

THIS WORD MEANS

EXTRAOCULAR VISION

The ability to 'see' without eyes. How does the red brittle star manage it?



Red brittle star, *Ophiocoma wendtii*. Lauren Sumner-Rooney/University of Oxford

coarse structures such as rocks, the research suggests.

Another peculiar feature of the red brittle star is its signature colour change. While the creature is deep red during the day, it changes its colour to beige at night.

The researchers think that there may be a link between their extraocular vision and colour changing abilities since the responses they saw in the creatures tested during the day, disappeared in those that were tested at night.

"It's a very exciting discovery. It had been suggested 30 years ago that changing colour might hold the key to light-sensitivity in *Ophiocoma*, so we're very happy to be able to fill in some of the gaps that remained and describe this new mechanism," Lauren Sumner-Rooney, a research fellow at Oxford University Museum of Natural History who studies unusual visual systems, said in a statement released by the university.

The researchers suggest that a brittle star sees with the help of light-sensing cells that cover its entire body. These light-sensing cells give the brittle star visual stimuli, allowing it to recognise

TIP FOR READING LIST

A BRISK INTRODUCTION TO LINGUISTICS

THE INTRODUCTION of *The Guardian's* Iranian-born editor and writer David Shariatmadari's new book, *Don't Believe A Word: The Surprising Truth About Language*, begins with a question: "Is there anything quite so familiar, yet so mysterious as language?" Because, he says, language "fills our lives" and "most of us use it without thinking", but "most of us also have only the vaguest idea of what it really is, and how it works". Several metaphors to describe language follow: "in our lungs and on our lips but far from our grasp"; "a box of magic tricks inside every one of us"; "an inescapable trap, (because) we can only think and talk about language by using it", and "deploy (it) to wonder about itself".



ing, 'We can't talk to animals,' 'You can't translate this word,' 'What you say is what you mean', etc.) explodes a common myth about language, says the review of Shariatmadari's book in *The Guardian*. There is no evidence, for example, to claim that the standards of English are declining — if younger people say "aks" instead of "ask", they are only demonstrating a natural linguistic process where the sounds in words wrap around. And since youth is the driver of linguistic change, says *The Guardian* review, "older people feel linguistic alienation even as they control the institutions — universities, publishers, newspapers, broadcasters — that define standard English".

The "Enemy Number One" for Shariatmadari, says the book's review in *The New York Times*, is "the pedant or self-styled grammar snob, who has been with us for at least 400 years... wringing his hands and lamenting the decline in linguistic standards". The expressive power of language is undiminished, but human communication is in constant flux — and ought to be understood, says *The NYT* review, quoting Shariatmadari, as "a snapshot of a time, place and particular community of speakers".

Why do millennials speak in their own language, he asks — do the words that they choose reflect their superficial, lazy, and addicted-to-technology personalities? Do words direct thoughts, or vice versa — that is, is the language that is used to talk about climate change, likely to impact the way people think about it? Who decides what a word actually means, anyway?

Each one of the books chapters (with titles such as 'Language is going to the dogs', 'A word's origin is its true mean-

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

Why Gen Soleimani mattered

The killing by the US of Iran's military and intelligence commander has raised concerns about worldwide ripple effects. What made Gen Qassem Soleimani so important, and what was the Quds Force he headed?

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI, JANUARY 3

ON FRIDAY, Iran's top security and intelligence commander, Major General Qassem Soleimani, was killed in a US drone attack in Baghdad. Why is the killing causing concern in the Middle East and beyond?

What exactly happened in Baghdad on Friday morning?

Gen Soleimani was killed in an airstrike, for which the US later claimed responsibility. The strike was carried out by a drone on a road near Baghdad's international airport. Soleimani had reportedly just disembarked from a plane. The blast also killed others including Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, deputy commander of the Iranian-backed militias in Iraq known as Popular Mobilisation Forces. The Associated Press quoted Iran's state TV as saying those killed included Soleimani's son-in-law.

The strike capped a week of conflict between the United States and Iranian-backed militia in Iraq, starting with a rocket attack at a military base on December 27, which killed an American contractor (see graphic).

Who was Gen Soleimani?

Soleimani, 62, was in charge of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which the US designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization in April last year. The Quds Force undertakes Iranian missions in other countries, including covert ones.

Soleimani, who had headed the Quds since 1998, not only looked after intelligence gathering and covert military operations, but also drew immense influence from his closeness to Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. He was seen as a potential future leader of Iran, according to various reports.

"... To say that today's Iran cannot be fully understood without first understanding Qassem Soleimani would be a considerable understatement. More than anyone else, Soleimani has been responsible for the creation of an arc of influence — which Iran terms its 'Axis of Resistance' — extending from the Gulf of Oman through Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon to the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea," the United States Military Academy (USMA) wrote in a dossier in November 2018.

Why is his killing such a big deal?

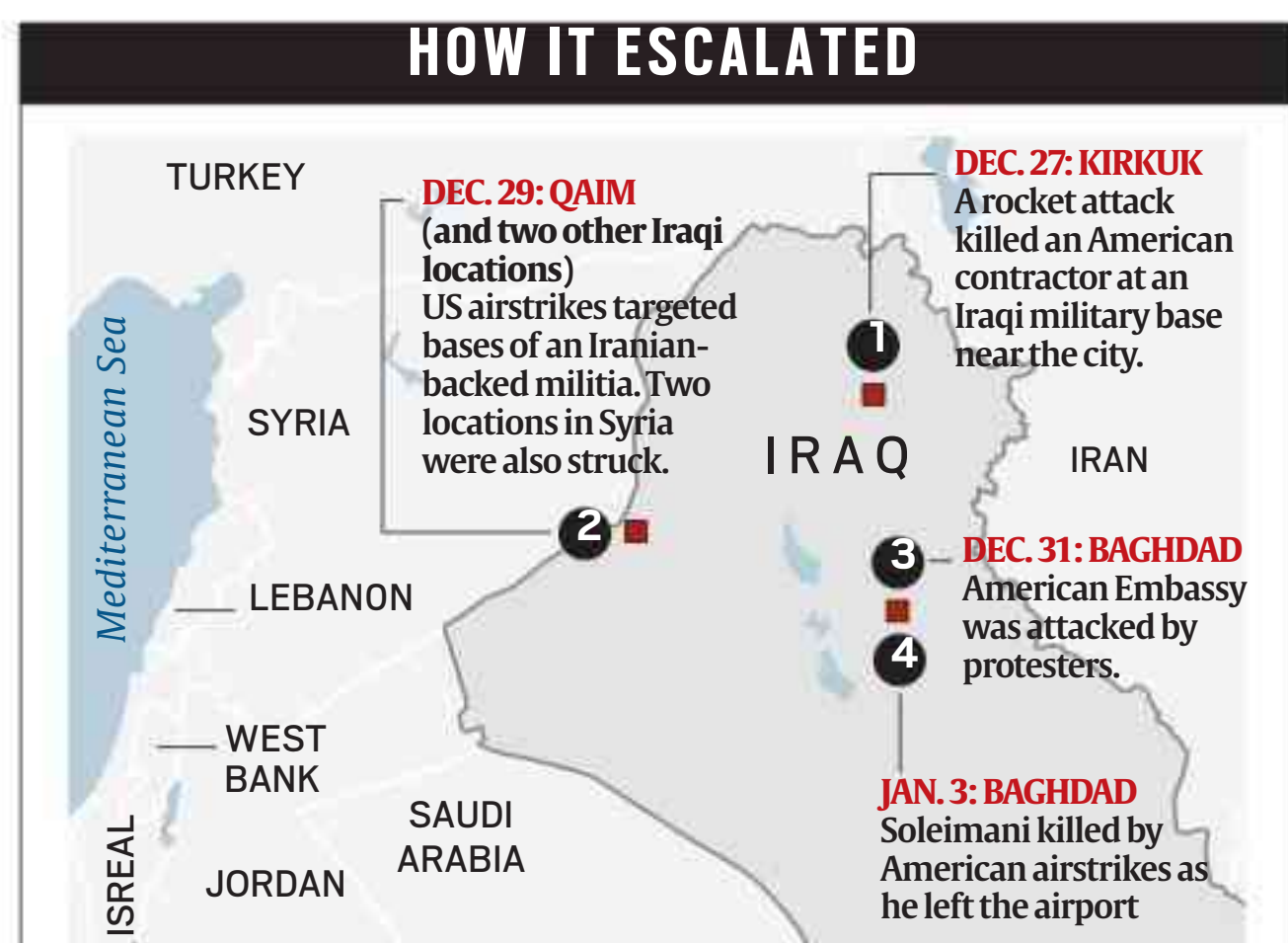
Because of his influence, observers have equated his killing with the killing of a United States Vice President. While he commanded respect in Iran, he was by most accounts a quiet man who usually stayed inconspicuous in public. However, there have been occasions when he has taken to bluster. One such occasion came last year, after US President Donald Trump tweeted: "To Iranian President (Hassan) Rouhani: NEVER, EVER THREATEN THE UNITED STATES AGAIN OR YOU WILL SUFFER CONSEQUENCES THE LIKES OF WHICH FEW THROUGHOUT HISTORY HAVE EVER SUFFERED BEFORE."

At a speech quoted by the USMA, Soleimani responded: "It is beneath the dignity of the President of the great Islamic country of Iran to respond, so I will respond, as a soldier of our great nation... Mr Trump, the gambler!... You are well aware of our power and capabilities in the region. You know how powerful we are in asymmetrical warfare. Come, we are waiting for you..."

An earlier display of his power came in 2008, in a text message to US General David Petraeus, then commanding the Multi-National Force in Iraq. According to *The Guardian*, Soleimani texted: "General Petraeus, you should know that I, Qassem Soleimani, control the policy for Iran with respect to Iraq, Lebanon, Gaza, and Afghanistan. And indeed, the ambassador in Baghdad is a Quds Force member. The individual who's go-



Major General Qassem Soleimani (centre) in Tehran in 2016. AP



The killing of Qassem Soleimani was the culmination of a US offensive in Iran over the last one week. The flashpoints:

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 27
THE TRIGGER: More than 30 rockets were launched at an Iraqi military base near Kirkuk, killing an American contractor and wounding four American and two Iraqi servicemen. United States officials blamed an Iranian-backed militia, Kataib Hezbollah, which denied responsibility.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 29
AMERICAN AIRSTRIKES: US responded to rocket launches with airstrikes on sites in Iraq and Syria. These killed 24 members of an Iranian-backed militia. Such militias represent a powerful faction in Iraq, controlling a large bloc in Parliament. As the Trump administration has imposed economic sanctions on Iran,

the militias have increasingly struck at American targets.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 31
EMBASSY SIEGE: Pro-Iranian militia members marched on the US Embassy in Baghdad, effectively imprisoning American diplomats inside for more than 24 hours and burning the embassy's reception area. President Donald Trump blamed Iran for orchestrating the protest.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 3
SOLEIMANI KILLING: American drone strike hit two cars carrying Soleimani and several officials with Iranian-backed militias as they were leaving the Baghdad International Airport.

Source: *The New York Times*

ing to replace him is a Quds Force member."

How did he rise to this stature?

In a September 2013 article in *The New Yorker*, Dexter Filkins charted Soleimani's life and career. Then 56, Soleimani lived in Tehran with his wife, and had three sons and two daughters; Filkins described him as "evidently a strict but loving father".

In 1979, when Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's rebellion toppled the Shah in Iran, Soleimani, then 22, joined the Ayatollah's Revolutionary Guard. During the Iran-Iraq War, Soleimani was sent to the front with the task of supplying water to soldiers, but ended up undertaking reconnaissance

missions, and earning a reputation for bravery and élan, Filkins wrote.

In 1998, Soleimani was made head of the Quds Force, which launched his rise to power.

What did the Quds Force do?

Khomeini had created the prototype in 1979, with the goal of protecting Iran and exporting the Islamic Revolution, Filkins wrote. In 1982, Revolutionary Guard officers were sent to Lebanon to help organise Shia militias in the civil war, which eventually led to the creation of Hezbollah. According to the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, the IRGC including the Quds Force has contributed roughly 125,000 men to Iran's forces

and has the capability of undertaking asymmetric warfare and covert operations.

As Quds head, Soleimani briefly worked in cooperation with the US. This was during the US crackdown in Afghanistan following 9/11; Soleimani wanted the Taliban defeated. The cooperation ended in 2002 after President George W Bush branded Iran a nuclear proliferator, an exporter of terrorism, and part of an "Axis of Evil", the USMA wrote. By 2003, the US was accusing Soleimani of plotting attacks on US soldiers following the 2003 invasion of Iraq, which eventually toppled Saddam Hussein. And in 2011, the Treasury Department placed him on a sanctions blacklist.

In recent years, Soleimani was believed to be the chief strategist behind Iran's military ventures and influence in Syria, Iraq and throughout the Middle East. (Soleimani) has sought to reshape the Middle East in Iran's favour, working as a power broker and as a military force: assassinating rivals, arming allies, and, for most of a decade, directing a network of militant groups that killed hundreds of Americans in Iraq," Filkins wrote.

How has the US justified his killing?

The Department of Defense issued a statement underlining Soleimani's leadership role in conflict with the US: "General Soleimani and his Quds Force were responsible for the deaths of hundreds of American and coalition service members and the wounding of thousands more. He had orchestrated attacks on coalition bases in Iraq over the last several months — including the attack on December 27th — culminating in the death and wounding of additional American and Iraqi personnel."

In its April 2019 decision designating the IRGC including the Quds Force as a Foreign Terrorist Organization, the State Department had said: "The IRGC FTO designation highlights that Iran is an outlaw regime that uses terrorism as a key tool of statecraft and that the IRGC, part of Iran's official military, has engaged in terrorist activity or terrorism since its inception 40 years ago. The IRGC has been directly involved in terrorist plotting; its support for terrorism is foundational and institutional, and it has killed US citizens."

What could happen now?

The strike has left the Middle East on edge, with possible repercussions beyond the region. President Rouhani said the killing would make Iran more decisive in resisting the US, while the Revolutionary Guards said anti-US forces would exact revenge across the Muslim world. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei issued a statement: "His departure to God does not end his path or his mission, but a forceful revenge awaits the criminals who have his blood and the blood of the other martyrs last night on their hands."

Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Javad Zarif tweeted: "The US' act of international terrorism, targeting & assassinating General Soleimani-THE most effective force fighting Daesh (ISIS), Al Nusra, Al Qaeda et al-is extremely dangerous & a foolish escalation. The US bears responsibility for all consequences of its rogue adventurism."

News agencies reported that US officials were braced for Iranian retaliatory attacks, possibly including cyberattacks and terrorism, on American interests and allies. Israel, too, was preparing for Iranian strikes. *The New York Times* reported that the killing could have a ripple effect in any number of countries across the Middle East where Iran and the US compete for influence. The State Department urged US citizens to leave Iraq immediately.

Oil prices have already jumped by \$3 a barrel. In India, a high-level meeting involving senior officials of Finance Ministry and Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas was held to assess the impact of a price rise and to review contingency measures.

Maharashtra's second farm loan waiver in 2 1/2 years: what is different?

PARTHA SARATHI BISWAS PUNE, JANUARY 3

LAST WEEK, the new Maharashtra government announced a loan waiver for farmers who had up to Rs 2 lakh in pending loans between April 1, 2015 and March 31, 2019. Maharashtra thus became possibly the only state to have offered two consecutive farm loan waivers within two-and-a-half years of each other. The previous loan waiver was announced by the Devendra Fadnavis government in June 2017. A look at why this loan waiver was considered necessary, and how it is different from the earlier one:

The loans, the defaults

At the start of the cropping cycle, banks extend short term credits to farmers to finance their need of capital for purchase of seeds, fertilisers etc. Financial institutions usually provide this loan at 7 per cent interest. Timely repayments allows farmers to get a 3 per cent interest subvention from the central government and a further 2 per

cent subvention from the state government, thus effectively reducing the interest rate to just 1 per cent. This is envisioned to help farmers access credit at the right time and keep them away from the clutches of money lenders who lend at exorbitant rates.

However, a spate of extreme weather events, like droughts, floods, hailstorms etc, often results in farmers defaulting on their repayment. As of September 30, 2019 the outstanding crop loan in Maharashtra was Rs 1,08,781.90 crore. Defaulting farmers become ineligible for new capital from the banks and are forced to knock at the door of private money lenders.

To help the farm sector, state governments have time and again announced loan waiver schemes. Back in 2008-09, the then UPA government at the Centre had announced a loan waiver scheme for the entire country. States like Madhya Pradesh, Chhatisgarh and others have announced similar schemes in the recent past.

The 2017 waiver

Faced with an unprecedented farmers'



A march by farmers from Thane to Mumbai in November 2018, demanding an unconditional loan waiver and compensation for drought. Archive

strike, the Fadnavis-led government had announced the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Shetkari Sanman Yojana in June 2017. Irrespective of the size of land holding, the scheme waived off outstanding crop loans

up to Rs 1.5 lakh per family. Farmers who made regular repayments got Rs 25,000 as incentive for good credit behaviour. The scheme waived off loans pending from April 1, 2012 to March 30, 2016. Later, this

was extended to include outstanding loans from 2001. Farmers whose outstanding was more than Rs 1.5 lakh were expected to deposit the additional amount to get the waiver. For example, for an outstanding of Rs 2 lakh, the farmer was to deposit Rs 50,000 in the loan account after which the government agreed to waive off Rs 1.5 lakh.

Government records show about 44 lakh farmers have benefited from the scheme so far, with loans worth Rs 18,600 crore having been waived.

The new scheme

Calling for a complete loan waiver, the Opposition Congress and NCP described the Fadnavis government's scheme as a cruel joke on farmers. They promised a complete loan waiver in their election manifestos ahead of Assembly polls. Even the Shiv Sena talked about making farmers loan-free.

Last week, the new coalition government announced the Mahatma Jyotirao Phule Shetkari Karja Mukti Yojana. State government sources said this scheme would see Rs 26,000 crore of outstanding loans of

over 36 lakh accounts being waived off.

The difference

Unlike the previous loan waiver, this latest scheme will see outstanding crop loan up to Rs 2 lakh, pending from April 1, 2015 to March 31, 2019, being waived off. Farmers with more than Rs 2 lakh outstanding are not eligible for the scheme. Also, the scheme has no incentive for farmers who are regular in their repayments. Farmers' activists have criticised these two provisions which they say defeats the purpose of loan waiver.

Thackeray and senior minister Jayant Patil have talked of extending the scheme later to cover farmers with more than Rs 2 lakh outstanding as well as for farmers who are regular with repayments.

A new provision in the present scheme is that families with more than one loan account are eligible for waiver in each one of their accounts. The last waiver was limited to one account per family. Also, this time farmers will not have to file online forms to avail their waivers. It had led to major confusion last time.



The Indian EXPRESS

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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Faiz and a dying pluralism

First Pakistan, and now India, has failed the poet who belongs to both countries



KHALED AHMED

AFTER SOLEIMANI

Escalation of Iran-US conflict could put entire Gulf region at risk. And with it, the already fragile global economy

THE KILLING OF a top Iranian military commander, Major General Qassem Soleimani, by the US forces is breathtaking and forebodes the escalation of the US-Iran confrontation. As Washington and Tehran move from a proxy conflict to open confrontation, the entire Middle East is in danger of being consumed. Gen Soleimani was no ordinary soldier. He headed the much-feared Quds Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps. He was the face of Iran's expanding regional strategic footprint. Soleimani was widely seen as the most consequential figure in Tehran's political hierarchy after the supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Soleimani's aggressive political and military tactics continuously challenged America's regional primacy. His hybrid warfare compensated for the weakness of Iran's conventional military forces. His successful intervention in the domestic politics of various countries in the Middle East — from Iraq and Syria to Yemen and Libya — made him a formidable opponent to the US and its regional allies.

President Donald Trump's successful targeting of Gen Soleimani has been compared to his predecessor Barack Obama's attack on Osama bin Laden in the summer of 2011. President Trump will surely expect a huge bounce in the approval ratings that could feed into his campaign to retain the White House in the elections later this year. But he will also have to contend with political consequences larger than those from Osama's killing. Unlike Osama, Gen Soleimani is a high-level functionary of an important state in the world. In a furious reaction, Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif warned that the US will bear "responsibility for all consequences" of its adventurism. There is no doubt that Tehran will respond at a place and time of its choosing. Having raised the ante in the confrontation with Iran, Trump has little room to back down. Unless something gives in either capital, there is no avoiding an intensified military confrontation between the two sides.

Ever since the Islamic revolution in Iran four decades ago, Washington and Iran have been daggers drawn. Occasional attempts at finding compromises have failed. But the unintended consequences of US policy in the region — the ousting of the Taliban from Afghanistan in 2001 and Saddam Hussein from Iraq in 2003 — generated huge space for the expansion of Tehran's regional influence. Iran has also successfully mobilised the support of Russia and China and has constructed a regional coalition with Turkey, Qatar and Syria against the US and its allies. Although the elimination of Soleimani and other militia leaders is a big setback, Iran is fully capable of widening and escalating the asymmetric war against America. This, in turn, puts the entire Gulf region, the world's largest supplier of hydrocarbons, at risk. And with it, the already fragile global economy. As a major importer of oil, India is especially vulnerable to the deepening crisis next door. Delhi will also be under pressure to take a fresh look at its regional policy that sought to overcome the multiple contradictions in the Gulf by trying to be friends with all. The sharpening conflict will certainly make India's navigation of the Gulf that much harder.

WHAT HAPPENED IN India on the eve of 2020 is unbelievable even given India's decline into religion, especially for Pakistanis who have been suffering under Islamic extremism for decades. The Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, has reportedly taken offence at Faiz Ahmad Faiz's famous poem "Hum Dekhenge" recited by students there protesting the Citizenship (Amendment) Act on campus in December. At Jamia Millia Islamia in New Delhi, too, a professor complained "that protesting students had made communal remarks at the event".

The verse that gave offence was: Abarz-e-Khuda ke Ka'abe se, sab buut uthwaae jaayenge / Hum ahl-e-safa mardood-e-haram, masnad pe bithaaye jaayenge / Sab taaj uchhale jaayenge, sab takht giraaye jaayenge / Bas naam rahega Allah ka, hum dekhenge (From the abode of God, when the idols of falsehood will be removed/ When we, the faithful, who have been barred from sacred places, will be seated on a high pedestal/ When crowns will be tossed, when thrones will be brought down, only Allah's name will remain.)

The objection was to the word "buut" (idol) which was taken as a reference to Hindu "murti" and was therefore seen as a communal insult — and perhaps Allah. Back in Pakistan, everyone was surprised. Faiz was a deeply secular person, a recipient of the Lenin Peace Prize under the Soviet Union, and much maligned by Islamist Pakistanis under General Zia ul Haq, who were particularly peeved by Faiz's use of Islamic symbols to write his "protest poem" against an intolerant religious order. The title of the poem written against religion "hum dekhaain gai" (we will see) was taken from the Quran. Only a savage will miss the irony.

General Zia is gone, killed suspiciously in an air crash, but his order endures through Islamic amendments of the legal codes. What is tragic is that some Pakistanis see their triumph in India's turning to religion: "See, we were right in announcing our belief in the two-nation theory that created Pakistan; now

India is taking that road". The theory didn't survive too long after 1947. Bangladesh found itself to be a nation separate from Pakistan, broke free and adopted a secular constitution and a wonderfully "inclusive" national anthem written by Rabindranath Tagore. Pakistan didn't survive its famous two-nation theory and broke up. Will India survive?

India is, in fact, not offended by Faiz's "communalism"; it is offended by Faiz's pluralist message in 2019. It started disliking his message some time back. In the fall of 2016, when the Jio MAMI 18th Mumbai Film Festival decided to ban the showing of the film *Jago Hua Saveri*, written by Faiz Ahmad Faiz, and boasting a galaxy of Indian actors, including Padma Shri recipient Tripti Mitra of the Indian People's Theatre Association.

Then in 2018, Moneeza Hashmi, daughter of Faiz Ahmad Faiz and trustee of the Faiz Foundation Trust in Pakistan, was not allowed to attend the 15th Asia Media Summit held in New Delhi on May 10 even though she had been invited to speak at the event. Moneeza, once a TV producer, was to speak on "Should all good stories be commercially successful"; but when she arrived at her designated hotel in New Delhi she was told that no room was booked in her name as "no Pakistani was invited to the event". "No one was willing to register me for the summit despite being a guest speaker," she said as she left India.

India is walking away from the ethos that compelled it once to adopt Vande Mataram as its national song by deleting all its verses except the first two because they were deemed offensive to Muslims. Sadly, the polarisation is so glaring today that a Muslim Samajwadi Party MP Shafiqur Rahman Barq actually said this in Lok Sabha: "Vande Mataram is against Islam, we cannot follow it". His statement was met with chants of "Vande Mataram" and "Jai Shri Ram" by several leaders in Parliament.

This is a far cry from what Indians were before Partition. In 1918, a group of countries in Europe decided to defrock the Caliph of Islam. Since the caliph of Turkey was a caliph

of all Muslims, there was a reaction in British India. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, who was to become a minister of India after Independence in 1947, called for agitation. The Khilafat Movement became the biggest movement of Muslims in history and was led by a Hindu remembered by all Indians today as Mahatma Gandhi, while the Muslim leaders Allama Iqbal and Jinnah stayed away. The movement was significant because Hindus participated in it. This unprecedented cooperation laid the foundation of the Jamia Millia Islamia University in Delhi, one of the functions of which was "to promote true Islamic and Indian values" among Muslims. The university remains one of the leading academic institutions in India. Gandhi gave its vice-chancellorship to poet Allama Iqbal which he declined.

Ali Hashmi, a grandson of Faiz, wrote an article after his mother's ouster from a conference in New Delhi, lamenting "the rise of bloodthirsty jingoism on both sides of the Indo-Pak border" and pointed out the obvious: Faiz belonged as much to India as he did to Pakistan. While he was born and raised near Sialkot in Pakistan, Faiz's first job out of college was in MAO College, Amritsar; he served in the British Indian Army in Delhi during World War II, got married in Srinagar and maintained a deep affection for the land that became India after 1947. Both his daughters were born in what is now India.

Ali Hashmi concludes: "While Faiz never proffered an opinion about Partition per se, his editorials in *The Pakistan Times* from 1947 make clear what he thought of the communal bloodshed. At one point, he wrote, 'The Muslims have got their Pakistan, the Hindus and Sikhs their divided Punjab and Bengal, but I have yet to meet a person, Muslim, Hindu or Sikh who feels enthusiastic about the future. I can't think of any country whose people felt so miserable on the eve of freedom and liberation.'"

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HORROR IN KOTA

Deaths of children in government hospital must be a wake-up call, draw attention to state of public healthcare

A MID THE HORROR provoked by the deaths of 100 children in the month of December at the J K Lon Government Hospital in Kota, Rajasthan, Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot has sought to shift the blame on to his predecessor, Vasundhara Raje, insisting that the issue must not be politicised. But CM Gehlot has been in office for nearly a year and cannot avoid responsibility. In a sense, it is high time the issue is, in fact, politicised. Public health must be pushed to the top of the political agenda and citizens must hold political parties accountable for the state of healthcare in the country.

The hospital authorities have claimed that the high rate of mortality is because J K Lon, being the only public referral hospital for children in Kota division, receives a large number of critical cases from a vast area. But that is also good reason for the hospital authorities to have been alert to the evidently deteriorating conditions at the hospital. While in a report to the Kota Government Medical College, the Paediatrics Department of the hospital had claimed that most of the equipment is functional and none of the patients died due to lack of resources, the secretary, Medical Education Department, Rajasthan, has admitted to several problems, including improper maintenance of equipment and shortage of oxygen lines. The hospital has also reported a 30 per cent shortage of nursing staff. Anecdotal evidence has pointed to the callousness and insensitivity of the hospital staff to the concerns of the patients. Of course, this is a story likely to be heard in the wards of most public hospitals in the country. Unfortunately, until the number of deaths crosses a critical threshold, which varies from state to state, the poor state of infrastructure, or the absence of professionalism fail to attract the attention of the authorities. Lon came into the spotlight — like the Gorakhpur Medical College where scores of children died in 2017 — only after the media reported that 963 children had died in 2019. Government data on Lon reveals that on an average, 1,000 deaths have been reported annually since 2014.

Every single death in a hospital ought to be seen as a failure that needs to be addressed urgently. Governments need to make public health a priority. Better supervisory systems to fix accountability also need to be in place. The Kota tragedy must be a wake-up call.

THE FIFTH DAY

It is essential to the romance of Test cricket, cannot be dispensed with without hurting the game

THE METAPHOR OF Test cricket as a dying patient was first heard when an Australian businessman brought bright colours and floodlights to cricket's landscape. The moaning of the old school fans grew louder after the advent of T20 cricket. It might get deafening in case the soon to be launched format — The Hundred — flourishes. Sure, Test cricket is not in the best of health. But the magic cure to the ailments afflicting it is not by compressing it to four days, an alternative the world body is seriously considering.

The suggested shift, its proponents argue, would free up space on the international calendar, bring greater certainty to boards and broadcasters, enliven the dull phases of the game and reduce players' workload. About 68 per cent of five-day games end in four or fewer days anyway. Yet, it is also true that everything in the game is planned with the fifth day in mind. There's also an undulating romance about the fifth day — a test of batsmen's nimble feet, icy veins and dexterous footwork on a subcontinental turner against a rampaging spinner, lower-order batsman braving the odds to force a draw, or the pitch suddenly cracking up, and slow-burning drama exploding to a nail-biting finish.

The arguments of calendar decongestion and workload reduction are but a myth, as it would only create space for more lucrative white-ball activities. There would be more financial windfall for the boards, but Test cricket should not be held hostage for their avarice. Also, longer days might not satisfy the stated goal of reducing workload for the players — rather, it could be just the opposite. It might be better to mercy-kill the dying patient instead of killing its very soul.



P C MOHANAN

BIAS HERE AND THERE

It exists in survey responses, but also in government's own telling

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SURVEY estimates and comparable data from administrative sources are not surprising. The survey data are believed to present a more realistic view, especially when it relates to access to public goods and services. Generally, the distrust is more on administrative data from implementing agencies. While the National Sample Surveys (NSS) are not meant to evaluate government programmes directly, its estimates, with a given margin of error, help in an independent assessment of outcomes. Impact assessments are, however, mostly done through specially designed studies.

In a recent article ('Between the lines of a survey', IE, December 4, 2019), the writers, one of them being the Chief Statistician of India, have claimed that surveys measuring the impact of government programmes have become less reliable. Several factors are stated to support this conclusion. These mostly deal with the tendency to conceal information. They claim that there is no incentive for people to correctly report their well-being in surveys; rather they perceive an incentive in concealing information on access to goods and services provided by the government.

The immediate cause for suspecting the genuineness of survey responses is the divergence in the estimates of households with access to toilets. The NSS survey pegged households reporting access to a toilet at 71.3 per cent. But when compared to claims of achieving complete access for all rural households or the estimates from the National Annual Rural Sanitation Survey, the NSS estimate falls short of official acceptability. The same sur-

vey found the percentage of urban homes with access to toilet at 96.2.

The earlier NSS surveys showed very high figures for rural homes without access to toilets, though there were schemes for rural sanitation even then. The authors of the article claim that this was due to the schemes remaining mostly on paper unlike now when these are actually reaching the people. The fact remains that there has been a creditable reduction in households without access to latrine as per the latest survey, evidently due to the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM).

It is well known that cooperation from survey respondents has been dwindling. This writer was part of the NSSO for many years and had the opportunity to observe respondents from close quarters. In the early years of the NSSO, the villagers genuinely believed that these surveys were meant to inform the government of their living conditions and responded favourably to field investigators, often providing them accommodation and other assistance to conduct interviews.

Experts agree that respondent cooperation cannot be taken as granted and it requires sustained efforts to cajole them to sit for interviews. Interviewing the head of the household is not always possible and data have to be gathered from other members. Non-government survey agencies have the flexibility to recruit local investigators and adopt innovative practices, which are not available to government agencies like the NSSO.

However, the temptation to attribute the divergence between government claims on toilet use and survey estimates to untruthful reporting by respondents to extract more ben-

efits overlooks the survey environment. The assumption that respondents have nothing to gain by admitting to having access to facilities is an oversimplification of the data collection scenario, as is accepting the achievements reported by implementing agencies against given targets as the gospel truth.

The data show that in the rural sector, only 54 per cent of the respondents were the heads of the households surveyed. It was the spouse of the head who responded in 31 per cent cases, while in the rest, the respondents were other members. Usually, information relating to financial aspects of the households is better known to the household head. But, information on access to facilities like toilets can be disclosed by any member accurately and does not suffer from recall or respondent bias.

An important factor in constructing a toilet is the availability of space. The survey shows the average area of a house in rural area was just 46.6 square metres. The data on land possessed shows that around 14 per cent of rural households possessed less than 50 square metres of land, while 23 per cent possessed land between 50 and 200 square metres. Forty per cent of households that reported having no access to a toilet belonged to these two categories.

Sweeping generalisations on respondent's behaviour is an oversimplification. Bias does exist in survey response just as administrative reporting has an inbuilt tendency to reflect positively on performance.

The writer is former acting head of the National Statistical Commission



JANUARY 4, 1980, FORTY YEARS AGO

POLL VIOLENCE
THREE PERSONS WERE killed and about 18 injured in a poll clash in Moradabad district. Polling in that centre was adjourned and a fresh date will be announced soon. All those killed and injured were believed to be Harijans supporting the Janata Party, the assailants armed with guns were alleged to be Jats supporting the Lok Dal. According to official information, the incident occurred at the Akoopur Patti polling centre following a dispute over the eligibility of a Jat voter. Reportedly, the village had two localities, one inhabited by Harijans and the other by Jats and others. The polling centre was nearer to the basti of the Harijans who were the first

to form the queue in the morning. When one voter believed to be a Jat came to vote, his eligibility was questioned. There was an exchange of words leading to a scuffle.

SOVIET INVASION
SOVIET INVADERS WERE reported to have crushed resistance and occupied Afghanistan's southern provincial capital of Kandahar and the eastern city of Jalalabad on Thursday, reports AP. Travellers from Kandahar, south-west of Kabul and 50 miles from the border with Pakistan's Balochistan province, told the Pakistani newspaper, *Jasarat*, that the Soviets occupied Kandahar city on Wednesday after two days of clashes

with Afghan government forces opposed to the Russians.

US-CHINA ALLIANCE
US DEFENCE SECRETARY Harold Brown, who is visiting China this weekend, is expected among other things to discuss with Chinese leaders coordinated aid to Pakistan in the context of the Soviet move into Afghanistan. Brown's visit had been scheduled several months ago but a senior official said that Moscow's intervention in Afghanistan has given his mission "a new dimension". The official said: "The Soviets have forced us and the Chinese into a posture in which we both see the world in the same way."

13 THE IDEAS PAGE

The new Indian Muslim

It is the ability to find a vocabulary — political, unapologetic and involving large numbers of women — that makes the current moment unique



SEEMA CHISHTI

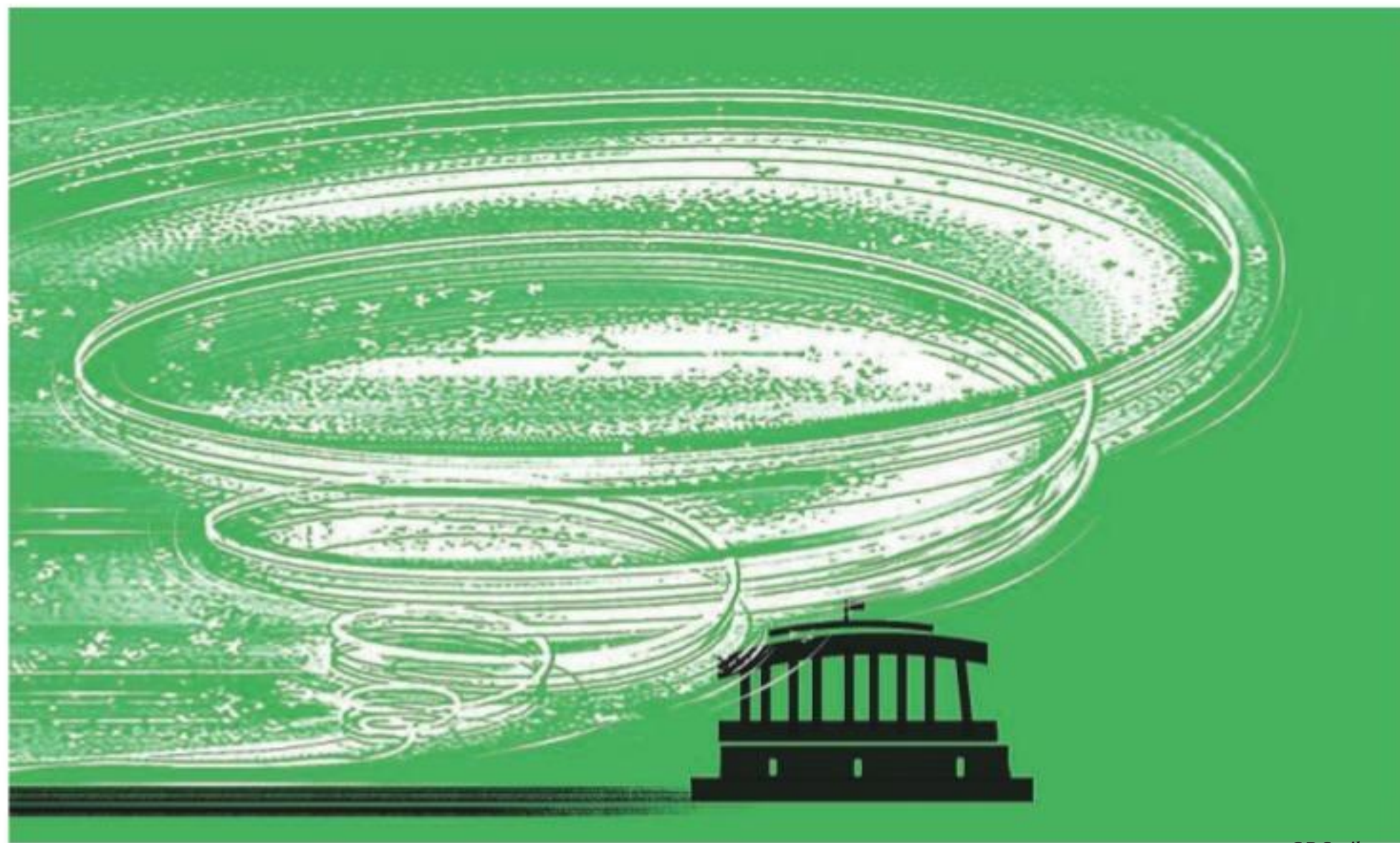
ON THE STEPS of the Jama Masjid in Delhi in 1947, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad addressed Muslims, several of whom would be heading to Pakistan, about the futility of the exercise. In a memorable speech that wove vivid Islamic imagery with the place of Muslims in India's history, he thundered: "I do not want you to lead a life of sycophancy as you did during the foreign rule. I want to remind you that these bright etchings, which you see all around you, are relics of the processions of your forefathers. Do not forget them. Do not forsake them. Live like their worthy inheritors, and, rest assured, that if you do not wish to flee from this scene, nobody can make you flee. Come, today let us pledge that this country is ours, we belong to it and any fundamental decisions about its destiny will remain incomplete without our consent."

The journey from then onwards for "Muslims" in India has been a roller-coaster. It has been an examined and studied path, but perhaps not quite as much as it should have been. This is where the largest number of Muslims anywhere in the world live in a functioning democracy. Those who heeded the Maulana's call, and became Indians "not by chance but by choice", chose to live here, well before India signed up for "We, the people", or gave to itself a Constitution. Long before citizenship was delinked from who you prayed to. The year 1950 was to witness one of the most modern ideas of nationhood — well before all Blacks had the right to vote in the US, making India an older democracy. The first Indian mosque came up in Kodangullur in Kerala during the Prophet's lifetime. The Muslim presence here is as old as Islam. This is no refugee or atithi story, it is an insider's tale. The civilisational unum has Islam as much in the mix as any other faith. But it has been a journey which has had its hiccups, defined as much by the strain as the smoothness of the ride.

But the nationwide debate on India's streets in the aftermath of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which provides that undocumented non-Muslims from three South Asian countries fast-track their citizenship has broken something, somewhere — even if no one can immediately point to exactly what.

The protests have been described as demography finally bursting upon democracy. But there is clearly much more to it. The 1990s were marked by many tremors — Other Backward Classes asserted themselves visibly and political parties were forced to make changes that should have been made decades earlier. The silent revolution of Dalit assertion came a little later, and was also seen as Dalits finally coming into their own. With Muslims, however, the "vote-bank" slur was something that was almost internalised. The rising wave of Hindutva meant that Muslims were political, but happy to be seen voting "tactically" and even till recent months, not keen to be seen as acting politically and visibly.

The CAA, by introducing religion as a differentiator in the question of citizenship, has resulted in a dam bursting, and brought many people, but also Muslims as Muslims, on to the street. The "Save Constitution" question was an abstract and the heavy idea so far. But with the line having been drawn



CR Sasikumar

clearly, and as one that keeps Muslims out, it personalised the Constitution like nothing before has. It has everyone asking how documents and the burden of proving citizenship will impact each person. So far, despite economic and social deprivation, the Indian constitutional democracy ensured an equilibrium of political rights whereby a former PM proudly witnessed ex-US President George Bush speaking of "no member of the al Qaeda" being an Indian Muslim.

Operating under the ghost of M A Jinnah, the "leadership" of Indian Muslims has been an uneasy question. A series of communal riots in Jabalpur, Calcutta and Rourkela pushed Muslims to start worrying about life under the post-Nehru Congress. The Majlis-e-Mushawarat was initially set up in August 1964 under Syed Mahmud, a Bihari Muslim leader, educated in Cambridge, and a friend of Motilal Nehru. The Mushawarat's UP unit was headed by a firebrand medical doctor. Abdul Jaleel Faridi proposed a new strategy for Muslims, asking them to vote for "good candidates" and not look to parties for security. But the Muslim vote was thought to be best mediated through a well-heeled upper class Muslim leadership. The notion of individual Muslim votes being aggregated was nowhere on the scene.

In the unstable and violent 1980s, amidst the rise of the BJP on the back of the Ayodhya dispute, leaders of the Janata Party, the RJD, Congress, Samajwadi Party, Left and Trinamool, all at different times, had the confidence of Muslims and their support had been forceful. Narendra Modi's win with a full majority was a turning point. But the CAA, seen as a fundamental reshaping of the Republic, threatens every dimension of citizenship. Both legally and in terms of identity, the social and emotional stakes for Muslims are much higher than the dadhi-topi "personal law" battle of the 1970s or even one for education-economic rights that emerged in the more modern debate around the Sachar Committee.

The idiom and turn of the phrase, the sharp and uninhibited articulation on hand-drawn posters that derives from Hindi cinema, the Urdu poetry from both India and Pakistan — what can be seen on the street now is decidedly young. It reflects a guilt-free generation, unencumbered by the burden of Partition, and one that feels solidly Indian enough to demand its due and make its case in Constitutional terms. It is a loud show of strength and cuts across classes. It is not shy to turn up fully kitted as 'Muslim', while also being happy to collaborate and seek support from all others who for personal or political reasons oppose the CAA.

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WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"In 2020, China will let the US know its strategic good faith as well as the fact that China is not to be trifled with. The US should be aware it must respect China as a major power." — GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA

A long fight

Country must unite in the effort to eradicate tuberculosis by 2025



HARSH VARDHAN

AT THE End TB Summit, 2018, the prime minister of India made a bold commitment to end tuberculosis by 2025 — five years ahead of the global target. To many, this goal may seem unattainable, but as someone who has worked at the grass roots all his life and had the privilege to dream of a polio-free India — and work for it for almost two decades — I believe it is possible, if we come together as a country to fight TB the way we did for polio.

India still has the highest TB burden in the world and despite the disease being fully curable, people still die from it. TB usually affects people in their most productive years and drives families into debt. It has a direct link to human suffering, discrimination and also poverty. Due to its infectious spread, it directly affects our economic growth as well. But, with resilience, sufficient investment, innovative approaches and strategies and the participation of all stakeholders, TB can be defeated.

The first step is the creation of awareness and empowering of communities. TB affects millions, yet very few know enough about it. We need a multilingual, multi-stakeholder awareness effort to ensure that every single Indian knows about the challenges of TB and where to seek treatment. Today, with the expansion of the media, especially in regional languages, and evolving technology, we can reach everyone with the right information. This is the first step towards ensuring that people are empowered with the necessary information to identify and recognise TB symptoms, and seek diagnosis and treatment.

The second step is ensuring that we provide every Indian with access to correct diagnosis and treatment for TB, regardless of their ability to pay for it. This can only happen if we work with the private sector as we did in the case of polio. We need to go door to door, identify TB patients, and provide each of them care with compassion. Today, there are numerous innovative private sector programmes and partnership schemes for TB. These have been formulated keeping in mind the needs of the private sector and those of patients' right to choose where to seek treatment.

I invite and urge the private sector to partner with the government. Our recently launched programmes for doctors and labs offer them various incentives and our health personnel are keen to work with them at all levels. We have made our processes simpler; we will make them simpler still. Even today, about half a million TB cases go unnotified, especially those seeking care in the private sector. We must track these missing cases and ensure that those in need of care and treatment are able to access it. We are also working with the private sector through organisations like the Indian Medical Association and Indian

Academy of Paediatrics, to ensure patient-centric care as per "Standards of TB Care in India" (STCI). A key challenge is building a forward-looking plan to address and control drug resistance, a man-made menace that is a major roadblock in our fight against TB. Every TB patient must be tested for drug resistance at the first point of care, whether in the public or private sector, to rule out any drug resistance.

Sincere efforts are also being made to make our health systems more accessible and reliable. Our government wants to ensure that those seeking care trust us and get the appropriate care for completing treatment. We are striving to create more labs, point of care tests, an assured drug pipeline, access to new drugs and, most importantly, provide counselling and support for those affected.

Every patient who is diagnosed late and does not receive timely treatment continues to infect others. How do we break this cycle of transmission? The government machinery at the field level should work with communities and provide free diagnosis and treatment to every affected individual. We also need to look beyond treatment. Recognising that medicines are not enough, we launched the Nikshay Poshan Yojana — besides numerous other schemes — under which TB patients receive Rs 500 every month while on treatment to ensure that the patients have economic support and nutrition during the required period.

We need to come together as a country to fight the disease and end the stigma surrounding it, so that every patient can seek care that is free from discrimination and with dignity. The community must act as a source of support for the patient. This will only happen as we educate more and more people about the nature of the disease.

On September 25, 2019, the 'TB Harega Desh Jeetega Campaign' was launched to accelerate the efforts to end TB by 2025. By employing a "multi-sectoral and community-led" approach, we are building a national movement to end TB by 2025. We have accordingly increased resource allocation towards the TB Elimination Programme four-fold and are confident of achieving our targets. The government has established a strong network of diagnostic and treatment centres, and all drugs and diagnostic are provided free to all types of TB patients.

The campaign aims to initiate preventive and promotive health approaches, and proposes potentially transformative interventions such as engagement with the private sector healthcare providers, inter-ministerial partnerships, corporate sector engagement, latent TB infection management and community engagement.

As long as our people continue to die every year from this preventable and treatable disease, we are failing in our duties as citizens, doctors, administrators and public health professionals. We must join hands to ensure a TB-free India. Each one of us can make a difference.

The writer is minister of health & family welfare, science & technology and earth sciences, Government of India

Larson Singla, Patiala

Safdar Ali, Kolkata

Aditya Rao, via email

Sangeeta Kampani, Delhi

Anoop Kumar Srivastava, Greater Noida



ANOOP ANTONY JOSEPH

IN LAJPAT Nagar, at the Afghan Church of Delhi, Sunday masses are held in Dari, a variety of Persian spoken in some parts of Afghanistan. This not-so-old church was set up by some hundreds of Christian refugees who fled the Islamic state facing persecution for years. Recalling the horrors back home, the pastor at the church says, "Life has changed positively after reaching India. Indian citizenship to us is God's justice."

Afghanistan has only one church now — inside the premises of the Italian embassy. The last Pakistani priest in Afghanistan was Father Giuseppe Moretti who had to return to his homeland after being injured in a bomb attack. Afghanistan built a church in 1970 as a reciprocal gesture to US President Dwight D Eisenhower for the Islamic centre in Washington. But it stood there only for three years before being razed to ground. Moretti says: "The roots of Zoroastrianism are in Afghanistan. For centuries, Buddhism also played a very important role. Nestorian Christianity was present, [and so were] Jewish communities. I believe this multiple religious presence left a profound respect for others' in the Afghan spirit. Today, however, one learns to live with the fear of bombs."

According to the 2009 report of the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor of the US State Department, " [In

Shelter from the storm

Given their persecution in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Christians should embrace CAA

[There are approximately 4,900 Sikh and 1,100 Hindu believers, and more than 400 Baha'is. There is a small, hidden Christian community; estimates on its size range from 500 to 8,000. Non-Muslim minority groups continued to face incidents of discrimination and persecution." As peaceful co-existence with radical Islam is next to impossible, non-Muslims had to flee to nations like India. There are about 14,500 refugees from Afghanistan registered with the UNHCR in India as of July 1, 2018.

A Pakistani Christian woman, Asia Bibi, reached Canada this May after spending 10 years in a Pakistani prison. Framed by her colleagues in a case of blasphemy, she was sentenced to death by a Pakistani court. Pakistan's minister for minorities, Shahbaz Bhatti, and Punjab Governor Salmaan Taseer were both assassinated for advocating relief for her. A Muslim cleric announced a Rs 5 lakh reward for killing her. Only significant international pressure, including from the Pope, could save her. Asia's ordeal reflects the viewpoint of Khawaja Nazimuddin, the second prime minister of Pakistan who said: "I do not agree that religion is a private affair of the individual nor do I agree that in an Islamic state every citizen has identical rights, no matter what his caste, creed or faith be."

In July 2010, a Hindu youth drinking water

from a tap near a mosque led to the ethnic cleansing of about 400 Hindu families. A suicide attack targeting Christians celebrating Easter at Lahore in March 2016 left 70 dead and more than 340 wounded. Hundreds fled their homes in Faisalabad in 2005 as churches and Christian schools were set on fire by a mob. A list prepared by the US-based platform, Open Doors, reveals that the top 10 nations which inflict maximum persecution on non-Muslims were Islamic nations, except North Korea and Eritrea. Pakistan ranked 4.

Hundreds of persecuted non-Muslim minorities including Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and Zoroastrians migrate to India from these neighbouring nations every year. The case of Christians is not different. The Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) recognises the role that each nation has to play in ensuring that all human beings are given a chance to live a life of dignity. India might be a non-signatory to the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees, but it has never shied away from granting asylum to those in need.

In his famous opening address at World Parliament of Religions, Swami Vivekananda said, "I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth." In the 12th century, India welcomed the Zoroastrian (Parsi) community facing perse-

cut by Iran's Qajar dynasty. So was the Baha'is, Jews lived in India for centuries, becoming part of its culture and ethos. The people of Tibet, under leadership of 14th Dalai Lama, were welcomed with open arms. The country has absorbed many who have been wronged into its syncretic culture.

Many ancient churches of Kerala acknowledge the support of Hindu rulers who facilitated their setting up. It is in this spirit that the CAA should be seen and understood. India is the only nation in South Asia that has a syncretic culture and can absorb all the persecuted minorities who have nowhere to go. Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh have followed the policy of state-led Islamisation, which has dehumanised people hailing from other communities.

With the CAA, India is performing its historical duty, one it has been fulfilling for centuries. The Act also echoes the spirit of the Indian Constitution. The voices that are raised today against CAA need to answer only one question: Has any exodus of Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Zoroastrians or Sikhs from India occurred due to persecution under BJP rule? If the answer is in negative, let us embrace the CAA with open arms.

The writer is National Secretary of the BJP's youth wing