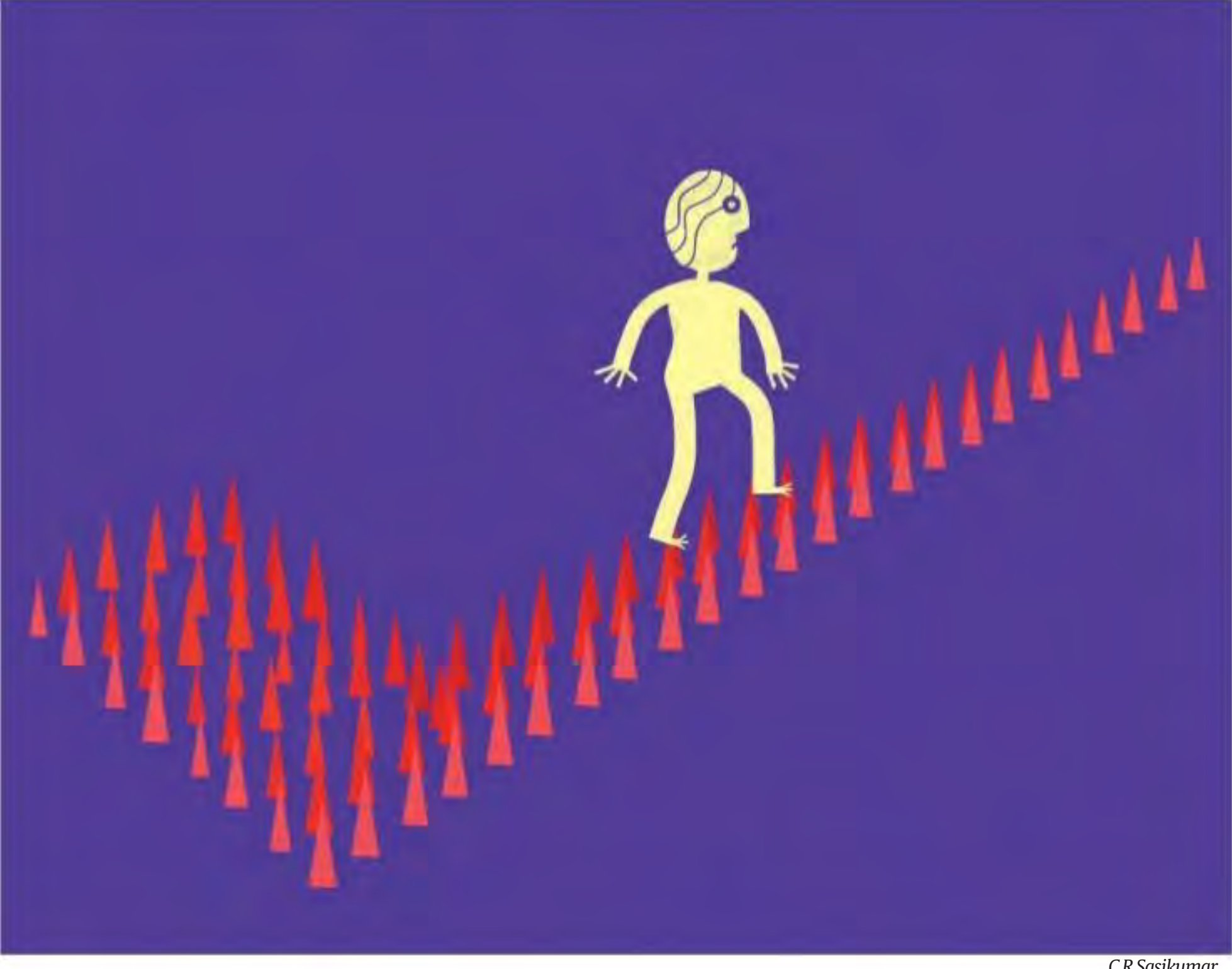
Is honesty to be understood as a pragmatic way of dealing with situations or is it simply an ethical response to any given situation influenced by an individual's character? When an individual is faced with a dilemma of making a choice, he either responds instinctively or makes a well-reasoned decision. For instance, an auto driver finding a passenger's purse in his vehicle, may decide to look for the passenger, deposit the purse in a police station, or report the matter to his owner. As long as he doesn't keep the money with him, he may have acted honestly. His honest act may or may not be rewarded, but he has chosen to exchange the pleasure of pocketing the money with the comfort of his conscience.

That, however, is a simplistic example. Honesty as a policy always comes with a price. It demands a premium like an insurance policy, although it might appear not to command a premium or provide any insurance. The path of honesty, like dharma, is straight yet seldom simple. It often turns out to be tortuous, consumes more energy, sometimes even damaging the vehicle because of unfavourable road conditions. The honest, however, go on regardless, perhaps driven by an inner force that borders on recklessness. A society that creates hurdles which exhaust the honest or wound them paves the path for its own perdition.

At the same time, should honesty be an obsession? Should it drive itself so hard that nothing survives save itself? No system would benefit by such a compulsive pursuit of a sacrosanct principle that believes in preserving itself regardless of the outcome of the task at hand. No system can be productive if it is obsessed with defining the idea of honesty narrowly and subjecting everyone to a hidebound, arbitrary ideal. The outcome of such a narrow approach would be a society of persons with their chastity belts seemingly intact but with little else to show.

Honesty is not a fetish to be preserved and worshipped without being practised. It is like keeping a toilet clean without using it. Toilets are meant to be used; if kept clean they will be used more.

The honest, one could say, are those who are honest to their job and achieve the desired result by adopting honest means, being neither unduly swayed by the pressure to perform at all costs nor weighed down by passive principles that shackle performance. For example, in the case of a civil servant, accommodating popular expectations is not necessarily an act of dishonesty; suc-



C R Sasikumar

cumbing to the pressure of the present is.

If a public servant decides to accommodate the genuine concerns of an individual without compromising public interest, it cannot be termed a dishonest act. Interventions to resolve such individual difficulties cannot be treated as favours to individuals. Discretion at senior level becomes necessary because sometimes people find it impossible to wade through the mire of regulations and deal with the cussedness of the system that disregards the peculiarities of an individual situation. Obsession with the appearance of non-discretionary application of rules would create an army of inert bureaucrats who would delight more in the preservation of rules than finding solutions to problems.

The Prevention of Corruption Act is meant to be a deterrent against exercising judgement with malafide intent; if it throttles individual initiative taken in right earnest, bureaucrats would be more servants and less civil. Civil servants have to solve problems without being shackled by the fear that their discretion in resolving a difficulty could be regarded as acts of undue benevolence. If their ability to resolve problems is curbed by such a shining armour around them, civil servants may end up as an unscathed army of defeated warriors.

The essential characteristic of an honest person is that he or she is truthful. His action is based on an inner voice that guides him to make a distinction between what is right and what is wrong, generally influenced by the prevailing law, his moorings and morality. There is seldom a conscious risk analysis of consequences. Therein lies the difficulty of being good. Some would call it foolhardiness, bravado or tactlessness; tact being the “kawach” of successful civil servants.

There is a price for honesty as for everything else in life. Being prepared to pay that price, directly or by way of collateral damage, is part of the honest act. The price depends on who bears the brunt of honest ac-

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tion. The sermon is that honesty is its own reward and it is recognised in the long run. In the real world, “the long run” could be unpredictably long. A quiet and prolonged grind could follow the fleeting drone of feeble praise. It is naïve to expect those that have been opposed by the honest to meekly accept the ascendance of the meek. They strike back and the price for the honest could be in the form of lonely suffering, even noticeable isolation. The honest could be shunned by friends and foe alike. It is an interesting interplay between those who dread the fearlessness of the honest and those that fear the generally dreaded.

It would be mawkish to think that those who do not stand by the honest are dishonest. People are generally good; they are also generally timid. Fear cannot always be associated with evil, just as fearlessness cannot be always associated with good. The absence of fear gives courage. Without courage honesty is a pathetic virtue.

The honest may not be physically strong or powerful; they have courage and that courage is their strength. Those that do not stand by them in that hour of grief, need or isolation, might not be courageous. They are like spectators who rise to applaud after the drama. Even if they empathise with the actor, they don't take part in the play. They may watch the protagonist suffer, even shed a tear at his plight, offer a silent prayer in his favour and wait for the denouement before they laud his part. They are either happy at the outcome or rue the tragedy. After all, what is drama if there are no silent spectators? They face the dilemma of “to be or not to be”. As far as the protagonist is concerned, however lowly or mighty he might be, he is convinced that his honest deed, whether instinctive or a conditioned response of his character, is the best policy after all.

The writer is a member of the Election Commission of India

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

Devilry has always made for better box office than doing the right thing. Rebellion, especially against divine goodness, requires an unusual and compelling level of intellectual vigour and vim. — **THE GUARDIAN**

Legality is not enough

Even if a law passes the legal test, it may still be repressive, can instil fear in communities



KAPIL SIBAL

I AM BOTH saddened and concerned about the public discourse that we witness on television channels over the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019.

Bhaktis contend that since Parliament has cleared the legislation, those opposing it should await the outcome of the challenge in the court or come to power in 2024 to undo it, as if peaceful protests are not part of our constitutional vocabulary. History has witnessed, often enough, the tyranny of the majority. The minority is seldom oppressive. Majoritarian diktats can never be legitimised by the passage of bills in Parliament. These thoughtless denizens should know that courts have often delegitimised legislation by striking them down. Also, courts have on occasion erred in upholding laws that are unconstitutional. Remember, the right to protest peacefully is a fundamental right. No argument, no court, no majority can diminish it.

Bhaktis then contend that this was part of the BJP's manifesto, and having won by a bigger margin in 2019, the legislation is no more than honouring its commitment to the people. Again, the argument is a non-starter. A commitment cannot be clothed with legality merely because a majoritarian government got it passed in Parliament. Even if the law passes the test of legality, it may still be repressive, can instil fear and target communities. Remember, Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code was good law, and yet targeted communities. Even though it has been struck down, the community is still targeted. Legality on most occasions is divorced from reality. Discrimination is an ugly word. The Constitution abhors it, yet people both embrace and encourage it.

A political party which has a discriminatory, divisive agenda cannot occupy the high moral ground because it won an election by including a divisive agenda in its manifesto.

The most ill-conceived argument is that both the law and its makers are being unduly vilified. They only seek to clear the way for members of certain persecuted communities, including Hindus, to be conferred the status of citizens, even if they have illegally entered India from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. The assumption is that they illegally entered India because they were persecuted in these Islamic countries whereas Muslims who entered India without papers were mere illegal migrants.

There are serious fallacies in this argument. First, one wonders how the government knows of the individual intentions of all non-Muslim illegal immigrants. Two, none of them have claimed at the time that they entered India illegally that they were being persecuted. Nor have they made any such claim thereafter to any authority in

India. They certainly are not refugees, since a refugee is one who seeks refuge and thus claims protection. One wonders how the BJP, and that too in 2019, came to the conclusion that all non-Muslims namely Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Jains and Parsis were all persecuted when they illegally entered India. For Amit Shah to say that this was a part of the BJP's commitment in the 2014 manifesto is a lie. Apart from a fleeting reference to welcoming Hindus, persecuted around the world, to seek refuge in India, being their natural home, the manifesto nowhere refers to persecuted non-Muslims as claimed. It only referred to the demands of refugees from Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK). The word “refugee” is not mentioned anywhere else.

With reference to the Northeast, the manifesto refers to illegal immigrants (not “refugees”) impacting local people's livelihood and employment. In the 2019 election manifesto, the BJP mentioned the problem of illegal immigration (not “refugees”) in the Northeast and committed to address that problem by initiating a National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam, to be expanded in phases to the rest of India. In it, the BJP also committed to enact a Citizenship Amendment Bill for the protection of individuals of religious minority communities from neighbouring countries escaping persecution and to also clear the apprehensions of those living in Assam who had agitated against all (whether “Hindu or Muslim”) illegal migrants' entry into the state which threatened to destabilise their socio-cultural identity. There was no mention of limiting this exercise to Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. In 2014, and prior thereto, the BJP never mentioned “persecution” of other religious minorities in the neighbourhood, with reference to the Northeast or to the rest of India, except for refugees from POK. How then did the BJP suddenly wake up to this problem only in 2019?

The answer perhaps lies in the fact that lakhs of Hindus were excluded from the NRC in Assam. An attempt was made, first in the Supreme Court, to reject the exercise and carry out a review. That did not work. For the BJP, to allow such exclusion of Hindus to continue, would have been politically suicidal. The only way out was to initiate the CAB to declare all illegal immigrants, other than Muslims, as having been persecuted in the three named Islamic countries through a legislative presumption. If this is allowed, the next step is an NRC exercise in the rest of the country designed to deny all Muslims with no documents the status of citizens. Others who also have no papers will be presumed to have been persecuted, and will therefore be granted the status of citizens.

This demonic political agenda must not succeed. If it does, our body politic will have been amputated and our Republic scarred. Those rejected will lose their homeland, and we, our brothers and sisters. A partition of exclusion is in the offing. If it happens, the outcome is anybody's guess.

The writer, a senior Congress leader, is a former Union minister

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

EXAMPLE SPURNED

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘A more progressive act’ (IE, December 27). The now-lapsed RTI law of Jammu and Kashmir should have been an example for the rest of the country. Providing information under RTI should be seen as part of the Right to Know under Article 19. Instead, the RTI has been systematically chipped away by successive governments.

Akash Mishra via e-mail

ARMY AND POLITICS

THIS REFERS TO the editorials, ‘Towards jointness’ (IE, December 26) and ‘Crossing a line’ (IE, December 27). The army chief has issued a political statement and the army is not immune to political influences. Will an head of the combined services stop this? Today, a former Army chief is a Union minister. There must be a five-year cooling period before a high-ranked armed forces personnel can join politics.

Suchak D Patel, Ahmedabad

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Crossing a line’ (IE, December 27). It criticises the army chief for advising the leaders of protesters, particularly university and college students, against indulging in violence. But the army chief did not question their right to protest, he did not cast aspersions on their cause. As the head of an organisation in which discipline is supreme he was well within his right to counsel restraint. Violent protests cross the limits of democracy and at times, the army is required to step in. General Bipin Rawat's words should be seen from a broader

LETTER OF THE WEEK

TIGER DOES WELL

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘The right count’ (IE, December 26). It's heartening that India's wild tiger population has increased by more than 30 per cent in four years. But there are worrying signs of tigers not able to disperse outside the protected areas. Tigers are extremely territorial and its range could sometimes be as large as 200 sq km, so they need quite a bit of space. If we want the country's tiger numbers to be stable, the tigers would need to disperse. Habitats are increasingly being encroached upon by developmental projects

Vandana, Chandigarh

perspective of democracy.

Y G Chouksey, Pune

CLEAR THE AIR

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘The perils of misinformation’ (IE, December 27). Union minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi has criticised the opposition parties spreading misinformation about the NRC. However, home minister, Amit Shah, has stated several times, both inside and outside Parliament, that there will be a nationwide NRC. Who is right?

Sanwar Nath Siddh, Churu



PRIYANKA DEO

The intolerance of liberals

CAA, NRC need to be debated objectively

including, passport, Aadhaar card, driving license, insurance papers, birth certificate, land or house papers, documents issued by public authorities and even the school leaving certificate. Additionally, if a person is illiterate and does not have documents, they can bring witnesses, or any proof that would help. This would then be considered under due process. To add to that, one does not have to prove one's ancestry dating to or before 1971. This was only for the Assam NRC, mandated by the Assam Accord. The NRC procedure for the rest of the country is entirely different and can be read under The Citizen Rules, 2003.

Why am I writing this? I recently interviewed an entrepreneur from Assam who expressed her support for the CAA. I shared this on my Facebook account and was bashed for it by my fellow Harvard alumnus. What shocked me was that the attacks were neither objective nor based on the content of the interview. The attacks were nasty and personal. Keep in mind that these are people I have shared laughs with, spent time with, and respected. I was taken completely off-guard. I was called “a disgrace” by one of them. Another threatened to “take (me) down from

all Harvard networks and groups”. For what? For interviewing a person who did not share their opinion? For expressing a viewpoint that did not match theirs?

I tried to explain the text of the Act, and answered their subjective claims objectively. I also repeatedly implored them to argue objectively, rather than personally — to read the text of the Act and factually point out why they disagreed. What was the reply? Well, let's just say that it started out with language that is unsuitable for a public forum. As these are private citizens, and peers of mine, I will not expose their identity. While I could have responded back, I refused to do so. Despite their insults, I still regard them as respected alumnus of my alma mater. When I do meet them at school gatherings, I will be cordial and will simply agree to disagree.

However, the problem with liberals is that this basic courtesy of conduct is not reciprocated. My Harvard experience taught me to present factually, listen and consider the other side, even though I may not agree with them. If I cannot have an objective debate with my peers, then how can I expect it from any other liberal?

This is precisely why liberals are losing

ground in India. They fail to listen to the other side and do not even consider a viewpoint other than their own. The liberal stance is “my way or the highway”. And, this to me, is detrimental to democratic India. Intelligent people who are bound to have different viewpoints. But, one can never innovate, build, develop, discuss and arrive at the best solution without considering all viewpoints.

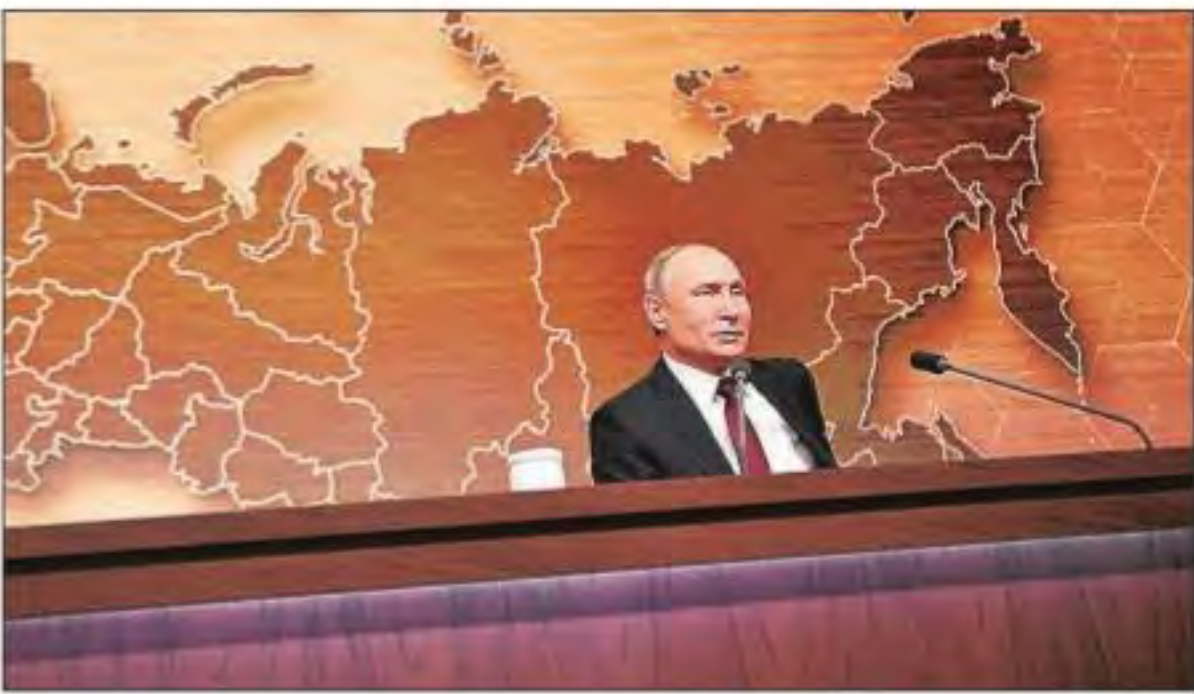
The liberals do not do adopt such an attitude. And, it is sad that this very attitude has resulted in misinformation and fake narratives on CAA and NRC which are currently causing physical injury, death, damage and ill feelings across the country. I find it ironic that the people responsible for this unnecessary violence identify themselves as “liberals”, when actually, it is the open-minded, so called non-liberals, who tolerate their drivel, and focus on putting factual content out there to stop the violence.

Let us debate objectively. Let the facts prevail. Let us not pit rhetoric against facts and expect rhetoric to win. The people of India, I am sure, will be on the side of facts.

The writer is an executive producer and anchor at New India Junction

FACT CHECK, GROUND REALITY

20 YEARS OF PUTIN IN RUSSIA:
KEY MILESTONES DURING HIS RULE



Putin has been PM or President since 1999. Sputnik, Kremlin Pool Photo via AP

VLADIMIR PUTIN has been in office as either President or Prime Minister of Russia for two decades now. He was named acting President on December 31, 1999, after having been appointed acting Prime Minister earlier that year. Some of the highlights of Putin's 20 years in power:

1999: Initiation

August 9: During an economic crisis, President Boris Yeltsin names Putin, then little-known security chief, as his acting prime minister (the fifth in less than a year). Yeltsin says he wants Putin to succeed him as President. In the following weeks, bombings across Russia kill more than 300 people, and Putin responds with a crackdown that includes aerial bombing of parts of Chechnya — although critics question if Chechen militants were really behind the bombings in Russia.

December 31: Yeltsin resigns, names Putin acting President.

2000-04: First term

March 26, 2000: Putin wins his first presidential election.

August 12: Nuclear-powered submarine sinks in the Barents Sea after an explosion on board, killing all 118 crew after an explosion. President Putin's image suffers after he comments on the crisis only after four days.

2002: Chechen militants take more than 800 people hostage at a Moscow theatre. Special forces end the siege, but use a poison gas in the process, which kills many of the hostages.

2004-08: Second term

March 2004: Putin wins second term as President with more than 70% of the vote after oil prices fuel a consumer boom and raise living standards, a trend that continues for another four years.

September: Islamist fighters seize more than 1,000 people in a school in southern Russia. A total of 334 hostages are killed, more than half of them children. Some parents say the authorities botched the handling of the siege and blame Putin.

December: Putin scraps direct elections for regional governors, effectively making them Kremlin appointees.

2005: President Putin describes the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union as the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe" of the 20th century.

2006: Investigative journalist Anna Politkovskaya, a critic of human rights abuses in Chechnya, is murdered in Moscow. Kremlin critic Alexander Litvinenko dies in London that same year after being poisoned with a radioactive substance. A British inquiry years later concludes that he was killed by Russian agents.

2007: Putin gives a speech in Munich in which he lashes out at the United States, accusing Washington of the "almost uncontained hyper use of force in international relations".

2008-12: PM & President

May 2008: Because of constitutional limits on serving more than two consecutive presidential terms, Putin becomes Prime Minister instead. His ally, Dmitry Medvedev, becomes President.

August 2008: Russia fights and wins a short war with Georgia.

2012: Putin returns to the presidency, winning re-election with over 60% of the vote after a decision to extend presidential terms to six from four years. Large anti-Putin protests take place before and after the vote, with critics alleging voter fraud.

2012-18: Crimea & Syria

February 27, 2014: Russian forces start annexing Ukraine's Crimea region after Ukrainian protesters oust their country's President Viktor Yanukovich, who was sympathetic to Moscow. Russia incorporates Crimea in March after a referendum condemned by the West. The US and EU impose sanctions on Moscow.

April 2014: Pro-Russian separatist revolt in eastern Ukraine; conflict is still ongoing with more than 13,000 dead. Rebels take control of a vast swathe of territory. Western nations accuse Russia of backing the revolt; Moscow denies direct involvement.

September 30: Russia launches airstrikes in Syria, turning the tide of the conflict in President Bashar al-Assad's favour.

November 2016: Donald Trump is elected President of the United States after promising to improve battered ties with Moscow. US authorities determine that Russia tried to interfere in the election in Trump's favour; Moscow denies it.

March 4, 2018: A former Russian spy, Sergei Skripal, and his daughter are poisoned in England with a nerve agent. They survive but a woman who lives nearby dies after her partner brings home the poison found in a discarded perfume bottle. Britain accuses Russia, which denies involvement.

2018: Until 2024

March 19, 2018: Putin wins a landslide re-election victory and a mandate to stay in office until 2024.

July 2019: Protests break out in Moscow over a municipal election which the opposition says is unfair.

December 2019: President Putin boasts of his country's lead in hypersonic weapons and says other countries are trying to catch up.

Source: Reuters

Why this winter is extra cold

December is always cold in northern India but has been much more so this year. A look at temperature trends, records broken or on the way to being broken, and the possible causes leading to the extreme chill

ANJALI MARAR & AMITABH SINHA
PUNE, DECEMBER 27

EXTREME COLD temperatures, rainfall and intense fog in the months of December and January are not something new for north and northwest India. And yet, this December, north India is feeling the cold much more than earlier. How low have the temperatures been, and why?

What is usual, what is different

Every year, in the second half of December and the first half of January, temperatures routinely drop to 2-4°C at some point of the day in many places in north and northwest India. In December, the maximum daily temperature does not rise beyond 16-18°C in most of Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and western Uttar Pradesh. In Delhi and northern Rajasthan, daily maximum temperatures are usually not over 20-22°C for most of December.

This winter, in many parts of the region, maximum temperatures on some days have been nearly 10°C below normal.

In Delhi, the average maximum temperature for December has been less than 20°C until December 27. This has happened only four times in the last 118 years, and the IMD has said this month would most likely become the second coldest December for Delhi since 1901. The maximum temperatures had averaged 17.3°C in December 1901.

Delhi has clocked 14 consecutive "cold days" at a stretch between December 14 and 27. This is already the longest such spell for December since 1997. That December, consecutive "cold days" lasted for 13 days, out of a total of 17 such days during the month.

How cold is cold

A cold-day condition is said to prevail when the maximum temperature during the day is at least 4.5°C below normal. If the maximum temperature is at least 6.5°C below normal, it is classified as a severe cold day.

Cold-day conditions prevailed in the north since December 15, and intensified after December 21. The most intense cold day — when maximum temperatures fell 7°C to over 12°C below normal — was on December 25 over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, north Rajasthan and some isolated areas in Bihar and Madhya Pradesh.

Conditions 'not unusual'

While the extreme cold in north India could point to some special causes, scientists say there is nothing unusual in the climatic conditions that influence temperatures in this region at this time of the year. The cold wave usually arrives from the west, through the Western Disturbance wind system. This system is also responsible for causing rains in northern and northwestern parts, after having picked up moisture on its way from the Mediterranean Sea. The intensity of the cold also depends on the amount of snowfall that happens in Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh and nearby areas.

"All these factors have their annual variabilities. They combine in different ways to produce different kinds of winter conditions. If you look at the climatic conditions this year, no special set of circumstances is visible at the macro level that can be held responsible for causing extreme cold. That can imply that the extreme cold being witnessed is just one of the outlying cases of natural variability that we see from year to year," said a former India Meteorological Department (IMD) scientist.



In Delhi, all days from December 14 to 27 fall into 'cold day' classification. Amit Mehra

DAILY MAXIMUM TEMPERATURES (°C)

Date	Delhi	Ambala	Amritsar	Chandigarh	Bareilly	Varanasi
Dec 27 (Deviation)	11.8 (-9.7)	9.1 (-11.4)	9.4 (-11.6)	8.8 (-12.2)	10.6 (-11.6)	11.0 (-12.0)
Dec 26	12.7	9.5	9.8	10.1	12.1	17.6
Dec 25	17.2	13.0	11.0	—	17.0	14.0
Dec 24	14.3	11.5	10.4	—	12.1	19.4
Dec 23	14.6	13.3	12.1	16.8	17.7	22.0
Dec 22	18.0	14.3	16.2	—	19.0	20.0
Dec 21	17.5	16.6	13.2	18.8	15.8	17.0
Dec 20	18.0	13.8	11.5	12.5	13.0	15.0

Source: IMD

A cold-wave condition now prevails in areas north of Jammu and Kashmir, in northern Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and parts of northern Iran. In all these areas, average temperatures have been 1°C to 5°C below normal for the last few days. This could add to the chill bring brought about by the Western Disturbances. North-central China and Mongolia are also experiencing similar conditions.

Looking for causes

CLIMATE CHANGE: The unusually cold December this year could just be another instance of extreme climates becoming more and more frequent, a result of climate change. Across the world, the frequency and intensity of both heatwaves and cold waves have increased in the last few years, and are predicted to increase further. The same is the case with extreme rainfall and drought. Just this year, India experienced an unusually wet August and September. The amount of rainfall that September produced was a once-in-a-century event. Scientists also agree that climate change was bringing in greater uncertainty in weather patterns, making them more difficult to predict.

WESTERN DISTURBANCES: Frequent western disturbances varying from moderate to intense have mainly contributed to the severe cold over all of north India this year. In addition, the flow of northwesterly winds over northwest India, that too over much

lower levels, further fuelled the chill factor, making the days much colder than normal during December. This December also witnessed haze, fog and rainfall after the passing of each western disturbance, triggering cold weather conditions over north India.

LOW CLOUDS: This extended cold spell has been triggered due to low stratus clouds that are blanketed over a large geographical area — between Pakistan, cutting across India and running up to Bangladesh. Similarly, it is prevailing over a stretch of 500 km to 800 km north-south, affecting the entire north India. R K Jenamani, senior scientist at IMD's National Weather Forecasting Centre (NWFC), New Delhi, said that formation of such clouds are unique over the Indo-Gangetic Plains (IGP) and that these clouds have been observed only since 1997. "As these clouds are formed at a height of 300 metres to 400 metres from the surface, they largely block the day's sunlight, resulting in cold days," he said.

"The average maximum temperatures for the month stands around 19.8 degrees (in Delhi, until December 27) and with cold days forecast till month end, December 2019 could be the second coldest after 1997. But, the impact could be higher than that experienced in 1997," Jenamani said.

In fact, cold conditions during the daytime can be more dangerous, said Anupam Kashyapi, head of the weather department at IMD, Pune.

THIS WORD MEANS

SNOWEX

How much water does snow contain?

AROUND 1.2 billion people, or nearly one-sixth of the world, depend on seasonal snow and glaciers for their water supply. For a better understanding of how much water is contained in each winter's snowfall and how much will be available when it melts in the spring, NASA has launched a seasonal campaign — part of a five-year programme called SnowEx, initiated in 2016-17.

While the geographical focus of SnowEx is North America, NASA's overall target is optimal strategies for mapping global snow water equivalent (SWE) with remote sensing and models leading to a Decadal Survey "Earth System Explorer" mission. NASA currently has no global satellite mission to track and study SWE. On its website, NASA acknowledges any future snow satellite mission will require observations from an international collection of satellites.

Within its geographic range, SnowEx assesses where snow has fallen, how much there is and how its characteristics change as it melts. It uses airborne measurements, ground measurements and computer modelling. The airborne campaign will fly radar and lidar (light detection and ranging) to measure snow depth, microwave radar and radiometers to measure SWE, optical cameras to photograph the surface, infrared radiometers to measure surface temperature, and hyperspectral imagers for snow cover and composition. Ground teams will measure snow depth, density, accumulation layers, temperature, wetness and snow grain size — the size of a typical particle. This year, real-time computer modelling will be integrated into the campaign as well.

Source: NASA

MGNREGA trends: fewer jobs since July, wider demand-supply gap

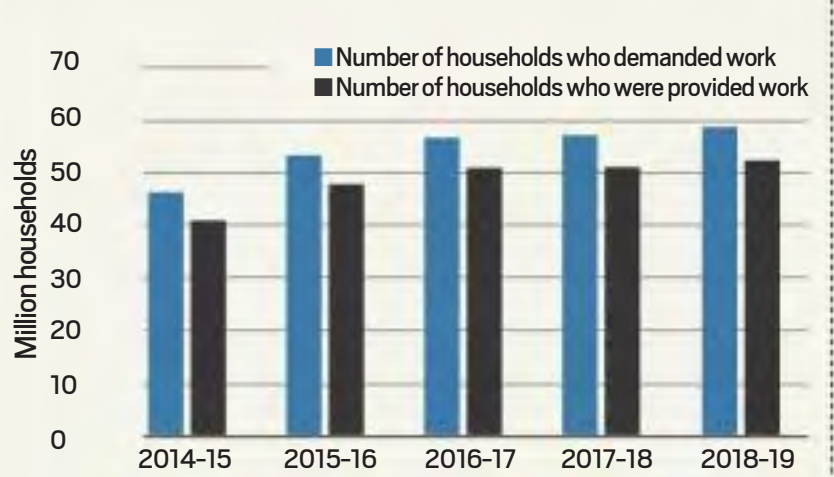
NUSHAIBA IQBAL
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 27

JOBS GENERATED under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) have shown a dip compared to last year after July. This comes even as 2018-19, the year that preceded the Lok Sabha elections, saw a record number of households demanding as well as being provided employment under the flagship rural public works programme.

Reading the numbers

Chart 1 shows the total number of households whose demand for work was registered by the gram panchayat authorities concerned and also the number that were actually provided work (MGNREGA is supposed to guarantee 100 days of total employment to adult members of any rural household that "demands" such employment). In 2018-19, demand was registered from 5.88 crore households, and 5.27 crore of them were provided work. These numbers were the highest, at least during the last five years of the present government. Even in terms of person-days of work generated, the numbers rose from a mere 165.64 crore in 2014-15 (the first year of the Narendra Modi government) to 267.99 crore in 2018-19.

CHART 1: DEMAND & SUPPLY



The current year, however, has witnessed a clear dip in the person-days of employment under MGNREGA, which is visible after July. Significantly, in all the months before, including those leading up to the elections of April-May, the work provided exceeded the corresponding levels for 2018 (*Chart 2*). According to government officials, the fall in MGNREGA employment after July has been largely due to the onset of the southwest monsoon. Rainfall during the monsoon season (June-September) this year was 10% above the historical long-term average — the highest since 1994 — whereas it was 9.4% below average in 2018. An above-normal monsoon meant there was

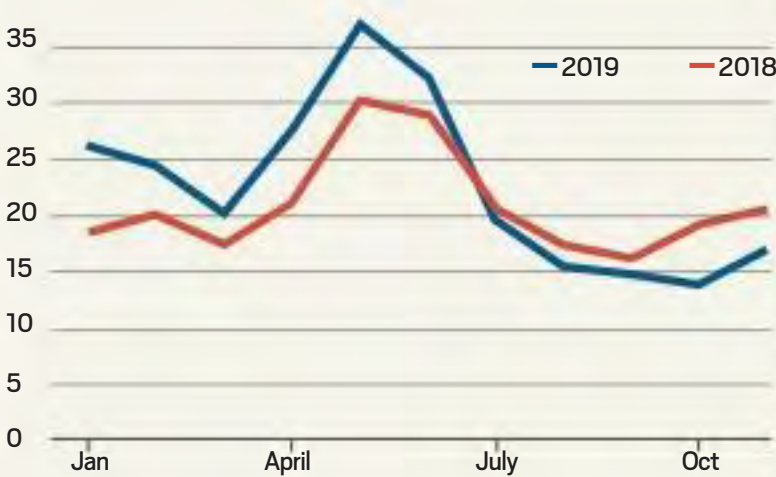
lower demand for MGNREGA work.

However, from *Chart 3*, it can be seen that the gap between the number of households demanding MGNREGA work and the number who were provided work has been the highest in 2019-20. This indicates that even if demand fell, supply of work fell even more.

Lack of funds

The trends raise the question whether all this is linked to lack of funds. For 2019-20, the Modi government has allocated Rs 60,000 crore towards MGNREGA. But out of this budgeted sum, Rs 9,493.80 crore would be required for clearing the liabilities of wages, material and administrative costs for previous

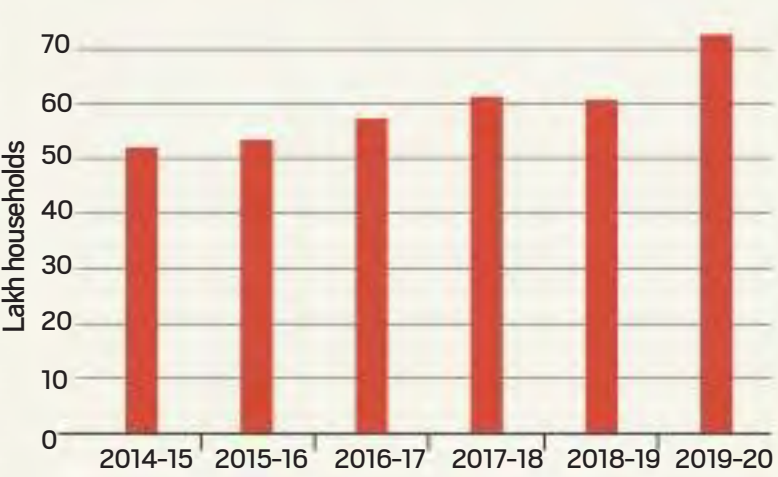
CHART 2: WORK PROVIDED, LAST YEAR & THIS YEAR



years. Nikhil Dey of the advocacy group Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan claimed that in 2018-19, the Centre had asked some state governments to pay wages to workers for February and March in advance and treat this as "loan" that the Centre would repay the states in the new financial year.

The cost of providing a day's work to a single person has been taken at an average of Rs 249.86 for 2019-20. For 270.21 crore person-days of work that was approved, the MGNREGA labour budget alone for this fiscal worked out to roughly Rs 67,514.67 crore. But the total budgetary allocation, which also includes provision towards material and administrative expenses, has

CHART 3: DEMAND-SUPPLY GAP



been only Rs 60,000 crore, out of which Rs 55,829.62 crore was already spent as on December 24. Meanwhile, the Centre has revised upwards its original plan of providing 260 crore person-days of work for 2019-20 to 316.73 crore person-days, following a decision to augment the number of days of employment per household under MGNREGA from 100 to 150 in flood-affected districts of states such as Karnataka.

Other support schemes

It is not MGNREGA alone that is witnessing a deceleration of activity this fiscal. The same goes for the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN), the Modi gov-

ernment's farm income support scheme that was launched in December 2018, ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. In the first instalment released for December 2018 to March 2019, as many as 8.05 crore farmers were covered, with each of them receiving Rs 2,000. Those numbers fell to 7.43 crore in the second instalment (April-July 2019) and further to 5.91 crore in the third (August-November). In all, the total amount disbursed under the income support scheme in the year 2019-20 is Rs 32,320.86 crore, which is significantly short of the Rs 75,000 crore budgeted for it. Further, of the total Rs 95,000 allocated for the scheme since its inception, Rs 48,421.65 crore has been spent up to December 2019, which is roughly half the allocated sum.

Even the number of rural houses built under PM Awas Yojana-Gramin — which had recorded a sharp rise from 11.96 lakh in 2014-15 and 18.22 lakh in 2015-16 to 32.13 lakh, 44.55 lakh and 47.33 lakh during the following three fiscals — has seen a drop to just 7.2 lakh so far in 2019-20. A senior government official clarified, however, that the process of registration, geo-tagging, etc has already started, and more houses will be built later in the year. The official also cited a target of building 60 lakh houses under the PM-AY Gramin by June 2020. Up to 55 lakh new homes are under construction, and 7 lakh have been completed.