



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

HAPPY NEW YEAR

A year which began with people electing a government with a large mandate ended with some of them talking back to it

IN SPITE OF its turbulence, and because of it, the year that has passed has imbued the new year with optimism and hope. The optimism comes from the fact that, in the end, 2019 was most enlivened by the voices of Indians protesting against a narrowing of the idea of Indianness. A year which began with the people electing a government with an overwhelming mandate to rule ended with some of them talking back to it — that's a reason to hope. It carries the promise of a more argumentative 2020, and of a livelier public space more resonant. Of course, there are no tidy oppositions, no comfort to be drawn from coherent contrasts. While the government may look like an implacable monolith, the people are not one. How large are the protests against the new law that seeks to recast citizenship in majoritarian terms? How many of those turning out on the streets are students from select urban milieux? How many non-Muslims are speaking out to oppose a law that, alongside the NRC, discriminates against Muslims? These are some of the important questions that will be carried over into 2020.

But whatever the answers may be, this much is certain: The pushback against the majoritarian impulse that began in 2019 is a reminder of democracy's capacity to spring surprises even after a verdict as decisive as the one that returned the Narendra Modi government to power. Even if it achieves little else, the opposition to the citizenship law, mostly peacefully, and mostly by students and the young, will have forced an arrogant government, quick to label any and all protest as anti-national, to backtrack on an imminent nationwide NRC. The dissent of the states, with several chief ministers speaking out against the CAA-NRC, will have reinstated some of the waning faith in the checks and balances of a layered polity. The stirrings in the Opposition space, still timid and hypocritical, still lacking the moral clarity and energy of, say, the young women and men of Jamia Millia Islamia, will have restored a bit of the imperilled sense of a vibrant democracy. There is immense reassurance to be drawn, too, from the fact that in the 70th year of the Republic, the Constitution, and its Preamble, with its promise of liberty, equality and fraternity for all, became the emblem of the protests, their centrepiece.

Many areas of darkness remain unbreached. Precious lives have been lost in Uttar Pradesh, where the government has sought to outlaw and criminalise democratic protest. In Kashmir, the partial restoration of telecom services on the last day of the passing year only served to draw attention to a people still isolated, their political leaders still under lockdown after the abrogation of special status in August. The solidarities forged in 2019, and the broadening of circles of empathy, are a work in progress. Resistance to the shrinking of the idea of Indianness will have to be accompanied by political and institutional efforts towards making it wider and more inclusive in the year to come. Happy New Year.

RESET AND PLAY

NITI Aayog's SDG report sheds light on uneven progress in states, suggests roadmap for intervention

IN THE LATEST edition of NITI Aayog's annual assessment of progress made by states in achieving the sustainable development goals (SDG), Kerala retained the top slot, followed closely by Himachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. In the lower ranks, still, are Jharkhand, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Assam, and Uttar Pradesh, with Bihar at the bottom. This latest report, which is much more expansive in nature than the previous edition, provides insight on the variations in states' performance across different parameters, and also serves as a useful guide to locate where state intervention is needed to achieve the SDGs.

The SDG Index 2019 measures the performance of states and Union territories on indicators such as poverty, hunger, gender equality, health, education, and clean water and sanitation, among others. While the 2018 index measured performance on 13 of the 17 SDG goals, the latest edition goes one step further, covering all 17 SDGs (a qualitative assessment has been made for measuring performance on partnerships). It has been constructed using 100 indicators, and covers 54 targets. At the aggregate level, India's composite score has improved from 57 in 2018 to 60 in 2019, much of the improvement taking place due to progress on five goals — clean water and sanitation; affordable and clean energy; industry, innovation, and infrastructure; life on land, and peace, justice, and strong institutions. On all these indicators, India has scored between 65 and 99. The improvement on these parameters, in part, stems from the beneficial impact of various government programmes. For instance, improvement on clean water and sanitation has been largely driven by the progress made by the Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan in eliminating open defecation, while the increased coverage of LPG, as well as the surge in electricity connections has helped shore up performance on affordable and clean energy. Large challenges remain, however, in areas of health, nutrition, basic infrastructure, quality of education, among others. On two goals in particular — gender equality and zero hunger — far greater attention is required as the country's score on both is less than 50.

This year marks the fifth anniversary of the adoption of SDGs. The 17 SDGs and 169 related targets are to be achieved by 2030. As India's success in achieving these goals will largely determine global outcomes, achieving these targets should be the cornerstone of economic policy. This calls for reorienting public policy away from its short-term emphases, towards focusing on long-term goals.

IDEAS ABIDE

Trump and Obama are tied in a race. Neither liberals nor conservatives can claim full victory

MORE OFTEN THAN not, the "most admired man in America" is the serving US President, according to the Gallup poll. For the last two years, however, Donald Trump did not make the cut. This year, he is tied for first place with his predecessor, Barack Obama, and the divide is, predictably, along party lines. It is easy to see the poll as a reflection of a deeply divided society as the US heads into an election year, as yet more evidence of liberal values being under siege. But the message, perhaps, is more complex.

The contested prize of "the most admired man in America" illustrates the shifting allegiances of people and the relative permanence of ideas. In almost every way, Trump and Obama are polar opposites — isolationist vs globalist, playing to the mob vs leading the public, conservative vs liberal. Given the bipolar nature of US politics, it may appear sometimes that one side scores a dominant victory. In the Obama years, for example, many were proudly proclaiming the end of bigotry, the beginnings of a "woke" era. And yet, in 2016, many of the people who had voted for Obama shifted to Trump.

While it may seem that liberal values — notions of equality and decency — are fighting for survival, that nativist, right-wing tendencies are ascendant, it is unlikely that either notion will disappear completely. The circumstances of the times may see people sway one way, but the dormant anti-thesis of the dominant narrative waits in the wings. Meanwhile, the person who has been in the top 10 for 10 years is Queen Elizabeth II. Even in the US, the first country to throw off the yoke of British imperialism, the idea of the monarchy also abides.



PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

Hope, Fear, Anger

In 2019, it was not just people versus government, but one definition of people jostling against another

IN A BRILLIANT and moving essay on Lessing, Hannah Arendt described three political emotions in terms of what she called "awareness of reality." Political emotion is not always about passion or excitement; it is rather an approach to reality. Arendt wrote, "In hope the soul overleaps reality, as in fear it shrinks back from it." But more surprisingly she wrote, "anger reveals and exposes the world".

What does the trinity of hope, fear and anger look like at the end of the year in which the government, in all but name, instigated civil war on its own citizens? Our laws have many debatable provisions. But for the first time, religion-based discrimination in citizenship is enshrined in law. The standing of protesting citizens is denied. All protestors are "Islamists" or "urban Naxals" who deserve only one fate: To be rooted out. In Uttar Pradesh, the government has used the pretext of violent protest to unleash a chain of retribution, collective punishment, lawlessness and intimidation, whose end point is too disturbing to even contemplate. The whole arsenal of surveillance, detention, shutdowns, disinformation, and threats is becoming the norm elsewhere. Public discourse is now suffused with communalism, or risks being hijacked by it at every turn. We are, literally and figuratively, gasping for air.

This is a different world from a decade ago. A decade ago, we were hopeful. The financial crisis was just beginning to unfold, and the two biggest worries India seemed to have were plutocracy and policy paralysis. But these seemed fixable problems — temporary dips that the self-correcting mechanisms of democracy could cure. India was fated to experience unprecedented economic growth, the exuberance of a new economy at least threw cold water over communalism, and Indian democracy would retain a modicum of civility. There was anger, but it was an anger born of hope and high expectations. India was doing decently by historical standards. But the anger was that it was not doing better. We overleapt reality in expectations of what we

could achieve; and perhaps underplayed the dire possibility that we could be doing much worse. We were so hopeful we took a leap into what we thought was a new reality. It, in fact, turned out to be darkness.

The BJP came to power in what, to those who voted for it, looked like a crescendo of hope. The old regime had crumbled in its refusal to fight. It listened but did not act on criticisms that could have saved it. It would be foolish to deny that the BJP had a democratic imprimatur behind it. What makes this a fraught moment that has the mental feel of a civil conflict is that the contest is not just people versus government, but one definition of the people jostling against another.

But the hope the BJP carried already had deep portents of fear. There was a shrinking back from reality in more ways than one could list. It was manifest in the will to simplification this government represented: As if all of India's policy problems could be solved by deferring to a leader. The fear was manifest in the refusal to come to terms with the truth that the Indian economy was in dire straits. But the shrinking from reality was most manifest in the denial of India's plenitude and diversity. India's identity needed to be simplified, made to march to one pied piper.

Not only did minorities need to be shown their place, any trace of authentic spirituality in Hinduism was emptied out into a collective narcissism. Instead of the Self embracing the plenitude of the world, the world was cut to size to fit the small Ego of an insecure nationalism. Arendt was right that in fear we shrink back from the world. But fear does not only shrink back from the world, it literally tries to shrink it. India has shrunk in the last decade. Ten years ago our anger was, why aren't we doing much better? Now the anger is: How much lower can we go?

The current moment of anger, promoted by the CAA, is that moment of revealing that Arendt talks about. It is not a moment of anger that is born of the illusory hopes of a decade ago, or the denials of the last five

years. It is the anger that seeks to expose the world that we are constructing for what it is. It is, at last, an attempt to reclaim reality in three ways. First to reclaim a basic moral reality, that there is a baseline of values, enshrined in non-discrimination, that we refuse to surrender. Second, there is a reclaiming of the world itself. It is a mark of fearful regimes that they want to make our hold over reality more tenuous. They don't want to argue about the truth, they want to make the idea of truth irrelevant, so that the world becomes just a theatre of combat.

This is the moment of anger where citizens refuse to take the government at its word; they are willing to tell the highest functionaries in the land that mere repetition of a lie, backed by power, does not make something a truth. And finally, this is a moment of reclaiming a semblance of political agency. One way in which a regime takes us from reality is by invoking necessity. "There is no alternative" can, in some circumstances be the ultimate lie. For it is a way of saying that citizens are our prisoners, they don't have a choice. They always do. They are beginning to exercise it again.

But this anger is still a long way from reversing the shrinking of India. What constellation of political forces will be up to reversing a tide of communalisation, authoritarianism, economic stagnation, environmental depredation, institutional decay with which we end the decade? To remind us of the enormity of this challenge is not a counsel of despair. It is not to induce fear of another kind where we throw up hands in the face of reality. It is, rather, to say this. In the last decade we gave in to both unfounded hope, and then unbounded fear. Will this be the decade where we finally come to terms with our reality, we find the will not to be deceived? And in that refusal of deception, will we find new beginnings — a new way of relating to each other that does not diminish any one of us? Happy New Year.

The writer is contributing editor, The Indian Express

A TIME TO THINK BIG

Women, Adivasis and Dalits will power India's growth story



YOGINDER K ALAGH

IN OUR MULTI-PARTY federal democracy, a Union of States, with different political parties of all hues calling the shots, there is much to look forward to with hope. Apart from our own stupidity, there is no reason as to why we should not be on our way to being "the dominant global power".

One of our more astute civil servants has in his book of experiences shown that coalition regimes, more often than not, have overseen periods of high growth and reform. History suggests that fast economic growth is a period of structural transformation from rural to urban and agriculture to industry. But Gandhi's India is showing a different path.

As India got into a high growth phase since the Eighties of the last century, its non-food grain demands started rising at two-digit rates. This led to rural-urban migration and to what are called "census towns". These are urban areas but not classified as such on account of the politics of remaining a panchayat.

In fact, we were rapidly urbanising as she/he moved to the nearby market towns to avail of its facilities. Some years ago, I discovered their importance and wrote a book about the stupidity of ignoring infrastruc-

ture in thousands of these growth centres. Sadly, even today, we are not doing that — shifting focus to these centres through the smart cities project.

The good news is that this neglect won't last and many of the states are picking up the mantle. It will become the norm as the need becomes pressing.

There are two other sources of growth we will garner. The first is women power. We will recognise that they hold up half the sky. My favourite example is the demographic dividend as she goes to college, marries late, the first baby comes later and the last earlier. We will stop saying they are "Devis" and accept them as fellow workers, and a great source of growth.

Women are not the only ones we discriminate against. Brahmanical leadership in thought will be changed to take advantage of the large Adivasi and Dalit population as another great asset for growth.

As Kaushik Basu has written recently, divisive laws are hurting our global reach and have serious economic consequences. Ten per cent less in the labour force means almost one percentage point lower growth than 8 per cent annually.

We will resist those who say Enjoy-Now-for-the-Good-Times are here, for the TV czar is clipped, and the reality of acche din will come to mean that this generation must sacrifice and build the nation with its prospering market towns, girls in college and facilities to get over other deprivations. Our savings rate will stop falling. It will get back from 29 per cent to 40 per cent as in China — not difficult for good leadership in Gandhi's India.

Above all, we will be the first human society which will show that a large Islamic population and not-so-insignificant other minority groups will be an integral part of a cultural super power, on its way to become a great economic power.

Are you not convinced? Barack Obama was possible because the future was crafted during the Kennedy era. We have inherited a freedom movement which made the impossible possible. How many countries can boast of Babu, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Maulana Azad? We are destined to be a great power.

The writer, a former Union minister, is an economist

JANUARY 1, 1980, FORTY YEARS AGO



CRUCIAL BATTLE IN UP THE ELECTORAL BATTLE being fought fiercely for 85 Lok Sabha seats from Uttar Pradesh — with the largest electorate of a little over 5.78 crore — is going to be decisive in many respects. UP, the home state of Prime Minister Charan Singh and former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi — both of whom are locked in a grim battle — may also decide who would be the next PM because of the number of parliamentarians the state sends to the Lok Sabha. The efforts, time and energy of the Janata, the Congress (I) and the Lok Dal are, therefore, concentrated more here than anywhere else.

DELAYED NEW YEAR INDIA USHERS IN the new year tonight one second late. The Indian Standard Time is to

be put back by a second for studies in astronomy, astrophysics, space physics and day-to-day work, says a National Laboratory press release. It says there is a 19-second time difference between earth and atomic times. The astronomical time is based on the rotation of the earth on its axis and "the rotation rate is said to be slowing down owing to various celestial forces acting on the earth".

DELHI TO MOSCOW INDIA ASKED THE Soviet Union to pull out its troops from Afghanistan. It told Moscow in plain words that the presence of the Soviet troops in Afghanistan would have far-reaching consequences for the entire region. The Indian position on the Afghanistan issue was made clear when the caretaker prime minister, Charan

Singh, told the Soviet ambassador of "India's deep concern at the substantial involvement of Soviet military forces in Afghanistan". The PM told the ambassador, Yuri Vorontsov, that India valued its friendly relations with Afghanistan and would like "its independence and non-alignment to be strengthened".

UN SANCTIONS IRAN THE UN SECURITY Council adopted a United States resolution threatening Iran with economic sanctions unless hostages held at the US embassy were released by January 7. The vote was 11-0 with four abstentions — the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Bangladesh and Kuwait. US Secretary of State Cyrus R Vance, raised his hand to cast the United States' vote in favour of its own proposal.

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"China's social stability has withstood the pressure test in 2019. The trade war didn't crush the will of society... More importantly, Chinese society has gained unity under trade war pressure." — GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA

Is every Indian mine?

That's the question for 2020 to answer



RAJMOHAN GANDHI

TENDER FLOWERS OF hope versus a ruthless bulldozer. That is how I picture the start of the year 2020 in India.

Among the hope-giving buds I include Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recognition, in the context of protests against the CAA and NRC, that India's youth "dislike discrimination". Modi didn't admit that the careful exclusion of Muslims from the list of persecuted migrants whom the CAA is designed to support is the precise discrimination upsetting India's youth. However, in today's setting that's the direct meaning of "discrimination".

The physical and ideological descendants of Badshah Khan — the "Frontier Gandhi" who opposed imperialism, the Pakistan demand and the two-nation theory, thereby inviting imprisonment by the British before 1947 and by Pakistani regimes after 1947 — continue to face murderous attacks from Islamist extremists in Pakistan. If any of them wish to enter India, the CAA would deny them succour. For only one reason — they are Muslims. It's a discrimination that India's youth are unwilling to accept.

Another bud of hope was Venkaiah Naidu's plea on December 29 for "enlightened, meaningful and constructive discussion" over the CAA and the NRC. A third was the call on December 28 by Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, the Union minister for minorities, for "immediate action" against the UP police officer who had asked Muslim protesters to "go to Pakistan".

A bigger blossom of hope had appeared on December 22, when Modi indicated at a Delhi rally that the NRC was not on the anvil. The biggest positive array, however, was formed by tens of thousands of students of all religious hues who spontaneously, and in almost every case entirely peacefully, rallied across India against the discriminatory CAA and the NRC — the latter now seemingly abandoned.

But the bulldozer has not been quiet. It has been particularly menacing in Uttar Pradesh, where Chief Minister "Yogi" Adityanath has threatened "revenge" on protesters who damage property. Bringing offenders to book is no doubt an administrator's task. Taking revenge on your own people is an offended ruler's rage in full flow. The damage that UP's protests caused was hardly unprecedented. Haryana in 2016, also under BJP rule, saw far greater destruction but invited no stern reaction. The crime last month of UP's protesters was that they had been born to Muslim parents.

Also damaging to the image of Indian democracy has been the elevation to the new post of Chief of Defence Staff of General Bipin Rawat right after his public criticism, unprecedented for a military chief, of civilian protests.

In his nation-wide address to the youth (December 29), Modi asked them to introspect. Rights, he added, came with duties. Presumably it was introspection that had led Modi a week earlier to, sort of, drop the NRC. Has he the courage now to bravely rethink the CAA? It has to be redrafted to address the situation of all persecuted persons who might seek relief, or might have sought relief, by entering India. Naming

specific religious groups as being entitled to relief, and deafeningly excluding Muslims, is probably unconstitutional and unquestionably un-Indian.

Some have tried to justify the discrimination by citing the circumstances of the 1947 Partition. Can circumstances 72 years ago justify inequality today? Moreover, those circumstances should be honestly recalled. The 1947 Partition was not designed to create two nations, one Hindu and the other Muslim. The Pakistan demanded by the League's 1940 resolution, and the Pakistan to which the Indian National Congress, the Muslim League and the Akalis agreed, was a separated state for the Subcontinent's Muslim-majority areas. It was not a Muslim homeland to which the Subcontinent's Muslims would migrate. Nor was there any agreement that non-Muslims in the Pakistan area would migrate to India.

The 1947 Partition did not bring about a Hindu India and a Muslim Pakistan. It created a secular India containing a Hindu majority, and a Muslim-majority Pakistan which MA Jinnah hoped would be a secular state. While Jinnah's hopes were belied, the free India envisioned by — to name only a few — Gandhi, Tagore, Nehru, Patel, Subhas Bose, Maulana Azad, Bhagat Singh and Ambedkar, grew as a pluralist and democratic nation. An amazed world had not expected that a long-colonised country with caste divisions that seemed greater than Africa's tribal divisions, a linguistic diversity before which even Europe seemed unilingual, and a religious mix that appeared even more challenging than the Middle East's brew, would remain democratic, with — at least on paper and often on the ground — equal rights for all.

That was India's promise and feat. And that is what the bulldozer would now crush and bury into the ground.

In 2020, the Indian, and in particular the young Indian, will interact more than before with counterparts from North America, Europe, Japan, Australia, China, the Gulf and elsewhere. Indian women and men will represent us in international cricket, chess, badminton and other sporting contests. Indian artists will rub shoulders with global artists, Indian musicians will perform on the international stage. Tens of thousands of Indian students will enter universities around the planet.

Some hurtful images are bound to influence resulting interactions. Including of the German student who had to leave IIT-Madras abruptly because he joined fellow-students in a peaceful protest. And of the Norwegian lady who had to leave Kerala before she had wanted to because she too had stood along with other quiet protesters. What will an Indian student say in 2020 to a fellow student in Europe or America from another part of the world?

Within India, will a Hindu student in UP say to a Muslim student in her city, "Let us grow in democracy, free speech, equality, mutual respect, knowledge of each other?" Or will she say, "Too bad. Because Pakistanis have done bad things, and because centuries ago some Muslim rulers were narrow-minded and harsh, you cannot have equal rights."

In the end, it's a question of the meaning, in our minds, of "my people". Is every Indian mine? Or only an Indian of a particular kind? In the long run, the tiniest shoot of compassion or courage will topple the heaviest stone. Meanwhile the bulldozer does its nasty work.

The writer is research professor at the University of Illinois



CRSasikumar

Put genie back in bottle

CAA and NRC introduce a meddling officialdom into a question as fundamental as citizenship. Why not open our doors to all who sign up in our national mission of being democratic, open, tolerant and inclusive?



ABHIJIT BANERJEE AND ESTHER DUFLO

we remember correctly) for birthplace. The NRC presumes that this woman would be able to provide enough details about her life to establish her true citizenship status. And if she cannot, there is the CAA — for migrant Hindus, or for Sikhs and Christians, Buddhists and Jains. But not for Muslims.

If they cannot establish their citizenship, they would be presumed to be guilty. Of being a foreigner. And perforce stateless. Or subject to the goodwill of some officials, who will decide what status they deserve. And one thing we have learnt from our field work is that this can be a very risky gamble.

This is not minimal government or maximal governance. It is introducing meddling officialdom into a question as fundamental to people's lives as citizenship — if you are not citizen of the country where you have lived all your life, and no one else wants you, who are you? And it is what many young people are upset about.

But there is something else that the government should worry about here. In all of this conversation about citizenship, it seems to take as given that immigrants are a problem. In Assam, this idea has been taken to its logical conclusion — all immigrants, irrespective of religion, are a problem. This is why the CAA is anathema there and the NRC was unpopular for not finding enough foreigners. In our recent book, *Good Economics for Hard Times*, we make the case that there is really no economic case against low-skilled economic migrants. All the evidence suggests that even after large bouts of low-skilled migration, the earnings of other low-skilled migrants are unaffected. This is, in part, because economic migrants tend to be hungry for opportunity and make the most of the chance they got by coming across, taking jobs that few locals would want. In part, it is also because migrants not only sell labour but they also buy food and haircuts and everything else with their new earnings.

Are Tamil-speaking children of Bengali Hindu migrants to Chennai entitled to jobs in the state government? How about the Marathi-speaking children from Bihar, who grew up in Maharashtra? And while you are worrying that, what about good jobs in the private sector? And why stop at the state boundaries? Should Mumbai city jobs be restricted to Mumbaikars? Paranoia about immigration is a genie that needs to be put back in the bottle as soon as possible.

The real economic challenge is for the middle classes, who worry that this new group of claimants will eventually reach for the prize that they have so far held onto, the ultimate gift of a local government job. But it is a sign of our poor governance that government jobs are as much of a windfall as they are now — the fact that in 2019, 19 million Indians applied for 63,000 low-level jobs in the railways, should tell us we are getting something very wrong.

But more importantly, the same questions about economic justice for the local population, if not confronted now, will arise (and have already arisen) everywhere in India, in an ever more fractal way. Are Tamil-speaking children of Bengali Hindu migrants to Chennai entitled to jobs in the state government? How about the Marathi-speaking children from Bihar, who grew up in Maharashtra? And while you are worrying that, what about good jobs in the private sector? And why stop at the state boundaries? Should Mumbai city jobs be restricted to Mumbaikars? Paranoia about immigration is a genie that needs to be put back in the bottle as soon as possible.

And the best way to get there is to embrace India's vision of being one of the mother lodes of civilisation. Why not open our doors to everyone who signs up in our national mission of being democratic, open, tolerant and inclusive? Why not Ahmadis who are persecuted in Pakistan (which often fails to be the welcoming homeland for South Asian Muslims that it purports to be) or Hindu Tamils uncomfortable in Sri Lanka? We have 1.3 billion people — a few more millions would disappear in a flash in to that melting pot. And we would really be a lodestar for the world.

Banerjee and Duflo are professors of economics at MIT and Overseas Citizens of India. They won the Nobel Prize for economics in 2019

Let's learn to listen

Hearing those unlike us is essential for the health of our society and nation



ARUN MAIRA

THE IDEA OF India is unity in diversity. Nations erect statues to symbolise what they stand for. "Send (the) homeless, tempest-tossed to me. I lift my lamp beside the golden door," reads the inscription on the Statue of Liberty — the lady with the torch. India has erected a Statue of Unity, in Sardar Patel's image, twice as tall as the Statue of Liberty.

India's democratic and secular Constitution provides a homeland to citizens of a larger number of religions and races and speaking a greater variety of languages than citizens of any other country. Whereas tall statues are feats of engineering that can be completed in a few years, nation-building is a complex process which takes decades — even centuries. But it can be shaken in a moment. The foundation of the idea of India — of unity in diversity — has been severely shaken by the Citizenship Amendment Act and fear of a National Register of Citizens.

The ruling party's leaders say they are implementing Sardar Patel's vision of a unified India, whose statue, the tallest in the world, they have built. They seem to have lost sight of another statue, less grand than their Statue of Unity but more evocative, which is a better description of India's journey to build an inclusive nation. This one, on Delhi's Mother Teresa Crescent, shows

Mahatma Gandhi leading a line of diverse Indians — Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and others — to peacefully claim their freedom from a foreign empire.

In this, the 150th anniversary year of Gandhi's, it behooves our leaders to recall the vision of India that inspired the birth of our free country 72 years ago. It was a grand vision of unity in diversity that inspired the world too. Gandhi invited students and citizens to study all religions with him in the Bible Room of the Gujarat Vidyapeeth. Where, along with words from many scriptures, his own words are inscribed: "I do not want my house to be walled in and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible."

Globally, the vision of one world is cracking. International cooperation in trade and climate is failing. Walls are rising within countries between people with different visions of what a good society is. The world is being "broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls" as Tagore had feared. Social media, which was expected to bring people together, is perversely driving them apart into conceptually gated communities of people who think alike. They do not listen any more to people not like themselves.

Citizens in democracies have a right — and a responsibility — to speak up. The prime

minister reminds them of their responsibilities, gliding over their rights. Protests have erupted on social media and on the streets against the divisive actions of India's government. A chief minister dares to declare "revenge" against protesters in a democracy. State power has been used to unjustly seize their property. This is "maximum government, minimum governance" at its worst.

Seven years back, India's citizens had risen up en masse against corruption and violence against women. A chain of coffee cafes had invited people to come in. "Stand up for this! Stand up for that! Let's sit down and talk, yaar!", its advertisements said. The government's leaders should have listened to India's citizens much better before taking actions that are provoking protests.

Can India become a beacon of unity in diversity as it once was? It will have to heal itself before it can throw light on others. Indians will have to learn to listen to each other calmly, to hear others' points-of-view, to know others' fears and hopes, and to respect and celebrate the differences amongst themselves.

Listening deeply to others, especially to those not like ourselves, will tone up the health of our society and our nation. We must learn to listen to why someone has a different point-of-view, and to learn who

this different person is — not our stereotype of him or her, judged by the clothes they wear. Sadly, our public discourse, on electronic and social media, and even in our elected assemblies, has degenerated into squabbles about who to blame, rather than a discovery of what "We" — together — want.

Listening, like breathing, is a very simple action. Children learn to breathe and to listen soon after they are born. Then, growing up, humans seem to forget the values of breathing and listening. Yoga teaches us how to breathe well again. By simply breathing deeply and well, the health of our complex bodies and minds is improved. Yoga as a means for personal well-being is India's gift to the world. It is celebrated as the UN International Yoga Day.

To achieve our vision of unity in diversity, let us switch off our smartphones and stop tweeting and insulting each other for just one day. Let us reach out to a citizen of our country who is "not like us". Let's listen to who she or he really is. Let's start a national listening movement. And lead the world to an International Listening Day.

Maira, a former member of the Planning Commission, is the author of *Listening for Well-Being: Conversations with People Not Like Us*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

NO MORE SILENCE

THIS REFERS to the article, 'The intolerance of liberals' (IE, December 28). The writer focuses on the lack of tolerance and ability to hear the opponents by the so-called liberals. It must be pointed out to her that when the very machinery which has the responsibility to hear people ignore it, people are left with no choice but to aggressively pursue their issues. One cannot be expected to remain silent and hear the lies of a majoritarian government.

Prasannjit Mishra, Kopergaon

DATA LIES

THIS REFERS to the editorial, 'Problem with figures' (IE, December 30). At last, the Narendra Modi government, coming out of its orthodox cocoon, has reposed its faith on statisticians and economists who have raised their voices earlier against the unwanted political interference in the functioning of official statistical machinery. The formation of a four-member Standing Committee on Economic Statistics is welcome. It must be allowed to function with freedom and dignity.

Chanchal Nandy, via email

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.

LISTEN TO KABIR

THIS REFERS to the article, 'The freedom to speak up' (IE, December 31). The ruling dispensation seems to view its mandate as a license to carry out an agenda that appeals to its most virulent fringe. It is heartening to see a person of influence, like Kabir Khan, speaking up. More people must do so. And the government must start to listen.

Bishwadeep Chatterjee, Delhi

ECONOMY
CHALLENGES: BOOST GROWTH AND GST REVENUES, KEEP DEFICIT IN CHECK

SANDEEP SINGH, SUNNY VERMA & ANCHAL MAGAZINE

SEVERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS made by the government after the Budget in July 2019, aimed at quelling anxiety around slowing economic growth, falling private sector investment, and decline of consumption, have so far failed to achieve the desired results. As India Inc., bankers, economists, and consumers wait for a next round of measures in the Budget next month, they will be watching how the government balances measures to boost growth with its stated objective of sticking to the fiscal deficit target, improves GST collections, and keeps rising inflation under check.

Where we stand now

GDP growth for the second quarter was at a six-year low of 4.5%. The Finance Minister has said earlier that the economy may have bottomed out; several analysts and experts, however, feel the worst may not be over yet. Passenger car sales, which witnessed a marginal uptick of 0.3% in the festival month of October after sliding continuously over the previous 10 months, went back into decline mode in November. In the eight months of this financial year, passenger car sales have declined 18%, sales of medium and heavy commercial vehicles by 37%, and two wheelers by 15.7%. This indicates a slowdown in economic activity in both urban and rural areas, and in industrial demand. Between April and October, gross bank credit growth expanded by just 0.7%; within that, the credit outstanding for the industrial and services sectors contracted 3.4% and 2.6% respectively. The personal loan segment expanded by only 7.6%.

Power demand has been falling — as of November 11, of the total 262 coal, lignite, and nuclear units, 133 were shut due to lack of demand. As of November 7, peak demand met was 1,88,072 MW, a little less than half the total installed generation capacity of 3,63,370 MW.

Both direct and indirect tax collections have slowed due to the overall economic slowdown, and it will be a challenge for the government to meet tax receipt targets set in the Budget. GST revenue collections have been slowing over the past few months. Barring November, when collections picked up due to festival sales, GST revenue has contracted for the previous two months, leading to delayed compensation payments to states.

The central GST collection during April–November has fallen nearly 40% short of the Budget estimate — Rs 3,28,365 crore against the Budget estimate of Rs 5,26,000 crore — as per data presented to Parliament. Direct tax collections have fared no better, with only 41.7% or Rs 5.56 lakh crore of the target of Rs 13.35 lakh crore, collected during the first eight months of the financial year, government data show.

What the government can do

There have been calls for the government to lead the revival through aggressive spending. The question is whether the government has the wherewithal to do so.

After the cut in corporate tax rates, there are expectations now of a reduction in income-tax rates, or adjustment of tax slabs in the Budget to stimulate demand. However, the government's fiscal health does not provide it with much leeway for an aggressive expenditure push. The fiscal space is tight, especially after the sharp cut in corporate tax rates, which is estimated to cost the exchequer Rs 1.45 lakh crore.

Privatisation of state-owned companies such as BPCL, Shipping Corporation of India and Container Corporation of India Ltd is being lined up to generate resources to cover the expected shortfall in tax revenues. A rollover of subsidies this year could add close to 0.3% of GDP to the fiscal space. Even so, analysts expect the fiscal deficit to be around 3.7–3.9 per cent of GDP, against the target of 3.3% by March–end 2020.

With the Reserve Bank of India maintaining a pause in its rate reduction cycle during the latest review of monetary policy, the government might wait for the corporate tax cuts to drive investments in the economy.

One way for the government to give a spending push will be to postpone the fiscal consolidation plan. Industry executives argue that if reduction is put on hold for a couple of years, the government would have extra resources to push spending. As the economy picks up pace later, it can revert to the targeted reduction in deficit.



Illustration: Suvajit Dey

GOVERNMENT & POLITICS

Pitched battle ahead for states, ideas, institutions

LIZ MATHEW

THE NEW citizenship law and the proposed National Register of Citizens (NRC) that have brought thousands of protesters out in the streets in many cities and towns, have not only overshadowed the concerns over the deepening economic slowdown and the absence of jobs, but have also become significant agents of polarisation.

The political scenario in 2020 will reflect the manner in which the mass public demonstration of disagreement with the government plays out — whether it helps the BJP to consolidate its Hindu base, or inspires civil society to increase the pressure on the regime by questioning its failures and broken promises on the economic front.

In drawing out at many places people of all castes and communities against the government, with gestures such as waving the Tricolour and reading from the Constitution, the protests are likely to have assured the minority Muslims that they are not completely isolated in society. While the BJP continues to publicly downplay the protests and dismiss them as orchestrated by political opponents, a section of party leaders believes that pressing ahead with the NRC in the face of the opposition would trigger widespread anger among citizens.

After the euphoria of the Lok Sabha elections, 2019 has ended on a sombre note for the BJP with the defeat in Jharkhand. The Delhi elections will

present an opportunity early in 2020 for the BJP to test the polarisation quotient of the new citizenship law. Following the enactment of the law, BJP leaders in Delhi have been optimistic about their prospects.

After Delhi in February, comes Bihar in October. The triumphs at the Centre in 2014 and 2019 notwithstanding, the BJP's defeats in 2015 in Bihar; in 2017 in Punjab; in 2018 in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh; and in 2019 in Jharkhand underline the party's vulnerabilities in the states when the vote is not directly to make Narendra Modi Prime Minister. In Gujarat (2017), and Haryana and Maharashtra (2019), the BJP performed below expectations. Building state leaderships that can complement Modi's popularity will be one of the party's top tasks in 2020.

At this juncture, a change in the party's internal dynamics could be significant. Amit Shah is likely to be replaced as the BJP's national president by J P Nadda — for whom the major challenge will be to retain the BJP's reputation and abilities as an election-winning machine. The hold of Modi-Shah over the party is absolute now — political observers would be watching whether Nadda might emerge as another power centre.

And what of the Congress, the shrunken party that the BJP continues to attack relentlessly, but which has improved its credibility as the leading Opposition party by producing an impressive performance in Haryana, succeeding in keeping the BJP away from power in Maharashtra, and winning

Jharkhand along with senior partner JMM?

The Congress task in Delhi is uphill, where it will be battling for largely the same votebank as the Aam Aadmi Party, which has a formidable record in government to show. In Bihar, the Congress is not a force at all, and will hope to ride with the RJD. Nitish Kumar's opposition to the NRC — along with his record of political flexibility — has raised fresh talk of a possible realignment of political forces.

The confusion at the party's highest level, however, continues. Sonia Gandhi's taking charge at a critical time is only an interim arrangement, and the leadership issue is far from settled. Rahul Gandhi's stated reluctance notwithstanding, the chances of the Congress having a president from outside the family are bleak.

Then, there are questions about the future of India's democratic institutions. The neutrality of several public institutions and offices have been put under a cloud, and the new year will see them subjected to continued scrutiny from the people and civil society.

The Supreme Court will hear the challenges to the removal of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir and the new citizenship law, among several crucial cases. The highest court will be called upon to both demonstrate and interpret its role as the guardian of the Constitution, and the guarantor of the founding principles of the republic. On test also will be the court's resolve to safeguard the independence of the higher judiciary.

(WITH MANOJ CG AND ANANTHAKRISHNAN G)

The year ahead will show whether the current protests against the government helps the BJP to consolidate its Hindu base, or inspires civil society to increase pressure on the regime by questioning its failures and broken promises on the economic front

TECHNOLOGY
EXPECT BETTER PHONES, GREATER CONTROL OVER DATA, BUT NO BIG 5G BOOM

NANDAGOPAL RAJAN

Tech trends change faster than you can jot them down. Given the pace at which technology is moving, it is expected that countries like India will leapfrog a few steps — they miss the bus often, but are the first to catch the Metro. We will see a lot of technology in 2020 — some that will change our lives, and some that will change even before we notice.

How will 5G impact your life?

We don't know if 5G will become available in India this year. Expect some pilots, but not a full-fledged roll-out. And even if 5G does start rolling out, it is not going to impact most of us immediately.

This is because smartphones that can use this technology are very expensive as of now — and these uses may not be enticing enough for most people to spend a lot of good money on. Also, since 4G data speeds are already very fast, the jump in speeds will not be that discernible for regular users.

But what 5G will enable is new experiences and use cases. For instance, online video could become more interactive and immersive while offering viewers the ability to change camera angles in real time even on 3D streams. Also, this new generation of networks will empower a mesh of billions of connected devices that can function without human intervention.

Will smartphones get better?

They are already quite good, so again, incremental changes may not be good enough for people to commit to an upgrade. Smartphone companies will try to woo you with more of everything — more cameras, more storage, more memory, even more screens.

Where we could see some real innovation is in the second wave of foldable devices, which could make this new form factor practical, and not just a fad. We could see larger screen devices that emerge out of chassis that are smaller than feature phones. This could offer a solution, which present smartphones cannot.

Another new offering will be 5G devices that are more affordable, and offer a real value proposition to potential customers.

What else will get smarter?

If a device has a chip inside, it has the potential to get smarter. In 2020, gadgets and appliances will be able to assign to themselves small levels of autonomy. They will learn from their user, and connect to the web and understand what users generally do. You will also see a lot of smartness come into everything from email to smartphones — constantly predicting what users will do, and trying to do it before they do. It does sound slightly scary, but it has immense potential if human intelligence retains control over artificial intelligence.

Will more devices hear?

Amazon's Alexa is now an Application Programming Interface (API) that can be plugged in to make any device respond to voice commands. It is already being loaded onto cars, and even very affordable earphones can answer a query if you start it with the right wake word.

But devices that hear will not be about convenience; they will be about access. Voice commands suddenly opens up the technology to people who otherwise would have struggled because of barriers presented by literacy, age, or just technology. As Alexa, Google Assistant and Siri get more intelligent, learning from everything they hear and respond too, questions are bound to arise on how much they should hear, especially of what they are not supposed to.

Will your data be of more value?

Yes, user data will finally be of some value to the user herself, and not just to the companies that mine it — with or without her consent.

This year, expect to take more informed decisions about your health, your spending, and your interactions with technology, because you will have more data on all of the above. Insurance companies could reward users who have a control on their health, as recorded by their smart bands and watches. However, users are gradually pulling out data from their social media accounts — as they become aware of how their data is used, they want to share less of their lives with social media companies.

SPORT

Hundred challenge to T20, borderline sports coming through the Rings

SANDEEP DWIVEDI

A LATE 2019 headcount shows the existence of at least 25 recognised international T20 leagues globally. In India, the IPL has about 10 offsprings around the country. Cricketers without borders — that ever-increasing tribe of nomadic T20 players — continues to effortlessly hop continents. Nationalism on cricket fields is shrinking. Franchising is the new driving force on Planet T20.

This was another year when Test cricket tried to stay relevant. It stayed up late and wore pink more often. The 50-over game — that much-neglected has-been dealing with a mid-life crisis wretch — rediscovered its glory hour in 2019. The World Cup final, aka greatest game ever, halted cricket's much-ignored middle child's worrying slide down the popularity charts. Meanwhile, T20 continued its monstrous growth. The newest format's

knack of hooking new fans kept exposing old cricket's inadequacies that come in way of making it a mass sport with universal appeal.

But 2020 might present Twenty20 with its first big challenge. In July, England will launch cricket's fourth format — a shorter and simplified version that's devoid of this aged game's ingrained eccentricities that have historically put off the uninitiated. Called 'The Hundred', it'll be a 100-ball-per-side game that isn't a T20 offshoot like, say T10, but a mutant with a uncomplicated binary DNA. A change of ends after 10 balls, and bowlers bowling 10 consecutive balls are some variations aimed at wiping away cricket's unique six-ball over concept. Packaged as a two-and-a-half-hour hit-and-miss gig, The Hundred aspires to spread cricket beyond the old British colonies and rekindle the perennial dream of an Olympic entry.

For years, cricket's expansion has been an illusion. The ICC's much-publicised China reach is an exercise in optics. The country that

has historically under-performed in team sports has given no clear signal to pad up *en masse*. But then, we should have known our neighbours better by now. China would rather sponsor IPL than have a league of its own. Except for Afghanistan, Nepal, and Papua New Guinea now, cricket beyond the Top 10 countries is still played by mostly

Commonwealth expats.

The Hundred is cricket's one desperate charge to somehow sneak into the sporting world's Promised Land America. Even though a good, hard, honest look in the mirror will show cricket that this is nothing but a leap of faith. Be it the Olympics or America, cricket happens to be way down the queue of

sports jostling to capture global eyeballs. This '100'-themed cosmetic baseballisation of the game might not be enough to guarantee Kohli, Root, Starc, and the likes a Summer Games experience.

While cricket was discovering cheerleaders, numbered T-shirts, and merchandising, the rest of the sporting world was finding newer ways to attract fans. Of late, the market-driven suits at the International Olympic Council have been leaning heavily on data optimisation spreadsheets while choosing their sports. They too are going down that slippery slope called clickbait. With an eye to woo big-spending brands that cater to the young, they were unabashedly swaying towards the youth demographic in the developed nations. Result: Tokyo 2020 will have surfing, skateboarding, and sport climbing as medal events. There's more in the pipeline.

Paris 2024 is eagerly awaited by the cool folks who wear their caps backward and sport

dangerously low-waist pants. Break dancing makes its Olympics debut with a promise to make the Games more urbane, artistic, and diverse. This new sport proved to be a runaway hit at the last Youth Olympics with the gold medal won by a rubber-body Russian known on the break dance circuit as Bumblebee.

The success of the borderline Olympic sports next year will decide the future of the other outlier that's pushing and shoving its way to be under the flag with five rings. E-Sports, the umbrella term of most Gaming enterprises, made its grand Asian Games entry in 2018. Even the IOC no longer rolls its eyes at these non-physical sports. They are engaging Gaming officials to understand the phenomenon that is driving away the youth from sporting fields. A virtual win for Gaming in round one.

Meanwhile, a handful of ECB officials and some retired cricketers feel that The Hundred will be the vehicle that will take cricket to Olympics. OK Boomer.