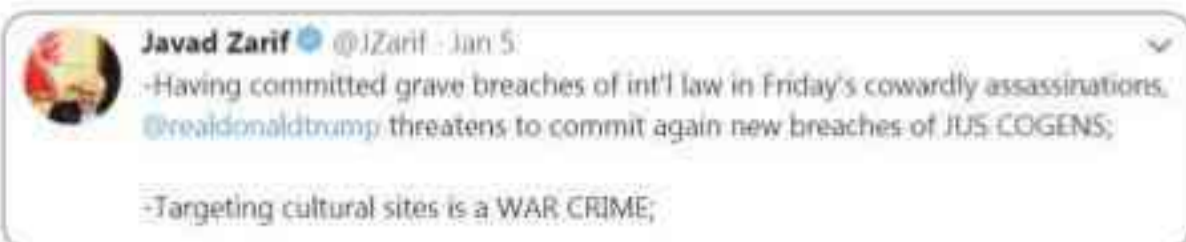


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THIS WORD MEANS

JUS COGENS

The Latin term that Iran invoked after Trump threatened to target its cultural sites



ON SUNDAY, responding to President Donald Trump's threat to attack sites that were "important to Iran and Iranian culture", Iran's Foreign Minister Javad Zarif posted on Twitter: "Having committed grave breaches of int'l law in Friday's cowardly assassinations, @realDonaldTrump threatens to commit again new breaches of JUS COGENS; - Targeting cultural sites is a WAR CRIME;... Those masquerading as diplomats and those who shamelessly sat to identify Iranian cultural & civilian targets should not even bother to open a law dictionary. *Jus cogens* refers to peremptory norms of international law, i.e. international red lines. That is, a big(ly) "no no".

("Bigly" is a word that many believe Donald Trump has been heard to say, and is frequently used to mock the President's speech, mannerisms, and behaviour. However, in 2016, the BBC quoted Fiona McPherson, a senior editor with the Oxford English Dictionary, as saying that "bigly" is, in fact a real word, which can mean "with great force". The US reference book company Merriam-Webster also agrees that "bigly" is a word, the BBC report said.)

JUS COGENS or *ius cogens*, meaning "compelling law" in Latin, are rules in international law that are peremptory or authoritative, and from which states cannot deviate. These norms cannot be offset by a separate treaty between parties intending to do so, since they hold fundamental values. Today, most states and international organisations accept the principle of *ius cogens*, which dates back to Roman times.

The *ius cogens* rules have been sanc-

tioned by the Vienna Conventions on the Law of Treaties of 1969 and 1986. According to both Conventions, a treaty is void if it breaches *ius cogens* rules.

Article 53 of the 1969 Convention ("Treaties conflicting with a peremptory norm of general international law (*ius cogens*)") says: "A treaty is void if, at the time of its conclusion, it conflicts with a peremptory norm of general international law. For the purposes of the present Convention, a peremptory norm of general international law is a norm accepted and recognized by the international community of States as a whole as a norm from which no derogation is permitted and which can be modified only by a subsequent norm of general international law having the same character."

Article 64 of the 1986 Convention, "Emergence of a new peremptory norm of general international law (*ius cogens*)", says: "If a new peremptory norm of general international law emerges, any existing treaty which is in conflict with that norm becomes void and terminates."

Besides treaties, unilateral declarations also have to abide by these norms. So far, an exhaustive list of *ius cogens* rules does not exist. However, the prohibition of slavery, genocide, racial discrimination, torture, and the right to self-determination are recognised norms. The prohibition against apartheid is also recognised as a *ius cogens* rule, from which no derogation is allowed, since apartheid is against the basic principles of the United Nations.

OM MARATHE

TIP FOR READING LIST

TRIBUTE TO AN ICONIC COMIC STRIP

THE PREFACE to *The Peanuts Papers: Writers and Cartoonists on Charlie Brown, Snoopy & the Gang, and the Meaning of Life*, edited by Andrew Blauner, begins: "Nearly twenty years after the death of Charles M Schulz, there still seems so much to say about *Peanuts*, the singular comic strip that occupied the artist for the greater part of his life and, through a miraculous ensemble of hand-drawn children and an independent-minded beagle, won over the world."



Schulz's iconic work, which ran in newspapers around the world from 1950 to 2000 (and continues to appear in many publications even today), was once described by John Updike as a "comic strip at bottom tragic". *The Peanuts Papers*, a "collection of deeply personal essays, will help you see it clear, if you don't already, as a psychologically complex epic about stoicism, faith and other approaches to

existential struggles", says the review of the book in *The New York Times*.

"This collection is varied, even kaleidoscopic, but it also offers the pleasure of detecting echoes and correspondences among writers who come to *Peanuts* from their own distinct perspectives... *The Peanuts Papers* celebrates Schulz's real-world cartoon universe by allowing this sort of dialogue among its contributors. Even matters they all agree on, above all the view that *Peanuts* is of endless interest and remains deserving of the highest praise, can be expressed through a wealth of fruitful approaches," says the Preface.

However, as *The New York Times* review notes, the list of contributors "skews quite noticeably to the older and whiter side", and the book does not have any of Schulz's strips. There are, however, some original illustrations by some of the cartoonist contributors.

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

California's data privacy law

It gives users new controls over the way Internet companies use their data. What are these changes, which will affect users beyond California too? How does the law compare with the privacy bill India has planned?

KARISHMA MEHROTRA
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 6

CALIFORNIA'S NEW privacy law — the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA) — is first-of-its-kind data legislation. As users' data are increasingly commodified by technology conglomerates, the law — which went into effect on January 1 — gives Californians new controls over how companies use their data. These controls include the right to access the data, the right to ask for its deletion, and the right to prevent its sale to third parties. Significantly, because of the global nature of the Internet, these changes will affect users worldwide.

"What this new law comes down to is giving consumers the right to take back control over their information from thousands of giant corporations. This is about power: the more a company knows about you, the more power it has to shape your daily life. That power is exercised on the spectrum ranging from the benign, such as showing you a shoe ad, to the consequential, like selecting your job, your housing, or helping to shape what candidate you support in an election," Alastair Mactaggart, author of the 2018 ballot initiative that led to CCPA, wrote in the law's proposal.

What rights does the CCPA give Californian users?

They have the right to see what personal information businesses collect about them, and the purpose and process of the collection. Personal information refers to any information that can be linked back to the user. They can request and view what inferences the businesses make about them, and have the right to see details about their personal information being sold or given to a third party.

Users can make businesses delete their personal information, and opt out of having their data sold to third parties. The law lays out some exceptions, such as information necessary for completing transactions, providing a service, protecting consumer security, and protecting freedom of speech.

Users can get a copy of the collected per-



Facebook says it doesn't "sell" data, and the law does not apply to it. *The New York Times*

sonal information for free. Parents have to give permission to companies before the companies can sell the data of their children under the age of 13 to third parties.

To which companies does the law apply?

The law only applies to businesses with gross annual revenues of more than \$25 million; those that buy, receive or sell the personal information of 50,000 or more consumers in California; or those that derive more than half of their annual revenue from selling consumers' personal information.

The law applies to businesses collecting information of Californians; not just to businesses that operate in the state.

Unintentional noncompliance will lead to fines of \$2,500 per violation; intentional noncompliance will attract a penalty of \$7,500 per violation.

Some studies estimate it will cost businesses \$55 billion to initially meet the standards, of which \$16 billion will be spent over the next decade.

One study has said that the law protects \$12 billion worth of personal information

that is used for advertising in California every year.

What has changed in practical terms?

The law went into effect on January 1, but the California Attorney General has not begun enforcing the act yet. The AG will be allowed to take action six months after the rules are finalised, or on July 1.

At the very least, companies will need to set up web pages and phone numbers to take requests. Users also may begin to see a new button on websites stating "Do Not Sell My Personal Information".

Several large companies have set up new infrastructure to comply. Google launched a Chrome extension to block Google Analytics from collecting data. Facebook has said that the law doesn't apply to them since they do not "sell" data, and that they already have features that comply with the law (such as a tool that allows users to access and delete their information).

Bloomberg has reported that a wave of new start-ups are pitching products to companies to help them adhere to the new rules.

How does this affect non-Californians?

First, even Indian companies that have customers in California would have to comply with the law.

Second, many firms are finding it easier to make the legal changes for all users rather than trying to distinguish users from California. Microsoft will roll out changes for all Americans, and Mozilla (which owns the Firefox browser) will make changes for all their users. The European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) too, shifted the entire Internet economy, not just that of the EU.

California is often a trailblazer for legislation, inspiring other states and even countries to adopt similar regulations. In the US itself, there is bipartisan support for several new data privacy bills making their way through Congress now.

What are the criticisms of the Act?

The Act gives users the right to stop the selling of their data, but not the collection of their data. So while this reins in the data broker system, it does not do much to affect companies like Facebook and Google that make most of their money by collecting the data, not by selling it. Advertisers pay Facebook to target ads to users based off that data; they don't pay Facebook for the data itself.

Some say the act places the burden of navigating this complex economy on users. Others argue that many of the provisions are vaguely worded — leaving concepts such as "third-party sharing" or "selling" up to interpretation. Experts told *The Verge* that compliance challenges will be greater with CCPA than with the GDPR.

How does this act compare with India's proposed data protection bill?

Several of these rights are also in India's Personal Data Protection Bill. These include the right to access a copy of your data, and the right to deletion. India's bill goes further in some regards, including the right to correction. However, India's bill is more focused on users' rights over collections, while California's act is focused more on the third-party sharing and selling of a user's data.

There's hope for the rare Bustard — here's why

ANJALI MARAR
PUNE, JANUARY 6

ONCE THE frontrunner to be named India's national bird, the Great Indian Bustard has long been on the brink of extinction. The Great Indian Bustard (GIB), is one of the heaviest flying birds, and is found mainly in the Indian subcontinent. Barely 150 of these birds are estimated to be surviving now globally. However, a major conservation effort launched about four years ago is bringing a ray of hope.

Nine chicks

Since June last year, nine GIB eggs collected from the Desert National Park in Jaisalmer where a conservation centre has been set up, have hatched, and the chicks are reported to be doing well. This is the largest number of hatchlings reported within a six-month frame by any GIB conservation programme in the world, say officials.

Forest officials have identified seven females and one male among the GIB chicks; the sex of the ninth and youngest chick, which hatched a couple of months ago, is not yet known.

Giving the chicks the right diet is a challenge, the officials said. "Very little is known



The Great Indian Bustard was once common in several parts of Gujarat, Karnataka, and Maharashtra. *Archive*

about their food habitat. With inputs provided by our counterparts in Gujarat, scientists have identified bird feed that is rich in proteins and calcium," Arindam Tomar, Chief Wildlife Warden of the Rajasthan Wildlife Department, told *The Indian Express* over the phone.

The GIB is known to eat insects, harvested foodgrains, and fruit. "The uncontrolled use of pesticides and insecticides in farms has badly hit their food habitat," said Tomar, who took over as the project head in early 2019.

Vanishing grasslands, and attacks by dogs and foxes have contributed to the threat to the GIB's survival.

Conservation

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, and the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Dehradun, are working to save the GIB. The Ministry has allotted special funds to the tune of Rs 33 crore, a part of which was used to set up the incubation and chick-rearing centre in Jaisalmer.

In a report submitted to the Ministry in November 2018, the WII said extensive land surveys have been carried out to locate suitable habitats for the chicks.

Officials have zeroed in on 14 spots, based rainfall, accessibility, proximity to wild source, habitat and topographic suitability, availability of water, temperature, etc., and identified Sorsan as the site most conducive for their rearing.

"Sorsan would allow the birds to breed more frequently, unlike Jaisalmer, which sees frequent droughts. Also, with access via road and suitable flat grassland habitat is available," the WII report said. The centre will be the birds' home for a few years — a safe habitat would have to be readied before they can be released into the wild.

Challenges

Male birds reach sexual maturity between the ages of 4 and 5; females at age 3-4. Generally, the GIB lives up to age 15 or 16, experts said. A female lays an egg once in 1-2 years, and the chicks' survival rate is 60%-70%. "Being such long-lived and slow reproducing species, adult mortality remains high," the WII report said.

Tomar said: "Once these birds mature and can produce offspring, there must be enough habitats to support their growth. Readying the necessary habitat will be key in the coming months and years."

According to the WII report, the bird was once abundant in Kutch, Nagpur, Amravati, Solapur, Bellary, and Koppal districts in the states of Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Karnataka. "Karnataka has expressed interest in working with us, but there is nothing concrete from Maharashtra so far," the officer said.

Globally and in India, high voltage power lines are a major threat to the GIB, the WII report says. The bird has poor frontal vision, which restricts it from spotting power lines early. "...About 15% of the population (dies) due to the power lines in Jaisalmer alone. This, in comparison to the natural cause of deaths contributed only 4% to 5% cases," the report says.

Why an American attack on Iran's cultural sites could constitute a war crime

NEHA BANKA
KOLKATA, JANUARY 6

FOLLOWING THE assassination of Maj Gen Qassem Soleimani, President Donald Trump tweeted on Saturday that if "Iran strikes any Americans, or American assets" in retaliation, the US would target 52 sites in Iran, "some at a very high level & important to Iran & the Iranian culture".

It was not clear what Trump would achieve by deliberately destroying Iran's cultural heritage, but such a step, should he follow through on his threat, could be considered a war crime.

Iran is home to one of the world's oldest civilisations dating back to 10,000 BC. Twenty-four Iranian sites are on UNESCO's World Heritage List, two of which are natural sites and the rest cultural sites.

Among the main World Heritage Sites in Iran are the Meidan Emam and Masjid-e-Jame in Isfahan; the Golestan Palace in the historic heart of Tehran; Pasargadae and Persepolis, capitals of the Achaemenid Empire, founded by Cyrus II and Darius I respectively in the 6th century BC; and the archaeological site of Takht-e Soleyman,

which has the remains of an ancient Zoroastrian sanctuary.

What is the problem with targeting cultural heritage?

Following the unparalleled destruction of cultural heritage in World War II, the nations of the world adopted at The Hague in 1954, The Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, the first international treaty focussed exclusively on the protection of cultural heritage during war and armed conflict.

The Convention defined cultural property as "movable or immovable property of great importance to the cultural heritage of every people, such as monuments of architecture, art or history, whether religious or secular; archaeological sites...", etc. The signatories, referred to in the Convention as "the High Contracting Parties", committed themselves to protecting, safeguarding, and having respect for cultural property.

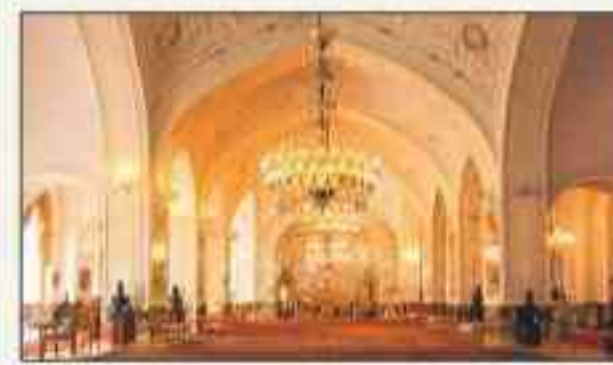
There are currently 133 signatories to Convention, including countries that have acceded to and ratified the treaty. Both the United States and Iran (as well as India) signed the Convention on May 14, 1954, and it entered into force on August 7, 1956.



Iranian World Heritage Sites Meidan Emam in Isfahan (left) and Golestan Palace in Tehran. *Sorush Angabini/UNESCO*

The Rome Statute of 1998, the founding treaty of the International Criminal Court, describes as a "war crime" any intentional attack against a historical monument, or a building dedicated to religion, education, art, or science. The International Criminal Court started functioning in 2002 with jurisdiction over four main crimes: genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and the crime of aggression.

Article 8 of the Rome Statute deals with war crimes. Article 8(2)(b)(ii) says war crimes include "intentionally directing attacks against civilian objects, that is, objects which are not military objectives", and 8(2)(b)(ix)



mentions "intentionally directing attacks against buildings dedicated to religion, education, art, science or charitable purposes, historic monuments, hospitals and places where the sick and wounded are collected, provided they are not military objectives".

122 countries are States Parties to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. The United States is a signatory that has not ratified the Statute. India has neither signed nor ratified the Statute.

Is it likely that the US will in fact, attack these heritage sites?

Following Trump's threats, Secretary of

State Mike Pompeo told ABC News: "We'll behave lawfully. We'll behave inside the system. We always have and we always will."

To CNN, Pompeo said, "We will be bold in protecting American interests and we'll do so in a way that is consistent with the rule of law." Pressed on whether "cultural centres" were fair targets, he said: "We're going to do the things that are right and the things that are consistent with American law."

Trump himself has been direct, underlining that he meant what he tweeted.

"They're (the Iranians) allowed to kill our people. They're allowed to torture and maim our people. They're allowed to use roadside bombs and blow up our people," the President told reporters on Sunday. "And we're not allowed to touch their cultural site? It doesn't work that way."

How has Iran responded to the threats?

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif posted on Twitter: "A reminder to those hallucinating about emulating ISIS war crimes by targeting our cultural heritage: Through MILLENNIA of history, barbarians have come and ravaged our cities, razed our monuments and burnt our libraries. Where are they now? We're still

here, & standing tall." He also said that Trump's threats, if carried out, would be a breach of "*ius cogens*" (See *This Word Means* in column at left) and a war crime.

When has cultural property been targeted earlier?

■ During the Siege of Dubrovnik in 1991-92 by the Yugoslav People's Army, the old town of Dubrovnik in Croatia was targeted in an attempt to wipe out Croatian history and cultural heritage. Subsequently, during the Croat-Bosniak war, Croat paramilitary forces destroyed the 16th century Stari Most bridge in Mostar in today's Bosnia and Herzegovina, in 1993.

■ In 2001, the Taliban destroyed Buddhas that had been carved into the mountainside in Bamiyan, Afghanistan, between the 3rd and 6th centuries AD.

■ In 2006, the UN and the Cambodian government established the Khmer Rouge Tribunal to prosecute the destruction of Cambodia's cultural assets.

■ Between 2014 and 2017, the Islamic State destroyed several places of religious and cultural significance. In 2015, the IS captured and destroyed the ancient Syrian city of Palmyra, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



IF YOU WANT A PICTURE OF THE FUTURE, IMAGINE A BOOT STAMPING ON A HUMAN FACE— FOREVER.
— GEORGE ORWELL

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Innocents no more

JNU violence reflects an apocalyptic politics driven by a constant need to find new enemies



PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

THE SHOCKING VIOLENCE at JNU should convince you of one simple proposition: India is governed by a regime whose sole *raison d'être* is to find an adversarial rallying point and crush it by brute force. Cowardly thugs running amok in one of India's most premier universities, inflicting head injuries on teachers and students, is not a minor scuffle explained away by JNU's local conflicts. To better understand what is at stake, it is important to listen to the entire range of speeches our honourable, "He Who Must not be Named" Home Minister delivers. One thing will become abundantly clear. The current political regime cannot exist unless it finds a new enemy. It now legitimises itself, not by its positive accomplishments, but by using the enemy as a rallying point. The targeting of enemies — minorities, liberals, secularists, leftists, urban naxals, intellectuals, assorted protestors — is not driven by a calculus of ordinary politics. It is driven by will, ideology and hate, pure and simple. When you legitimise yourself entirely by inventing enemies, the truth ceases to matter, normal restraints of civilisation and decency cease to matter, the checks and balances of normal politics cease to matter. All that matters is the crushing of real and imaginary enemies, by hook or by crook.

The events at JNU are another symbol of the apocalyptic politics this government is playing. It is apocalyptic in a triple sense. At the level of discourse, the normalisation of the phrase "tukde tukde gang" abetted by the home minister, with the help of a pliant media, laid the background conditions for this kind of violence.

There is no doubt that many of those who were cowardly enough to assault unarmed professors and students and hit them on the head, see themselves as some kind of nationalist warriors: Avenging national honour by unleashing violence in a university. But the fact that they think in this way has been enabled by the larger ideological climate, something government functionaries have done much to inculcate.

There is no getting away from the fact that hunting down your own citizens as anti-national is now part of the ideological construct of this government, as evidenced by the home minister's speeches. There is no get-

ting away from the fact that the kind of state response that you have seen in UP against minorities, on the heels of the tepid response to earlier episodes of lynching, emboldens the worst elements of our society to act as vigilantes. The state will, directly or through proxies, encourage violence against anyone who is not in tune with it.

This violence is apocalyptic in another sense: Its purpose is to foment more violence, so that targeting enemies becomes self-fulfilling. The logic is: Apply force and intimidation. If it succeeds, all well and good. If it does not succeed respond in two ways. One is to ideologically discredit the opposition even more. The pattern is depressingly familiar. The attacks on JNU will be presented as some kind of "left-liberal" conspiracy. They will intone, as many are doing on social media, "these left liberals are so fanatical that they will smash their own skulls to embarrass government". The second strategy is to use the violence as a pretext for more control and violence. "See these anti nationals, they refuse to be crushed by violence. So, we need more violence." This is the strategy in Kashmir, this is the strategy in UP, and now it is coming to the heart of the capital. There will be a massive disinformation campaign. Remember, the government exploits the asymmetry between doubt and truth. It will use odd bits of information, without context, to buttress its claims that this is a conspiracy. Meanwhile, the most obvious questions will go unanswered.

Let us for a moment assume there was a local scuffle between students — those wanting to register and other students preventing them from the registering process. That cannot explain the fact that armed goons from outside the campus were allowed to run amok; that does not explain the fact that the police, which had no compunction in cracking down in Jamia, stood by as mute spectators and even respectfully seem to have escorted out the thugs. That cannot explain why unarmed professors and students would be hit in the head. The government is counting on the fact that it thinks we are looking for a pretext to support it. It thinks pictures of disorder — the spectre of rioting minorities or leftists — will increase support for authoritarianism. The worst indictment of India is that

the government thinks the people are behind it in this apocalyptic vision.

The third apocalyptic element of the vision is the literal destruction of all institutions. The most pathetic moment of the long night was two "who do not deserve to be named" ministers — the finance minister and minister of external affairs — reduced to tweeting a general, anodyne condemnation of violence. They are members of the cabinet committee on security. They could have arranged, through their colleagues, for Delhi Police to act. If they, with their privileges, exclude this kind of pathetic helplessness, think of the ordinary JNU student or citizen in UP or Kashmir. Think of those who are the target of vigilante violence and have no recourse to justice; think of those whose homes were invaded by UP police; think of those who have disappeared in Kashmir. The aim of the government may or may not be literal annihilation of its citizens. But its aim certainly is that it annihilates our will, our reason, our spirit, so that we all become willing supplicants in its ideological project.

The silver lining is that, as recent events have shown, enough Indians are refusing to be cowed down. This is embittering and shaking the government and its supporters even more. In the short run, we need three things. There has to be an absolute refusal to patronise anyone who normalises the "tukde tukde gang" talk — licensing the militarisation of domestic politics. There has to be institutional accountability: From the JNU VC to the home minister. But, this moment will also require the forces of protests to be more visible in the peaceful and dignified way they have been over the last few days. The government's strategy is not to solve old issues; it is to divert attention by bringing in new adversaries in the hope that we remain divided. But now the movement against the government has to turn this very fact into an advantage. The one thing the violence in JNU, and Delhi more generally, should bring home is that plain truth: In the eyes of this government, no one is innocent. None of us have the choice to even pretend otherwise.

The writer is contributing editor at The Indian Express

POWER TO THE GOON

The mob violence on JNU students is a chronicle foretold. Those whose job is to protect the campus are accomplices

THE VICIOUS ATTACK on students and teachers in JNU by a group of goons, allegedly affiliated to the RSS student-wing ABVP, on Sunday night is not merely a case of campus violence peaking. It is the outcome of the daily demonising of the university, its staff and faculty, over a period of time by people holding high public office. The mob that went on a rampage in the campus, including in girls' hostels, was empowered by the very government that is vested with the power and responsibility to uphold law and order, to act as it did. It did not happen in a day, of course; it has been in the works ever since JNU was seen by the establishment as a rebel outpost. Students and faculty have been branded "anti-nationals", who need to be punished. Phrases like "tukde tukde gang" and Urban Naxal were used by BJP functionaries, including senior ministers, to describe students and cases foisted on student leaders. A narrative of aggressive nationalism was carefully nurtured to normalise the vilifying of the university and its inhabitants, dogwhistling that targeting JNU has the sanction of the government.

Two members of the Union Cabinet, both JNU alumni, have condemned the incident. But this rings hollow. Visuals of hooligans roaming in dormitories and the campus, wielding hockey sticks and bludgeons, shouting "desh ke gaddaro ko, goli maaro saalo ko", and finally trooping out of the campus, under the benign gaze of Delhi Police, are available in the public domain. Delhi Police, which the other day was seen wreaking havoc on the Jamia Millia Islamia campus, has been co-opted to act against the thugs who had a free run in JNU. The vandals have been aided and abetted by the institutions that ought to have cracked down on them in the first place. What is the message that is sent out? Who is to act against the hooligans? How long before such mob transforms itself into lynch bands that have murdered people in the name of food and faith in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Jharkhand in recent years.

The wardens of JNU hostels that faced the brunt of the thugs have quit their posts, taking responsibility for failure to protect students. The university vice-chancellor, M Jagadeesh Kumar, a divisive presence in the campus at the best of times, seems to run the university as a department of the Union Human Resources Development Ministry, its strings pulled by Union Home Ministry. Clearly, his fidelity is not to the students and staff — his tenure is remarkable for its failure in winning the trust of the campus. Kumar should be relieved of the responsibility he has long abdicated. But for that to happen, saner heads need to prevail. Who understand that a campus where goons are empowered is a campus that will shrivel — and shrink a nation's future.

BLAZE DOWN UNDER

In Australia's bushfires lie warnings about the complex ways in which climate variables interact

AT LEAST 24 people have lost their lives, nearly 500 million animals have perished and more than 12 billion acres of land — an area as large as Denmark — has turned to cinders as bushfires have ravaged large parts of Australia. The fires, among the worst in the country's history, have been raging since September and show no signs of abating. New South Wales, the country's worst-affected state, declared an emergency last week in its southeastern region and people were asked to move to safer locations. But the state government faced people's ire when those fleeing the inferno had to face long traffic jams. More opprobrium has been heaped on the country's Federal government. Across the country, frustrated Australians have vented their anger at Prime Minister Scott Morrison for playing down the blaze's association with climate change — a charge the Federal government has denied.

Bushfires are actually a part of Australia's ecosystem. Many plants depend on them to cycle nutrients and clear vegetation. In fact, eucalyptus trees in Australia depend on fire to release their seeds. But all this usually happens during a few weeks in late January-February, when the country is at its driest. The prolonged blaze this year has coincided with Australia's harshest summer. Parts of the country recorded their highest recorded temperature in December. Then, longer-term factors have been at play. Much of Australia is facing a drought that is a result of three consecutive summers with very little precipitation. This, according to climate scientists, is unprecedented. Moreover, as the Australian Bureau of Meteorology's 2018 State of the Climate report notes, "Australia's climate has warmed by just over 1 degree Celsius since 1910, leading to an increase in the frequency of extreme heat events." This has led to more rainfall in northern Australia, but created drought-like conditions in the more densely populated southeast.

Australia is home to nearly 250 animal species, some of them like the koalas and kangaroos are not found elsewhere. But the region also has the highest rate of native animals going extinct over the past 200 years. The fires will aggravate this situation. Experts, for example, reckon that more than a quarter of the koala habitat has been consumed by the blaze. The fires have also caused a drop in the bird, rodent and insect populations. These creatures are the building blocks of the ecosystem and the fall in their population is bound to have long-term impacts. In Australia's bushfires lie a warning about the complex ways in which climate variables interact.

PURE STARSHINE

The Golden Globes had many surprises, least of which was an all vegan menu

THERE WAS A time stars let down their hair at the Golden Globes, with the first awards of the season a good dress rehearsal for the Oscars and the over 75,000 glasses of free Champagne lubricating enough Dutch courage. Now, Hollywood's glitziest night has stirred itself "woke". On Sunday night, the best of TV and cinema of 2019 were first served the rapier-sharp tongue of anchor Ricky Gervais, and then an all-vegan menu (a Globes first). With Donald Trump rushing the US headlong into another blunder in West Asia, the best film surprise was a just-released war movie, *1917*. The best actor no-surprise was Joaquin Phoenix's anarchist and confused Joker who, in his acceptance speech, strewn with cuss words and casual informality, lectured Hollywood on climate change, private jets and responsible voting. The luminaries of Netflix's hot contenders were resoundingly shut out — Martin Scorsese and Robert De Niro (*The Irishman*), Adam Driver (*Marriage Story*) — looked on unimpressed.

But if Phoenix stressed that he didn't want to rock the boat, the women didn't need reminding. Top honours again eluded them, while Olivia Colman won best TV actress for the solidly establishment *Crown*. Michelle Williams struck a few political notes, as Awkwafina became the first performer of Asian descent to win a Best Actress Musical or Comedy.

With no fire sizzling the red carpet either, the clouds parted for pure starshine for one brief moment. Brad Pitt, the Best Supporting Actor, wearing his blond splendour and dating status lightly, complimented his director Quentin Tarantino and thanked co-actor Leonardo Di Caprio as their Hollywood nostalgia film walked away with the most awards of the night. Pitt's four-letter word of choice was simpler. "If you have the chance to be 'kind' to someone tomorrow, take it. I think we need it," the actor said. Aah, for that forever fairytale, *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*.

AFTER THE STICKS AND STONES

With the violence at JNU, citizens face a stark, binary moral choice



AAKASH JOSHI

GEORGE ORWELL ONCE lamented that he "was forced to become a pamphleteer" by the times that he lived in. His happy place, to use the contemporary parlance, was gardening and writing novels. Orwell was much more than a pamphleteer. He was a chronicler of the evils of nationalism as well as one who understood its appeal. There are few Orwells among us. But our time, like his, is a moral test.

What is the metaphor, the analogy, that describes the masked men and women that rampaged across Jawaharlal Nehru University on the night of December 5? Were these stone-pelters (though given the size of their projectiles, perhaps rock throwers) and rod-using assaulters of students the great Indian Ku Klux Klan — they have it down pat, the masks and narrow majoritarianism? Or, perhaps, they are just "goons" or the "lumpen element" — those broad terms that can mean anyone, on a given day. And, since we dare not say the F-word or the N-word, can we call them Brownshirts, despite the decidedly saffron tint to their sloganeering? By the time of writing this, both the complicities that enabled the violence and the equivocations in its aftermath are well underway.

The Delhi Police, which reports to Home Minister Amit Shah, has not made a single arrest, nor taken into custody anyone connected to the violence. In fact, by all accounts, the mob moved with impunity through the campus even as the police stood at the gate. This,

remember, is the same force that was loading up by the busloads peaceful protestors last month from anti-CAA-NRC demonstrations. Campus security is conspicuous by its absence, the university's vice-chancellor deafening in his silence.

Now, the equivocations. BJP MP Meenakshi Leki managed to blame Left parties (even as the violence was underway) for "politicising students", evoke the spectre of "Jamia students" on the JNU campus and took a swipe at Priyanka Gandhi. She went on to say that "if my kids were doing this (protesting, striking) they would get a tight one (presumably a slap) from me". Shah has asked for a "report" on the matter from the Delhi Police — seen on video allegedly escorting weapon-wielding men and women from the campus.

It is not difficult to imagine what will follow. More voices from the BJP, the Union government and their loud sympathisers will try to present this as a clash between student groups; Urban Naxals will be brought up and a minor disagreement between students — an everyday part of campus life — will be used as a justification for creating terror in a place that dissents. And, given the love for "debate", of pretending that there are two equal sides to every immortality, the discourse will move on as it always does. But it need not be so.

Something has changed in India over the last few months. In Delhi, those who watched the country change, lose its character have fi-

nally decided to show up for others. As with Jamia, so with JNU. Even before the police took action, well-meaning citizens and alumni of JNU showed up at the university. There, a young woman was first chased by men with rods — outside the gate on the road leading up to the campus. When she did make it, ABVP activists greeted her and others with slogans of "Jai Shri Ram", "Desh ke gaddaron ko, goli maaro saalon ko" and "...Afzal (Guru) ki maat maroge". When they spoke to these men, argued with them, they were told to get the men of their house. She, and others like her, were a symptom of their cowardice, "pallu ki aad mein anti-national" is how they were described.

The women engaged in the debate, pointed out that their agency was not circumscribed by men, and that's a privilege that should be a right.

But this must be said to the men who chased the young women, those who assaulted JNUSU President Aishe Ghosh leaving her face battered and bleeding. And because in the times we live in, the dreaded first person must be employed — the political is as personal as it gets. The "men of the house" — for the children we may someday have, or just to assuage our conscience — will, at the very least, have to turn pamphleteers. Beat that with a stick.

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JANUARY 7, 1980, FORTY YEARS AGO

CONG SET FOR WIN THE CONGRESS-I SEEMED to be firmly in the saddle for a major victory in the Lok Sabha mid-term election. The results declared so far show that the voters have swung away from the Janata Party and the Lok Dal. The performance of both parties was utterly dismal. Of the 61 results declared till midnight, the Congress (I) had won as many as 44 seats.

BACK TO MRS GANDHI THE PEOPLE LOOK like returning Mrs Gandhi with the same vengeance as they had rejected her in the 1977 election. The verdict against the Janata may be even more

severe because the combined Congress did win 153 seats in the last poll. As predicted, the Lok Dal does not figure anywhere. The leftists may do far better than the Lok Dal and the Congress put together. If today's trend continues, the Congress (I) may have a two-third majority in the new Lok Sabha. Indeed, it will be Mrs Gandhi's personal victory. The argument that she alone can give a stable government to the country seems to have gone down well with the people.

SOVIETS DENY CHARGES THE SOVIET UNION, denying charges of military interference in Afghan affairs, last

night accused United States officials of making the charges to kill the second Soviet-American Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty. The Soviet Ambassador, Oleg A. Troyanovsky, seemed to have President Jimmy Carter in mind when he brought the accusation in the UN Security Council, at the second meeting of a debate on the situation in Afghanistan begun last afternoon by request of the United States, China and 48 other countries. "American leaders", he said, "have seized on the so-called Afghan question to justify attempts to prevent the so-called SALT II treaty from coming into force and justify the increase in the military budget."



West Asia after Soleimani

An all-out war between the US and Iran will destabilise the region and have major economic impact worldwide. The outcome could be apocalyptic for India's interests



SYED ATA HASNAIN

NOT MANY IN India are aware of Major General Qassem Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) of Iran — the man who was killed by a surgical drone airstrike near Baghdad airport on the morning of January 3. The killing began the New Year and decade with a trigger that may have far reaching consequences. But first, Soleimani needs a brief introduction.

"His brilliance, effectiveness, and commitment to his country have been revered by his allies and denounced by his critics in equal measure," wrote US General Stanley McChrystal in 2018. "Soleimani is arguably the most powerful and unconstrained actor in the Middle East today. A ghostly puppet master, a practical strategist." It was Soleimani who put the Quds Force among the top few forces of the world that have the rare capability to combine intelligence with special forces strike capability and possess a fiercely strategic ideological orientation. The IRGC, with Quds Force at its core, is an organisation which oversees and executes Iran's regional interests, maintains linkages with other friendly forces and also works through a system of local proxies. Its effectiveness over time has created linkages with the Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Palestine, Houthis in Yemen, militias in Iraq, Bashar al Assad's forces in Syria and, very importantly, with the Russians in the Middle East. Iran's Middle East strategy was developed through this capability and it gives out the message that it cannot be meddled with.

The US can use a sledgehammer to defeat and destroy Iran and its forces but after the Iraq and Afghanistan experiences, it is aware that victory in such wars does not necessarily belong to the stronger side.

Soleimani had been in the US's crosshairs right from the time the US declared the Quds Force a terror organisation. His operational effectiveness had the US worried but it is learnt that even when opportunities to target him arose in the past, former President Barack Obama desisted from following up with an authorisation simply because the next steps in escalation gave no positive options. That is the issue now as well. While no one in the US laments Soleimani's death, no one is happy with it either since it was not part of a strategy with a focused aim. Is that being fair to President Donald Trump, who is obviously revelling in this achievement?

A short chain of events in Iraq, set off in the last few days of 2019, led to the assassination. US military facilities in Kirkuk (Iraq) were attacked on December 27 by a Shia militia, killing a US contractor. The US responded on December 29, killing 25 militants — Iraq's leadership was extremely upset. This sparked a retaliatory attack on the US base in Taji before a mob attacked the US Embassy compound in Baghdad on December 31. This is a flagship US embassy in the Middle East, spread over 100 acres, and the breach of its security unnerved the US — that is actually all the more reason that any attack on the Quds Force Commander should have been outside Iraq. The US cannot afford to yield



C R Sasikumar

space in Iraq to a Iran-driven popular people's movement — very much a possibility as a consequence of Soleimani's killing.

The question everyone seems to be asking is related to the feasibility of an all-out war. There is no doubt that the domestic political environment of the US is in flux and Trump would risk anything for a fillip to his chances of re-election. However, the US is war weary and if Trump thinks that an all-out war will help his re-election chances, he would be mistaken. A limited set of military actions from time to time — those that exploit US technological superiority — will draw more favourable support. Of course, a lot is contingent upon the nature of Iran's retribution for the death of the man who was often called a "living martyr".

Iran's leadership is aware of its limitations and would wish to stay short of a tipping point, which the US could use to commence an all-out war. For its own larger cause and image, the US would be least concerned about the worldwide economic ramifications of it subsequent actions. Energy price rise, risk to shipping and the economic collapse of the Gulf economies will probably be of less concern than it did in 1990 because the US is no longer dependent on the Middle East for energy. It will, of course, have to be mindful of the worldwide economic impact.

The other question for strategic minds is the nature of a future proxy war in the Middle East. Early reactions from US-based thinkers appear to conclude that a war between the US and Iran will now be direct and beyond proxies. This may not be entirely correct. Weaker nations, such as Iran in this case, choose to fight through proxies who are not exactly unorganised and undisciplined elements. If the US chooses to confront them directly without using its own proxies, it runs the risk of an Afghanistan or an Iraq type of commitment.

Early reactions from US-based thinkers appear to conclude that a war between the US and Iran will now be direct and beyond proxies. This may not be entirely correct. Weaker nations, such as Iran in this case, choose to fight through proxies who are not exactly unorganised and undisciplined elements. If the US chooses to confront them directly without using its own proxies, it runs the risk of an Afghanistan or an Iraq type of commitment.

exactly unorganised and undisciplined elements. If the US chooses to confront them directly without using its own proxies, it runs the risk of an Afghanistan or an Iraq type of commitment. For Iran's proxies, borders remain just lines on maps; they can be crossed at will despite modern surveillance systems. In flat organisations, such as those the proxies are part of, there is minimum control and direction. That is where Iran too runs the risk of overplaying its strategy without presence of a strong and experienced commander like Soleimani, which could lead to a more direct confrontation. An irregular entity such as the Islamic State (IS) lacked air power, armed drones and missiles and yet displayed its conventional war fighting capability. All this will be available if irregular proxies receive a higher level of state support.

Finally, a look at the effect on Indian interests. Energy prices, a diaspora of eight million and \$40 billion in remittances for 5m the core of India's concerns. Energy prices are already on the rise, without even an inkling of the Iranian response. The diaspora presence is mainly in the Gulf countries, which have thus far been largely out of the theatre of proxy war, except for Saudi Arabia. However, this situation is not permanent. It is contingent on the intensity of escalation of the war by proxies and could extend beyond the current sub regions of the conflict, engulfing the UAE, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain. That would be apocalyptic for Indian interests.

The writer, a former corps commander of the Srinagar-based 15 Corps, is chancellor, Central University of Kashmir

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

Trump has increased the risk of a region-wide conflagration sucking in Iraq, Syria and Israel. And he has normalised murder of high officials as a tool of state policy, a precedent whose implications he himself might do well to ponder.

— THE GUARDIAN

Realism behind the rhetoric

Both Trump and Khamenei are realists. There are political constraints on them that limit the pressures of a further escalation of conflict between US and Iran



RAJA MANDALA
BY C RAJA MOHAN

AS US PRESIDENT Donald Trump and the "Supreme Leader" of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, raise the pitch of their rhetoric, it is quite easy to underestimate the political constraints on both leaders that limit the pressures for an escalation.

Khamenei has promised "harsh revenge" for the killing of Major General Qassem Soleimani and Trump responded with the threat to bomb 52 Iranian sites, including its precious cultural heritage. While the world gasped at Trump's threat, he insists that nothing is off limits if Iran takes another American life.

Khamenei certainly can't afford to look weak in the face of an unprecedented provocation from Trump. He, however, would certainly not want to lose his head in trying to save his political face. The Supreme Leader will also have to factor in Trump's unpredictability. Barely 48 hours before Soleimani was killed, Khamenei had dared Trump last week by saying "you can't do a damn thing". Trump's campaign of maximum pressure has put Iran's economy under great strain and deepened domestic political discontent. While the killing of Soleimani helps Khamenei in the near term to close domestic political ranks, a prolonged war with the US could sharpen the Islamic Republic's internal contradictions. For Trump, too, the elimination of Soleimani has played well with his political base. But pushing the confrontation too far carries huge risks for Trump's campaign to retain the White House in the general elections later this year. Like Khamenei, Trump would not want to lose the crown in trying to win a distant war.

Is there some room, then, for de-escalation? US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has repeatedly emphasised that the Administration's strategy is to establish deterrence against future threats to Americans and that it is prepared for de-escalation. Meanwhile, Trump has also sent signals of reassurance to Khamenei by affirming that his Administration has no interest in engineering a "regime change" in Tehran. Through the last few years of his presidency, Trump has often talked about a potential deal with Iran's clerics. And it was Khamenei who spurned Trump's offer of an unconditional dialogue as unacceptable amidst the pressure of sanctions.

Until now, Khamenei had some success in running a proxy war against the US but a direct confrontation would be suicidal. Triggering self-destruction can't be a strategy for Tehran. Despite all the talk of a "third world war", a direct military contest between US and Iran is loaded in America's favour.

Iran's leaders are also realists. Recall the decision of Ayatollah Khamenei, the founder of the Islamic Republic, to accept a ceasefire in the prolonged and bloody war with Iraq in 1988 amidst domestic difficulties. Iran's decision to stop fighting was also influenced

by the brutal use of chemical weapons by Saddam Hussein and the accidental downing of an Iranian airliner by US that killed nearly 290 passengers. Khomeini was convinced that the US was about to destroy his clerical regime. Khomeini's words on "drinking the poison of peace" are very much part of the Islamic Republic's political lexicon. More recently, Khamenei accepted quite a humiliating set of terms in concluding a nuclear deal with the Obama Administration. That Trump wants ever harder terms is another story.

Tehran's first responses to the killing of Soleimani have been measured. One, Iran has resumed uranium enrichment as part of its step-by-step withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear agreement with the international community in response to Trump's decision to tear it up. Second, it has got its political allies in Iraq to get the parliament in Baghdad to pass a resolution demanding an end to US military presence in Iraq.

The two moves ramp up pressure on US allies and mobilise anti-Americanism in the Middle East. The Europeans are deeply committed to the nuclear agreement. They are eager to contribute to the de-escalation of the current crisis if only to save the nuclear deal. But Trump does not set much store by America's traditional alliances like NATO. He did not bother to consult the allies in Europe before taking out Soleimani.

The second move feeds into the declared long-term Iranian objective of driving Americans out of the Gulf and brings us to the ultimate irony of the present crisis. During the 2016 campaign and since, Trump has repeatedly affirmed that he would rather bring the American troops home.

Unlike the security establishment in Washington, Trump does not believe the US needs a permanent military presence in the Middle East in the name of "American global leadership". With the US emerging as a major oil producer and exporter, energy security is no longer a driving force for Trump. For Trump, counter-terrorism is perhaps the only credible reason to sustain a large military footprint in the Middle East. That, arguably, could also be achieved through offshore military presence.

Trump might not be averse to taking US troops off the ground in the Middle East. But he would like to do it on his own terms. In responding to the non-binding resolution in the Iraqi parliament, Trump threatened Iraq with major sanctions if the US withdrawal is not on friendly terms. Trump is also conscious that not everyone in Iraq wants America to leave the country and cede it to Iranian domination. The minorities in Iraq — the Sunni and Kurdish communities — as well as sections of the majority Shia see US presence as critical in ensuring Iraqi sovereignty vis a vis Iran.

Trump's radical departure from the conventional US thinking on the Middle East and the deepening of many regional contradictions make the current crisis very different from those we have seen in the past. While there is always the danger of miscalculation by one or more of the actors, it would be unwise to assume they are irrational.

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PRAKASH SINGH

Proceed with CAA, reject NRC

State miscalculated law's fallout, failed to recognise anger among Muslims

THE AGITATION AGAINST the Citizenship Amendment Act appears to have gone through three phases. In the first phase, it was a protest against its enactment, as there were genuine apprehensions that the Act, followed by a pan-India NRC exercise, would lead to a large section of society, mostly Muslims, being declared illegal migrants/citizens. There was protests in Jamia Millia Islamia and large-scale demonstrations in Assam and other Northeast states. In the second phase, it became a confrontation between students and the police. Allegations of police high-handedness spread and there were sympathetic protests in educational institutions across the country. The CAA remained the trigger, but it was pushed to the background. Student anger was directed against the police and the government. In the third phase, which we are witnessing today, the movement has been hijacked by political opportunists, separatist factions, fundamentalist groups and lumpen elements. The CAA is an excuse; the target is the ruling party.

The government, in retrospect, appears to have seriously miscalculated the fallout of the CAA. Its success on three fronts appears to have made it insensitive to the simmering anger among the Muslim community. The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill 2019, which banned triple talaq, was a good measure for the emancipation of Muslim women from an atrocious practice,

but it antagonised the radical elements. The abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution, ending the special status of Jammu and Kashmir, aggravated the discomfiture of Muslims. Then the Supreme Court verdict on Ayodhya added to the sense of unease. The canard that the judiciary had been influenced to give the disputed plot to the Hindus for the construction of the Ram temple, with some luminaries writing about the alleged flaws in the judgment, added fuel to the fire. All these three developments — the annulment of triple talaq, the abrogation of Article 370 and the Ayodhya verdict — collectively led to a feeling of anger, resentment and frustration among Muslims. The government either was not aware of the depth of Muslim resentment or was not bothered about it and was confident of being able to weather any storm.

The announcement of the National Population Register was unexceptionable, but it was ill-timed. Heavens would not have fallen if it had been delayed by a few months. It has provided further ammunition to the Opposition which has embarked on a disinformation campaign to mislead people.

The police are presently doing a thankless job. If they take action against the agitators, as they did in UP, there are allegations of high-handedness. If they play it safe, as they did in West Bengal, the agitators will have a field day — destroy railway property, burn buses, attack police posts and indulge in

acts of vandalism. It is indeed sad that in most of the states, the governments are not particularly bothered about the destruction of public and private property. The taxpayer's money is nobody's concern.

The Supreme Court had, in the context of state governments not taking effective measures to protect public and private property from being damaged by unruly mobs, constituted two committees, one headed by Justice KT Thomas and the other by F S Nariman, to study the problem. The Thomas Committee gave recommendations regarding the modalities for preventive action and for providing sharper teeth to inquiry/investigation. The Nariman Committee made suggestions regarding the assessment of damages. These were accepted by the Court which clearly said that "the liability will be borne by the actual perpetrators of the crime as well as the organisers of the event giving rise to the liability" and that "exemplary damages may be awarded". Uttar Pradesh is perhaps the first state to have shown the political will to punish those who vandalised property.

The agitation has thrown up some disturbing questions. In UP, according to the police chief, there was a conspiracy to create disturbance. If so, one would like to know its full ramifications. Another senior police officer said that the pattern of protests in the state showed guerrilla tactics. The official version that the police did not open fire, and the fact

that there have been deaths due to bullet injuries need to be reconciled. Reports about the involvement of Popular Front of India (PFI) in the agitation are a matter of grave concern and require in-depth investigation. The Karnataka home minister, speaking about the Mangaluru violence, stated that the attack on police was premeditated and the arson was orchestrated by anti-social elements. It would appear that the roots of the agitation go much deeper. Resentment against CAA was perhaps the proverbial last straw. But the movement has since degenerated into a confrontation between the government and diverse elements opposed to it.

The objections to the Citizenship Act are generally unconvincing. Assam is the only state which has reasons to feel aggrieved. There is substance in the argument that the Act contravenes Clause 6 of the Assam Accord which guaranteed safeguards to "protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people". Reservations on the NRC are understandable. While going ahead with the CAA, the government would do well to scrap the proposal to expand the NRC and explore the possibility of settling refugees in other states across the country which are willing to and in a position to absorb them.

The writer was formerly Director General of Police, Assam

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WHOSE NATION?

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Tableaux of exclusion' (IE, January 6). The government at the Centre is on the backfoot especially in these "excluded states". And that is why it is arguing that nationalism is under threat. Actually, it's the Sangh Parivar's idea of nationalism that is under threat. The Centre-state confrontation goes against federalism.

Anurag Ekka, Ranchi

GRAINS OF TRUTH

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Lifting growth, containing inflation', (IE, January 6). The foodgrain procurement regime under the FCI requires reimagining. The decentralised scheme, wherein participating states procure grains on behalf of the FCI for their projects, must be made more flexible. States should be allowed to expand their procurement basket, incentivise procurement of pulses and millets.

Sudip Kumar Dey, Kolkata

THIS REFERS TO 'Lifting growth, containing inflation' (IE, January 6). There is a need to address certain structural issues such as de facto nationalisation of the grain market, the open ended procurement system and inefficient management of inventory. Steps such as scaling up of the National Warehouse Receipt system, outsourcing stocking operations to the private sector and revisiting the MSP policy could be some

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.

issues to ponder upon.

Sarthak Sonwalkar, Ujjain

BJP IN DELHI

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'BJP to fight Delhi polls in Modi name, CAA agenda' (IE, January 6). It is strange that the BJP's leaders in Delhi could not reach a consensus over a CM candidate for the assembly elections. If the elections to be fought under Narendra Modi's leadership, as announced by Home Minister Amit Shah, will not result in a victory for the party, will it accept that the PM's charisma is on the wane?

Tarsem Singh, Mahilpur