



Imperial excess

Governors must work within constitutional parameters, not as agents of the Centre

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's outburst against Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar on Monday was not a first but it brought to the fore, yet again, the role of the Governor in relation with the elected government and legislature. Mr. Dhankhar and his counterparts in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra appear to be testing the limits of their power and confronting the elected governments and legislatures in recent weeks. Tired of Mr. Dhankhar's constant trade against her on Twitter, Ms. Banerjee blocked him on the platform. The Governor then sent her a message for "dialogue and harmony amongst constitutional functionaries" but promptly posted that too on Twitter. The Chief Minister said the Governor was trying to treat the elected government as "bonded labour". He has been summoning the Chief Secretary and the Director General of Police on a regular basis, and when they do not turn up, taking to Twitter and often tagging the Chief Minister. Mr. Dhankhar also had a run-in with Assembly Speaker Biman Banerjee recently, on the premises of the State Assembly. He has withheld assent to the Howrah Municipal Corporation (Amendment) Bill 2021, delaying polls to the civic body. He has made allegations of impropriety in welfare schemes, questioned Government claims about investments in the State, and taken up the cudgels for the Opposition BJP.

In Maharashtra, Governor Bhagat Singh Koshiyari has stalled the election of Speaker since the post fell vacant in February 2021. He has taken umbrage over the amendments in the legislative rules for holding the Speaker's election through voice vote instead of secret ballot. The Governor's view that the State Assembly cannot decide its own rules is unacceptable to the ruling coalition, but is being cheered by the Opposition BJP. Mr. Koshiyari had in the past battled for the BJP, supporting its demand for a special session of the Assembly on women's safety and security. He had refused to accept the recommendation of the Council of Ministers on the nomination of 12 members to the Legislative Council, until the matter reached the High Court. In Tamil Nadu, Governor R.N. Ravi has not acted upon the T.N. Admission to Undergraduate Medical Degree Courses Bill, adopted by the Assembly in September 2021. The Governor is required to either send it to the President of India for approval or return it for reconsideration by the Assembly, but the indefinite delay in taking a decision amounts to undermining the legislature, and is unjustifiable. The Bill relates to a question of State-Centre relations, as it proposes to dispense with the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) for medical graduate admissions in the State. NEET has been criticised for curtailing state powers, and the Governor's delay in processing the Bill is only aggravating the situation. Some of these issues may require debate and discussion before resolution. But any imperial overture of Governors can only do harm to the constitutional scheme of things.

A dose of realism

Disease prevention with COVID-appropriate behaviour and vaccination is still necessary

The World Health Organization (WHO) chief, Dr. Tedros Ghebreyesus, in a recent briefing, noted that 90 million cases of coronavirus have been reported since the Omicron variant was first identified 10 weeks ago. His statement comes in the context of many countries easing their restrictive movement measures amid public fatigue. From WHO's perspective, the blanket lifting of restrictions poses a problem as most people appear to believe that Omicron is less threatening compared to previous variants and that two shots of vaccines are an adequate defence against the virus. He underlined that a narrative that "preventing transmission is no longer possible and no longer necessary" had taken hold and this was problematic. This was false, he underscored at the briefing, as the virus continues to evolve and four of the six WHO regions globally are reporting an increasing trend in deaths.

Britain, France, Ireland, the Netherlands and Finland are on the path of easing COVID-19 restrictions. In India too, with current evidence pointing to a fall in the daily caseload, several States have moved to ease movement restrictions. WHO has also said that the newly emerged variant, BA.2, is as transmissible as Omicron and that all measures needed to contain the original Omicron variant are applicable to it too. After facing criticism that it did not move soon enough in 2020 to alert the world of the magnitude of the calamity that it awaited, WHO, which takes a global view of the crisis, cannot be faulted for airing concerns from the evidence available so far. It has also consistently warned that the pandemic cannot be over until all regions of the world are sufficiently vaccinated and that economic incentive continues to be a driver of the pandemic. The coronavirus, while secular in its infectiousness, affects nations differently. The richer ones can afford to bear the consequences of disrupted social activity a little longer than the rest. Just about half the world has been fully vaccinated; unfortunately, so far, the available vaccines are only equipped to protect against disease rather than infection. WHO must use its influence to continue to encourage vaccination and step in with advice and bear upon governments to do more to meet vaccination targets. Framing the pandemic as a war that humanity must 'win' was useful to accelerate the development of vaccines. However, science is not equipped yet to predict the future trajectory of the coronavirus; COVID-appropriate behaviour, vaccines and accessible health care remain the only credible defences.

There is a discourse shift in Uttar Pradesh

Economic hardship, chronic unemployment and farm distress appear to be at the centre of public discussion



ZOZA HASAN

The Uttar Pradesh elections of 2022 are the most important Assembly elections in living memory. The poll outcome in India's weightiest State will be a crucial metric of public sentiment ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha election. Uttar Pradesh invites attention not merely because of its size but also because of its centrality to the Hindutva project, and equally importantly, the Opposition taking shape against it. One question repeatedly asked in this election is: will caste trump religion or will Hindutva triumph again over Mandal? The poll results would provide an indication of whether the aggressive Hindutva line pushed by the ruling party over the last five years was successful.

A challenge on its hands

A quick survey of political economy, identity politics, alliances, resources and campaign strategies leaves one with one clear impression: the winds of change are sweeping the State but how they will affect voting patterns is not clear. But even so, one trend is clear—the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) faces a tough fight in Uttar Pradesh as communal polarisation loses its edge. Economic hardship, chronic unemployment, and farm distress are at the centre of public discussion. As politics returns to normality at the State and local levels, it is quite conceivable that dominance in Uttar Pradesh will be challenged.

The landslide victory of the BJP in the 2017 Assembly elections created the conditions for the establishment of a communal authoritarian regime in Uttar Pradesh. The new political dominance was reflected in the increasing mainstreaming of Hindutva in Uttar Pradesh's public arena. The huge legislative majority enabled the BJP to advance its political agenda virtually unopposed. Many Opposition parties during this period were not visible on the streets against the BJP government (with the exception of the Congress, which led several public protests). They barely existed on the ground. The Opposition parties came to life only in the last few months with the farmers' movement and the Lakhimpur Khairi incident proving to be the springboard for launching their respective campaigns.

Cracks in identity politics

Identity politics has been at the centre of Uttar Pradesh politics for the last three decades. After 2014, Hindu communalism gained momentum at the expense of caste politics which was weakened by the BJP's campaign of uniting voters across caste lines by building a wide-ranging Hindu coalition. This was made possible because the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) intervened to garner the support of non-Yadav Other Backward Classes and non-Jatav Dalit communities by assuring them that they would no longer be neglected as they had been under the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the Samajwadi Party (SP) governments. But the tables have turned as those very groups that helped the BJP to gain power in Uttar Pradesh are now disgruntled that they have not got their share of power. The exodus of some OBC MLAs



and cabinet Ministers from the BJP to the SP is a sign of that. As early as 2019, more than 100 BJP MLAs, mostly belonging to backward castes, had staged a dharna inside the Vidhan Sabha and shouted slogans against their own government. It was only after the senior party leadership intervened and gave them assurances that they could be pacified.

Brewing discontent

The disrumpment of the OBCs underlines the privileging of caste over communal politics driven by a tension between the political and social domains. Since the BJP has privileged the former over the latter, the 'social' was left out as all attention was centred on the 'political', i.e., Hindutva. The exit of influential OBC leaders and Jat anger in western Uttar Pradesh against the BJP following the year-long farmers' agitation indicate the difficulties of seeing groups as permanent majorities and minorities. In democratic politics, categories of majority and minority are not fixed—there is no pre-existing Hindu majority that will always vote en bloc against an imagined enemy—the Muslim minority. Shifting electoral majorities do not coincide with persistent social cleavages. Indeed, democratic politics offers the possibility of redefining who be-

longs to a majority and whom to a minority across multiple arenas.

The substantive shift in political discourse in this election has been encouraged by a surge of protests in the last two years. The anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) protests, the farmers' movement, the student agitation despite the brutal police crackdown and the thousands of people regularly taking to the streets demanding jobs have pushed this shift. What is striking about these protests is that they were not organised by political parties and that people are willing to take to the streets despite concerted efforts to stop them, but also, above all, they are concerned with the everyday issues of life. The discontent brewing and growing across the State is propelling the shift towards the material conditions of life. This has shaped opposition against the BJP especially with regard to the issue of jobs as the State has failed to provide employment.

The Union Home Minister's decision to start the campaign from Kairana is a clear attempt to neutralise the discursive shift by driving a wedge between communities through communal polarisation—the BJP's master strategy for fighting elections. The party's brazen communal appeal to Jat farmers, for instance, to think as Hindus, is not making much headway, though. The OBC revolt, demands of caste census and the farmers' agitation are important barriers to polarisation in eastern and western Uttar Pradesh. No communal consolidation has built up so far despite the concerted efforts of the ruling party and its principal campaigners. This reveals the challenges in creating a stable political model centred on identity.

But this also reveals the limits of caste-driven identity politics

which too cannot solve the dilemma of representation or inequality or unemployment. Caste alliances can win elections, but they will do so by merely displacing religion with caste as the central organising principle of politics. This will, in the process, further empower the Hindu community as it promotes caste-based political mobilisation and power sharing between caste groups. Caste identity and identity around which the politics of social justice, equality, and discrimination is organised in Uttar Pradesh today to the exclusion of other communities even when they are persecuted by the regime.

As political counterweight

However, popular anger is shifting the political discourse to social and economic issues which have become more salient, buttressed by voter fatigue against hate politics. This development would probably bring the liveability of everyday life back to the fore and could serve as a counterweight to Hindu majoritarianism. More to the point, voters do not seem to be terribly excited about their experience of living under a Hindu Rashtra in Uttar Pradesh. But still, what is not clear is to what extent the popular discontent will impact elections and translate into votes against the ruling dispensation. People have paid the economic price for the Government's neglect of their basic needs. Will the ailing people live the political price for the discontent of millions of poor workers who had to trek back home after the pandemic and lockdown, the appalling shortage of public health facilities, and massive unemployment in one of the most crucial States of the Union?

Zoza Hasan is Professor Emerita, Jawaharlal Nehru University

Ink India-Britain free trade, unlock new opportunity

There are good economic and strategic reasons for an FTA that will spell many opportunities for both countries



ALEX ELLIS

In May last year, Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Boris Johnson announced their shared vision for a transformative decade for the India-United Kingdom partnership. That they met in the middle of India's second wave of COVID-19, shows their determination to turn their shared political will into action. As part of that transformation, the two leaders declared their ambition to move from double bilateral trade by 2030, which totalled over £23 billion in 2019. They directed their governments to take rapid steps to reduce barriers to trade, and to complete the groundwork necessary to begin work on a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) by the end of 2021.

A beginning

These words have now been made real. Both governments have already taken action; for example, unlocking the export of British apples to India and enabling a greater number of Indian fisheries to export shrimp to the U.K. Small but meaningful steps by which

both countries have demonstrated they can and have taken concrete measures to stimulate growth.

The big next step was the latest FTA negotiations, which began in month. On January 13, 2022 in New Delhi, India's Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal and the U.K.'s International Trade Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan announced their shared ambition to finish negotiations on a comprehensive and balanced FTA by the end of 2022. This is a big task; all trade negotiations are complex, and especially so between two partners of such different sizes and at such different stages of their development. The opportunities an FTA presents, however, are bigger—for both countries.

Businesses in both nations

Before looking at the future, it is worth taking stock of the present. There are nearly 600 U.K. companies in India employing more than 3,20,000 people. This includes Barclays which has its biggest office outside of London in Pune, whilst JCB's products manufactured in India are exported to over 110 countries across the globe, as are those by consumer goods giant Hindustan Unilever. Unilever is headquartered in Mumbai; just two of many examples of British companies supporting Prime Minister Modi's vision for an Atmanirbhar Bharat.



Similarly, India is already a big investor into the U.K.—especially in dynamic sectors such as fintech, electric vehicles and batteries. In 2020-21, India was the U.K.'s second largest source of investment in terms of number of projects.

Just last week, both Essar Group and Ola Electric announced investments into the U.K. But given the size of our two economies—the fifth and sixth in the world—our trade relationship in particular has underperformed. An FTA will change that. The U.K. thrives on free trade. Having left the European Union's common trade bloc after 47 years (in 2020), we are building a network of like-minded democracies committed to free trade. The Indian government is showing its determination to agree to a new set of trade deals; and it is not coincidental that both governments are negotiating with similar countries,

for example, Australia. India has an extraordinary opportunity to transform its economy and society in the next 30 years, as it hits its demographic sweet spot, at the heart of the Indo-Pacific region where half the world's people live and 50% of global economic growth is produced. Freer trade with the U.K. will help through greater access to a highly open and competitive market, offering valuable opportunities for India's booming companies—for example giving Bengaluru's start-ups direct access to London's capital markets.

Finite prospects

A U.K.-India trade agreement will stimulate growth and employment in both countries. U.K. government analysis shows that, depending on the depth of the deal, an FTA would add around £14.8 billion to the GDP of India and the U.K. collectively by 2035. A trade deal helps diversify supply chains by making it easier and cheaper for more businesses to do business across borders. Lower barriers coupled with greater regulatory certainty would incentivise new small and medium-sized enterprises to export their goods and services. An agreement also means Indian and British consumers see improvements in the variety and affordability of products.

There are good economic reasons for agreeing to an FTA. There are also good strategic reasons. The British Government's Integrated Review, the blueprint for the future, which I worked on before coming to India, describes the world we are in; messier, with more geo-strategic competition. It is one in which two dynamic democracies such as India and the U.K. need to work closer together to promote open economies.

From past to future

Finally, an FTA would mark a new way of working between the U.K. and India. It gives a new framework within which the two countries can grow and flourish together, putting the colonial economic relationship where it belongs—in the history books. We should acknowledge that past, especially in this 75th year of India's Independence, and build a future which is about opportunities for both countries.

This month also marks one year since I presented my credentials to India's Prime Minister Ram Nath Kovind. I am honoured to be here in this defining moment—when the U.K. and India will shape the next 25 years of our destiny, as equal, forward-looking partners.

Alex Ellis is British High Commissioner to India

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.

Essence of the Budget

While the Finance Minister finds enough money in her Budget to boost the country's infrastructure or digital connectivity, it is strange that she has failed to provide much-needed relief to the middle, salaried and poor classes (Page 1, "Medium wave", February 2). It would appear as if the Finance Minister had anything but sympathy for the masses who have faced the heavy impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Budget could exacerbate the divide between the rich and the poor. Economists agree that widespread inequality is one of India's most pressing problems. It is also disappointing that there was no special COVID-19 surcharge on the rich.

KANGAYAM R. NARASIMHAN,
Chennai

One thought that the Union Budget would have had a human face, given the

turbulent period the country faces. Alas! It has turned out to be a Budget with a virtual face. There is support for all things digital but an obliviousness to reality: an exponential rise in unemployment, widening economic inequality and disturbed livelihoods. Unless the immediate issues of lives and livelihoods are addressed properly, there is no use in focusing too much on the long term. In these difficult times, the rural employment guarantee scheme needs to be expanded, perhaps even to urban areas. The Budget fails to infuse confidence in a majority of people.

D. DVG SANAKARAO,
Nellore, Andhra Pradesh

announce an increase—even nominal—in the usual interest paid in bank fixed deposits. Instead, it was a disappointment. If the Centre can earmark crores to construct mega projects, it will be the will to raise interest rates. Pandemic or otherwise, the spiralling cost of living confronts families.

MANI NATARAJAN,
Chennai, The Nilgiris

banking is being thought of. The most disappointing factor is of scarce relief for the income-tax assessee.

GOVARDHAN MYYENDE,
Vijayawada

While the Budget has received its fair share of bouquets and brickbats there can be no two opinions that the expectations of the salaried class have been abridged. We expected an increase in the tax exemption limit, a rise in standard deduction and a raising in the limit of ₹1.5 lakh under Section 80C. By leaving these sections untouched, the Government has shown its indifference towards the salaried class, which unlike the powerful corporate and agricultural sectors has no lobby to plead its case.

C.V. ARAVIND,
Bengaluru

more pronounced is a betrayal of the social sector.

C.A.C. MURUGAPPAN,
Kothamangalam, Tamil Nadu

The Budget has been an extreme disappointment. There is high inflation but no tax breaks for the middle class. Criticism by the political Opposition and citizens is genuine. The promised 'Ache din zaroor aayega' is a mirage. We expected an increase in the tax exemption limit, a rise in standard deduction and a raising in the limit of ₹1.5 lakh under Section 80C. By leaving these sections untouched, the Government has shown its indifference towards the salaried class, which unlike the powerful corporate and agricultural sectors has no lobby to plead its case.

DEEPAK SINGH,
Noida, Uttar Pradesh

The article, "A betrayal of the social sector when it

needs help" (OpEd page, February 2), has sufficient data to prove that the resource allocation for schemes in the social sector in the Union Budget is a disappointment especially when only around 4.7% of India's workforce is formally trained. According to UNESCO, 35% of the world's illiterate population resides in India. Of greater concern is that a large chunk of the population, despite being educated, is still not sufficiently equipped or skilled enough to be absorbed productively in the workforce. India's employment score is estimated at 48.2%. How can governments, in Budget after Budget, accord low priority in resource allocation to the social sector? There is such a strong link between economic growth and human development. RAMEEZA A. KASHEER,
Chennai

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Creating jobs by increasing capex

The thrust on capital expenditure is laudable, but it comes with some caveats and risks



ANANTH NARAYAN

If we had to look for one single metric that held the key to us achieving our immense economic potential as a nation, creation of gainful jobs, particularly for our underemployed youth and women, would perhaps be a strong candidate.

Data from the International Labour Organization (ILO) suggest that India's employment to population (over the age of 15) ratio has steadily dropped from 55% in 2005 to 43% in 2020. In 2020, it was 52% in Bangladesh, 63% in China and 73% in Vietnam. Specifically, women form just 20% of India's workforce, while they comprise between 20% and 70% of the workforce in the other three countries. Further, CMIE data suggest that across manufacturing and services, India lost nearly 1 crore jobs between December 2016 and December 2021.

Amidst a global and domestic context muddled by the COVID-19 pandemic, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, and indeed the entire administration, has their job cut out, trying to enable creation of sustainable jobs over time. In the 2022-23 Budget speech, she went all in on allocating ample money towards productive infrastructure investments as the way forward.

Momentum in tax collections

Before we get into that, let's start with some good news. Data released by the Controller General of Accounts (CGA) shows that for the first nine months of the current fiscal year 2021-22 (FY22), the Centre's revenue receipts across taxes and dividends already stood at ₹17.3 lakh crore, just shy of the full year budget of ₹17.9 lakh crore. There are many factors that contribute to this remarkable outcome. First, the Centre's tax and Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections are on the back of a robust performance of India's organised sector, amidst increased formalisation of the economy. Second, the government deserves full credit for the conservative Budget projections



of last year, even as it enhanced credibility by coming clean on expenditures hidden in off-balance sheet in the books of the Food Corporation of India. Put together, for the first time in many years, notwithstanding the pandemic and the intense hurt amongst the unorganised sectors, tax collections for this fiscal year will end well ahead of the original Budget projections.

This Budget, therefore, revised up FY22 Central revenue receipts to ₹20.8 lakh crore, nearly ₹3 lakh crore higher than the original Budget. Given the momentum in tax collections till December, notwithstanding the Omicron wave, actual revenue receipts may exceed even this number by an additional ₹0.5 lakh crore-0.7 lakh crore. All this will more than make up for the projected shortfall in the government's disinvestment Budget for this year.

Despite the much higher revenue receipts than budgeted, the overall FY22 fiscal deficit is projected to end at ₹15.9 lakh crore (6.9% of GDP), higher than the Budget Estimates of ₹15.1 lakh crore. Additional spending towards food and fertilizer subsidies, increased allocations towards the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme and export incentives, and a

clean-up of the books of Air India prior to its sale all contributed towards increased expenditures.

Going forward, however, a sustained momentum in tax collections will provide additional degrees of fiscal policy freedom to the Finance Minister as she tries to foster domestic jobs and output. She has chosen to back investments into capital expenditure as the way to achieve this.

For the next fiscal year FY23, she has increased her capital expenditure by ₹2.8 lakh crore - or investments into productive capital creation - to ₹7.5 lakh crore, 24% higher than the FY22 revised estimate of ₹6 lakh crore. Alongside she has pencilled in just 1% increase in revenue expenditure, i.e., into items such as salaries, pensions, interest, and subsidies. In this regard, she is continuing a trend that she started in last year's Budget. Between FY11 and FY21, capital expenditure averaged just 12% of the government's overall expenditure. For the current FY22, that ratio increased to 16%, and for FY23, the Finance Minister has proposed to take it to 19%.

The intent and commitment behind this strategy is clear and laudable. The expectation is that sustained investment in roads, railways, freight corridors, power, renewable energy

along with initiatives such as Production-Linked Incentives (PLI) and other enabling legislation, will create the conditions for drawing in private sector investments into manufacturing, and foster job creation and sustainable growth.

The key lies in execution

But as with everything else, this strategy does come with a few caveats and risks.

First, not all the headline capital expenditure is indicative of fresh greenfield investments. The ₹0.5 lakh crore of clean-up of Air India's books this year counts as capital expenditure. Similarly, for FY23, the government has set aside ₹0.8 lakh crore to partly clean up the books of NHAI and BSNL. Nevertheless, the transparency this brings about is still very welcome.

Second, while there is a visible thrust on hard capital expenditure, the outlays towards critical areas such as education, healthcare and urban infrastructure remain subdued. One would think investments in these areas are equally, if not more critical, than hard infrastructure alone.

Third, the thrust on capital expenditure has resulted in notably higher fiscal deficit numbers than expected. Notwithstanding the intent and commitment, such high fiscal deficits can put pressure on interest rates and the Reserve Bank of India, even as it raises the risk of inflation, higher current account deficits, and the attendant threats to financial stability.

Ultimately, the key lies in execution. The Finance Minister has provided ample funds for the infrastructure thrust. It is up to the entire administration - Central, State, and local - to ensure that the funds are utilised in a timely fashion, and result in delivery of world-class infrastructure. Alongside, ease of doing investments have to be continually addressed, especially around key areas such as land acquisition, contract enforcement, and policy stability. Sustained investments in manufacturing and value-added services hold the key for the growth of small businesses, jobs, and our economic well-being.

Ananth Narayan is Associate Professor (Adjunct), Finance, and Head of Public Policy, SPJIMR.

A feminist manifesto

The Congress in U.P. has made a push to recognise the electoral value of women and, in turn, help women recognise it



VAISHNA ROY

At a time when crimes and hostility against women are being plotted on a disquietingly rising graph, the special manifesto for women released by the Congress ahead of the Uttar Pradesh elections is a landmark. That it comes on top of the party's move to field 40% women candidates in these polls provides cautious hope.

A bold move

While cynics could dismiss this as Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, whose brainchild it is, clutching at the one electoral constituency she can claim in the absence of obvious religious or caste affiliations, what it could mean for women in politics as a whole cannot be underestimated. Given that the Women's Reservation Bill remains firmly buried, Ms. Vadra's decision to reserve 40% seats for women candidates is a bold one. The party has been criticised for not extending the move to other States but to make a tentative beginning in U.P. might not be a bad idea.

Interesting also is the direction of thought that is apparent in the manifesto. For instance, there is a promise to reserve 40% of 20 lakh new jobs for women, but it goes beyond Anganwadi and ASHA jobs to talk of training women as bus drivers, of reserving 50% ration shops to be run by women, 40% reservation in MGNREGS jobs, and to encourage mahila chaupalis in villages where women can gather and organise. The manifesto also promises mandatory creches in government offices and waiving of fees for land registered in women's names.

These are not new ideas but there is attention to detail from a woman's point of view and to see this in a political manifesto is significant. In fact, explaining the need for such a manifesto, Ms. Vadra has spoken of the hyper-masculine and hyper-aggressive political discourse in vogue today and has called for countering it with hyper-femininity, with compassion, with constructive debate. Similarly, she has spoken of replacing the language of victimhood with that of agency - of women not asking for justice but shouldering political roles to seize justice.

One does not often hear this strongly feminist tenor in India's populist political corridors, where women either receive a passing pat or have internalised the patriarchy. It's a gap she seems to have identified. Aware

of the disingenuity in the "free gas cylinder" and "ma-beti" model of women-friendly policies, she appears willing to go beyond such pigeonholing. Thus, even the manifesto promise of a scooter for college girls and a smartphone for girls in Class 12 comes with a nuanced qualification that this is not for safety or education alone, but because many families allow only boys these amenities. The scooter or phone, therefore, becomes as much about women's personal freedoms.

Similarly, along with promises of 25% placements for women in the police and the suspension of personnel who don't register complaints within 10 days, there is mention of a special commission to fight victim-shaming. One has little faith in commissions, but the acknowledgment of victim-shaming as a problem is quite remarkable in the misogynistic cesspool that is Indian politics today.

Raising the bar

The move, launched late and with little groundwork in the last five years, may not become a game-changer in U.P. but at the very least it will raise the bar. Across the world, and certainly in India, women are relegated to the margins of political life, despite the Mayawatis, Mamatas and Jayalalithas who occasionally blaze across the firmament. Everyday realities don't change, polls are not won or lost on women's issues, chauvinism remains rampant. Even governments ostensibly meant to uphold women's rights do the opposite. A 2019 poster in BJP-led Haryana for the Beti Bachao (save daughters) campaign featured a girl child making roti and asked, 'How will you eat roti made by her if you don't save her life?' On a sweet box one recently saw online, the message was followed by "vanah babao" (save lineage). Women must be saved not because they are valuable individual entities but because they make roti or bear progeny. In fact, so little have women mattered in Indian politics that they are expected to, and mostly do, vote along caste, community and family lines and only seldom for the issues or beliefs.

The need for such a manifesto thus becomes immediately apparent - unless women participate in, and are considered during, political decision-making, their interests will not be taken into account. It is in this context that the document assumes importance. Regardless of how the Congress performs in the polls, the manifesto will have performed one vital role - that of recognising the electoral value of women and, in turn, helping women recognise it. Who knows, it might even one day result in women consolidating as a vote bank.

vaishna.ri@thehindu.co.in

STATE OF PLAY

Turmeric woes in Telangana

A farmers' agitation backed by the TRS is intensifying, but the Centre refuses to relent

B. CHANDRASHEKHAR

Nizamabad MP Dharmapuri Arvind, who belongs to the Bharatiya Janata Party, chose a novel way of making his pre-election promises before the 2019 general election. Unlike other candidates who make promises in manifestos or at rallies, Mr. Arvind made them on stamp paper, mostly in vogue at the village level in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. He won the election.

Last week, Mr. Arvind's convoy was obstructed by turmeric farmers, whom he later called TRS (Telangana Rashtra Samithi) activists, when he was on a visit to Nandipet mandal. Mr. Arvind alleged that disguising themselves as turmeric farmers, TRS activists had attacked him and damaged his vehicle as the police "played spectators".

Nearly three years after the novel way in which he made his pre-election promises, Mr. Arvind has not been able to give a reason for his inability to fulfil two of his promises: one of getting a Turmeric Board sanctioned to Nizamabad and the other of getting a minimum support price fixed for turmeric and red jowar, both of which are grown extensively in his parliamentary constituency. He had also said in 2019 that he would quit as MP and join the farmers' people's movement if he fails to keep these promises.

India is the largest producer, consumer and exporter of turmeric in the world. In the country, Telangana was the largest producer of turmeric in 2020-21. Since 2014, the Telangana government has been requesting the Centre to establish a Turmeric Board in the State along the lines of the Spices Board but its efforts have not borne fruit. The erstwhile Nizamabad district is one of the biggest centres of turmeric trade in the State. Telangana's argument is that the mandate of the Spices Board is too large and it handles too many spices, which is why it needs a separate Turmeric Board. Special zones to promote and export the spice have not

been created, which is why exports are low, said TRS Lok Sabha Member K. Kavitha in 2018. While the BJP-led Centre government has not conceded to this demand, it promised before the 2021 Tamil Nadu Assembly elections a Turmeric Board in that State. This further enraged farmers in Telangana.

In reply to a question by TRS MP K.R. Suresh Reddy in the Rajya Sabha last year, Union Minister for Agriculture Narendra Singh Tomar made it clear that there was no proposal to set up a Turmeric Board in Telangana. He said that the Ministry of Commerce and Industry had set up regional office-cum-extension centres of the Spices Board in Nizamabad to promote exports of spices in the region, including turmeric.

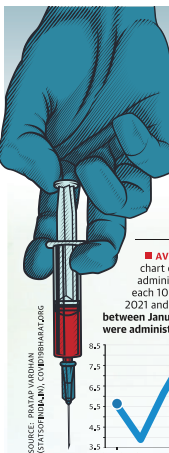
Perhaps, Mr. Arvind has also come to the conclusion that the issue is beyond his control now and is mulling instead of re-contesting from the Nizamabad parliamentary constituency, irrespective of what the party leadership has in store for him.

During the war of words between the BJP and TRS, particularly between him and Armuro MLA A. Jeevan Reddy of the TRS, Mr. Arvind vowed that he would contest from Armuro in the next election and defeat Mr. Reddy with a majority of at least 50,000 votes. Mr. Reddy, in turn, said he will mobilise 10,000 farmers and felicitate Mr. Arvind if the latter gets the Turmeric Board sanctioned.

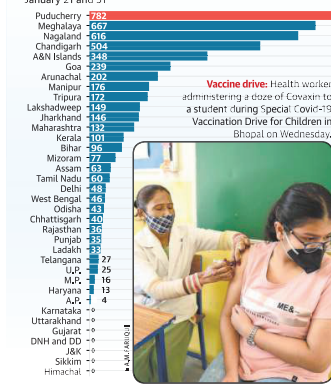
The turmeric-growing farmers in the State continue to mount pressure on the Centre for a Turmeric Board. They argue that it is essential for them to get MSP for the spice crop. They say that the price of the crop has crashed while production costs have increased. They believe that a Board will address their problems. The farmers are planning to intensify their protests. Resolving the issue quickly would help the government avert another farmer-related crisis.

chandrashekar.bhaskar@thehindu.co.in

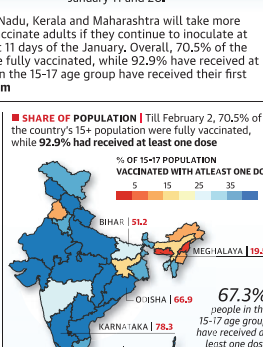
DATA POINT



STATE OF PLAY The chart shows the number of days it will take for each State to fully vaccinate its adult population if it continues inoculation at the average daily rate recorded between January 21 and 31

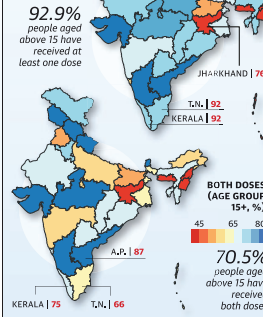


SHARE OF POPULATION Till February 2, 70.5% of the country's 15+ population were fully vaccinated, while 92.9% had received at least one dose



SINGLE DOSE (AGE GROUP 15+, %)

92.9% people aged above 15 have received at least one dose



The Hindu

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 3, 1972

"Dislike the term 'backward classes'"

Hyderabad, Feb. 2: The Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, said here today that the sooner the problem of backward classes was solved the better it would be for the country. She did not like the term "backward classes," Mrs. Gandhi said. Addressing the All-India Backward Class Conference the Prime Minister said: "We should strive to build a society where all will get equal opportunities." The backward classes were given some extra facilities to speed up their uplift. She deplored that a few of the backward classes, who had progressed, showed little interest in the welfare of the rest of the backward classes and kept aloof. The Prime Minister regretted that in certain places, where the sarpanches belonged to the backward community, they were not given the co-operation they deserved. She said officials, who went to rural areas, should bring to the notice of the Government instances where justice was denied to the backward classes. She did not know what the Kaka Kalekar Commission's report, submitted 20 years ago, was about. She would go into it at the first available opportunity on her return to Delhi. Mr. P.V. Narasimha Rao, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, welcoming the Prime Minister, stated that a search for really talented people from among the weaker sections was going on so that they could be provided opportunities to march to the front. Mr. Konda Lakshman, Chairman of the Reception Committee, regretted that the Centre's silence over the Kaka Kalekar Commission's report, had caused much frustration among backward classes.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 3, 1922

Malabar Situation

Delhi, Feb. 2: The following is an official summary of the Malabar situation for the week ending 29th January: Fighting gangs under Avokar Mussalliar and Komara Thangal are still concealed in hills south-west of Calicut Taluq - some of them have been killed or captured. Abdul Haji and a small party were killed in a Hindu temple near Pukkottur and Karath Moidin Kutti Haji was captured in the same area, leaders named Coymam and Muku Ayamad now practically remain to be accounted for. Chin Hills Battalion of military police has returned to Assam. Restoration of normal conditions is still delayed by reluctance of Muslims to return. The most important criminals have been arrested. Minor arrests are delayed by congestion in jails.

Text & Context

NEWS IN NUMBERS



Press threatened

6 The number of journalists killed in India in 2021, according to the India Press Freedom Report 2021 by the Rights and Risk Analysis Group. At least 17 scribes were arrested across States/UTs. Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) reported the highest cases of arrest/detention (5 journalists), followed by Delhi (3); Maharashtra, Manipur and Tripura (2 each); and Assam, Chhattisgarh and Haryana (1 each). Also, at least 24 journalists were allegedly physically attacked, threatened, harassed and obstructed from doing their job by public officials including the police.

Communal riots

1,807 The number of communal riot cases registered in different parts of the country between 2018 and 2020 in which 8,565 people were arrested, according to a reply in the Rajya Sabha. The highest number of communal riot cases were registered in Bihar, followed by Maharashtra and Haryana. While 4,097 people were arrested for riots in 2018, 2,405 people were arrested in 2019 and 2,063 in 2020. Altogether, 200 people were convicted for the riots in 2018, 332 in 2019 and 229 in 2020.

Credit for Sri Lanka

500 In million USD, the amount for which Sri Lanka has signed a credit line with India to import fuel. The island nation sought to stave off rolling power cuts amid a foreign exchange crisis that has hampered purchases of diesel for power plants. The Export-Import Bank of India (EXIM) will provide the credit line for purchasing petroleum products, India's High Commission in Colombo said on Twitter. Sri Lanka is struggling with its worst financial crisis with reserves hitting \$3.1 billion in December. REUTERS

Migrant woes

12 The number of migrants who rose to death and were found near Turkey's border with Greece. On Wednesday, the Turkish Interior Minister Suleyman Soyulu accused the Greek border guards of pushing the bodies back over the frontier. He tweeted that the 12 were among the 22 migrants pushed back into Turkey. He said they were found near the Ipsala border crossing between Turkey and Greece "without shoes and stripped of their clothes." He didn't provide further details but shared blurred photographs of eight recovered bodies. AP

Landmark match

1000 The Indian men's cricket team will play its 1000th One-Day International when it takes on West Indies in Ahmedabad on Sunday. No other country has played 1000 ODIs in the history of the game. After India, Australia (958), Pakistan (936) and Sri Lanka (870) have played the most ODIs. India has the joint second-best win percentage of 52. Australia and South Africa have win percentages of 61, the highest among all countries. Twenty-six captains have led India in ODIs so far.

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM



Stop the spread: Health workers on a door-to-door fever survey in Hyderabad. The campaign aims to identify individuals with COVID-19 symptoms, supply medicine kits and isolate them in order to break the transmission chain in the fight against the Omicron variant. SAMARASHINHA

EXPLAINER

The sub-lineages of the Omicron variant

How many different lineages does Omicron have and how are they different from each other?

THE GIST

■ The Omicron cluster encompasses not just a single lineage but rather a family of three sister lineages branching from a common parent. These lineages are BA.1, BA.2 and BA.3 (where BA is an alias for B.1.1.529). Of the clusters, BA.1 is the most prevalent Omicron lineage worldwide, accounting for over 97% of Omicron sequences. Lineage BA.2, although less prevalent globally, is becoming the most frequent variant in recent weeks in many regions, particularly in Europe and Asia. The third sub-lineage, BA.3, is rare as of now.

■ While there are many mutations that BA.1 and BA.2 have in common, lineage BA.2 has 28 unique mutations as compared to BA.1. This number is also higher than the number of defining mutations in any previously designated VoC, including Delta (lineage B.1.617.2) which has a unique set of 17 mutations. BA.2 was first detected in India in November 2021 and has since become the dominant Omicron lineage in India, increasing from 5% of all Omicron cases in December to over 50% by January 2022.

■ A preliminary risk assessment analysis by Statens Serum Institut in Denmark estimates that BA.2 is about 1.5 times more transmissible than BA.1. But since all early work done on Omicron was primarily focused on the BA.1 lineage, additional research will be needed to see how concerning the BA.2 lineage is.

The story so far: In late November 2021, the World Health Organization designated the lineage B.1.1.529 of SARS-CoV-2 as a Variant of Concern (VoC) and assigned it the Greek alphabet Omicron. This variant was initially uncovered by researchers based on genomes from southern Africa as well as travellers from the region and was characterised by a strikingly large number of mutations, particularly in its spike protein. The Omicron variant has now been detected in over 130 countries. The variant is now present in all seven continents and associated with an uptick of COVID-19 cases in the regions where it has been detected, including infections in fully vaccinated individuals or people who were previously infected with other variants of SARS-CoV-2. Omicron continues to dominate the pandemic in most regions since early 2022, although this wave of the virus in many countries have already peaked.

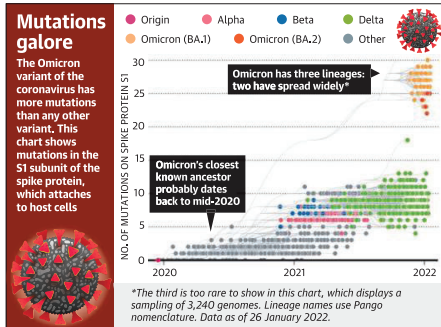
The timely detection and reporting of Omicron was a result of the efforts of researchers from South Africa, Botswana and Hong Kong who shared the initial genome sequences of the variant on GISAID, a database in which researchers from all over the world deposit sequencing data of SARS-CoV-2.

What are lineages?

The SARS-CoV-2 virus evolves by accumulation of genetic mutations. These form the basis of the continued evolution of the virus and are produced during the process of infection and replication of the virus in cells. Clusters of viruses with similar genomic mutations and a common origin are called a lineage or clade of the virus, and the naming of the lineages follows an open system contributed by researchers who form the PANGO network.

What are the sub-lineages of Omicron?

While the initial designation of the lineage was based on just seven genomes, the designation of the lineage as a VoC by the WHO has seen an accelerated pace of screening and sequencing. As a consequence, a larger number of sequences are representative of Omicron. As more genomes became available, researchers noted that not all sequences designated as Omicron had the full set of mutations that were initially reported for the variant. It was also observed that the Omicron cluster encompasses not just a



SOURCE: NATURE

single lineage but rather a family of three sister lineages branching from a common parent. These clusters were subsequently named as lineages BA.1, BA.2 and BA.3 (where BA is an alias for B.1.1.529). The VoC Omicron thus comprises all three sub-lineages, although each of them differs significantly from one another and contains common as well as unique mutations as compared to another. Of the clusters, BA.1 is the most prevalent Omicron lineage worldwide, accounting for over 97% of Omicron sequences. Lineage BA.2, although less prevalent globally, is becoming the more dominant variant in recent weeks in many regions, particularly in Europe and Asia. In Asia, BA.1 lineage is found in 85% of the total Omicron sequences while BA.2 makes up for 15% of them. The third sub-lineage, BA.3, is rare as of now, accounting for only a few hundred known cases globally and has not yet been reported from Asia.

What is the BA.2 lineage and how is it different?

As the number of COVID-19 cases is declining across many parts of the world, the lineage BA.2 is observed to be increasing in proportion in many countries and competing for dominance with the previously prevalent BA.1 lineage. The BA.2 lineage has so far been detected in over 50 countries.

While there are many mutations that BA.1 and BA.2 have in common, lineage BA.2 has 28 unique mutations as compared to BA.1 which makes it

across the world as a proxy for Omicron and deposited in a preprint server before formal peer review, suggests that household transmission is higher among contacts of BA.2-infected individuals as compared to BA.1 indicating that BA.2 is intrinsically more transmissible than BA.1. Whether this is driven by immune escape is still an open question. A preliminary combined report for all vaccines by the U.K. Health Security Agency shows that vaccine effectiveness against symptomatic COVID-19 was similar for the BA.2 and BA.1 lineages, although the report is based on a small amount of data and further research will be required to perceive vaccine efficacy.

Since all the early work done on Omicron was primarily focused on the BA.1 lineage, additional research will be needed to see how concerned we should be about the BA.2 lineage. While there are increasing indications to show that BA.2 is more effectively transmitted than BA.1, there is limited evidence yet in terms of how different BA.2 is in terms of disease severity. Very early data from countries like Denmark and India does not suggest a substantial difference in disease severity between BA.1 and BA.2.

Why is BA.2 being discussed?

The BA.2 lineage is seen to be increasing in many countries in Asia including India and in Europe, which is an early indication that the lineage is more transmissible than its sister lineage BA.1.

Despite the decrease in COVID-19 cases in many regions in recent weeks, BA.2 has been seen to be competing with BA.1 and has become the prominent lineage in some countries including Denmark, where cases continue to rise. The BA.1 lineage was detected in Denmark in November 2021 while BA.2 was first detected a few weeks later in December. By the end of January 2022, BA.2 has outcompeted BA.1 in Denmark to become the dominant lineage in the country, and its prevalence is seen to be increasing in several other countries including India, the United Kingdom, Singapore, the Philippines and South Africa.

In India, BA.2 was first detected late in November 2021, two weeks after the detection of its sister lineage BA.1. BA.2 has since become the dominant Omicron lineage in India, increasing from 5% of all Omicron cases in December to over 50% by January 2022. In the United Kingdom, an increase in the number of cases linked to BA.2 has been seen since the first week of January 2022. In South Africa, where the Omicron variant was first detected, BA.2 is seen to be growing in prevalence in the recently sequenced samples, although the Omicron wave in South Africa continues to go down.

Is the BA.2 lineage more transmissible?

A preliminary risk assessment analysis by Statens Serum Institut in Denmark estimates that BA.2 is about 1.5 times more transmissible than BA.1. Another

study conducted in Danish households and deposited in a preprint server before formal peer review, suggests that household transmission is higher among contacts of BA.2-infected individuals as compared to BA.1 indicating that BA.2 is intrinsically more transmissible than BA.1. Whether this is driven by immune escape is still an open question. A preliminary combined report for all vaccines by the U.K. Health Security Agency shows that vaccine effectiveness against symptomatic COVID-19 was similar for the BA.2 and BA.1 lineages, although the report is based on a small amount of data and further research will be required to perceive vaccine efficacy.

Since all the early work done on Omicron was primarily focused on the BA.1 lineage, additional research will be needed to see how concerned we should be about the BA.2 lineage. While there are increasing indications to show that BA.2 is more effectively transmitted than BA.1, there is limited evidence yet in terms of how different BA.2 is in terms of disease severity. Very early data from countries like Denmark and India does not suggest a substantial difference in disease severity between BA.1 and BA.2.

What next?

As the SARS-CoV-2 continues to be transmitted causing infections in a significantly large number of people, it is apparent that it will continue to accumulate mutations at a heightened pace. Being the currently dominant lineage, it is expected that several more sub-lineages of the Omicron variant are likely to come up in different regions of the world as the virus explores its evolutionary landscape and is similar to what was observed for Delta. In the context of the current Omicron wave, it is reassuring that vaccines and boosters continue to be effective in preventing severe disease. Whether BA.2 can cause reinfections in those previously infected with BA.1 and continue unabated is still an open question, for lack of evidence. Additional research efforts revolving around the BA.2 lineage in the upcoming weeks would help ascertain facts and address these pressing questions.

Meanwhile, in the periods of uncertainty, non-pharmaceutical interventions including good quality masks, ventilation and social distancing have become more important than ever in our fight against COVID-19.

The authors are researchers at the CSIR Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (CSIR-IGIB) in Delhi. All opinions expressed are personal



KEYWORD

Ethnocentrism

The tendency to view one's own group as ideal and all other groups with reference to this ideal could lead to prejudice, dislike, dominance, conflict, instability of democratic institutions, and even war

THE GIST

■ Ethnocentrism broadly refers to ethnic self-centredness and self-importance. This attitude could lead an individual to believe that their own culture or way of life is the correct way of living. It could also result in hostility towards other cultures. It was initially used in anthropology but is now used in many other disciplines.

■ Early anthropologists argued that ethnocentrism curtailed an individual's ability to understand other groups and to trust them. This feeling of superiority could lead to prejudice and active discrimination. However, later theorists argued that ethnocentrism might simply be preference for in-groups over out-groups. In other words, you can be indifferent towards perceived out-groups or even like them, but less than you like your perceived in-group. The term has assumed different definitions over the years.

■ All the expressions of ethnocentrism could be easily attributed to nationalism, but while ethnocentrism is at the level of an ethnic group, nationalism is at the level of a national group.

RADHIKA SANTHANAM

Ethnocentrism broadly refers to ethnic self-centredness and self-importance. This attitude could lead an individual to believe that their own culture or way of life is the correct way of living. It could also result in hostility towards other cultures. Ethnocentrism is therefore the tendency to view one's own group, the 'in-group', as the archetype and all other groups, the 'out-groups', with reference to this ideal. The in-group's boundaries are defined by one or more observable characteristics such as language, accent, physical features or religion, indicating common descent. While initially used in anthropology, the term is now used widely in sociology, psychology, political science, economics and markets, among other disciplines.

Changing definitions

Scientific interest in the term ethnocentrism started in the late 19th and early 20th century. Charles Darwin argued that competition with other groups makes people more cooperative with members of their own group, which further influences group prosperity (Boris Bizumic, 2012). Herbert Spencer argued that societies in general are characterised by internal affinity (towards members of one's group) and external enmity (towards everyone else). Neither of them used the term ethnocentrism, however. Developing their ideas, it was the anthropologist William Sumner who is first said to have coined the term in 1906 in his book *Folkways* and also used the concepts 'in-groups' and 'out-groups'. However, it was the geologist and anthropologist William John McGee who is said to have first used the term in print. For McGee, ethnocentrism was a particular way of thinking similar to egocentrism, but characteristic of ethnic groups. Robert A. Levine, an anthropologist, and Donald T. Campbell, a social psychologist, argued that ethnocentrism is a set of 23 characteristics, nine of which are positive attitudes towards a perceived in-group (such as perceptions about virtue and morals) and 14 of which are negative attitudes towards a perceived out-group (such as distrust, suspicion and blame). Early anthropologists argued that this feeling of superiority about the in-group curtailed an individual's ability to understand the practices and values of other groups and to trust them. This

feeling, they said, could lead to prejudice, dislike, dominance, ethnic conflict, instability of democratic institutions, and even war. Ethnocentrism can also affect consumer choices and voting.

However, later theorists argued that ethnocentrism might simply be preference for in-groups over out-groups. They said that the segregation of in-groups and out-groups should not necessarily be attributed to bias. In other words, they argued that you can be indifferent towards perceived out-groups or even like them, but less than you like your perceived in-group. Or you may dislike an out-group, but that attitude might not necessarily translate into some sort of discriminatory behaviour in a given situation. The ways of defining ethnocentrism has thus kept changing and there is no definite consensus on the meaning of the term even today.

There are many examples of ethnocentric behaviour. Let's try to understand this concept with a simple example that some of us may be familiar with or may have experienced. Ravi in India prefers to eat food with his hands. Ravi invites his American friend, Robert, to attend his sister's wedding in India. When Robert arrives at the wedding, he is horrified to see everyone eating with their hands instead of using cutlery, as they do mostly in the U.S. Robert makes a rude remark about this unfamiliar practice, which makes Ravi angry. Robert's attitude may be conscious or unconscious but his inability to accept this way of eating food as another culture's practice and his tendency to view it as primitive while seeing his own culture as superior or advanced is ethnocentric.

Ethnocentrism is also quite similar to nationalism. All the expressions of ethnocentrism, such as feelings of superiority and even hostility towards out-groups, could be easily attributed to nationalism, but while ethnocentrism is at the level of an ethnic group, nationalism is at the level of a national group. Nevertheless, it is also important to note that nationalism also assumes certain factors that are not necessary for ethnocentrism. National groups are defined by the belongingness to a group that inhabits a national state or aspires to form a national state whereas ethnic groups do not require national states to be called ethnic groups, and they may lack a shared public culture or even territory (Smith, 2001). Ethnocentric feelings and attitudes such as

preference for a familiar culture and group superiority have been exploited by nationalism.

A study from India

We can also understand ethnocentrism with a study from India. In a paper published in 1974 in the *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, Donald M. Taylor and Vaishna Jaggi tried to understand ethnocentrism and causal relations in the south Indian context. Thirty Hindus were asked to attribute the behaviour of their in-group (Hindus) and out-group (in this case, Muslims) performing socially desirable or undesirable acts to internal or external causes. The subjects in the study were presented with a series of one-paragraph descriptions of an actor behaving in a social context. They were asked to imagine that they were in that situation and the actor was directing the behaviour at them. Each situation depicted one of four situations involving a Hindu or Muslim behaving towards them in a desirable or undesirable way. The situations included a shopkeeper being generous to the subject or cheating the subject and a teacher praising or scolding the subject.

For each paragraph, the subject was provided with four or five possible reasons for the behaviour. One of these reflected internal attributions (Hindu shopkeepers are generous or Hindus are rude) and the remaining reflected external attributions (the actor was compelled by social rules to behave as he did or there was a misunderstanding between the actor and the perceiver). The study found that Hindus were more favourable to their in-group. They were more likely to make internal attributions for socially desirable behaviour performed by Hindus than for socially undesirable behaviour. Thus, they said Hindu shopkeepers are generous or Hindu teachers praise students. Conversely, undesirable behaviour performed by the same were not seen as reflections of internal behaviour but caused by external factors. The subjects reversed their internal attributions for Muslim actors. Thus, they made internal attributions for socially undesirable behaviour (cheating was seen to reflect the internal characteristic of the actor) and external attributions for socially desirable behaviour. The study showed how ethnocentrism is evidenced not only in the form of generalised attitudes but also in the form of attributions for specific behaviour.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

"Good evening, sir."
"Good evening."
"Sir, today I bought a new transistor. I disposed off the old one."

"Congratulations! I hope you got a good price for your old transistor. By the way, you dispose of something. You don't dispose off something or dispose something off. Examples:

I disposed of my car.
He disposed of his old books.

So dispose of 'dispose off'. 'Dispose off' is extensively used in our country but that doesn't make it correct. I hope you understand."

"Yes, sir, Sir, I want to do my M.A. through correspondence."

"M.A. in English?"
No, sir. M.A. in Economics."

"Good luck. I am sure you will do well. Incidentally, you do your M.A. by correspondence rather than through correspondence. 'By' here means 'by means of'. Examples:

English by radio, English by correspondence.

'By' refers to the physical means of transmission.

I left by air.
I got the book by post.

'Through' is used to describe artistic media like drama, dancing and music.

You will be transported to a different world altogether through his music.

'Through' has other meanings also. I am talking about the use of 'by' and 'through' in the context of your statement.

"Sir, is there any difference between 'idle' and 'lazy'?"

Yes. An idle person is one who will not do anything useful. He is not lazy. In fact, he may be busy with trifles. A student may be busy on the sportsfield but he may not study. He is scolded for idling away his time. A lazy man will not exert himself physically. An idle man may not do anything that you may consider useful but he is not really lazy. Careful writers and speakers maintain the distinction between the two. But most people use them indiscriminately.

"Sir, next month I am going to Guntur to attend a conference. I am looking forward to it."

"Where will you stay there?"

"I don't know, sir. The organisers are making arrangements for my boarding and lodging."

"That's very good. By the way, it is 'board and lodging' and not 'boarding and lodging'."

Example:
I pay £300 for board and lodging."

"Sir, everywhere I find only 'boarding and lodging'. It is strange. English is a difficult language."

"A Frenchman called English a crazy language when he heard someone say, 'Mr. X. who is a sitting member will run for office in the next election.'"

"Sir, when I travel by bus and when I want to get off at some place, I generally shout 'hold on'. 'Hold on' means 'continue'. Of course, this is one of the meanings of 'hold on'. So shouldn't I say 'hold up' rather than 'hold on' to 'hold on'?"

"No, in this context 'hold up' is not used at all. 'Hold on' is a colloquial expression meaning 'stop', 'wait'. So 'hold on' to 'hold on' and don't switch to 'hold up'. In this context 'hold up' will be inappropriate.

Well, I must stop now. Otherwise you might say 'hold on'!"

"Thank you sir. Goodbye."
"Goodbye."

THE DAILY QUIZ

Rafael Nadal became the first men's tennis player to win 21 Grand Slam singles titles surpassing his rivals Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic, who have won 20 each. How much do you know about the 'Big Three'?

1 Only two men in history have won the Olympic gold in both the singles and doubles events. One among them is Chilean Nicolas Pietrangeli who won both the titles in the 2004 Athens edition of the Games. Name the other and the year in which he accomplished the feat.

2 Roger Federer won his first Wimbledon title in 2003, which was his fifth appearance. In three of his previous appearances he did not progress past the first round. However, in one of them he reached the quarter final. En-route he defeated a tournament favourite. Who did he beat and in which year?

3 Novak Djokovic holds the record for the most weeks as world number 1. For how many weeks has he held the top rank as

on January 30, 2022?

4 Federer has won _____ number of titles in his singles career and is only second to 23 characteristics, nine of which are positive attitudes towards a perceived in-group (such as perceptions about virtue and morals) and 14 of which are negative attitudes towards a perceived out-group (such as distrust, suspicion and blame). Early anthropologists argued that this feeling of superiority about the in-group curtailed an individual's ability to understand the practices and values of other groups and to trust them. This

5 Rafael Nadal has played 108 matches in the French Open. He has won 105 of them and lost three. Only two players have ever defeated him. Novak Djokovic beat him in 2015 and 2021. Who is the other player who beat him and in what year?

6 A calendar slam is when a player wins all the four Grand Slams in a single year. A golden slam is when a player wins all the four tournaments and the Olympic gold in a single year. Steffi Graf is the only player, among both men and women, to win a golden slam while Rod Laver is the last men's player to win a calendar slam. Djokovic was on course to win both last year but lost in the semi-final at the Olympics and in the U.S. Open final. Name the player/s who beat him.



◀ Name the event, year and what is so special about this match? ▶ ATP, OLYMPICS.COM

Please send in your answers to the dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in

Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. Yashwanth Sinha, 2. Indra Gandhi, 3. 2017, Arun Jaitley, 4. Moraji Desai, 5. The word Budget comes from the French word 'Bougette', which means leather briefcase. Finance Ministers have always appeared with a leather briefcase for the annual exercise. In 2019, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman ditched the briefcase and opted for the 'Bahi Khata' to carry the Budget papers, 6. The 'halwa ceremony' organised by the Finance Ministry. It indicates the start of the 'lock in' period for officials associated with the Budget.

Early Birds: Kailash Maswani Kavitha Pavithran Divyadarshini VJ Durga Anil Muddanai Rushikesh Telange

For feedback and suggestions for Text & Context, please write to letters@thehindu.co.in with the subject 'Text & Context'

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

TREADING GINGERLY

On both growth and revenue estimates, the Union budget has been cautious, building in buffers

THE UNION BUDGET numbers indicate that the government has once again chosen to be conservative in the assumptions it has made for estimating its fiscal position. To begin with, it has assumed a nominal GDP growth at 11.1 per cent in 2022-23. This seems cautious, considering that the Economic Survey, tabled a day earlier, had pegged real GDP growth at 8-8.5 per cent. In a similar vein, for the upcoming financial year, it has estimated tax collections to grow even lower than nominal GDP growth — gross tax revenues are pegged to grow at just 9.6 per cent. Even for the last quarter (January-December) of this year, the government appears to have been rather cautious in its estimation of revenue receipts. Based on tax collections in the first nine months of the year (April to December), and the revised estimates for the full year, it appears that the Centre has budgeted for tax collections to fall in the last quarter. If collections this year outstrip the revised estimates, it will make the task of achieving next year's targets even less challenging. These relatively safe assumptions will act as inbuilt buffers against any unforeseen events.

Next year, the government expects direct taxes to grow at 13.6 per cent, while indirect taxes are pegged to grow at a mere 5.7 per cent. Slower growth of the latter is largely on account of excise collections estimated to fall from the levels observed in the current year, presumably due to the cuts in fuel taxes. Under non-tax revenue, the government expects lower dividends from public sector enterprises, as well as transfers from the RBI. Telcos are expected to fork out Rs 52,806 crore mainly on account of licence fees and spectrum usage charges, with a part likely to accrue from the proceeds of the 5G spectrum auctions. The disinvestment target too has been cut down to Rs 65,000 crore in 2022-23, down from expectations of garnering Rs 78,000 crore in 2021-22.

On the expenditure side, even as the Centre's capital expenditure has been budgeted to grow at 24.4 per cent (more has been allocated for housing, railways and roads), its revenue expenditure is projected to grow barely by 1 per cent. As a consequence, spending on items has been restricted. The subsidy bill has been pruned, and allocations to schemes such as MGNREGA have been cut. And while education has seen an uptick, the health expenditure remains at almost the same level. What has increased is interest payments. With the Centre's borrowings having risen sharply, so has its interest outgo — interest payments now account for 23.8 per cent of total expenditure, up from 19.4 per cent in 2020-21. Considering that the general government debt is around 90 per cent of GDP, it is disconcerting that not much attention has been given to the medium-term fiscal roadmap.

TALK IT OUT

Move in Maldives to outlaw protests against government's foreign policy is ill-advised. MDP should engage with protesters

THE MALDIVIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY, the ruling party in the Indian Ocean atoll nation, wants to outlaw protests against the government's foreign policy on grounds that these endanger national security. It has drafted a bill prescribing fines and jail sentences as penalties against violators. The bill is clearly aimed at protests ongoing for about two years against the MDP government's perceived proximity to India. The "India Out movement" believes that India has a large military footprint on Maldivian soil. This belief became further entrenched after the two countries signed an agreement in February 2021 for the development of a coast guard base for the Maldivian National Defence Force in the Uthuru Thilafalhu atoll. The campaign gathered steam following the release from house arrest of former president Abdulla Yameen in December, after a court overturned his conviction in an embezzlement case. During his presidency, Yameen brought in a pronounced pro-China tilt to his government's foreign policy, much to Delhi's dismay. When Ibrahim Mohamed Solih was elected in 2017, the new government declared an "India First" policy. India is now building a \$500 million infrastructure project, the Greater Male Connectivity Project, billed as the biggest ever in the Maldives. A draft of the bill that targets protests that "negatively affect relations with foreign countries" may be submitted when the Majlis, the country's parliament, meets today. This is an ill-advised move.

It is ironic that a party that has "democratic" as its middle name is now preparing to bring in a law that will restrict freedom of expression. This can only hand the opposition a stick to beat the MDP with, and whip up more anti-India sentiment. In the present atmosphere, it would not be a surprise if an Indian hand is seen behind the legislation, heightening suspicions that the MDP is putting people's rights at stake to please India. It must not be forgotten that some 30,000 Indians live and work in the Maldives. The sustained campaign is now causing concern in the Indian expatriate community.

The better option for the MDP would be to engage more with the protesters and address their concerns, by being transparent about Indian projects in the country. The fact that it is the party, and not the government, that has been spearheading the need for such legislation, indicates that not all in the MDP are on the same page. It would be in the nation's and MDP's own political interests to drop the idea entirely.

SPLENDID ISOLATION

Kyoto faces financial ruin thanks to the lack of tourists due to pandemic. But there are gains too

KYOTO'S VOICES SEEM tragically commonplace in the Covid-19 era: In 2019, the year before the pandemic struck, Kyoto received about 8 million visitors. In 2021, the number of tourists shrunk to less than 2,500,000 — an over 99 per cent drop. Without the tourist spending, Mayor Daisaku Kadokawa has warned that the Japanese town could face bankruptcy within the decade. Yet, the residents of Kyoto are divided over the recent developments. For many, the escape from tourists has come as a welcome respite.

Even before 2020, there were movements in Kyoto against "tourism pollution". Rich, entitled foreigners — most visitors are well-heeled considering how expensive Japan is — insisted on taking selfies with locals, many of whom just wanted to enjoy a quiet cup of tea sans interruptions. Restaurants had to deal with ill-mannered tourists who didn't show up after reserving half the place for a large party. The public transport system was unable to support the influx of joyriders, making the commute to work all that more difficult. And perhaps most irritating of all, as devotees made the long climb up to the Kiyomizu-dera Buddhist temple, buses and vans full of "loud Americans" would already have beaten them to it, piercing the calm.

Kyoto's harried denizens will probably find sympathetic ears in Nainital and Darjeeling, Goa and Ooty. For all the inherent hostility in many cultures — there are versions of "atithi daiva bhava" across Asia and beyond — there is something irritating about the loud entitlement of the paying customer, believing as he does that he is always right. Not getting a table at your favourite hometown restaurant and finding a hillside or beach littered with Kurkure packets only makes matters worse. But, for better or worse, when people circulate, so does money. And the t-shirt seller and street food vendor in Kyoto need that cash almost as much as their counterparts in Kanyakumari.



NK SINGH

EACH BUDGET MUST respond to the contemporary challenges and be sensitive to the mood of the times. In this sense, this year is somewhat unique.

The raging pandemic imposed atypical expenditure burdens. Uncertainties on the path of the pandemic loom large. This circumscribes policy prognosis. The elections in five important states, including Uttar Pradesh, loom large. Its outcome would determine the political course for policymakers vis a vis far-reaching economic and structural reforms. Domain experts have concluded that monetary policy has run out of steam. The efficacy of any policy of forbearance and extending guarantees or moratoriums is no substitute for fiscal action. Fiscal stimulus is stressed for job creation and relief to the MSME sector and the informal sector.

In this context, this budget is a commendable balancing act. It is seeking symmetry between contradictory pulls and pressures. It represents continuity with trust.

To begin with, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman was truthful that this was no time for tax reprieves. The fact that she has not resorted to tax increases normally expected during a pandemic through enhanced health cess or a pandemic tax is no mean achievement. Continuity in tax policies is central and obviating unpleasant surprises reinforces investor confidence.

Second, the continued emphasis on capital expenditure (capex), which decisively alters outcomes of public outlays is a long-awaited expenditure reform. Capex has gone up by 26 per cent, from Rs 4.39 trillion in FY21 to Rs 5.54 trillion in FY22. Job creation will be the direct outcome of enhanced capex and altering of employment patterns in seeking more gainful employment and asset creation, such as through the National Highways Development Programme and the National Infrastructure, giving an impetus to Gati Shakti.

Third, this focus on productive capex comes ahead of elections in five states. The government could have been distracted by more direct monetary support to influence the electoral psyche. The decision to stay away from a populist budget is consistent with the PM's objective to enhance long-term competitive efficiency supporting growth objectives and a new export thrust.

A fiscal consolidation of half percentage point for the following year is significant. This



TRISHA RAY

WE OFTEN THINK of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies as a gateway to a future written in chrome, operating on a virtual cloud. This techno-optimism underpinned PM Nirmala Sitharaman's 2022 budget speech, where AI was described as a sunrise technology that would "assist sustainable development at scale and modernise the country". While there is an allure to national dreams of economic prosperity and global competitiveness, underwritten by AI, there is an environmental cost and — like any issue at the nexus of technology, development, growth and security — a cost that comes with being locked into rules about said environmental impact set by powerful actors.

The "race" for dominance in AI is far from fair. Not only do a few developed economies possess certain material advantages right from the start, they also set the rules. They have an advantage in research and development, and possess a skilled workforce as well as wealth to invest in AI. North America and East Asia alone account for three-fourths of global private investment in AI patents and publications.

We can also look at the state of inequity in AI in terms of governance. How "tech fluent" are policymakers in developing and underdeveloped countries? What barriers do they face in crafting regulations and industrial policy? Are they sufficiently represented and empowered at the international bodies that set rules

The budget's balance

It seeks symmetry between pulls and pressures of growth and stability, finds a path of continuity, trust

This budget must be read in conjunction with the statements of fiscal policy as required under the FRBM Act, which includes statements of the macroeconomic framework and medium term fiscal policy cum strategy.

According to the IMF's Fiscal Monitor report published in late October 2021, countries which have a fiscal rule must focus more clearly on cyclically adjusted fiscal balance. On debt, the report suggests even a longer timeframe of aligning emerging markets' original debt targets anywhere beyond 10 years. The current debt to GDP of 90.6 per cent is somewhat above comfort levels. Given that the debt stock is high, spectacular changes cannot be expected in one year. However, the direction is a positive one.

is consistent with the objectives of a 4.5 per cent fiscal deficit at the end of 2024-25. No doubt, this is somewhat higher than the stipulated 3 per cent in the FRBM Act and a little misaligned with the 4 per cent suggested by the Finance Commission. However, this exercise commenced last year and continued this year in taking on all extra budgetary borrowings, contingent liabilities and extra budgetary resources, reinforces the credibility of our accounting process.

One of the outstanding achievements is the somewhat unexpected revenue buoyancy. Painful but sustained efforts in improving GST outcomes as well as on direct taxes will result in tax to GDP of around 10.7 per cent over the next year. This is a significant gain considering that tax to GDP has for long languished far below its potential. The GST Council must now engage in more decisive action in broad banding, inverted duty structure and including excluded items as well as improving all-round compliance. We are, by international reckoning, losing about 4 percentage points of GDP in our overall revenue realisation. A coherent plan on sustaining our current revenue buoyancy would be keenly watched.

This budget must be read in conjunction with the statements of fiscal policy as required under the FRBM Act, which includes statements of the macroeconomic framework and medium term fiscal policy cum strategy. According to the IMF's Fiscal Monitor report published in late October 2021, countries which have a fiscal rule must focus more clearly on cyclically adjusted fiscal balance. On debt, the report suggests even a longer timeframe of aligning emerging markets' original debt targets anywhere beyond 10 years. The current debt to GDP of 90.6 per cent is somewhat above comfort levels. Given that the debt stock is high, spectacular changes cannot be expected in one year. However, the direction is a positive one.

For the agriculture sector, the setback on farm reforms could have shelved further action. Yet the budget strategy includes improving the farm incomes and long term productivity of agriculture including crop diversification. The digitisation of land records is important for market based economies to be benefited by the agriculture sector.

On education, the need for bridging the digital divide has been echoed. The setting up of 200 TV stations as well as digital universi-

WORDLY WISE
PEOPLE CRUSHED BY LAWS HAVE NO HOPE
BUT TO EVADE POWER.
— EDMUND BURKE

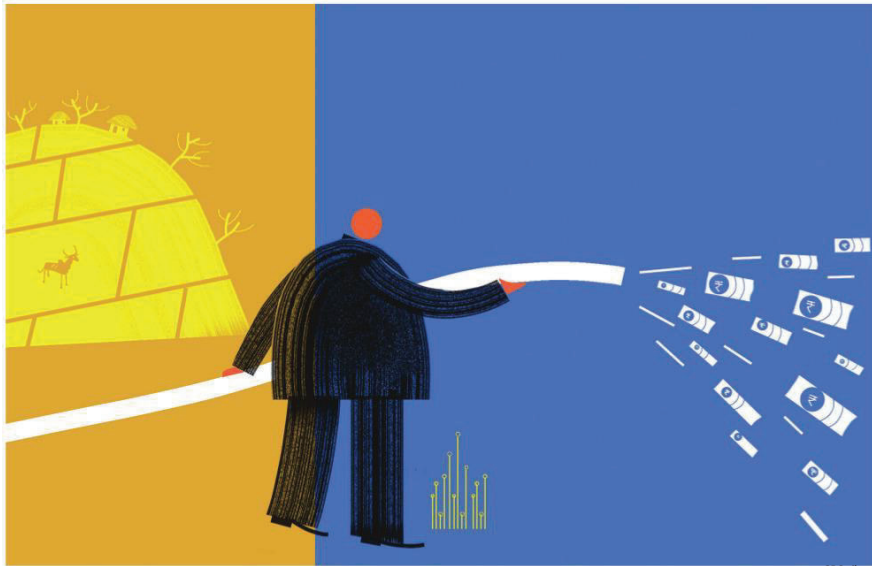
ties are important steps. On technology, the spectrum of 5G mentioned in the budget along with Artificial Intelligence and machine learning will enhance the reach of the technology revolution.

The need for more integrated urban planning in making the urban sector a true engine of growth has been echoed in the budget with the recommendation of the formation of a high-level committee. Attention has been given to Gati Shakti being replicated for the Northeast states. The encouragement of the states for enhancing capex by supporting capital outlays of Rs 1 lakh crore would make a significant difference in their efforts to strengthen infrastructure development through the state highways, Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, and other related logistics. Equally, acting on the recommendation of the Fifteenth Finance Commission, the acceptance of a borrowing limit of 4 per cent than the 3 per cent in the state FRBM with 0.5 per cent earmarked for power sector reforms will improve the states' overall economic efficiencies.

In terms of the road ahead, there are a few areas where we can reinforce our actions. First, public outlay on health has remained somewhat static. Hopefully this would be somewhat rectified.

Second, the delay in the programme of the BharatNet Scheme for providing high-speed digital connectivity to all villages. Third, on the energy transition and the outcomes of COP26 and reiterating the commitments of PM Modi's Panamitri. The green bonds will augment resources but each of the ingredients of the Panamitri deserve closer attention including a coal transition map. The net zero target imposes obligations for a non-disruptive transition to renewable green technology. Fourth, innovative steps to garner private investment through guarantees and regulatory changes are important. Fifth, the creation of credible fiscal transition map. The net zero target imposes obligations for a non-disruptive transition to renewable green technology. Fourth, innovative steps to garner private investment through guarantees and regulatory changes are important. Fifth, the creation of credible fiscal transition map. 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THE IDEAS PAGE



The seeds not planted

This budget will be remembered for its silence on the problems of farmers, its lack of a long-term vision for agriculture



AJAY VIR JAKHAR

THE FINANCE MINISTER'S frequent references to the "Amrit Kaal" — India's 25-year-long lead-up to its first centenary of Independence in 2047 — in her budget speech, frame, in no small measure, the government's accomplishment of running the world's largest welfare programme: Feeding 800 million in the country free or subsidised food. As a farmer, however, one hopes a better measure of accomplishment would have been the country not having to feed anyone for free because everyone can afford nutritious meals.

Times have been harsh and, with the pandemic adding to the severity of the situation, the youth in all parts of the country has been engulfed by anxiety. Over a fourth of the country's youth are without employment and that is without even factoring in the disguised unemployment across rural India. After the farmers' protest — globally the largest and the longest — rattled up pressure on the government, students are now agitating for jobs. It seems that an era of mass protests is beginning. The finance ministry has lost its appetite for bold announcements and the government, overly influenced by foreign consultants and businesses, remains resolute in falsely assuming that a trickle-down economy will solve the problem. Unemployment remains the biggest challenge faced by the country. It is like a powder-keg waiting to go off.

There is much more at stake though. Inflation has raised its head and the emerging picture is frightening. People will only be able to afford less nutritious food, poor households will see their savings dwindle, medical treatment will be deferred, more food will be cooked by burning wood, and education degrees will lose their relevance. That will be India adjusting to a new normal. The illusion of PM KISAN is unravelling in the villages — the monthly dole of Rs 500, limited to the landowning classes, does not even cover the rise in gas cylinder prices, two-wheeler fuel costs, the hike in tractor diesel prices, or healthcare and education costs that have shot up multiple times. It's quite possible that in Budget 2023, a year before the parliamentary elections, the government will double the PM KISAN amount to Rs 1,000.

This year, at least, the finance minister did not fall for electoral populism. Arguably, the backlog of problems received by Nirmala Sitharaman left her with little room to manoeuvre. The rising global fuel and fertiliser prices have forced tougher choices upon the nation.

The allocation for the Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying is up substantially, as are the funds apportioned for the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana. One can only hope the talk of millets and oilseeds will be backed by real resources unlike the allocations for natural farming. But there are also instances of reduction and stagnancy in budgetary allocations for departments like rural development and health. Programmes guaranteeing rural employment have been slashed as well. Even when there is an increase in allocation — for instance, agriculture research and education — it does not even offset the level of inflation. After six years of rhetoric, the slogan of doubling farmers' incomes has expectedly and conveniently been forgotten. This budget will be remembered for its silence on the problems of farmers, its lack of a long-term vision for agriculture

Inflation has raised its head and the emerging picture is frightening. People will only be able to afford less nutritious food, poor households will see their savings dwindle, medical treatment will be deferred, more food will be cooked by burning wood, and education degrees will lose their relevance. That will be India adjusting to a new normal. The illusion of PM KISAN is unravelling in the villages — the monthly dole of Rs 500, limited to the landowning classes, does not even cover the rise in gas cylinder prices, two-wheeler fuel costs, the hike in tractor diesel prices, or healthcare and education costs that have shot up multiple times.

berred for its eerie silence on making a difference to Indian agriculture. International inflationary concerns were flagged as a problem in the Economic Survey, but one must realise that improved international commodity prices also help agriculture grow. Farmers have responded to higher prices with higher agriculture productivity. The FM, however, tripped up in not declaring a statutory imposition of import duties on crops where the landing cost is below the MSP (where declared) or below remunerative prices (where there is no MSP) — this would have ensured that these crops do not enter Indian markets below a threshold price.

The states — as well as the Centre — are highly indebted with a large portion of revenue receipts being used for interest payments. But there is a desperate rush for creating new physical infrastructure rather than prioritising human resources by filling up vacancies in all critical departments such as the police, health, agriculture extension, animal husbandry, education, revenue, and administrative services. These omissions are tantamount to transferring the costs, including the costs of missed opportunities, to future generations.

The government refuses to confront the reality that social welfare schemes need to be sustainable. It has also wasted the occasion by not committing to repurpose farm subsidies to payment for farm ecosystem services. Hopes for MSP procurement for crops other than wheat and paddy have been belied. Overall, one senses the absence of a long-term vision. Agriculture, like other departments, has been asked to solve its problem in isolation. It is not as if India's growth story is jinxed. It's just that the policymakers routinely mistake a plan for a strategy and refuse to even acknowledge the difference.

The writer is chairman, Bharat Krishi Samaj

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

Just when it seemed that the Big Three's time was coming to an end, Nadal came up with a sucker punch — DAWN

A budget that looks away

With the economy in a precarious position, one expected some awareness of it in the budget. It has turned out to be a non-event, ignoring the poor



PRABHAT PATNAIK

THE SETTING for the 2022-23 Union Budget was quite unprecedented: Acute unemployment, growing poverty, burgeoning wealth and income inequalities, and accelerating inflation. One expected to find in the budget some measures for stimulating the economy, and also some gesture towards alleviating distress. Such alleviation, even if not used as the primary means of stimulating the economy, could have constituted a set of separate and additional provisions. This was not to be. The budget has been a gigantic non-event, blithely ignoring the economy's travails and providing neither stimulus nor succour to the poor.

True, the budget envisages a rise in capital expenditure by the government but if we look at total government expenditure, which is what matters from the point of view of aggregate demand, the increase is only Rs 1.75 lakh crore, from Rs 3.77 lakh crore in 2021-22 (RE) to Rs 39.45 lakh crore in 2022-23 — a 4.6 per cent rise. This is even lower than the inflation rate. In real terms, the budgeted total expenditure change is thus negative. Government expenditure as a proportion of GDP is set to decline sharply, entailing a dampening effect on the economy.

Likewise, the provision for MGNREGA, a lifeline for the poor, is pegged at Rs 73,000 crore, lower than Rs 98,000 crore in 2021-22 (RE) and Rs 1.11 lakh crore in 2020-21. It would be argued that this being a demand-driven scheme, the outlay can be expanded if necessary. What this argument misses is that such an expansion of outlay takes time, and delayed wage payment in the interim discourages demand. The initial budgetary provision is, therefore, important.

This damp squib of a budget implies that the perverse fiscal strategy the Modi government has been putting into effect of late is allowed to persist. This strategy consists in giving tax concessions to the rich (expecting them to invest more), while restricting the fiscal deficit through higher indirect taxation, notably on oil. Even in the current budget, the oil price is set to increase for consumers because of the additional excise duty of Rs 2 per litre on unblended fuel.

This fiscal strategy is a perverse one for several reasons. First, it is inhumane, inegalitarian and hence anti-democratic. Its inhumanity, in contrast to other resource mobilisation measures like a wealth tax, is so appalling that a group of American billionaires on the occasion of the Davos summit expressed their desire for being taxed more so that the poor are spared. Second, it goes against what advanced capitalist countries like the US have been trying to do. The Biden administration's recovery strategy entails spending more, including on welfare schemes, by resorting to heavier, not lighter, corporate taxation. It has, in fact, even negotiated an international industry-agreed minimum corporate tax rate to prevent corporates from parking profits in tax havens. Third, it has been a major contributory factor to the phe-

nomenon of inflationary recession that is plaguing the Indian economy. Raising fuel taxes raises prices in general and since the money incomes of the working people do not increase in tandem, there is a reduction in real demand, and hence a recession. Fourth, precisely because of this recession that develops, the increase in private corporate investment, that had supposedly constituted the justification for such tax concessions, does not materialise. On the contrary, the larger unutilised capacity in existing units, that arises because of the recession, causes a curtailment in private investment.

This perverse fiscal strategy, which one hoped would be abandoned in the current budget, continues even as the government itself admits that private investment is unresponsive to tax concessions which is why it has decided to increase public investment hoping that it would "crowd in" private investment.

The budget, by doing nothing either for alleviating distress or for reviving the economy, shows not just a lack of concern; it is dangerous because all indications point to a worsening of the situation because of both internal and external developments. Internally, whatever recovery has occurred in 2021-22 relative to 2019-20 has not touched real consumption expenditure, which continues to be below its 2019-20 level. The level of capacity utilisation in consumer goods sectors, therefore, cannot be higher than in 2019-20. In fact, since there has been some addition to capacity meanwhile, because of the lagged effect of investment decisions taken earlier, unutilised capacity in these sectors has obviously increased, which means that investment will come down, and its multiplier effects on consumption will make it shrink further. This recovery, therefore, unlike what the Economic Survey predicts, cannot last.

Externally, the oil price is on the rise, with many expecting it to reach \$100 per barrel soon. The Modi government, whose revenue comes substantially from taxing petro-products, will then have to pass on the higher import price to the consumers for fear of losing revenue otherwise, which will only exacerbate domestic inflation. What is more, the near-zero interest rate policy pursued in the US and elsewhere till now, which had enabled India to access global financial flows easily for balancing its external payments, is coming to an end because of the acceleration of inflation there. This threatens a depreciation in the external value of the rupee and that will add further to the rate of inflation in the Indian economy, including through higher rupee prices of imported oil whose dollar price itself is rising. This, in turn, will add further to recession and unemployment, as curbing inflation acquires priority.

With the economy in such a precarious position, one expected some awareness of it in the budget. Such an awareness would have suggested a shift towards greater imposts on the rich through wealth or corporate income taxation. At least some reversal of the perverse fiscal strategy being pursued could have been signalled or some other strategy for coping with the situation could have been tabled for discussion. The budget also appears oblivious of these developments and that is a dangerous portent.

The writer is former professor of economics at JNU, Delhi

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A MIXED BAG

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Measured steps & a leap to spend" (IE, February 2). The finance minister should be complimented for avoiding a populist budget. However, she must be questioned for not adequately addressing inequality and poverty. Pruning MGNREGA and PDS allocations on the assumption of normalcy being restored soon is risky and could prolong the suffering of the poor. Similarly, the hesitation to tax the wealthy, who did not respond favourably to an earlier corporate tax cut by investing more, is surprising and will only exacerbate the inequality gap. Increased capex is the redeeming feature of the budget, with its employment potential which, though spread out, could bring relief to the jobless many.

Hemant Contractor, Pune

UNSEEN CONDUCT

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Unblock" (IE, February 2). From the Day Manu Bhanerjee returned to power with a thumping majority in the last West Bengal assembly elections, she has been acting as the head of a separate country. She has the entire state administration at her beck and call — even senior IAS officers refuse to obey the Centre's orders of recall — and has been questioning almost every policy decision of

the Centre which she believes erroneously is against the federal structure of the Constitution. The present governor does not conform to her expectation of a submissive figurehead. As such their regular confrontation inside and beyond the public domain have become lamentable.

Y G Choudhary, Pune

BASICS MISSING

THIS REFERS TO the article, "Voices the budget didn't hear" (IE, February 2). While the booster shot for capex and infrastructure development in Budget 2022 is duly appreciated it has a lot of misses as well. In many ways, the FM has left the nation high and dry. Instead of providing resources and stimulus for the private sector to take over capex for roads and railways, the government has decided to be the leading player. It's a surprise that tax incentives were not given for startups in the technology space considering that future growth will be driven by technology. (IE, February 2). From the Day Manu Bhanerjee returned to power with a thumping majority in the last West Bengal assembly elections, she has been acting as the head of a separate country. She has the entire state administration at her beck and call — even senior IAS officers refuse to obey the Centre's orders of recall — and has been questioning almost every policy decision of

Gaurav Gupta, Pune



BENITA FERNANDO

Why I wear a mask

It is a chance the healthy give to the vulnerable in the pandemic

THREE MONTHS after the pandemic started, my family faced the stressful diagnosis of cancer. A loved one would have to undergo a prolonged treatment plan spanning up to a year. If the pandemic was exacerbating, managing cancer in it seemed doubly so. The vaccine was a distant hope at this point. A flu episode could be difficult to manage for a cancer patient with suppressed immunity, so one couldn't imagine what Covid might mean. It came to define my family's perspective on masking up, one that hasn't changed till date.

The chance of isolation or social distancing was impractical if you are making multiple trips to hospitals and labs, as we were. It was hard to say if we, as patients and caregivers, would dodge the virus or not. The best we could do — all we could do — was to just sit tight behind our masks. Not all may agree, but for a cancer patient, a mask can determine the difference between lesser suffering or more, life and death. It's knowledge that I wasn't aware of some years ago.

For a decade, lived in the vicinity of one of South Asia's best, and busiest, cancer centres in Mumbai. On mundane trips to buy groceries or take the bus, I'd see patients,

many of them children, wearing masks in crowded street corners and food stalls around the hospital. In my biased ignorance, I like many others, assumed that the patients had to hide their faces, perhaps they didn't want to be contagious. A mask in public was a sign of weakness and a sign of sickness. It was ominous unless you were a camera-toting tourist. It was similar to why people avoid going to a doctor — seeking a diagnosis means you are sick, not the other way round. Things changed dramatically with the cancer diagnosis. In the last two years, I have told off customers at markets for wearing their masks incorrectly or for not wearing them at all. I have made snide comments in packed elevators and shamed people into pulling up their masks. The municipal corporation should be thankful. All this only because I knew that I couldn't afford to catch a virus that would create a cross-mutation of irreversible crisis in the family.

Today I find great joy and even liberation in masking up — I no longer smile politely at dull jokes or casual sexism, my eye make-up has improved significantly and I can talk to myself in public without drawing attention. My family wears masks as much as possible

while waiting the course of the cancer treatment, sometimes doubling up in the second wave. It's impossible for cancer patients to be masked up all the time, not only because they have difficulty breathing or are panicking or want a good cry or a wave of nausea has hit them. Sometimes it's logistically unmanageable — like with feeding tubes that are needed in certain cases. If patients eat when they can or at appointed hours, it means that some of this has to be done in crowded spots, which is practically all of Mumbai.

It's why the current messaging around "mild" Omicron is disconcerting. It's ableist, to start with. If you are young, or with no comorbidities, then Omicron may be as tolerable as a bad cold. With healthy populations reporting that Omicron hasn't felt mild by any means, for cancer patients and others with immunocompromised conditions, Omicron can be twice as severe or lead to delays and interruptions in treatment plans. To say that Omicron is inevitable is to say that immunosuppressed people just have to deal with it, over and above everything else.

Our approach towards the pandemic and safety measures is also true of how cities are

planned in India — so long as you are young and able, you should have no problem crossing the average busy intersection in an Indian city. If you aren't, you figure. The slow change of messaging from cloth masks to N95 ones in the course of the Omicron surge is also part of this misguided approach. Even the cheapest N95 mask in the market is not affordable for large sections of India or even feasible.

Seeing through cancer in a pandemic showed us that masking up is the work of a community. The times that we had to remove our masks, we did so, thankful to the people around us in hospitals who were dutifully masked up. We breathed easy because of them.

We often assume that cancer, like Covid, is something that happens to other people and that we will somehow be insulated from it. It took Omicron to show us that Covid can happen to just about every other person in our circles. In the hubris of our youth or ableism, we forget that one day we could be in a position where we are desperate for a fighting chance, and the only way to get it that the community stays masked up.

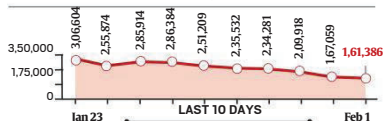
benita.fernando@expressindia.com

TRACKING INDIA'S COVID CURVE

DASHBOARD, AS ON FEB 1

702 DAYS SINCE PANDEMIC BEGAN	New cases 1,61,386	Active cases 16,21,603	Deaths 1,733
	Weekly CFR: 0.37%	Overall CFR: 1.31%	Total deaths: 4,97,975

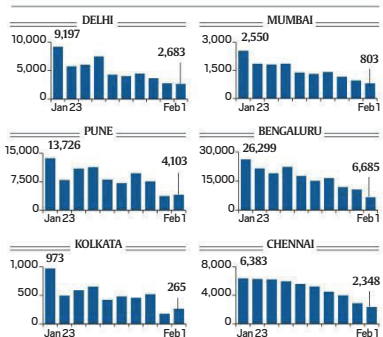
NEW CASES, DAILY



SURGE IN THE STATES

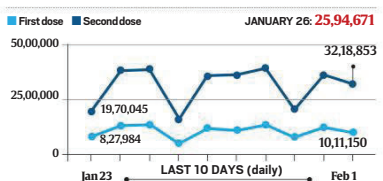
State	New cases	Active cases	Deaths	Weekly positivity
Kerala	51,887	3,68,580	1,205	45.86%
Tamil Nadu	16,096	1,88,599	35	17.01%
Maharashtra	14,372	1,91,524	105	15.12%
Karnataka	14,366	1,97,755	58	19.06%
Gujarat	8,338	75,464	38	9.09%

CASES IN THE CITIES, LAST 10 DAYS



TOTAL TESTS	73,24,39,986
TESTS ON FEB 1	17,42,793
WEEKLY POSITIVITY	13.02%
OVERALL POSITIVITY	5.68%

INDIA TOTAL DOSES 167,29,42,707
(Adults 1st dose: 89,63,78,414; 2nd: 71,51,85,846; 15-18 age group 1st dose: 4,72,32,018; 2nd: 11,28,099; precautionary: 1,30,18,330)



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The India-Israel relationship

Diplomatic relations between the two countries have just completed 30 years. A look at how the relationship has evolved, with India of late walking a tightrope between its ties with Israel and Palestine.

NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN
CHENNAI, FEBRUARY 2

ON JANUARY 30, India and Israel marked 30 years of full diplomatic relations. Israel opened its embassy in Delhi on February 1, 1992. The Indian Embassy in Tel Aviv opened on May 15 that year. The anniversary comes at a time the steadily growing relationship is in the spotlight over Pegasus, the surveillance software made by the Israeli company NSO. The company has said it sells the licence for use only to governments, and only after approval from the Israeli government's Defense Export Control Agency.

The New York Times reported earlier this week that Pegasus and a missile system were the "centrepieces" of a package of sophisticated weaponry and intelligence equipment that India purchased during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 2017 visit to Israel. If the NYT report indicating a secretive deal for surveillance tech that would be used against Indian citizens cast a shadow on the anniversary, neither Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, who succeeded Benjamin Netanyahu last year, nor Prime Minister Modi allowed that to mar their exchange of congratulatory messages of the January 30 anniversary.

Bennett addressed "all the people of India" on "30 years of a wonderful partnership, deep cultural connection and economic and military co-operation", and described as "endless" the opportunities for collaboration between the two countries. Modi spoke about setting new goals to take the relationship forward, and referred to Jewish communities in India who had lived here without discrimination for centuries.

Under the radar
Modi's famous visit in 2017 was the first by an Indian Prime Minister, and with that, he took full ownership of a relationship that had mostly grown under the radar for over a quarter century. India had recognised Israel as far back as 1950 but normalisation took another four decades. In the wake of the first Gulf War, Arab equities in West Asia underwent big shifts. Arab support for the Palestinian cause began to weaken due to PLO's backing for Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Then came the breakup of the Soviet Union, which was until then India's go-to country for military hardware. From 1992, while there were defence



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with then Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu in Delhi during the latter's India visit in 2018. Express Archive

deals, and co-operation in science, technology and agriculture, India was reticent about its ties with Israel as it balanced this with its historical support for the Palestinian cause, its dependence on the Arab world for oil, and the pro-Palestinian sentiments of the country's Muslim citizens.

But the first high-level visits took place only when the NDA-1 under Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee took office. In 2000, LK Advani became the first Indian minister to visit Israel. The same year, Jaswant Singh visited as Foreign Minister. That year, the two countries set up a joint anti-terror commission. And in 2003, Ariel Sharon became the first Israeli Prime Minister to visit India.

Unlike his predecessors, Modi went all out to woo Israel, playing to Hindutva's natural affinity for Israel as a muscular state that gives no quarter to its "terrorist" enemies. With the 2020 Abraham Accords that saw UAE, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco normalising relations with Israel, and India's own newly strengthened ties with the UAE and Saudi Arabia, New Delhi is now more confident about its key relationships in West Asia than at any other time.

India & the Palestinian cause
While the India-Israel embrace has eroded what once used to be New Delhi's unequivocal support for the Palestinian cause,

India does continue to walk a tightrope, between its historical ties with Palestine and its newfound love for Israel.

An indication of this came last year in India's statement in the UN Security Council on the Israel-Palestine violence. The statement virtually held Israel responsible for the violence, and expressed India's "strong" support to the "just Palestinian cause" and "unwavering" support for the two-state solution.

Earlier, the relationship with Palestine was almost an article of faith in Indian foreign policy for over four decades. India backed the Palestinian right to self-determination and rallied behind the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and its leader Yasser Arafat as the sole representative of the Palestinian people.

In 1975, India invited PLO to open an office in Delhi, giving it diplomatic status five years later. In 1988, when the PLO declared an independent state of Palestine with its capital in East Jerusalem, India granted recognition immediately. Arafat was received as head of state whenever he visited India.

And even as India opened a diplomatic mission in Tel Aviv, it set up a Representative Office in Gaza, which later moved to Ramallah as the Palestinian movement split between the Hamas (which gained control of Gaza) and the PLO.

During the UPA's 10 years in office, Mahmoud Abbas, head of the Palestinian Authority that administers the West Bank, visited four times—in 2005, 2008, 2010 and 2012.

India voted for Palestine to become a full member of UNESCO in 2011, and a year later, co-sponsored the UN General Assembly resolution that enabled Palestine to become a "non-member" observer state at the UN without voting rights. India also supported the installation of the Palestinian flag on the UN premises in September 2015, a year after Modi was voted to power.

Shift in policy

The first big shift in India's policy came during the visit of Mahmoud Abbas in 2017 when India in a statement dropped the customary line in support of East Jerusalem as the capital of a Palestinian state. When Modi visited Israel, his itinerary did not include Ramallah, as had been the practice by other visiting dignitaries.

But the balancing act continued. Modi made a separate visit to Ramallah in February 2018, and called for an independent Palestinian state. Even as it abstained at UN-ESCO in December 2017, India voted in favour of a resolution in the General Assembly opposing the Trump administration's recognition of Jerusalem as the Israeli capital. At the UNHRC's 46th session in Geneva earlier in 2021, India voted against Israel in three resolutions—on the right of self-determination of the Palestinian people; on Israeli settlement policy; and on the human rights situation in the Golan Heights. It abstained on a fourth, which asked for an UNHRC report on the human rights situation in Palestine, including East Jerusalem.

In February 2021, the International Criminal Court claimed jurisdiction to investigate human rights abuses in Palestinian territory including West Bank and Gaza and named both Israeli security forces and Hamas as perpetrators. Then PM Narendra Modi wanted India, which does not recognise the ICC, to take a stand against it, and was surprised when it did not come.

The Indian statement in the UNSC was another disappointment for Israel. But it did not affect the relationship as both countries weigh their long term interests against the fast changing geopolitics of West Asia. Both will be hoping that the Pegasus episode will similarly blow over without any major impact on bilateral ties.

Assam-Arunachal border dispute, 1951 to now

TORA AGARWALA

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 2

LAST MONTH, days after Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma met with his Arunachal Pradesh counterpart Pema Khandu to discuss a "permanent solution" to the decades-old boundary dispute between the two states, fresh tensions were reported along the border.

Bone of contention: 1951

Shubra Ranjan, earlier part of Assam, now shares an about 800-km boundary with it, along which frequent flare-ups have been reported since the 1990s.

The roots of the dispute lie in the "inner line" regulation, introduced by the British in 1873, demarcating an imaginary boundary between plains and the frontier hills. These hills, designated in 1915 as the North-East Frontier Tracts, make up Arunachal Pradesh today.

After Independence, the Assam government assumed administrative jurisdiction over the North East Frontier Tracts, which became the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) in 1954,

the Union Territory of Arunachal Pradesh in 1972 and a state in 1987.

Before it was carved out of Assam, a sub-committee headed by then Assam chief minister Gopinath Bordoloi had made some recommendations about the administration of NEFA. Based on the Bordoloi committee report in 1951, around 3,648 sq km of plains areas of Balipara and Sadiya fortfalls was transferred from the frontier tracts to Assam.

"This remains the bone of contention as Arunachal Pradesh refuses to accept this notification as the basis of demarcation," said a senior government official from Assam. "It was arbitrary, defective, and no tribal leader from Arunachal Pradesh was consulted before the land was transferred. They just decided to draw a line between the hills and plains," said Tabom Dai, general secretary, All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union.

Efforts at demarcation
In the 1970s, multiple efforts were made to demarcate the boundary. In April 1979, a high-powered tripartite committee was constituted to delineate the boundary on the basis of

Survey of India maps, as well as discussions with both sides.

By 1983-84, out of 800 km, 489 km was demarcated. But Arunachal Pradesh did not accept the recommendations, and claimed large chunks of the 3,648 sq km transferred as per the 1951 notification.

Assam filed a case in the Supreme Court in 1989. The court appointed a local boundary commission in 2006, headed by a retired SC judge. Its report in September 2014 recommended that Arunachal Pradesh get back some territory transferred to Assam in 1951, and that the two states arrive at a consensus through discussion. Nothing came of it.

Flashpoints

According to a 2008 research paper from the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA), clashes were first reported in 1982 when the Arunachal government alleged that people from Assam were "building houses, markets and even police stations on its territory". Another MP-IDSA paper in 2020 said Assam had raised the issue of Arunachal encroaching on its forest land, and

periodically launched eviction drives.

The recent clash between the Likhit-Dumrai road, under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, under the Mantri Ganga Sadaik in Arunachal's Lower Siang district. Assam claims some parts of it fall under its Dihemaji district. The road, about 65-70 km, is meant to connect 24 villages between Arunachal's Dumrai and Likhit (a site of dispute).

Last week, a culvert under construction was burnt by "unidentified miscreants from the Assam side", authorities said. Following that, there were unauthorised reports of "firing in the air" by locals from the Arunachal side. This was preceded by a protest from Assam Police stopping the construction in the area, claiming it was touching disputed territory.

The road ahead

In the last few months, CM Sarma has been discussing border issues with his counterparts in Meghalaya, Nagaland and Arunachal. Last week, Sarma and Khandu described their meeting in Guwahati as "positive", saying they were ready to conduct a ground level survey on boundary status.

Why Washington is making Pakistan's ambassador designate wait

NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN
CHENNAI, FEBRUARY 2

PAKISTAN'S AMBASSADOR designate to the United States, Masood Khan, is being made to wait longer than usual for an agreement, a term that means the host government's acceptance of his appointment. Nominated by the Pakistan government in November 2021, he is still awaiting word from the Biden Administration to take up his new role.

Republican Congressman Scott Perry is reported to have written to President Joe Biden, calling Masood Khan a "jihadist" and a bona fide terrorist sympathiser and demanding the nomination should be rejected, as Khan was working to undermine US interests as well as the "security of our Indian allies".

Background

A diplomat who joined Pakistan's foreign service in 1980, Khan, now 70, is a Pashtun who was born in Rawalakot in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

just two years after 9/11, as spokesperson for the Pakistan Foreign Office. Khan won praise from the media for his approachability. Pakistan's military considers foreign policy as part of its remit, and senior officials in the ministry of foreign affairs are deep-rooted establishmentarians. Khan was also the rare "Kashmiri" in Pakistan's foreign service. After his stint as spokesman, he was sent by the Prevez Musharraf government as ambassador to China. Four years later, he was named Permanent Representative to the UN at New York.

On his return, he ran for president of PoK towards the end of Nawaz Sharif's abruptly interrupted term as Prime Minister. The PML(N) had won the elections in the region—officially Pakistan does not include PoK as part of its territory—and Masood romped home with a comfortable margin.

A Khan in PoK

Those who interacted with Khan in those



years noted his stridency in the heyday of the India-Pakistan peace process, even if it was amiably delivered. As a politician in PoK, Khan was expected to see with the establishment's view on Kashmir. In this view, India is an "illegal occupying force". Kashmir is an international dispute, and India's position that the 1972 Simla Agreement tacked into a bilateral matter is sheer "manipulation", as India does not wish to discuss Kashmir with Pakistan even bilaterally. Khan's election as PoK president came two months after the killing of Hizb-ul-Mujahideen leader Burhan Wani, when Kashmir erupted in protests. Khan called

Burhan a "hero" who had passed on the baton of resistance against India in Kashmir through his "martyrdom".

As Pakistan's top man at the UN, he would have also worked with the Chinese for blocking the designation of Jaish-e-Mohammed chief Masood Azhar, for which India campaigned for years. The designation finally came in 2019, after the Pulwama attack.

Anti-Modi statements

Khan has mirrored his Prime Minister Imran Khan's statements against Hindutva and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. And he has made it known that he will push the Biden Administration for the release of Afia Siddiqui, a Pakistani woman convicted and imprisoned in the US on terror charges. Weeks after he was named the envoy, Khan tweeted that "the US Government can find a way to free Afia Siddiqui".

In an interview to the Turkish news agency Anadolu in May 2019, Khan said a "catastrophic" chapter had begun in Kashmir, and that Kashmiris had become "fodder" in the election victories of the Indian leadership.

Grey shades

More recently, Khan has written about peace with India. On January 22, days after Pakistan released its first National Security Policy, in an article on a website called Narratives that says its aim is to project Pakistan's case abroad, Khan wrote that Pakistan "should not envisage a future of perennial hostility with its eastern neighbour, through the settlement of outstanding issues necessary for economic co-operation with it". He also made a case for a fresh look at the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline "in which Russia is a tacit guarantor, if not a partner", adding that livelihoods would eliminate terrorism rather than a military response.

Earlier in his career, there was also enough bonhomie for him to attend a reception hosted by the Indian ambassador at his home.

Why no agreement yet

After the Perry agreement, speculation in India has swirled around his alleged "jihadist" links. His wait for an agreement has come at a time when ties between India and Pakistan

have lost energy. After withdrawing from Afghanistan, Biden seems to have lost interest in Pakistan. He has not yet had a conversation with Prime Minister Imran Khan.

A report in Dawn said the "longer than usual" delay had given an impression of a "pause in the process". It quoted an unnamed Foreign Office source in Islamabad as saying the delay could be due to his stint as president of PoK. Technically, Khan was head of state of a region in Pakistan that is not officially integrated within its federation. The Biden Administration may be considering this anomaly, which has the potential to muddy the pitch with India.

In October 2019, a few months after the Modi government did away with the special status of Kashmir, Delhi prevented Khan, then PoK president, from addressing a programme organised by the Pakistan Embassy at the French parliament. India sent a demarche to the French government that an invitation to him was a violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of India.

New Delhi would be watching to see how the wait for the agreement ends.