

How to give children joy, even during a pandemic

Esau McCaulley
Contributing Writer

I drove my oldest son, a middle schooler, to his baseball game a few miles down the road. There was a slight breeze, a perfect setting for summer activity.

On the field, it looked like a standard summer of boys learning the nuances of the sport, some further along the road to adult coordination than others. What stood out were the masks on all their faces: a visual reminder that we are in the summer of Covid-19. Joy and sadness, normalcy and profound change competed among the young athletes for our attention.

During the game we parents stood at least six feet away from one another. We discussed the opening of school in the fall, the politicization of wearing masks in public, and how quickly life had changed. We talked about how the last time we saw one another it was at the tryouts for the team in early March, before the world shut down. They asked me how I planned to teach my college students with all the changes, and I answered that I did not know.

As we talked, I wondered, as I have many times during the pandemic, how much to tell my children. Does a 13-year-old or a 12-year-old need to know how many have died?

This mixture of safety and peril and difficult decisions about a child's freedom to play: It is familiar to me. Covid-19 has given all parents a small taste of what it is like to be a Black parent.

Having our bodies as potential threats because of the coronavirus has introduced all of America to what it is like to be perceived as a problem merely by our presence. The major difference is that some of us do carry an unknown virus, while blackness is simply one manifestation of God's creativity. Nonetheless, the perceived danger has given others insight into what it is like for Black bodies, even children's bodies, to be a source of fear.

Pandemic parenting involves a similarly challenging calculus that those of us who raise Black and brown children have faced for centuries. How do we balance the need to protect from danger with the desire to let them be young and free?

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once recounted the story of not knowing what to say when his 6-year-old daughter asked

to go to a local theme park called Funtown. He did not want to tell her that she could not go because Black people were forbidden. He said that explaining segregation to his daughter was more daunting than the speeches he gave all over the country.

People often mention "the talk" as if the only conversation Black parents have to have with their children is about the complex interaction with the police. That is hard, but not the only thing. At some point we have to tell them about Funtown: the limits society wants to place on them and the struggle to tear those limits down.

My son is in the midst of the transition from early middle schooler to emerging teenager. In the strange moral reasoning of the United States, this will mean a move from a dangerous.

The coronavirus forces parents to weigh their kids' safety against the need for freedom — a tension Black parents have been contending with for generations.

dangerous. His Black body and his increasing size could, in certain circumstances, be weaponized against him. Citizens and officers merely have to utter the words "I feared for my life" and his Black life could be in peril.

When do I warn him about wandering around our largely white neighborhood in the evening? How long do I let him remain a child? Am I negligent if in my attempts to give him a "normal" childhood I leave him unprepared for the challenges he faces?

I was initially hesitant to have my son return to the baseball diamond, even though it is a sport well suited for distancing. I reluctantly agreed. My son's coach said that some teams would follow the safety rules and others would not, but that they would do the best he could to keep them safe.

At that first game, our team dutifully wore their masks. The other team did not. Had politics sneaked on to the baseball field? Were some families and teams simply not as worried as us? I did the math again. Should I interrupt the game or remove my son? We already barely had enough players to field a full squad. I decided to let him play, to be a child.

There are no easy answers as to how to parent Black children in America inside or outside a pandemic. It is not



SABRINA KARASIK

my job to tell someone how to do it.

My wife and I have drifted to a bias toward joy. We tell our children about some major events, other burdens we carry ourselves. Our children know much of the history of this country, but the focus is on Black triumph over suffering, not the suffering itself. I immerse them in the soul, hip-hop and gospel music that has lifted many a weary soul even when they would rather listen to Kidz Bop.

I have told them of Moses and the Israelites, of Mary Jesus' mother and her dramatic yes to God. They know about Sojourner and her railroad and Martin and his dream of Mother Pollard and her rested feet. I remind them that God has looked upon their Black skin, hair and bodies and called it good.

I am making deposit after deposit of

Black joy and faith in the hope that it will be with them when the inevitable struggle comes. I do so because that is what my mother did for me.

My oldest has a favorite saint, the North African church father Athanasius. He was called Athanasius Contra Mundum — against the world, a name he received for standing against seemingly insurmountable foes, even at great cost, because of his convictions. My son loves the defiance. Given that being Black in America can sometimes feel against the world, that is a great trait to admire.

My son's team failed to emerge victorious in that first game back on the field. A socially distanced wave from across the diamond replaced the customary handshakes. Some two weeks later, it seems that we avoided infection.

I'm glad baseball is back in our lives. Even with masks covering the kids' faces and parents shouting encouragements from afar, it is still baseball in the summer. There are still kids in the outfield more interested in the cloud formations than a pop fly. The clean double play remains the stuff of legend.

We parents had a brief moment of shared victory. We had given our children the gift that is often only available to the young: the chance for uncomplicated joy. We who looked on wondered what was next.

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The future of policing?

DIRKS, FROM PAGE 9
ing Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents to collect with mouth swabs DNA samples from people in their custody and add that information to the FBI's DNA database.

Global norms around how to handle genomic data are unsettled, and against that shifting background, the actions of superpowers like China and the United States are likely to set dangerous precedents for other states.

The high courts of some countries, like Kuwait and Kenya, have either banned as unconstitutional or restricted the mass collection of DNA by state authorities.

Other states are trying to forge ahead.

In India, the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi introduced a bill last year aimed at "expanding the application of DNA-based forensic technologies to support and strengthen the justice delivery system of the country." But advocacy groups have identified the risk of potential misuses.

A senior judge had previously warned that legislation covering India's vast system of biometric identification, Aadhaar, might be interpreted in the future to justify the collection, not only of people's fingerprints and iris scans, but of DNA samples as well.

Last month, civil rights groups in Thailand raised concerns that Thai border authorities, including soldiers, had, without explanation, forcibly taken DNA samples from minority Muslim Thai citizens returning from Malaysia.

Malaysia, for its part, is mulling plans to create a national registration system that would link biometric and DNA data to existing ID documents — this purportedly to keep ineligible foreigners from fraudulently being added to the country's citizenship rolls.

The battle over biometric privacy will be one of the defining civil liberty issues of the 21st century. And grimly, on this front, too, China seems to be leading the way.

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Assessing a new global flash point

KAUFFMANN, FROM PAGE 1
May, thanks only to support from Turkey, Turkey provided firepower and brought in thousands of mercenaries from Syria.

The assault on Tripoli was led by Khalifa Hifter, a self-styled field marshal who controls eastern Libya. He is supported by the United Arab Emirates and Egypt and enjoys assistance from perhaps 1,000 Russian mercenaries from the Wagner Group, a private army with close links to the Kremlin. Having halted Mr. Hifter's offensive, Turkey now has a decisive hold on Tripoli.

What will Turkey do with it? The question is of primary concern to the European Union. "What happens in the Eastern Mediterranean is no longer a peripheral issue for Europe," the European Council on Foreign Relations, a think tank, noted in a recent report.

Turkey's ever expanding activities in the area have many tentacles. Turkey's unresolved dispute with Greece over Cyprus is complicated by claims to recently discovered gas fields. That led Turkey to strike a deal last November

with Libya for a maritime boundary that created an exclusive economic zone that encroaches upon Greek and Cypriot interests. Turkey's ruling party also has links with the Muslim Brotherhood, and, of vital importance, Turkey controls a crucial migrant route to Europe.

As always, the European Union is divided. France took the lead in marched ahead alone, not trying to involve Italy, which has historical links and business interests with Libya. Concerned about the spread of jihadist groups in the lands south of Libya, France early on put its bet on Mr. Hifter, who seemed better armed to serve as a bulwark against Islamist terrorism.

Wrong choice. "Hifter committed a grave mistake when he decided to launch an offensive on Tripoli," a French diplomatic source now reckons. The French could not stop him, the Americans would not try, and the Russians helped him.

France now finds itself isolated when confronting Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean. On June 10, off the Libyan coast, a Turkish flotilla encoun-

tered a French frigate, the Courbet, under NATO command as part of an operation to enforce a U.N. arms embargo on Libya. The French and Turkish versions of the incident differ: Paris lodged a complaint but a NATO investigation was inconclusive.

When France looked for support in its clash with Turkey's NATO meeting, it could rally only eight countries to its side out of 30, and neither the United States nor Britain came to the rescue. Yet President Emmanuel Macron has not hesitated to accuse Turkey of "criminal responsibility" in Libya. Among Mr. Macron's advisers, Turkey's purchase of the S-400 air defense system from Russia is considered a challenge to NATO — as much so as it is a challenge to all Europeans when Turkey brings Syrian mercenaries into Libya.

Could France be right to sound the alarm about Turkey's ambitions? Unfortunately, being right alone doesn't help much. "The mission of France has always been to have a vision that no one shares," Gérard Araud, a former French ambassador to Washington, has noted. Last November, after NATO did not respond when Turkey endangered French forces in Syria, Mr. Macron referred to a "brain death" of the alliance because it had not reacted to a member's breach of NATO solidarity.

The Trump administration does not claim that France is wrong. It even shares France's concerns over Libya's "terrible situation," as stated by Robert O'Brien, President Trump's national security adviser.

"We don't want Libya to be colonized by Turkey or Russia," he said in Paris on Bastille Day.

But to Washington, Russia's presence is much more of a concern than Turkey's. Mr. Trump does not want to mess with Mr. Erdogan. He is happy to let Mr. Macron play the bad cop. As for France's European friends, they will most likely quietly wait for Nov. 3.



The "Tripoli Brigade," a militia loyal to the UN-recognized government of Libya that survived a yearlong offensive by rival forces in May, paraded in the capital on July 10.

STYVE KAUFFMANN is the editorial director and a former editor in chief of Le Monde.

U.S. catastrophe through German eyes

COHEN, FROM PAGE 9
"Decree of the Reich President for the Protection of People and State" as his means to seize power.

German horror at Trump has many components. He's the fear-mongering showman wedding nationalism, racism and violence as if the 20th century held no lessons. He's the would-be destroyer of the multilateral institutions that brought European peace and made it possible for Germans to raise their

bowed heads again. He is a fascist in the making.

As Ian Beacock argued recently in The New Republic, Angela Merkel, the German chancellor, got it right on the virus. Not for her the imagery of war — all that talk of the silent, invisible enemy to be vanquished. No, for her the challenge of the virus has been a lesson in the power of democracy.

They are not condemned to accept the spread of this virus as an inevitable fact

of life," she said. "We thrive not because we are forced to do something, but because we share knowledge and encourage active participation." She went on to say that success largely depends "on each and every one of us."

It worked. Merkel was addressing all democratic citizens, Americans included. No wonder Trump cannot stand her, a woman trained as a scientist whose life lesson has been the sacred value of freedom.

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Opinion

China is harvesting DNA. Is this the future of policing?

Authorities are systematically gathering genomic data from tens of millions of people.

Emile Dirks
James Leibold

For several years now, the police and other authorities in China have been collecting across the country DNA samples from millions of men and boys who aren't suspected of having committed any crime.

In a report published by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute last month, we exposed the extent of the Chinese government's program of genetic surveillance. It no longer is limited to Xinjiang, Tibet and other areas mostly populated by ethnic minorities the government represses; DNA collection — serving no apparent immediate need — has spread across the entire country. We estimate that the authorities' goal is to gather the DNA samples of 35 million to 70 million Chinese males.

Matched against official family records, surveillance footage or witness statements in police reports, these samples will become a powerful tool for the Chinese authorities to track down a man or boy — or, failing that, a relative of his — for whatever reason they deem fit.

The Chinese government denies the existence of any such program, but since our study's publication, we have continued to uncover online scattered evidence revealing the program's enormous scale, including government reports and official procurement orders for DNA kits and testing services.

DNA is being harvested across the country: in the southwestern provinces of Yunnan and Guizhou; in central-southern Hunan; in Shandong and Jiangsu, in the east; and up north, in the autonomous region of Inner Mongolia.

We have continued to find photographic evidence that the police are collecting blood from children, pinpricking their fingers at school — a clear violation of China's responsibilities under the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child.

And we have found fresh proof, including official documents, showing that DNA samples are also being gathered in major urban centers. (For a time, the focus seemed to be largely on rural communities.)

An official report dated June 16, available on a website of the government of Sichuan Province, details the creation of a DNA database by the Public Security Bureau of the city of Chengdu, the province's capital, and seeks expert opinion on the creation of a "male ancestry investigation system."

It documents how 17 public security offices have collected DNA samples from nearly 600,000 male residents across the city — that's about 7 percent of Chengdu's male population (assuming that roughly half of the city's total population of about 16.6 million is male).

The Chengdu procurement report states that building a massive genetic database about local residents will help the police "maintain public order and stability as well as meet the needs of daily case work." This is of no comfort.



THE SHENYANG MUNICIPAL PEOPLE'S GOVERNMENT

In China, securing the public order essentially means maintaining the untested rule of the Communist Party. Dissent is a crime, and police operations are a key part of the state's apparatus of repression.

The Chinese police are not doing this work alone. Evidence continues to accumulate that private companies, both Chinese and foreign, are complicit in this extraordinarily vast, and ominous, assault on the privacy of Chinese citizens.

In Hunan Province, Huangrui Scientific Instruments Ltd. — a company based in the provincial capital that produces a range of medical, chemical and scientific products — has sold to the Public Security Bureau of the city of Liuyang some 140,000 DNA testing kits produced by Thermo Fisher Scientific, a U.S.-based Fortune 500 company. That's enough equipment to test roughly one in five men in the community.

In Fujian Province, Forensic Genomics International, a subsidiary of BGI Group — a Chinese gene-sequencing

and biomedical company that describes itself as "one of the world's leading life science and genomics organizations" — won a contract to analyze 16,000 blood samples collected by one district in the province's capital as part of the authorities' effort to build a "male ancestry investigation system." The estimated total male population of the district is 43,500.

The Australian Strategic Policy Institute has contacted Thermo Fisher and Forensic Genomics International asking for comments on our report; neither company replied.

In a statement issued to The New York Times for a news story last month related to the report, a representative of Thermo Fisher said that the company was "proud to be a part of the many positive ways in which DNA identification has been applied, from tracking down criminals to stopping human trafficking and freeing the unjustly accused."

The note, titled "Statement on Xinjiang," did not address the concerns we raised about the potential for wide-

spread abuse of genomic data by the Chinese police throughout the country.

Thermo Fisher had previously been criticized — by human rights organizations and scholars — for supplying DNA collection and analysis equipment to the Chinese authorities in support of their campaign of repression against ethnic minorities in Xinjiang. Already in February 2019, the company had vowed to cease any such sales in the region.

Last week, the U.S. Commerce Department added to its list of sanctioned companies two other subsidiaries of BGI Group — the Chinese parent company of Forensic Genomics International — for "conducting genetic analyses used to further the repression of Uighurs and other Muslim minorities" in Xinjiang.

BGI Group has rejected the accusations. Yet the company is also reported to have agreed to build "a gene bank" in the region.

BGI Group has also been producing tens of millions of Covid-19 test kits for distribution to more than 80 countries

— raising concerns in places like Australia and California that any DNA data collected in the process might then be misused.

For now, China appears to be the only country in the world where police are harvesting en masse DNA samples outside the scope of criminal investigations. But how much longer before others follow suit?

In other countries, including the United States, law enforcement authorities are also pushing the ethical boundaries of genetic data collection.

The police in New York routinely collect DNA samples from people they arrest or simply question — sometimes without saying. Across the United States, police officers search private ancestry sites like GEDmatch, scouring genetic data looking for potential leads in cold cases — also without the knowledge or the consent of the people who uploaded their personal information.

Earlier this year, the Trump administration put in place a program requiring, **DIRKS, PAGE 11**

Police officers collecting DNA samples from schoolboys in Shiga, Yunnan Province, in September.

American catastrophe through German eyes

Trump says he wants to protect law-abiding citizens. In 1933, Hitler issued his "Decree of the Reich President for the Protection of People and State."



Roger Cohen

PARIS No people has found the American lurch toward authoritarianism under President Trump more alarming than the Germans. For postwar Germany, the United States was savior, protector and liberal democratic model. Now, Germans, in shock, speak of the "American catastrophe."

A recent cover of the weekly magazine Der Spiegel portrays Trump in the Oval Office holding a lighted match, with a country ablaze visible through his window. The headline: "Der Feuer-teufel," or, literally, "the Fire Devil."

Germans have a particular relationship to fire. The Reichstag fire of 1933 enabled Hitler and the Nazis to scrap the fragile Weimar democracy that had brought them to power. Hitler's murderous fantasies could now become reality. War, Auschwitz and the German catastrophe followed.

I have known many thoughtful German diplomats over the years, including Michael Steiner, who labored to stop the Balkan wars of the 1990s, and Wolfgang Ischinger, the former German ambassador to the United States. It always seemed to me that their particular passion for freedom, democracy and openness stemmed from the knowledge of how easily these are lost.

Michael Steiner, a professor of history at Brown University and the former president of the American Academy in Berlin, wrote to me last week:

"The American catastrophe seems to get worse every day, but the events in Portland have particularly alarmed me as a kind of strategic experiment for fascism. The playbook from the German fall of democracy in 1933 seems well in place, including rogue military factions, the destabilization of cities, etc."

Steiner continued, "The basic comparison involves racism as a political strategy: a racist imaginary of a pure homeland, with cities demonized as places of decadence."

Trump provokes outrage in a cascade designed to blunt alarm. He deadens reactions through volume and repetition. But something about the recent use of unmarked cars and camouflage-clad federal agents without clear identifying insignia detaining protesters shattered any inclination to shrug.

From the deployment of these federal units in Portland, Oregon's largest city, where protesters have been demanding racial justice and police accountability, it's not a huge leap to the use of paramilitaries (like the German Freikorps in the 1920s) to buttress a "Law and Order" campaign. The Freikorps battled communists. Today, Trump claims to battle "anarchists," "terrorists" and violent leftists. It's the leitmotif of his quest for a second term.

Perhaps the years I spent covering Argentina in the 1980s, in the aftermath of the military junta, made me particularly sensitive to the use of unmarked cars — in the Argentine case, Ford Falcons — to grab left-wing political opponents off the street. They were



"disappeared," a word whose lingering psychological devastation I measured in countless tear-filled rooms. Later I went to Berlin, where there was only one story: totalitarian tragedy and the labors of democratic salvation.

The Department of Homeland Security's Customs and Border Protection confirmed last week that it has deployed officers from three paramilitary-style units to join the federal crackdown in Portland. The Trump administration, facing lawsuits, has cited post-9/11 legislation establishing the department to justify its action. Chicago is now among several cities being targeted as Trump seeks to foment confrontation.

As Tom Ridge, a Republican who was the first head of the Department of Homeland Security, noted in an interview with the Sirius XM host Michael Smerconish, the department was "not established to be the president's personal militia."

In wartime, the Third Geneva Convention, to which the United States is a party, requires even irregular forces to wear "a fixed distinctive sign recognizable at a distance." This is critical not only to protecting civilians but also to ensuring accountability for misconduct.

When paramilitary-style units have no identifying insignia, there is no transparency, no accountability — and that means impunity. Democracy dies. Think of all this as setting the scene for Trump's own "state of emergency" if he does not like the November election result. Social media is combustible enough for a physical fire to be unnecessary.

The president says he wants to protect law-abiding citizens. In 1933, after the Reichstag burned, Hitler issued the **COHEN, PAGE 11**

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, TUESDAY, JULY 28, 2020

THE IDEAS PAGE

The lockdown advantage

It decelerated the pandemic, averted lakhs of cases, saved thousands of lives. The time it provided has been utilised effectively to strengthen the health system



VINOD PAUL

THE FIRST CASE OF COVID-19 in India was reported on January 30. For the next six weeks, aggressive contact tracing and containment measures kept the numbers minimal. However, by the third week of March, it became apparent to experts that the outbreak was entering the exponential phase. The growth rate of new cases had increased by nearly 80 per cent in just over a week preceding March 22, from 10.9 per cent to 19.6 per cent (figure). The doubling time of cases at just over three days was pointing toward an imminent trajectory of an overwhelming caseload and excessive mortality, experienced by the US and many European nations.

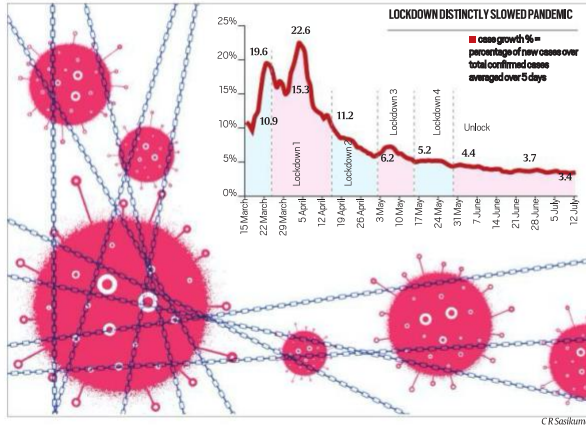
The nationwide lockdown announced by the prime minister on March 24, based on this assessment, was a necessary intervention to quell the transmission chain of the virus and to gain time for a high level of preparedness. The unanimous support of the states has been critical in making this measure effective and successful.

SARS-CoV-2, a respiratory virus, generally spreads by respiratory and salivary droplets within close physical proximity. There is neither a vaccine nor a drug for prevention. While there are several unknowns in dealing with this new disease agent, increasing the physical distance between individuals and decreasing the frequency of person-to-person contact makes it difficult for the virus to spread. This principle underpins the lockdown strategy. It results in suppressing the transmission chain of the virus, thereby decelerating and limiting the spread. In doing so, lives are saved, the infection is controlled and valuable time is gained to strengthen health systems and prepare a fitting response.

The impact of the lockdown on pandemic progression became evident after about 10 days, by the end of the first week of April, as was expected given the infection incubation period. The figure shows that the growth rate of new cases dropped from an unimpressive 23 per cent in the first week of April at the cusp of the lockdown-effect period to decline to just over 5 per cent in the next six weeks by mid-May. This translated into increasing the doubling time of cases from 3.4 days at the outset to over 14 days. As a lasting gain of the lockdown, the growth rate continues to be consistently low even in the unlock phase with the doubling time having climbed to 21 days.

Several independent analyses give us a big-picture view of the situation we would have found ourselves in without the lockdown. Some estimates of cases averted run into crores. The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation has estimated that based on a rational model, the lockdown prevented as many as 14-29 lakh COVID-19 cases and 37,000 to 78,000 deaths (with point estimates of 20 lakh and 54,000, respectively) by mid-May. Remember, even in mid-July, we have yet to reach such a high tally, and this could have been a grim reality in mid-May.

The lockdown has kept the outbreak geographically contained. Even today, only 13



C R Sankumar

states make up 90 per cent active cases, the others together have 10 per cent active cases. Nearly half of our total cases and 65 per cent of deaths are confined to just 10 cities. In the media din, it escapes notice that the vast population of our nation has low or negligible infection prevalence. Notwithstanding the challenges in containing the disease in metros and large cities, the fact remains that overall, the nation has ensured that the pandemic remains manageable so far. Yes, the number of confirmed cases is rising, but on a much lower trajectory than the pre-lockdown stage. Most significantly, the case fatality rate has been progressively declining. India's health teams are delivering better and better outcomes.

Thanks to the lockdown decision, the total burden of confirmed cases and deaths is among the lowest in the world despite our large and dense population. Six months into the pandemic, we have had about 12 lakh cumulative cases and 27,000 deaths. In contrast, with almost an equivalent combined population, Europe (740 million) plus North America (580 million) together have had 72 lakh cases, and about 4 lakh deaths despite having stronger health systems. So far, we have 811 total confirmed cases per 10 lakh against the world average of 1,881 (USA 11,774, Brazil 9,876, Spain 6,573, UK 4,341, Italy 4,043, France 2,676). Likewise, total deaths per 10 lakh in the country are just 20 compared to the global mean of 78 (UK 667, Spain 608, Italy 580, France 462, USA 433, Brazil 374). We continue to reap the results of the effective reduction in case growth due to the suppression of virus transmission that was achieved during the lockdown (figure).

Besides, the lockdown provided an opportunity to ensure all-round preparedness to face the disease. In the first two months of the lockdown, states realised 3.2 lakh COVID-specific hospital beds along with additional 6.5 lakh beds for suspected and mild cases. In the same period, the testing number reached 30 lakh from a mere 20,000. An entirely new industry manufacturing PPEs was built in a matter of weeks. The country experienced a

game-changing moment for telemedicine. The most important gain of the lockdown was the behaviour change in the people. Wearing masks, do *guz ki doori* and hand hygiene became widely embraced as the "new normal". In this pandemic, each day counts because we learn more about this virus every day and we get better at saving lives. The wisdom provided by the lockdown has also taken us closer to a more informed treatment, better drugs and even vaccines. Two indigenous vaccines have entered human trials and emergency use has been authorised for a few therapeutic modalities.

A lockdown is a very difficult choice for any nation to make. It has huge economic and social costs. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, this option had to be exercised by many countries to save lives and restore people's confidence in the face of an emergent catastrophe. At end-April, half a billion people were under lockdown — imposed by most countries in Europe and Latin America. Earlier in the same month, almost 300 million people in the US were in some form of lockdown. Most of these countries resorted to lockdowns at a stage when the epidemic was already overpowering their health system capacities were close to being exhausted and the burden of deaths was already overwhelming. The lockdown had become an inevitable compulsion for them. In contrast, India has been proactive and pre-emptive in its approach and took this measure at a point when the size of the outbreak was manageable and deaths were low.

The writer is Member (Health), NITI Aayog. Views are personal.

A livable planet

APJ Abdul Kalam's vision for development has special resonance today



ARJUN RAM MEGHWAL

THE WORLD is going through very turbulent times. National and international bodies are cooperating on various platforms to overcome multiple crises. In this context, a thought of former President of India, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, that the earth is the only livable planet in our solar system, has particular relevance. Humanity is duty-bound to protect and preserve the earth. Our society and governance systems recognise this and have become more sensitive to that fact that even small delays in action can cause unrepairable consequences.

Today, man-made forces like global warming and pollution are a threat to the planet. The combination of better governance systems and our demographic dividend — 65 per cent of its population is less than 35 years old — are key ingredients in developing India in a sustainable manner, which can also be inspiring to rest of the world. Few individuals have possessed the knowledge and wisdom to enlighten society on these lines and inspire future generations. Kalam, a Bharat Ratta, was one such person. Recalling his wisdom and adopting his values in our daily lives will be the best tribute to the noble soul, whose fifth death anniversary fell on Monday.

Kalam inspired many people to work for

making India a developed nation by 2020. In his final, cautionary lecture — "Creating a Livable Planet Earth" — at the Indian Institute of Management, Shillong, on July 27, 2015, he gave a warning about the damage our quest for development has inflicted on the earth's ecosystem. He laid down the vision for the future course of action to save nature.

It was at the Beijing Forum in China on November 2, 2012, that Kalam first spoke about how vital the idea of a livable planet earth is. Addressing the Forum, he said: "Humanity needs a great vision to forget all the conflicts and move towards a common goal of peace and prosperity for all global citizens. We visualise the birth of a world vision leading to 'Livable Planet Earth'. This vision will be greater than any other vision so far envisioned by humanity." The need to adhere to this vision asks us to take lessons from nature itself. Today, the technology-connected world has become a global village. We must include green measures in our daily lives. Lives are interlinked and we need to strengthen these linkages. Nature can teach tolerance and build an amicable relationship with humanity. This is a moment to introspect on this relationship. The need of the hour is to find new op-

portunities for serving the society in ways hitherto not imagined. As an important stakeholder in the ecosystem, we must act towards strengthening policy initiatives such as recycling, waste management, energy efficiency, designs without pollution, paperless offices, renewable energy, effective use of natural light and ventilation, sustainability education and other such relevant activities. This is how we could follow Kalam's vision.

In *The Family and the Nation*, a treatise of values for building a sustainable society, Kalam, along with Acharya Mahapragya, has shown the right path for making India a great nation. Kalam advised politicians to show maturity and work for the sustainable development of the country. As per Article 79 of the Constitution, Parliament consists of the President and the two Houses of Parliament. Emphasising this relationship, Kalam expressed concern about frequent disruptions of Parliament many times. In his IIM Shillong lecture, he asked young professionals to come up with three innovative ideas to make Parliament more productive and vibrant. Inspired by Kalam, the Sansad Ratna and Sansad Maha Ratna awards for the best parliamentarians were instituted. I received these awards during the 15th Lok Sabha. I

had several informal discussions with Kalam on the role of MPs and Parliament before the publication of his book, *A Manifesto for Change*.

Kalam dreamt of a developed India. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been leading the people on a journey to achieve Kalam's dream. PM Modi's clarion call of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' has given further impetus to our efforts. The identification of champion sectors, collaboration and co-option of the best international practices with a vocal campaign for local manufacturing, are among the steps taken towards making India a superpower as envisioned by Kalam. The principle of self-reliance is guiding the government's actions in all sectors. The 17th Lok Sabha has witnessed the dynamism of MPs and their legislative work towards nation-building.

While denouncing office as the President, Kalam said that his mission in life was to connect the hearts and minds of billions of people and to give them self-confidence that "we can do it". Karnayogi Kalam's wisdom continues to guide us even after his death.

The writer is Union Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs, Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises.

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The world must not be hijacked by a group of political madmen. The tragedies in 1910s and 1930s must not be repeated again." —GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA

On a dark path

Rajasthan case shows that institutions charged with holding the line are crossing it



RANDEEP SINGH SURJEWALA

FORMER PRIME MINISTER Lal Bahadur Shastri once famously reminded the nation to hold dear the rule of law "so that the basic structure of our democracy is maintained and strengthened". Like other statesmen of that era, Shastri knew that the continued existence of a democracy was (and remains) inextricably linked to its adherence to the rule of law. A democracy can only function if the constitution on which it is founded — and from which flows this rule of law — is treated as inviolable and sacrosanct. That certain lines cannot be crossed if a democracy is to flourish in the trust sense.

And yet, the last week has seen a litany of unprecedented assaults by institutions that were once charged with holding the line. These institutions have not just acquiesced but also participated in the crossing of a Lakshman rekha in a manner which, either willingly or unwillingly, benefits the interests of a single political party, all the while flagrantly flouting long-standing legal precedents.

First, the conduct of the Rajasthan governor. Government is willing to prove its majority on the floor of the House, through the constitutionally-prescribed method and asks for a session to be called. However, the governor, instead of discharging his obligations which are clearly circumscribed by the Constitution, chooses to raise arbitrary and unrelated issues (qua period of notice, pending case etc.) to buy time and delay the process. This action stands out for its lack of constitutional sanction. The Constitution simply doesn't give the governor the authority to raise these concerns. There is similarly no provision or precedent that allows the governor to defy the calling of a session of the Assembly. Multiple benches of the Supreme Court have confirmed this (including a seven-judge bench in *Shamsher Singh* in 1974 and a five-judge bench in *Nebam Rebu* in 2016).

During the Constitution Assembly debates, Babasaheb Ambedkar (May 1949) explained that "According to the principles of the new Constitution he (the governor) is required to follow the advice of his ministry in all matters... We felt that the powers of the governor were so limited, so nominal, his position so ornamental that probably very few would come forward to stand for election". This is just

one reference out of many which explain the limits placed on the office of the governor by the Constituent Assembly.

It is telling that there is no statement or concern expressed by those who appointed the governor in question. The Modi-Shah run Union government has chosen to remain silent at a time when the governor's new-found eloquence clearly benefits them. However, no one is in doubt about the conspirators and collaborators behind these attempts. What should worry us as a country is that there is an almost pathological political desperation, even in the face of a pandemic, a devastating economic spiral and a border crisis, to seize power in yet another state through means that are neither honourable nor legal.

Second, we saw a high court, in a manner never witnessed before, disregard the decision of a constitutional bench of the Supreme Court (*Kihoto Hollohon*, 1992) to halt the disqualification of individuals who are openly working to destabilise a government.

The high court, after indulging a specious constitutional challenge, intervened to "stay" the Speaker's notice in a manner that was, in this writer's opinion, premature and without jurisdiction. The decision, almost immediately, invited widespread and legitimate criticism given that it went, inexplicably, against the categorical direction of the five Supreme Court judges (in *Kihoto Hollohon*) that "[H]aving regard to the constitutional scheme in the Tenth Schedule, judicial review should not cover any stage prior to the making of a decision by the Speakers/Chairman; and no quia timet (that is, fear of future interventions) are permissible". No reasoning whatsoever is provided for this striking departure from established precedent by the high court. No plausible justification is provided to explain why the constitutional precedents presented before them were disregarded.

Third, a number of foundational constitutional principles are being casually revisited as a cause for concern. Democracy will cease to have any meaning if all constitutional institutions fall to the wayside and capitulate in this manner. By betraying the officers created and upheld by great men and women and by committing acts that border on rewriting the law based on convenient opinions instead of precedent, we are set on a dark path.

But the Constitution of India can survive this assault. Indeed, it was designed to do so. We will maintain our vigil as a parliamentary opposition should. And in doing so, we will hope that other institutions, which are sought to be bullied and undermined, stand together and uphold the rule of law.

The writer is an advocate and the AICC in-charge, media and communication

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WHO FAILED US?

THIS REFERS TO the article, "Case for a presidential system" (IE, July 25). The presidential system carries with it the dangers of creating a dictatorship. Indian democracy drives its strength from the illiterate poor who have kept it thriving by defying the sceptics, not Oxford elites. The presidential system was forwarded as a solution even when Indira Gandhi was prime minister. But the problem is the cult of personality or "bhakti" as B.R. Ambedkar said. The lacunae in the parliamentary system needs to be addressed especially that pertaining to time-bound discussion of bills, but so that presidential system is the answer to India's woes is incorrect. Thus neither India's democracy nor its Constitution has failed, it is the leaders who have failed us. As Ambedkar said "If tomorrow you fail to implement the Constitution, don't blame it, blame the villain!"

Husain Dalvi via e-mail

REMAIN ON ALERT

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "The propaganda front" (IE, July 27). Information warfare can easily disrupt the functioning of a government. For years, Pakistan has spread an anti-India narrative, especially in international fora. Terrorism and information campaigns are the biggest threats to India. Delhi needs to keep the vigil against the propaganda until it becomes too late.

Omkar Thorat, Mumbai

NAGALAND UNREST

GOVERNOR AND GOVERNMENT'S interloctor RN Ravi about a parallel government in the state pertains to well-known facts. Successive governments at the Centre have tried hard and for too long to bring stability and harmony in

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the region. The Centre should not remain a mere spectator and assert firmly against violent, seditious and anti-India stands of the Naga insurgent groups. The government must also find alternative voices representative of the Naga people that are peaceful and reasonable in dealing with the Naga cause.

Sagar Ganesh Borade, Thane

SCHOOL CHALLENGES

THIS REFERS TO the article, "How COVID has hit learning" (IE, July 27). The pandemic has slowed down the economy, shut down domestic and international markets and has impacted the government treasury. It has also hit the country's educational system. The boards have been compelled to lighten the syllabus for the year; classes are being conducted online with lesser scope of healthy education being imparted. The "Sara Sikshya Abhiyan" did attempt to increase literacy levels, but today amidst this problem, it has also hit the rural areas where the Internet has not spread fast an uncertain future.

Chandrasekhar Singh, Agra

| GUEST VIEW

Turbocharge India's youth for a sustainable economic comeback

The Centre, private sector and even the IMF could help unlock resources for much-needed online education in the country



EJAZ GHANI
worked at The World Bank, and has taught economics at Delhi and Oxford universities

India, with a median age of around 25 years compared to 40 in China and the US, and 50 in Europe, has the world's largest youth bulge, exceeding 500 million. Although this has positioned the country well to sustain growth, this is not automatic. It needs to be turbocharged to prevent a youth advantage from becoming a demographic disaster. A transition from farm to factory jobs, home ownership and economic security are causes and consequences of investment in human capital.

India's investment in human capital has simply not kept up with the size of its youth bulge, the pace of structural transformation, and technological advances. The country will continue to add 12 million new workers every year to its labour force for the next two decades. Agriculture, which employs more than half of that force, will not be able to employ new entrants. Non-agricultural jobs must take the lead role, but are more skill intensive. The covid pandemic, however, could create an education crisis, given its various restrictions, and yield a generation that will lose out on learning. This would be a severe setback. Even before the pandemic, access to basic education was denied to the bulk of school-age children, and a university-level education was far beyond the reach of millions. The divide between those who have access to education and those who don't has increased, as existing education and skill development programmes are limited in scope, and not accessible or affordable for everyone. These are focused on urban areas and on formal sectors. It is tilted against small towns and rural areas, and the informal sector that employs more than 70% of the labour force. Hub-and-spoke models, which link different states, ministries and the public sector with the private, are outdated and unable to promote collaboration among multiple stakeholders.

We are going through the greatest technological revolution of all time. To escape a low-skill equilibrium trap, current models need to be modernized to keep pace with technological advances and meet youth aspirations. India's digitization process is the second fastest in the world, with the number of internet subscribers exceeding 500 million, second only to China. Indians, who spend nearly 20 hours per week on social media, use a lot more data than Americans. Policymakers need to tap information communication technology (ICT) to turbocharge the youth. ICT will help scale up programmes aimed at the youth bulge in small towns and rural areas, internalize the externalities prevalent in skill development initiatives, promote public-private partnerships (PPPs), improve the links between training and industry needs, and upgrade outdated training systems. New technology will not only educate more people, but also lower education costs and make it more affordable.



A key challenge will be to promote PPPs in data collaboration that will promote online learning, networking and communication. India needs a database of local IT capabilities and must provide local IT training in small towns and rural areas. Data collaboration in India is still an early stage, and plans can be designed to ensure that data is used responsibly to maximize the potential of skill development. Data collaboration can overcome the asymmetry in information that has plagued skill development in the past. PPPs can also help private companies boost their brand reputation, channel their development spending, and identify new opportunities.

Online skill and education programmes have the potential to be a multi-billion dollar opportunity. India's culturally and geographically diverse population stands to gain a lot from mobile learning, multi-lingual support, and virtual classrooms. Big data analytics could be deployed, and this could drive cloud market growth in the future.

The demise of the informal sector is unlikely. Staying small is a rational business response to high urban density. Also, technological changes have enabled entrepreneurs to operate at a smaller scale also gain from networking and agglomeration economies. The growth benefits of urbanization come from agglomeration economies, which are much stronger in India, compared to the US, and even stronger in informal sectors.

Meanwhile, empowering women with knowledge and skills to participate in the 21st century economy is not just the right thing to do, but the smart thing to do. Bringing women's participation in the labour force up to the same level as that of men has the potential to boost India's economy by

as much as 30%. Eliminating the obstacles faced by women in economic participation could be done through various means. Fiscal, financial and skill development programmes can play a vital role to eliminate gender disparities. Gender budgeting improves gender equality through well-structured fiscal policies and adequate and properly monitored spending on gender-related goals. Gender budgeting can inspire fiscal policies in key areas of budgetary allocation, such as education and skill development, that contribute to the achievement of gender-related goals.

Preparing women for gender equality in skill development is an exercise that still has a long way to go in India, given that more than 225 million women are still not in the labour force. Surveys report their status as "attending domestic duties". Women face social and cultural barriers, too, that limit their access to education and work. However, the aspiration of women youth has changed, as they are increasingly enrolling for unconventional job roles, such as digital and financial literacy. Partnerships with industry to support women-centric skill projects in non-traditional trades need to be expanded. Gender parity, we should note, is both an economic and a moral imperative.

Silicon Valley, regional development banks, and multilateral financial institutions all have the potential to unlock global resources for online learning. The International Monetary Fund could issue special drawing rights (its global reserve asset) to unlock more resources to meet the fiscal needs of online learning in this global downturn. Digital technology is a force for the good, and it needs to be kept open and global, not chained in the face of efforts by governments to fragment it.

| THEIR VIEW

A great inexcusable macroeconomics—grim—omission

VIVEK MOORTHY



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Colossal job losses are ongoing globally due to the corona calamity. In a recent article, I suggested that pragmatic policies, when demand drops drastically, to reduce hours per worker (ignore the work week; reduce the work year. *Mint*, 16 June). As a matter of fact, policies to share work, based on the week, were widely discussed in the 1930s and partly implemented in response to the Great Depression. Nevertheless, leading economists then failed to discuss shorter-hour policies, and so in the post-War period too, delving into the raging discussion then provides valuable guidelines for policies now.

During the 1920s, continuing a pre-War one trend, the work week was shrinking and more companies adopted the 8-hours-for-5-days (8x5) workweek in the US. By 1932, there was strong support across a wide spectrum to enact legislation for a 30-hour week (3x5). In June 1932, New York's Mayor Fiorello La Guardia stated that if the 30-hour week was not enacted, "the US Constitution

would have to be rewritten within three to five years." The doctoral sociology thesis of Arthur Dahlberg, a former engineer with fountain pen patents, titled *Jobs, Machines and Capitalism*, was published in 1932. He recommended statutory federal enactment of shorter hours. With Communist influence growing after unemployment rose in the Depression, he said that capitalism as a system should be given a "fair trial".

Although addressed to "technicians and managers", Dahlberg's book greatly influenced Senator Hugo Black of Alabama. He initiated legislation for a 34-hour week, and asked Dahlberg to testify before Congress. Across the Atlantic, the English philosopher and mathematician Bertrand Russell called for a shorter 20-hour week in October 1932 in a famous essay. There were umpteenth articles in US publications on shorter hours.

Both the Republican presidential candidate Herbert Hoover and Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt actively supported the 30 Hour Bill. However, after being elected in November 1932, Roosevelt withdrew strong support for the Black-Cornery 30-hour week. It failed to get enacted in April 1933 despite easily clearing the Senate. The above facts are drawn from the book *Work Without End: How Labor Abandoned Shorter Hours for the*

Right to Work (1988), by the labour historian Benjamin Hunnicutt.

Much milder work-sharing legislation based on a 40-hour week cap was finally enacted in 1933. The National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) of July 1933, part of the National Industrial Recovery Act, created the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. It also established the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to enforce the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) of 1935, which replaced work sharing as the main mechanism to boost jobs.

Unfortunately, this vital work-sharing issue has been neglected by mainstream economists from then to now. Specifically, consider the explanations for the Depression—and ensuing policy prescriptions—of the three greatest macroeconomists of the last century, who lived through it. John Maynard Keynes attributed the slump to a collapse of animal spirits of entrepreneurs and called for massive fiscal stimulus to overcome it. Milton Friedman and Anna Schwartz argued that massive errors in Federal Reserve policy were to blame and that Fed decisions should have

been based on money supply, not interest rates. Irving Fisher, after evaluating various theories about business cycles, attributed the collapse in the US to debt deflation and deleveraging. His remedy? The deliberate raising of the price level, i.e. reflation.

All three had a pronounced bias against discussing, as distinct from endorsing, work sharing as a remedy. Friedman and Schwartz's *Monetary History of the United States: 1867 to 1960* (1963) covers the Great Depression and the New Deal in great depth. The 800-plus-page book's index itself runs to about 80 columns, but has only one detailed discussion focusing on wages and prices, pertaining to the National Industrial Recovery Act. Yet there is no mention at all of the 1933 work sharing PRA, a part of the above Act, and its possible impact on macroeconomic recovery.

Irving Fisher, in his 1933 article *A Debt Deflation Theory of the Business Cycle*, writing shortly after the New Deal began to be enacted, stressed that Roosevelt's reflation-

ary policies were leading to recovery. However, he didn't discuss shorter-hour policies.

Finally, let us scrutinize what Keynes wrote in 1936. In chapter 22 in his *General Theory*, on the trade cycle, he discussed other New Deal policies, but not the PRA. Indeed, in less than half a page, he broadly dismissed "redistributing the existing output" to unemployment as "a premature policy—much more so than the plan of increasing consumption". There is no mention of his Cambridge don and friend Lord Russell's call for a 20-hour week. In the index, there are about 50 sub-entries under Wages, none of which mention hours. Neither "work" nor "hours" features in the index.

Yet, in the next chapter, Keynes is sympathetic to mercantilism and protectionist policies (with qualifications, recognizing the risks of retaliation), since a trade surplus entails more jobs. Returning to the present, US President Donald Trump has been bashing China for its trade surplus but ignoring the need to reduce manufacturing hours to save jobs in America. In some sense, he is in distinguished intellectual company. One can certainly conclude that this Great Inexcusable Macroeconomics—or Grim—Omission that has continued for nearly a century needs to be rectified.

MINT CURATOR



Durian waste might be able to charge your phone.

Hold your nose and bear this new energy source

Lithium-ion batteries have transformed our ability to store and carry energy around with us. But they have their limitations. This has spurred scientists around the world to try and develop new types of battery that can overcome these problems. By harnessing a range of materials, from diamonds to super-stinky fruit, they hope to find new ways of powering the technologies of the future. One innovative group are not only trying to find new ways to power our devices, but also tackle the issue of food waste at the same time. Vincent Gomes, a chemical engineer at the University of Sydney, and his team, including Labna Shabnam, are turning waste from the world's smelliest fruit, durian, and the world's largest fruit, jackfruit, into a supercapacitor that can charge mobile phones and laptops within minutes.

BBC

The shocking scale of Amazonian animal trade

Millions of wild animals are trafficked within and out of Brazil every year, a new report has found, with its authors warning that a lack of good quality data means the country's illegal wildlife trade is not taken seriously enough, with grave consequences for biodiversity. "The information is very dispersed," said the lead author, Sandra Charly, a biodiversity consultant who wrote the 140-page study with Juliana Ferreira from Freeland Brasil, a non-profit group combating the trade. Produced by wildlife trade monitoring network Traffic, it called for a national strategy to combat the lucrative business. Data from the Brazilian Amazon is even more "notoriously scarce", the report found. Turtle eggs and pirarucu fish are sold for food and river fish sold to Asia for aquariums.

The Guardian

Boats in demand as families venture out to sea

Brandon Mitchell had big plans to visit family in Michigan and take his wife and three kids to Disney World. The pandemic put those plans on ice. So they bought a boat instead. "We're going to take the sea. There's so much to explore," the ebullient skipper said. "I'll get us the recreation and the escape that we're not going to be able to get anywhere else." A growing number of people like Mitchell—who plans to spend the remainder of the summer island-hopping along the Maine coast—are looking to the water amid the coronavirus pandemic. And that's good news for the boat industry. A recent survey showed more than 70% of boat dealers were either completely out of boats or had low inventory, said Matt Gruhn of the Marine Retailers Association of America.

AP

Why some mosquitoes just can't resist humans

Out of thousands of species, only a few like to bite humans—and even within the same species, mosquitoes from different places can have different preferences. Why do some find us irresistible, while others remain unimpressed? To answer that question, a team of Princeton researchers, working with a large network of local collaborators, spent three years driving around sub-Saharan Africa collecting the eggs of *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes, which are responsible for Zika, yellow fever and dengue. After sending the eggs to New Jersey to grow new colonies, and then tempting the insects with the sweet smells of human and of rodent, the researchers found that the more human-loving mosquitoes tended to come from areas with a dry climate and dense human population.

The New Zealand Herald

The viewer who spotted a TV reporter's tumour

A television news reporter in Florida is crediting an eagle-eyed viewer for noticing a lump on her neck and emailing her that she should get it checked out. Victoria Price, a reporter for WFLA in Tampa, followed the advice and was diagnosed with cancer. Price tweeted that she is undergoing surgery on Monday to remove the tumour, her thyroid and a couple of lymph nodes. "Doctor said it's spreading, but not too much, and we're hopeful this will be my first and last procedure," she said. The viewer emailed Price last month, saying the lump reminded her of one she had had. Price, 28, an investigative reporter, said this week that her television station's catchphrase is "8 On Your Side." "But the roles recently reversed when I found a viewer on MY side, and I couldn't be more grateful," Price said.

AP



In reverse gear

The draft EIA notification needs wider consultation and progressive changes

The Union Ministry of Environment has been in the spotlight on more than one occasion during the pandemic, as it worked to push through retrograde environmental decisions in an atmosphere of general paralysis. In April, Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar used a virtual conference to ensure that the National Board for Wildlife's Standing Committee stamped its approval on several projects, with serious implications for conservation. He now wants to hurriedly make a fundamental change to the process of project approvals, by introducing a new Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification. Now in draft, it seeks to replace the existing EIA notification of 2006. The proposed provisions show that the Ministry has gone to great lengths to reduce or even remove public participation, and by extension independent expert opinion, from the process of granting environmental clearances; public reporting of violations may also not be taken cognisance of. While there is no argument about the importance of development projects, it has resorted to sophistry in classifying activity for exemptions. Section 26 provides a list of projects that would not attract environmental clearance or permission, including coal mining and seismic surveys for oil, methane and shale gas on some lands. Section 14 provides exemption for these and some other projects from public consultation, also limiting the scope of public involvement to the districts concerned, in the case of national parks and sanctuaries where pipeline infrastructure will pass. Roads and highways get liberal concessions. Further, it retains the clause that if a public agency or authority considers the local situation not conducive to participation by citizens, the public consultation need not include a public hearing.

In spite of the far-reaching nature of its proposed actions, the Centre has displayed unseemly haste to get them in place and Mr Javadekar has not aided credibility by trying to shut down public responses to the draft early. It took a Delhi High Court order to extend the deadline to August 11. The exercise has been further muddied by the mysterious blocking of some activists' websites calling for the EIA proposal to be dropped, and demanding a new approach towards conserving natural resources for future generations. Clearly, the Centre's attempts at weakening checks and balances are not new. A study of coal mining clearances shows that 4,302 hectares of forest were diverted during 2014-18, favouring extraction over conservation. COVID-19 has powerfully demonstrated the value of nature for well-being: of lost forests in captured wildlife bringing virus reservoirs closer to humans and foul air destroying their health. While there might be a case for some changes, much of the proposed EIA system can only make things worse, and should not be pushed through.

Sudan's troubles

The continuing violence is a reminder of the task of restoring peace among ethnic groups

The massacre of over 60 people over the weekend in Sudan's Darfur region marks a further escalation in the violence blighting the territory since the 2019 ouster of the country's dictator Omar al-Bashir. About 500 armed men targeted the Masalit community in west Darfur's Masteri town, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. On Friday, 20 people, including women and children, were gunned down in a South Darfur town when displaced farmers were returning to the region under a recent government-backed agreement with the original landowners. Days earlier, Khartoum declared an emergency in the North Darfur region after a police station was burned down and vehicles set on fire by protesters in a small town and militias attacked another. These incidents are a reminder of the unfinished task of restoring stability in Darfur racked by a conflict between the nation's dominant Arab rulers and the African ethnic communities demanding greater autonomy from Khartoum. Nertit town in central Darfur has become the epicentre of the growing opposition in the region. The mass sit-ins since June have attracted wider support from the professional classes that spearheaded the 2019 popular uprising that led to the fall of the autocratic regime of Mr. Bashir. In response to demands from women's groups for basic protection following the violence, Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok has announced the deployment of additional security forces. But the continuing tensions merely reinforce concerns that the government's assurances at the beginning of this month have not translated into concrete measures.

Another key demand is the hand-over of Mr. Bashir to The Hague to be tried for genocide and atrocities in Darfur. While some officials have sounded positive on the question, top military officials in the transitional government are said to be concerned about the risk that others close to him could be implicated. Meanwhile, extraditing Mr. Bashir – now imprisoned in Khartoum – could serve as a useful trade-off for the government to restore ties with the West, have sanctions removed and attract investment. Sudan's largely young and educated population counts on advances in economic growth and guarantees of democratic freedoms to better its prospects overall. The issue will test the tenuous ties between the military and the civilian-led government and the credibility of the progress to a participatory democracy. At any rate, securing the peace in the nation's west was critical for Sudan's broader democratic transition that was set in motion last year. An immediate end to the violence in Darfur ought to be Khartoum's uppermost priority. Restoration of normalcy is also the only route to the timely conduct of democratic elections.

Needed, a map for India's foreign policy

In the backdrop of setbacks, especially in the neighbourhood, the country has to reconsider its diplomacy's trajectory



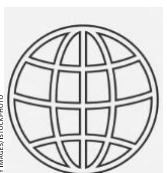
STANLEY JOHNY

Not long ago, India was seen as a natural rising power in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region. It was the de facto leader of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). It has historical and cultural ties with Nepal. It enjoyed traditional goodwill and influence in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. It had made investments worth billions of dollars in Afghanistan and cultivated vibrant ties with the post-Taliban stakeholders in Kabul. It had committed itself to multilateralism and the Central Asian connectivity project, with Iran being its gateway. It was competing and cooperating with China at the same time, while the long border between the two countries remained largely peaceful.

Cut to the present, India is perhaps facing its gravest national security crisis in 20 years, with China having changed the status quo along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the western sector in its favour. The border saw violent clashes last month, leading to fatalities for the first time in 45 years. SAARC is out of joint. Nepal has turned hostile having adopted a new map and revised border disputes with India. Sri Lanka has tilted towards China, which is undertaking massive infrastructure projects in the Indian Ocean island. Bangladesh is clearly miffed at the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019. When Afghanistan is undergoing a major transition, India is out of the multi-party talks. Iran has inaugurated a railway link project connecting the Chabahar port, on the Gulf of Oman, to Zahedan (which India was to have constructed) without India. How did we get here?

Specific reasons can be found for these setbacks. Also, foreign policy need not be static. There will be ups and downs depending on the changes in policy as well as the changes in global politics. What makes the current downturn serious is that there is a relative decline in India's smart power, especially in the neighbourhood and the extended neighbourhood, which demands a deeper pursuit of the foreign policy trajectory itself. And when we dig deep, three problems can be found which are more or less linked to this decline – a closer alignment of policy with the U.S. line, coupling of foreign policy with domestic politics and hubris.

The U.S. line
India's official policy is that it is not aligned to any major power. Even after India started moving away from non-alignment, which it calls irrelevant in the post-Cold War world order, New Delhi maintained that strategic autonomy would remain the bedrock of its policy thinking. But there has been a steady erosion in India's strategic autonomy, which pre-dates the current government. When India started deepening its partnership with the United States (which was a historical necessity), New Delhi began steadily aligning its policies with U.S. interests. The case of Iran is the best example. The agreement to develop the Chabahar port was signed in 2003. But India, under pressure from the U.S., was moving slowly, despite the fact that the project offered India an alternative route to Central Asia bypassing Pakistan. India voted against Iran at the United Na-



GETTY IMAGES/REUTERS

tions; scuttled an ambitious gas pipeline project and cut down trade ties drastically. After the Iran nuclear deal was signed in 2015, India immediately stepped up oil purchases and expanded works at Chabahar. In 2016, Prime Minister Narendra Modi travelled to Tehran and signed a trilateral connectivity project with Afghanistan and Iran. But when U.S. President Donald Trump pulled the U.S. out of the Iran deal in 2018 and reimposed sanctions on the country, India toed the U.S. line, bringing down its oil imports to zero.

This dilly-dallying to the tunes of policy changes in Washington co-existed with India's deepening defence and military ties with the U.S. Washington wants India to play a bigger role in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific region to contain China's rise. While India has been cautious of becoming an ally, it has steadily deepened military-to-military cooperation in the recent past – the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) is one example. These developments probably altered Beijing's assessment of India. The border aggression at different points on the LAC could not be a localised conflict; it is part of a larger strategic move, initiated by the top brass of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). One of the rea-

sons for the shift could be Beijing's assessment that India has already become a de facto ally of the U.S. The forceful altering of the status quo on the border is a risky message as much to New Delhi as it is to Washington.

Domestic politics

At least two decisions taken by the government mainly keeping its domestic audience in mind have had foreign policy consequences. First, the passing of the CAA. The official narrative has been that India is offering citizenship to the persecuted minorities of select countries in its neighbourhood. There were two problems. One, this is a reversion of the domestic problems of the countries in India's neighbourhood, some of which are its long-time friends. The countries are genuinely upset with India's move. Two, Muslims, including those sub-sects persecuted in neighbouring countries, were by design excluded from the citizenship programme. This drove new wedges between India and the countries that had a Muslim majority and were friendly to India in the neighbourhood. Forget Pakistan, which is a traditional rival, Bangladesh took offence at the CAA and the National Register of Citizens (from which the Indian envoy in Dhaka backed off) and the political rhetoric in India against the "termites" from other countries. Bangladesh media reported recently that the Indian envoy in Dhaka had tried to fix an appointment with Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for four months but did not get one. There were anti-India protests even in Afghanistan.

Second, the abrogation of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir. This was another popular move among those who form the support base of the ruling party. But it led to the suspension of fundamental rights in the Kashmir Valley for a prolonged period that damaged India's reputation as a responsible democratic power and gave propaganda weapons to Pakistan. The move did not help India quell militancy either as the Valley continues to see violence nearly a year after the decision. More importantly, the change of status quo in Jammu and Kashmir, including the bifurcation and reduction of the erstwhile State into Union Territories, could be another factor that prompted the Chinese to move aggressively towards the border in Ladakh.

The perils of hubris

Misplaced confidence does not do good for rising powers. Great powers wait to establish their standing before declaring that they have arrived. The Soviet Union started acting like a superpower after it won (with allies), the Second World War. China bided its time for four decades before it started taking on the mighty U.S. Since the 1970s, its focus has almost entirely been on its economic rise. India should learn from at least these modern examples. If it did, it would not have used high-handedness in Nepal during the country's constitutional crisis and caused a traditional and civilisational ally to turn hostile. The updated political map which India released in November rubbed salt into the wound on the Nepal border.

To address the current crises, India has to reconsider its foreign policy trajectory. It is a big power with one of the world's biggest militaries. It is a natural naval force in the Indian Ocean. It does not lack resources to claim what is its due in global politics. What it lacks is strategic depth.

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An opportunity to reshape health care

The COVID-19 pandemic may have unwittingly led to some desirable changes; the challenge is to build on this



AKSHAY BAHETI & SANJAY NAGRAL

The COVID-19 pandemic has massively disrupted our lives. Besides direct devastation of health, the epidemic and the lockdown have had myriad indirect effects, be it on the environment, livelihoods, or supply chains. There has been a lot of discussion around the lack of capacity of our health-care system to fight this epidemic. But the impact of COVID-19 and the lockdown on the 'business' of health care has not been examined. This has an important bearing on the larger arena of health care for our citizens in the near future.

Care and the COVID impact

Indian health care has been increasingly privatised over the last few decades. This has led to intense market competition. A uniquely unregulated form of health care has thrived. It has also been marked by several questionable practices. These have been under the media and public glare leading to a huge trust deficit. Will the changed milieu have an impact on this? How will this affect care of other conditions?

COVID-19 has led to a dramatic reduction in the numbers of patients seeking care. This is especially true of planned, non-urgent

problems including procedures and surgeries. Many patients are scared to visit health facilities fearing COVID-19. While this has caused collateral damage, worse is the condition of some patients worsening or taking an unfortunate turn, there may indeed be those who have avoided intervention without any deleterious impact. In other words, they have been spared of procedures for debatable indications. For example, the large number of women who undergo an unnecessary hysterectomy has reduced. The incidence of Caesarean sections is reported to have gone down. Similarly, procedures such as coronary stents, knee replacements or cosmetic surgery which reflect supplier-induced demand have almost stopped. 'Routine' admissions for 'observation' or 'insurance claims' have got curtailed.

Strangely, even emergency medical cases have declined during the lockdown, with a decrease in the cases of heart attacks or strokes presenting to hospitals. While some of these may have been true emergencies involving those who suffered at home, perhaps the unpolluted air, decreased work stress, or home-cooked food has had a bigger impact on health than we assume. Or maybe we were over-diagnosing and over-treating certain emergencies. Investigating these important questions and critically analysing their answers may make future health care more beneficial to patients. The cartellisation of health care has been naturally curbed during the pandemic. 'Cut practice', with



GETTY IMAGES/REUTERS

doctors and hospitals prescribing tests, drugs, referrals and procedures in return for commissions, is entrenched in India. This leads to significant negative consequences, be it increased patient expenses, patients not reaching the right doctor or not getting the appropriate investigation, and also an erosion in the doctor-patient relationship and the image of the fraternity. It puts ethical doctors in a quandary, making them cynical about their profession. However, during the pandemic, the availability of doctors, beds and proximity are now the chief drivers for patient referrals, rather than the commission route. Most practices have had to take a forced 'detox' of sorts from this addiction.

Like in life, there are several grey areas in treatment decisions, where doctors are not sure of the best way forward for the patient. For example, terminal patients with widespread cancers are often prescribed chemotherapy, which can cause side-effects worse than the disease, without impact on life span or quality of life. Oncologists often end up prescribing chemotherapy to such patients instead of symptomatic treatment to alleviate the pain and weakness

because of the urge to 'do something', or even financial imperatives. The dangers of chemotherapy with COVID-19 lurking in the air has made everyone weigh its pros and cons with more caution than usual.

The widely prevalent practice of a 'health check-up' which does not have proven public health value but is a tactic which targets health-obsessed clients, has also got derailed. The focus has instead shifted back to the basics of preventive health such as diet, exercise, good sugar control, and quitting smoking and tobacco. The pandemic may have finally taught our population the importance of not coughing or spitting in the open. These may indeed have more far-reaching benefits in a much larger population.

The two sides to the churn

The COVID-19 epidemic has cent stage the need for a robust public health system and increased investment. While disrupting care, it may have unwittingly led to some 'desirable' changes by the circumstances. It has curbed on unwarranted medical practices. This churn may even lead to genuine reflection among health-care providers. The question is whether this effect will linger on. Will lessons learnt during the epidemic nudge us towards rational and ethical care?

However, there are dangerous fallout of the disruption as well. The breakdown of overburdened health-care facilities, negative impact on the morale of health-care workers, and the collapse of pri-

vate sector institutions (under financial strain) are all real. With hospital and doctors incomes falling during the pandemic, there may be a resurgence of unethical practices with a vengeance as the industry tries to make up its losses. This is already evident in the huge bills that patients with COVID-19 are being slapped with, often by creating additional billing heads. Though prices in the private sector have been capped, loopholes in the system may be found, such as profiteering on personal protective equipment. Artificial demand may be created in an effort to increase footfall. Let the epidemic's 'positive' impact on unnecessary practices may get washed away as 'normalcy' is restored.

In general, the medical fraternity in India has risen admirably to the challenge of COVID-19. The call of duty has led many to don Coronavirus warrior outfits and set aside commerce for now. It has forced them to consider alternative paradigms. Public respect for the profession has also improved. It we can seize this chance to correct undesirable practices, which have become an albatross around our neck, it may help the return of trust in the doctor-patient relationship, which was under severe threat before the pandemic. In the middle of gloom, this is a window of opportunity. Is this just wishful thinking or a genuine possibility? We should know soon.

Dr. Akshay Baheti is a radiologist practising in Mumbai. Dr. Sanjay Nagral is a surgeon practising in Mumbai

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.

Matters of the court
The articles, "The chilling effect of criminal contempt" and "A motorcycle and the art of court management" (Editorial page, both July 28), were enriching, enlightening and entertaining. While the two writers have subtly and wittingly argued that the Supreme Court of India show large-heartedness and magnanimity in dropping its decision to commence contempt proceedings against lawyer-activist Prashant Bhushan, the acerbic and remarkably bold Editorial (July 28) has emphatically called for revisiting the idea in contempt law and ushering in judicial

accountability. Those who matter in the judiciary could heed such advice, which would only enhance the image and reputation of the courts and our judicial system. After all, admiration and respect are earned, not ordered.

C.G. KURIKORSE,
Kottayam, Kerala

■ The best way any person or organisation can improve is take criticism with open ears. This applies to the judiciary too. If the judiciary takes on government officials for contempt proceedings for violating laws, environmental issues and other public issues, faith and respect for it would increase manifold. Also, the western world is more liberal towards

accepting criticism. There is even a judge in the U.S. who telecasts all his court proceedings over social media. The judiciary should analyse the best practices currently followed by different countries in delivering efficient and timely justice and set in motion judicial reforms.

SHREE VATHSAN K.S.,
Chennai

■ The subject highlighted in the articles has only ended up sharpening the focus on the key issues – the huge number of pending cases and the delay in trials. One only wishes that the Indian judiciary has an answer to this soon.

ASHITA AVATPA,
Mumbai, The Nagar

■ The hullabaloo over the Supreme Court's suo motu initiation of contempt of court proceedings against the lawyer-activist, Prashant Bhushan, seems unwarranted. The outrage against the top court's action has sidestepped the nuance of context and seeks to paint the court as intrinsically intolerant. To be fair, there has been no dearth of criticism directed against the Supreme Court's functioning and its judgments in recent years. They hauled no critic before the court for scandalising the judiciary because the dissent had no underlying motives other than a democratic expression of different perceptions. The court seems to believe that the

lawyer-activist's 'offensive' tweets are part of insidious attempts to prejudice the Supreme Court's verdicts in important cases through covert and overt campaigns. We cannot expect the judges to ignore attempts to undermine the court's independence and authority and to bully the judges into delivering preferred verdicts, however subtle the campaigns may be.

V.N. MUKUNDARAJAN,
Thiruvananthapuram

Office of the Governor
The office of the Governor is currently a political appointment and various governments over the years have never hesitated, and still do, to use it to ensure that their political goals are



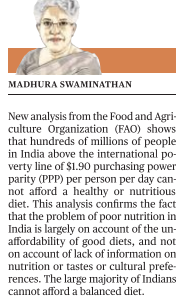
met. This institution, a colonial relic, continues to serve as a pro-consul of the ruling party of the day. The office of the Governor should act as the guardian of our nascent democracy. The appointee must ensure that the ideals of our Constitution is upheld and not usher its twilight. The Raj model of nominating governments should be dispersed with. Instead it should be made an elected office as is the norm in all democracies. It is only then that the office of the Governor will be accountable to voters and decisions taken non-partisan.

R.N. RAMAKRISHNA,
Bengaluru



The majority cannot afford a balanced diet

Even millions who are above the poverty line do not have access to healthy or nutritious food in India



MADHURA SWAMINATHAN

New analysis from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) shows that hundreds of millions of people in India above the international poverty line of \$1.90 purchasing power parity (PPP) per person per day cannot afford a healthy or nutritious diet. This analysis confirms the fact that the problem of poor nutrition in India is largely on account of the unaffordability of good diets, and not on account of lack of information on nutrition or tastes or cultural preferences. The large majority of Indians cannot afford a balanced diet.

Every year, the FAO, in partnership with other United Nations organisations, publishes a report on food security across the world. This year, the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020 (SOFI 2020) was released on July 13. A new feature of SOFI 2020 is a detailed analysis of the "cost and affordability of healthy diets around the world".

Types of diets

Three types of diet are defined. The first is termed a "basic energy sufficient" diet. This is one in which the required calorie intake is met by consuming only the cheapest starchy cereals available (say, rice or wheat). A requirement of 2,329 kcal for a healthy young woman of 30 years is taken as the standard reference. The second is a "nutrient adequate" diet, one where the required calorie norms and the stipulated requirement of 23 macro- and micro-nutrients are met. This diet includes at least cost items from different food groups. The third diet is a "healthy diet". This is one which meets the calorie norm and the macro- and micro-nutrient norm and also allows for consumption of a diverse diet, from several food groups. Defining a healthy diet is more complex than the other two diets, and the FAO uses actual recommendations for selected countries. The Indian recommendation includes consumption of items from six groups: starchy staples, protein-rich food (legumes, meat and

eggs), dairy, vegetables, fruits, and fats.

Using data on retail prices of commodities in 170 countries, linear programming techniques are used to identify the cost of each of these diets. The following are the findings for South Asia. First, the energy-sufficient diet or eating only cereals to meet your calorie requirement costs around 80 cents a day in South Asia, and is thus affordable to a poor person or one defined as having an income of \$1.9 a day. In short, the poor in India and other South Asian countries can get their calories by sticking to rice or wheat alone.

Second, the nutrient-adequate diet costs \$2.12 a day. This is more than the international poverty line. If a person with income just above the poverty line spent her entire daily expenditure on food (ignoring fuel, transport, rent, medicines or any other expenditure), even then she would not be able to afford the nutrient-adequate diet. No one can, of course, survive by spending their entire income on food. The SOFI Report assumes that a person cannot spend more than 63% of total expenditure on food (that is, 37% would be required for non-food essentials). Third, the healthy diet costs \$4.07 a day, or more than twice the international poverty line. In other words, a healthy diet is totally unaffordable for those with incomes at

even twice the poverty line. And what is this healthy diet? It includes 30 gm of cereal, 30 gm of pulses, 50 gm of meat/chicken/fish and 50 gm of eggs, 100 gm of milk, 100 gm of vegetables and fruit each, and 5 gm of oil a day. In short, a balanced and healthy meal but not excessive in any way.

How does this translate into numbers of people? The SOFI Report estimates that the poverty line in India "may not permit a comfortable existence, including a balanced diet, (but) allows above subsistence existence." Second, even those with incomes of twice the international poverty line cannot afford a healthy diet. If we want to reduce malnutrition and food insecurity, we have to address the problem of affordability of healthy diets.

Affordability of healthy diets

These eye-opening and shocking numbers have got lost in the daily news of the pandemic. If anything, the number of people who cannot afford a healthy diet will have risen in the last three months, as employment and incomes collapsed for the majority of workers in the informal sector. Note that the Indian poverty line of 2014-12, as defined by the Tendulkar Committee, amounted to ₹33 per day in urban areas and ₹27 per day in rural areas, and corresponded roughly to \$1 a day at international PPP prices. The Indian poverty line (there has been a redefinition in the last decade) is thus lower than the international poverty line used in the SOFI Report.

Whatever the limitations of the SOFI methodology, there are some clear and simple messages. First, those we officially count as poor in India - with a cut-off that is lower than the international norm of \$1.9 a day - cannot afford a nutrient-adequate diet let alone a healthy diet. This result is completely contrary to the view of scholars such as Arvind Panagariya that the poverty line in India "may not permit a comfortable existence, including a balanced diet, (but) allows above subsistence existence." Second, even those with incomes of twice the international poverty line cannot afford a healthy diet. If we want to reduce malnutrition and food insecurity, we have to address the problem of affordability of healthy diets.

Should not at least one nutritious meal (with protein, fruits and vegetables) be ensured for the majority of our people, and particularly in this time of crisis? The Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana offers, up to November 2020, an additional 5 kg of wheat or rice and 1 kg of gram or lentils a month free of cost to all households with ration cards. This is welcome, of course, but utterly inadequate to address the massive and growing problem of malnutrition.

Madhura Swaminathan is Professor and Head of the Economic Analysis Unit, Indian Statistical Institute, Bangalore

Modern tools, age-old wisdom

The pandemic presents an opportunity for Sri Lanka and India to focus on the revitalisation of partnerships



PRASAD KARIYAWASAM

The unique India-Sri Lanka relationship, de jure, is between equals as sovereign nations. But it's asymmetric in terms of geographic size, population, military and economic power, on the one hand, and social indicators and geographical location, on the other. It is steeped in myth and legend, and influenced by religious, cultural and social affinities. This is an opportune time for Sri Lanka and India to nourish the roots of the relationship using modern toolkits, but leveraging age-old wisdom and experience.

Historical ties

History reveals that the advent of Buddhism to Sri Lanka during the time of Emperor Ashoka was the result of cross-border discourse. For many centuries in the first millennia, the ancient capital city of Anuradhapura housed an international community which included traders from India, China, Rome, Arabia and Persia. Later, Buddhist monks from Sri Lanka travelled to India, China, Cambodia and Java leaving behind inscriptions. Buddhist temples in Sri Lanka, to this day, contain shrines for Hindu deities. The colonial expansion of European maritime nations reshaped the Sri Lankan economy. Labour from south India was brought to Sri Lanka to work in plantations. The Indian freedom struggle had its influence on Sri Lanka as well. There was cross-border support for the revival of culture, tradition, local languages, spiritual practices and philosophies, and education. Both countries transformed into modern nations with constitutional and institutionalised governance under colonial rule.

Most aspects of today's globalisation existed in a different form in the pre-colonial era with free exchange of ideas, trade and intellectual discourse. However, process engineering by colonial powers for identification and categorisation of people was a factor in the emergence of separatist ideologies based on ethnicity, language and religion. This mindset is now ingrained and accentuated in politics. Episodic instances of communal hostility are referenced often to suit tactical political gain. Around the world today, and not just in South Asia, policies and thinking are becoming communally exclusive, localised and inward-looking. The COVID-19 pandemic hit the world against this backdrop, allowing some leaders an opportunity to

double down on insular thinking, ostensibly for providing local communities with better economic and social prospects, and security.

Meanwhile, governance models favoured by nations keep vacillating between fundamental freedoms-based democratic systems and quasi democratic, socialist authoritarian systems. In this regard, the people of Sri Lanka and India have been served well by long years of uninterrupted democratic governance. This has provided long-term stability for both countries and must not be vitiated. Sri Lanka's strategic location makes it apparent that not only economic fortunes but the security of both countries are inextricably linked. Therefore it is heartening that India and Sri Lanka constantly strive for excellence in neighbourly relations, recognising that a calamity in one country can adversely impact the other. Though robust partnerships with other countries must be sought in line with the non-alignment foreign policies of both countries, such efforts must be bounded by an atmosphere needed for peace, prosperity and stability. Among others, freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific together with a rules-based international order and peaceful settlement of disputes are of common interest. While avoiding advocacy of zero sum solutions on crucial issues, both countries must seek to harmonise strategic and other interests in line with common values and socioeconomic compulsions.

Addressing issues and imbalances

The socioeconomic development of Sri Lanka has remained linked to India. But there are many options available to address issues of imbalance and asymmetries. For instance, Sri Lanka can encourage Indian entrepreneurs to make Colombo another business hub for them, as logistical capacities and facilities for rest and recreation keep improving in Sri Lanka. Integrating the two economies with specific complementary treatment for Sri Lanka due to economic asymmetries can be fast-tracked for this purpose. There is immense potential to accentuate or create complementary strengths in local and human resource potential, for harnessing benefits in the modern value chains. Robust partnerships across the economic and social spectrum can promote people-to-people bonds. Active engagement of legislatures is essential for promoting multiparty support.

With many countries receding into cocoons due to the pandemic, this is an opportunity for both countries to focus on the renewal and revitalisation of partnerships.

Prasad Kariyawasam is Sri Lanka's former Foreign Secretary and was High Commissioner to India

Reports for posterity

The reports of committees examining riots are often ignored by the state but they are useful

SHAIKH MUJIBUR REHMAN

In India's evolving majoritarian political culture, the Delhi riots present an opportunity to examine not only how conditions under which riots occur have changed but also post-riot situations are addressed. Theoretically speaking, two things have happened: first, victims have often been presented as perpetrators; second, post-riot reconciliations between supposedly warring communities are not attempted thus creating an enduring source for the perpetuation of the politics of polarisation.

Context of riots

The findings of the Delhi Commission for Minorities examining the Delhi riots of 2020 deserve serious attention, though the Andhra Pradesh government is yet to show any interest. Three particular contexts need to be borne in mind to make objective sense of these riots. The first are the political developments linked to the nationwide protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, the epicentre of which was Shaheen Bagh in Delhi. The second is the New Delhi Assembly election that was held on February 8, 2020 and how the unprecedented polarised campaign presented fuel for the violence. And finally, the visit of U.S. President Donald Trump to India. A close reading of the report reflects that the violence was shaped by the politics of these three particular contexts.

One fact becomes clear from the report: the Delhi riots were anti-Muslim almost the way the 1984 riots were anti-Sikh. In some instances, victims were asked to show their ID cards and targeted based on their faith, the report says. Testimonies of victims to the fact-finding committee reveal that slogans shouted by the mob were hate-filled and anti-Muslim. One woman, for instance, said there was a reference to the Partition movie *Gadar*. Many said the mob shouted that Muslim women should "run to save themselves". Muslim women said their houses were looted, they were subject to vulgar language and even sexual harassment and assault. Additionally, the report presents a list of mosques, dargahs, madrasas and graveyards that were

destroyed. The report mentions that there was selective targeting of Muslim shops while Hindu ones were left intact in the same neighbourhood.

On March 18, 2020, the fact-finding team wrote to the Delhi Police inquiring into the following questions: One, the list of detainees since February 23, 2020; two, police station-wise copies of FIR; and three, complaints not converted into FIRs. The Delhi Police gave no response either to these inquiries or to other clarifications sought by the Commission. Testimonies by victims, survivors and journalists present ample evidence of the active complicity of the Delhi Police. An institution of a democratic country, the Delhi Police's decision not to cooperate with the Minorities Commission in its inquiry is a matter of grave concern.

A matter of ritual

One major recommendation is to urge the Modi government to set up an independent committee headed by a retired High Court judge to inquire into the violence. Almost as a matter of ritual, such committees have been set up to examine various riots in modern India. But the track record of even the so-called secular non-BJP governments to implement the recommendations of such reports has been shoddy, contributing to the growing limitations of the Indian state to grapple with riots. And then there are other issues. For instance, the Justice Sahai Commission set up to investigate the Muzaffargarh riots of 2013 gave a clean chit to the Home Department responsible for law and order under the then Chief Minister, Akhilesh Yadav. The Justice A.S. Naidu commission investigating the anti-Christian violence in Kandhamal, Odisha, in 2008, submitted its report in December 2015, but that report is yet to be tabled in the State Assembly.

However, the fact that previous governments have not taken the reports of such Committees seriously should not discourage the setting up of Committees to examine riots. If nothing else, such reports remain useful as historical records.

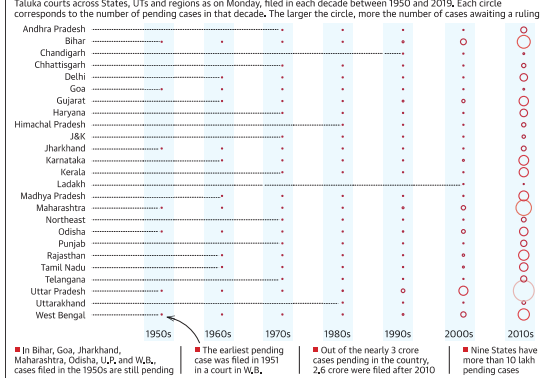
Shaikh Mujibur Rahman teaches at Jamia Millia Central University, New Delhi



DATA POINT

Justice DELAYED

HOW TO READ THE CHART The chart shows the number of civil and criminal cases pending disposal by District and Taluka courts across States, UTs and regions as on Monday, filed in each decade between 1950 and 2019. Each circle corresponds to the number of pending cases in that decade. The larger the circle, more the number of cases awaiting a ruling



The Hindu

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JULY 28, 1970

AIR forced to stop transmission

The Cuttack station of All India Radio switched off its transmission at 7:45 this morning (July 27), an hour after the "Orissa bandh" to press for the second steel plant started. Fifty pro-bandh volunteers forced their entry into the A.I.R. station, raising threatening slogans this morning. They also cut telephone wires. The Additional District Magistrate, who was on duty, ordered the Station Director to stop the broadcast in the interests of maintaining law and order. The Station Director rushed an officer to switch off the transmitter located 10 miles away. The Magistrate, in his order, said that the circumstances were so serious that unless broadcast was stopped, there was likelihood of grave threat to law and order and bloodshed and danger to life and property. Contingents of the Central Reserve Police posted at the A.I.R. station was withdrawn last night and the Orissa Military Police took over guard duty. It is learnt that last night, a spokesman of the all-party action committee which has organised the bandh, spoke to the Union Minister, Mr. Satyanarayan Sinha over the phone and pleaded with him to close down the A.I.R. station in Cuttack.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JULY 28, 1920

The Rules in the Commons.

(From an editorial)

The debate on the Reforms Rules in the Commons once again throws light on the extent to which we can depend on the present Parliament to get our point of view given due consideration. Except in regard to two small amendments, which Mr. Montagu accepted, the House approved of all the reactionary Rules in toto. Col. Wedgwood, un-discouraged by disappointment and unimpaired of the impatience of the salaried legislators to be done with the whole thing, moved a series of amendments calculated to democratise the franchise and liberalise the powers of the legislators. As may have been expected perhaps, all these amendments, except one, were negated without even the presence of any serious discussion. The Rules, as they stand at present, are, some of them, calculated to fetter the discretion of the Secretaries in regard to the choice of candidate to represent them in the Councils. We have not a plethora of candidates of unbending independence and the bureaucracy has striven, until lately, with success, to disqualify even those that we have from standing as candidates for election to the Council.