

OUR VIEW



An official map of India should be available to all

The country's boundaries need not fixate us, but Chinese hostility has raised the ante on the territorial integrity of India. Oddly, though, we still haven't a modern map on the internet

A country's map tends to get etched in the consciousness of its people. So, any reminder of how India's de facto borders have shifted since independence, as Mint's Plain Fact section showed on Tuesday, could come as a surprise. The truth is that the outline of the country as we know it took quite some time to form, with princely states like Hyderabad and non-British colonies like Goa being annexed or amalgamated by and by. Then, there were some changes imposed by the vagaries of history (and hostility). Within a year of casting off Britain's imperial yoke, for example, we lost two northern chunks of mountainous territory to Pakistan, which ceded the north-western part in the 1960s to China, with which our Line of Actual Control along the Himalayas has never been converted to mutually-agreed border, despite diplomatic efforts. There have been a few other inductions, too, such as Sikkim in '75. Also, a few minor handovers, like the Kabaw Valley that we gave to Myanmar as a friendly gesture in '53 and Kathachuevu island awarded to Sri Lanka in '74 under a maritime deal. Even a cursory awareness of these changes would make it clear that our map has never been hard cast. Sure, this may partly be because the nature of the terrain in some outlying areas, from high-altitude glaciers to marshy rivulets, has enforced a certain fluidity of borders. But, overall, the very mutability of our landmass should nudge us not to be fixated on an allied map-as-a-state.

Yet, the world of geopolitics is never quite so simple. So long as nation-states remain the principal actors in global affairs, borders will not only remain relevant, they need to be defended from the incursive aims of aggressive

countries. Borders are powerful markers of relations with neighbours, especially if a brute force on the other side sees their redefinition at its own whim as a way of asserting its dominance. While India has long had a dispute with China over the 3,500-odd-kilometre stretch that separates the two, and has fought a war with the latter in 1962, the loss of 20 Indian soldiers in military scuffle this summer in Ladakh has served as a wake-up call on the need to pay our territorial integrity greater attention. Despite the government's silence on the matter, there are signs that a significant patch of Indian land might still be under Chinese control. It is not clear if Beijing's tactical "salami slicing" game of tiny incursions is aimed at gaining some sort of leverage over New Delhi in other geostrategic spheres, but we must insist on a revision to the status quo ante, enhance border security, and foil whatever plans our adversary has.

What we also need is an officially-approved national map that is not stored somewhere in a cupboard to be unrolled from time to time for high-level scrutiny, but is available in digital form on the internet, for anyone to click open and zoom in for the finest of details. As Google Maps has shown, satellites, drones and other modern tools now allow high-resolution cartography. The Survey of India does have an ongoing project to this end, but its map is expected only next year. Its accuracy parameters have been set to enable clear demarcations of property for land records, and it could serve other practical purposes such as aiding home delivery businesses. But that's not the only reason the project should be speeded up. In this age of democratic transparency, we should all be in a position to go online and check the country's borders for ourselves.

MY VIEW | ARTHANOMICS

Capitalism and democracy seem to be at odds across today's world

Call to bail weak companies out with public funds must be resisted for true capitalism to prevail



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Once upon a time, it was useful to think of free enterprise-based capitalism and electoral democracy as buddies. One supported the other, since both were about freedom. But trends in two versions of capitalism—the free enterprise one of the US and the authoritarian variety of China—should force us to re-examine this hypothesis. Faced with periodic economic crises, American politicians are wooing voters with socialist rhetoric and promises of bigger state; the authoritarian Chinese state is metamorphosing into a new kind of imperialism that is inimical to democracy. China is growing richer, but neither more democratic nor responsible.

The waning of domestic audiences, whether through the ballot box in the US and Western democracies or through an implicit social consensus in China, where citizens trade political freedoms for greater prosperity, has resulted in abjuring of the line that separates politics from economics. Four major economic crises seem to have hastened that trend: the global financial crisis of 2008, the eurozone crisis of the subsequent period, the post-covid economic collapse this year, and the 30-year Japanese debt binge. From the current mania of endlessly printing money to appease voter anxieties, it would seem that economics is just politics by another name. Despite

its flaws, capitalism works only when a free market is allowed to play its role in separating the strong from the weak; creative destruction is the key to innovation and viable growth. If deadbeat companies are allowed to remain afloat by taxpayer-financed bailouts, especially if the funds are obtained not from tax revenues but debt, then even competitive companies will end up sinking under the pressure. In short, trying to save too many bad apples could leave the whole basket rotten.

Few observers seem willing to give India's Narendra Modi government credit for trying to follow relatively sensible economics (during the first four years of its first term) and pushing unviable companies towards liquidation or sale to stronger companies. At no time in the history of India have companies owned by some of our biggest promoter groups—the Tata, Reliance, Ambanis (the Anil Ambani part), Dhoots, Jaiprakash, Binani, GVK, GMR—been forced to either sell their troubled companies or opt for bankruptcy proceedings. The process is far from complete, or even smooth, and unviable parts of the micro, small and medium enterprise sector are likely to see a gruesome shakeout in terms of jobs lost and consanguinity. But at the end of it all, there is a possibility that only relatively viable firms will remain afloat.

It is easy to say that "metayay"—where the big fish swallow or kill the small—is morally reprehensible, but protection should be restricted to human beings, not companies. In the current covid crisis, the Modi government has tried hard to protect the big fish by focusing its expenses in cash and kind only on the most vulnerable (migrant labour, the poor, etc.), and avoiding massive bailouts for the multitude of sectors now in distress. While there is little doubt that the fisc is going to be stretched for a while, the government has so far resisted calls to open the spigot of massive debt-financed cash bailouts for all and sundry.

India is at least attempting to maintain some modicum of fiscal restraint in how it deals with the covid-induced economic crisis. We can't say that about the US, but for the US, the US dollar is an article of faith. In an article for 'The Wall Street Journal', Morgan Stanley's Ruchir Sharma says that the world has repeatedly been using debt to fund stimulus programmes on the assumption that all these are not only necessary, but can easily be financed in an near-zero interest rate regime. But cheap money enables even "zombie firms" to borrow, leading to huge losses in productivity.

The downside of such fiat money-fuelled assaults on market mechanisms is that debt keeps piling up, and this debt may be financing not good quality investment, but stock market binges or gold purchases. It enables giant monopolies to become even bigger and more menacing. If capitalism is supposed to prevent monopolies, either by allowing market forces to produce competent rivals or through sensible regulation, prolonged cheap money policies have delivered the exact opposite. Big Tech monopolies and other megacorps seem to have gained the most. The same speculators who brought on the 2008 crisis are again the prime beneficiaries of covid bailouts in the US.

Capitalism is already under attack on many fronts, from trade barriers to its curbs on the free movement of people. It hardly needs the world's big capitalist democracies to use any and every economic crisis to print more currency in the name of helping the poor and then ending up financing the speculative wealth of their richest. The ever-growing state and push for welfareism are slowly ruining capitalism, as democratic politics requires politicians to make payouts to voters at the cost of fixing the structural problems that constrain growth. These policies could bankrupt economies as well as democratic politics. Capitalism faces an existential crisis, just as communism did in the late 1980s.



JUST A THOUGHT

To be called a sovereign nation, a nation has to be able to control its own borders. It is controlling your own destiny in a way.

TOM TANCREDO

MY VIEW | EX MACHINA

The mission to put health records at doctor's fingertips

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The National Digital Health Mission recently released a Strategy Overview document that laid out, in broad strokes, the National Health Authority's (NHA's) plan to build India into a Digital Health Nation. What is apparent from this paper is that the NHA sees the nascent state of digitization of our health-care system as an opportunity to learn from the experiences of other countries that are much further down this road. While this allows us to avoid the mistakes that other countries have made, the sheer scale of what the document attempts to deliver seems too vast for what is possible for us to achieve.

There is a lot to unpack in the document. At the outset, it is good to see that the NHA has decided to adapt and extend India's novel data portability architecture to facilitate transfers across the digital health ecosystem. The regulatory basis for India's unique brand of data portability is set out in the draft Personal Data Protection Bill. However, the technological scaffolding on which

this portability will be implemented is contained in the Data Empowerment and Protection Architecture (DEPA), a framework that is already being used for the sharing of financial information through the central bank's account aggregator framework.

If we can successfully implement DEPA in health care, we just might be able to make good on the ambitious, radically-federated design that the National Digital Health Mission has selected for the country. According to the strategy document, health care data must be stored as close as possible to the point of its generation. This means that, instead of creating a single, centralized database, data can remain in the hospitals, pharmacies, diagnostic laboratories and polyclinics where they first came into existence. As long as all these digital nodes of the health care ecosystem adopt software that is compliant with NDHM standards, as they are supposed to, data can rapidly be hunted across the digital health system from its original place of storage to wherever it is immediately required.

The most obvious benefit of this sort of radical portability is how much easier it will become for patients to get second opinions. With the click of a button, any specialist they are consulting will be able to gain access to

all the lab reports, test results and diagnosis documents that are stored in the hospitals where they were first admitted. This will obviate the necessity for them any repetitive and expensive tests we currently undergo each time we go to another doctor for a different point of view.

But perhaps most importantly, this framework facilitates the creation of a personal health record, a patient-centric history of all of our interactions with the medical ecosystem. This will generate, for the first time, a record of all our interactions with the medical ecosystem, giving doctors the information they need to provide us with a complete diagnosis.

In order for all this to work, it is important to ensure that all the health care providers who currently make up the ecosystem conform to the digital health standards. Around the world, digitization of health care has historically been driven by the internal billing departments of large hospitals and the insurance companies

that are responsible for health care payments. This has resulted in the creation of health data standards that cater to the requirements of administrative departments of large medical institutions, instead of providing doctors with the data they need to treat patients. The reason health care software systems have atomized medical procedures into smaller and smaller fragments is that they allow these procedures to be billed more granularly. While this is useful from a financial and administrative perspective, it is hostile to our medical benefit. As we look to select the standards for India's digital health ecosystem, we need to choose one that places a clear premium on medical outcomes.

The proposed data-sharing protocols could achieve better healthcare in India if we get the details right

From that perspective, it is heartening to note that the NHA has recommended the use of FHIR-R4 resources to format its Strategy Overview document. This Fast Healthcare Interoperability Resources standard looks to treat any item of clinical data as a resource that can be described using medically relevant

attributes like "medication prescription", "adverse reaction", "procedure" and "condition". This would allow for medical data to be placed in a contextual framework that is far more relevant to a clinician than the current coding standards that are currently used in various medical systems around the world.

What's even more exciting, however, is that FHIR offers application programme interfaces through which health data can be easily accessed. This will allow for the creation of apps that allow us to interrogate the data and generate the kind of results and analyses that would otherwise not have been possible. More importantly, it promises to enable the integration of data from a variety of non-traditional sources—wearable and Internet-of-Things devices—that are capable of generating the sort of always-on data that was earlier available only at a health care facility. All this can unlock new possibilities of treatment and patient care, and thus transform the Indian health system.

The path that the NHA has chosen for the country is ambitious and aggressive. As we start down this journey, we would do well to remember that the urgency to build the digital health infrastructure in India need not only surpass by the risk of not getting it right.

Questions that still hover around our monetary policy framework

The first four years of the Reserve Bank of India's inflation-targeting framework could offer lessons for the journey ahead



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The first monetary policy committee (MPC) appointed by the government to decide the benchmark interest rate in India ended its term this month. A lot has already been written on the voting pattern over the 24 meetings of this Reserve Bank of India (RBI) committee. A new MPC has to be appointed soon under the existing rules. The central bank's inflation target has to be reset a few months later in April 2021.

How should the lessons of the past four years inform the journey ahead? This column takes a look at three important questions—on the inflation target, on the choice of nominal anchor, and on coordination of monetary policy with fiscal policy. Some of these questions are likely to dominate policy debates in the coming months.

Question one: Does India need a new inflation target? It is well known that the committee on the new monetary policy framework had in its 2014 report recommended that India's inflation target should be 4%, with a wide band of two percentage points on either side to take into account unexpected supply-side shocks, such as a jump in food prices, which account for nearly half of the Indian consumer price index.

This level of threshold inflation—or broadly the level of inflation that maximises growth—was more or less in tune with what nearly 30 years of empirical research had yielded. The Sukhamoy Chakravarty committee had estimated threshold inflation at 4% in 1985. The RBI annual report released in 2011 had come up with a range of 4-6%. Other studies have broadly come to similar conclusions. The inflation target given to RBI by the government is thus not out of sync with these earlier estimates.

The government may consider increasing its inflation tolerance level when it gives the central bank a new target next year. A higher inflation target would give the next MPC more room for monetary easing. However, a higher target should ideally be empirically grounded rather than picked out of thin air. And India's inflation target cannot be delinked from the overall global inflation trend, more specifically inflation in our major trading partners as well as countries that Indian exporters compete with in global markets.

Question two: Should core inflation be the nominal anchor of monetary policy? RBI targets consumer price inflation, dominated by food prices that do not respond to monetary policy. So should it shift its nominal anchor to core inflation? I was one of the economists who had made this suggestion to the Ugi Patel committee in a meeting held in December 2013. The committee chose headline over core because inflation expectations react to changes in the overall price level rather than only a part of it. Thailand, which was the only



economy that used core inflation as its nominal anchor for monetary policy, shifted to targeting headline inflation.

Few realize that core inflation continues to be tracked closely by monetary policy authorities. RBI's forecasting model—the Quarterly Projection Model—parts ways with standard central bank models by treating core, food and fuel inflation in three separate equations. The Phillips Curve in the model is sensitive to the gap between core and headline inflation. Food prices influence the core through changes in inflation expectations.

Core inflation is part of the analytical framework. Some recent research shows that as inflation expectations have got anchored, sudden shocks to food and fuel prices do not unsettle core inflation (*Changing Dynamics of Inflation in India*, by Ravindra Dholakia and Virinchi S. Kadiyala, March 2018). Even shocks to core inflation tend to dissipate faster than before. Such a decline in inflation persistence is at least partly because of the rising credibility of monetary policy in recent years. A shift towards core inflation targeting—either in law or in practice—is dependent on how confident citizens are about the ability of Indian economic policy to meet its fiscal and monetary targets.

Question three: Should fiscal and monetary policy work in tandem? There is a good reason to ask this question. Fiscal spending has in recent years

been a big part of incremental aggregate demand in India, thus influencing inflation. And lower inflation via RBI has impacted the government budget by bringing down the rate of nominal economic growth. This column has earlier argued that India's fiscal and monetary targets should be set through a common analytical framework, and that the government budget should be designed with RBI's inflation target in mind.

A lot depends on the political economy. Kenneth Rogoff had famously argued in a 1985 paper that a central banker with lower inflation tolerance than the political system will increase social welfare. The idea of central bank independence is now under attack. The existing division of labour is a sensible one. The government as a representative of the Indian people gives RBI an inflation target for the medium term. The central bank should then have the requisite operating freedom to pursue the target, while being insulated from the inevitable political cycles.

In an insightful paper published in March 2007, Alberto Alesina and Guido Tabellini showed why rational politicians tend to delegate to unelected bureaucrats those tasks that they can get blamed for by voters, while keeping control of those tasks that involve redistribution. Think about it the next time someone asks why an unelected MPC sets interest rates.

GUEST VIEW

Supply chains move from just-in-time to just-in-case

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In a May 2020 survey of global business leaders by McKinsey, as many as 92% of the respondents said they plan to increase their supply-chain resilience in the coming months. Many of them have created individual blueprints for this since then. Now, they are evaluating a wide variety of approaches to turn their strategies into action.

The writing on the wall, however, has been the same for everyone. Just-in-time (JIT), the decades-old poster child of supply chains, is no longer tenable. It was ideal for a world of certainties, in which you could minimize your inventory because you knew that your supplies would arrive on time and that your demand would not disappear overnight. But, in a post-covid world, where the rug has long been pulled from under our collective feet, industry practitioners are being forced to look beyond JIT.

Increasingly, they are taking refuge in the philosophy of just-in-case (JIC), which has been the mainstay of companies that have a

hard time forecasting demand. JIC tenets revolve around eliminating risk from supply chains, and are finding wider resonance now, as companies across the world try to de-risk their operations. Three trends are emerging from this shift.

First, diversification of supplier bases as a shield against geographical uncertainties. While this trend has dominated newsprint and mind-space for a few months, it is intriguing to see the lengths some companies are willing to go in their mission to diversify. A multi-billion-dollar industrial tools manufacturer, for example, is considering shifting its vendor base for a high-cost precision tool—traditionally manufactured using advanced technologies by skilled labour only in the EU—to developing markets in Asia, where it will need to establish much of the required infrastructure from scratch. The move will come at a significant additional cost, but it is an investment the company is willing to add as a one-time "cost of resilience" to its total cost of ownership of the supply chain.

Second, reconfiguration of warehouses to limit supply disruptions. Many supply chain practitioners are expanding their warehousing footprint to spread their eggs across baskets and ensure uninterrupted supply even

if a few of their facilities end up in containment zones. A leading two-wheeler manufacturer, for instance, is planning to create more space for storage and is considering two options: shifting to a larger warehouse in a different city, or splitting its existing warehouse between two cities.

Some contract logistics players are going a step further. Not only are they beefing up their warehousing capacity, they are also connecting their warehouses using digital means to create unit-level transparency. With the combined leg-up accorded by these moves, they are now in a position to offer a pan-India single "cost per pallet" to their customers, instead of the variable, regional pricing that characterized the trade in pre-covid days.

Third, increased automation in warehouses to build resilience. Traditionally, businesses have seen warehousing as an avoidable internal investment, with a large proportion choosing to outsource it to low-cost third-party players. Most warehouses,

therefore, have taken the shape of manpower-dependent facilities using outdated technologies. The labour crisis engendered by the pandemic has exposed these warehouses as weak links in the system.

To de-risk them, some companies are now turning to technology. According to the 2020 *Honeywell Intelligence* report, more than 40% of the companies in the US are planning to invest in warehouse automation software, order-picking technology and robotics solutions in the near future. Recently, a global logistics services provider announced that it is planning to deploy a thousand robots across its North American supply chain.

Indian companies are expected to follow suit, but only in the medium-to-long term, as India's low labour costs tend to act as a disincentive against immediate and large technology investments. A few players, however, are making a head start. One of India's leading third-party logistics providers, for example, is planning to invest

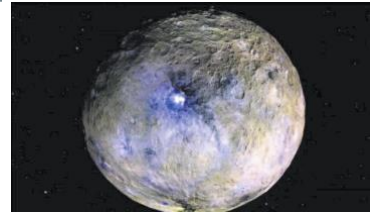
in Internet-of-Things-enabled inventory tracking and semi-automatic conveyor belts. Eventually, it plans to deploy even automatic guided vehicles in its warehouses. In response to this emerging market need, an automation provider is also developing a "warehouse automation" service line, which it believes could be a \$1,000 crore opportunity over the next 18-24 months.

These trends indicate that global supply chains are being restructured in fundamental ways, which is likely to lead to the emergence of a crop of new global sourcing hubs. These are likely to be regions where JIC tenets are quickly gaining ground. In this context, it is encouraging to note that both Indian manufacturers and logistics service providers are already adding JIC tenets to their business strategies.

It is too soon to say what the exact ramifications of these trends will be. Will JIC become the new supply-chain normal, for example, or will a hybrid JIT-JIC model emerge? But these shifts bode well for the world. If and when there is another external shock of the scale of covid-19, JIC could prove to be an invaluable tool in countries' efforts to keep their essential supply chains running and reduce widespread suffering.

Nadeem Ahmad contributed to this article

MINT CURATOR



Ceres was believed to be just another barren rock in space till recently

NASA

A dwarf planet with an oceanic world of its own

The dwarf planet Ceres—long believed to be a barren space rock—is an ocean world with reservoirs of sea water beneath its surface, the results of a major exploration mission showed on Monday. Ceres is the largest object in the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter and has its own gravity, enabling the Nasa Dawn spacecraft to capture high-resolution images of its surface. Now a team of scientists from the United States and Europe have analysed images relayed from the orbiter, captured around 13km from the asteroid. They focused on the 20-million-year-old Occator crater and determined that there is an "extensive reservoir" of brine beneath its surface. Several studies published Monday... shed further light on the dwarf planet, which was discovered by Italian polymath Giuseppe Piazzi in 1801.

The Straits Times

The genetic tricks that Malthus did not foresee

Tobacco plants have been modified with a protein found in algae to improve their photosynthesis and increase growth, while using less water, in a new advance that could point the way to higher-yielding crops in a drought-afflicted future. The technique focuses on photosynthesis, the complex process by which plants are able to use sunlight and carbon dioxide to produce nutrients that fuel their growth. Enhancing photosynthesis would produce huge benefits to agricultural productivity, but the complexities of the process have stymied many past attempts to harness it. In research published in the journal *Nature Plants*, scientists used genetic manipulation processes to increase an enzyme that already exists within the tobacco plant.

The Guardian

The quest for low-noise quantum computers

Scientists have made a major breakthrough in the development of large-scale quantum computers. "Noise" remains the biggest problem for the development of quantum computers, and must be solved before they can be used widely and in the revolutionary ways that have been proposed. [A] new paper suggests a way of dealing with such noise, in turn potentially opening up a way to control that noise and develop much better quantum computing systems. Quantum computers could potentially change the way we use technology, by allowing for the solving of problems that are impossible using today's computers. But, to do so, scientists need to be able to understand how noise functions across a quantum system. Until now, they have only been able to do so using very small devices.

The Independent

A meltdown that we can only watch in dismay

Twenty-five years of satellite observations have been used to reconstruct a detailed history of Antarctica's ice shelves. These ice platforms are the floating protrusions of glaciers flowing off the land, and ring the entire continent. The European Space Agency data-set confirms the shelves' melting trend... But the innovation here is not so much the fact that the shelves are losing mass—we already knew that relatively warm ocean water is eating their undersides. Rather, it's the finessed statements that can now be made about exactly where and when the wastage has been occurring, and where also the meltwater has been going. So this cold, fresh water has been entering the deep sea around Antarctica where it is undoubtedly influencing ocean circulation.

BBC

Kindly decongest those orbits around the Earth

Welcome to the age of the satellite megaconstellation. Within the next few years, vast networks, containing hundreds or even thousands of spacecraft, could reshape the future of Earth's orbital environment. Much of the attention on these strings of satellites has been placed on the public launches of SpaceX and OneWeb, but the focus is now turning to Amazon. Last month, the Federal Communications Commission approved a request by the online marketplace to launch its Project Kuiper constellation, which aims to extend high-speed internet service to customers around the world, including to remote and underserved communities hobbled by a persistent digital divide. The rapid influx of satellites into low-Earth orbit has prompted pushback from professional and amateur astronomers.

The New York Times



Rajasthan lessons

If the truce in the Congress is to endure, both factions must mend their ways

The crisis in the Congress in Rajasthan that nearly brought down the government led by Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot has blown over. The group led by Sachin Pilot has reiterated its loyalty to the party, though the stand-off cost him the posts of Deputy Chief Minister and State party chief. The truce is an outcome of the realisation on both sides that their positions had become self-destructive and unsustainable. Mr. Gehlot faced the risk of losing the government, while Mr. Pilot stared at the unimproved prospect of a life outside the Congress. The turmoil in Rajasthan has also been yet another occasion to note with deep concern the tendency of the judiciary to overstep its remit set by law, brazen partisanship of the Governor, and misuse of central agencies to tilt the political balance. The crisis was primarily internal to the Congress, but the Bharatiya Janata Party's maximalist approach to capture power at all costs was evident. The unseemly power struggle had derailed governance in the State in the midst of a pandemic. Now that a settlement has been reached, the Centre and the State, the Bharatiya Janata Party and all sections within the ruling party must come together to combat the pandemic.

The Congress is facing the most severe crisis in its history and it cannot afford any complacency in keeping its house in order. The party is constantly at the receiving end of the Bharatiya Janata Party's relentless onslaught and in March it lost the government in Madhya Pradesh, which it had won in 2018 along with Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. According to Mr. Gehlot's own admission, there was no communication between him and Mr. Pilot ever since the formation of the government in 2018. That is a sad commentary on the party. Mr. Pilot has said he resorted to rebellion only after his grievances went unheeded. This brinkmanship might have taught them both, and the party's central leadership, some lessons for the future. The resolution of the crisis took the intervention of former Congress President Rahul Gandhi, who commands the loyalty of both. He could have resolved it earlier or even preempted the crisis altogether. There is no single model for running a political party, but the discipline, honesty and charm that the Congress impel it to be consultative and deliberative in its internal and external conduct. As Rajasthan demonstrated, Mr. Gandhi has a role to play in facilitating this. Mr. Gandhi has been focused on building a critique of the Bharatiya Janata Party and its government but such politics will be effective only when reinforced by a strong organisation. He has strong opinions on what the Congress should ideally be, but he has no option but to start with what it currently is.

Just closure

The focus must be on adequate compensation for families of fishermen killed by marines

It may seem pragmatic to keep any pending litigation alive until all dues relating to it are paid and all legal issues are settled. However, it is somewhat puzzling that the Supreme Court of India has said it would keep the Italian marines' case alive until "they" and "adequate" compensation is paid by Italy for the killing of two fishermen by its marines on February 15, 2012. The Court has indicated that it would not allow the closure of the trial until such compensation is paid. And it has ordered that the families of the victims be heard on this matter. Once the Union government has declared that it would abide by the ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) at The Hague, which granted immunity to the marines and favoured Italy as the appropriate jurisdiction where they could be tried for the crime, it does not seem proper to delay the process of bringing closure to the matter. For one thing, the PCA, an arbitral tribunal that adjudicates disputes under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), has itself ruled that India is entitled to compensation for "loss of life, physical harm, material damage to property... and moral harm suffered by" the captain and crew members of St. Antony, the fishing vessel involved, and mandated negotiations on the quantum. Second, it hardly needs emphasis that the pendency of the matter in court should not become a bargaining point that delays the reaching of a fair settlement. Continuing hearings may also be seen as India being reluctant to cease all criminal proceedings against the marines as per the ruling.

The Court's resolve to obtain adequate and hefty compensation for the families of the victims is welcome, though it would be difficult to have a judicial determination of what quantum would satisfy these requirements. The Centre may have approached the top court for formal permission to close the pending trial proceedings as a matter of abundant caution. But as far as the law goes, it could have approached the trial court itself through the public prosecutor for withdrawal from prosecution under Section 321 of the CrPc. Too many legal tangles have already caused enough diplomatic rupture in the progression of the Enrica Lexie-St. Antony case since 2012. Article 253 of the Constitution, which says Parliament may enact a law to give effect to any international treaty or convention, has been cited to argue that in view of the arbitral court's finding on jurisdiction being in conflict with the Supreme Court's ruling in 2013 that the Union government alone can try the case, a law may be needed before the trial is closed. This is just needless quibbling as the conflict has ceased after India agreed to abide by the tribunal's ruling in keeping with its obligations under UNCLOS. India's focus should now be on negotiating for compensation and ensuring a purposive criminal trial in Italy.

The future of Indian secularism

It is premature to pronounce the end of constitutional secularism: it has only suffered a setback and can be revived



Rajeev Bhargava

Our public discourse is re-sounding with triumphalism on the one hand, and lament on the other about the death or defeat of secularism. It seems as if the bhoomi puja has burnt its bodily remains, and if anyone cares to claim it, the ashes of secularism will be buried near a dargah or immersed in the Sarayu. As a child of the republic founded in 1950, one part of me wishes to join the lament. But the other part, nudging me to contemplate this moment, asks: does anything in India ever die? Silenced, yes; forced temporarily to go underground, maybe; transmute to another bodily form under a different name, possibly. But death? Gone forever? Not.

Three years ago, on August 6, 2017, I had written, in this very paper — in the article, "Constitutional secularism: a party-political secularism?" — that secularism has paid a heavy price in our country for being at the centre of public and political discourse. It has been persistently misused and abused. Distinguishing it from constitutional political secularism, I called this abused entity, 'party-political secularism'.

Respect and critique
Constitutional secularism is marked by at least two features. First, critical respect for all religions. Unlike some secularisms, ours is not blindly anti-religious but respects religion. Unlike the secularisms of pre-dominantly single religious societies, it respects not one but all religions. However, given the virtual impossibility of distinguishing the religious from the social, as B.R. Ambedkar famously observed, every aspect of religious doctrine or practice cannot be respected. Respect for religion must be accompanied by critique.

It follows that our state must respectfully leave religion alone

but also intervene whenever religious groups promote communal disharmony and discrimination on grounds of religion (an inter-religious matter) or are unable to protect their own members from the oppressions they perpetuate (an intra-religious issue). Therefore, and this is its second feature, the Indian state abandons strict separation but keeps a principled distance from all religions. For instance, it cannot tolerate untouchability or leave all personal laws as they are. Equally, it may not preferentially subsidise schools run by religious institutions. Thus, it has to constantly decide when to engage or disengage, help or hinder religion depending entirely on which of these enhances our constitutional commitment to freedom, equality and fraternity. This constitutional secularism cannot be sustained by governments alone but requires collective commitment from an impartial judiciary, a scrupulous media, civil society activists, and an alert citizenry.

Advent of opportunism
Party-political secularism, born around 40 years ago, is a nefarious doctrine practised by all political parties, including by so-called 'secular forces'. This secularism has depleted all values from the core idea and replaced them with opportunism. Opportunistic distance (engagement or disengagement) but mainly opportunistic alliance with religious communities, particularly for the sake of immediate electoral benefit, is its unyielding aim. It has eroded the freedom and equality-based religious reform, it has removed criticism from the term 'critical respect' and thereby interpreted 'respect' to mean cutting deals with aggressive or orthodox sections of religious groups — unhooking the Babri Masjid/Ram temple for puja, and forsaking women's rights in the Shah Bano case. It has even been complicit in igniting communal violence. This party-political 'secularism' zooming up alternately to the fanatical fringe of the minority and the majority, was recently made for takeover by a majoritarian party. This was accomplished



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by removing the word 'all' and replacing it by 'majority'; respect only the majority religion; never criticise it, but recklessly denigrate others; and riding the state of the corrupt practice of opportunistic distance not by restoring principled distance but magically abolishing distance altogether. This is untrammelled majoritarianism masquerading as secularism, one that opposes 'pseudo-secularism' without examining its own equally unethical practices. Today, Indian constitutional secularism is swallowed up by this party-political secularism, with not a little help from the Opposition, media and judiciary. Yet, I hesitate to pronounce the death of constitutional secularism. Grounded in millennia-old pluralist traditions, it cannot easily be brushed aside. Instead, I prefer the word 'setback'. Brakes have been suddenly applied to this large state-driven political project of dealing with inter-religious issues such as communal harmony. It has come to a screeching halt, broken down. Does secularism then have a future?

Two crucial moves
I suggest two crucial moves to kickstart the discourse and practice of secularism. First, a shift of focus from a politically-led project to a socially-driven movement for reform. Second, a shift of emphasis from inter-religious to intra-religious issues. I invoke the name of two great leaders, B.R. Ambedkar and Jawaharlal Nehru, to make my point. B.R. Ambedkar's disposition is what I call 'secularism'. It is what he observed that when two roughly equal communities view each other as enemies, they get trapped in a majority-minority syndrome, a vicious cycle of spiralling political conflict and social alienation. This was true in the 1930s and the 1940s. Today, feel-

ing extremely vulnerable, Indian Muslims appear to have opted out of this syndrome. When this happens, the syndrome implodes. The result is neither open conflict nor harmony, simply an exiled existence for Muslims in their own homeland.

B.R. Ambedkar also claimed that when communities view each other as a menace, they tend to close ranks. This has another debilitating impact: all dissent within the community is muzzled and much needed internal reforms are stalled. If so, the collapse of the religiously contentiousness throws up an opportunity. As the focus shifts from the other to oneself, it may allow deeper introspection within, multiple dissenting voices to resurface, create conditions to root out intra-religious injustices, and make its members free and equal. After all, the Indian project of secularism has been thwarted as much by party-politics as by religious orthodoxy and dogma.

Europe's example
Here, Europe's example helps. The fight against the oppression of the church was as much a popular struggle as it was driven by the state. Europe's secularism provided a principle to fight intra-religious oppressions. Nehru understood this. For him, secularism was not only a project of civic friendship among religious communities but also of opposition to religion-based caste and gender oppressions — an endeavour at the heart of our own socially-driven freedom and equality-oriented project. A critique purely from the outside, one which is not party immanent, will not work. Nor can popular-democratic struggles be taken over by middle-class vanguards. However, such struggles too need support from intellectuals. But to be effective, these intellectual vanguards already have learnt from a variety of failed traditions, both natal and those outside their immediate ambit. Only then will their voice carry weight, and be heard.

equality, liberty and justice. A collective push from young men and women untainted by the politics and ideological straitjacketing of the recent past may help strengthen the social struggle of emancipation from intra-religious injustices. Those who most benefit from upholding these constitutional values, the oppressed minorities, Dalits, women, citizens sick to death with zealotry or commercialisation of their faiths must together renew this project.

Inter-community relations
I am not suggesting that we must hereby ignore inter-religious issues. But having itself produced disharmony, it is surely beyond the capacity of the current state to restore communal harmony. But distance, freedom from mutual obsession, give communities breathing space. Each can now explore resources within to construct new ways of living together. The issue here is not simple retrieval of older, failed modes of religious toleration. The political project of secularism arose precisely because religious toleration no longer worked. Needed today are new forms of socio-religious respect, crucial for the business of everyday life and novel ways of reducing the political alienation of citizens, a democratic deficit whose ramifications go beyond the ambit of secularism.

If a critique of religion is to come at least partly from within, then its idiom must also draw from local religiosities and the multiple languages in which they find expression. A critique purely from the outside, one which is not party immanent, will not work. Nor can popular-democratic struggles be taken over by middle-class vanguards. However, such struggles too need support from intellectuals. But to be effective, these intellectual vanguards already have learnt from a variety of failed traditions, both natal and those outside their immediate ambit. Only then will their voice carry weight, and be heard.

Rajeev Bhargava is Professor, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi

India's population data and a tale of two projections

The country's demographic future will see peaking and then declining numbers driven by a sharp fertility reduction



Sonalde Desai

A new study (<https://bit.ly/30zokd>), published in the highly regarded journal, *The Lancet*, and prepared by the World Bank-based Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), has shaken up the world of population policy. It argues that while India is destined to be the largest country in the world, its population will peak by mid-century. And as the 21st century closes, its ultimate population will be far smaller than anyone could have anticipated, about 1.09 billion instead of approximately 1.35 billion today. It could even be as low as 724 million.

Readers who follow COVID-19 projections will remember that in March 2020, the IHME projected U.S. deaths from COVID-19 to be around 81,000 by August. Deaths in the U.S. today are more than twice that number. The underlying assumptions for the initial model were not borne out. The IHME population projections are also subject to underlying assumptions that deserve careful scrutiny. They predict that by the year 2100, on average, Indian women will have 1.29 children. Since each woman must have two children to replace herself and her husband, this will result in a sharp population decline. Contrast this predicted fer-

tility rate of 1.29 for India with the projected cohort fertility of 1.53 for the United States and 1.78 for France in the same model. It is difficult to believe that Indian women could be less committed to child-bearing than American or French partners.

Until 2050, the IHME projections are almost identical to widely-used UN projections. The UN (<https://bit.ly/2FVYALA>) projects that India's population will be 1.64 billion by 2050, the IHME projects 1.61 billion by 2048. It is only in the second half of the century that the two projections diverge. The UN predicts a population of 1.45 billion by 2100, and the IHME, 1.09 billion.

Part of this divergence may come from IHME model's excessive reliance on data regarding current contraceptive use in the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) and potential for increasing contraceptive use. Research at the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) National Data Innovation Centre by Santanu Pramanik and colleagues shows that contraceptive use in the NFHS is poorly estimated, and as a result, unmet need for contraception may be lower than that estimated by the IHME model, generating implausibly low fertility projections for 2100.

Fertility decline
Regardless of whether we subscribe to the UN's projections, or the IHME projections, India's demographic future contains a peak and subsequently declining



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population driven by a sharp reduction in fertility. In the 1950s, India's Total fertility rate (TFR) was nearly six children per woman; today it is 2.2. Ironically, the massive push for family planning coupled with forced sterilisation during the Emergency barely led to a 17% decline in TFR from 5.9 in 1960 to 4.9 in 1980. However, between 1992 and 2015, it had fallen by 38% from 3.4 to 2.2. School and college enrolment happened to accelerate fertility decline to a level where 18 States and Union Territories have a TFR below 2, the replacement level. One might attribute it to the success of the family planning programme but family planning has long lost its primacy in the Indian policy discourse. Between 1975 and 1994, family planning workers had targets they were expected to meet regarding sterilisations, condom distribution and intrauterine device (IUD) insertion. Often these targets led to explicit or implicit coercion. Following the Cairo conference on Population and Development in 1994, these targets were abandoned.

If carrots have been dropped, the stick of policies designed to punish people with large families has been largely ineffective. Punitive policies include denial of maternity leave for third and subse-

quent births, limiting benefits of maternity schemes and ineligibility to contest in local body elections for individuals with large families or how many material goods they purchase. However, smaller families invest more money in their children by sending them to private schools and coaching classes. It is not aspirations for self but that for children that seems to drive fertility decline.

Aspirational revolution
If public policies to encourage the small family norm or to provide contraception have been lacking, what role can individuals play to do the ideal of large families? It seems highly probable that the socioeconomic transformation of India since the 1990s has played an important role. Over this period, agriculture became an increasingly smaller part of the Indian economy, school and college enrolment grew sharply and individuals lucky enough to find a job in government, multinationals or software services companies reaped tremendous financial benefits. Not surprisingly, parents began to rethink their family-building strategies. Where farmers used to see more workers when they saw their children, the new aspirational parents see enrolment in coaching classes as a ticket to success.

The literature on fertility decline in western countries attributes the decline in fertility to treatment from the family. Indian parents seem to demonstrate increased rather than decreased commitment to family by reducing the number of children and investing more in each child. My research with demographer Alaka Basu at Cornell University compares families of different size at

the same income level and finds that small and large families do not differ in their leisure activities, women's participation in the workforce or how many material goods they purchase. However, smaller families invest more money in their children by sending them to private schools and coaching classes. It is not aspirations for self but that for children that seems to drive fertility decline.

In language of the past
Ironically, even in the face of this sharp fertility decline among all segments of Indian society, the public discourse is still rooted in the language of the 1970s and on supposedly high fertility rate, particularly in some areas such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar or among some groups such as women with low levels of education or Muslims. This periodically results in politicians proposing remedies that would force these ostensibly ignorant or uncaring parents to have fewer children.

Demographic data suggest that the aspirational revolution is already under way. What we need to hasten the fertility decline is to ensure that the health and family welfare system is up to this challenge and provides contraception and sexual and reproductive health services that allow individuals to have only as many children as they want.

Sonalde Desai is Professor of Sociology at the University of Maryland and Professor and Centre Director, NCAER National Data Innovation Centre. The views expressed are personal

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.

Part of the steel frame

The more appropriate question to ask in the Indian context is, even if the right type of men and women are inducted into the higher bureaucracy (Editorial page, "The main bricks to use in India's steel frame," August 11), will they be able to retain their best qualities during service? The Indian bureaucracy does not function in a vacuum. On the contrary,

bureaucrats need to survive in strong and powerful situations created for them by some unscrupulous politicians. Further, how can one expect a mid-career review of their performance to be devoid of any political influence? There is no guarantee that even good bureaucrats can keep their honesty and integrity intact, considering the high-level of politicisation of anything

and everything in India. A. Venkateswararao, Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu

Language policy

One is in agreement with the views of a former Vice-Chancellor, E. Balagurusamy, on the two language policy, as they are very reliable. Even an issue such as when the Prime Minister is addressing the nation live on important issues, leaves

many including me very challenged in understanding the language (Hindi). We have to wait for the translation in the respective local language. Before taking a decision on NEP 2020, the Tamil Nadu government needs to understand reality and the various challenges, and encourage Hindi as a third language.

M. Prakash, Kikil, Ramanathapuram, Tamil Nadu

MP's experience

I refer to a letter in the "Letters to the Editor" column (August 11), on Dr. Ravindra Kumar, a Karagam Member of Parliament Kanimozhi's recent experience at Chennai airport. It is unfortunate that the reader has termed the arrogant and chauvinistic quip of the CISF officer as "an off the cuff remark that has been blown out of proportion".

In my opinion, no person with self-respect can accept such a remark. It is only next clearly because such acts go unchallenged by many that the government of the day is doing everything it can to thrust Hindi down the throats of the non-Hindi speakers in India. Pradeep S. Fernando, Chennai



To read more letters online, scan the QR code

THE HINDU
WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 12, 2020

A 'democracy capture'

What happened to Indian democracy? A bad accident? Or the only possible outcome of the system?



Yogendra Yadav
Brought up during the heyday of the "Congress system", Yogendra Yadav was first exposed to politics during the Emergency. After several decades as professor, psephologist, politician and activist, he looks back at what he calls India's first republic, 1950-2000. Why is there an acute crisis in Indian democracy, he asks. How did India end up here? His new book, Making Sense of Indian Democracy, provides some answers. An excerpt.

The current state of Indian democracy is neither just a bad accident in an otherwise perfect journey nor its inevitable destination. The rise of Narendra Modi to power was anything but a freak phenomenon. The Ramjanmabhoomi movement had signalled this possibility 25 years ago. That was foreshadowed by Congress' victory in the wake of the Sikh massacre and followed by Modi's victories in the Gujarat Assembly elections, held in the wake of the anti-Muslim pogrom of 2002. We should have known about the dark side of Indian democracy. At any rate, we are no longer now looking at Modi's victory in 2014 as a single incident: his popularity thereafter and even bigger victory in 2019 is enough to make it clear that we are looking at something deeper than one individual, one election, one incident.

At the same time, the victory of a Modi-led BJP was not the only possible outcome of India's political trajectory. The political logic of Indian democracy, the economic logic of a neo-liberal state, the social logic of a caste system under transformation, and the cultural logic of India's own modernity still left open several possibilities. Modi's rise to power in Gujarat, his ascendancy within the BJP, and his nationwide electoral victory were not preordained. Plausible counterfactuals come to mind: it is not hard to imagine a very different course of history had the Anna Hazare movement not delegitimised the UPA regime, had the Congress leadership not proved itself so utterly inept, had the Pulwama attack not

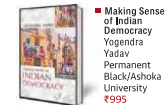


BJP supporters at Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rally at Ramila Maidan, New Delhi, on May 8, 2019. SANDEEP SAXENA

happened as and when it did. So, I think it is best to see the current crisis of Indian democracy as the outcome of a "democracy capture" that was at once contingent and determined. We need to understand how a political leader seized upon a very difficult chance and converted it into a personal triumph – and how it is that he now manages to do so repeatedly. At the same time, this democracy capture could not have happened without some structural weaknesses within the Indian democratic enterprise. A student of democracy must focus on the conditions that made this kind of capture possible.

Challenging old notions

Understanding this democracy capture requires rewriting democratic theory. The dominant orthodoxy on democracy presents us with a neat definition of democracy, a universal normative standard which allows every political regime to be pigeon-holed into a democracy/non-democracy binary. This is a highly stylised and selective version of what has in fact been the contingent path that democracy has taken, a tiny but dominant part of the globe. Making sense of democracy in most other parts of the world in the twenty-first century demands that this orthodoxy be challenged on multiple grounds.



■ Making Sense of Indian Democracy
Yogendra Yadav
Permanent Black/Ashoka University
₹995

First of all, we need to widen the conceptual apparatus of "democracy" to include diverse ways – languages, idioms, theories – in which democracy has been understood all over the world. Second, it requires enriching the normative standards embedded in the idea of democracy by taking into account the histories and traditions of democratic thinking across the world. Third, we need to expand the repertoire of institutions, conventions, and practices that go into the making of democracy in societies that are often quite different from each other. And fourth, we need to rewrite the history of actually existing democracies, both in the global north and the global south, to reflect their radically different experiences and trajectories.

While challenging democratic theory is a global challenge today – besides Narendra Modi, we live in the age of Donald Trump, Boris Johnson, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and Vladimir Putin – the task is certainly essential

if we are to make sense of Indian democracy, for the dominant narrative fails to understand both the successes and the failures of our specific variety of this broad template called democracy. If we go by the dominant understanding of the preconditions of democracy – namely, some degree of affluence, and widespread literacy – India should never have been a democracy in the first place. If we insist on oscillations of power within a multi-party competitive framework, the "Congress system" should not be characterised as democratic. If we stick to the idea of an overlap between the cultural boundaries of a nation and the political boundaries of a state, independent India with its deep diversities should never have survived beyond its first decade and made a transition to a democratic nation state. If we believe in a balance between participatory urge and institutional depth, Indian democracy should not have taken off in the 1960s; and having taken off, it should not have suffered the crisis that it did during the Emergency; and, once its institutional fragility had been exposed as it was during that episode, Indian democracy should not have survived the Emergency. The rise of identity politics – region, caste, and religion-based mobilisation through the 1980s and 1990s – should not have led to a consolidation of democracy. And, once democracy became "the only game in town" and was buttressed by an unprecedented rate of economic growth, Indian democracy should not have faced its worst crisis – the one it faces today.

Clearly, students of Indian democracy need a fresh pair of glasses. We need to see the democratic enterprise in India as an open-ended journey. The formal journey began as a joint enterprise: building a self-reliant and self-governing nation alongside the building of democratic institutions for the new nation. Alternatively, democracy featured as an impediment, as a road block necessitating consultations, procedures, and consensus-building – all resulting in slowdowns that could ignite the existing tensions and lead to explosions. The democracy capture that we face today is one such danger, always lurking round the corner.

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OPED 7

Whither our view of the world?

The case for non-American voices in international relations debates has never been stronger than now



Krishnan Srinivasan

At this time when every Indian is a self-proclaimed China expert, it is worth tracing the evolution of international relations as a discipline, now 100 years old. Its origin was in the U.K. after World War I as part of the liberal internationalist reaction that also led to the League of Nations. Three University Chairs in Britain were endowed with funds by entrepreneurs who held the view that if dynastic rulers gave way to democracies, hostile alliances and conflict would come to an end.

The subject in the U.S.

The U.S. soon took up the subject of international relations with its characteristic zeal, identifying its self-interests with those of the world. Once it was clear that isolation was no longer a policy option, U.S. administrations looked for professional advice. The presidents needed their Machiavellis, a role filled by George Kennan, Hans Morgenthau and others, establishing the dominance of realism in the field.

Academia in the U.S. post-World War II came up with concepts like conflict resolution, game theory and area studies, multidisciplinary social research focusing on specific geographic regions or ethnically defined areas, drawing on disciplines such as political science, history, sociology, ethnology, geography, linguistics, literature, and cultural studies. Such research provided a fertile field for the development of databases for use of American academics, and for the ever-expanding U.S. intelligence community.

The American obsession to follow the lead of the natural sciences to create a predictive social science of international relations led to a divide between how the subject developed in the U.S. and elsewhere, where the primary aim was to better understand the complexities of international politics rather than attempt to fashion government policy along scientific lines. However, some new concepts emerged, such as non-interference in domestic jurisdiction and internal affairs of other states, and were incorporated into the UN Charter. The end of World War II and the Charter gave liberals a second opportunity to assert themselves, though the Charter also subscribed to the realist view by giving the Security Council prime responsibility for maintenance of peace and its five permanent members a veto.

The field of international relations has in-

creasingly become related to international law, and the current salience of human rights law and humanitarian law renders this necessary. The boundaries of definition have pushed international relations to embrace new territories such as the environment, feminism and post-modernism. The basic question, however, remains: is the concept of a world community a realistic goal or a dangerous illusion? Stanley Hoffman's opinion of 1977 is relevant: rather than pursue certainty or absolute security, "international relations should be the science of uncertainty, the limits of action, of the ways in which states try to manage but not succeed in eliminating their insecurity".

Think tanks in India

The case for non-American voices in the debates coursing through the study of international relations have never been stronger than now. In India, the field of international relations has a much shorter history than 100 years and The Indian Council of World Affairs was the first independent institution with Indian roots. There are now international relations disciplines in many universities under nomenclatures such as area studies and peace and conflict studies, which are nevertheless far fewer than our think tanks. The Pennsylvania University Diplomatic Courier publishes a league table of think tanks across the world in which the top spot for 2018 is Brookings U.S. While the U.S. tops with 1,871 think tanks, India is second with 899 followed by China with 507. This suggests that in India there is ample funding available for think tanks but not for university departments. When it comes to quality, however, the first 100 ranked think tanks, the Observer Research Foundation and the Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses are in the top 50. Three more are listed in the next 50 and all five are in the next 100. Such ratings are of dubious value but confirm suspicions about the negligible impact of our think tanks on policy. No nation can compete with the spoils system in the U.S. that enables academics and government officials to move in and out of the decision-making circuit, but the Diplomatic Courier ratings reveal the gulf between the Indian government and academic expertise.

Without regard to immediate concerns, the discipline will lose its influence. Raymond Aron and A.J.P. Taylor's impact was due to their public profile. It is important for our international relations specialists to appear regularly in the media to replace the vacuous politicians and the greying tribe of retired diplomats.

Krishnan Srinivasan is a former Foreign Secretary

From locker rooms to classrooms

Various educational interventions will enable us to move towards gender equality

Eric Falt

Instances of non-consensual sharing of images online to threaten and shame girls and women have raised serious questions about the mindsets of not only boys but of all youngsters, and their use of social media. Public opinion has pointed the finger at the growing and sometimes nefarious influence of technology. A quick fix of deactivating social media handles or deleting so-called provocative photos is often the most common response to such situations. However, this does not address the real problem.

COVID-19 has exacerbated the challenges that women face. The National Commission for Women has reported a surge in domestic violence and cybercrimes, which has made girls and women more vulnerable as they struggle to fight another pandemic of violence and abuse inside their homes and online.

Against this background, UNESCO, UNICEF, UN Women, UNFPA and the South Asia Foundation joined hands recently to support Nandita Das in the production and launch of the short film *Listen to Her*. We hope this will contribute to breaking the stigma around the issue and encourage women to speak up and seek help.

Various initiatives

Young minds are malleable and therefore a concerted effort must be made to shape positive mindsets at this critical age. As the boundary between the real and the virtual world becomes increasingly blurred, the perceived risks increase. For those looking to prevent and counter cyberbullying, UNESCO's information booklet, "Safe online learning in times of COVID-19", can serve as a useful reference. The booklet, developed in partnership with the National Council of Educational Research and Training, supports the creation of safe digital spaces and addresses nuances of privacy, especially in the current context.

We also need to engage with school communities, civil society organisations and governments to define alternatives for pre-existing norms of masculinity. One such initiative, the "Action for Equality" programme, driven by our partner the

Equal Community Foundation, has already trained over 130 educators across India on how to engage boys to achieve gender equality through educational interventions. At the core of this initiative is a community-based behavioural change programme designed to provide young boys with the skills and knowledge they need to challenge existing gender norms and take action to end violence and discrimination against women and girls.

Many more schools should adopt School-Related Gender-based Violence programmes and curricula, so that conversations can move out of the locker room and emerge as healthy discussions in the classroom. The ground-breaking National Education Policy 2020 provides historic opportunities to shape the educational response to these challenges for decades to come. Ultimately, societies across the world must sensitise children and young women and men towards understanding the repercussions of their choices and guide them towards a more sound actualisation of their own individualities.

Message from movements

From Riot Grrrl to #MeToo and other actions, it is fairly evident that the global movements towards gender equality and the eradication of violence against women are here to stay and hopefully for good. One of the most important lessons to be drawn from these movements is that change can be effected through peaceful means when people come together to confront the dominant social norms. Just as the challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis demand interconnectedness, the challenge of gender inequality too is a battle that cannot be fought in silos.

The pandemic is hopefully a gateway between the current world and the next and in our quest to get back to normal, let us reconsider which parts of normal are worth rushing back to. It would be a wasted opportunity if we campaign in poetry but conduct ourselves in prose in Year 1 AC. After Coronavirus.

Eric Falt is the Director and UNESCO Representative to Bhutan, India, the Maldives and Sri Lanka



DATA POINT

No green shoots

About two months into the stringent lockdown owing to the COVID-19 crisis, a significant share of farmers across India were not able to sow their seeds, harvest their crop and sell their produce on time, according to the Gaon Connection and Lokmiti-CSDS Covid Rural Survey 2020. Significantly, the distress came despite a slew of exemptions and relaxations for agriculture and allied sectors from the lockdown

By The Hindu Data Team

1. Were you able to harvest your crop on time during the lockdown?

Yes	52.2
No	41.6
No response	6.4

2. Were you able to sow on time during the lockdown?

Yes	37.9
No	42.4
No response	19.7

3. Were you able to sell your crop on time during the lockdown?

Yes	27.8
No	55.2
No response	16.9

All respondents interviewed were the main earners of their households, and were primarily men

4. If you were able to sell your crop, then where did you sell it?

Govt. purchasing centre	41.7
Govt. market yard/middleman there	8
Private trader	38.1
Somewhere else	3.1
No response	9.1

5. If you were able to sell your crop, were you able to do so at the government rate or lower?

Same as the government rate	58
Lower than the government rate	31.6
More than the government rate	4.6
No response	5.8

6. If you were able to sell your crop, how much difficulty did you face in taking your crop to the buyer?

Extreme difficulty	30.7
A lot of difficulty	27.5
Some difficulty	23.9
Not much difficulty	10.7
No difficulty at all	4.6
No response	2.7

7. Did you sell any land during the lockdown?

Yes	2
No	79
Didn't sell but mortgaged it	2.7
Don't own land	11.1
No response	5.2

The Hindu.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO AUGUST 12, 1970

China strengthens its sea-arm

Peking is boosting the development of its naval and merchant vessels, in the interests of its national defence. Editorials have recently appeared in the Chinese press calling for vigorous efforts in the future. Whether this is due to the quarrel with Russia or the realisation that the sea offers new opportunities for expansion is not clear. China has already a large number of warships but many of them are obsolete vessels of Russian origin. In recent years, a considerable effort has been made to develop indigenous skills in the building of submarines, torpedo and missile boats for coastal defence. The latter have a capacity to launch surface-to-surface missiles with a range of 15 to 20 nautical miles. They are modelled on the Russian "Komar" and "Osa" class missile boats. In 1967, it was reported that China had started production of high-speed hydrofoil patrol craft. Another new warship launched in 1968 was a frigate, also based on the Soviet "Riga" type.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO AUGUST 12, 1920

An Echo of Amritsar.

Mrs. Easdon of Amritsar will be remembered as one of those persons who helped in their own way to make history in the Punjab. The search for her by the infuriated mob and her perilous escape has moved so many to fearful indignation and opened the purse-strings of many a Membership in contribution towards a sword of honor. General Dyer. It was reserved for the Commissioner of the Bombay Corporation to show his sympathy for that unhappy lady in the most practical form. Amritsar being impossible, as reminiscent of too many terrible memories, as a place of residence and evangelisation, he translated her to a Maternity Home Bombay founded by subscriptions from the Moslem community. The result was a mild breeze at a meeting of the Corporation when vigorous protests were made against the appointment, additional point being lent to them by the fact that the previous incumbent was calmly sea-tracked into an honorary and perfectly innocuous supervisorship of the institution. In course of the discussion references were made to Mrs. Easdon's record and the evidence of Nelly Benjamin was quoted. The latter, it will be remembered, helped at considerable risk to save Mrs. Easdon and the could hardly be considered prejudiced.



THE INDIAN EXPRESS, WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 12, 2020

THE EDITORIAL PAGE

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

GREEN AND RED

Environment ministry must heed criticisms of draft EIA, do justice to process of public consultation

IN MARCH the Union Minister of Environment, Forests and Climate Change invited public comments on a draft notification that seeks to overhaul the country's Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) procedure. The ministry set June 30 as the deadline for the feedback. The Delhi High Court extended this window to August 11 in response to a petition by environmental activists — the court remarked that the "process of consultation is not an obstacle... it has some sanctity". In its 150-day sojourn in the public sphere that ended on Tuesday, the draft has attracted, according to the ministry, "four to five lakh responses". These include criticisms of environmentalists, academics and civil society groups, concerns raised by people from ecologically fragile areas such as the country's Northeast and objections voiced by the former Union environment minister, Jairam Ramesh. In parts of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, people braved the COVID pandemic to protest against the proposed changes — the Kerala government reportedly submitted its comments on Tuesday.

Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar has termed these criticisms as "preliminary". But the public consultation process has triggered important concerns about the environmental regulatory regime. The ministry must pay heed to them, take them on board.

Formed in 1994 to address the safety concerns raised in the decade after the Bhopal gas tragedy, the EIA is a part of the Environmental Protection Act, 1986. It was last revised in 2006. Activities that "access, utilise and affect natural resources" fall under its purview. The regulatory regime was also framed as a social safeguard — it recognised that land sought by project developers could have economic and cultural significance for communities. At several places, however, authorities continued to dilute the EIA's public consultation process. In 2000, in *Centre for Social Justice v. the Union of India*, the Gujarat High Court observed, "Officials are holding public hearings at district headquarters. The persons who are likely to be... adversely affected in environmental matters, are poor persons who would not travel a long distance between the proposed project site and the district headquarters". The court also noted that "the minutes of the public hearing are either not recorded or not given to the concerned persons".

The Supreme Court also flagged the undermining of public hearing procedures in its *Vedanta* verdict of 2013.

The proposed amendments to the EIA have invited criticism for sanctioning — and codifying — such dilutions to the regulatory mechanism. The period of public hearing has been reduced from 30 days to 20 days. The draft legitimises violations by developers who begin projects without obtaining due clearances, in apparent disregard of the SC's reservations against post facto certificates — the latest as late as April, this year. Exemptions to projects that ostensibly have environmental benefits — renewable energy parks, for example — have also drawn criticism. Critics have pointed out that such projects involve diversion of agricultural lands and have a bearing on people's livelihoods. The environment ministry must make sure that the final EIA draft does justice to the complex relations between environment, development and local communities that the public consultation process has brought to light.

ALL'S NOT WELL

Notwithstanding apparent truce in Rajasthan, Congress needs to address leadership question

THE APPARENT TRUCE between the warring Congress factions just four days ahead of a scheduled floor test in Jaipur may have saved the party's government in Rajasthan, at least for now. However, the month-long drama that saw a prominent leader nearly split the party and bring down its government is just another indication of the deep crisis within the Congress. Though the central leadership was instrumental in hammering out a deal with the rebels in Rajasthan, the crisis has once again exposed the frailties of the Congress high command, especially its inability to understand and manage ambitious young leaders and legislators. It will be unwise for the party to pretend that all's well, now that the Ashok Gehlot government looks safe.

What looks like the resolution of the Rajasthan crisis has coincided with Sonia Gandhi completing a year as interim party president. The party has announced that she will continue in the post until an alternative leadership is installed. The absence of an agile, engaged leader has been one reason why the party continues to drift when the polity is desperately seeking an opposition voice that can pose hard questions to the government, and call it to account. The leadership of the party is manifestly in the inability of the Congress to put forth a coherent vision and strategy on important national issues ranging from the removal of the special status of J&K to the Ram Mandir shilanyas. Rahul Gandhi's forays into policy debates, while well-intentioned, have failed to influence national conversation partly because he is seen to speak more for himself than for his party. Different party leaders offering contradictory views on national issues is a sign of the confusion within the party, not an indication of inner-party democracy, and the Congress might want others to believe.

In light of Rahul Gandhi's ostensible reluctance to return as party chief, some Congress leaders have suggested that the party ought to hold organisational elections and elect a new president. These proposals have been met with a stony silence — the Congress seems in no mood to let go of its dependence on the Gandhi family and risk a reorganisation. Rajasthan should make the Congress recognise the urgency of addressing the leadership question. It can ill afford to lose venk@indianexpress.com.

TEACHING BY EXAMPLE

With the arrest of Jimmy Lai, newspaper publisher, Beijing is telling everyone who's who, and what's what

HONG KONG MEDIA baron Jimmy Lai is the most prominent citizen to be arrested under the island's new national security law, which criminalises actions that Beijing regards as subversive, secessionist, or smacking of collusion with foreign powers. As the most visible backer of the pro-democracy movement, Lai ticks all the boxes. In Washington, he even met US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to lobby for support for the movement.

Lai is a study in the unexpected. He took issue with authoritarian government under the influence of Friedrich Hayek, but his weapons of choice are lively tabloids like *Apple Daily*, which was raided when he was arrested. The newspaper, part of a large stable of publications, which Lai had positioned as a champion of aggressive free speech, has said that it will not be intimidated. But earlier, Lai had to back off when Beijing moved against him. In 1994, he had asked former Chinese premier Li Peng to "drop dead", and declared that the Communist Party of China was a corrupt monopoly which short-changed the people. In retaliation, Beijing had closed down outlets of the fashion retailer Giordano, which Lai had founded in 1987 though it is usually mistaken for an Italian brand. To save it from ruin, Lai had to quit his own company.

Lai's arrest is a show and tell lesson. Beijing has targeted a media baron, a business tycoon and an influential backer of the pro-democracy forces with wide access overseas, to demonstrate that resistance is useless. The new national security law will be applied wherever the mainland sees signs of resistance. The arrest signals that Hong Kong has ceased to be an offshore haven where the mainland interfaced with the world, and where its writ was somewhat tempered by historical immunity.



VANDITA MISHRA

MANY STORIES WILL be told of the inauguration of the Ram temple by the Prime Minister at Ayodhya one week ago, exactly 2 years after India's only Muslim majority state was stripped of its special status and statehood. One of them is the story of secularism. The silver-bellied Narendra Modi had to symbolise the start of temple construction on August 5, just after noon, obscured in rain from view.

But that temple construction began over the debris of the Babri masjid amid a pandemic that secularism as it used to be appears to have gone missing during disruption of life as we know it. It is not a work of fiction. Its resemblance to the real-life politics of a leader is not coincidental.

For all the chants and invocations of a past glory, culture and civilisation, the spectacle in Ayodhya was about the leader, here and now; Modi, wearing long hair and a mask, framed solo, no props or supporting cast, enacting a by-now familiar script of Fall and Rise.

Modi's politics reveals in notions of destruction and creation, and chimera of the clean slate. Be it the sweep and suddenness of the November 2016 demonstration, the abrogation of Article 370 by imprisoning the entire existing political leadership in Kashmir 2019; the call for an *Atmanirbhar Bharat* Abhiyan (Self-Reliant India Mission), even as migrants, abandoned by city and state, walked the long highways to home in May — common to them is a dramatic, political imagination imbued with the symbolism of death and birth and a messianic self-image.

The Hindu vs Muslim story of Ayodhya, seminal as it is, is a play within a play — an inset in the larger before-and-after canvas in which the subjects can be, and are, as in demonisation, both Muslim and Hindu. Even the so-called aspirational vote for Modi, cutting across caste and class faultlines, is located in this setting. It depends crucially on the imagination of political and institutional elites and the willing suspension of belief by the people in their own ability to rally what they have, and build on. At all the people must begin all over again, and it is the leader who will write their destinies afresh on a clean slate.

The politics of the clean slate, then, shapes what the people themselves can aspire to. What is hope, and how much can you demand, after all, when everything old must be given up for crumbling or dying, when you are called upon to start from the beginning? Should you be asking the mundane *bijli-sadak-pani-padhai*-internet-sehat-naukri questions when a grand reconstruction has begun? In a politics where only the leader's new dawn will deliver, the Opposition must be consigned to the night and its shadows.



MOHAMMAD QASIM

THE COVID-19 pandemic has fostered confusion on the efficacy of non-allopathic forms of medicine in combating the virus, including homeopathy. The pandemic is a challenge to the scientific community, which is dealing with an unknown pathogen. However, scientists and doctors have known about viruses over the years from research literature and recurring episodes of seasonal flu-like symptoms. Homeopathic practitioners too have been treating several viral diseases. This knowledge can be harnessed to combat COVID-19.

Coronavirus is akin to several other pathogens that cause flu-like symptoms. But the virus grafts itself on to human cells, making the task for the immune system more challenging. So COVID-19 is an infectious disorder of greater intensity than several other viral diseases. That is why there is no antidote to yet. The disease is closely linked to the patient's fibres, which influence the body's innervation. This makes it difficult to diagnose the disease early and treat it unless the dynamic principle of the body is brought in.

We know about the symptoms caused by other SARS viruses. This has given us considerable knowledge of coronaviruses and their pathogenicity. The past view of the virus is the sole means to know the character of the present coronavirus. This is an opportunity to know the individual's suffering while at the same time, allow homeopathy to choose possible similar remedies from within its system. This is actually the basis for all research work on the virus today.



AUGUST 12, 1980, FORTY YEARS AGO

UNFRUITFUL TALKS

THE MUCH-AWAITED ASSAM talks in Imphal ended with the agitators' spokesman describing them as "not fruitful" and a Manipur official press note expressing the hope that both sides would make efforts to "bring about a congenial atmosphere" for the Shillong conference. Lalit Chandra Rajkhowa, adviser to ASU and a member of the six-man delegation of the Assam agitators said that the talks were not fruitful. He said that the delegation demanded of the government the immediate withdrawal of all repressive measures and the release of all 27 detainees on or before August 15. Else, ASU and AACSP might not be able

to attend the August 18 talks at Shillong.

NO-SHOW STUDENTS

LEADERS OF THE All Manipur Students Union (AMSU) and the All Manipur Students Coordinating Committee (AMSCC) did not turn up at the chief minister's house for talks with Dorendra Singh. The student leaders had come a day earlier for talks with the CM, but as Singh was taken ill, the meeting could not be held. The Deputy CM requested the AMSU and AMSCC leaders to come at 10 am to meet the Chief Minister. Singh and the student leaders had arrived at an agreement on August 5 that talks on starting the process of identification

WORDLY WISE

FOUR HOSTILE NEWSPAPERS ARE MORE TO BE FEARED THAN A THOUSAND BAYONETS.
— NAPOLEON BONAPARTE

Clean slate politics

Notebandi to Article 370 to Mandir: People must begin all over again, the leader will write their destinies afresh

where only the leader's new dawn will deliver, the Opposition, opposing ideas, must be consigned to the night and its shadows.

This framing isn't new. It has marked the Modi campaigns.

About 270 km from Ayodhya, straddling the border between Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, is Chitrakoot — Lord Ram is said to have spent more than 11 years of his 14-year *vanvas* (exile) in its deep forests. Here, in the last parliamentary election of 2019, the perfectly ravaged landscape that Modi's politics both conjures and performs to Chitrakoot framed in miniature, the second Modi majority, which was more emphatic than in 2014.

Candidates of all three leading formations in Banda-Chitrakoot — BJP, Congress and SP-BSP Mahagathabandhan — had switched sides, each more than once, with no pretence to a cause larger than themselves.

Nearly 12 years after he was killed in an encounter by the STF, a dacoit called "Dadur" was a vivid presence, and his brother was the Congress candidate. At least four living dacoits, carrying cash rewards on their heads, joined with Dadur's legend to influence votes. The bandits, who had risen, according to local lore, by taking on the oppression of the big landlords, had since elections in the 1980s, started to put up their own candidates.

Meanwhile, bonded labour, a long-standing problem targeting the forest-dwelling community of Kols, had changed form — local activists pointed to forced migration to the brick kilns of Meerut and Delhi, Punjab and Haryana, and to continuing police oppression of the Kols in the name of fighting the dacoit.

In this denuded setting, the 2019 Modi campaign, as the National Security Adviser, Ajit Doval, said, "was a Saviour, here it invoked Pulwama and Balakot, and won handsomely. On poll-eve in Chitrakoot's Goswami Tulasidas Degree College, where students lamented the missing jobs, many more said "rastra saraksha (national security)" was above "rozgar (jobs)" than vice versa.

Alongside Modi the Protector, was Modi the Benevolent. The BJP campaign, under *sangathan* (party organisation) and *sarkar* (government), reached out to the people and Chitrakoot as the "labharthi", beneficiaries of government schemes and of bigger things to come, directly from Modi.

Modi, the Nationalist, also fought and won the election in Chitrakoot — the larger-than-life figure in a land held hostage to the bareknuckled jati calculus of local rivalries and

tyrannies in alternating regimes of the SP and BSP for decades.

Framed in Chitrakoot, then, was the Saviour, Provider and Nationalist, who effortlessly lifted himself above a fray laid low by its factions and politicians. Modi's clean slate politics, that promised grand creation over complete destruction, played resolutely to the Chitrakoot gallery.

Leaders have played a special politics to win before. In December 1984, at the end of an Orwellian year — Operation Bluestar, Indira Gandhi's assassination, killings of Sikhs, Bhopal gas leak — Rajiv Gandhi ran a hysterically negative Congress campaign that unabashedly played with people's insecurities and fears, apart from manipulating a sympathy wave.

The Congress harped on threats, foreign and home-grown, to India's unity and integrity. Its ad campaign, illustrated by barbed wires and reptilian creatures, asked: Why should you feel uncomfortable riding in a taxi driven by a taxi driver who belongs to another state? Will your grocery list in the future include acid balls, iron rods, daggers?

Yet Rajiv Gandhi's oversized victory had all but petered out in the time before he dealt it a fell blow in 1987, perhaps the moment worst time, or he wasn't a good fit in it. In the case of Modi, however, his personal myth slices neatly into his moment.

By the time Modi travelled from the state to the political centre, overwhelming fatigue with the Congress, cynicism about the opportunities of "secular" politics and the hijacking of "social justice" agendas by corruption or dynast or both in parties like the SP and BJP, had combined with the damage done by a taxi driver who belongs to another state? Will your grocery list in the future include acid balls, iron rods, daggers?

The Anna Hazare phenomenon was a portent and warning. At Ram Lila Maidan in Delhi, the Anna Hazare was a stirring distill of and antagonism for politician and Parliament. A sense of catharsis, but even more, of purge, it was in this dishevelled landscape and pegging their aspirations to the politics of the clean slate.

Six years later, Modi's politics, our participation in it has brought Chitrakoot, that arid place in the no-government land between two states, closer to us all. Across the country, the people of Chitrakoot are tailoring their lives and pegging their aspirations to the politics of the clean slate.

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SCIENCE, WITHOUT PREJUDICE

Homeopathic knowledge about viral diseases can be harnessed to combat COVID-19

mopathy to choose possible similar remedies from within its system. This is actually the basis for all research work on the virus today.

Unfortunately, there is much confusion over the efficacy of homeopathy and COVID-19. This is reflected in the debate over the system of medicine after several states recommended a homeopathic drug, Arsenicum Album 30, for prophylactic use. An article in this paper, "A homeopathic drug touted as effective against COVID-19, (June 3), does not address this confusion by tracing this arsenic from the standpoint of allopathic principles.

The therapeutic value of arsenic in homeopathy must be appreciated in terms of principles embodied in this system of medicine. In its natural form, arsenic is a poison that has the capability to produce violent reactions which are similar to what it can cure. To judge the scale of this curative power, one must know the rationale behind homeopathic therapy and the process by which homeopathic medicines work — in this case, the transformation of crude arsenic into a dynamic energy specially adapted to harmonise the vital life forces that restore health. Homeopathic therapy is based on the study of symptoms a substance causes. Arsenic Album has been used effectively in treating acute respiratory infections and several other conditions.

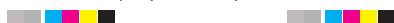
About two months ago, the Ministry of AYUSH convened a meeting of homeopathic

experts along with members of the Scientific Advisory Committee of the Central Council for Research in Homeopathy. The experts unanimously agreed that Arsenic Album could be used as a prophylactic for COVID-19.

Homeopathic remedies have usually not had the technical support to prove their efficacy. Remedies like Arsenic Album, Antimonium Tartaricum, Bryonia Alba and Gelsemium, have been effectively used in the past. The novel coronavirus's symptoms resemble those associated with Arsenic Album as a homeopathic remedy. In recent times, it has been observed that an appropriate dose of Arsenic Album and Gelsemium can remove susceptibility to the disease-causing agent. These remedies stimulate the body's defence mechanism. Individual practitioners have used Arsenic Album as a prophylactic in the past against virus-related signs and symptoms.

The experiences gathered so far have provided sufficient evidence and knowledge to apply them to the present situation. Arsenic Album has proved effective in non-resolving conditions where other so-called proven medicines have failed. Of course, no science is complete and all experiments are open for discussion, provided it is without prejudice.

The writer is a Delhi-based homeopathic physician



New Delhi

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THE IDEAS PAGE

Mending fences with neighbours

Delhi doesn't just have a China problem. In six years, relationships with other South Asian countries have frayed, providing Beijing with an opening



ARDHUR PANNIAN

The Ministry of External Affairs has not put it on record with specific dates and details, then pulls the information down from its website the next day. Either the MoA got the facts wrong or was told to pull it out, especially after the prime minister told an all-party meeting that no one had either come in or is on Indian territory. As we wait for an explanation that may never come, one thing is clear: There is confusion in our diplomacy with China, which remains determined to push its boundaries.

We are caught in what strategic experts call the "Thucydides Trap"—the condition that war is likely if a new power feels threatened by the rise of another. That term, from ancient Greece for the tension between Athens and Sparta, as enunciated by Thucydides, is commonly used for US-China relations but can be easily transposed to India versus China.

For, there is a disconnect between what Beijing says and what it does. It kept calling the situation "stable and controllable" as 20 of our soldiers were martyred. Our PM and defence minister visited Ladakh and addressed the nation from there but we haven't heard one word from Chinese President Xi Jinping. He has left to his Foreign office spokespersons to respond.

Diplomacy with Beijing, as many countries have realised, is as credible as dry water or wooden iron. So it won't be a surprise if the Chinese withdrawal from Galwan and other points of friction is accompanied by permanent occupation in Depsang and Pangong Tso.

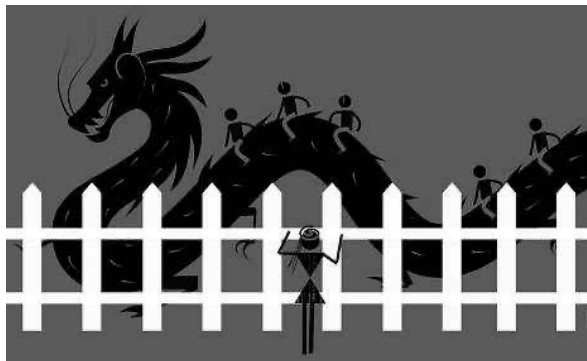
Therein lies the crux of the problem—it is about much more than China. China isn't interested in nibbling away some land along the Line of Actual Control, it wants its footprints in the entire region.

It's more than an accident of geography that India shares her borders with all other South Asian nations. No other South Asian country, except Afghanistan and Pakistan, share a border with any other South Asian nation.

This is our asset and the value of this asset is determined by our neighbours and our investment in the relationship with them. In May 2014, amid pomp and grandeur, hype and hoopla, newly-elected Prime Minister Narendra Modi invited the heads of all the SAARC countries for his swearing-in ceremony. Look where we are now, merely six years down the road. That sense of camaraderie has evaporated. What was presented as a strong signal of regional solidarity is faint and flickering.

China is an overwhelming presence in each of our neighbouring countries. When the prime minister warned against expansionism, the irony wasn't lost on many—China's expansionism in the region is directly proportional to the deterioration of our relationship with our neighbours. Our neighbours, including Nepal, are all young emerging democracies developing new institutions but they find a growing appeal in the authoritarian paradigm of Beijing than India's democratic one.

It was the late Indira Gandhi who said: "The nations of our region can prosper only by treating one another as sovereign equals." She said that friendship does not mean identical views but a basic framework of respect based on equality and trust in which there is sympathy for each other's difficulties. This



C R Sankaranar

was behind former Prime Minister I K Gujral's doctrine, too, in which India made unilateral concessions to neighbouring countries with regard to trade and travel without expecting reciprocal treatment. Over decades, even by clearing through the wall of our adversaries, we have been accumulating trust and goodwill among our neighbours. That is now being frittered away.

Never in our contemporary history has Nepal gone down such an acrimonious path. With our only neighbouring Hindu country, the spiritual link is frayed over a dispute related to 400 sq km of Indian territory at Kala Pani. So much so that Nepal is even asking for a review of the 1947 agreement on Gurkhas.

The flashpoint came on May 8, the day the 80-km road was inaugurated by the defence minister. But the New Delhi-Kathmandu chill set in since the blockade of 2015, when China saw an opportunity and rushed in. Since May 8, we have seen a sudden upsurge of hostility with Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli openly adversarial; Nepal border guards firing upon Indian residents; Kathmandu staying away from the multilateral BIMSTEC counterterrorism exercise; refusing to accept the US-sponsored Millennium Challenge Cooperation Grant which was supposed to upgrade Nepal's electricity transmission system and connect it to the Indian power grid. We all know that the Chinese envoy in Kathmandu is proactive, intervening to resolve the internal bickering of the ruling Communist party to bring stability.

Take Bangladesh, a country that called the bluff of Jinnah's two-nation theory, its war of liberation fought by both Hindus and Muslims for a distinct cultural and linguistic identity. That revolution, led by Bangabandhu Mujibur Rahman, had the full support of the Indian people. I know what that history means, I am an MP from Murshidabad. My district has 71 lakh people, 66 per cent of whom are Muslims and 33 per cent Hindus. In absolute terms, it has the largest Muslim concentration in the country. I insisted and was successful in persuading my colleague Pranab Mukherjee to contest the Lok Sabha election from my district. Pranab did was dithering but the people overwhelmingly voted for him in the 2004 general election and he won. It is a fact that despite fervent calls by M J Jinnah, the Muslim population of the district never desired to move to Pakistan and no communal riots occurred there during Partition.

The foreign minister of Bangladesh cancelled his visit. PM Modi was invited to the inaugural ceremony of 'Mujib Borsor' (Mujibur Rahman's centennial birth anniversary) but that was cancelled in the wake of the corona pandemic. The purported visit was vehemently opposed by various organisations in Bangladesh, much to the discomfiture of India.

Certainly, these aren't good signs and there is a fear that China is waiting to rush in.

This same Muslim population is now fearful of the new citizenship law, the NRC and the NPR—this trinity puts their existence at stake, that is the refrain. Where do they go if they can't pass the test? This concern reverberates in Bangladesh. No less a person than the Union Home Minister said that illegal migrants will be picked up like termites and thrown away. Where India has assured Bangladesh that the NRC is an internal issue but the tone of domestic politics—where Bangladesh Muslims are painted as cash enemies eroding India—have set off deep disquiet in Dhaka.

We should not forget that since 2009, when Sheikh Hasina assumed power in Bangladesh, she has waged a zero-tolerance campaign against terrorist outfits inimical to India. Bangladesh is burdened with more than 10 lakh Rohingya refugees and yet there is simmering discontent about its relations with India. The foreign minister of Bangladesh cancelled his visit. PM Modi was invited to the inaugural ceremony of 'Mujib Borsor' (Mujibur Rahman's centennial birth anniversary) but that was cancelled in the wake of the corona pandemic. The purported visit was vehemently opposed by various organisations in Bangladesh, much to the discomfiture of India.

Certainly, these aren't good signs and there is a fear that China is waiting to rush in.

We need to explore innovative long-term efficacious and durable initiatives to mend fences in the neighbourhood and provide them with the comfort to look beyond the sphere of Chinese influence.

Some of the low-hanging fruit that can be plucked: BBIN (Bangla, Bhutan, India, Nepal) signed a motor vehicles agreement which should be speedily implemented; the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway needs a renewed push; medical tourism, education, arts and culture—the entire thrust of soft power—can be used to generate and renew connections between the aspirational youth of all the countries.

From Indira Gandhi to Atal Bihari Vajpayee to Manmohan Singh, all prime ministers have stressed that the more stable and cordial our relationship with our neighbours, the more sustained will be our progress. At a time when the pandemic has forced us to retreat behind walls, we need to look back and take lessons from history so that we can forge a more peaceful future for the young generation in not only our country but the entire region.

Chowdhury is leader of the Congress in Lok Sabha and chairperson, Public Accounts Committee

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Both Nepal and India should stop squabbling over the citizenship of an individual [the Buddha] who was born and died before the concept of citizenship came into existence, and who defied the conventions and boundaries of physical comfort for a transcendental experience." — THE KATHMANDU POST

Bollywood, the punching bag

Nepotism is a symptom of the inequality and entrenched privilege in our society. It permeates all sectors



KARIM KHAN

misuse of a young actor has reignited the debate around nepotism and the pressures on "outsiders" in the Hindi film industry. The conversation is an important one but has unfortunately been painfully myopic. What hasn't helped is that it has been led by prime-time TV performers in the garb of journalists sermonising on the film industry about ethics and morality. This conversation requires a profound reckoning of the different ways in which privilege manifests itself in society. Much has been said about insiders and outsiders in Bollywood, but the reality is that our society is full of deep insider vs outsider challenges.

According to a 2019 Oxford report, India's richest 10 per cent own 77.4 per cent of the national wealth, while the bottom 60 per cent own less than 5 per cent. Cronyism is a defining principle of economic activity, and while entrenched business houses control the nation's resources, newer entrepreneurs face significant barriers to entry. According to the World Bank's 2020 Ease of Doing Business report, India ranks 125 out of 190 countries on the "setting up a new business" parameter. High-profile cases of suicides among Indian entrepreneurs such as Sajjan Parayil, Vineet Whig and Lucky Gupta, have all pointed to the bureaucratic, regulatory, and financial distress they've had to contend with.

This trend is more obvious in politics. Even before a young professional working in public policy can articulate an interest in politics, a new generation of Thackerays, Scindias, and Gehlots is waiting in the wings. Not only do each of these individuals come with a name recognition, but also a network that allows them to grow faster than any outsider can hope to. The Indian civil services and judicial system have similarly been characterised by nepotism and favouritism, with appointments being opaque and subjective, and conversations in courtrooms involving inside jokes and banter.

No conversation on privilege is complete without considering discrimination on the basis of caste, perhaps the most perverse manifestation of nepotism and privilege. A recent article in *The Economist* reports that such discrimination remains ubiquitous: "...in the government as in the private sector, the highest positions remain a near-monopoly for the three top castes or varnas of the broader caste pyramid."

We are a feudal society and unfortunately, nepotism and privilege permeate all echelons. The film industry also exemplifies all of the flaws and constraints of the society it inhabits. But it is often an easy punching bag, even though the aforementioned sectors are ostensibly more pertinent, and require more tangible skills versus the subjective charisma or "star-power" the film business operates with.

The film industry also contends with a unique set of challenges. Bollywood has had

"industry" status for a little over two decades, resulting in the entry of foreign studios and corporates. Yet, a range of finance and distribution challenges hinder the industry's ability to tell more diverse stories. Corporates tend to be up most of their funds in multiple film slates with the bigger production houses and seldom bankroll independent producers. Smaller producers are also unable to access bank loans, forcing them to rely on private financiers, builders and high-net-worth individuals. From a distribution perspective, the industry is severely constrained—India has only 9,800 cinema screens compared to more than 60,000 in China. This results in independent films and those without established stars getting smaller releases vis-à-vis mainstream films. They are not really given a fair chance at the box office and most get pulled off the screens if they don't get off to a flying start. This perpetuates a cycle in which these films get branded as non-profitable by the trade and face difficulties in raising funds.

There is high pressure to demonstrate success in this constrained environment. Inevitably, formulaic films with known names are both easier to finance and distribute. Producers start viewing "star kids" as financially more viable compared to rank newcomers. Even before they are launched in their first films, they have millions of followers on their social media handles and photographers are tripping over themselves to take their pictures. The audience—whose patronage has created an industry out of little Taimur Ali Khan's pictures—laps these up.

Despite this, the industry has managed to try has witnessed some positive changes. The past decade has seen a sharp increase in female-driven films, spearheaded by actors such as Vidya Balan, Kangana Ranaut, Taapsee Pannu, and with those like Anushka Sharma and Deepika Padukone (none of whom belong to film families) turning producers. There is also a palpable increase in demand within the industry for the hitherto under-represented stories and storytellers from the interiors of India. The names of Thackerays, Scindias, and Gehlots is waiting in the wings. Not only do each of these individuals come with a name recognition, but also a network that allows them to grow faster than any outsider can hope to. The Indian civil services and judicial system have similarly been characterised by nepotism and favouritism, with appointments being opaque and subjective, and conversations in courtrooms involving inside jokes and banter.

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The film industry also contends with a unique set of challenges. Bollywood has had

Khan is a filmmaker and screenwriter. Sandhu is a public policy analyst

A symbol of friendship

Ebrahim Alkazi's legacy bears testimony to cultural links between Saudi Arabia, India

SAUD BIN MOHAMMED AL-SATI

LAST WEEK, we lost Ebrahim Alkazi, a legend of Indian theatre with Saudi Arabian roots. I fondly remember my first experience of meeting him in the spring of 2014 at his house in New Delhi. I was touched by his unique character and his passion for the arts. He greeted me with a few words spoken in the distinct Qassimi dialect. Alkazi was also a noted art connoisseur and collector, credited for fundamentally transforming Indian theatre and having etched a name for Indian theatre worldwide. His legacy with the arts remains a testament to the rich intellectual and cultural links between Saudi Arabia and India.

Alkazi's father, Hamad, was a trader from Utaiza in Saudi Arabia's Qassim region, who subsequently settled in Pune where Ebrahim was born in 1925. Despite his early immersion in theatre, he gradually pursued his love for visual arts. He showcased the avant-garde artist in him throughout India, the US and Europe through his path-breaking work before becoming the director of the National School of Drama in Delhi and the Asian

Theatre Institute in 1962. He will always be remembered for his contributions in the field of arts that resonate with our cultural bonds. The strings that bind Saudi Arabia and India are many and have become stronger and more diverse over time. However, the cultural ties that the two countries share are the distinct Qassimi dialect. Alkazi was also a noted art connoisseur and collector, credited for fundamentally transforming Indian theatre and having etched a name for Indian theatre worldwide. His legacy with the arts remains a testament to the rich intellectual and cultural links between Saudi Arabia and India.

The two countries have a fascinating history of intellectual exchanges. Science, arts, literature, and languages—the mutual influence has indeed been profound. For instance, many Indian texts in the field of medicine, mathematics and astronomy were translated over the centuries into Arabic. The father of Indology is none other than the Arab scholar Al-Biruni. His monumental work *Tarikh al-Hind* is undoubtedly the most comprehensive pre-modern encyclopaedic work on India.

Another notable text, the *Panchatantra*, was translated by the Arabs who took it to Europe and the rest of the world, as were

Hitopadesha and Chanakya's *Arthashastra*. India's famous medical treatises such as *Charaka* and *Susruta* were translated into Arabic as well. The Arab travellers were also prolific writers and wrote extensively on India, its people and diverse cultures. Writers such as Sulaiman, Ibn al-Faqih, Al-Masudi and Al-Idrisi documented in great detail their impressions of south India, its people, customs and traditions. The world-famous *Arabian Nights* also called *Alf Laila* in Arabic and *Adventures of Sindbad the Sailor* too describe southern India. According to Ibn Nadeem, a 10th-century Arab writer, Sindbad was written in India.

These deeply-rooted cultural ties have continued to grow. For instance, Yoga has become an increasingly popular sport in Saudi Arabia. Since November 2017, the International Yoga Day is celebrated in an open area in the centre of Riyadh. In 2018, India was a guest of honour at our annual cultural festival of Al Janadiyah. The theme

of the Indian pavilion at the festival was "Saudi ka Dost Bharat" (India is a friend of Saudi Arabia). This last decade has been seminal for the expanding our friendship into a strategic partnership.

A most significant milestone in our ties with India was the visit of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in February 2019, which reaffirmed the deep commitment of the two nations to strengthen their strategic engagement.

Our shared cultural bonds are also deepened by the religious ties between our peoples. The annual pilgrimage to Makkah has facilitated the exchange of cultures and traditions as well. But above all, our ties have been strengthened by pioneers like Ebrahim Alkazi. He will continue to live in the hearts of Saudis and Indians who are on the quest to deepen the friendship and cultural heritage they share.

The writer is the ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to India

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TAX DIRECTLY

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Tax and the crises', (IE, August 11). Indirect taxes unfairly burden the working class. A significant share of the Indian economy is informal that, by and large, escapes the tax net. Direct taxes are progressive and hence should ideally be the principal tax revenue stream.

Sudip Kumar Dey, Kolkata

FOR A SAFE VALLEY

THIS REFERS TO the article, '370 myth gone, now reality' (IE, August 11). Three BJP lawmakers were killed last week, a separatist from the Congress also lost his life and many political workers are risking their lives in Kashmir. The government's present safeguard pro-democracy voices in the Valley. The people of the region will stand with India if they feel secure and enjoy better opportunities.

Harshil Mehta, Ahmedabad

NOT FOR NATURE

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Mandate betrayed' (IE, August 11). The new EIA draft has raised many questions over clauses which exempt public hearing before the environmental clearance. The recent landfalls in Kerala are testimony to the fact that destruction

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of nature can lead to unforeseen calamities.

Chandranvir Singh, Agra

NAB THE DEFAULTERS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Fire and the pandemic' (IE, August 11). Fire safety inspections are critical to prevent fire outbreaks. Fire safety inspectors are not really given a fair chance at the box office and most get pulled off the screens if they don't get off to a flying start. This perpetuates a cycle in which these films get branded as non-profitable by the trade and face difficulties in raising funds.

Priya Sen, Lucknow