



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

NRC's cost-benefit analysis

Identifying illegal migrants through NRC process will be cumbersome, costs far outweigh benefits



PRIYARANJAN JHA

A REVENUE GAP

With sluggish tax collection, little disinvestment, government is unlikely to meet targets. Budget must present true picture

ASLOWING ECONOMY has taken a grave toll on government finances. At the aggregate level, the Centre's gross tax revenues have grown by a mere 0.81 per cent in the first eight months (April to November) of the current financial year. In comparison, the budget had pegged revenue growth at 18.3 per cent this year. With revenues falling well short of expectations, the Centre may have to cut back on spending in order to meet the fiscal deficit target. Considering that higher government spending has propped up the economy so far, any cuts in spending will aggravate the slowdown. Lower capital spending will also have implications for the plans for the infrastructure pipeline unveiled by the finance minister recently.

A closer look at government finances suggests stress on both tax and non-tax revenues. On the direct tax side, though the full impact of the reduction in the corporate tax rate on revenues is not immediately clear, corporate tax collections have contracted by 0.91 per cent over the same period, as against a target of 15.4 per cent. Personal income tax collections have fared marginally better. On the indirect tax side, if Integrated GST collections in December are equally split, then Central GST collections at the end of December would stand at Rs 3.72 lakh crore, compared to the full year target of Rs 5.26 lakh crore. This implies that CGST collections, including IGST, will need to average Rs 51,207 crore per month in the current quarter to meet the target, as opposed to the current average monthly collection of Rs 41,375 crore. Then there is also concern over meeting this year's disinvestment target. As against a target of Rs 1.05 lakh crore, collections so far have been only Rs 17,364 crore. It was hoped that the sale of BPCL would help meet the target but it is unlikely to materialise soon. In such a situation, it is difficult to see how the Centre can meet its revenue targets this year. But, it's not just the Centre. State governments are also facing difficulties with revenue growth slowing down sharply. And as, put together, spending by states far outstrips that by the Centre, cutbacks in state spending will have serious implications. Though it is possible that both the Centre and the states deviate from the fiscal road-map, borrow more to finance their spending, higher borrowing could push up bond yields, negating the impact of monetary easing.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's maiden budget was criticised for not presenting an accurate picture of government finances. The upcoming budget is an opportune moment for the government to come clean, present an accurate picture. This could then form the basis for drafting a new, realistic fiscal road-map.

WHO'S AFRAID OF A SONG?

IIT-Kanpur needs to embrace students who protested CAA by singing Faiz poem, not probe them

THE EMINENCE OF IIT-Kanpur as a centre of excellence is well-known and showcased by its high rankings in numerous international surveys, its distinguished research departments, alumni, and faculty. Unlike most science and technology schools, IIT-Kanpur even has an artist-in-residence programme to make education more holistic. Hence, it is ironic and disquieting that the institute, acting on a complaint by a temporary faculty, has decided to investigate if Faiz Ahmed Faiz's 1979 iconic poem, *Hum Dekhenge*, immortalised as an anthem of protest by singer Iqbal Bano, contains anti-Hindu references.

Faiz and Bano and their work, including *Hum Dekhenge*, are a part of the Subcontinent's collective cultural heritage. That's how it has been, and it will continue to be so. Of course, the faculty member has a right to be offended by the song. But should IIT-K have legitimised his "hurt", ordered a probe? How absurd is it for IIT-K to sit in judgement over Faiz's secular credentials, as mirrored in *Hum Dekhenge*? Surely, even the junior-most faculty member in its humanities department could have explained to the deputy director heading the probe who Faiz and Bano are, even if a google search had failed to do so. In fact, the institute that hosted Naseeruddin Shah as artist-in-residence, at a time when the actor was critical of the government, ought to be proud of students who chose to stand in solidarity with their community elsewhere and protest the new citizenship law. These students have announced to the world that their campus, which has a distinguished record in academics, rejects all forms of bigotry and will speak out when the liberal values and foundations of the Republic are seen to be threatened. It is unfortunate that the institute's bureaucracy has chosen to be blind to the message of the students and even forced Vox Populi, the online platform of the student body, to take down an editorial that complained about a peaceful gathering of the students being communalised.

The move to probe the protesters and the censure of Vox Populi send out disconcerting signals. They mirror a sense of insecurity that doesn't behave a first-rate institute like the IIT-K. Faiz wrote the poem at a time of political repression in his country, and in Bano's rendering a people denied democratic freedoms found a collective voice. The then military dictator of Pakistan, Zia ul Haq, felt that *Hum Dekhenge* was about him and sought to suppress it. There is no reason why anyone in India, a democracy that upholds the right to free speech, needs to feel similarly discomfited.

AUTO VS BULLET TRAIN

In Maharashtra, between government and opposition, political repartee is a moving thing

THE ART OF political repartee is evocative precisely because of its ambiguities. A phrase or a slogan is meant to capture the moment, freeze it and own it, while offering a stinging rebuke of an opponent's ideology and practice. The game, in essence, is about framing the conversation and finding the right metaphor to act as an appropriate caricature. And in Maharashtra, it's game on. Two leaders of the NDA — former Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and Union minister Ramdas Athawale — compared the ruling Shiv Sena-NCP-Congress alliance to an autorickshaw. Like the three-wheeler, they suggested, the allegedly unstable alliance would make heavy weather of reaching its destination.

Modes of transportation have a history in Indian politics. In 1977, soon after she faced an electoral rout post the Emergency, Indira Gandhi arrived in Belchi in Bihar, but not with a convoy of cars and jeeps. A large number of Dalits had been murdered by landlords, and sensing the political moment, Mrs Gandhi arrived at the flooded village astride an elephant. The elan provided by the mode of transportation — regal, traditional as well as symbolic in terms of the community's politics — marked the beginning of her political comeback. In 1989, V P Singh famously rode a motorcycle — playing both angry young man and man of the people — during his election campaign against Rajiv Gandhi. And more recently, and less successfully, SP leader Akhilesh Yadav made the cycle — his party's symbol — a calling card.

The manner and mode of transportation has been used to establish both political credentials and electoral constituencies. Fadnavis and Athawale's three-wheeler jibe, though, may have backfired. Uddhav Thackeray claimed that his was indeed an "autorickshaw sarkar" that will try to take people along, not a "bullet train government" that leaves them behind. The thing about vehicles in politics is this: The dictum, the more expensive is better, does not always hold true. An elephant and a rickshaw can give competition to the bullet train.

WITH THE PASSAGE of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) coupled with the proposed nationwide National Register of Citizens (NRC), massive protests have erupted across India. The primary goals of the NRC are to create a register of citizens in order to identify illegal immigrants and deter future illegal immigration. While these goals may seem practical from a national security standpoint, will they be achieved? And if so, at what cost?

The estimated monetary cost of the recently concluded NRC in Assam — a state with approximately 1/40th the population of India — was approximately Rs 1,600 crore. Scaling such a venture to a nationwide level could result in a monetary cost of Rs 64,000 crore (40 times that of the cost in Assam) or even more, depending on how thoroughly the government wishes to complete the task. To put this number in perspective, India's annual education budget was Rs 96,000 crore in 2019. Thus, the monetary cost of the NRC would be at least two-thirds of the annual education budget.

The non-monetary costs would include the time cost for citizens in gathering the documents and complying with the NRC, bribes demanded by bureaucrats (particularly from the poor), and the enormous burden of litigation on the judiciary. Individuals deemed illegal can take legal recourse, but the vast number of cases going through several layers of the judiciary will take years to resolve.

The most significant cost will be the hardship and suffering caused to genuine Indian citizens without adequate documentary proof of their citizenship. My UC-Irvine colleague, Kamal Sadiq, found in his research that Bangladeshi illegal immigrants have been successfully obtaining citizenship papers. Unlike their illegal Bangladeshi counterparts, poor citizens of India will disproportionately be the victims of the NRC process as they have never considered the need for cit-

izenship documents in the past. It is unclear if someone deemed illegal will be deported. After all, where can you deport a stateless individual? It is more likely that they will be held in detention centres indefinitely and, ironically, be dependent on the state instead of working and contributing to the economy.

Is illegal migration from Bangladesh a major problem for India? Estimates of illegal migration are hard to come by, but wild guesses range from 2 to 20 million. There is, however, an unambiguous downward trend in the number of Bangladesh-born people living in India, declining from 3.7 million in 2001 to 2.7 million in 2011, as corroborated by Chinmay Tumbe based on census data.

Whatever be the number of illegal migrants already in the country, the number of Bangladeshis sneaking into India illegally over the last couple of decades and in the future will be negligible for myriad reasons. The key motivation for an economic migrant is the difference in the living standards between the home and the host country. According to the recent World Bank data, Bangladesh does better than India on several quality of life indicators: Life expectancy (Bangladesh 72, India 69); infant mortality (Bangladesh 25, India 30); incidence of poverty measured by \$3.20 a day (Bangladesh 53 per cent, India 60 per cent); inequality measured by the Gini index (Bangladesh 32.4, India 35.7). It is true that the per capita GDP in Bangladesh at \$1,698 is slightly lower than \$2,010 in India, but the GDP gap is narrowing, as Bangladesh's economy grows faster. Overall, many quality of life indicators in Bangladesh have overtaken India, removing much of the economic incentive for migration.

The fertility rate in Bangladesh has declined from 3.17 in 2000 to 2.1 (compared to 2.2 in India) in 2016. Research by Gordon Hanson and Craig McIntosh finds that as the fertility rate in the Latin American countries declined,

emigration to the US declined as well. Given the significant decline in fertility in Bangladesh, the demographic pressure for emigration to India has weakened significantly.

Do migrants from Bangladesh cause an economic drain on the Indian economy? There is ample empirical evidence that immigrants tend to be younger and more likely to work and contribute to the GDP of the host country. Similarly, the claim that immigrants commit more crimes has no empirical support. In fact, research by Alex Nowrasteh based on data from Texas in the US found that illegal and legal immigrants both have lower incarceration and criminal conviction rates than native-born Americans. There is no reason to believe that Bangladesh migrants are any different in this respect.

In sum, the economic and demographic factors pushing Bangladeshis to migrate to India have reversed. Identifying illegal migrants through the NRC will be cumbersome and the costs far outweigh the benefits. If the Indian leadership still wants to deter illegal immigration from Bangladesh, they should devote more resources towards securing the border instead of spending a colossal amount of money on the NRC. A barbed-wire fencing, which exists in some parts, could be erected along the entire border, supplemented by more resources to patrolling and electronic surveillance, at a fraction of the cost of implementing an NRC.

While the NRC in Assam was politically necessitated and mandated by the Supreme Court, there is no such compulsion for a nationwide NRC. Given the enormous costs of the NRC and meagre benefits, the only rationale for conducting it would be the political dividends it will yield to the ruling party. One can only hope that better sense will prevail.

The writer is professor, Department of Economics, University of California, Irvine

DATA AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Personal Data Protection Bill strikes a discordant note on 'non-personal data'



DIVIJ JOSHI

ON DECEMBER 11, 2019, the Personal Data Protection Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha as a landmark legislation meant to safeguard the constitutional guarantees of privacy for Indian citizens and provide a just and equitable vision for the future of India's digital economy. However, an incongruent provision in the Bill departs from this expectation — clause 91 enables the central government to direct any of the regulated entities under this Act to provide anonymised personal data or non-personal data to enable "targeted delivery of services" or "evidence-based policy making". The implications of such a provision for India's digital economy must be carefully considered as Parliament reviews the proposed legislation.

"Anonymised data" under the Bill refers to data from which markers of identity have been "irreversibly" removed. However, anonymisation should not be seen as a silver bullet for the use of large datasets without compromising privacy. Recent research shows that the common methods of anonymisation applied today are imperfect and data released as "anonymous" can be re-identified, particularly with the use of modern machine learning techniques. This renders large anonymised datasets vulnerable to "re-identification attacks", where data from other sources can be combined to re-identify anonymised data and link it back to individuals.

In the UK, personal location information has been extracted from anonymised datasets of public transit, while in Australia, individual health records have been mined from anonymised medical bills. These examples should caution Parliament from allowing the government to acquire anonymised data without further protections — if anonymisation techniques are imperfect, then forcing

companies to create and share insecure datasets with the government increases the vulnerability of personal information and undermines data protection. Going forward, the approach to regulation of anonymised data must be contextual and sectoral, targeting sensitive areas such as healthcare and finance, and focus on data aggregators, which are often used for reidentification attacks.

The proposal to acquire non-personal digital data must also be seen in the context of the Centre's push towards using "big data" and "artificial intelligence" technologies within governance and planning systems. Indeed, the use of these technologies has the potential to increase government capacity and transparency, as well as provide insight for making informed decisions about economic and social planning. However, the provision ignores the multiplicity of existing and inchoate rights and interests that exist within non-personal data, particularly those which are created by private firms.

While the Bill assumes that any such data held by any entity should be open to acquisition by the government, similar to a power of "eminent domain" over land, this is in conflict with existing legal systems such as copyright law and trade secret protections. Such databases are commercially significant to private companies, and a law to acquire them must consider how it will affect their commercial exploitation. Moreover, the overlap of these existing rights within government systems can jeopardise accountability and transparency by limiting the ability of citizens to participate in, understand or interrogate government decisions. The RIT Act, for example, may not apply to private databases protected by intellectual property law.

The unregulated use of private datasets in

governance also has consequences for the people and communities who are being made more visible, or are being invisibilised, through the use of this data. While the government has historically relied on qualitative methods like the census for understanding populations and their needs, the shift to quantitative methods and "big data" relies upon private datasets, which were created and used in a completely different context and for different purposes.

Inevitably, such data will be incomplete for the purpose of governance, and replete with the biases of the private entity creating and analysing the data. In the absence of regulation which carefully considers its limitations, using such data to target beneficiaries or for economic planning can have hazardous consequences — including arbitrary denial or exclusion from critical government services; or through biased and discriminatory planning which replicates biased data and risks undermining important legal principles such as the right to equality before the law.

The regulation of non-personal data must take into account both the potential harms to individual privacy as well as the wider social and political consequences of such "datafication" of government. This is ostensibly why an expert committee was established to look specifically into the governance of non-personal data, even while the PDP Bill was expected to limit its scope to personal data of individuals. Instead of jeopardising both these goals and putting the cart before the horse, as the PDP Bill has done, the Gopalakrishnan committee must be allowed to deliberate and inform a public consensus on the appropriate models of governance of non-personal data.

The writer is a Mozilla Technology Policy Fellow

JANUARY 3, 1980, FORTY YEARS AGO

INDIA TO VOTE

FOR THE SECOND time in three years, the nation is going to the polls. The polling will be held on two days — in 226 constituencies on January 3 and in others on January 6 — and by midnight of Sunday the results of nearly 150 seats will have been announced after the first phase of counting to indicate what kind of government the people have in mind. The final results will be announced by January 8 noon. Last August's tumultuous events and shifting alliances, which led to the dissolution of the Sixth Lok Sabha threw up three contenders for power — the Janata Party led by Jagjivan Ram, the Congress (I) led by Indira Gandhi and Charan Singh's Lok Dal.

SOVIETS OCCUPY KABUL

THE SOVIET TROOPS are in complete control of Kabul city. More than 16,000 soldiers, backed by three mechanised divisions comprising 1,000 tanks and 2,000 armoured personnel carriers, are guarding the strategic points in the city. Soviet soldiers have completely disarmed the Afghan army. Local residents and diplomats said there was no trace of Afghan soldiers in the city and the Soviet tanks and soldiers were in complete control of the radio station and the airport. They were also guarding all government buildings.

AFGHANS PROTEST

ABOUT 85 AFGHAN students forced their

way into the Afghanistan Embassy building in New Delhi and held three persons in their custody to protest against the "Soviet occupation" of their country. They left the building and released the three persons, all Embassy officials, after nearly four hours. The students, belonging to the Islamic Association of Patriotic Afghan Students and the Association of Afghan Students in India, entered the embassy premises shortly after 10 am. The students have alleged that Major Tawfiq Azizi, the Afghan military attache, fired at them. The students caught the military attache, the cultural attache and another person believed to be an Afghan businessman, and held them in custody.



13 THE IDEAS PAGE

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"We are entering an age when what defines the internet may be not expansion but contraction; while the number of its users continues to grow, the imaginative and discursive space it offers is under threat." — THE GUARDIAN

Anarchy, ours and theirs

Prime Minister Modi cut his political teeth in a student-led movement that turned violent. He now decries damage to public property by student protesters



MANI SHANKAR AIYAR

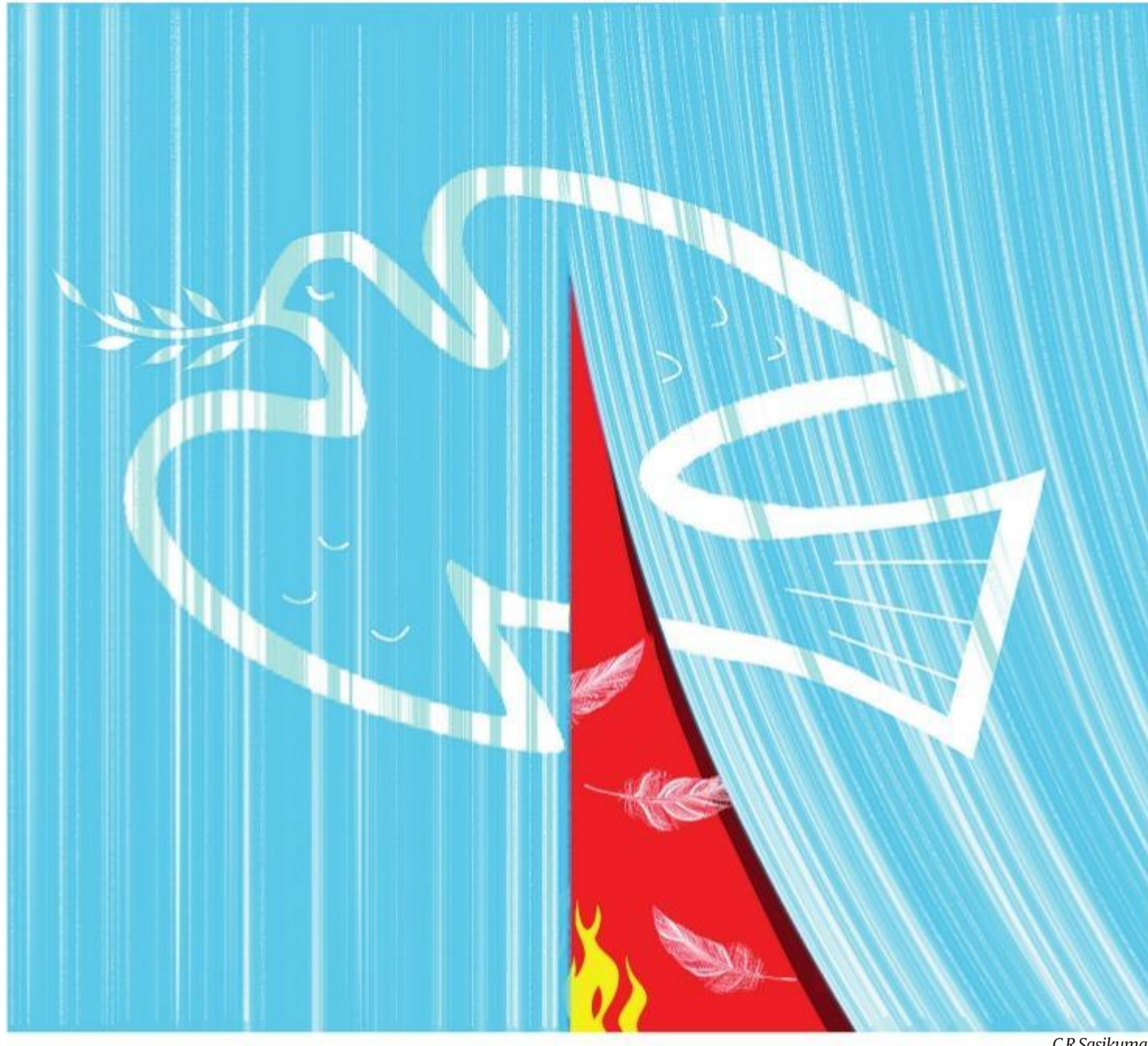
IT TAKES SOME chutzpah for Prime Minister Narendra Modi to proclaim his horror of violence in student demonstrations and "anarchy" on the streets directed at a duly elected government when he himself was the product of one of the most violent student protests known to India after Independence. That protest included vicious attacks on police personnel, widespread arson and the destruction of public property, and was directed against a state government that had come to office only months earlier with a huge majority of 140 out of 184 seats — a rather greater proportion than the seats Modi and his party have won in the elections to the Lok Sabha in May 2019.

I refer, of course, to the student agitation that grew into the Navnirman Movement in Gujarat in 1974, in the course of which Modi cut his political milk teeth. Indeed, the Modi website devotes an entire page to the Navnirman agitation and boasts that it "propelled Narendra (sic) to the first post of his political career, General Secretary of the Lok Sangharsh Samiti". It goes on to admiringly relate how "as a young Pracharak and associate of the ABVP, Narendra joined the Navnirman movement and dutifully performed the tasks assigned to him". (It does not add that as a college drop-out, he could not have been a member of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad — hence, perforce, an "associate").

We are not vouchsafed the details of what these "duties" were but we do know of the havoc the movement wrought. What had started in December 1973 as student protest over canteen charges at the Morbi Engineering College spread to the LD College of Engineering, Ahmedabad on December 20, 1973 and by January 10, 1974 turned palpably violent. The next day, on January 11, 1974, the Navnirman Yuvak Samiti was formed. They called, says Gyan Prakash in his *Emergency Chronicles*, "for strikes, bandhs, conducted mock funerals of Chiman Patel (the Gujarat CM) and burned him in effigy". Over the next two weeks, the strike burgeoned state-wide covering at least 33 towns. Not even the curfew imposed on 44 towns could stop the violence. By January 28, with the police unable to cope with the violence, the Army had to be called out. Wikipedia says, "at least 100 died, 1,000-3,000 were injured and 8,000 were arrested". It was into this fray that our non-violent, peace-loving pracharak assiduously took over his "assigned tasks".

We are not told what these "tasks" were but we do know that "the agitation helped local leaders of the Rashtriya Swamsevak Sangh and its student organisation, ABVP, to establish themselves in politics." Wikipedia helpfully adds, "Narendra Modi was one of them".

What did they do? They ensured, as Sagarika Ghose notes in her biography of Indira Gandhi, that "mayhem ruled in India". She goes on, "it was the most harrowing period in the governance of India, with gheraos, bandhs, calls for revolt and revolution, agita-



CR Sasikumar

tions and strikes". Into this melee steps young "Narendra". He goes about his tasks apparently oblivious of how, says another Indira biographer, Katherine Frank, "the state (Gujarat) was reduced to near anarchy. Shops and houses were looted, buses and cars burnt and government property destroyed". Narendra Modi — the same one who is now denouncing arson, looting and the destruction of government property — it would appear, was unfazed by all this. Not a word of reprimand escaped his lips. He just went "dutifully" about his "assigned tasks" even as "the police could not contain the situation and were often the subject of attacks" (Frank). Student protesters also "attacked the vehicles and property of Congress (I) legislators and corporators" (Raghu Karnad, *The Wire*, December 16, 2019). Even this did not move the disciplined Narendra Modi, loyal pracharak that he was, to protest then as he doth protest today, with the consequence that, "in a month, over 103 people were killed in riots, 300 were injured and 8,000 arrested" (Frank).

Inder Malhotra's figures modify Frank's a little but his testimony as one of the most important and influential journalists to cover Indira's rise, fall and rise again (Hodder & Stoughton, 1989) bears recall: "For more than ten weeks, the state (Gujarat) was a virtual anarchy. At one time a curfew had been imposed in Ahmedabad and 105 other cities and towns. Looting of shops, burning of buses and government property and attacks on the police became routine." Became routine? And yet what did our PM-in-waiting do?

Over the next two weeks, the strike burgeoned state-wide covering at least 33 towns. Not even the curfew imposed on 44 towns could stop the violence. By January 28, with the police unable to cope with the violence, the Army had to be called out. Wikipedia says, "at least 100 died, 1,000-3,000 were injured and 8,000 were arrested". It was into this fray that our non-violent, peace-loving pracharak assiduously took over his "assigned tasks".

Nothing. He was reserving his righteous indignation for the time when his government would come under similar siege. The toll, according to Malhotra's estimate: "103 people had been killed, 300 injured and more than 8,000 arrested".

More important still was Malhotra's penetrating observation that while "India was no stranger to street violence, all through the preceding quarter of a century neither side had transgressed certain self-imposed limits. In Gujarat, for the first time, this self-imposed restraint broke down". And where was young Modi? Climbing, climbing, climbing the greasy saffron pole, so assiduously that he chose to ignore the Lakshman Rekha being crossed.

The Gujarat example set Bihar on fire — literally. "The ABVP (with which the reader will recall Modi was "associated") formed the hard core of JP's student revolutionaries" (Karnad). Their excesses may today be laid at Modi's door. Karnad says: "... students torched government buildings, a public warehouse and two newspaper offices" — while Modi, the upcoming pracharak, took maun vrat. Yet, he has the gall as PM to tweet on December 16, 2019, that "never has damage to public property and disturbance of normal life been a part of our ethos". "Never"? Then was the "arson and loot" of the Navnirman Movement and the "anarchy", now deplored, which it engendered then, an aberration from our "ethos"? Or is sauce for the goose not sauce for the gander?

The writer is a former Union minister

Why I protest as a Muslim

If the state bullies me because of my faith, I shall publicly assert it



IRENA AKBAR

WHEN I protested against the Citizenship Amendment Act at Parivartan Chowk in Lucknow on December 19, I did not protest just against the legislation. That was the obvious, immediate protest.

There was another *unspoken, more passionate* protest happening within the hearts of Muslims like me who had assembled at Parivartan Chowk. It was a protest against six long years of the anti-Muslim agenda of the Narendra Modi government. It was a protest against the lynching of Mohammad Akhlaq, Pehlu Khan, Tabrez Ansari, Junaid Khan, and many others whose names have been forgotten. It was a protest against the passing of the Triple Talaq Bill. It was a protest against the Supreme Court verdict in the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi title suit. It was a protest against the CAA and the National Register of Citizens (NRC). Finally, it was a protest against the trigger that pushed us out on the streets — the Delhi Police's crackdown on the students of Jamia Millia Islamia. It was a cumulative protest, a release of pent-up anguish over the relentless anti-Muslim agenda of the state and the media since 2014.

Why did Muslims take so long to feel "enough is enough"?

In Modi's first term as prime minister, the anti-Muslim agenda was played out strategically, one that averted a collective protest. Individual Muslims were lynched frequently, but in different states and at different points of time. No collective action was taken at one point of time against the entire Muslim community. The state's attack on Muslims was indirect, executed through ragtag cow "vigilantes", WhatsApp myths and shrill TV discussions on "why don't Muslims chant Bharat Mata ki jai?" or "why does AMU have a Jinnah portrait?" or "what is love jihad?"

Designed to intimidate Muslims, the state's confrontation was successful, as few Muslims protested in the BJP's first term. Those like me, who did, merged invisibly into multi-religious crowds, ineffectually chanting "Not In My Name". The inability to protest as one large, visible unit came across as "weak submission". Among ourselves, we said it was "better to be wise than to be bold". Wisdom meant *not* actively resisting the confrontation, quietly going about our work, and building each other up economically.

In its second term, beginning May 23, 2019, however, the government began upgrading the anti-Muslim narrative to law. In July, the Triple Talaq Bill was passed, threatening to imprison Muslim men for instantaneously divorcing their wives. In August, Article 370 was abrogated, locking down Muslim-majority Kashmir indefinitely. In December, a month after the SC announced its verdict in the Ayodhya title suit, the Citizenship Amendment Bill became law. Along with the NRC, it threatens

to strip Muslims of their citizenship.

When agenda is written into law, the "wisdom" of not resisting won't save you. When you are pushed to the wall, you can't be pushed further. You must rise back. So, after six years of patience despite repeated provocations, Muslims began rallying across cities in large numbers, holding placards against CAA-NRC. The protests allegedly turned "violent" in BJP-ruled UP and Karnataka, giving an excuse to the police to crack down on protesters. The fear of such a crackdown was the precise reason for Muslims not protesting in Modi's first term. But one has to rise above fear, and sadly, pay the price for active resistance.

Many non-Muslims, too, are participating in the active resistance and calling for "azaadi" from Hindutva. Some, though, have expressed discomfort with Muslim protesters chanting distinctly Islamic slogans like "Allahu Akbar" (God is Great) and "La ilaha illallah" (There is no God but Allah). Shashi Tharoor, for example, tweeted: "You can't fight Hindutva communalism by promoting Muslim communalism. Identity politics will destroy India."

If Muslims are asserting their religious identity with their religious slogans, it is because they have been targeted on account of their religion. If the state wants to bully me because of my faith, I will only publicly assert it. Hannah Arendt, the Jewish political philosopher who fled Nazi Germany in the 1930s, wrote, "If one is attacked as a Jew, one must defend oneself as a Jew. Not as a German, not as a world-citizen, not as an upholder of the Rights of Man." A democracy allows you to protest from your standpoint. An unaffected majority can protest solely as an Indian. An affected minority has the right to protest as an Indian and as a minority.

At a small protest in Lucknow, on December 16, I was stopped from chanting "Allahu Akbar" and told, "The issue is about India, not religion." I walked out after being denied the right to protest as a Muslim. Some argue that religious slogans play into the government's agenda and harm the "idea of India". Why should Muslims always strategise to uphold the "idea of India", be it during protests or during polls ("vote to keep fascists at bay")? Instead of asking Muslims to "secularise" protests, non-Muslims can carry "I am Muslim" placards, like the Whites did in the US against Trump's "Muslim ban" in 2017. The onus of saving India from majoritarianism is on the majority, not on minorities.

Some ordinary Hindus have commendably taken up that responsibility. Indulekha Parthan, a law student in Emakulam, and Prabha Raj, a social media influencer in Chennai, for example, wore hijabs at anti-CAA rallies to protest against Modi's "recognise the protesters by their clothes" remark. The burkha and the hijab, being markers of Muslim identity, have become symbols of the anti-CAA protests. Many Muslim women, who don't wear the hijab, donned it for the protests to assert their identity. I did so too, as I wanted to be "recognised by my clothes". Since then, I have been wearing the hijab at public spaces. The state wants to target me for being Muslim? I shall be "too Muslim" for its comfort.

Akbar is an entrepreneur and writer

The way ahead in Manipur

Rival territorial claims by ethnic groups can derail potential gains of Naga Accord



THANGKHANLAL NGAIHTE

WHILE MUCH OF India is roiled in protests over the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), something else took centre stage in Manipur. On December 20, 2019, the Manipur Assembly passed a resolution opposing, *inter alia*, "any kind of autonomy to any part of State, as a result of Framework Agreement leading to the resolution of Naga political issue". Interestingly, rallies in Naga-dominated districts three days earlier had seen speakers predicting the creation of a regional Territorial Council (TC) for the Nagas of Manipur as part of the Indo-Naga accord. Territorial Council is a term used when the territorial limits of councils under Sixth Schedule extend beyond one district.

Anxiety over Manipur's integrity has dominated politics in the Meitei-dominated plain areas for the last 20 years. As it becomes clear that the government is considering granting local autonomy in the form of the TC to the Nagas of Manipur in lieu of integration, the cry for protecting Manipur's "territorial integrity" subtly transforms into preserving "the present administrative set up" of the state. Be that as it may, the idea of a Naga TC in Manipur needs close attention.

Manipur has been inhabited by three broad ethnic groups. The Naga and Zomi-Kuki tribes in the north and south have long claimed that they have never been part of Manipur historically and have demanded separation from it. The task of defending

Manipur's territorial integrity, therefore, falls on the majority Meitei community who occupy the middle plains. They have so far succeeded in preserving the status quo.

The Naga and Zomi-Kuki tribes' demand for separation from Manipur is aligned with their aspiration for political integration with their cognate tribe-groups in the surrounding states and countries. The Nagas' struggle for territorial integration is well known. Less known was a similar aspiration by the Zo tribes to politically re-unite their lands in present day Mizoram, the south districts of Manipur, and the Chin Hills of Burma. In fact, political reunification with their kindred tribes outside Mizoram was one major aim of the Mizo National Front (MNF) insurgency. The Indo-Mizo Accord of 1986 acknowledged this demand but didn't accede to it. It took another 30 years for the Nagas to arrive at this point.

Administratively, the major divide in Manipur is between the plain areas and the hill areas. The entire "Hill Areas", covering both Naga and Zomi-Kuki tribes, always had a uniform structure of administration. In terms of local autonomy, there are the Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) set up by an Act of Parliament in 1971. There are six ADCs covering the hill areas of Manipur. Unlike the ADCs elsewhere, the ADCs in Manipur are not under the Sixth Schedule. Demands were made at various times for

placing the Manipur ADCs under the Sixth Schedule, which will augment their powers. Yet, they remain unmet.

According to reports, the proposed Manipur Naga TC will be bolstered with provisions akin to Article 371A of the Constitution. Article 371A gives the Nagaland Assembly overriding powers over the Indian Parliament in respect of the Nagas' customary laws, religious and social practices, and land and its resources. It remains to be seen how a special provision that empowers one state vis-à-vis the Union can be adapted to apply to a particular area within another state.

If the Naga TC is created, it will be the first time in Manipur's history that the state's administrative structure is rearranged on ethnic lines. Demarcating "Naga areas" from the rest will itself be a challenge because there are overlapping claims on territories. Manipur will take the form of three ethnic enclaves cohabiting out of necessity.

If this happens, then the existing ADCs will become redundant. Then, what will become of the rest of the Manipur hills? As it is, the Zomi-Kuki tribes, who make up the rest of the hill areas are also hoping for a TC on the lines of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) in Assam. As was the norm in India's Northeast, two militant groupings — United Peoples Front (UPF) and Kuki National Organisation (KNO) — as representatives of these tribes, are in talks with the Indian gov-

ernment. The UPF, in their detailed proposals recently submitted to the interlocutor, have laid claim to an area almost half of Manipur for their proposed Zomi/Kuki TC.

Reports of progress in the Indo-Naga talks and the idea of a Naga TC have kept people on tenterhooks. Recent days have seen mass rallies being taken out, asking the government to expedite the talks process with the UPF/KNO. It is likely that creation of a Naga TC will unleash dynamics that will make a parallel Zo/Kuki TC inevitable. Yet, the fight over claimed lands will likely consume the region, which will offset the gains from the Naga accord. It could derail the Act East Policy too.

One option is for the parties to agree to demarcating the boundary by a neutral body. Else, it may come down to upgrading the existing ADCs together and simultaneously to a higher status under the Sixth Schedule. Or, converting existing ADCs into a single TC covering the entire hill area. This will keep the boundaries ethnic-neutral and preclude fights over claimed ancestral homelands. It will assuage the Meitei's fears on this score. Manipur will remain intact. This will, of course, be too little for some and too much for others. But under the circumstances, it may be the safest way forward.

The writer teaches political science at Churachandpur College, Lamka, Manipur. Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

REAL NEW INDIA

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Azaadi is a dangerous word' (IE, January 2). The protests against the NCR, CAA and NRP are spreading among students across the country. The government seems eager to suppress the peaceful movement. Historically, as the article says, fearless students have been at the centre of many social struggles. Their collective decision to protest is not just emotional, it is also full of patriotic significance. They want to build real a "New India", in their own vision and by their effort.

Tapomoy Ghosh, Katwa

A BOOST

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'A tall plan' (IE, January 1). The government's attempt to boost the infrastructure market is welcome and the government funds were much-needed in the sector. If this move is an unqualified success, the sector will provide jobs as well as achieve the "Himalayan task" of making India a \$5-trillion economy.

Barad Krishnapalsinh, Ahmedabad.

IIMS EXCLUDE

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Exempt us from faculty quotas, IIMS tell gov't' (IE, January 1). There is no research available that shows that reservation is killing meritocracy. In fact, study on the Indian Railway shows that proportion of SC-ST employees in high-level positions is positively associated with a

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.

growth in productivity. Therefore, the exemption from reservation in appointing faculty by the IIMs is nothing more than an attempt to exclude Dalits, Adivasis and OBCs, and maintain the hegemony of a few communities.

Aditya Rao, via email

INDIA'S WEALTH

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Let's learn to listen' (IE, January 1). The writer has reminded our politicians of "unity in diversity". Why don't we think for a few minutes and understand the meaning of diversity? The article reminds us how we are different, and it is those differences that make India a rich country.

Jayalakshmi Aluri, Belapur.

THIS WORD MEANS

MICHELIN STAR

Celebrity chef loses lawsuit over one of three stars. What are these stars, awarded to restaurants?

FOR ANY restaurant, the highest honour in the business is three "Michelin stars", provided the restaurant is in a country covered by this rating system. Michelin stars are in the news now because of a lawsuit against the Michelin Guide, which awards them.



La Maison des Bois restaurant, and one item from its cuisine. From chef Marc Veyrat's website.

THE CONTEXT: In 2018, the French restaurant La Maison des Bois won its third Michelin star. In 2019, the Michelin Guide stripped it of the third. Celebrity chef Marc Veyrat sued the company, asking for reasons for the downgrade and demanding \$1 in symbolic damages. This week, a French court ruled against him, saying Michelin need not share the reasons and there was no proof that any damages were suffered.

WHAT'S A STAR: In 1889, brothers Andre and Edouard Michelin founded the Michelin tyre company. To encourage motorists, they gave out a free guide with information such as maps, how to change a tyre, where to get fuel - and where to eat. As the restaurant section grew in popularity, the brothers recruited a team of "mystery diners", who visited and reviewed the restaurants anonymously. From 1926, the guide started awarding single stars.

HOW IT WORKS: In 1936, the Michelin Guide started the three-star system - one star for "a very good restaurant in its category"; two for "excellent cooking, worth a detour"; three for "exceptional cuisine, worth a special journey". Every year, restaurants visited by "mystery diners" can be awarded or stripped of a star.

Restaurants are judged on five criteria: quality of the ingredients used, mastery of flavour and cooking techniques, the personality of the chef in his cuisine and value for money and consistency between visits. The restaurant inspectors, who remain anonymous, do not look at the interior decor, table setting or service quality when awarding stars.

While Veyrat sued the company, it is important to note that the stars are given to the restaurant, not the chef. The same chef can prepare cuisine for two restaurants, each earning a star, but cannot claim these to be his or her stars. On the other hand, two different chefs can fetch the same restaurant two Michelin stars over two different years, but these will belong to the restaurant.

WHERE IT WORKS: The Guide began by covering French restaurants, but has now expanded across the world. The Michelin website says the Guide now rates over 30,000 establishments in over 30 territories across four continents, including Asia.

To be reviewed, a restaurant needs to be in a territory where a Michelin Guide already exists. No Michelin Guide exists for any Indian city yet.

TIP FOR READING LIST

WHEN LITERATURE WAS A WEAPON

DURING THE Cold War, authors walked a tightrope between the competing ideas of capitalism and communism. If they defied those in power, they could face possible exile or imprisonment, or even execution. Intelligence networks in the US and Britain, as well as the Soviet Union, ran propaganda networks devoted to literary warfare. Duncan White of Harvard University has now chronicled how this intellectual struggle was waged on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

Civil War and the collapse of the Berlin Wall. The book follows Graham Greene, Stephen Spender, Mary McCarthy, George Orwell and Andrei Sinyavsky as the key writers, but also includes John le Carré, Ernest Hemingway, Boris Pasternak, Lillian Hellman and many more.

White begins the book with: "Between February and May 1955, a group secretly funded by the Central Intelligence Agency launched a secret weapon into Communist territory. Gathering at launch sites in West Germany, operatives inflated ten-foot balloons, armed them with their payload, waited for favourable winds, and launched them into Poland. These, though, were not explosives or incendiary weapons: they were books."



Cold Warriors: Writers Who Waged the Literary Cold War tells the history of journalists, spies and writers whose work changed the course of the Cold War through their involvement with disinformation, espionage and propaganda. The book spans events including the Spanish

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

What Rlys restructure means

The government has decided to trim the Railway Board, and merge service cadres. How were the Railways being run so far, and why was an overhaul felt necessary? And why has it upset civil servants in Railways?

AVISHEK G DASTIDAR
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 2

THE CABINET recently approved trimming of the Railway Board, the powerful body that governs the Indian Railways. From nine, the Board will now have only five Members.

The Cabinet also decided to merge all central service cadres of Railways officers into a single Indian Railways Management Service (IRMS). Now, any eligible officer could occupy any post, including Board Member posts, irrespective of training and specialisation, since they will all belong to IRMS.

The five members of the Board, other than a Chairman-cum-CEO, will now be the Members Infrastructure, Finance, Rolling Stock, Track, and Operations and Business Development. The Board will also have independent Members, who will be industry experts with at least 30 years of experience, but in non-executive roles, only attending Board meetings.

The move has led to protests from serving civil servants, prompting the Railway Board to reach out to them to allay their concerns.

What is the present system like?

The Indian Railways is governed by a pool of officers, among whom engineers are recruited after the Indian Engineering Service Examination, and civil servants through the Civil Services Examination. The civil servants are in the Indian Railway Traffic Service (IRTS), Indian Railway Accounts Service (IRAS) and Indian Railway Personnel Service (IRPS). The engineers are in five technical service cadres - Indian Railway Service of Engineers (IRSE), Indian Railway Service of Mechanical Engineers (IRSM), Indian Railway Service of Electrical Engineers (IRSEE), Indian Railway Service of Signal Engineers (IRSE) and the Indian Railway Stores Service (IRSS).

Until the 1950s, the Railways system was run by officers from just three main streams: Traffic, Civil Engineering, and Mechanical. The other streams emerged as separate services over time.

Why was the reform needed?

The government wants to end inter-departmental rivalries, which it says have been hindering growth for decades. Railway Minister Piyush Goyal said departments were working "in silos".

Several committees including the Bibek Debroy committee in 2015 have noted that "departmentalism" is a major problem in the system. Most committees have said merger of the services in some form would be a solution. The Debroy report recommended merging of all services to create two distinct services: Technical and Logistics. But it did not say how to merge the existing officers.

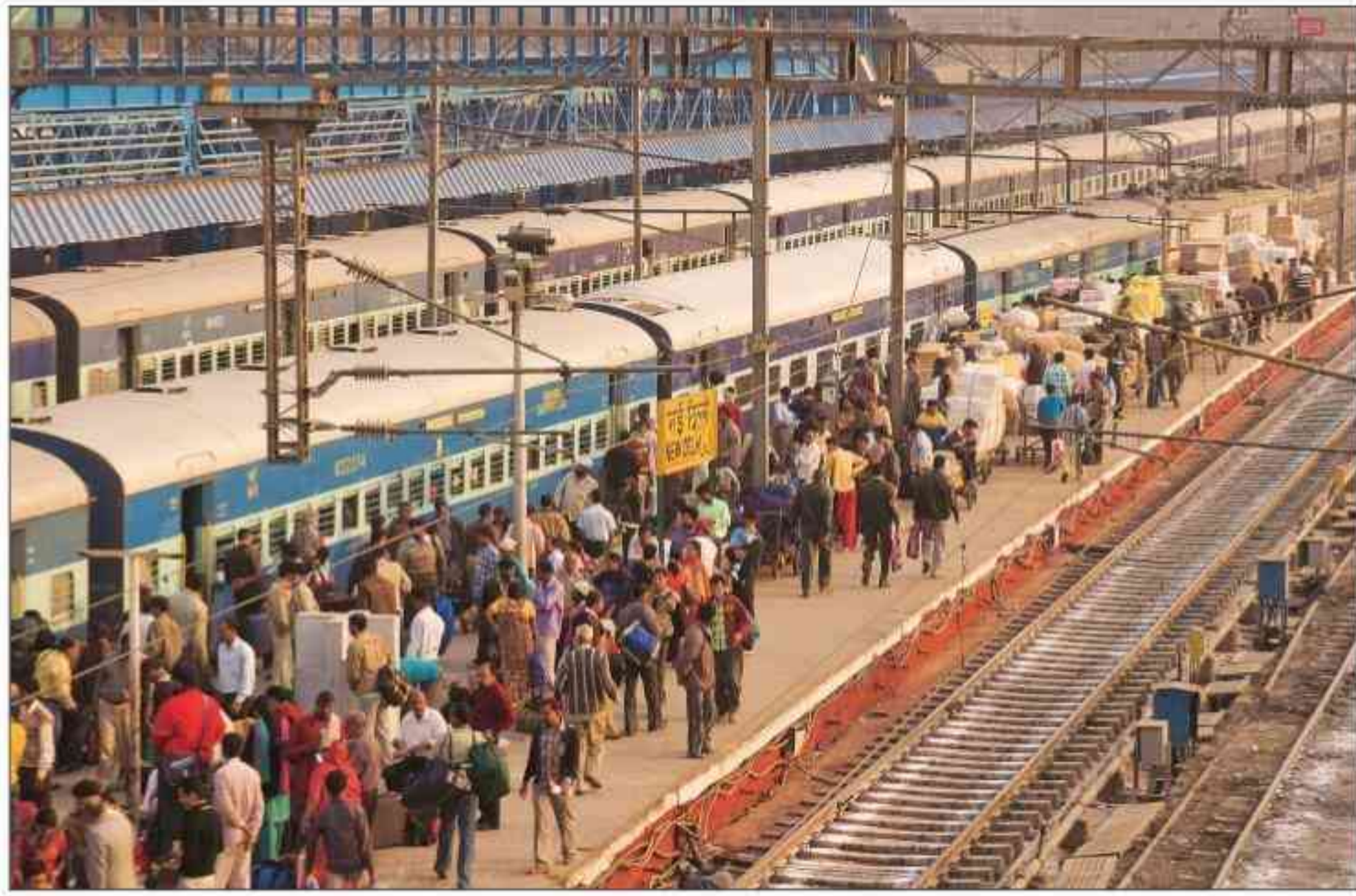
A separate exam under the Union Public Service Commission is proposed to be instituted in 2021 to induct IRMS officers.

Why are officers opposed to the move?

The questions started with a proposal to merge all 8,400 officers in the eight services - five technical and three non-technical - to prepare a common seniority list and a general pool of posts, especially in higher managerial ranks. The Cabinet has decided that a Group of Secretaries, and then a Group of Ministers through the 'Alternate Mechanism', will look at how best to do this. The process might take a year, officials said.

Those protesting the government's decision say that the merger is unscientific and against established norms, because it proposes to merge two fundamentally dissimilar entities, with multiple disparities.

First, the civil servants come from all walks of life after clearing the Civil Services



Indian Railways, a huge organisation with 13 lakh employees, will be run by a trimmer Board. Getty Images

Examination. The engineers usually sit for the Engineering Services Examination right after getting an engineering degree. Various studies have noted that engineers join the Railways around the age of 22-23, while the civil servants join when they are around 26, barring exceptions. The age difference starts to pinch at the later stages of their careers, when higher-grade posts are fewer. There are more engineers than civil servants.

Protesters are also saying that the merger is against the service conditions which civil servants sign up for while choosing an alternative if they cannot make it to IAS.

How pronounced is this skew?

The Railways have legitimised a system wherein an officer with a certain number of years left in service will be considered eligible for general-management higher posts, the most important of which is that of General Manager, who heads zones and production units.

An officer, irrespective of seniority in his batch and acumen, requires at least two years of service left to be eligible for GM. There are 27 such posts, including as the heads of the 17 zonal railways.

While any officer from any service can be considered for GM, civil servants have often found themselves at a disadvantage since they don't have the required service tenure left. Today, of the 27 posts, civil servants occupy only two. One of them is from the Traffic service, not just because of merit but also because the Member (Traffic) post cannot be filled by anyone other than a Traffic service officer and, to be the Member (Traffic), an officer needs to have served as GM. And only engineers have been Chairman Railway Board since July 2013.

In the fields where the Railways are actually operated, the share of civil servants in junior-to-middle levels is over 40 per cent. But in higher management, their representation is around 16-17 per cent.

What will change with the restructure?

In inter-departmental seniority - a complex process to fix, which has led to court cases in the past - problems arise when different services compete for posts that are

open to all - like those of Divisional Railway Managers (DRMs), GMs, and subsequently, the Chairman Railway Board. And here lies the major criticism of the move.

The civil servants are saying that if all present cadres are merged and even higher departmental posts become open to all, engineers, being in larger numbers and of a certain age profile, may end up occupying most posts, if not all.

Another aspect is the suitability of jobs. The move, many say, emerges from the "simplistic" belief that while non-technical specialists cannot do technical jobs, technocrats can do both. The counter-argument is that civil servants in government, by virtue of the screening process and subsequent training, possess acumen and skills that go beyond academic specialisation.

How did the Railways get here?

Departmental posts are ring-fenced; promotions happen within each department from officers of that service. The problem starts when, within a department, there are too many officers eligible for a few posts. A department needs a constant supply of posts in higher grades to keep promoting its seniors so that the juniors can keep getting timely promotions.

In the Railways, this has happened either organically when the government restructured the cadres and created new posts at intervals of several years, or through the execution of projects.

Across the Railways, the internal attempt by each department has always been to get a bigger share of resources to spend on projects, although the limited funds are meant for all. Until recently, for execution of each project, departments could create "temporary" posts, called "work-charged" posts, funded through money from the particular project. Departments would seek more projects since the byproduct was more work-charged posts - and that meant more promotional avenues for the department's officers. The departments grew, promotional prospects expanded, even if Railways did not. The "temporary" posts were almost never surrendered, and were "regularised" over time. This was most prevalent in the techni-

cal departments and, to an extent, in the Accounts department as well, officials say.

In the cadre-restructuring exercise, overseen by the Cabinet and the Cabinet Secretary, work-charged posts have been banned. But a majority of the "temporary" posts were absorbed in regular cadres.

In 2015, the government merged the verticals (not cadres) of Electrical and Mechanical on "functional lines" to make the Rolling Stock and the Traction departments. Electrical was made in charge of locomotives, and Mechanical of coaches, wagons, AC - even though the Railways are an electrical system. So Mechanical verticals working in one field started reporting to an Electrical boss and vice versa, with many of them losing influence on their domain subjects.

What happens next?

The current demand is for two distinct services instead of one - a civil services, and one that encompasses all engineering specialisations. The logic is that functionally, departments will continue to exist through various technical and non-technical specialisations, so merging them will not end departmentalism per se.

The government has on record assured all existing officers that no one's seniority will be hampered and promotion prospects will be protected. "We would not have taken such a big decision without some planning. Everything will be apparent in due course," a senior Railway Board official said.

The protests are gathering momentum. Some of the recently graduated civil services batches plan to write to the Department of Personnel and Training seeking a permanent transfer to a non-Railway service. Unofficial support is said to be coming from civil service groups outside the Railways. Railway unions are planning protests next month. There are boycotts of official functions, and a clamour to meet the Prime Minister. There are allegations lower down the ranks that seniors in the Ministry did not put up resistance to the move. The morale of officers is said to be affected.

Amid all this, one concern among the higher-ups is that the actual job of safely running trains 24/7 must not get neglected.

The story of the MiG-27, the IAF's now-retired ground attack Bahadur

SUSHANT KULKARNI
PUNE, JANUARY 2

ON DECEMBER 27, the Indian Air Force retired its fleet of MiG-27s. The 29 Squadron, known as the Scorpions, flew the aircraft into the sunset at the IAF's Jodhpur base.

The service life of the 'swing wing'-type aircraft marked an important era for the IAF as various efforts were made to strengthen the nation's air defences. The Russian-origin MiG-27s were inducted in 1984-85, and underwent a midlife upgrade around 2006.

Ground attack aircraft

The MiG-27 is primarily a 'ground attack' aircraft, whose main role is to conduct precision air strikes in battle while tackling the adversary's air defences. The jets have proved to be extremely effective in both Battle Air Strikes - air attacks in a war situation to support ground forces - and in Battle Air Interdiction, which are preventive operations that are sometimes carried out deep inside enemy territory, to target enemy installations, supplies, and forces,

and hamper its future actions.

In the 1980s, the IAF had the MiG-21, but was in need of effective modern aircraft that could perform Battle Air Strikes and Battle Air Interdiction roles. The MiG-21, which was at the time used in ground attack roles, was primarily an 'Interceptor' aircraft. The induction of the swing wing MiG-23BN, in a way a predecessor of the MiG-27, was an important addition to the IAF's capabilities.

Swing wing aircraft

Swing wing (or variable geometry) technology allowed the aircraft to change the sweep of their wings - thus changing the geometry of the plane as per operational requirements. This provided flexibility and an ability to stay stable at low altitudes; however, the additional hardware mechanism added to the aircraft's weight, and increased the possibility of failure.

Advances in aerodynamics ensured that variable geometry aircraft were no longer needed. The 29 squadron that operated the upgraded MiG-27 was the IAF's last swing wing squadron.

Swing wing was not the only distinguish-



At the de-induction ceremony in Jodhpur on December 27. PTI

ing feature of the MiG-27. Said Angad Singh, air power analyst at Observer Research Foundation: "The navigation and attack systems of the MiG-27 were second to none when it was inducted. It was a very effective strike aircraft when operating as designed at high speeds and low altitudes. The indigenous upgrade made it even more potent, and it was widely regarded as the most accurate weapons delivery platform of the IAF."

Record of performance

At the time the MiG-27s were inducted,

India's air defence was focussed primarily on Pakistan. The jet showed its efficacy over Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Punjab, and also proved to be extremely effective in the high altitude conflict in Kargil in 1999. In Kargil, the MiG-27 took part in the IAF operation codenamed Safed Sagar, in which Air Force assets operated jointly with ground forces.

The Kargil war saw the most extensive role for the IAF since the 1971 war. MiG-21s, MiG-23s, and MiG-27s were used, along with Jaguar and Mirage jets. Then Flight Lieutenant K Nachiketa's MiG-27 was hit by

the Pakistanis, after which he ejected and was held prisoner for more than a week.

Concerns over safety

The MiG-27 suffered its share of accidents, including a couple of crashes in 2019 as well. Some of the officers who flew the aircraft believe that having one of the most powerful engines in the single-engine category may have made the MiG-27 more prone to engine malfunctions. "The engine was the principal safety issue with the jet. Engine fires and other failures relating to the powerplant were common," Angad Singh said.

The jet also saw groundings like the one in February 2010, after an accident in Siliguri. Air Chief Marshal P V Naik (retd), who was Chief of the Air Staff at the time, said, "Whenever an accident takes place, a Court of Inquiry is set up to investigate the causes. If there are reasons of the concern, the fleet is grounded. There is nothing unusual in that. All the aircraft are then checked before being cleared for flying."

Retirements, replacements

As the 'Bahadur' aircraft - a name the

MiG-27 acquired during the Kargil War - was decommissioned, there was concern over the Air Force's depleting strength. The IAF is still operating four squadrons of the upgraded MiG-21s, which entered service before the MiG-27s, but will phase out its entire MiG fleet by 2024. The MiG-21s will be the last one to go.

Angad Singh explained: "Aircraft retirement has little to do with induction date. The life of an aircraft is described in flying hours or years of service. Typically after an upgrade, the aircraft life is extended by a certain amount. In the case of the MiG-27, this was around 10 years, whereas for the MiG-21 Bison, the figure was 15 years. Considering both aircraft were upgraded around the same time in the mid-2000s, the MiG-27 would logically be retired earlier."

The Air Force is now operating with 28 fighter squadrons against its sanctioned strength of 42. The proposed addition of two more Sukhoi squadrons, two Rafale squadrons, and various versions of the indigenous Light Combat Aircraft Tejas, will fill in for the retiring MiGs and legacy aircraft like the Jaguar.