

Addressing transgenerational trauma through history education

For a civilisation which constantly reiterates its belief in the power of truth, it is sad that its descendants do not seem to have the courage of their conviction to let the truth do the talking through history books.

INDIC VIEWS

J. SAI DEEPAK



Two days ago, legendary West Indian cricketer Michael Holding delivered a powerful message on the ongoing anti-gay discrimination movement which has taken the United States of America by storm and has started a global anti-gay movement, in particular with respect to the stereotypes associated with members of the African community in the United States and other countries. While there are several relevant threads from an Indian perspective to pull from Holding's message, the most important message, following are the excerpts which this author wishes to focus on for the purposes of this piece.

"I hear people talking about brainwashing. I

knows Thomas Edison invented the light bulb. Thomas Edison invented the light bulb with a paper filament. It burnt out in no time at all. Can you tell who invented the filament that makes these lights shine throughout? Nobody knows, because he was a child. The impact of education in schools, Lewis Howard Latimer invented the carbon filament to allow lights to continuously shine. Who knows that? Everything should be taught! When you go back to schooling as a young man, I remember the first time I was ever taught anything good about black people.

And you cannot have a society that is brought up like that, both white and black, that only teaches what's convenient to the victor, not by the conqueror, not by those who are conquered. History is written by the people who do the harm, not by the people who get harmed. And we need to go back to the roots of history and until we do that and educate the entire human race, this thing will not stop. They're on telling me, "There's nothing called White Privilege". Give me a break! I do see the white man in the store and I don't see them being followed. A black

of various colonizers and the oppression suffered by Africans in different parts of the world, perhaps the common thread is the experience of slavery, which through slavery which was religiously justified and institutionalised by various forms of colonialism. In fact, indigenous communities of Bharat have suffered the most and have a long session for a longer period of time with the result being that members of several communities suffer from transgenerational trauma, which the Indian State has been conveniently oblivious to. The neo-colonialist policy of the Indian government since the 1950s.

The continued insensitivity underlying the said approach has been sought to be justified on grounds of preserving social harmony, when the fact remains that

the fragility of this pretence of harmony is exposed so often that harmony is the exception and is rarely intentional. This thoroughly exposes the Indian State's inability to wrap its head around the importance of presenting true history before the society so that the right lessons are drawn by all stakeholders. In general, one of the central purposes of teaching history is to ensure that, while the current generation cannot be held responsible for the reprehensible behaviour of its ancestors, there is sufficient disincentive in the form of social sanction against repeating such behaviour. This is the very object of memorializing the trauma of the past.

The Indian State's failure to grasp this basic role of history education is one of the single biggest reasons for the existing fissures in the trust of the citizenry. If the 484-page Draft National Education Policy 2019 ("the Draft NEP") is anything to go by, there is no sign of improvement on this front. The Draft NEP presented the Government with a fantastic opportunity to institutionalise the process of truth and reconciliation by revamping its approach to history, instead of the partisan propagandist role history has been employed for over seven decades. However, there is no sign in the document that the Government has either the intent or the stomach for such an exer-

cise

While the Draft NEP (a) indicates a review of certain accepted premises of the Indian education system and (b) tentatively attempts to proffer a path which remoulds the system in a manner which is consistent with Indic civilizational ethos and aspirations, it appears that this is more inadvertent and incomplete than intentional and comprehensive. As a consequence of this diffident approach, the Draft NEP lands a half punch. For a nation which aspires to be a "Vishwaguru", the Draft NEP lacks the civilizational confidence needed to revamp the education system to be able to achieve that status in the foreseeable future.

Even if such a lofty purpose were not placed at the centre of this exercise, at the very least the NEP is expected to be sensitive to the long existing and emerging challenges which can be traced to the Indian education system, right from the history curriculum which actively aids the maleficent process of historical amnesia, to the science curriculum which reinforces the accepted false notion that science and reason are essentially Western constructs which have been imported to civilize the superstitious natives.

The sad irony is that while colonizers had no compunction benefitting from Indic knowledge systems despite perpetuating

negative stereotypes about it through the education system to deprive the native of his/her sense of self-worth. Indian education policy makers have had no qualms whatsoever in perpetuating the same mindsets to the detriment of the present and the future, and certainly at the expense of the past. In other words, independent India has continued with the very same education system which was designed to produce glorified Anglicised colonialised subjects, instead of producing rooted, civilizationaly aware and confident thought leaders, entrepreneurs and nation builders. In short, any Indian achievement is despite the education system, and not because of it.

Another critical aspect of the Draft NEP which is inexplicably terse (a single Paragraph) in its comments and suggestions for improvement, is legal education. The Draft NEP appears to be comfortable with the fundamental Anglo-Saxon outlook of the Indian legal system and makes no attempt to introduce and mainstream Indian legal jurisprudence, logic and reasoning as part of legal curriculum and as part of law-making in the country. This reflects a deep-seated ignorance, apathy and perhaps even a self-loathing approach to the native legal systems which held this civilization together even when it was not a single political unit.

Policy makers appear to be indifferent to the impression that exists in the minds of young law students and practitioners that concepts of justice and rule of law are necessarily and solely attributable to Western thought. No wonder even the highest Court of the land looks to the West for inspiration, as opposed to drawing from the vast ocean of Indic jurisprudence which is much more in sync with the native pulse of this land.

The bottom line is that the #BlackLivesMatter movement has stirred discussions across the globe which have long been brushed under the carpet for various reasons. Bharat must benefit from the momentum provided by this movement to ignite those discussions within its society which have been considered politically incorrect and taboo for generations for the fear of "hurting sentiments". For a civilization which constantly reiterates its belief in the power of truth, it is sad that its descendants do not seem to have the courage of their conviction to let the truth be told the talking through history books. If the truth be told, the people of Bharat, does Bharat at all have the right to aspire for the status of "Vishwaguru"?

J. Sai Deepak is an Advocate practising as an arguing counsel before the Supreme Court of India and the High Court of Delhi.

LAW & ENVIRONMENT

Covid-19 : Environment impact, law and lessons to be learnt

OPINION

ASHUTOSH K. SHARMA



The countries across the globe are facing unprecedented impact on humans as well as businesses due to outbreak of coronavirus/ COVID-19. It was declared as a pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO). This pandemic has resulted in ramping down of the human activities which also affected the business cycle. Following the outbreak of the coronavirus, many countries had adopted the policy of complete lockdown that brought the world to a standstill resulting in financial slowdown across the world in all sectors. Although the impact of

the virus on humans cannot be ascertain as of now but it has definitely emerged as a boon for our environment. The climate experts predicted that the greenhouse gas emissions could drop to proportions which had seen never before since World War II. This outcome is mainly due to the policy of lockdown and social distancing adopted by the governments in wake of the pandemic. There have been record breaking emissions in carbon and nitrogen oxides. In India, people are breathing the cleanest air ever since our Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared the first nationwide lockdown in March, 2020.

The nature is healing itself from all our cruel acts in a way which we had never seen in history. It is regenerating itself. Carbon Brief (CB) published that the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted energy use worldwide, which could cut carbon emissions by an estimated 5.5% of 2019's

global total [1]. That means the coronavirus crisis is so far "triggering the largest ever annual fall in carbon dioxide emissions in 2020, more than during any previous economic crisis or period of war." We have witnessed few vital environmental changes seen in India after the Covid-19 lockdown.

The Capital city has undergone a significant reduction in air pollution level after the announcement of nationwide lockdown. Cities like Mumbai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Chennai have seen their average Air Quality Index (AQI) staying within two digits. In nearly all other big Indian cities, emission of nitrogen oxide (NO_x) had reduced by 30-40% and particulate matter (PM₁₀) and acid rain have also reduced. After COVID-19 pandemic, thousands of flamingos have gathered in the city of Navi Mumbai. This year there was a massive increase in their numbers. Due to the lockdown, there has been a significant reduction in the number of cars on the road, which has helped in the improvement of the air quality. The lockdown has also helped in the improvement of the water quality of Ganga and Yamuna has become much cleaner in Delhi, Prayagraj and Haridwar. It was assumed that during the lockdown, the drainage of industrial waste into the Ganga and Yamuna would have brought a significant change in the water quality. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the air around us was very toxic to breathe. Environmental pollution was a big factor in the increasing fast due to the depletion of resources such as air, water and soil. But after the lockdown commenced to prevent the outbreak of COVID-19, there have been significant changes in the environment.

Dolphins have been spotted at various Ganga Ghats of Kolkata. On 3rd April 2020, residents of Jalandhar city in Punjab also witnessed the cleaner air, as they woke up to a view of the Dhauladhar mountain range, which had never been seen in normal times, considering the longer distance of more than 200 kilometres between the two places. As the power

government in the month of April, 2020 relaxed few restrictions to allow e-commerce companies transportation by roads, as well as restart port and air cargo operations. However, there is pressure on the government to push the economic growth and mitigate the said pressure; the Indian government had relaxed the environmental standards and several protection laws. The government had approved several industrial projects and the Environmentalists in India are criticizing government moves to continue to approve major industrial projects, and to relax the nation's environmental assessment rules, even as the COVID-19 pandemic has complicated public oversight reviews.

They are carrying on as if there is no health emergency, hosting meetings and taking decisions including on big ticket projects," said Kanchi Kohli, an environmental governance expert with the Centre for Policy Research. In the month of April, 2020 the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change had approved opencast coal mining in reserve forest land that is a part of Dehing Patkai Elephant Reserve. According to a report of The logical Indian, a Right to Information (RTI) application filed

by an Assam-based environmental activist Rohit Choudhury into the Tikok coal mining project in Dehing Patkai Elephant reserve in eastern Assam has been a "big chunk" of "unhunks" forest land has already been mined and cleared. Further, amid this difficult time, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, which had approved and issued a notification amending the land use of five plots for the Centre's ambitious and controversial project to remake New Delhi, has also been in the centre of a Central Vista project. [7] The Expert Appraisal committee of the Ministry of Environment had given a green nod to construction of the new Parliament building in April 2017, but in May 2017, it was approx. The Ministry of Environment in an attempt to revamp the fourteen years old EIA notification has also released a draft EIA notification impact assessment notification notification on 12th March, 2020.[8] However, even the new notification does not look to strengthen the regulatory processes or the institutional framework for governing environmental clearance in India. The proposed changes could normalize approval of projects that went ahead without environmental clearance.

reduced the time allowed for public comment on assessments as it gives a minimum of 20 days of notice period which was previously 30 days. It also reduced the time period to complete the public-hearing process from 45 days to 30 days to the existing norm of 45 days. The draft was open for public comments till 30th June, 2020 which has now been extended till 11th August, 2020 by Hon'ble Delhi High Court. The draft of the Environmental Assessment Authority (DEAA) which was scrapped by NGT. The notification has been drafted with a view to ease development against the principles of sustainable development. The draft has received several judgements of the courts. Further the Dibang valley, a biodiversity hot spot in northeastern India, is threatened by a proposed hydropower dam. This area is well known for supporting a large number of rare and 75 species of mammals.

The UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment, David Boyd on 15th April 2020 said that COVID-19 must not be used as an excuse to weaken environmental protection. After a number of governments announced that they are lowering environmental standards, suspending

environmental monitoring requirements, reducing environmental enforcement, and restricting public participation he said that *"In light of the global environmental crisis that predates COVID-19, these actions are irrational, irresponsible, and jeopardize the rights of vulnerable people."* The UN expert further said that *"Such policy decisions are likely to result in accelerated deterioration of the environment and have negative impacts on a wide range of human rights including the rights to life, health, water, culture, and food, as well as the right to live in a healthy environment."*

Hence, we need to understand that we cannot take the nature for granted and once the universe will come out of this pandemic, better implementation of the environmental, transport and industry regulations should be considered on priority basis to check the detrimental impacts of human activity on the environment. This pandemic is an alarming bell for all of us and it has shown us the true portrait of our resources and our administration. India requires a major environmental governance change which can make it as a true ecological champion in this time of unprecedented social and ecological crisis.

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A LETTER TO PARENTS

IQ MAY BE IMPORTANT
BUT EQ IS NECESSARY

We must remember, as the famous saying goes, IQ is important for winning the race but EQ is important for winning life.

SANTOSH AJMERA



Dear parents, all of us are in the same boat when it comes to our kids' future. The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has brought a lot of uncertainties for the both of us. From reduction in school curriculum, scheduling of online classes and loss of a regular and normal way of education, these new situations have become a cause of worry for the parents and kids alike. Some of us, therefore, in desperation, are lapping over the online education platforms, in the search for compensation of lost time. Some don't even have this access due to no availability of equipment or Internet connectivity. This online education, though, is the best option at hand.

We need to understand the essence and purpose of education to let go of the anxieties surrounding the future of our kids. Our lives have

become very 'achievement-centric' with the entire onus of education being on 'rank and marks', where the focus should have been on fulfilling our social needs, and growth of the kids' personality. Locked inside the house, Covid-19 has given us the opportunity to introspect and understand these realities better.

Online education, as of today, has become a forum of one-way interaction. It's more a medium of instruction than of education, unlike formal schooling where education happens through every interaction may it be with teachers, with friends or with school staff. Education in formal schooling is an ongoing, two-way process, where each minute is teaching our kids some valuable lesson for life. It can be through lectures, school sports, etc.

Education is acquiring knowledge, developing the power of reasoning and applying the learnt lesson on practical situations. Classroom education gives an opportunity for getting information and its understanding in a collective milieu. The kids, therefore, not only gather information from the teachers but also learn from each other, which helps in their socialisation,

getting them prepared for the vagaries of life. The peer group learning, thus, is an important aspect in kids' life, which can never be compensated through an online education system. Further, for the development of emotional quotient, other kids, group studies and sports are important prerequisites. Kids' surrounding atmosphere, peer group studies and sports become important prerequisites.

EQ relates directly to intellectual pursuits such as the ability to learn as well as understand and apply information through skill sets. EQ refers to an individual's ability to perceive, control, evaluate, and express emotions. Emotional awareness is best inculcated from an early age by encouraging qualities like sharing, cooperation, help, assistance, thinking about and empathising with others. This therefore helps in team work, relationships in family, friends and at work places. Ironically, we expect our kids' IQ development, so that they can crack the exams and score good marks but often neglect their EQ development, which helps in their successful life journey. Only IQ may lead a person to be eccentric, whereas EQ makes a person, people-centric, suitable for the development and well-being of the self, family and society.

A good life is the result of our championing over these challenges. This journey doesn't ask us for school/college marks or our ranks, except during the job interview stage. Once in the job or in profession, it's our work and social interaction which matters. It's therefore more of EQ than of IQ which play a role in our professional and personal journeys. The Covid-19 time has given our kids ample time, at home. We may use this time, for their overall development by imparting practical and health education. Kids can be taught to cook, to fine-tune their skills of art and craft, to clean the house, to learn yoga, to work on their writing and language skills, to learn new skills and such others, which are useful for a better life. All these, may expose our kids to new experi-



ences and emotions, contributing in development of their emotional quotient. These can be learnt easily at home, without much support and could result in better utilisation of Covid-19 times.

We, as a parent, therefore need not be worried, if kids are not taking their online classes seriously, or missing out due to lack of availability of equipment or access. This classroom information could be gathered at any stage of life. What can't be are experiences, which every kid is missing, due to absence of formal schooling. Let's, therefore, be assured that we are not missing much, if missing out on a few online classes.

'EQ is important for winning the race, while EQ is important for winning life'. Santosh Ajmera is an Indian Information Service officer, currently working with the IAS Ministry. Views are personal.

COVID-19

HARYANA EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
TO REDUCE CLASS 9-12 SYLLABIRAVINDER MALIK
CHANDIGARH

Haryana Education Minister Kanwar Pal said that in order to reduce mental pressure over students, state Board of School Education will reduce the syllabus of the students studying in classes IX to XII in the present academic session of 2020-2021. The Minister said that the schools remained closed across the country and state during the lockdown amid Covid-19 pandemic due to which holding of regular classes in the classrooms was not possible, although the State Government has made adequate arrangements to impart online education. In order to reduce mental pressure on students, now the State Government has decided to reduce the syllabus for the academic

session 2020-21 in schools affiliated to the Board of School Education Haryana following the pattern of CBSE. Mr Kanwar Pal said that to reduce the syllabus, the State Government has instructed the Board of School Education, Haryana to set up a Committee by coordinating with SCERT Gurugram and to put up the proposal within a week after exploring all possibilities in this regard. He said that till now the syllabus that has been taught online to the students of IX to XII classes should also be included in the syllabus, so as to benefit the students. The Education Minister said that the State Government does not wish to put academic pressure on the students, and wants to continue imparting necessary education, therefore there will be reduction in syllabus for the students studying in classes IX to XII.



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THE INDIAN EXPRESS, FRIDAY, JULY 10, 2020

THE IDEAS PAGE

Wait for the migrant

Once opportunities are there, they will return to the city. But until then, they must not be stopped from going back home. The market should be allowed to work for both industry and labour



YOGINDER ALAGH

MIGRANTS, VERY OFTEN, get an undeserved bad name in our market economy. However, in India's not very old experience, and in the process of development generally, as migration plays a major developmental role it's careless and somewhat irresponsible to downplay the role of migrant workers. Statements emphasising that in a downturn economy, local labour will fill the gap, simply ignore the cycles in the demand for labour. We in the cities, after all, will have to worry about our needs whenever the "M" or the "W"-shaped swing takes place.

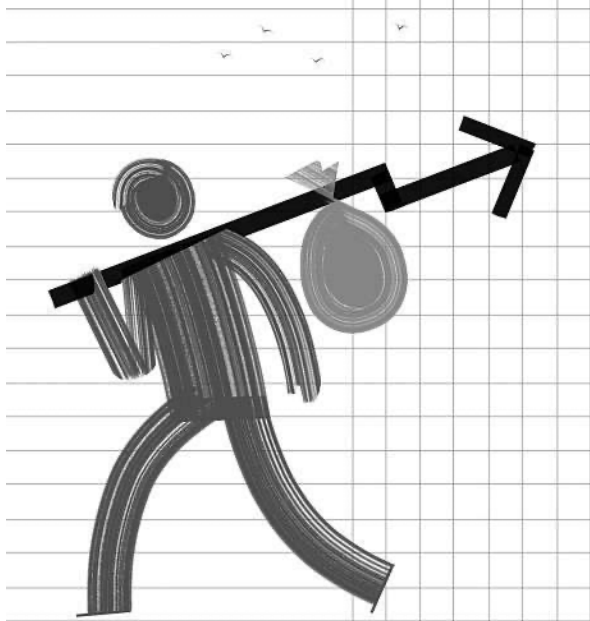
In the Seventies of the last century, the economist K N Raj, a guru to many of us, brought the importance of migrant labour to our attention. Raj, an example to most of us, worked in India for most of his career. But at that time, certain compelling personal reasons led him to work with the UN. He chose to go to the ILO and set up the ILO ARTEP—an Asian Regional Employment Programme. There Raj brought to our notice the historical role of migration in Japan's development. He propagated the work of the eminent Japanese economist Kouru Ishikawa. Ishikawa had shown that labour migrated to those Japanese prefectures which were growing fast economically, including agriculturally. Diagrammatically, if you plotted output per unit of land against labour per unit of land, you got an inverse relationship in a rectangular hyperbola. If agricultural productivity went up, more labour was "sucked" into the prefecture. Much like migrant workers from UP and Bihar going to the Green Revolution belt.

Raj wanted to test Ishikawa's hypothesis in India. He asked me, G S Bhalla and Amit Bhaduri to do this job. He knew me because he was a good admirer of my patience in selecting younger people at the Centre for Development Studies in Thiruvananthapuram and holding my own against some of the bigwigs of the institute who tended to be very formal.

I had co-authored a book with Bhalla on district-level agricultural experience and had a lot of data. Over many rounds of analysis and discussions, Bhalla kept repeating that "this business was a truism". At one stage, a little fatigued, I had to tell him: "We don't want to work with falsisms, do we? Let's go ahead." This was the origin of the book, the well-known *Alagh, Bhalla and Bhaduri thesis*. Our paper proved that there was indeed a "suction mechanism" in Indian agriculture.

Not satisfied, Raj organised a meeting of seminars on the issue in different parts of the then deputy chairman of the Planning Commission chaired the meeting. M Nanjundappa, chairman of the Karnataka State Planning Commission, said that if instead of irrigation pumps we had the old bullock driven wheels and water was lifted by buckets, employment in well irrigation would be higher. Bhalla, a Marxist by inclination and very critical of what he thought were ante-diluvian ideas, responded that "if we do irrigation with spoons, employment would be even higher". Nanjundappa protested that "Bhalla is making fun" of him. Lakdawala, the great liberal, dismissed the fire.

Later, the ILO economist of Pakistani ori-



C R Seshumur

gin, Rashid Amjad, published a book that talked about the similar experience of migrant workers in several other countries, making the Ishikawa hypothesis a universal theory endorsed by the ILO. Labour migration as a serious policy issue had arrived.

In this context, as the different globalisation crises hit us, Iwan J Azis, the Indonesian economist who held positions at the Cornell University in the US and the National University of Indonesia, and I looked at reverse migration. Azis showed that the Southeast Asian economies were chugging along at 6 per cent plus growth when the SARS outbreak hit the region. The Thai baht lost half its value in a few days. The contagion was a lot like the later viruses. In a few months, many countries lost up to a third of their wealth. India, I showed, fared better because it was a relatively closed economy.

Azis showed that there was reverse migration. The migrants went back to their villages where they did not have to starve. They had picked up skills in the cities which helped them initiate agro-based development like diversification away from rice in Indonesia. The experience was similar in Philippines and Vietnam. Migrants were regarded as an asset.

At a dinner in Delhi, I was made to sit at the head table with the then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. I had written to him to get the meltdown in Surat locked into. He

turned to me and said, "Alagh saheb, sab theek hain" (Everything is all right). I didn't have the heart to complain.

Migration has always been a shock absorber. It is this role we choked off by regional lockdowns and transportation blockages, causing enormous suffering and many deaths. I get disturbed when some very eminent colleagues recognise the uncertainty of the situation and yet choose livelihood over life. The starving people may return to a filled up belly. The dead won't come back. This is not the empirical welfare economics my teachers—many of them Nobel Prize winners—taught me. Good economics doesn't make careless choices between life and death.

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We have now, hopefully, learnt from our mistakes. Today, many of the migrants may say that they will never come back. But once opportunities are there, they will return. Until then, it is not quite kosher to stop them from going home under pressure from builder lobbies. The market should be allowed to work for both industry and labour. In fact, the reverse migration could bolster the agricultural sector in the short-run. We should integrate the process of reverse migration with agro-based development in the short-run and wait for the migration back to cities as we get out of this disaster.

The writer, a former Union Minister, is an economist

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"These China-bashers are now trying to pit Hong Kong people against the central authorities in Beijing with a smear campaign aimed at arousing suspicion about the office and its role."

—CHINA DAILY

Task after Galwan

India must take a leadership role in developing a diplomatic and strategic counter to Chinese expansionism



DEEPENDER HOODA

FINALLY, AFTER A round of high-level talks—which included India's National Security Adviser—following a three-week standoff at the Galwan Patrol Point 14, Gozra and the Hot Springs area. There is no movement yet at the Pangong Tso finger area. But the talks are continuing and it is now possible that further blows will not be exchanged.

Yet India's broader strategic challenge remains. How India responds to China's "expansionist tendencies in 21st century", as Prime Minister Narendra Modi put it in Nimu, will have significant ramifications not only for us but the world.

In 2017, I had sent out a warning through these pages that Doklam was symbolic of a new Chinese policy: President Xi Jinping is aiming to create for himself "the greatest legacy"—greater than the great Mao's—based on nationalistic fervour. Xi had started speaking about the "Chinese global dream and national glory" as early as 2012, even before he took over as president in 2013.

The other reason for Beijing's expansionism is its economic model. The Chinese growth model needed to find subservient emerging markets where it can park huge debts and make investments to keep feeding the Dragon's high growth rates. Friendly foreign debt-investment markets were needed to compensate for over-investment at home. The Belt and Road Initiative was rolled out as a meeting point for China's geo-strategic and geo-economic interests.

Since Doklam, China has expanded its global footprint by signing on about 100 countries to the BRI. It has made aggressive moves on most of its non-submissive neighbours—from Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia and the Philippines in the South China Sea to India in the Himalayas; from its traditional rivals like Japan and Taiwan to its neighbours like South Korea and Australia. Include recent Chinese actions in Hong Kong, and the message is clear: China sees itself as a global power whose time has come. It will assert itself—compactly or defiantly.

The US and western powers have been very vocal in calling out Beijing in recent times. US-China relations have hit rock bottom, especially since Donald Trump took office. The US-China trade war is now taking a toll on the world system. For example, it is creating fissures among ASEAN members.

As the destabilising rise of China is shaking up global alignments and shaping a new world order, the Trump administration is increasingly being criticised for not providing global leadership. India could afford to be largely non-aligned during the 20th century Cold War, but our size and economic momentum necessitate that we play a clearer role in the Cold War's 21st-century sequel.

Our foreign policy has lacked a clear vision about China. Delhi so far has been "hedging" its interests globally—we have been deepening our strategic relationship with the US but without wanting to alarm

China. Ahmedabad has witnessed both the "jhula diplomacy" with Xi and "Namaste Trump". Recent events show that Beijing is unconvinced by this nuanced balancing act.

Meanwhile, relations with other neighbouring nations have also become a cause of concern. Pakistan has practically become a minion state for the Chinese—the \$62-billion CPEC is a case in the point. Nepal is no longer on our list of all-weather friends. Chinese influence is growing in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh—both signatories to the BRI. And just last week, Beijing, to put more pressure on Delhi, sent an anti-China message to our loyal friend, Bhutan, by making ridiculous territorial claims on its eastern border containing the Sakrang wildlife sanctuary, next to Arunachal Pradesh.

A nation's self-respect is as non-negotiable as its territorial integrity. As with the latter, one cannot cede even a notional inch of national pride for white-washing. China's expansionist and bullying Chinese apps are welcome but can only be considered the first baby steps. What is required is determined leadership that secures strategic and tactical deterrence.

One forum we need to build on and provide leadership to is the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, which was started with India, Japan, Australia and the US as members in 2007. Not much has happened since except a few joint military exercises. India should now propose the expansion of the Quad's scope with a possible exploration of a collective defence architecture clause like Clause 5 of NATO, where an attack on one of the members is considered an attack on all. Not just that, the membership of the Quad should be expanded. Vietnam is already keen to join. South Korea, New Zealand, and Malaysia may also be interested.

On the economic front, India must welcome the US proposal to expand G7 to include India, Russia, Australia and South Korea without China as a member. Apart from strengthening ties in our neighbourhood, effort must be made to regain the relationship with Russia. Vladimir Putin is seen as one global leader who is happy to do business with Xi, but with Russia pursuing an independent geo-strategic path.

I am not advocating for joining a US-led platform as a devoted member. To push back against Chinese adventurism by deepening dependence on another power also runs counter to the very logic of protecting our national sovereignty. India needs to be strong enough to stand for its interests and yet must be adroit enough to find common ground with those with whom its interests align, whether to the West or East.

China must be made to choose: Is it willing to push the equally poor, equally numerous, equally historical and glorious civilisation to the south in this long-term direction for a few square kilometres of territory and a round of chest-thumping?

The Dragon must know that the Elephant may take its time to turn but it is, if it is, doing so.

The writer is a Congress MP



GANESAN KARTHIKEYAN

RELIABLE INFORMATION is key to tackling any outbreak and nowhere is it more crucial than in the management of the ongoing pandemic. However, the sheer volume and variety of information being thrown at us make it difficult to judge which bits are true and which hyperbole. Leave alone the common man, even the so-called experts are at sea. The consequence of all this is impaired judgement, misplaced beliefs and distorted priorities. The run on pharmacies for hydroxychloroquine (triggered by mere speculations) that we witnessed a few weeks ago is a prime example.

I am prompted to write this article because of another irrational obsession that has gripped us at the moment. Almost every television channel and newspaper seems to be gushing over the miraculous effects of the antiviral drug remdesivir, and that other "cure", plasma therapy. Barring a few honourable exceptions, even some of the so-called experts are not hesitant to overstate their benefits. It is not uncommon to hear exaggerated assertions such as "three patients were cured with plasma therapy". Level-headed advisory from institutions like the ICMR, that plasma therapy is still an experi-

The remdesivir effect

There is an irrational preference for expensive COVID treatments over effective ones

mental treatment, are lost in the din. So, it is very likely that people are, in general, convinced that the only two currently available treatments for COVID-19 are plasma therapy and remdesivir.

Till about two weeks ago, there was no proven treatment for COVID-19. But that changed dramatically when a group of researchers in the UK released the results of their study of dexamethasone (an inexpensive, readily available medicine). Working away from the limelight, these researchers pulled off the unprecedented feat of completing a rigorously done clinical trial within 100 days of conceiving it. News channels in this country reported the story for a couple of days and then promptly went back to talking about plasma therapy, remdesivir and another as yet unproven drug, favipiravir. Some may be forgiven for dismissing the results of the dexamethasone study as just another study—after all, no one is talking about it. But the results of this study deserve prominence for at least two reasons.

First, this is the first study to show an unequivocal, and large benefit in sick patients with COVID-19, on the outcomes that matter most—the risk of death and the risk of need-

ing ventilator support. Among the sickest of patients, just eight patients would need to be treated for 10 days with dexamethasone (compared to not treating with the drug) to save one life. By any measure, this is a large treatment benefit in modern medicine. To put this in context, 25 patients would need to be treated with bypass surgery (compared to medicines alone) to save one extra life, over 10 years. In contrast, remdesivir merely reduces the duration of hospital stay by four days without any significant effect on dying from COVID-19. Plasma therapy is yet to be rigorously tested in people with COVID-19 and has shown little or no benefit in other types of flu.

Second, dexamethasone is cheap and readily available, with several "branded generics" available in the Indian market. A course of treatment at the prescribed dose would cost less than Rs 10 per patient. On the other hand, remdesivir, even the brands marketed by Indian companies, would cost tens of thousands of rupees per course. Likewise, the infrastructure and cost of acquiring and concentrating plasma from volunteers who have recovered from COVID-19 make plasma therapy an expensive proposition.

In the absence of adequate information, the price of a commodity serves as an indicator of quality for the consumer. Information asymmetry is most acute in healthcare, with the added disadvantage that the providers of care have far greater access to, and understanding of the information. It is naive to expect that the pharmaceutical industry and for-profit healthcare providers will fill this information gap to their detriment. The responsibility to rescue the media, the general public and our policymakers from the "remdesivir effect", therefore, falls squarely upon physicians and public health agencies.

The direct and opportunity costs of prioritising less effective and expensive treatments can have dire consequences both for health and the economy. It is critical that we focus on providing the most effective treatment to the largest number of people at an affordable cost. The message should be loud and clear, that for once, the inexpensive option is by far, the better option.

The writer is a professor of cardiology at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi. Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

FAST AND LOOSE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Blunt cut" (IE, July 9). Knowledge is the lifeblood of education. The decision to ditch complete chapters on the pretext of reducing the burden on students only undermines the real purpose of the education system. The CBSE must not play fast and loose with the future of students.

Varun Das, Zirokpur

UNWISE ATTACK

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Cruel and reckless" (IE, July 9). COVID-19 has impacted lives and livelihood across the world. The US being the most affected has put a question mark on Donald Trump's leadership. The recourse to xenophobia for electoral gain, and asking foreign students to leave will not restore the credibility that was expected of him in the war against coronavirus.

LR Murtu, Delhi

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Cruel and reckless" (IE, July 9). US Immigration and Customs Enforcement's move to revoke F-1 visas for international students taking full-time courses in the fall semester is a thoughtless move. At many universities, students have few options but to take classes online. Both as a vote-catching and COVID-unlocking strategy, this unwise attack on universities and

IDEAS ONLINE

NEPALI, KHAMBOU, VIETNAMESE, DATA PRIVACY COMPLAINTS: SMRITI PARSHEERA

G20 AND COVID: PUSHPESH PAINT

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students could backfire outside Trump's core base.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

DON'T BAN

THIS REFERS TO the article, "Liberty and responsibility" (IE, July 9). The adverse effects across the border of imposing information war against India by manipulating young minds in Kashmir. The security establishment should learn from corporations and political parties on harnessing big data to build its own narrative online. It mustn't see cyberspace through monocromatic glasses.

Sudip Kumar Dey, Kolkata

The Indian EXPRESS

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UNDUE PROCESS

Murky Vikas Dubey case is a test that UP government and police can ill afford to fail

THE CASE OF Vikas Dubey, the gangster who was arrested by the Madhya Pradesh police in Ujjain on Thursday, nearly a week after eight policemen in his pursuit were killed near Kanpur, exemplifies a crisis in Uttar Pradesh police. At the time of his arrest, Dubey had at least 60 cases, including murder, to his name. The July 3 ambush in his village raised several questions that haven't been addressed, including complaints by a Deputy Superintendent of Police who was one of those killed. The DSP had red-flagged the conduct of an official who has now been suspended. Dubey evidently travelled three states even as the UP police gunned down five of his accomplices. The wanton short-circuiting of the rule of law in Affaire Dubey seems part of the chilling "encounter culture" and the alleged complicity within the system. The not in the police force has its roots in this no-accountability encounter culture that's celebrated by officialdom and touted by many in the government as a major governance achievement. The police need to ensure that Dubey has his day in court. Only a detailed trial, investigation and prosecution will reveal what exactly led to the killing that night and the nature of the relationship between Dubey and those whose job it is to keep a close tab on him and his gang.

For, the Dubey case has all the makings of a disquieting nexus that involves politicians, policemen and criminals. Bahubalis, as criminals often associated with politicians are known in UP and Bihar, have been an integral part of the political landscape in these states for decades. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath had promised a clean-up of law and order in UP when he came to power. The crackdown on criminals, however, has also strengthened a culture of impunity and an apparent disdain for due process—the disproportionate police response and the stamping down of all protests during the anti-CAA mobilisations last year were part of the same pattern.

Now, the government will be watched on how it handles the Dubey case. The UP police must know that in a society governed by the rule of law, justice for the death of eight policemen is contingent on due process in the prosecution of those accused. To ensure this and considering the scale and scope of the alleged crime and conspiracy, including the possible involvement of officials, it will be prudent for the government to entrust the probe to an independent and impartial agency.

OPEN THE HOUSE

Parliament must find ways to reconvene amid pandemic. Its work is crucial, in good times and bad

THE FATE OF the Monsoon session of Parliament, usually held in the third week of July, is still uncertain. There is no official word yet on when the House, brought to an abrupt standstill by the COVID-19 outbreak, which cut short the Budget session in March, will reconvene. The pandemic has not only subverted even the parliamentary committees, which carry on Parliament's work of scrutiny of government's functioning in between sessions and form a crucial bridge between the parliamentary institution and the people. Ever since both Houses adjourned on March 23, the over 3-month-long silence was broken only last week when the Committee on Welfare of Other Backward Classes met and made recommendations to various ministries—two parliamentary committee meetings are scheduled for today, Friday. The apparent hesitation, or reluctance of India's Parliament to resume work amid the pandemic, even as legislatures worldwide are designing innovative and hybrid modalities for doing so, is taking a toll that may not be visible but it is there—arguably adding an accountability and representation deficit to a serious and prolonged public health emergency.

Since March 23, according to PRS Legislative Research, the central government has issued about 850 COVID-related notifications and 11 ordinances. These range from international travel restrictions to board exam dos and don'ts, from prohibitions on exports of ventilators to mandating of the use of the Aarogya Setu. Many of the measures were needed, but many have also sparked questions and controversy about the nature of government response to the pandemic—its proportionality and its responsiveness to the anxieties and needs of the most vulnerable, including migrants. It is also true that across the world, even as they scramble to respond to a mostly unknown virus that does not yet have a cure, governments have used the crisis to extend and enlarge their own powers, impose stricter, even draconian, curfew and curfew orders, short-circuit privacy concerns, or simply resort to technocratic solutions that not mindfully enough of human costs and unintended consequences of policy responses. It is all the more important, therefore, that spaces and forums for the scrutiny of executive decisions, and for enforcing accountability, remain alive and kicking—especially in crisis.

India's Parliament must meet sooner, rather than later, physically or virtually. If the rules of procedure stand in its way—parliament secretariat has flagged the confidentiality of virtual meetings as a concern—they must be tweaked and the NC's technological prowess harnessed. After all, the Prime Minister and other ministers and high government officials continue to meet and transact business. The government must get back to work.

SOORNA BHOPALI

Jagdeep was once and forever the character from 'Sholay' who brought into the narrative an energetic and bracing humour

WHEN A CHARACTER outlives a film, or outstrips the actor, it can be both boon and bane. Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed Jafri, better known as Jagdeep, began his long stint in Hindi cinema as a perky child actor in such notable early '50s films as *Hum Panchhi Ek Daal Ke* and *Ab Dilli Door Nahin*. He shone in Guru Dutt's *Aar Paar*, and Bimal Roy's *Do Bighra Zameen*. He even played the traditional singing-dancing hero, but his real calling, the film industry decided, was to make people laugh. In 1960 came *Brahmachari*, and with it Jagdeep's career as a comic actor took off in earnest. It took him 15 years to reach Soorna Bhopali, in Ramesh Sippy's *Sholay* (1975), and that was it.

It was a walk-on part, and according to folklore, not even part of the film as it was first conceived: Producer G P Sippy, it was said, added the character later. What we do know for sure is that post-*Sholay*, Jagdeep was once and forever Soorna from Bhopal, who boasts of taking the measure of the infamous Jai and Jai, in a scene topped with this unforgettable line: "Hamara naam bhi Soorna Bhopali aise hi nahin hai, haan." It wasn't as if Hindi movies were writing distinctive parts for comedians in the '50s and the '60s. His contemporaries like Johnny Walker, Mehmood, Mukti, and so on, were all bound by a loud, broad tradition where laughs came out of physical comedy, and dialogues bordering on the crass. Heroes were meant to be straight-laced and honourable; heroines were demure and innocent. Mainstream cinema got around these genteel restrictions by adding energetic comedy tracks. Just like Shakespeare's jokers, it was left to the comics to bring in rude, bracing humour.

Jagdeep could never get past the *Sholay* overhang. In one of his last significant parts, in which he plays Salman Khan's father (*Andaz Apna Apna*, 1994), his name was Bannekhal Bhopali. A nod, and a tribute, to a character who lives on.

The regimes of boundaries

They have multiplied, even as pandemic nudges us towards broader discourse of access, across borders



TANUJA KOTHIYAL

BORDERS HAVE NOT been so nebulous, and yet so firmly drawn, as in the past three months.

A virus that originated in China, travelled with people, along with their passports and visas, to distant parts of the globe and became a world-wide pandemic. A cyclone in the eastern Indian Ocean devastated coastal regions in India and Bangladesh, two countries separated by a border for over 70 years. Locusts, benefiting from a freak combination of multiple climate events in the Indian Ocean region (leading to torrential rains in the Middle East and north African regions in 2018), have swarmed over India and Pakistan, the warning off-spring of an ill-fated Partition in 1947.

On the other hand, nations and regions have firmed up their boundaries, to prevent and regulate movement of people and goods across nationally and internationally recognised territories. This irony cannot have been more poignant anywhere than in India, a country forever in motion. As technology has made it easier to travel across city, state or national boundaries, cities, states and nations have used physically marked and fenced boundaries, documentation and surveillance, to make border crossings as difficult as possible.

In these months, regimes of boundaries have multiplied and become visible in ever shrinking domains of cities, townships, localities, and finally, housing societies, with each promulgating a different set of rules. Each one of these has attempted to prevent access to one suspected of being carriers of the virus through emergency rules and regulations. This has disrupted connections of employment, health care, education and sociality in cities otherwise intrinsically connected by growing metro rail networks, for example Delhi, Noida, Gurgaon, Faridkot and Panipat. Strict imposition of state boundaries during and after the lockdown by Delhi, UP and Haryana left those working across state borders without access to work, and therefore incomes. This included health practitioners living and working across the borders.

In the Delhi-NCR region, state boundaries normally go unnoticed by people who cross

Nations and regions have firmed up their boundaries, to prevent and regulate movement of people and goods across nationally and internationally recognised territories. This irony cannot have been more poignant anywhere than in India, a country forever in motion. As technology has made it easier to travel across city, state or national boundaries, cities, states and nations have used physically marked and fenced boundaries, documentation and surveillance, to make border crossings as difficult as possible.

them every day to go to work, study, shop, get medical attention in three different states. Similar examples exist in other parts of India, where, but for administrative markers, it is difficult to guess which side of state boundary could a village or town belong to. Borders disrupt historical, social, cultural and emotional relationships between people who can hardly be differentiated from each other, if it were not for the documentary identities that they carry. However, in modern state-systems, rights as citizens/residents get defined through documentary proofs that entitle citizens/residents with access to state benefits. In doing so, they end up creating separate categories of residents, who despite accessing the same borderlands on daily basis, get divided when it comes to access to administratively defined benefits. For example, a resident of Delhi, while possessing all documentary proof required for a domicile in Delhi, gets debarred from applying to 85 per cent Delhi state quota, if she passes the qualifying exam in UP or Haryana even while living in Delhi.

While pre-modern empires in India and other parts had a general sense of their territories, their internal and external borders were not very clearly defined. Frontiers existed as borderlands where multiplicity of jurisdictions led to complex understandings of sovereignty. Borderlands were zones of possibility which allowed their residents to access more than one region. However, with the emergence of colonial state, cartographic anxiety took over, requiring regions to be mapped and marked with exactitude as legal spaces with clarity of jurisdictions and rights. Post-colonial India redefined internal boundaries in reorganisation of states several times over. These included linguistically reorganised states as a result of the State Reorganisation Act, 1956, as well as the reorganisations that followed like Maharashtra-Gujarat and Punjab-Haryana-Himachal in the 1960s. North-eastern states in 1971, Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Telangana in the 1980s, and Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh in 2019.

While the redefined states are viewed as self-defined entities with internal coherence, there remain several internal conflicts within

states which challenge the assumption of coherence. The idea of Harit Pradesh, for example, emphasises on socio-cultural continuities with parts of Punjab and Haryana, than Uttar Pradesh that it currently is part of. Therefore, it is clear that state boundaries are not cast in stone, and nothing prevents newer borderlands from being drawn in future.

While in the premodern contexts borderlands were often uninhabited, hostile geographies, the expansion of agrarianism and urbanism has ensured that state and district boundaries are very often densely populated sprawls. In case of ever expanding metro cities, the sprawl often crosses district and state boundaries with special industrial and economic zones, as well as sub-urban housing complexes located in multiple jurisdictions placed in close proximity to each other. This leads to the creation of new borderlands connected through expanding transport networks, with people living in one state and working in another. These borderlands have their own challenges, particularly in the matters of maintaining law and order, as well as with regard to access to state-specific benefits.

In India, central and state powers and responsibility get clearly defined through the Union, state and concurrent lists. However, these do not address the issues faced in borderlands of the states where resources are shared on everyday basis. Therefore, what we need is a multidimensional perspective, which helps locate the rights of residents/citizens in a broader discourse of access, unhindered by state boundaries. Just like non-resident Indian origin people can claim benefits in India through OCI status, similarly residents of different states who are placed in the borderlands should be able to have access to opportunities to work, health care and education in India through OCI status, similarly residents of different states who are placed in the borderlands should be able to have access to opportunities to work, health care and education in India through OCI status.

The writer teaches history at Ambedkar University, Delhi

A COGNITIVE LOCKDOWN

Delhi needs coordination across agencies and proactive leadership to fight COVID



RAJIB DASGUPTA

THE CUMULATIVE COVID-19 case count for Delhi crossed 85,000 by the end of June, the highest among the country's megacities. Delhi's test positivity rate also increased (that is, worsened), despite a four-fold increase in daily testing, between mid-May and mid-June, coinciding with lockdown 4.0 and 1000. This period also witnessed a marked rise in daily cases, from an average of about 300 to more than 3,000—it has since come down to about 1,000. The warning bells were louder, clear, culminating in meetings between the Union and Delhi government along with the mayors of the city's municipalities.

Despite an impressive early start, the initiatives in Delhi seem to have lost steam along the way. The "revised" testing guidelines—of only testing symptomatic contacts of COVID-19 patients—attracted some criticism, as did the handling of the private sector, particularly on the issue of price caps. The issue of data management and the government-appointed death audit committee certifying "official" COVID deaths showed the Delhi government in poor light. There were reports of "horrific scenes" regarding the lack of dignity in handling the dead. This culminated in the Supreme Court making adverse observations about the Delhi government.

Delhi has now set up large temporary hospital facilities with support from the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP)—more facilities are likely to follow. But the ambitious door-to-door survey, mass screening and the sero-survey projects are not sailing smoothly going by reports. The submission of the Delhi govern-

The recipe for the earlier successes included close technical coordination across central, state and municipal agencies as well as proactive political leadership, ably backed by a strong public health establishment of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi. The weakening and marginalisation of municipal structures and the failure of the incident management system has badly exposed the chinks in the armour.

ment before the High Court on June 29 was ominous—it was facing a shortage of human resources with at least 2,000 healthcare professionals infected and four doctors losing their lives.

Getting a handle on this crisis was never going to be simple. Success stories of various "models" from around the country abound, but the cold truth is that this is not about models but playing the game of epidemiology by its basic rules. The term "incident management" describes the activities an organisation takes to prepare, respond and learn from an event or hazard. The epidemiologist's skills and expertise apply to scenarios that require enhanced preparedness and responses even when pathogens associated with outbreaks are poorly characterised or when they require additional interventions. These interventions are not necessarily pathogen-specific and apply to a range of infectious diseases outbreaks. The command structure and system is extremely crucial to incident management and epidemiologists are trained for that function. The Delhi government has reportedly never revealed if there were any epidemiologists or virologists in its task force.

The invocation of the National Disaster Management Act (2005) early on brought a sense of much-needed urgency but also led to an over-reliance on generalist bureaucratic-administrators. The situation did not evolve an adequately broad-based response from the government as the inter-disciplinary and inter-agency nature of the challenge warranted. Delhi has for long been riddled with a multi-

licity of agencies, and political, resource-linked and inter-agency conflicts. Yet, epidemics were successfully managed in the past. Care systems and information-communication systems are now vastly improved. Therefore, the current failure is even starker. The recipe for the earlier successes included close technical coordination between central, state and municipal agencies as well as a proactive political leadership, ably backed by a strong public health establishment of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi. The weakening and marginalisation of municipal structures and the failure of the incident management system has badly exposed the chinks in the armour.

On June 29, the Director General, WHO, cautioned: "This is not even being close to over". Disaster management principles are typically designed for short-term acute needs. Perhaps the leadership was guided by the notion that "flattening the curve" shall automatically follow a stringent lockdown—this perhaps explains the elaborate securitisation. Caleb A Scharf observed in his article in *Scientific American* (May 14) that the COVID response, in general, has been marked by a "failure of imagination" and "a state of cognitive lockdown, flipping from one small piece of the problem to another and not quite building a cohesive whole". Delhi needs to rest itself and prepare for the long haul. In short, reinstate the imagination.

Dasgupta is professor at the Centre of Social Medicine & Community Health, JNU and former deputy health officer with MCD

JULY 10, 1980, FORTY YEARS AGO

FARAKKA ACCORD
THE MINISTER FOR Irrigation, Kedar Pandey, made it clear to Bangladesh that the formula for the sharing of the Ganga waters under the Farakka 1977 agreement was unacceptable to India. Speaking at the inaugural session of the 19th meeting of the Indo-Bangladesh Joint River Commission, Pandey said the accord had burdened India with "disproportionate sacrifices". This has given rise to a "great deal of frustration and resentment amongst our people". He also underlined the need for a speedy solution to the problem. The unprecedented drought in the last season, demonstrated the inadequacy of the "existing flows for meeting our require-

ments", Pandey said. His Bangladesh counterpart Azizul Haque said that the two sides were trying to understand each other.

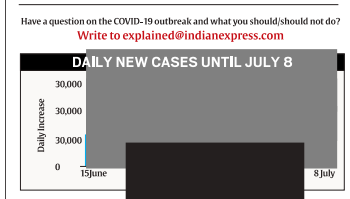
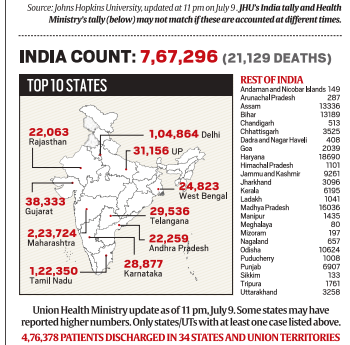
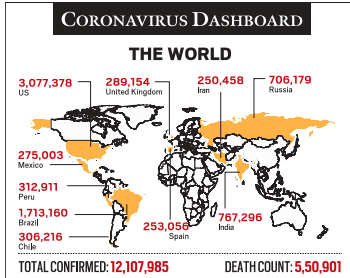
ASSAM STIR
THE MINISTER FOR External Affairs, Iqbal Singh, offered to hold talks with the Assam agitators immediately. The doors for "negotiations are open" and "we are trying to resolve the issue through talks", he said. The Minister also told the Raja Sabha, the home minister was responding to a declaration that conferred on the President, Assam legislature's power to make laws for the state. He put up a stout defence of the bill which attracted heavy criticism of large sections of the Opposition. Meanwhile,

the All Assam Students Union rejected the prime minister's call for talks.

TALKS WITH CHINA
THE EXTERNAL AFFAIRS Minister P V Narasimha Rao has deflected the government's move to hold talks with China. "After all why should we not talk. Even enemies talk. And we are not enemies. We are neighbours," he said in the Lok Sabha. He deployed a Congress (I) member's emphasis on "caution". Rao said, "caution should not be the end and all of India's policy". He said there was no change in India's position on the Afghan issue. "We have taken a positive view of the Soviet withdrawal," he said.

14 E. EXPLAINED

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, FRIDAY, JULY 10, 2020



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Behind

Since a slump on March 23, I and projections of econo

SANDEEP SINGH & ANIL SASI
NEW DELHI, JULY 9

UNDETERRED BY the pandemic, projections of an unprecedented economic contraction and border tensions, India's stock markets have staged a remarkable rebound. While the Sensex has gained 40% since hitting a low of 25,581 on March 23, markets have continued to climb since June 1, even as the number of daily new Covid-19 cases rose from around 9,000 in the first week of July to over 20,000 in the first week of July.

Will this sustain? Markets in India are broadly mirroring the trend elsewhere, effectively highlighting the disconnect between financial markets and the real economy across the world. Investors appear to be focusing on the easing of some short-term tail risks, and placing their bets on central banks' return to monetary policy easing, ignoring the economic slump and the rise in global poverty. From a medium-term perspective, the fundamental risks to the global economy are actually getting worse, with the pandemic nowhere near ending. The big concern is the unrealistic valuations, given that FY21 is a washout in terms of earnings for companies across sectors. There are also red flags regarding near-performing assets for banks, which may begin to show up after the moratorium period ends on August 31. Experts feel that a lag in economic revival, demand in the economy and reinstatement of income levels may lead to stress in all segments — corporates, MSME and retail in the quarter ended December 2020.

How have stock markets behaved globally?

In the US, the June quarter, which saw stock market gains of 18%, ended as the best performing quarter from American indices since 1998. This came amid concerns over new coronavirus cases spreading to US heartland states and a worsening trade stand-off with China. The S&P 500 and Dow Jones Industrial Average rose by over a quarter, and the Nasdaq by over a third during this period.

European stocks actually outperformed the S&P 500 in June. Chinese stocks have also surged, with both the CSI 300 of Shanghai and Shenzhen-listed shares recording a sharp recovery, supported in recent days by state-run media encouraging retail investors to buy stocks. The Nikkei 225 in Japan also gained over 35% in the same period.

Why are markets going up?

The near 40% gain in India's benchmark indices — BSE and NSE — since the March 23 low came even as retail investor sentiment was weak and individuals held on to cash amid uncertainty. The rise, interestingly, has not been limited to premier indices, with mid-cap and small-cap indices rising 39% and 41%, respectively.

While the gains in stock markets world-

July 2020 -5,588 579.4

All figures in Rs crore; July Data till July 8

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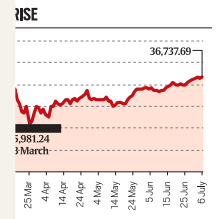
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QUESTION & ANSWER

Market rebound

have been rising despite Covid-19, tensions with China it explains this trend, and how likely is it to sustain?



Will the momentum sustain?

The big concern for the market is around the valuations. While FY21 is a washout in terms of earnings for NIFTY 50 companies, experts say that based on projected earnings for FY22, the markets look richly valued. "At projected EPS of around 500 for NIFTY for FY22, the price-to-earnings ratio comes at around 22. That is rich valuation and is the biggest concern for the markets as of now," said Pankaj Pandey, head of research at ICICI Securities. He further added that while Covid-positive cases are rising, "if we were to go by death rates, the peak of the problem is behind us".

Another concern that may come up is non-performing assets for banks, which may begin to show up after the moratorium period ends on August 31. Experts feel that a lag in economic revival, demand in the economy and reinstatement of income levels may lead to stress in all segments — corporates, MSME and retail in the quarter ended December 2020. "As the moratorium period ends on August 31, we may start witnessing the early warning signs for rise in NPAs beginning October 2020 and by December it may grow substantially," said a banker who did not wish to be named.

However, there are certain positives that may keep the markets to do well. A good monsoon holds the key to gain in momentum in rural recovery and growth in demand during the festive season.

A positive in the current rally is the participation of broader indices — mid-cap and small-cap — alongside Nifty and Sensex. There is a sense in the market that if a medical solution to Covid-19 comes over the couple of months, then there may be a big rally as there is a huge amount of liquidity sloshing about in the market.

While retail has entered in Indian market and other markets in a big manner, market participants say that even FIIs and DII's will continue to invest as there are IPOs in the market and the fund managers. He cautioned, however, that "it is not a healthy trend as the delivery volumes are low and that reflects speculative tendencies in the market".

Many feel that there is a growing sense among retail investors that since the fatality rate of Covid-19 is low, this suffering will be short-term and when the economy bounces back they may not get the opportunity to buy in the market at current levels. "Believers of markets have the faith that Covid-19 also will pass and then liquidity will push stock prices up," said C J George, MD, Geojit Securities.

Mutual funds however, have seen a decline in flow of new investors. While new SIP registrations for FY20 stood at a monthly average of 9.8 lakh, in the month of April and May it fell to a monthly average of 7.8 lakh. Senior officials at mutual funds say a sizeable number of investors who used to transact physically were not able to do so during the lockdown, but things are improving since the

branches reopened.

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In archives, reminder of Galwan in

MANAMAN SINGH CHHINA
CHANDIGARH, JULY 9

IN JULY 58 years ago, Indian and Chinese troops were taking steps towards disengagement on the Line of Actual Control. On July 15, 1962, *The Sunday Standard* ran its front-page lead report with the headline "Chinese Troops Withdraw From Galwan Post". And on July 8, 2020, *The Indian Express* headline on the current steps towards disengagement ran: "After Galwan Valley troops on both sides start pulling back in Hot Springs sector".

Archives of *The Indian Express* from 1962 reflect how tensions unfolded in the same areas of Ladakh, particularly Galwan, that have been in the news in the last two months.

June 12, 1962

China has charged India with setting up Army posts on its territory. India denies it.

REPORT: The *Indian Express* reports the government's rejection of the Chinese assertion that the Indian Army has set up two new posts in Sinkiang-Uighur of Chinese territory. It says India has protested against establishment of a post in Chip-Chap river and that China had ordered aggressive patrolling by its forces from Karakoram Pass on one end of the border to Kongka La on the other.

June 14, 1962

Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru says Chinese have entered Indian territory.

REPORT: The headline notes that the PM raises out war and also that China is unhappy over rift with India. Nehru is quoted as saying that "they (China) are not happy with our present relations". The PM also says the Chinese have crossed into large chunks of Indian territory in Ladakh.

June 20, 1962

Notes are exchanged over incursions in

Ladakh and NEFA

REPORT: India's Defence Minister Baldev Singh says the headline, adding that the Chinese charges of intrusion in Ladakh have been repudiated by India. The report highlights the government's statement to China about incursions in Ladakh as well as a village in the eastern sector, along with the fact that India and China have "exchanged notes".

June 21, 1962

Nehru's statement in Parliament about situation getting better in Ladakh.

REPORT: Front page reports PM's speech that the military situation on the northern borders is more advantageous to India than it was previously and the advantage is growing. It quotes Nehru as saying, "I do not say the position is hundred per cent satisfactory, but it is getting better and better".

June 23, 1962

India reiterates it will not accept Chinese demands to withdraw posts in Daulat Beg Oldie, notes for mutual withdrawal of forces.

REPORT: Headline declares India Not To Abandon Posts in Ladakh; Armed Clash Threat by Peking Deployed. The report quotes Nehru as saying that a fear complex has gripped China. The then Deputy External Affairs Minister, Dinesh Singh, is quoted as saying that India had asked China for mutual withdrawal of forces in a note dated May 14.

July 11, 1962

Indian Army post in Galwan valley is surrounded by Chinese troops.

REPORT: It refers to a post in Galwan valley surrounded by 400 Chinese troops. It notes that the lower reaches are not only well inside Indian territory but also 28 miles from the claim line shown by the Chinese 1956 map about which Premier Chou En Lai had written to Nehru on November 17, 1959. Referring to a Chinese memorandum of June



8, the Indian government is quoted as saying, "If as claimed in the Chinese memorandum, the Chinese troops have infiltrated and set up a post in the lower reaches of Galwan river it is a serious violation of Indian territory. That must be vacated."

July 12, 1962

Ministry of External Affairs says Indian troops will retaliate if attacked in Ladakh.

REPORT: A map of the Northern borders is published on the front page, with a cross marking Galwan valley position encircled by

the Chinese. "Should the Chinese attack the Indian Post here, the Indian forces will retaliate appropriately," a Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson is quoted as saying.

July 14, 1962

Chinese troops tighten encirclement; India warns of firing in self-defence.

REPORT: China Warned Against New Moves in Galwan' reads the headline. Report quotes the Indian government as saying the Chinese troops are now only 50-70 yards from Indian troops in Galwan post.

July 15, 1962

Chinese troops withdraw some distance from the Indian post.

July 23, 1962

It quotes officials as saying that great courage was shown by Indian jawans in the face of Chinese troops. 15 times stronger and that the warning delivered by Delhi to China had a telling effect. Asked if there will be a major clash, Nehru is quoted as saying, "There is a risk of clash but not a major one". Another report states the government's position that Aksai Chin was never part of China.

July 16, 1962

Nehru praises tenacity of Army jawans.

REPORT: 'Nehru Happy at Chinese Withdrawal' The headline adds, 'No Wish to Provoke Shooting in Galwan'. Report says Nehru praises jawans guarding the frontiers.

July 17, 1962

Chinese troops withdraw 200 yards from Indian post in Galwan; China complain of Indian posts in Pangong Lake area.

REPORT: Headline notes the situation is still tense. An NEA spokesperson is quoted as saying the Chinese have withdrawn 200 yards and are 400 m number. Another report notes that the Chinese have alleged that India has set up three posts at Siripag on the banks of Pangong Lake about 2 km inside Chinese

territory, at Yala on the Southern bank of the lake "over ten km within China", and northwest of Nyugzu "about five km within China".

July 23, 1962

First incidents of firing since 1959 Hot Springs incident.

REPORT: The headline notes Chinese troops have fired on Indian guards and two jawans have been injured in Ladakh valley. The report says the "Indian party exercised restraint and did not fire back" in Pangong area. At Chip Chap river, an Indian patrol was attacked with light machine guns, rifles and two-inch mortars and this time returned fire.

July 25, 1962

Chinese troops attempt to sever Indian lines of communication and supply to Galwan post.

REPORT: Chinese Bid to Set Up Base in Galwan — the report says the government has urged that Chinese forces stop interfering with the communication and supplies to the Indian post and withdraw peacefully.

August 23, 1962

India sends 5000 troops, sends fresh troops to relieve those on Galwan post.

REPORT: The headline reads 'Border Talks Only if Aggression is Vacated'. Nehru is quoted as saying Galwan garrison would be relieved soon by a column sent by road.

September 13, 1962

Focus shifts to NEFA as Chinese launch full-scale invasion across McMahon Line.

REPORT: The headline states 'Chinese Troops Advance into NEFA'. The report says Delhi is rushing forces.

Hereafter, developments in the Northeast would take centre stage. On October 19, 1962 the Chinese launched an offensive in Ladakh and took over Chip Chap valley, Galwan valley and posts in Pangong.



On top

A combination of circumstances is helping Nitish Kumar stay ahead in the race for Bihar

In the last 15 years, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has been on the winning side in all elections, barring one to the Lok Sabha in 2004. In 2005 and 2010 he led the NDA to power in the State. In 2014 he parted with the BJP, refusing to accept Narendra Modi as the candidate for Prime Minister. After his party, the Janata Dal (United), fared badly electorally, he vacated the CM's post for Jitan Ram Manjhi, a Dalit leader, in political manoeuvring that went out of his control soon. He reclaimed the chair and went on to fight and win the 2015 Assembly election in alliance with the RJD, the Congress and other small parties on the social justice plank. He had bitterly fought RJD founder Lalu Prasad since his exit in 1993 from the Janata Dal mother ship in which they both had cohabited for long. On July 26, 2017, he snapped ties with the new partners and returned to the BJP's embrace. Helped by an amoral agility and elastic ideological moorings, Mr. Kumar has outperformed expectations of political survival that his thin social base could yield in the normal course.

Mr. Kumar's claims of being a changemaker in governance were always exaggerated, though he did manage to pick up the shredded pieces of governance in the State in the initial years. Marginal improvements in education, health and local bodies allowed him some self-congratulatory indulgence, but the State's halting response to the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed glaring failures of governance. Bihar singularly failed in managing the return of nearly 25 lakh migrants from other States in the wake of the outbreak and abrupt lockdown of the economy. Testing levels are very low in Bihar, and Mr. Kumar has remained aloof. But the crisis has only reinforced him politically as things stand now. The widespread mobilisation against the CAA forced the BJP to announce in January that he would continue to lead the NDA and the alliance remained intact. The fate of many regional partners of the BJP in the past – for instance, from leadership to secondary status as with the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, or even to extinction as it happened with Janata rump in Gujarat – could have befallen the JDU too. A succession of one crisis after another, including the Chinese aggression now, has forced the BJP to abandon any plans it may have had to relegate Mr. Kumar to a subsidiary role in the State. With the BJP and the JDU clinging to each other, the social composition of large sections of the upper and middle castes and Dalits that propels them appears to be formidable. The opposition is in chaos. His father in jail, siblings playing spoilers and party seniors sulking, Tejashwi Yadav is struggling to steer the RJD. The Congress lacks vision, strategy and leadership. Mr. Kumar may not even need to use all his manipulative skills of time. Friends or foes, he is one step ahead of them all.

A case for extension

MGNREGS is important in the rescue of the poor during a time of distress

The finding that 8.4 lakh poor households have completed at least 80 days of the 100-day limit for work under the MGNREGS and 1.4 lakh among those have completed the full quota, should come as no surprise. While these numbers are a fraction of the 4.6 crore households which have benefited from MGNREGS this year, the fact that many poor households have nearly completed their full quota of employment under the scheme in just the last two months (May-June 2020) is a reflection of the distress that has driven them to take recourse to it. With the economy reeling after extended lockdowns following the COVID-19 pandemic and migrant labourers losing jobs in urban areas and returning to their rural homes to avoid destitution, the scheme has come as a huge relief to poor families. The government's decision to extend it into the monsoon season has also benefited households. Data from this year show that in nearly two-thirds of the States, demand for MGNREGS work has doubled or even tripled in a number of districts compared to the previous year. Only in States where *kharrif* crop was sown, the demand was relatively lower. But with some States resorting to their own shutdowns to curtail the spread of COVID-19, the prospects of a robust economic recovery that would benefit those engaged in casual labour and daily wage-labour remain dim. The fairly good monsoon this season should help with providing for more agricultural jobs beyond the MGNREGS works as well, but the surging rate of demand for work under the scheme suggests that it is time the government thought about extending the limit, at least on a State-by-State basis. The swell in agrarian employment in the monsoon season notwithstanding, the excess supply of labour owing to reverse migration from the cities could depress wages. This makes an extension of the limit of work days under the MGNREGS even more imperative.

Since its implementation over a decade ago, the scheme has acted as insurance for rural dwellers during crop failures and agrarian crises. But the Centre's outlook towards it continues to limit it only as a "fall-back" option for the poor. Even before the COVID-19-induced crisis, a lack of demand and falling consumption among the poor were constraining the economy. The MGNREGS, if utilised as more than just an insurance scheme and as a vehicle for rural development, could potentially address that problem. The lessons from its successes and failures could be used for a more comprehensive job guarantee plan that covers urban India too. Besides alleviating distress, this could also boost consumption and aid economic recovery. An extension of the 100-day limit and comprehensive implementation of the scheme in rural areas can be the first step.



SRINATH SRIDEVAN
AADIL CURRIMBHOY

The novel coronavirus pandemic has affected the lives of many and its catastrophic impact goes far beyond the disease itself. Governments across the world have dealt with the problem in different ways. We do not intend to criticise the lockdown or any governmental actions or inactions in this piece. Posterity will judge how good or how bad any government performed in 2020 on this count.

Finding cause

The world does not seem to have answers to many of the problems thrown up by the epidemic, especially those faced by the poorest of the poor. No doubt, some small countries have claimed victory in containing the impact of the disease, but their claim appears to be hollow and even myopic; the fact is that these countries are affluent, and have sealed their boundaries. So, is the pandemic's impact the result of the failure of individual governments? Or is it due to the failure of the bipolar ruler-dominated dynamic of governance structures across the world?

There is a view that mankind's ancestors, in the course of evolution, formed the concept of social groups and resultant rules they would abide by. This is the most rudimentary form of what is known as the 'social contract theory'. When monarchies and empires prevailed, it was easy to understand a social contract – to obey an identifiable sovereign, who in turn was deemed to be

god's representative on earth.

But democratically elected governments have found it more difficult to derive the same legitimacy. With the growth of fundamental freedoms, such as those of speech and expression, unquestioning obedience to governmental authority began to fade. Unquestioned obedience is the holy grail of every autocrat. Some governments yearn for it.

Modern society and modern governments also use the social contract theory to claim legitimacy for their actions, but rely more on the theory as expounded by Hobbes and Rousseau. While Hobbes believed that man, in Nature, was "solitary, nasty and brutish", for Rousseau, man, in Nature was "born free".

However, both agreed that the social contract comprises two distinct agreements; first, people agreed to establish society by collectively and reciprocally renouncing the rights they had against one another in unbridled nature and second, they agreed to confer upon one (or more) among them, the authority and power to enforce the initial contract. Thus, the social contract comprises people agreeing to live as one under common laws justly. Modern day governments take this further. Their fundamental credo is that society is best served if a government or other type of institution takes on executive or sovereign power, with the consent of the people.

Consolidating power

We have seen governments go still further and use the power democratically invested in them to decide what is in the best interest of the people. Thus, there is a bending of individual free will towards the collective will. Ironically most such leaders constantly invoke



"the will of the people" when consolidating executive power. So, the social contract is being used by modern governments to justify greater aggrandisement of power in the hands of the sovereign, under the garb of "public good". In fact, if the world events that occurred in 2018-19 were to be examined later by future historians, they would be excused for having an image that people across the world had voluntarily surrendered their individual rights to their governments, who exercised these powers with discipline and benevolence.

The case of two Indias

The pandemic caused crisis has laid bare the falsity of this image. For example, access to information about this pandemic has not been equal. The access to resources to avoid the disease has not been equal. And, of course, access to treatment has not been equal.

There are two Indias. The first is an India that observes social distancing, buys its groceries and provisions by observing all precautions and largely obeys governmental directives about COVID-19 prevention. The second is an India that crowds railway terminals to travel long distances, sometimes for days, to get back to native towns, and when that fails, decides to resort to the drastic step of even walking those hundreds of kilometres, defying all government-

tal directives. It is for the second India that the impact of COVID-19 has hit hardest and the impact has nearly nothing to do with the disease.

"Social distancing" was a stirring phrase and call that those of us who are privileged responded to with gusto. We wore our face masks and went about our actions, taking the changed world in our stride.

But there were the others: lakhs of Indians less privileged and living cheek by jowl in hovels and slums, for whom the mandated distance of separation of "6 feet" was and still is an impossibility; an abstract concept.

It is often said that "we are all in this together". But hardly so. We are not sharing the brunt of the pandemic with the poorest of India, the voiceless millions. Professor H.L.A. Hart once said, "freedom (the absence of coercion) can be valuable to those victims of unrestricted competition too poor to make use of it; so it will be pedantic to point out to them that though starving they are free".

The pandemic caused crisis has shone a light on how governmental methods to deal with a crisis largely come to the aid of only those with a voice. All societies have some measure of inequality. However, in deeply unequal societies (where the Gini Coefficient exceeds 0.4, for instance) different strata of society will have very different ways to deal with a crisis of this nature. We have seen societies with lower Gini Coefficients deal with the crisis far better, because a uniform approach works perfectly when society is perfectly equal.

For those in governance

In moments of crisis, people look to the state for guidance and take them to safety. This has led to some sections of society seeking a strong response from a strong

leader. Unfortunately, when the source of power in an unequal society is centralised, the response to the crisis will result in unequal relief to different strata of society. The more unequal the society, the more decentralised the response should be.

The social contract which imbues a centralised sovereign with overreaching powers has clearly failed on this occasion, and will continue to fail every time a similar challenge is posed. The centralised sovereign will work well against a mighty external aggressor, but not against a microscopic pathogen.

What is required is not just a decentralised approach but also a state which is sensitive and responds not only to the needs of those who cry out for help but also meets the requirements of those who are voiceless. Thomas Hobbes described the mighty state as a "Leviathan" which would rule by the will of the majority. He argued that once a ruler is chosen, citizens lose all rights except those the ruler may find it expedient to grant. While no elected government would publicly espouse such a position, it is the unwritten premise underlying every rule and dictat which is issued.

As seen above, a Leviathan has its uses, as for example, in times of war or in a fight against terrorism. The novel coronavirus cannot be defeated by a Leviathan. COVID-19 can only be defeated by an empowered populace. The social contract requires to be rewritten. It does not require anything drastic such as a revolution or anarchy. Rather, it only needs fundamental introspection and rethinking by the governing classes including bureaucrats.

Srinath Sridevan and Aadil Currimbhoy are advocates practising at the Madras High Court, and work with HRB Partners

The pandemic is about eyes shut

There is a resonance between Saramago's literary world and the migrant labour distress in contemporary India



RAJENDRAN NARAYANAN

The novel, *Blindness*, by Portuguese Nobel Laureate José Saramago, is strikingly prescient about a sweeping illness. The plot revolves around a mysterious epidemic because of which people suddenly turn blind.

The thread

It starts with a person driving his car who turns blind while waiting at a traffic signal. He pleads to be taken home and a man, on the pretext of helping, takes him home, but soon after runs away with his car. The contagion spreads rapidly and all those affected by the epidemic are quarantined in an asylum. The novel follows seven people, who do not have names but only descriptions: the doctor, the doctor's wife, the girl with the dark glasses, etc. Lack of equitable delivery of food, inopportune and unhygienic living conditions, police brutality and apathy of power structures lead to panic among the blind. They are on the brink of starvation. Seven characters escape the asylum and enter the city where they came from only to find that everybody in the city has become blind. Lacking any support, the country plunges into utter despair before resurrection happens quite magically.

Apart from the obvious connections with the pandemic, there are other, numerous and allegorical

ways in which Saramago's world resonates with contemporary India.

Data and worker anonymity

Consider for example, the case of blindness regarding the number of migrant workers. The government's own data sources are inconsistent and are a massive underestimation. The office of the Chief Labour Commissioner stated that there are 26 lakh migrants while various estimates, including the Economic Survey, put this number above 8 crore people. The anonymity of the workers has been reinforced as governments have kept records of who they are and where they are working. This lack of accountability has given a free rein to the complex web of contractors and subcontractors to exert various forms of exploitation. The migrant workers, like the characters in *Blindness*, have been rendered nameless in this unequal power gambit.

Then, there is the blindness about hunger and deaths. On June 30, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced free food grains for the National Food Security Act (NFSA) beneficiaries till November. While it is a welcome move, it yet again excludes those without ration cards. As per estimates of Meghana Munglikar, Jean Dreze, and Reetika Khara, roughly 10 crore eligible beneficiaries continue to be excluded under the NFSA. This is because the central government is still using 2011 Census data and hence underestimates NFSA coverage. Moreover, migrants and many self-employed workers do not have ration cards. At a time when the warehouses of the Food Cor-



poration of India have 2.5 times the buffer stock norms, not universalising access is inexcusable. Two petitions concerning food and income support for migrants were summarily dismissed by the Supreme Court of India during lockdown. The Court finally took *suo motu* cognisance of the crisis after 20 senior lawyers wrote a letter to the Chief Justice of India to demand that the government, Tushar Mehta, representing the Union of India, has submitted that there has been no death in the Shramik trains because of lack of water and food, and all deaths took place due to "earlier illnesses". On May 15, Union Minister of Railways Piyush Goyal at Bennett University said, "we have gone through the entire three months without a single person starving". In reality, there have been at least 850 non-COVID deaths due to an unplanned lockdown. Indian Railway Protection Force Service data show that there have been 80 deaths in Shramik trains alone between May 9 and May 27; most of these are due to starvation and financial distress. Numerous ground reports indicated the extent of hunger. As in Stranded Workers Action Network (SWAN) reports covering more than 34,000 workers, 50% had just one

day of rations left and 64% had less than 100 when they reached out during the lockdown. In such light, the combination of falsehoods and measured silence by the governing institutions and the judiciary indicate that they have been afflicted by Saramago's imaginary epidemic of blindness that refused to see the gravity of the crisis.

Museum of misery

As rising cases of COVID-19 suggest, the lockdown did not curb the spread of the virus. It was an unilateral decision taken, apparently, to buy time to create health-care facilities. However, the government's hubris backfired. The resilience and the perseverance of the migrants exerting their fundamental right to return pushed the government to respond this time. The SWAN report says: "While a part of the government's slow response is due to the lack of empathy towards workers, a part is also the result of inefficiencies resulting from unilateral decision-making. Consequently, the government has created a museum of distress and a museum of misery." The maze of obfuscating travel orders and the opacity surrounding train schedules was as if the migrants were made to play a cruel game of snakes and ladders. The lucky ones took the metaphorical ladder to the train only to find themselves hungry and fighting with fellow migrant travellers to get food. Even among them, most have had to pay for travel forms, pay bribes and face police brutality. The resemblances with the plight of those in Saramago's novel are uncanny. The unlucky

ones stayed back, some evicted from their rented spaces, waiting anxiously for their illusory chance to come. As a character says in the Saramago novel, "... you have to wait, give it time, it's time that rules, time is our gambling partner on the other side of the table and it holds all the cards of the deck in its hand, we have to see the winning cards of life, our lives."

Some advice

Unlike Saramago's fictional world, such systemic and structural blindness has no magical cure. After continued hostility that work-arounds have been tried, it is difficult to pin down the precise analytical reasons for the diverse expressions from migrants. Some have resolute about returning immediately while some are unable to return home without earnings. Surveys cannot do full justice to understanding these categories. We need to see the world at best create reductive categories. We definitely do not need piecemeal platitudes coming from the central government. We need many corrections such as stronger adherence to constitutional values, transparency and accountability from the government and the judiciary. And, not just those in power but also those who elect them need to collectively treat the epidemic of blindness that has eroded our moral core where we do not feel uneasy in seeing the hardships of marginalised communities.

Rajendran Narayanan teaches at Azim Premji University and has been a SWAN volunteer

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Moving back

While there are numerous reports about China's PLA pulling back from occupied positions in the eastern Ladakh following the call between the Special Representatives of India and China, there is still an absolute lack of clarity on what actually has been mutually agreed upon between the parties towards disengagement and de-escalation. Despite the vague explanation, why should Indian troops too withdraw from their present positions which are well within our side of the LAC? Are we making a concession to buy

temporary peace with a most untrustworthy neighbour? If so, it would amount to compromising our territorial integrity. How will the "buffer zone" be defined and marked on the ground? What happens to the structures put up by the Chinese well within our side? There is no reason why the media should not be briefed jointly by representatives from the Indian Army and the Ministry of External Affairs on such vital issues of national security. This was done every day during the Kargil war.

S.K. CHOWDHURY, Bengaluru

On policing

It is common knowledge that the services of the police are beyond the reach of the common man. The root cause can be attributed to the apprehension of getting entangled in unnecessary and unexpected turn of events. The police for justice (Editorial page, "Police terror and the theatre of law", July 8). The situation is equally bleak for the government, at the Centre and in States,

initiate reforms that would ease work stress and ubiquitous pressure from the higher-ups and people with political influence on the police, atrocities of the kind seen in Sattankulam, are bound to recur.

G.B. SIVANANDAM, Coimbatore

The manner in which Jayaraj and Benicks had their lives snuffed out is a reminder of how torture is a biggest concern of human rights in India. The police are not the only party responsible. It is also the apathetic and unresponsive from society. Most States are silent on the Prevention of

Torture Bill. All is not well with the state of policing. A pandemic can never be an excuse to harass people.

JASPREET SINGH, Pudukkottai

Police training centres and academies should impart interpersonal skills to trainee police. Many of them in their line of duty act cruelly with no remorse of any sort. Their acrimony towards the accused and suspects appears to prevail over their bonhomie towards them. How sad! A generational change is needed in the apathetic and unresponsive from society. Most States are silent on the Prevention of

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are oblivious to this.

K. PRADHEEP, Chennai

Body cams

The report (Chennai, July 8) that traffic policemen will now wear body cameras appears to be the result of some 'soul searching' about the spate of media exposures showing the protectors having turned perpetrators. It would be unfair to expect entire police force with the same brush due to some bad apples. But this move to modernise is welcome.

DR. THOMAS PALCAMPAN, Villavil, Tamil Nadu



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DR. THOMAS PALCAMPAN, Villavil, Tamil Nadu

OUR VIEW



How India could revive two birds in one stroke

As airlines respond to demand for middle seats kept empty on flights, the Centre should buy all these in bulk. This will assure flyers of safety from corona and also bail the industry out

Airlines have been gasping for survival across the world ever since the covid pandemic grounded aircraft and suffocated demand for air travel. Airports were seen as transmission hubs right from the outbreak's onset, and recent reports that the risk of airborne coronavirus infection in enclosed spaces may be higher than estimated earlier have done little for the confidence of would-be flyers. In India, even though air carriers have been allowed to resume only partial services, their occupancy levels are reported to be in a pale range of about half on high-traffic routes to roughly two-thirds on flights that link destinations that are hard to reach overland. Flights are being called off, too. According to OAG, a UK-based travel data provider, only 1.3 million seats were on offer this week, half the figure last week. With post-lockdown revenues failing to gain altitude, now that stranded passengers have presumably reached home, some airlines are looking for novel ways to attract custom. Earlier this week, the Tata-Singapore Airlines joint venture Vistara began offering the option of buying an adjoining seat to keep vacant on its flights. The idea has caught on, it seems, and a sub-market for onboard social distancing may soon emerge. IndiGo and SpiceJet might also start selling empty middle seats as add-ons at "dynamic discounts" (determined by market conditions), to lure those who are uneasy about flying too closely with strangers.

Onboard distancing should ideally have been mandated by India's regulator of civil aviation. It would have been consistent with the government's advisories on public safety. Since market demand for spaced-out seating is

now in evidence, however, amends could yet be made. This could be done in a way that achieves two objectives in a single stroke. Rather than intervene to enforce an onboard distancing rule, it should snap up the middle seats on all domestic flights to keep empty. This would serve the cause of safe flying while also acting as a bailout package for cash-strapped airlines. Most of these carriers had flown into rough weather even before they encountered the air pocket of April and March, a phase in which they had to meet fixed expenses without any money coming in, barred as their operations were by a government order. Like all businesses forced to shut, they deserved some compensation. But the government's finances have been so overstretched that its rescue efforts so far have had to be highly selective. If airlines are to be bailed out, one might ask, why not firms in other badly hit sectors such as hospitality? There are two good reasons. For one, aviation counts as a crucial support service in every economy, including ours. Like telecom, the quick connectivity it allows is an enabler of economic growth. For another, it is a market for whose survival and prosperity the government bears extra responsibility. Since aviation uses public resources—air corridors, airport infrastructure, etc.—that are scarce, it is a licensed category. Unlike hospitality, this market has big state-imposed entry barriers; new carriers cannot rush in to replace those that go belly up. Also, its operational dependence on the State is especially high. This means that the sector deserves special attention. Today, even a single airline's exit would impair competition. An oligopoly could take hold. Let aviation not succumb to neglect.

THE NEW NORMAL

From grand theatrical sublimities to OTT absurdities

SUSHMITA BOSE



is a journalist, editor and the author of 'Single In The City'.

Many many years ago, I had watched a musical called *Annie*. On 70mm. It was about an eponymous red-haired, freckle-faced little orphan girl who is adopted by a stern, never-been-in-love millionaire. One of the many fun things *Annie* does to "humanize" her foster father is to take him—along with her governess (who, by the end of the reels, becomes her foster mother)—to the movies.

That particular sequence, where they all get dressed to the nines for an evening out, is something I recall whenever I toy with intimations of cinematic mortality. Those lines they sing—"Let's go to the movies/Sitting in the darkness/What a world to see!/Song and romance, life is the dance/Sitting in the darkness, popcorn on your knee"—I had imagined would, like an old classic, endure happily ever after. But instead, they've gotten a reality check.

"Is 'The End' popping up on the big picture screen?" Well, yes. At least for the foreseeable future. The death knell on the grand illusion rung in when, recently, a spate of new releases got a vent via OTT (over-the-top) streaming. I just read somewhere that the London Film Festival, to be held in October, will be a virtual one this year. Over 50 films will have online premieres. We can now watch a sweeping drama debuting on a smart-pant gadget while loitering around in pyjamas on a dishevelled couch. And the popcorn can always be microwaved.

The last time I watched a movie in a theatre was in early March. Other than that it was titled *Thappad*, the experience itself was like a slap in the face: There were six of us in an auditorium designed to accommodate at least 150. Covid hadn't yet checked in like that annoying guest who doesn't want to leave, but it was lurking around the corner—so, inside the hall, all six of us looked at the other far-flung five with a certain amount of suspicion. Everyone continually sanitized their hands, and collectively heaved a sigh of relief when the movie ended.

Soon after, all theatres downed shutters. Temporarily, it was emphasized. But I'm not so sure how the scene will play out once (and if) the covid phase gets over. In markets like China, for example, where screens are being

reopened in a phased manner, only re-runs of popular films are being shown, since new offerings cannot be granted a sliced-and-selective-audience.

For me, the grandeur of the big screen had in any case been on the decline since the advent of multiplexes. It's simple: Most of them are housed within mall premises, and there's something distinctly unholy about cinema being reduced to a stopping point on a retail trail.

Growing up, when movies were an outing, a treat, I never forgot a single film. I'd remember lines, scenes, actors' names. Plus, there were a host of memories. Like when, as schoolkids, we were not allowed to watch an "Adults only" film, and how we sidled, shame-faced, into a neighbourhood theatre to catch a "wholesome family" one. Or when a bunch of us college friends had watched a re-run of *The Exorcist* armed with

extra *kathi* rolls those days, so we could easily smuggle in outside food; so we could busy ourselves eating if the going got too scary. Or when my grandmother told me how the ladies who sat in dress-circle seats at a *Fair Lady* screening (sometime in the 1960s) got a vanity case each.

Till a few months ago, I had steadfastly refused to fall prey to the excesses of mindless OTT bingeing, falling back on my vast DVD collection whenever I wanted to enjoy cinema. In late March, I capitulated like a row of pins flattened by a curveball, and am now hooked to the single-minded pursuit of endless entertainment.

These days, memories are created. But there's a lot of forgetfulness. I've lost track of plots and twists as I navigate overpopulated platforms, watching whatever catches my fancy. Nothing stays anymore, even great shows and movies blur into nothing in one's consciousness.

Yet, unlike cinema-going of yore, OTT experiences leave one with no memories to cherish. We watch what catches our fancy, and even great shows blur into nothing in one's consciousness.

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WHAT IF WORKING FROM home goes on forever?

As the covid-19 pandemic forces more companies to consider remote working their new reality, keeping the human touch alive in our interactions with colleagues by making that extra effort to crack a joke or praise someone becomes more important than ever before

TONGUE-IN-CHEEK
HARISH BHAT

Wrote about
businesslife@vsnl.com

It is now several months since we began working from home. Some of us have returned to our offices, partly if not fully. Some of us are still eagerly awaiting the safe reopening of our cities. In a few other cases, organizations have announced that work from home (WFH) will continue for much longer, perhaps become a way of life.

Now, that's not too bad at all, say some of my friends because WFH saves on commute time, and you know what, the last few weeks have shown that we can deliver even better productivity from our homes. None of the distractions of office, hence better work output. Some other friends believe all this short-term productivity hasn't been possible because we know our colleagues well, we have built strong bonds with them by working together in offices for several years. That social capital can sustain a few

months of WFH and transactional video calls, and then we will need to be back in our offices, for sure.

Even while this interesting debate is running its course, there is one aspect of work from home that we would do well to pay heed to—the human touch, which can bring in the fun and happiness of our offices into our homes. I am not talking here of knowledge webinars or online learning programs, which are no doubt important because they keep us engaged intellectually.

I am talking of recreating the joys of offices, and banishing the loneliness that often accompanies WFH, with small little touches that we often forget. Here are a few of them.

MAKE TIME FOR CORRIDOR TALKS

Spontaneous corridor conversations are such a wonderful part of office life. You meet a colleague on your way towards the staircase or pantry, or you drop in at their workstation on a whim, and you get around to immediately discussing something which has been on both your minds. These are unplanned meetings, but I think we look forward to them.

WFH, because everyone is remote, tends to be more planned, with meetings that are scheduled and calendared well in advance. You can break this well-scheduled, rigid pattern by calling a colleague spontaneously, at lunchtime

or at end of day, just to talk about something that needs a little bit of smart navigation, or to pick each other's brains about some unique problem that needs resolution. Such spontaneous collisions are so different from scheduled and well-planned video meetings, that they trigger a different channel in our minds, and leave us fulfilled in a nice and charming way.

STAY BACK AND RELAX
Having coffee and tea together with your team—mission one of the most relaxing rituals in our offices. This is also the time for banter and light conversation. Some teams prefer to do this in the mornings, and others in the late afternoons.

You can bring this joyful coffee break into your WFH routine too, by scheduling virtual coffee breaks with your colleagues, over a video call, once or twice a day. Switch on the video, see each other, sip your cups of coffee, and chat for awhile. Stay off serious work topics during virtual coffee time. But if relevant references to the workplace, or poking a bit of fun at yesterday's virtual meetings, are totally in order.

HUMOUR ALWAYS HELPS

Offices and conference rooms come alive when there's a touch of humour in the air. When we take a break during a meeting in the office, there's often humorous banter that goes around. Some colleagues are naturally more humorous, and they ensure meetings don't get too uptight, boring or serious. The risk tendency for meetings over video to be largely devoid of humour, because everyone is focused on productive conversation and the transaction at hand. It is also easier to be humorous when you are actually seeing each other, at close quarters.

You can address these deficiencies by injecting some WFH humour yourself, into a few remote meetings that you are part of—particularly with teammates whom you know very well. Towards the end of

any such remote team meeting, request your colleagues to switch on their video feeds, and one of two of you can then narrate a small humorous incident each, from your homes. You will be surprised by the stock of domestic humour, primarily relating to valiant efforts at child-care, cooking or cleaning, that is readily available among

your colleagues. The meeting will end with a few chuckles, for sure.

GO AHEAD, APPRECIATE YOUR PEER
Often caught in our own WFH warp, we focus on being very productive, and forget to convey our appreciation for others' achievements, however small or big.

Providing and receiving genuine appreciation is one of the best points of office life, and this should never take a back seat, even while working remotely. In offices, we see our colleagues regularly, and so we are able to convey our thanks or praise in person. When we work from home, we don't meet them personally. So, it is useful to keep note of any achievement that strikes you as commendable, and then send your colleague a message of generous admiration for what she or he has been able to deliver. Remember that this is still a pandemic and a crisis, that people are working with anxieties about their health and families. Hence, taking the extra effort to share a word of praise, even for a small accomplishment, is worthwhile during these difficult times.

Harish Bhat works with the Tata Group. He tries to bring a human touch to his WFH routine by engaging in arguments on video calls because arguing is human too.

Build your mental resilience to get through this pandemic

Sujata Kalkar Shetty

A Buddhist monk was walking on a dirt road when he heard the clattering of hooves and turned to see a horse galloping towards him. The rider seemed unable to control the animal. As they sped past, the monk asked, "Where are you going in such a hurry?" The man yelled back, "Don't ask me, ask the horse!"

Like the man on the horse, the mind sometimes seems to have a will of its own. It takes us to places unbidden, places we would prefer not to go because those thoughts leave us tired, anxious and unhappy. This is true when we live in uncertain times, like the present. Living through a lockdown and without a sense of how things will change is leaving many of us stressed. Business is suffering, people are being laid off in droves, and we are all in survival mode.

Topping that is the looming worry about contracting the disease that started this all, covid-19. This present atmosphere of uncertainty, financial insecurity, and the threat of an unpredictable illness have made many of us vulnerable to anxiety and depression.

Anxiety and depression may seem unrelated but they are in fact two faces of the same coin. They

have similar symptoms and often coexist. Given the extraordinary and unprecedented nature of the covid crisis, the number of people suffering from these conditions is going up. There is a silent mental health epidemic on our hands.

It is imperative that we make a conscious effort to strengthen our mental resilience as individuals and as a society. For that, the way that we think of mental health needs to change.

While we may find resourceful ways of staying physically fit with classes available online, we do not think of how we can maintain our emotional health by using the same device to speak with a therapist. This attitude needs to change.

We need to be proactive in looking after our mental health. And yes, while there is a social stigma attached to seeking help for mental health, the only way this can change is when each of us accepts that we are human and can fall ill in both mind and body. Just as we can do things to make our bodies more resilient, we need to recognize that we can choose to make our minds more resilient too.

Behavioural activation is a simple tool you can use to help yourself. When we aren't feeling our best, we tend to withdraw from activities that we enjoy. When we withdraw from activities we enjoy, our mood dips further, making it that much harder



to do the things that would help us feel better. It's a downward spiral that we often don't recognize ourselves, particularly when the going gets tough.

What makes this pandemic so hard to deal with is that our usual methods of coping with stress—socializing and/or exercising—are no longer available

to us. We need to use novel ways to help ourselves. That's where behavioural activation comes in. The rules are simple.

You need to schedule things into your day that you find pleasurable, meaningful and necessary. It is important these things align with your values. Pleasurable and meaningful could mean taking a walk with a friend in a park, both of you wearing masks and maintaining distance, or taking an online class in advance form you've always wanted to learn. Routine would cover the basics like making sure the house is clean and there is fresh food on the table. Necessary would be what is essential for survival, such as tasks related to work and bills.

It is important to realize two things. One, all these activities won't be fun but they will all add to making your life more positive.

Two, behavioural activation rests on the principle that you need to get yourself moving to feel better. This also means cutting out time when you aren't doing much. Cut out the time you spend scrolling through social media feeds because it will likely leave you feeling lower in mood after. Low effort activities like watching TV are fine as long as you don't use them to avoid doing something that you need to get done.

Most importantly, stick to the plan you make

even when you don't feel like it. It could take a week or two for you to find out whether what you have scheduled, particularly in the pleasurable and meaningful category, is working for you.

Finally, you will be able to help yourself in this manner if you have a mix of activities to help you. Counsellors and therapists are offering services via Zoom and phone. Your mental health matters and there is no shame in asking for help when you need it.

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