



THOSE WHO WILL NOT REASON, ARE BIGOTS, THOSE WHO CANNOT, ARE FOOLS, AND THOSE WHO DARE NOT, ARE SLAVES. — LORD BYRON

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

The right to return

If Pandits return to Kashmir, as they should, they may have to live in fear as their Sikh and Muslim brethren do



SUVIR KAUL

IN AUGUST 2010, at a time when Indian security forces systematically shot down stone-throwing protestors all over Kashmir (112 were killed), various relatives living elsewhere phoned my mother to ask when she was planning to leave Srinagar. Her answer was simple: We aren't planning to leave; this is home, and the weather is lovely. Some years later, at another moment when violence rippled through Srinagar, I called to speak to her, and because our home adjoins Maisuma, a neighbourhood known for its protests, I could hear shots being fired. Are you fearful, I asked? Why, she said in response, do you never have bullets being fired on the streets of America?

I mention these two instances (I could recount others) because my mother taught us a quiet lesson each time. If you are Kashmiri, and a Pandit, you need to go home and to make it yours, regardless of the privations you suffer. And Kashmiris have suffered, and continue to suffer, all manner of deprivation. But if Kashmir is home, you need to be there, to insist, even in your declining years, that you will suffer the inconveniences and the fears that are a staple of life, because it is home. (Yes, she and my sister were marooned in our attic during the floods in 2014, and had to be rescued, after a harrowing 10 days, by a group of our local friends. Do I need to say that the friends were Muslim?). There had been a decade and more when my parents were not able to spend time in our ancestral home in Srinagar, but once they returned in 2003, they made it a point to be there for the long summer months. My father passed away in his favourite chair in the home his father built. My mother died in Delhi, too frail in her last year of life to go to the Srinagar she longed for. But they returned us to Kashmir, and taught us what it means to be Kashmiri in a time when Kashmiris have been denied basic dignities and rights.

Of course, my parents' example cannot be generalised. They had an apartment in Delhi, and so they did not suffer as most Pandits did who left in 1990 and after. Our home in Srinagar is in a neighbourhood

ringed by paramilitary bunkers, and while it was twice broken into, it did not suffer major damage. This was not the case with many Pandit homes, which were burnt, or commandeered by soldiers, or were sold at distress prices, or still stand as decaying, empty hulks. In camps or in homes outside Kashmir, Pandits struggled with adversity and loss, and found the resilience to recover. Many elderly people died, bewildered and miserable away from home. Successive central and state governments treated them with a malicious cynicism — Pandits were of importance only as political pawns, to be trundled out as examples of the ravages of fundamentalist Islam.

Pandits had left Kashmir in fear of their lives. I should make clear that it does not matter if you believe in the canard that all Muslims in Kashmir turned upon them, or if you believe in the equally self-serving theory that Governor Jagmohan encouraged them to leave so that Indian paramilitary forces could act with impunity. The fact is, a tiny minority community felt scared enough to give up their homes and livelihoods and no one did anything about that displacement. Their absence has warped the substance of Kashmiri life. Kashmiri Muslims, particularly the older generation, lament their loss but after decades of being subject to far worse forms of the violence that the Pandits feared and experienced, their sympathies are strained.

What lies ahead, now that Pandits are pledging to return home (#HumWapasAayenge)? I hope large numbers of us do just that but we should know that we cannot expect any government to provide more than token financial help. It is absurd to think of life in armed encampments, or in protected enclaves, that will be forcibly planted in Srinagar and elsewhere. If there is to be a rapprochement between Kashmiri communities, Pandits must live as we did before, sharing our lives with our Muslim neighbours. Will this be easy? Not at all, for it will take years and years for mutual suspicion to wear away.

return and insist upon their right to be full citizens of the land, their claim will be as strong as that of the tens of thousands of non-Muslims who have lived in Kashmir all these years. Will they face threats to their well-being and lives? They almost certainly will, as do their Muslim and Sikh and Pandit neighbours today, for Kashmir is a conflict zone and will remain so for a while to come. But it is our right to live in Kashmir, and such a right can only be claimed through individual effort, not the devious sponsorship of state agencies.

There is also a major obstacle in the way, which will take great integrity to surmount. Pandits by and large see their future, and that of Kashmir, to lie within India; most Muslims desire an independent, or at least, largely autonomous nation-state. Pandits will have to display great fortitude in choosing to live as Indians while recognising the immense alienation of their Muslim neighbours from the Indian state. They have the right to their political positions, which they will have to fight for within a larger polity that seeks self-determination. The popularity of the *tehrak* has only increased since the abrogation of Article 370 and Article 35A, and the vindictive anti-Muslim actions of BJP-led governments all over India have worsened Kashmiri fears. If Pandits return to Kashmir, they will realise just how life has been disrupted and violent for years now, and they will live as their Muslim and Sikh brethren have lived, in fear of the soldiers who control civilian lives.

Both Muslims and Pandits will have to find the empathy and generosity to overcome their political differences, particularly since state agencies will do all that they can to blunt any developing solidarities. This is a very difficult task, but if we want the return of a tolerant, shared, syncretic Kashmir — and indeed a tolerant, shared, syncretic India — we have to try.

The writer is A M Rosenthal Professor, Department of English, University of Pennsylvania

THAKUR & COMPANY

They incite violence and peddle hate knowing they will get away — the onus is on the EC to draw the red line

WITH LESS THAN a fortnight left for Delhi elections, the BJP leadership seems to have got a sudden gleam in its electoral eye: A little corner in this sprawling city-state, Shaheen Bagh. The party's campaigners, from Union Home Minister Amit Shah to local rabble-rousers like Kapil Mishra, frame the protests in this Muslim-dominated neighbourhood against the new citizenship law — that excludes Muslim migrants from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh — as challenging not only the party and the government but also the sovereignty of the state. Last week, Mishra called Shaheen Bagh "a mini-Pakistan" and compared the election to an India-Pakistan contest, prompting the Election Commission (EC) to ban him from campaigning for two days. Shah picked up from where Mishra left and exhorted a rally to "press the button with such anger that the current is felt at Shaheen Bagh".

So, when Anurag Thakur, a junior minister in the Narendra Modi government, hollers, "desh ke gaddaron ko", and gets the crowd to howl, "goli maaro saalon ko", he is, clearly, reading from a script that was first flaunted by Mishra. In doing so, Thakur, who has earlier packaged himself as the players' voice in the cricket board, is now being a minion who echoes his masters, says what he thinks they want to hear. At the rally, later attended by Shah and senior BJP minister Giriraj Singh, Thakur clearly knew what the chorus was. Speaking to this newspaper, he was being too clever by half when he said he didn't know what the mob would say. And a mob it clearly was, its frenzy revealing how exactly lynch mobs are created. A day later, on Tuesday, BJP MP from Delhi, Parvez Verma, invoked the violence that forced Pandits to flee the Kashmir Valley in the 1990s while referring to Shaheen Bagh. "Today, a similar situation has arisen at a place in Delhi. Lakhs of people gather there... They can enter your houses, rape your sisters and daughters and kill them," he said. In the raucous marketplace of ideas that is an election campaign, politicians push the limits of free speech and poll rhetoric is given a wide berth, as it should. But Thakur and Verma incite violence and peddle hate. They reveal a contempt for the voters of Delhi — the belief that such hate and trash talk will translate into votes. The fact that they can get away without even a slap on the wrist shows who holds their hands.

The Election Commission, the institution with the remit to draw the red lines during an election campaign, needs to step in. Azam Khan and Pragya Thakur have been banned from campaigning for violating the Model Code of Conduct in the past. The institutional credibility of the EC to ensure a fair campaign, no matter how high the office of the violator, is on test. Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora and his colleagues should ensure due process and let Thakur & Co. know that they can get cheers, even votes, but they can't get away with incitement to violence.

TAMING THE FLU

Coronavirus outbreak calls for global efforts to check diseases that jump from animals to humans

INA LITTLE more than a week, deaths due to coronavirus have multiplied by more than 20 times. Over a hundred people have succumbed to the mystery virus that originated in China's Wuhan province and it has been confirmed in at least 10 other countries. The Chinese authorities have acknowledged that the virus has affected 4,500 people. But modeling by researchers at Imperial College London suggests that 70,000 to 100,000 people could be affected. The WHO, which last week desisted from describing the situation as a public health emergency, has asked countries in Southeast Asia to remain vigilant. The Indian government is reportedly considering steps to prepare for evacuating the country's nationals from Wuhan.

The outbreak has evoked memories of the SARS epidemic of 2002-2003, which killed nearly 800 and affected more than 8,000 people worldwide. It was also ascribed to a coronavirus and manifested similar symptoms — fever, cough and shortness of breath. Antibiotics do not work against such viral pneumonia and there are no vaccines against them. However, there are reassuring differences between the situation in 2002-3 and the one today. For one, China's response to the current outbreak is markedly different from the way it dealt with SARS. In contrast to its secretive ways 17 years ago, Beijing informed the WHO, shared the virus's gene sequence with the world, imposed travel restrictions and quarantined 50 million people. Moreover, experts suggest that the current coronavirus outbreak is not as virulent as the one in 2002-3 — it has a mortality rate of less than 3 per cent as compared to SARS's death rate of nearly 10 per cent. But we are still looking at preliminary data, and scientists are likely to know the exact magnitude of the problem in the coming weeks.

The coronavirus is a zoonotic virus — one that jumps from humans to animals. The WHO estimates that three out of four new diseases that have infected humans in the past decade have been transmitted by animals. Bats are known to be the carriers of virus such as Ebola, SARS and even the current coronavirus. How such viruses spill over to humans is still not clear. But we do know that bushmeat markets — in China, Southeast Asia, Africa and other parts of the world — provide conditions for such pathogens to proliferate. The recent virus is reported to have originated in a wet market in Wuhan. In a globalised world, chances of the flu spreading fast are high. But global cooperation to check such virus has, at best, been episodic. Viruses are a global challenge and it's time they are seen as such.

THE MUMMY SPEAKS

A priest of Karnak is heard from across the gulf of time, and sounds very much like the horn of Noddy's car

IN LIFE, ABOUT 1100 BC, the priest Nesyamun was a scribe and incense-bearer in the Karnak temple complex in Egypt, one of the highest beings in a highly stratified society. He was brought low in death, succumbing to what could be an insect-bite on his tongue, which caused it to balloon out. But death is a bad moment which is soon over, and once his sarcophagus had been discovered and brought to the museum of Leeds, UK, Nesyamun got lucky again. His mummy escaped a direct hit by a Luftwaffe bomb which wiped out many exhibits, including two other mummies, during the Blitz in 1941.

But now, ill luck favours him yet again, and his voice is in danger of being commodified. Being well-preserved, Nesyamun is one of the most studied mummies ever, and a CT scan of his larynx has been replicated by a 3D printer. And the mummy has spoken. In an ideal world, this would have opened a franchise on Nesyamun voice-overs. Hollywood has already press-ganged dead actors using CGI. Oliver Reed's role in *Gladiator*, for instance, was finished posthumously by a computer. But imagine the impact of a real voice, speaking to audiences from across the centuries. Imagine it singing "As Time Goes By". There would be serious dollars in exploiting such talents.

But Nesyamun has declined to co-operate. First, he can't articulate words in the absence of the rest of his vocal tract. And the sound he has made through a machine after three millennia is suspiciously like the horn of Noddy's car: "Paaaarp!" Or, to recall P G Wodehouse, perhaps it is the sound of ducks that die in thunderstorms. It is certainly not the voice of a priest accustomed to addressing Ra and Isis. Or maybe the old man is having us on.



K P NAYAR

HARSH VARDHAN SHRINGLA, who assumes charge as India's foreign secretary today, faced his first real life challenge involving foreign affairs when he was a little boy. And he overcame that challenge diplomatically, with pragmatism.

Born in Mumbai to T Tshering La, his name was to have been Harsh Vardhan Tshering La, a mix of his father's Buddhist ancestry and his mother's Hindu faith. Both his parents are Sikkimese from Darjeeling and spoke Nepali at home. Harsh Vardhan's birth and school documents, made in Mumbai, where the name Tshering La is not well known, recorded his surname as Shringla. Tshering La and Shringla are phonetically identical. This was in the 1960s when Sikkim was not a part of India. Implicit in this conundrum was an element of foreign affairs. Harsh Vardhan settled for the change in his surname and became a Shringla.

As a diplomat abroad, his surname has sparked curiosity about his ethnicity. Five months ago when Shringla accepted an honorary doctorate from the ICFAI University in Sikkim, his acceptance speech was made partly in Nepali: "My native language... also a language of Sikkim."

Shringla's rise to the top of the Foreign Office brings closure to one of India's foreign policy challenges for three decades: The merger of Sikkim with the Indian Union in 1975. Chokila Iyer was the first Sikkimese to briefly become foreign secretary. Shringla's full tenure will be an important message to lingering critics abroad that there is no glass

A DIPLOMAT FORETOLD

Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla has overcome challenges pragmatically

ceiling for ethnic Sikkimese in India.

That Shringla would become foreign secretary one day was accepted by the Indian foreign service as a *fait accompli* in August 1984 when he joined the IFS. Shringla topped the entire civil service examination that year. Only a grave misstep in his 35-year service would have cost him the top job.

The biggest challenge any diplomat can face is when he comes across information that can end the career of his own foreign minister. That was the dilemma Shringla faced in 2005 when he was a minister at the Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations. Because of his extensive contacts in New York, Shringla was one of the first diplomats at the UN to get hold of the report of the Independent Inquiry Committee that looked into huge bribery in Iraq's "Oil for Food" programme before the 1,000-word report was presented to the Security Council.

Shringla did not duck, he did not shrink. He told his boss, Nirupama Sen, Permanent Representative to the UN, that K Natwar Singh, the powerful external affairs minister, was named in the report. No one other than these two men at the large diplomatic mission had a whiff of what was coming. When this writer met Shringla that day at the UN, he was so cool, calm and collected that there was no indication that this diplomat had information which was to inflame India's politics in a day or two. Sen managed to convey the damaging information by-passing the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), directly to Prime Minister

Manmohan Singh. Natwar Singh resigned after a futile resistance.

The MEA is not one of those ministries where corruption scandals erupt periodically. An exception was in 2011 when India was contracted to build 50,000 houses in civil war-ravaged Tamil areas through a line of credit to Sri Lanka. A civil war erupted inside the MEA with the joint secretary in charge of Sri Lanka, accusing on files, then External Affairs Minister S M Krishna's office of corruption in the contract.

It was an unequal battle between the middle-level IFS officer and the minister's office, but the joint secretary dug his heels in, so much as refusing an ambassadorial assignment to stay on and fight alleged political corruption.

For then Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao, this situation could not be sustained. The compromise was to draft Shringla as joint secretary for Sri Lanka, who firmly, but diplomatically ended the civil war within the MEA and successfully oversaw completion of the housing projects sans any corruption. This experience stood him in good stead later in delivering critical assistance to Bangladesh, as high commissioner, making relations with Dhaka one of the recent success stories of the Narendra Modi government's neighbourhood diplomacy.

The writer was a resident UN correspondent in New York when Shringla was minister at the Permanent Mission of India to the UN from 2002 to 2006



JANUARY 29, 1980, FORTY YEARS AGO

INDO-FRENCH TALKS THE FOUR-DAY INDO-FRENCH talks have ended with the two countries agreeing to their cooperation in the fields of industry, agriculture, commerce and science and technology. The two countries signed a series of documents to this end. One important document says a massive aluminium complex will be developed in Orissa costing as much as Rs 1,000 crore for utilisation of bauxite reserves with French technical know-how. It also involves credits on preferential terms as well as loans by a consortium of banks. France also wants to buy coal from India. The two countries have set up a working group for industrial cooperation.

NO GLOBAL FUND THE RICH NATIONS have more or less rejected the idea of a global fund for the industrial development of the Third World. They spelt out their stand in a document presented to the third general conference of the UN Industrial Development Organisation. Questioning the need for setting up new institutions or funds, the document argues that there already exists an established and flexible framework to provide more financial resources. It says that the advanced countries are nonetheless prepared to continue to participate in efforts in the appropriate fora to improve the operation of channels for providing external finance.

ISLAMIC CONFERENCE FOREIGN MINISTERS AT the special Islamic conference in Islamabad devoted the second day's sessions to a study of drafts submitted by delegations for resolutions on the Afghan and Palestinian question. A number of resolutions have been tabled — some directly speaking out against the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and others demanding that any pressure on Muslim countries be condemned at the source. Tunisia's foreign minister Habib Chatty, also secretary-general of Organisation of Islamic Countries, said the conference resolutions would condemn the Soviet Union by name for its action in Afghanistan.

Peaceful development is China's strategic choice

Positive growth is inevitable, but the Chinese people are committed to shun hegemony as well



SUN WEIDONG

HISTORY HAS JUST started on the third decade of the 21st century. There is a mixture of anticipation and confusion about the future.

We live in an era full of opportunities and challenges. The dawn of the fourth industrial revolution illuminates the way forward for human progress, with the collective rise of emerging countries improving the lives of billions of people. At the same time, however, the international order and system on which all countries depend for their survival and development have been undermined. Unilateralism, hegemonism and power politics still haunt us. Some countries still take military risks in international relations, and the Sword of Damocles of war still hangs high. Open or closed? Cooperation or confrontation? Multilateralism or unilateralism? Justice or "law of the jungle"? Once again, mankind stands at a crossroads, facing the historical choice of where to go.

The Chinese people have given their answer to the questions facing the world and the perplexity of the times: We will always stick to the path of peaceful development, build a community of a shared future for mankind, and achieve win-win sharing.

China's choice for peaceful development is based on our cultural genes. The Chinese nation is a peace-loving nation. For more than 5,000 years, the pursuit of peace and harmony has been deeply rooted in the spiritual world of the Chinese nation. The extensive and profound schools of thought that ancient Chinese philosophers established covered many important ideas, such as the emphasis on kindness towards fellow human beings and the belief that people should be in harmony with each other, and seeking harmony without uniformity. These values and teachings still carry a profound impact on the Chinese people's way of thinking and system of values. For several thousand years before the industrial revolution, China had been among the top in national strength. However, China has never had a record of colonisation and expansion.

China's choice for peaceful development is based on our experiences of vicissitudes. After the onset of modern times, China found itself left behind in terms of development. As a result of incessant foreign invasions thereafter, Chinese people had to lead a life of extreme destitution. The ancient eastern country was subdued to a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. After a hundred years of persistent and unyielding struggle, the Chinese people, sacrificing tens of millions of lives, ultimately took their destiny back into their own hands. Nevertheless, the memory of foreign invasion and bullying has never been erased from the minds of the Chinese people. Confucius once said, do not impose on others what you do not desire upon yourself. We would never impose the pain we have suffered on other countries.

China's choice for peaceful development is based on our internal needs. Development is the top priority, and this principle applies to all countries. Over the past 70 years, China has made historic achievements in development, and its economic aggregate has become the second largest in the world. But at the same time, China is still the largest developing country in the world. China's population is 1.4 billion and its per capita GDP is still ranked around 70th in the world. More



CR Sasikumar

than 15 million people need to get employment in China every year. There is no doubt that it will take a long and arduous effort to make such a large population prosperous. China must concentrate on development, which requires us to have a peaceful external environment.

China's choice for peaceful development is based on our commitment to world peace and development. China's development benefits from a peaceful international environment. China is also willing to promote world peace through its own development. China is one of the founding members of the UN, and the second-largest contributor to the UN and UN peacekeeping operations. Over the past 70 years, China has provided over 400 billion RMB in foreign aid. Since the international financial crisis, China's contribution to world economic growth has averaged over 30 per cent annually. At present, the Chinese government is taking firm, effective and scientific measures to prevent and control the pneumonia caused by the coronavirus. Acting with a high sense of responsibility for global health security, China has maintained close cooperation with the World Health Organisation and other international partners and will continue to share information on the virus and epidemic in a timely manner.

China provides an opportunity for world development. However, there are always some people with biases who look at China with a Cold War mentality. They choose to believe that when China becomes strong, then we will seek to expand and dominate. These people's perception of China is seriously skewed.

In the 21st century, when human beings share a common destiny and civilisation is highly developed, these people look at international relations through the prism of the law of the jungle. These kinds of stereotypical ideas, at the end of the day, stem from an obsession with maintaining a hegemonic position and the Cold War mentality, and go against the trend of history.

China will become strong and this is something that is bound to happen. But it is not necessary that a stronger country is bound to follow the beaten path of seeking

China will not develop itself at the expense of the interests of other countries, but we will never give up our legitimate rights and interests. We have always resolutely safeguarded our sovereignty, security and development interests. We firmly oppose other countries using Taiwan, Hong Kong, Tibet and Xinjiang as pretexts to interfere in China's internal affairs. Under no circumstances will we swallow the bitter fruit of damaging our own rights and interests.

hegemony, posing a so-called threat to other countries. Albert Einstein once said that we can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them. In this era, the revitalisation of a country can be achieved through international communication and cooperation on an equal, orderly, mutually beneficial basis. As history and reality have repeatedly proven, as long as countries treat each other as equals and with mutual understanding and accommodation, there is no problem that cannot be solved through negotiation. Power politics goes against the will of the people and the use of force in international relations is simply not feasible. China is confident and capable of blazing a new trail of win-win cooperation and peaceful development.

China will not develop itself at the expense of the interests of other countries, but we will never give up our legitimate rights and interests. We have always resolutely safeguarded our sovereignty, security and development interests. We firmly oppose other countries using Taiwan, Hong Kong, Tibet and Xinjiang as pretexts to interfere in China's internal affairs. Under no circumstances will we swallow the bitter fruit of damaging our own rights and interests. Over the past decades, China has developed itself by fostering a peaceful international environment, while promoting and maintaining world peace through its own development. In the future, China will stay committed to the path of peaceful development. It also sincerely hopes that all countries in the world will follow the path of peaceful development, and jointly safeguard peace, stability and prosperity of the earth, which is the only home of mankind.

China has written into its constitution the principle of adhering to the path of peaceful development and the win-win strategy of opening up. No matter which stage of development we reach, we will never seek hegemony, expansion or spheres of influence. This is not China's expediency, but our strategic choice and solemn commitment.

The writer is the Chinese Ambassador to India

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"To say that the Pakistani media is going through a grave crisis would be an understatement. The drop in revenues and stagnant state of the national economy overall has had a devastating effect on the country's media organisations." —DAWN

Law takes whose course

UPCM's offensive statements against Muslims, particularly women, must not go unchallenged



KARAN THAPAR

NORMALLY I DON'T take Yogi Adityanath seriously. He's certainly not the fount of political wisdom. Worse, he's made a habit of saying risible, though foolish things. But what he asserted at a BJP rally in support of the Citizenship Amendment Act in Kanpur last week deserves to be countered. Unlike his earlier follies, it simply cannot go unchallenged.

First, he said that protesters who shout azadi slogans would be charged with sedition. "In the name of dhama and demonstration, if you raise slogans of azadi that were once raised in Kashmir, it will come under sedition and the government will take the harshest action." This statement is wrong on several counts.

Let's start with the Constitution and the law. Article 19 (1) of the Constitution states: "All citizens shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression." Article 19 (2) states: "Nothing (can)... prevent the state from making any law... (to) impose reasonable restrictions... in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India." Two things follow. Article 19 (2) does permit a restriction on freedom of speech on grounds of sovereignty, but it's an enabling provision. It is not the law itself. A law along these lines needs to be promulgated by Parliament to put Article 19 (2) into effect.

Now, does such a law exist? Until 1962, the penal code provision for sedition (Section 124A) was such a law. However, in the Kedar Nath Singh judgment, the Supreme Court read it down. It now only applies if there is an actual incitement to violence. In 1995, in the Balwant Singh case, when the Supreme Court ruled that "Khalistan Zindabad" is not seditious, it upheld the 1962 ruling. More recently, in September 2016, the Supreme Court explicitly reaffirmed this judgment: "We are of the considered opinion that the authorities while dealing with offences under Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code shall be guided by the principles laid down by the constitution bench in *Kedar Nath Singh versus State of Bihar*."

So the situation that prevails today is simple. The Constitution permits the government to make a law to restrict freedom of speech in the interest of the sovereignty and integrity of India. But the law that does that only applies if there is incitement to violence. If the government wishes to criminalise peaceful non-violent calls for azadi, it needs to pass a specific law to do so. Article 19 (2) is not sufficient.

This means that every Indian citizen has the right to peacefully and non-violently call for azadi. It also suggests that Sharjeel Imam's call to peacefully block roads connecting Assam to the rest of the country is not sedition. This sort of protest has happened earlier, most notably in Manipur. And Imam was not advocating or inciting violence.

Yogi Adityanath is clearly unaware of the law. Unfortunately, so too are many

other BJP leaders. In fact, almost each time the police moves charges of sedition, it's almost certain they are equally ignorant. What the police claims is sedition is rarely, if ever, the case.

Now, should the BJP pass such a law? I have two reasons for saying no. Perhaps, in the immediate years after independence, India was a fragile nation whose future was uncertain and so even peaceful calls advocating for separation or division were a threat that could not be permitted. That's not the case any longer. Today we're resilient enough to withstand the rhetoric of college students. Indeed, their liberty to say what they want should be proof of our strength.

Second, as far back as 1962, in his maiden Rajya Sabha speech, C N Annadurai said: "Dravidians demand the right of self-determination... we want a separate country for southern India." If his words were laughed off rather than seen as a threat 58 years ago, then surely similar calls should be treated similarly today.

Now, I don't mean to suggest that calls for azadi are not offensive and distasteful. But, free speech includes the right to offend. A law to protect against that would diminish us. It would also suggest that instead of maturing as a democracy we're regressing. We would end up shaming ourselves without any meaningful gain.

The second foolish claim made by Adityanath was, arguably, worse. It was a direct attack on Muslim women who have been protesting. He claimed that they were forced by their husbands and brothers because Muslim men are scared to protest themselves.

With these words, Adityanath made several things clear. He doesn't believe that Muslim women have a mind of their own and a right to act of their own volition. He doesn't view them as individuals. He sees them as possessions of their brothers, husbands and fathers. They will only do what they are told to do. He refuses to accept that they actually want to do it themselves. But, perhaps, this is not surprising from a man who believes "women do not deserve independence".

He also undermines the BJP's vaunted claim that with last year's Triple Talaq Act, the party had empowered Muslim women. This was the great boast during the 2019 election and the reason why many BJP leaders believe that large numbers of Muslim women voted for them. With one thoughtless rhetorical swipe, Adityanath has shattered that presumption. Indeed, if some Muslim women did praise the Triple Talaq Act, they are even more likely to be offended by Adityanath's male chauvinism.

Finally, Adityanath has also revealed what he thinks of Muslim men. He doesn't believe they are fearless or resilient. Instead, they hide behind their women's skirts. So whilst the government sends ministers to the Valley to reach out to Kashmiris, Adityanath, single-handedly, is taunting and ridiculing Muslims in Uttar Pradesh. Yet Amit Shah and Narendra Modi are silent. I would have thought that they might want to distance themselves from his intemperate remarks. Their failure to do so raises the question: Has he revealed the BJP's real feelings about Muslims?

The writer is a senior journalist based in Delhi

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MINISTER AND MOB

THIS REFERS TO report, 'Minister Thakur chants desh ke gaddaron ko, poll rally crowd completes goli maaro.' (IE, January 28). The chant is a chilling sign of the times. It was out of line for a politician of Anurag Thakur's stature to further goad and embolden his multitude of trigger-happy supporters. No leader, irrespective of his political persuasion, should foment violence.

Varun Das, Zirakpur

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Thakur chants desh ke gaddaron ko, crowd completes goli maaro.' (IE, January 28). Instead of engaging in a dialogue with the protesters, the BJP is using various methods to delegitimise the public's dissent. Thakur's chants attempt to legitimise mob violence.

Manjul Chaudhary, Kangra

FRAGILE FRINGE

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'The fringe that isn't' (IE, January 28). Right-thinking and scientific-minded rejected religion or community-based functions, festival and rituals consciously because they were another matter to a modern society. It is another matter that they did not remain alert to prevent hide-bound organisations like the RSS from dining out on fictions to win over the downtrodden and marginalised. However, as the benighted Brahminical fringe is pathologically averse to equality and fairness, these sec-

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.

tions of society will return to the fold of their real well-wishers sooner than later.

Tarsem Singh, Mahilpur

BELIEF AND LAW

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'The language of belief' (IE, January 27). Any comment on someone's belief should be made in good spirit and with an understanding of its essence. However, this leads to the question of to what extent can the law interfere in matters of reforming religion. If the Sabarimala verdict is a legal encroachment, how do we justify the law on bigamy and other Hindu Code laws?

Vasu Jain, via email

Compiled by Deeptiman Tiwary

opposition to it is largely to perpetrate violence against Hindus. "What we are witnessing in the name of protests against the Government is violence against Hindus. At the level of optics, national flag and anthem are cleverly used; interestingly, the display of such nationalist sentiments was opposed by the same elements supported by liberals till recently... One should not forget that the seeds of Partition were sown in the Khilafat, which is again reminded by the fundamentalists directly or indirectly," Ketkar has said.

KHILAFAT REDUX

IN ANOTHER ARTICLE titled, 'Khilafat 2.0 — Deja Vu', *Organiser* has called the Hindu support to CAA protests as "naivety". The article says: "The entire movement will be hijacked by the Jihadi forces (sic). And under the garb of protecting Muslim interests, social justice will be sabotaged as reservation benefits available to the Hindu Scheduled Castes will slowly be shifted to accommodate Muslims... efforts will be unleashed to perpetrate violence akin to the ones that followed the Khilafat and national's unity and integrity will be damaged from within."

It has, however, said that the ordinary Indian has seen through the farce. "Common Bharatiya has now clearly understood that constitutionalism, secularism and equity

were all smokescreens to hide a violent and vulgar polarisation of Islamist forces," it says.

SLOWDOWN CURE

IN AN ARTICLE focused on the economic slowdown, *Organiser* has suggested many ideas for recovery despite the global recession. These include universal basic income (UBI) and heavy investments in education, health and the judiciary to help improve the quality of manpower and create jobs.

The article, written by Sudip Kar Purkayastha, acknowledges the slowdown and the government's less-than-satisfactory approach towards its correction: "India has a huge internal market. That should have largely insulated the economy. If the business confidence is still low, the government needs to look at the management of the 'aggregate demand' and its components," it said.

Arguing for UBI, the article says, "A section of economists argues that large numbers of Indians do not have adequate purchasing power and the government must place some money in their hands to stimulate consumption. They advocate inter alia a scheme of Universal Basic Income (UBI) which will raise demand & consumption, and therefore lead to utilisation of idle production capacity and rise in employment." It has further argued for "urgent reforms

to improve the quality of human infrastructure" through investments in education, health and the judiciary. It proposes fixed income salaried government jobs for the short term for unemployed youth belonging to weaker sections.

"The acute scarcity of standard education in villages and small towns is a stark fact. Its impact has been particularly severe on socially backward classes. As a matter of fact, considerable vacancies in the government for reserved categories today remain vacant for want of educationally competent candidates," the article says.

It has also indicated that the paucity of schools is pushing children towards "faith-based schools" which is the root of "social evils". "A serious introspection would reveal that such dependence has been at the root of many social evils, social inequalities, alienation from India's civilisational ethos and radicalisation of mindsets that afflict the country today," the article said.

Arguing for the health sector, it has highlighted huge vacancies and the consequent need for more doctors and paramedics. "Educational and training infrastructure need to be organised to build the army of health service providers," the article asserts, asking the government to act in mission mode.

TELLING NUMBERS

Nearly 2,800 coronavirus cases, including 37 outside China

THERE HAVE been 2,798 confirmed cases of novel coronavirus until January 27, with 2,761 of these cases occurring in China, according to the latest update on the outbreak from the World Health Organization.

The 37 cases outside of China have been reported from 11 different countries. Three of these 37 cases were detected without the onset of symptoms. Among the remaining 34 patients, there are 27 cases for whom there is detailed information on date of symptom onset and travel date from China - 8 cases had symptom onset in China, 5 had onset on the same day as travel, and 14 developed symptoms after leaving China.

Of the 37 cases, 36 had travel history to China, of whom 34 had travel history in Wuhan city, or had an epidemiological link to a confirmed case with travel history to Wuhan. For the remaining two, investigations into their travel histories are ongoing, WHO said. One additional case was the result of human-to-human transmission among close family contacts in Viet Nam.

WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus and colleagues are in Beijing to meet with government and health experts.

CHINA AND ELSEWHERE

IN CHINA	
Confirmed	2,761
Suspected	5,794
Severe	461
Deaths	80
OUTSIDE CHINA	
	37
Country	Confirmed cases
Japan	4
S Korea	4
Viet Nam	2
Singapore	2
Australia	4
Malaysia	4
Thailand	5
Nepal	1
United States	5
Canada	1
France	3
Total	2,798

Source: WHO

Current estimates of the incubation period of the virus range from 2-10 days, and these estimates will be refined as more data become available, WHO said.

THIS WORD MEANS

SPITZER SPACE TELESCOPE

Mission set to end; what did it achieve?

ON THURSDAY, NASA's Spitzer Mission, which studied the universe in infrared light for more than 16 years, will come to an end since it is low on fuel and has been drifting away from Earth for a few years now. Engineers will decommission the Spitzer aircraft, after which it will cease to conduct science operations.

The Spitzer Space Telescope is a space-borne observatory, one of the elements of NASA's Great Observatories that include the Hubble Space Telescope and the Chandra X-Ray. Using different infrared wavelengths, Spitzer was able to see and reveal features of the universe including objects that were too cold to emit visible light. Apart from enabling researchers to see distant cold objects, Spitzer could also see through large amounts of gas using infrared wavelengths to find objects that may otherwise have been invisible to human beings. These included exoplanets, brown dwarfs and cold matter found in the space between stars.

Spitzer also studied some of the most distant galaxies ever detected. The light from these galaxies reached us after traveling for billions of years, enabling scientists "to see those objects as they were long, long ago". Hubble and Spitzer in 2016 identified and studied the most distant galaxy ever observed. Using these two telescopes, scientists were able to see a bright infant galaxy as it was over 13.4



Spitzer Space Telescope ready for launch in 2003. NASA

billions years ago, roughly 400 million years after the Big Bang, when the universe was less than 5% of its current age.

Spitzer was originally built to last for a minimum of 2.5 years, but it lasted in the "cold" phase for over 5.5 years. On May 15, 2009 the coolant was finally depleted and the "warm mission" began.

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

Takeaways from Bodo Accord

Monday's agreement is the third signed by the government with Bodo groups in Assam. What has been agreed, how is it different from previous accords, and why is it significant amid protests against CAA?

ABHISHEK SAHA
GUWAHATI, JANUARY 28

ON MONDAY, the Centre, the Assam government and Bodo groups - including all factions of the militant National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) - signed an agreement for peace and development. Home Minister Amit Shah described it as the "final and comprehensive solution" of the long-standing Bodo issue.

What is the Bodo issue?

Bodos are the single largest community among the notified Scheduled Tribes in Assam. Part of the larger umbrella of Bodo-Kachari, the Bodos constitute about 5-6% of Assam's population.

The first organised demand for a Bodo state came in 1967-68 under the banner of the political party Plains Tribals Council of Assam. In 1985, when the Assam Movement culminated in the Assam Accord, many Bodos saw it as essentially focusing on the interests of the Assamese-speaking community. In 1987, the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) led by Upendra Nath Brahma revived the Bodo statehood demand. The armed group Bodo Security Force arose, under the leadership of Ranjan Daimary, in October 1986. It subsequently renamed itself NDFB, and later split into factions.

"All NDFB factions under SoO [Suspension of Operations] shall abjure path of violence, surrender their weapons and disband their armed organisations within one month of signing this MoS," the Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) said.

Amid protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act, what is the political takeaway from the Accord?

At a time when the ruling BJP is under fire from the large Assamese-speaking community, the Accord underlines its effort to cement its hold among Bodo voters. The Assamese-speaking community had voted overwhelmingly for the BJP in 2016. Now Assamese student leaders, activists, popular singers and actors, and eminent citizens have addressed large, anti-BJP protest gatherings across the state. These have been prominent in Upper Assam in the east, where the Assamese-speaking community is dominant. The Bodoland region is in western Assam, and large sections of the Bodos are already seen as supportive of the BJP. Hagrama Mohilary, who heads BJP ally Bodoland People's Front (BPF), is the chief executive member of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC).

The pahas of India

In Vijayvargiya's own Indore, *poha* is the signature breakfast dish and a popular item of street food. The recipe uses chopped onion and chillies, mustard seeds, pomegranate, coriander, and jeeravan masala - the mix of spices that is said to give the Indori *poha* its distinctive taste. There is cumin, bay leaf, nut-



ABSU president Promod Boro in Guwahati on Tuesday. Dasarath Deka



What is the BTC?

It is an autonomous body under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. There have been two Bodo Accords earlier, and the second one led to the formation of BTC. The ABSU-led movement from 1987 culminated in a 1993 Bodo Accord, which paved the way for a Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC), but ABSU withdrew its agreement and renewed its demand for a separate state. In 2003, the second Bodo Accord was signed by the extremist group Bodo Liberation Tiger Force (BLTF), the Centre and the state. This led to the BTC.

What has been settled now?

Primarily, a truce with four factions of the NDFB after decades of armed movement that, according to Shah, claimed over 4,000 lives. "The most significant point is this Accord marks the end of the armed movement. The coming of all factions of the armed groups together to sign the Accord is a very

big thing," ABSU president Promod Boro said.

Asked about the statehood demand, Boro said the ABSU will decide in its next special convention. Assam minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the demand for statehood came to end with the Accord. An ABSU leader, however, said: "It is not mentioned anywhere in the settlement that the ABSU will give up the statehood demand."

The agreement says: "Negotiations were held with Bodo organisations for a comprehensive and final solution to their demands while keeping intact the territorial integrity of the State of Assam."

What was agreed on territory?

The area under the jurisdiction of BTC, formed under the 2003 Accord, was called the Bodo Territorial Autonomous District (BTAD). On Monday, the BTAD was renamed Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR).

BTAD comprises Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri districts, accounting for 11% of Assam's area and 10% of its population. Estimates for the Bodo population in BTAD vary. A 2015 report in *The Assam Tribune* quoted the then state government as telling the Assembly that "it does not have any information of the break-up of population of Bodo and non-Bodo communities in BTAD". Also in 2015, an article in *Economic and Political Weekly* said only 27% of the BTAD population is Bodo. The four districts in BTAD constitute Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency, whose MP Naba Kumar Saraniya is a non-Bodo.

The new Accord provides for "alteration of

area of BTAD" and "provisions for Bodos outside BTAD". A commission appointed by the state government will examine and recommend if villages contiguous to BTAD and with a majority tribal population can be included into the BTR while those now in BTAD and with a majority non-tribal population can opt out of the BTR. This, minister Sarma explained, will lead to an increase in the Bodo population in BTR and decrease in non-tribal population, leading to mitigation of inter-community clashes wherever it was happening.

The government will set up a Bodo-Kachari Welfare Council for focused development of Bodo villages outside BTAD - which opens up a way to potentially address the needs of Bodos outside BTAD.

Several of the provisions agreed upon on Monday were an extension of what was already in effect. For instance, it provides for more legislative, executive, administrative and financial powers to BTC; and amendments to the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution to "improve the financial resources and administrative powers of BTC". The 2020 agreement says the Government of Assam "will notify Bodo language in Devanagiri script as the associate official language in the state".

What happens to the cases that were filed during the armed movement?

Among the signatories was Ranjan Daimary whose faction is called NDFB(RD). Other factions include NDFB(Progressive) and NDFB(S). Ranjan Daimary and nine others were sentenced to life last year for the killing of around 90 people in serial blasts in Assam in October 2008. The settlement says criminal cases for "non-heinous" crimes shall be withdrawn and those in connection with heinous crimes "shall be reviewed case by case according to the existing policy on the subject".

In 2014, in Khagrabari in Baksa district, Bodo extremists and others had allegedly gunned down nearly 40 Bengali Muslims. Advocate Aman Wadud, who is representing the victims at the special NIA court in Guwahati, said, "No 'understanding' can absolve those accused of heinous mass murders. The MoS says cases of heinous crimes will be 'reviewed'. Justice should not be throttled in the name of 'peace'."

On January 30, 1,500 cadres of NDFB factions will lay down arms before the state government. The MoS states New Delhi and Dispur will take all necessary steps to rehabilitate the cadres, such as *ex-gratia*, funding economic activities, vocational training and recruitment in appropriate government jobs.

FACT CHECK, GROUND REALITY

Poha, the flattened rice dish beloved of India

KAUSHIK DAS GUPTA
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 28

SENIOR BJP leader Kailash Vijayvargiya said last week that he was able to identify construction workers at his home as Bangladeshi because "strangely", they were "eating only *poha*". Dishes of flattened rice - *poha* - are, however, ubiquitous in states across India.

The pahas of India

In Vijayvargiya's own Indore, *poha* is the signature breakfast dish and a popular item of street food. The recipe uses chopped onion and chillies, mustard seeds, pomegranate, coriander, and jeeravan masala - the mix of spices that is said to give the Indori *poha* its distinctive taste. There is cumin, bay leaf, nut-

meg, mace, asafoetida, black salt, ginger powder, mango powder, cloves, cinnamon and cardamom - all dry roasted - in the spice mix. The Indori *poha* has a characteristic sweet-sour taste, and is often enjoyed with *jalebi*.

Elsewhere, different flavours and spice mixes go into the *poha*.

In Maharashtra, the onions are lightly sautéed; and the *kanda batata poha* of both Maharashtra and Gujarat derives its texture, taste, and name from potato. In Madhya Pradesh, the onions are chopped and sprinkled on top. There is a crunch of peanuts and coconut shavings, along with curry leaves and a garnish of coriander leaves.

The *poha* in Odisha is made from the shortgrained, fragrant Acharmati rice - the autumn crop with which Odias also make *khichdi*, *pulao*, and *kheer*. The Odia *poha* or

chuda santula is distinctive for its use of vegetables like carrots, and of ginger.

In the *aval upma* of South India, the aroma of curry leaves and the heat of green chillies mix with mustard tempering and the crunch of roasted peanuts to make for a breakfast dish that is also tempting as a snack at any time.

For Bengalis, the *poha* is *chire'r pulao*, to which is added, apart from a variety of vegetables, often raisins. Goans make *doodanche fov*: *poha* cooked with milk, sugary, with a hint of cardamom - this is the Goan Diwali sweet dish. A variant of this pudding is the *nalla rosanche fov*, or *poha* cooked in coconut milk.

The main ingredient

In *The Illustrated Foods of India*, KT Achaya, the doyen of Indian food history, wrote that one of the names in Sanskrit for beaten and

parched rice is *chipita* or *chidva*, also pronounced *chivda*, *chevda*. Rice is par boiled, rolled, and flattened to produce flakes. These bland flakes can absorb moisture and imbibe a variety of flavours. They can be toasted or fried. They can be thick, medium, thin, "nylon", or extra thin.

Across India, *chivda* as *poha* is a breakfast staple. In Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Assam and West Bengal, the flattened rice is washed and mixed with yogurt. *Doi chira/chire* is a breakfast dish in West Bengal and Assam. With palm jaggery added to it, flattened rice rings in the harvesting season all over eastern and northeastern India. In Bihar, *dahi chura* is a Makar Sankranti special.

And of course, with roasted peanuts, coconut shavings, raisins, and *sev*, the *chivda*, roasted or fried, makes for a crunchy savoury.

India's imports of palm oil: dynamics of the trade with Malaysia

NUSHAIBA IQBAL
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 28

INDIA HAS cut import duty on crude palm oil (CPO) and refined, bleached and deodorised (RBD) palm oil, and also moved RBD oil from the "free" to the "restricted" list of imports.

While curbing oil imports has been under discussion since the Budget presented in July 2019, the move has been construed as retaliation against Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad, who has criticised India's internal policy decisions such as the revocation of the special status for Jammu and Kashmir and the new citizenship Act. Malaysia has also been sheltering since 2017 the Islamic preacher Zakir Naik, who is wanted by India on charges of money laundering, hate speech, and links to terror.

Has India banned import of Malaysian palm oil because of political reasons?

Not really. The import of RBD palm oil has been restricted, not banned - and this is from all countries, not just Malaysia. Also, CPO can still be imported freely.

Under the trade classification system

that India follows, except for goods that can be imported only by state trading enterprises (such as Food Corporation of India), all goods whose import is not restricted or prohibited are traded freely.

Normally, a special licence is required to import a restricted good. The government has neither specified what the restrictions entail nor issued any licences. However, it has been reported that vessels carrying RBD palm oil are stuck at several ports because buyers have been asked to shun the product.

How much palm oil does India import?

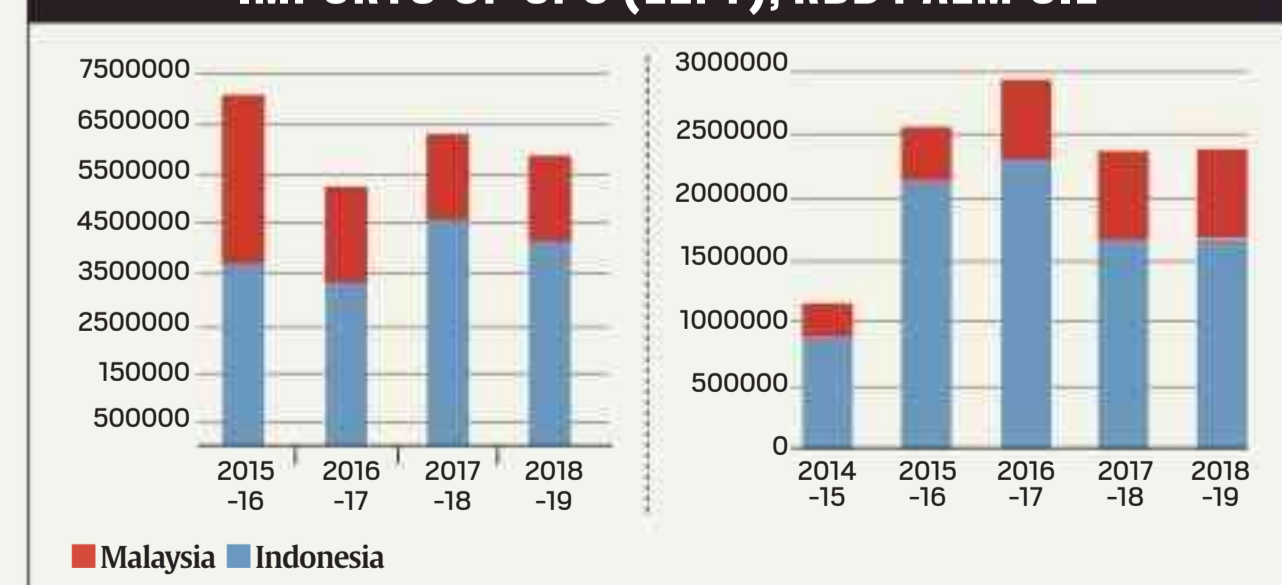
India imported 64.15 lakh metric tonnes (MT) of CPO and 23.9 lakh MT of RBD in 2018-19, the bulk of which was from Indonesia. (Charts 1 and 2 right)

Commerce Ministry data show India imported \$10 billion worth of vegetable oil in 2019-20, making it the country's fifth most valuable import after mineral oil (\$141 bn), gold (\$32 bn), coal (\$26 bn), and telecom instruments such as cell phones (\$17 bn).

Why does India need so much palm oil?

It is the cheapest edible oil available naturally. Its inert taste makes it suitable for use

IMPORTS OF CPO (LEFT), RBD PALM OIL



in foods ranging from baked goods to fried snacks. It stays relatively stable at high temperatures, and is therefore suitable for reuse and deep frying. It is the main ingredient in *vanaspati* (hydrogenated vegetable oil).

However, palm oil is not used in Indian homes. That, and the fact that CPO continues to be imported, makes it unlikely that the decision to restrict refined palm oil imports will impact food inflation immediately.

Who will be impacted by the decision?

Indonesia and Malaysia together produce 85% of the world's palm oil, and India is among the biggest buyers. Both Indonesia and Malaysia produce refined palm oil; however, Malaysia's refining capacity equals its production capacity - this is why Malaysia is keen on exporting refined oil. Indonesia, on the other hand, can supply CPO, which would allow India to utilise its full refining capacity.

The CPO that India imports contains fatty acids, gums and wax-like substances. Refining neutralises the acids and filters out the other substances. The filtrate is bleached so that the oil does not change colour after repeated use. Substances that may cause the oil to smell are removed physically or chemically. This entire process increases the value of a barrel of crude oil by about 4%.

Additionally, there are costs to transporting the crude, which makes it more cost-effective to import the refined oil. But the refining industry has been demanding that the import duty on refined oil be increased, which would make importing crude oil cheaper than importing refined oil. The decision to restrict imports of refined oil will benefit refiners, which include big-ticket names like the Adani Wilmar group.

Will restricting imports of RBD palm oil help farmers?

Restricting refined oil imports will not help farmers directly, as they are not involved in the process of refining. However, the restrictions have caused refined palm oil prices to increase. If prices continue to hold, farmers will get a better realisation for their crop.

But the timeframe over which the changes in import policy will have an effect on domestic crop realisation is fairly long, given that palm trees take over four years to provide a yield. Also, if the demand is met entirely by importing and refining CPO, farmers will be left out of the picture.

How will Malaysia be affected?

Malaysia has said that it cannot retaliate against India because it is "too small". With imports to its largest market restricted (India bought over 23% of all CPO produced by Malaysia in 2019), Malaysian palm oil futures fell by almost 10% between January 10 and January 17, although it has recovered since then.

India and Malaysia signed a free trade agreement - Malaysia-India Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement - in February 2011. Under the agreement, India was required to reduce import duty on CPO to 37.5% (from 40%) by December 2019, and on RBD to 45% (from 54%) by December 31, 2018. In 2018, Malaysia exported 25.8% of its palm oil to India. If India does not issue licenses for importing refined oil, Malaysia will have to find new buyers for its product.