



The Indian EXPRESS

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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Reading between faultlines



SHASHI THAROOR AND SAMIR SARAN

A new, fractured global order is upon us. India's response must evolve accordingly

WINDOW FOR PEACE

Tehran signals intent to avoid escalation of the conflict in Gulf. Washington must seize the opportunity and engage politically

ON WEDNESDAY MORNING Iran delivered the promised retaliatory blow against the killing of Major General Qassem Soleimani by raining more than a dozen missiles at US forces in Iraq. In the tense moment that followed, the much feared military escalation between the US and Iran seemed inevitable. Oil prices spiked and stock markets dipped as the world waited with bated breath for the American response to the missile attack on the US bases. As the dust cleared though, a counter-intuitive possibility came into view — that the Iranian retaliation may have opened a brief window for potential de-escalation of the US-Iran confrontation. Although much uncertainty prevails amidst the continuing room for misjudgement and miscalculation in both Tehran and Washington, a measure of caution seems to be settling down on both capitals as they absorb the full import of a military escalation.

There is no doubt that Iranian leadership had to be seen avenging the killing of Soleimani, if only to salvage its political self-esteem and calm the anger among the multiple militias that were commanded by the departed general. Tehran appears to have carefully calibrated the attack to reduce the possibilities for escalation. While sections of the Iranian media claimed scores of Americans died in the missile attack, US and Iraqi forces reported no American casualties. Having hit back visibly, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei could now claim Tehran has "slapped" Washington on its face. The Iranian foreign minister, Jawad Zarif, quickly affirmed that the attacks on the base "concluded" Iran's retaliation. He also insisted Tehran has no desire for further escalation. President Trump too seemed to step back a bit, by ending the threat to target Iranian cultural sites.

Trump, however, would be well advised not to treat Iran's decision to avoid escalation as some kind of victory. The White House, instead, should try and find ways to turn the temporary pause into an opportunity for not only de-escalation but also a long overdue direct political engagement with Iran on the future of the Gulf. It is also a moment for Delhi to consider a more active role in promoting regional peace, for a war in the Gulf will push the struggling Indian economy into the abyss. India's good relations with both the US and Iran positions Delhi well to undertake that exercise. To be sure, Prime Minister Narendra Modi can't overestimate his leverage over Trump and Khamenei and India's ability to influence the course of an entrenched conflict between US and Iran. India's high stakes in the Gulf, however, demand that Modi try his hand at regional peace. Doing it in partnership with other regional countries like Saudi Arabia and like-minded powers like Europe and Japan might yet make some difference to the political outcomes in the Gulf.

WEATHERING THE STORM

State of Climate of India report should occasion interventions to make people resilient to extreme weather events

AN INDIA METEOROLOGICAL Department (IMD) report, released on Monday, confirms what climate scientists have been claiming for more than half a decade — extreme weather events have become par for the course in the country. The Statement on Climate of India in 2019 notes that excessive heat, cold and rainfall killed 1,562 people during the year. The mean temperature last year was 0.36 above normal while the country also recorded excess rainfall during both the southwest and northeast monsoons. Intense dry spells, even droughts, were interspersed with floods in several parts of the country — a phenomenon that policymakers will increasingly be called to factor while drawing up projects in areas as diverse as agriculture, urban planning, water resources and disaster management.

The IMD report should be seen in conjunction with long-term meteorological trends. The World Meteorological Organisation, for example, reckons that the decade starting 2011 remains on track to be the warmest on record. At the same time, data from the European Center for Medium Range Forecast shows that the relative humidity in the mid-troposphere in the Subcontinent has increased by about 2 per cent in the past four decades. Such warming has increased the capacity of oceans to form intense cyclonic disturbances. Last year, as the IMD report notes, the Indian Ocean witnessed eight cyclones. Ipso facto, cyclones don't kill but buildings can turn hazardous during such extreme weather events. Last year, in Odisha for instance, winds blowing at more than 140 kilometres per hour ripped off roofs and window frames in modern houses and also exposed the vulnerability of the mud and bamboo houses of the poor. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs does have guidelines for climate-friendly construction. But planners in coastal cities and towns rarely pay heed to its provisions.

This year, Kerala, southern Karnataka and Gujarat were heavily deficient till July. But within a few days in the last week of July, these states recorded surplus rainfall. For farmers, such vagaries mean disruptions in the entire cropping cycle. Increasing their resilience calls for efficient rainwater storage and use. The changing dynamics of weather also demand cooperation between states that share a river basin. This year, Maharashtra and Karnataka bickered over opening the gates of the Almatti dam on the Krishna. By the time the two states agreed over the amount of water to be discharged from the dam, the damage was already done. It's clear that dealing with exceptional weather will require interventions at the national, state and local levels. The Statement on Climate of India 2019 drives home the urgency of such interventions.

DELAYED ACTION FUSE

Over a decade after it was published, Mohammed Hanif's 'A Case of Exploding Mangoes' sets off the Pakistan army

ELEVEN YEARS AFTER Mohammed Hanif's debut novel *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* was published and won a Commonwealth prize for best book, it has been discovered by the Pakistan army. This has to be the slowest-burning fuse in military history. Actually, the book has been found in translation, after the Urdu version appeared last year. According to Hanif, its publisher Maktaba Danial was raided by persons claiming to be from the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), who confiscated all copies and threatened to return to secure a list of booksellers who carry the novel.

Hanif's story, told in a satirical vein, is set at the time when Gen Zia-ul-Haq's reign of 11 years ended in mid-air after he boarded Pak One, his C-130 Hercules, accompanied by a case of mangoes. It is a coming of age novel like Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English, August*, which scandalised the IAS. But while Chatterjee anonymised his characters and set them in the fictional town of Madna, Hanif's story begins in the Pakistan Air Force Academy, from where he graduated himself, includes historical figures from Pakistan and the US, and even features a cameo appearance by Osama Bin Laden.

Hanif suggests that a defamation notice recently served on his publisher by Zia's son may have something to do with the raid and confiscations. In a Pakistan where civil society has become vigilant and assertive over the years, brazenly repressive steps, allegedly taken by an intelligence agency, would have been unusual enough. But it is totally bizarre that character assassination, if any, went unnoticed for 11 years in English but was instantly detected in Urdu by the intelligence community. We eagerly await a Punjabi translation which, given Zia's roots in Jalandhar, can only cut even closer to the bone.

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY will stumble into the third decade of this century amidst much uncertainty and anxiety about the future. There is a sense that the gains of the past century are being undone, that grievances — real or perceived — are being manipulated by "strongmen leaders" who have gained currency across the world, and that subsequent generations are likely to be worse off than their ancestors. Many blame our current predicament on these leaders, who are seen to have undermined the norms and institutions that their predecessors were instrumental in establishing. Yet these populist figures are not drivers of change; they reflect it.

How did we get here? It is increasingly clear to communities and countries that the distribution of agency in the international system is inequitable and no longer reflects contemporary realities. It is this anger and disappointment, directed against globalisation, that has powered the rise of these strongmen and women. While the project of economic integration has successfully reduced inequality among countries, its domestic consequences were given insufficient consideration by those evangelising the old global economic order. Should exclusionary economics and the rise of nationalism really surprise us when 10 per cent of the global population controls 84 per cent of its wealth? As the fourth industrial revolution continues to accelerate the demise of manufacturing and implicate organised labour, a deep sense of economic insecurity is fuelling perverse socio-political developments around the world.

The affected individual has found an ally in digital technologies. Ordinary people now possess a loud megaphone to communicate with each other and with the state, sometimes supporting the establishment, and often undermining it. From the Arab Spring at the turn of the past decade to the ongoing protests in Hong Kong, digital technologies have erased the asymmetry between the voice of those in power and those governed. This understand-

ing of digital technologies is now being reassessed as well. The very tools that allow communities to mobilise are fast becoming instruments to subdue and control them. Today's technologies, defined by ubiquitous surveillance and algorithmic decision making, are concentrating wealth and power into the few hands capable of designing and deploying them. The coming decade will inevitably witness a new tussle between agency and control.

Taken together, the anxieties around technology, globalisation and representation have left democracies around the world struggling to contain discord and discontent. Once characterised by the rule of elite institutions arranged around a set of established principles, democracy's immediate future is being recast by the changing mood on the streets that is challenging many old norms and values. We are all struggling to define this moment. Scholars and scientists are certainly trying, describing the political climate in democracies variously as illiberal, authoritarian, partial or empty. However it is theorised, it is clear that the texture of democracy will undergo a dramatic shift in the time it takes to fully appreciate the limitations of today's political projects.

As political ideologies fail to provide purpose and meaning to individuals, they are increasingly finding refuge in identity and religion. The thin line separating church and state is collapsing rapidly. Dislocated from the factory floor and distant from the corridors of power, individuals who once organised themselves under an imagined state of cosmopolitanism are now rallying around a far narrower, tribal sense of self, often located in specificities of place, religion and ethnicity.

This fracturing of the political-economic consensus has diminished the international community's capacity for collective action. The most crucial failure perhaps relates to mitigating climate change. The 2020s are certain to be a crucial decade for climate action and

politics. Once a priority only for scientists and activists, the impact of climate change is now more visible and more devastating than any time in history. Consider, for instance, that climate refugees now outnumber those fleeing conflict or looking for economic opportunity. Individuals, businesses and states remain at war with their environment and constrained by short-term thinking in their limited efforts to end this conflict.

When the world is struggling to manage the most pressing existential risk, is it any surprise that other international regimes are equally gridlocked? Twentieth-century rules relating to trade, connectivity, innovation, peace and security have all become forums for the application of perverse unilateral state behaviour. Instead of searching for shared interests that can make these regimes fit for purpose in the 21st century, states are locked into an increasingly destructive zero-sum race.

In these challenging times, defined by what we characterise in our new book as the "New World Disorder", we cannot overstate how important it is for us in New Delhi to re-think the paradigms that are challenging our world order. Today, the need is for India's reflexive and discrete responses to these challenges to evolve into the creation of a coalition of like-minded leaders who will use their individual and institutional capacities to respond to the demands of global governance in the 21st century.

This century will take shape in an era of strong leaders, strong corporations and strong communities. It will be an era where cooperation is sporadic, where contest is frequent and consensus is elusive. We hope that India will find the courage to take fresh new initiatives to catalyse a new consensus for our world.

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As political ideologies fail to provide purpose and meaning to individuals, they are increasingly finding refuge in identity and religion. The thin line separating church and state is collapsing rapidly.



SARJAN P SHAH

DRONE-DELIVERED INJUSTICE

Soleimani's assassination has no ethical justification, brings global order to the brink

THE SHIA MUSLIMS are estimated to account for only between 10-15 per cent of the global Muslim community. They are and have always been a persecuted minority within the wider Muslim world. While there is no doubt that atrocities have been committed by both sides during this sectarian struggle, the Shia perceive themselves as besieged and fighting an existential conflict. Since 1979, Iran has seen itself, correctly, as the only major Shia power.

Much of Iran's post-revolution foreign policy has centered on three major axes — pushing back against the American "imperialist" influence in the Middle East, supporting the Palestinian cause against Israel, and protecting the Shia minority wherever they may be found. Most of the links that the Quds Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) maintains with militia groups in places like Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Kurdistan, Iraq and Yemen — as well as political actors in places like Bahrain — are designed to aid one of these axes of foreign policy.

Iran sees American interference as meddling and consistently disadvantageous to poor and developing countries and it fully buys into the leftist narrative of a 20th century replete with examples of American neo-imperialism. This is why Iran feels justified in zealously preventing its own return to the America-dominated era of the Shah of Persia as well as combating American influence anywhere in the region. On the Palestinian question, it seems to be clear: Unlike some of the wealthy Gulf states and even Saudi Arabia (who have largely paid lip-service to the plight of the Palestinians), Iran rages against the injustices of 1948 and the continued "occupation" of Palestine.

A further point that Iranian diplomats often make is the arbitrary and unjust nature of the current nuclear status quo. With the five original nuclear powers being joined surreptitiously by Israel, India and Pakistan, Iran feels isolated and vulnerable. After all, even Saudi Arabia purportedly has standing arrangements with Pakistan for nuclear materials and hardware. In response, Iran claims to have mastered the use of asymmetric warfare — sleeper cells, suicide squads, IEDs, covert assassinations and logistical support for irregular troops. While these activities have much in common with al Qaeda, Taliban and ISIS, they represent an entirely different thing. Apocalyptic groups like ISIS have at their root a diabolical, end-of-all type of aim, while Iran's activities have clear rational or at least rationalisable motives that are within the normal range of a nation state's global purpose.

As such, General Qassem Soleimani's activities and career have to be seen within this context: He was a legitimate officer and a soldier of Iran. He was not only a veteran of the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, but also led the fight against Sunni extremists and ISIS in Iraq, and countered Sunni-Wahabi extremism across the Middle East. No doubt America was his enemy in the past, but they also worked with him. It is indeed telling of the status quo before he was assassinated that US generals remember having parked their jets next to his at the Baghdad International Airport.

Whether Soleimani's past makes him a likely war criminal or not, the US cannot abrogate to itself the right to mete out drone-delivered justice, and so, any arguments in favour of an ethical justification for the assassination based on his past are empty. We used to have imperfect, yet principled approaches to such people — the International Criminal Court and prosecution under the Geneva Convention.

imperfect, yet principled approaches to such people — the International Criminal Court and prosecution under the Geneva Convention. This is a purely political act of open hostility by a member state of the international community and a largely unprovoked one at that. Public international law justifies the use of armed force only in response to armed aggression, but a small allowance for limited pre-emptive action exists where there is a clear and present danger of impending attacks. This argument has, throughout the war on terror, been stretched to the point of breaking. In the deadly and opaque world of espionage and disinformation, the definition of a perceived threat has become meaningless.

The US action suffers from other disadvantages: While Donald Trump's self-touted "unpredictability" does make strategic sense, it serves only to weaken the norms that allow nations to conduct commerce together and share in each others' culture and values. Reducing international relations to a game theory-based confrontation is dangerous. While irresponsibly withdrawing from large parts of the world, abandoning the US's NATO allies in Eastern Europe and demolishing its diplomatic ties with nations, big and small, Trump has now also used US military power to illegitimately assassinate a senior, if dubious, member of the Iranian government. It is only to be hoped that Iran sees it fit not to respond with vengeance at all costs, for that will only bring the world closer to a catastrophic conflict.

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JANUARY 9, 1980, FORTY YEARS AGO

AN INDIRA VICTORY
INDIRA GANDHI'S PARTY further improved on the massive majority it has already achieved in the elections to the seventh Lok Sabha. With the results of 47 seats yet to come in, the Congress (I) needed 28 seats more to achieve the two-thirds majority necessary for pushing through important constitutional amendments. The Congress (I) would have crossed the 362 mark — which gives it a majority — during the day, but for the stiff resistance it met from the Left Front in West Bengal and from the Lok Dal in several constituencies in Uttar Pradesh and the Janata in some seats in Bihar.

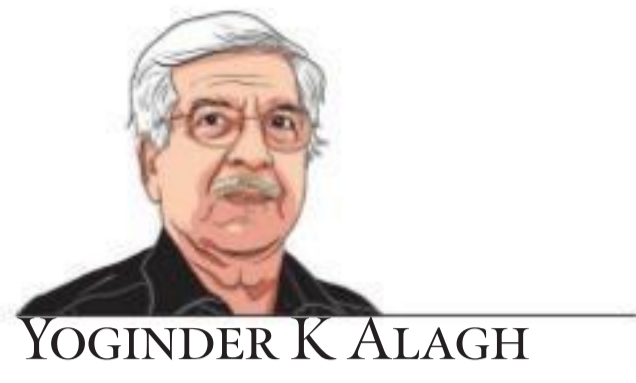
STRONG CENTRE
REGIONAL PARTIES HAVE taken a big knock in this election. Since 1967, they have been a regular feature. The AIADMK in Tamil Nadu had 18 seats in the Lok Sabha; this time its count is only two. The DMK has won 16 but did not present itself as a regional party; it rode the bandwagon of Indira Gandhi. The Akalis in Punjab had nine seats in the 1977 election but has won only one this time. The Karnataka Congress of Devaraj Urs, which merged with the Congress later, has none compared to 10 last time. Biju Patnaik's strength of 11 from Orissa in the Lok Sabha after his parting with the Janata has been reduced to one. This means that the people

have risen above regional considerations and have preferred an all-India party so that there could be a strong Centre, without which, they believe, there can be no stability.

ASSAM RESTIVE AGAIN
THE SPECTRE OF linguism haunts Assam. The frontier state has had three language riots since Independence — one in the early Fifties, another at the outset of Sixties and the third in the beginning of Seventies — and several skirmishes at regular intervals. A series of clashes, both in upper and lower Assam, during the last few days are now threatening to plunge the state into the vortex of a fourth major language conflict.

Notes from a VC's diary

JNU is one of India's great universities. Its autonomy — at all levels — must be nurtured and replicated



YOGINDER K ALAGH

INSTEAD OF DESTROYING the one great university we have, we should realise what a great university JNU is and focus on building many more such centres of learning.

My country has been kind to me. Returning with a doctoral degree and after teaching at the University of Pennsylvania, "the ivy'st of the ivys", I worked for a couple of years at IIM-Calcutta. When I returned to mainstream academia, I joined a new research institute in Western India. I was an adviser at the Planning Commission, heading its powerful Perspective Planning Division — setting agricultural and industrial prices — and later member of the commission, and a minister. You name it, I did it, on deputation from my academic nest. But my best stint in Delhi was as vice-chancellor JNU.

I was in Valencia, Spain, arguing with a global group that we in India also have globally competitive industrial clusters that were discovered in Italy by Piore and Sable. P K Laheri, then industries commissioner in Gujarat, knocked on my room at night and said, "Delhi wants to get in touch with you". The secretary, MHRD, told me I was selected as VC of JNU. Will I accept? Of course I will.

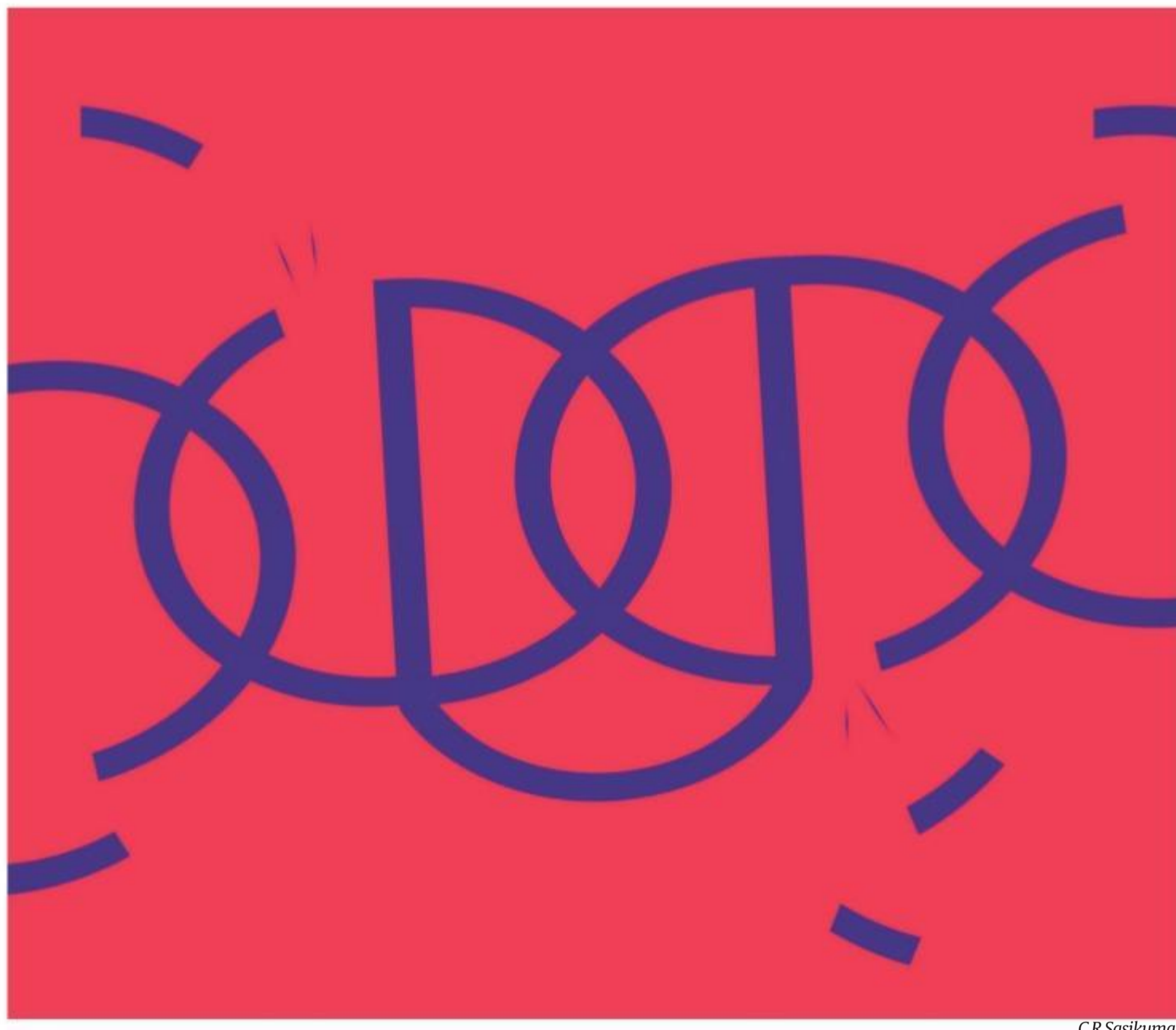
On December 5, 1992, I landed up at the small, lovely VC's Lodge and after getting the windows opened, I went to my office. At lunch time, dispensing with security, I walked to a hostel, picked up my plate and sat down to eat. It turned out that the students union in 1984, when the police was called in to the campus, had passed a resolution that they would break the VC's leg if he came to a hostel. Once I ate, they came to me and said, isn't the food terrible? No, the dal, roti and a subzi is good. But the water is bad. Why? Isn't it filtered? No filter. The university engineer was called. He said they break the cooler. They promised not to. Give us two coolers. I said you get one. Look after it and will get the second.

Soon, another practice started: I was expected to go to each hostel, every semester, or face an agitation. Then they would call me at night to chair after-dinner meetings. Here, the outsiders would be invited: Lal Krishna Advani, Comrade Vinod Mishra, who had just accepted that non-violent politics was also an acceptable tactic, younger Hurriyat leaders and the like. A meeting had to continue until the problem was "solved". In other words, the last question had been answered, say by 2 am. A visiting Japanese scholar described the JNU Students Union as one of the most democratic societies in the world.

Soon after I joined, the union executive went on strike and took out a dharna. I went to them and they were chanting Kabir's *dohas* to make fun of the administration. I said, why not protest after class hours? VC you want to save the system: we want to destroy it. I want you to be effective in whatever you want to do. The system won't fall if you bunk classes. Don't give us lectures VC, we want water in the hostels. It is your responsibility. Of course but give me time. Get lost, VC.

We were getting less water. Why don't we dig for groundwater? The wells dry up.

The Rohillas had retreated from these hills because of water shortage. I was not a Rohilla and had no intention of retreating. Satellite imagery showed us the spots to dig but the water is 300 feet deep. No worries. Dig deep tubewells. I come from a state where temple



C R Sasikumar

bells ring if you get water at 300 feet.

It is a special place. The IIMs and IITs also select students after national tests, but here it's a wide area, ranging from Indian languages to biotechnology. My rector, Asis Datta, was to patent the first Indian gene map. Thousands of young people apply and we took in only 900 and 100 more from other countries. She would be a landless labourer's daughter doing Japanese and would not have the money to pay the hostel food bill. Despite the subsidy of free cooking fuel and cooks, the wardens want their money for they have to buy the veggies. Two thousand-plus meals a day. We would find ways of funding the kids until the scholarships started coming. My wife would check my savings bank account.

Then there came a day of reckoning. The Academic Council was to meet to discuss a Ford grant for the SIS and some other controversial matters. The president of the students union met me at night at the VC's lodge and said we won't let the meeting take place. I told him, you are a member of the council, come and object. We will set up a committee with you in it. No Sir. In the morning, I was told they have blocked the Entrance. I called the Dean. Call the police! No. Why, they will do what we say. Listen I am a fauji's son. Our boys will throw a stone at them and they will go berserk. Finally, I decided to appeal to their idealism. When they stopped me, I sat down on satyagraha. Soon, over a hundred teachers were there. I write to the chancellor, saying I have handed over charge and asked the finance officer to deduct my pay when I am in protest. They gave up the next day, not able to stand the moral pressure.

In the jubilee year, I wanted to celebrate in style. G Parthasarthy, the first VC and P N Haksar did the honours. The students union said we are against celebrations and other capitalist practices. I negotiated with them.

Last year, a consultant came to meet me. He was commissioned to give a report on how to build globally eminent universities and since JNU had done it in my days, he wanted the 'formula'. There isn't one: A great university is built with autonomy and accountability. Not only that of the students, teachers and karmacharis, but of the administration, the VC and MHRD.

They agreed to protest and withdraw.

As a minister, I went to a forum meeting in Hong Kong. A young TV broadcaster from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation interviewed me. She said, don't you recognise me? I was joint secretary of JNUSU, removed for sloganeering at the jubilee function. I said you were not wearing patented shoes. I was a jholawala, minister.

Then there was the day when I was having my morning chai after my jog in the JNU hill and reading the paper, I started laughing. My wife asked, what's the joke. I told her of a news item that a JNU boy was asked about a problem and he said we will solve it. The correspondent said but DU has given up and this kid said, "We are JNU, the best university in India". I told her we will make it, because they have decided. Sure enough, we were named the first Indian university to make the top 100 globally and I became a part of a select global rectors group. We met every quarter to plan out higher education in the world.

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The youth are idealistic. They want change. It is good that they do. Otherwise, we may not have discovered fire. Engineers and managers encourage improvement based on the present. But great universities have to conjure a better future. The name of the game is to build many more JNUs and to nurture the mother JNU.

The writer was vice-chancellor of JNU and has been a Union minister

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Several lawmakers are working on a resolution barring the White House from escalating the conflict without congressional blessing. While appropriate, such efforts to rein in executive war-making powers have proved insufficient since the 9/11 attacks." — THE NEW YORK TIMES

Empathy for the Other

It is for majority community to realise its duty not to discriminate against minorities



DUSHYANT DAVE

THE NATION is in a crisis. The polarisation brought about by a series of legislation, judgments and executive action is dividing the nation. India, for the first time since 1947, is facing a direct confrontation between hardliners and liberals, between political ideologies, and sadly, between the majority and minority communities among its great people. All this was avoidable and can still be repaired. But that will take a herculean effort from those occupying high legislative, executive and judicial offices. These people will have to rise above political and short-sighted considerations.

One shudders at the thought of the final outcome if the slide is not contained. A large section of the society, especially those belonging to the minority community and among them the Muslims, are feeling marginalised. They are justified. Unfortunately, we have not heeded the warnings given by some of the greatest leaders on the eve of Independence and before we became a republic. B R Ambedkar warned us on November 4, 1948, with the prophetic but disturbing words: "To diehards who have developed a kind of fanaticism against minority protection I would like to say two things. One is that minorities are an explosive force which, if it erupts, can blow up the whole fabric of the State. The history of Europe bears ample and appalling testimony to this fact. The other is that the minorities in India have agreed to place their existence in the hands of the majority... They have loyally accepted the rule of the majority, which is basically a communal majority and not a political majority. It is for the majority to realise its duty not to discriminate against minorities. Whether the minorities will continue or will vanish must depend upon this habit of the majority. The moment the majority loses the habit of discriminating against the minority, the minorities can have no ground to exist. They will vanish."

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while laying the foundation stone of the Ambedkar Memorial on March 21, 2016, offered glowing tributes to Ambedkar and compared him to Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela. He said: "should see him as 'Vishwa Manav' not limit him to our borders. The way the world sees Martin Luther King, Babasaheb should be seen like that. Babasaheb was the guardian of human values. In the pages of history I see two people as really special — Sardar Patel and Babasaheb Ambedkar... The time has come when we must once again strengthen the unity of our society. And we can learn about this from Babasaheb."

One only hopes that the prime minister will pay heed to Ambedkar.

Patel, whom the PM claims to revere, while discussing the report of Advisory Committee on Minorities etc. on May 25, 1949 said: "It is for us who happen to be in a majority to think about what the minori-

ties feel, and how we in their position would feel if we are treated in the manner they are treated." A number of legislation and executive decisions, including on triple talaq, Article 370 and the relegation of Jammu and Kashmir into two Union Territories, and the Citizenship Amendment Act have created a feeling of insecurity amongst the 150-million strong Muslim community of the country.

The freedom of speech and expression and the right to peacefully demonstrate are Fundamental Rights, but the right to protest to ensure constitutional morality transcends all these rights. It becomes the duty of every citizen to protect the Constitution and its values. Protests in this regard cannot be wished away, ridiculed or suppressed by unconstitutional methods, including by the brute use of the police. Such methods will be counter productive and will necessarily create a piquant situation, which must be avoided. Violence must be abjured, of course. But violence to stop legitimate protests also deserves equal condemnation. Thousands of people have died in the Islamic world in suicide bombings, including in Pakistan. The minority community in India has stuck to the constitutional goals and methods to articulate their point of view.

In his statement in court at the Rivonia trial (April 1964), Mandela justified the creation of the movement of Umkhonto. He said: "I, and the others who started the organisation, did so for two reasons. Firstly, we believed that as a result of Government policy, violence by the African people had become inevitable, and that unless responsible leadership was given to canalise and control the feelings of our people, there would be outbreaks of terrorism which would produce an intensity of bitterness and hostility between the various races of this country which is not produced even by war. Secondly, we felt that without violence there would be no way open to the African people to succeed in their struggle against the principle of white supremacy. All lawful modes of expressing opposition to this principle had been closed by legislation, and we were placed in a position in which we had either to accept a permanent state of inferiority, or to defy the government. We chose to defy the law. We first broke the law in a way which avoided any recourse to violence; when this form was legislated against, and then the government resorted to a show of force to crush opposition to its policies, only then did we decide to answer violence with violence. But the violence which we chose to adopt was not terrorism."

He then quoted from the Manifesto of Umkhonto (1961): Time comes in the life of any nation when there remain only two choices — submit or fight. That time has now come to South Africa. We shall not submit and we have no choice but to hit back by all means in our power in defence of our people, our future, and our freedom."

I do not subscribe to these words. But history should not be forgotten, it has uncanny ways of repeating.

The writer is president, the Supreme Court of Bar Association of India. Views expressed are personal



SRINIVAS

A history of violence

JNU has been used by the Left to further its political agenda

THE RECENT INCIDENT at Jawaharlal Nehru University can be understood only in the backdrop of the incidents of violence and chaos that have been going on for the last 50 years. The Left considers this university its stronghold and since its establishment (April 22, 1969), it has dominated JNU's politics. Frequent violent episodes have occurred in this period.

The young today might incorrectly assume that JNU has been in the headlines only after the coming of a non-Left government in 2014. The *Economic and Political weekly*, a journal held in high regard by communists, carried an article on July 9, 1983, which stated: "JNU is again in news. News of the smallest incidents JNU finds prominent place in the media. This time even the BBC was fascinated by JNU."

In 1983, leftist politics on campus became so violent and uncontrollable that the university had to be closed for a year. Even the leftist masters of propaganda will not be able to accuse someone else for the large-scale violence of that period — no other ideologies, especially the nationalist one, had been allowed to enter JNU at the time. The then vice-chancellor, P N Srivastava, told the media that rowdy students had forcefully entered his house, destroyed his property and looted his

35-year deposits. Harjit Singh, who was the warden of Jhelum Hostel, witnessed the horrors of a rampaging mob of communists breaking into his house. These teachers were accused by leftist students of being "nationalists". In this violence, teachers who subscribed to the Left ideology were engaged in instigating the students and making plans for them. After this incident, a contingent of paramilitary forces had to be deployed in the campus for a fairly long time.

It is worth noting that during the Emergency, when there was opposition to the authoritarian government all over the country, a section of the communists of JNU were silent. This was because a major left party had declared its support for the Emergency. Many major incidents of violence also occurred in the 1990s. In 2000, a sensational case of violence in JNU was alleged in Parliament by BJP MP B C Khanduri. In the open auditorium of JNU, a *mushaira* was organised by leftist organisations. They had called in poets from Pakistan. There some couplets were sung describing India as bad and Pakistan as good, and from the stage, lines were read condemning India's action in the recent Kargil war. Two Indian soldiers — who were on leave — were sitting in audience and had themselves taken part in Kargil. They stood up to oppose what

was happening. The leftists beat them up and threw them outside the main gate.

In 2005, there was a controversy on the arrival of the then Prime Minister of India to JNU, which resulted in violence. In 2010, when 76 CRPF jawans were killed in a Maoist attack in Dantewada, there was mourning across the country. But at the Godavari Dhaba in JNU, it was alleged that Left groups celebrated the event. In 2013, there was a celebration of "Mahisasura Day" and a pamphlet was distributed which disparaged Durga. Naturally the sentiments of Hindus and Sikhs were hurt by this programme.

In 2016, in JNU, the incident of the alleged slogan of "Bharat tere tukde honge" on the death anniversary of the terrorist Afzal Guru is deeply engraved in the memory of our society. Among those anti-India slogans, there was also "Aaein Hindustan ka, manzoor nahi, manzoor nahi". "Aaein" means constitution in Persian.

The destructive politics played by the anti-India forces, using JNU as a platform, has three targets — the unity and integrity of its faith and culture and the Constitution.

A university is meant to be a centre for study and research. But for the last two-and-a-half months, almost all educational activities in JNU have ceased due to aggression by some

people who claim to belong to the Left. These include teachers, students and external elements as well. The main building of the JNU administration has been occupied for the last 60 days. They also interrupted the semester examination to be held in November-December. Apart from preventing the students from going to their classrooms, these people used pressure from teachers and administrators who subscribe to Left ideology. In order to justify their actions, they sometimes mention the hostel fee as their issue, at others the withdrawal of Article 370 and more recently, the CAA.

Students affiliated to Left groups in JNU issued a decree that no student will register herself for the new semester starting January 1. If the students don't register, then neither the class nor any examination will be conducted in the university.

The country has begun to realise that any idea that challenges the unity and integrity of India seems to have a connection with the leftists who use JNU as their base. It cannot be a mere coincidence that Naxalite, Maoist, jihadi and separatist forces always appear to find some kind of support from the leftists of JNU.

The writer is the national joint organising secretary of the ABVP

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BETTER TOGETHER

THIS REFERS to the article, 'Friendship and progress' (IE, January 7). Amartya Sen has zeroed in on the need for collaboration in the progress of civilisation with finesse. A Nobel laureate himself, he knows best the power of synergy in unravelling recondite issues that, perhaps, is not always possible by the genius of one person alone. Perhaps that's also why the Nobel Prize is, more often than not, the result of teamwork. Eminent minds should always come in communion with each other to spawn seminal ideas. Indeed, where would mathematics still be if Hardy had not discovered the great Ramanujan?
Suhail Nazir Khan, Kashmir

NO COP-OUT NOW

THIS REFERS to the editorial, 'Whose police?' (IE, January 8). The whole exercise of police (in action inside the JNU campus) is a stark reminder of Gujarat in 2002 when the police went on a rampage without any brakes applied by the state leadership. The situation in JNU is different. The state is not in as strong a position as in Gujarat then. Also, recently, the rule of the BJP across the nation has met with some serious setbacks electorally and the student unrest is mounting. Unlike the citizens in Gujarat who would gulp BJP's arguments, it is confronted now by a community of students and teachers whose eyes are wide open and who are better equipped to confront the state.
Ashok Rajwade, Mumbai.

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.

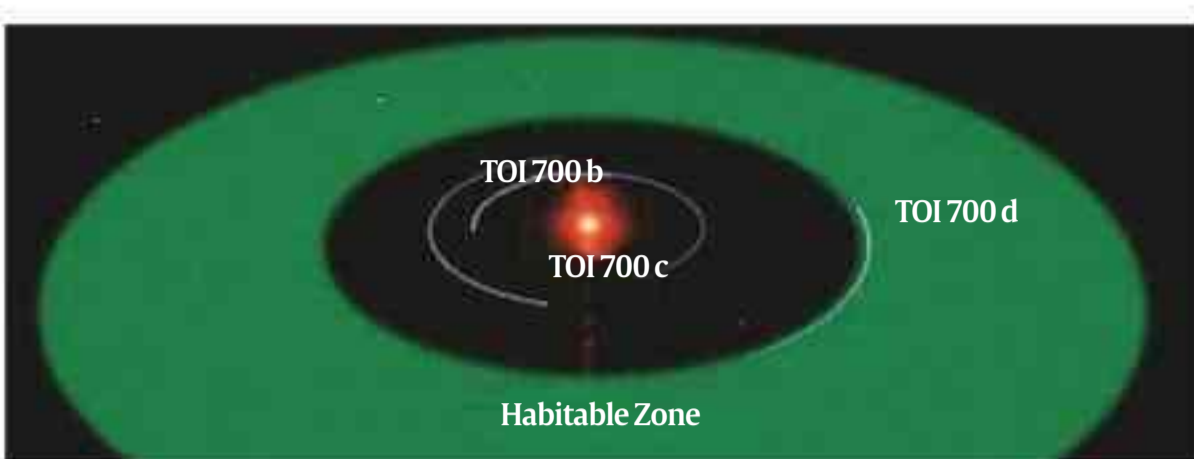
MUSLIM QUESTION

THIS REFERS to the editorial, 'Let's reclaim the Muslims' (IE, January 8). How is it that despite the fact that Islam is based on one God, one prophet and one holy book, two adjacent Muslims countries don't live in harmony with each other? And, there is no need for Indian Muslims to be involved with the RSS — it is not the government. The RSS is just an organisation. Involvement is neither required nor fruitful as it has a different ideology and an exclusionary view. What is needed is the involvement of Indian Muslims in government processes and their mainstreaming in society, in order to strengthen economic base.
H Upadhyay, via e-mail

THIS WORD MEANS

GOLDBLOCKS ZONE

Where a planet is just the right distance from its star to sustain liquid water — and possibly life



The three planets of the TOI 700 system orbit a small, cool M dwarf star. TOI 700 d is the first Earth-size habitable-zone world discovered by TESS. NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center

ON TUESDAY, NASA reported the discovery of an Earth-size planet, named TOI 700 d, orbiting its star in the "habitable zone". A habitable zone, also called the "Goldilocks zone", is the area around a star where it is not too hot and not too cold for liquid water to exist on the surface of surrounding planets. Obviously, our Earth is in the Sun's Goldilocks zone. If Earth were where the dwarf planet Pluto is, all its water would freeze; on the other hand, if Earth were where Mercury is, all its water would boil off.

Life on Earth started in water, and water is a necessary ingredient for life as we know it. So, when scientists search for the possibility of alien life, any rocky exoplanet in the habitable zone of its star is an exciting find.

The newest such planet was found by NASA's Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS) mission, which it launched in 2018. Very few such Earth-size planets have been found so far, including some by NASA's Kepler mission, and this one is the first such discovery by

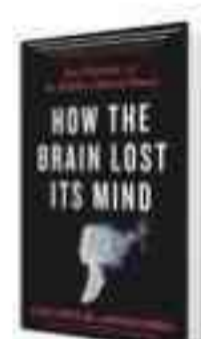
TESS. The find was confirmed by the Spitzer Space Telescope, which sharpened the measurements that TESS had made, such as orbital period and size.

TOI 700 d measures 20% larger than Earth. It orbits its star once every 37 days and receives an amount of energy that is equivalent to 86% of the energy that the Sun provides to Earth. The star, TOI 700, is an "M dwarf" located just over 100 light-years away in the southern constellation Dorado, is roughly 40% of our Sun's mass and size, and has about half its surface temperature. Two other planets orbit the star — TOI 700 b, which is almost exactly Earth-size, probably rocky, and which completes an orbit every 10 days, and TOI 700 c, the middle planet, which is 2.6 times larger than Earth, is probably gas-dominated, and orbits every 16 days. TOI 700 d is the outermost planet, and the only one in the star's habitable zone. NASA said future missions may be able to identify whether the planets have atmospheres and, if so, even determine their compositions.

TIP FOR READING LIST

WHAT IS SICKNESS OF THE MIND?

IN THE 19th century, European society was swept with neurosyphilis, or syphilis of the brain. Marked by an ability to mimic the symptoms of many mental or physical illnesses, the disease came to be known as the "Great Imitator". Its sweep included artists and writers including Guy de Maupassant, Vincent van Gogh, and the Marquis de Sade. It "produced a rapidly expanding wave of debilitating insanity that filled asylums and cut lives short in a grotesque and frightening way". At the same time, there was another outbreak. This was of bizarre behaviours resembling epilepsy, but with no identifiable source in the body. Neurologists referred to it as hysteria.



Harvard neurology professor Allan H Ropper and University of Massachusetts Amherst mathematician Brian Burrell look at the way the twin outbreaks were tackled then, and what we know of these conditions now. What is the difference

between a sick mind and a sick brain? Does madness lie in the brain or in the mind? These are among the questions addressed by Ropper and Burrell in *How the Brain Lost its Mind*.

Today, syphilitic madness is accepted as a destructive disease of the brain while hysteria is taken to reside solely in the mind, but the book explores how neuroscience and brain scans alone cannot account for a robust mental life, or a deeply disturbed one. The authors note that after a cure for syphilis was found, popular awareness about brain-based disorders receded. "Do we really understand the difference

between a sick brain and a sick mind? In setting out to write a book about neurosyphilis, we ended up with a book about sex, hysteria, psychosis, hypnosis, psychoanalysis, mind cures, synthetic dyes, sensation fiction, psychotropic drugs, genius, and madness," they write.

SIMPLY PUT

Voting at the GST Council

The tradition of deciding by consensus has been broken, and the Council could now see voting on other issues as well. What are the rules of voting, and can the Centre's view be defeated by states?

AANCHAL MAGAZINE
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 8

BREAKING THE tradition of consensus-based decisions in its 37 earlier meetings, the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council voted for the first time in its 38th meeting held on December 18. The proposal to have a higher single rate for lotteries went through by a majority, with 21 votes in favour.

The GST Council is a federal body that aims to bring together states and the Centre on a common platform for the nationwide rollout of the indirect tax reform. With the precedent of voting now established, consensus at the Council could be challenged again in the future.

The rules of voting in the GST Council are such that the odds are stacked in favour of the Centre in the normal course. However, in case of a vote, any disagreements within the ruling coalition at the Centre may bring its support below the three-fourths majority that is needed for the passage of a decision.

First GST Council vote

In the 38th meeting, Kerala's Finance Minister Thomas Isaac pushed for voting on the proposal for a uniform rate for lotteries. A total of 21 members of the GST Council voted in favour of a uniform rate; seven (including Kerala, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Puducherry) voted against; and three members abstained — paving the way for a single 28% rate effective March 1. Currently, a GST rate of 12% is levied for state-run lotteries and 28% for state-authorized lotteries.

After the meeting, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, who heads the Council, said "every attempt was made to



The 38th GST Council meeting last month saw voting for the first time. ANI

keep that set tradition (of consensus) alive"; however, the Council was reminded that the "rules allow and that tradition was not part of the rulebook", and voting was held on the "request of one member".

Some members said that the voting was not a major development, since it was on the issue of a 'sin good' like lottery, and was mainly done on the insistence of one state.

GST Council voting rules

As per The Constitution (One Hundred and First Amendment) Act, 2016, in case of a voting, every decision of the GST Council has to be taken by a majority of not less than three-fourths of the weighted votes of the members present.

The vote of the central government has a weightage of one-third of the total votes

cast, and the votes of all the state governments taken together have a weightage of two-thirds of the total votes cast in that meeting.

As of now, out of the total 30 states and Union Territories (excluding Jammu & Kashmir), 20 are ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party or its allies (including parties who voted with the BJP on recent legislation in Parliament). This essentially means that a vote in the Council could largely be an academic exercise — unless a number of the BJP's allies switch sides.

Past record and future scope

So far, even if states voiced their differences over a proposal in the Council, all decisions had been taken by consensus in the meetings of the GST Council. Former Finance

Minister Arun Jaitley had underlined that the GST Council was an excellent federal institution, in which thousands of issues were decided through consensus. But the 38th meeting, the fourth under the chairmanship of the present Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, saw voting for the first time.

With a departure from the consensus approach having been made, there could be more instances of voting exercises going forward — especially as revenue-raising measures come up in future meetings.

Differences of opinion are likely to crop up on proposals to raise rates, especially of the lower slabs, in the future — a concern that made most states rule out an immediate rate hike in the last Council meeting, even as they were in agreement over a broader overhaul of the GST structure.

Iran's counterattack: where and how big?

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 8

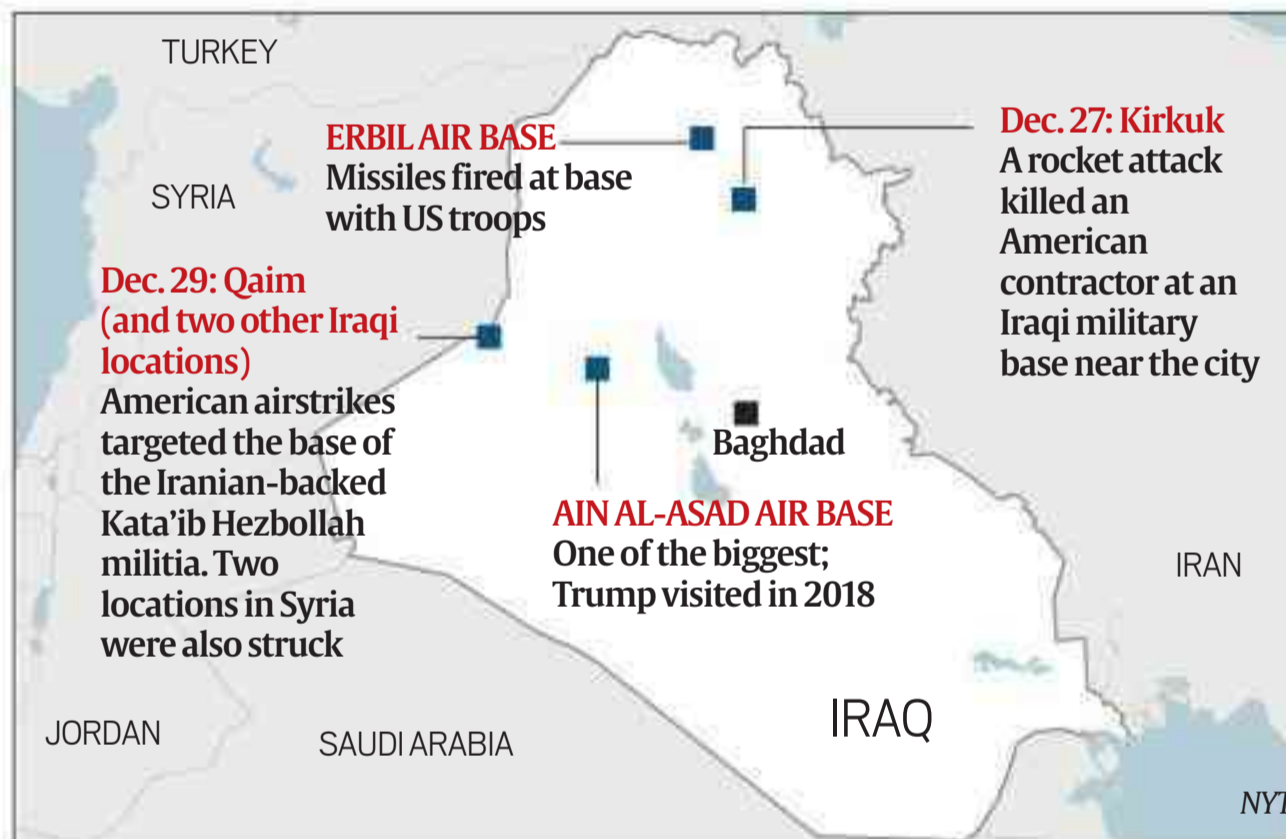
EARLY ON Wednesday, Iran launched a barrage of missiles at two American military bases in Iraq. The attacks began at 12.0 am, the same time that Maj Gen Qassem Soleimani was killed by a US missile in Baghdad on Friday, Iranian officials said — and hours after the remains of the general reached his hometown Kerman for burial.

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei posted on Twitter that the US had been "slapped... but such military actions are not enough; the corruptive presence of the US in the region of West Asia must be stopped". President Hassan Rouhani tweeted: "Our final answer to [Soleimani's] assassination will be to kick all US forces out of the region."

As of December 2019, the US had an estimated 6,000 soldiers in Iraq. After Soleimani was assassinated, Iraq's Parliament voted to throw the Americans out of their country — and President Donald Trump responded with a threat of sanctions "like they've never seen before ever".

What was the scale of Iran's attack?

NUMBER OF MISSILES: The US Department of Defence said in a statement that Iran had launched "more than a dozen ballistic missiles" that "targeted at least two Iraqi military bases hosting US military and coalition personnel". Western media reports quoted unnamed Iraqi military officials as



saying Iran had fired 22 missiles. The editor-in-chief of Mashregh, the IRGC's main news website, said more than 30 ballistic missiles had been fired at the Ain al-Asad air base, one of the two bases that were targeted.

CASUALTIES: Late on Wednesday evening (India time) President Donald Trump confirmed that the United States had not suffered any loss of lives. He had tweeted earlier that "all is well!", the "assessment of casualties & damages [were] taking place now", but "so far, so good!"

Other countries who have troops in Iraq — Australia, UK, Denmark, Poland, Sweden — also said that none of their service mem-

bers had been killed. However, Iran's semi-official Fars news agency, in an account headlined "US army sustains heavy casualties in Iran missile attacks", said "some 80 US army personnel have been killed and nearly 200 more wounded" in the reprisal attacks.

Where are the two bases that were hit?

AIN AL-ASAD: This vast air base is located in Iraq's western al-Anbar governorate, about 160 km west of Baghdad, and nearly 220 km from the border with Syria. The base, for long a major hub for US military operations in western Iraq, has also hosted Danish

and British troops. In 2015, as the Islamic State swept through Iraq and Syria, Iraqi forces repelled an IS attack on Ain al-Asad.

In 2017, as the US entered the war against the IS, some 500 American military and civilian personnel were stationed at the base, including, a report in *The New York Times* said, a shock trauma medical unit, a targeting cell, a Navy SEAL Special Operations task force, and a company of Marines. After the defeat of the IS in 2019, the base scaled down, but it still houses significant numbers of soldiers, who are now helping train Iraqi security forces.

Trump visited the base along with his wife Melania on December 26, 2018. On November 23, 2019, Vice President Mike Pence and his wife Karen paid a thanksgiving visit to US troops at the base.

ERBIL: The other base that came under attack, is located in Erbil, the capital of the autonomous Kurdistan Region in northern Iraq. The base is adjacent to the city's airport, which American transport aircraft, gunships, and reconnaissance aircraft have used for operations in northern Iraq and eastern Syria. The base has been a Special Operations hub to hundreds of American and other allied troops, logistics personnel and intelligence specialists throughout the fight against the IS, *The NYT* reported.

In October 2019, commandos stationed at the base launched the operation that ended with the death of the leader of the IS, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who detonated a suicide vest after being cornered in a compound outside the village of Barisha in northwest Syria's Idlib governorate.

Indian cobra genome decoded: how this knowledge can help fight snakebite

KABIR FIRAUQUE
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 8

THIS WEEK, an international team of researchers reported that they have sequenced the genome of the Indian cobra, in the process identifying the genes that define its venom. This, they hope, can provide a blueprint for developing more effective antivenom.

Are existing antivenoms not effective enough?

Their efficacy varies, besides producing side effects. In India, the challenge has been producing antivenom for the species known collectively as the "big four" — the Indian cobra (*Naja naja*), common krait (*Bungarus caeruleus*), Russell's viper (*Daboia russelii*), and saw-scaled viper (*Echis carinatus*). A common antivenom is marketed for the treatment of bites from the "big four", but its effectiveness came under question in a study published last month (not connected to the one that sequenced the cobra genome). While the common antivenom worked as marketed against the saw-scaled viper and the common cobra, it fell short against some neglected species and also against one of the "big four" — the common krait.

Accidental contact with snakes lead to over 100,000 deaths across the world every year. India alone accounts for about 50,000 deaths annually, and these are primarily attributed to the "big four".

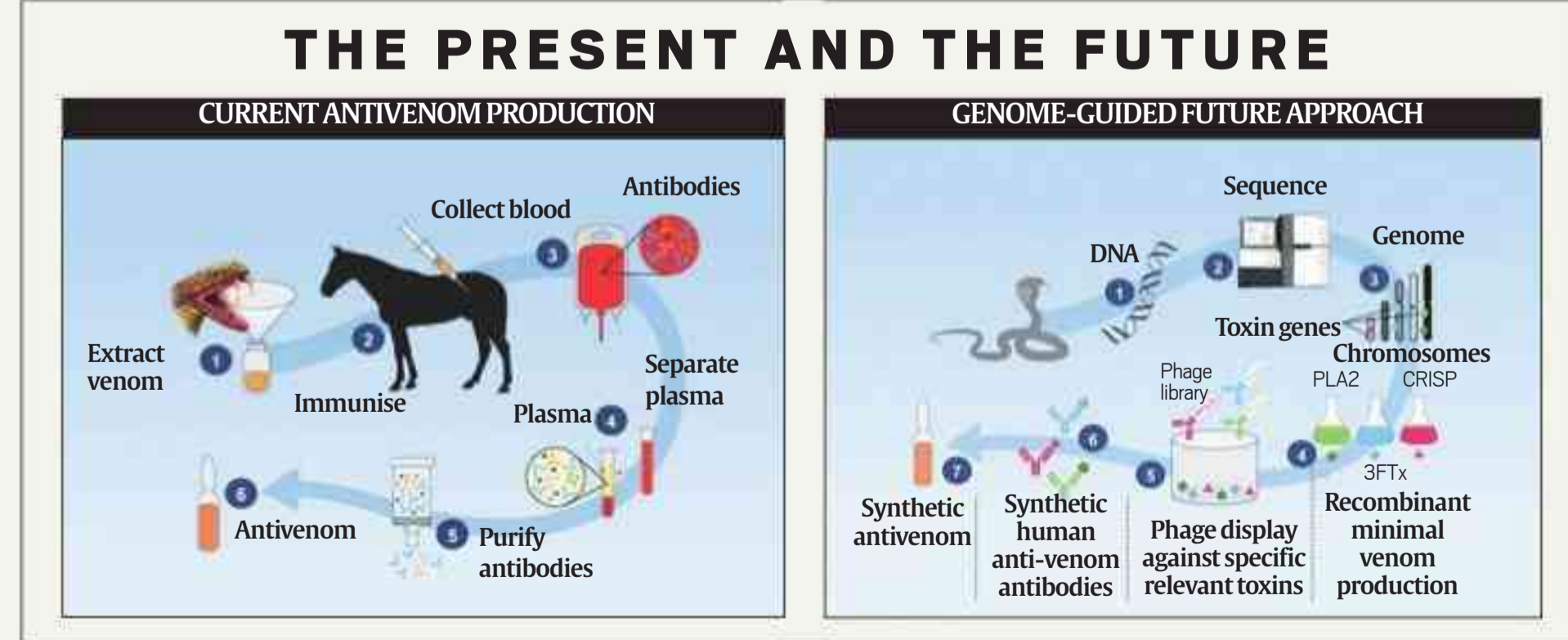
So, there are two different studies?

This week's paper is the first one to describe the cobra genome. It is a multinational study by 42 authors, including from India, and is published in *Nature Genetics*. It is led by Dr Sekar Seshagiri, president of the nonprofit SciGenom Research Foundation based in Bengaluru.

The other study, while unrelated, also deals with antivenom. Published in *PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases* last month, it is led by Professor Kartik Sunagar of IISc Bengaluru; other authors include the herpetologist Romulus Whitaker.

Why has production of effective antivenom been challenging?

Venom is a complex mixture of an estimated 140-odd protein or peptides. Only some of these constituents are toxins that cause the physiological symptoms seen after snakebite. But antivenom available today does not target these toxins specifically. Antivenom is currently produced by a cen-



Source: Nature Genetics via SciGenom Research Foundation

tury-old process — a small amount of venom is injected into a horse (or a sheep), which produces antibodies that are then collected and developed into antivenom.

This is expensive, cumbersome and comes with complications. Some of the antibodies raised from the horse may be completely irrelevant. The horse also has a lot of antibodies floating in its blood that have nothing

to do with the venom toxins. "One more problem with horse antibodies — our immune system recognises it as foreign and when antivenom is given our body mounts an antibody response... This leads to what is called serum sickness," lead author Seshagiri told *The Indian Express*. "Also, next time if one is unlucky and has a snakebite incident (even if it is a different snake) and they are given a

horse-derived antivenom, the body is going to have a severe allergic reaction."

How does decoding the genome help?

In the Indian cobra genome, the authors identified 19 key toxin genes, the only ones that should matter in snakebite treatment. They stress the need to leverage this knowledge for creation of antivenom using syn-

thetic human antibodies. "Targeting these 19 specific toxins using synthetic human antibodies should lead to a safe and effective antivenom for treating Indian cobra bites," Seshagiri said. And the logical next step would be obtaining the genomes and the venom gland genes from the other three of the "big four" (as well as deadly African species), leading to a possible common antivenom against bites from all four.

Is genomics the only way forward?

Sunagar, who led the other study, is part of an international consortium, funded by the UK Department for International Development, and looking to develop new-generation antivenom. "... We are trying to produce highly specific antibodies to counter the toxic effects of snake venoms. The aim is to produce antibodies that are broadly effective, not only against snake venoms in India but also in the sub-Saharan Africa," he told *The Indian Express*.

Asked about the cobra genome sequence, Sunagar said it is of really high quality. "Sequence information of the genes that code for venom proteins is very important for the production of recombinant antivenoms. However, there is a very long way to go from genomes to effective anti-snake venoms."