



Anger in diplomacy

Pak. establishment was behind MNC Kashmir tweets, but India should have shown restraint

The advent of social media has no doubt changed how diplomacy is conducted between countries. Even so, it was surprising that the MEA and the Commerce Ministry put as much energy as they did in ensuring that several multinational companies retracted social media posts their Pakistani distributors had put out last week. The posts, that appeared to be part of a coordinated exercise sponsored by the Pakistani establishment, were put out on February 5 – marked in Pakistan as “Kashmir Solidarity Day” – and contained what New Delhi termed as highly offensive messages calling for “Kashmiri liberation”. The Government’s outrage was valid, given that these companies, including Hyundai, Toyota, KFC, Pizza Hut, and pharmaceutical Schwabe, also have flourishing businesses in India, and it was strange that private MNCs would post such politically charged messaging at all. However, where a sharp word or even a short statement of disapproval would have sufficed, the Modi government decided to go the whole distance: even summoning the Korean Ambassador while ensuring that Indian embassies took up the issue with other governments. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar also raised the matter with his Korean counterpart, who apologised to the Indian people. Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal added in Parliament that the original apology by Hyundai India was not adequately “forceful or unequivocal”, even as social media consumers in India threatened to boycott products made by the companies concerned.

While the Government might feel it has achieved its purpose by ensuring the companies and governments involved were contrite about the posts, it must also consider the big picture of how its actions, that appear to be at variance with those of a secure and powerful global player, are viewed in the rest of the world. India’s claims over Jammu and Kashmir are strong, and widely acknowledged, and not so fragile that a few social media posts, that appeared only in Pakistan, can dent in any way. Second, holding foreign governments in democratic countries to account for the actions of the local distributors of their private companies could have unforeseen repercussions. It is also worth considering whether the Foreign Ministry’s resources are better spent in furthering India’s interests than on expending diplomatic capital on short-lived controversies such as the MEA’s objection to pop star Rihanna’s posts on the farmer protests last year. The apologies and statements thus extracted may prove to be a pyrrhic victory, if one considers that the intentions of those behind the obnoxious posts in Pakistan, aimed at drawing attention to their propaganda on Kashmir, were also met. A quiet word with the MNCs might have worked better than a public display of diplomatic opposition.

The French format

If Normandy Format talks could be convened, it would be a breakthrough for Russia, Ukraine

French President Emmanuel Macron’s shuttle diplomacy between Russia and Ukraine is one of the most significant interventions in the crisis ever since tensions started soaring in Eastern Europe. Mr. Macron, who has held talks with Russian leader Vladimir Putin in Moscow and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Kiev, has said that both sides remain committed to the Minsk accords (2014-15), aimed at ending the violence between Ukraine and Russia-backed separatists in the east; Mr. Putin assured him that Russia would not escalate the crisis. Put together, these statements offer a path towards calming the Russia-Ukraine tensions. Moscow has issued sweeping demands, including rolling back NATO from Eastern Europe, which the West has rejected. But Russia’s key concerns are the growing NATO-Ukraine cooperation and the increasing western presence in the Black Sea. The U.S. had earlier offered dialogue on mutually reducing military drills in the eastern flank of Europe. And what Mr. Macron is trying to do now, through the Normandy Format talks (including France, Germany, Russia, Ukraine), is for a Moscow-Kiev dialogue based on the Minsk protocol, which, in theory, was accepted by both sides.

The crisis has also laid bare the differences within the western bloc on how to deal with Russia. While the Biden administration has threatened to shut down Russia’s Nord Stream 2 pipeline in the event of a Russian invasion, the German leadership has been less specific in its response. Germany has barred Estonia, the tiny NATO member that shares a border with Russia, from supplying arms to Ukraine. Hungary’s Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who met Mr. Putin in the Kremlin earlier this month, has said Russia’s demands were reasonable. Turkey’s Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who visited Ukraine last week, has offered to host a peace summit. And now, Mr. Macron, who says the West “must respect Russia”, has already moved ahead. These varied responses, despite Joe Biden’s assertion of unity, show that Europe has less appetite for conflict with Russia. As a continent that experienced two disastrous World Wars and a Cold War, Europe understandably adopts pragmatic realism. But what needs to be seen is whether France and Germany have the diplomatic muscle to calm Russian nerves without making compromises on the continent’s security. A starting point could be reviving the Minsk process. The accords call for a general amnesty for the rebels, constitutional amendments giving the breakaway regions in eastern Ukraine more autonomy and the handing over of Ukraine’s borders to its army. None of the clauses in the agreement has been implemented. If the Normandy Format talks could be convened and Russia and Ukraine take steps to revive the agreement, it would be a diplomatic breakthrough.

Reviving the ‘Kerala Model’ of development

Its lustre is fading as there are threats from emerging social and environmental risks, but the question is how



SHASHI THAROOR & VINOD THOMAS

Kerala has long been recognised to have done many things right. For years the darling of development experts, non-governmental organisations and social activists, the ‘Kerala Model’ seemed to show that impressive levels of human development indicators – in health, education and quality of life, comparable even to some rich countries – could be achieved without a correspondingly high level of income.

A focus on ‘failures’

But in the recent past, there has been a new debate on the ‘Kerala Model’ of development. Are we not guilty of exporting our unemployment and becoming over-dependent on remittances? Can you build high growth and strong human development indicators on such a flimsy basis? Is it sustainable? The focus in the new debates on Kerala seems increasingly on its failures: low employment, low levels of food intake and low incomes, accompanied by high levels of alcoholism and the nation’s worst suicide rate.

After decades of robust social spending and participatory governance, the lustre of the Kerala model is now under threat from emerging social and environmental risks. Indeed, there is an irony here: some of the very strengths of Kerala’s approach have become sources of vulnerability. For instance, its high life expectancy is

translating into a high death rate from COVID-19.

In the face of rising risks, the Kerala model needs to be re-evaluated. The crucial question is how.

Reflecting the State’s social outcomes, Kerala has India’s highest literacy rate despite ranking only the ninth-highest in per capita income among 28 States. But as new global risks emerge in areas from health to climate change, Kerala’s policies need to be bolstered and new challenges deftly managed. Severely hit by COVID-19, Kerala’s Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) contracted over 2019-20 and 2021-22, and unemployment, at 9%, is much higher than the 6% national average. The space to revive Kerala’s sagging economy is limited because of a high fiscal deficit, around 4% of GSDP.

These difficulties could be meaningfully mitigated by smarter socio-economic investments, attention to good governance and a better stewardship of the environment. Kerala can develop as a knowledge economy, improve the quality of higher education and vocational training to meet the requirements of a modern workforce, and build on success in tourism and hospitality services. All this will create meaningful employment and raise incomes.

Interventions that reach all

Our focus should be on the quality as well as quantity of health and education, and on ensuring that interventions reach all segments of the population. Basic education should continue to be a priority, but it is higher education that presents a pivotal opportunity on the global stage for Kerala – a State with high human capital and high population mobility. Played right, Kerala could become a regional, if not a national, centre for tertiary



education in areas such as marine biology, health care, and digital technology, where it has considerable expertise.

Kerala was India’s first digital State with the highest share of households with personal computers and internet connections, mobile phone penetration, and digital literacy. Digital tools are being widely used in Kerala’s COVID-19 response – for example, application of India’s eSanjeevani, a telemedicine portal, offering psychosocial support for those struggling with the virus or its after-effects. We can build on and expand such approaches, learning, for instance, from Singapore’s new generation of health apps and technologies.

Cracks in the health system

Serious gaps are growing in Kerala’s health system. A pandemic response that laid a stress on mask-wearing and social distancing and tracing got off to a vigorous early start. But infections and deaths skyrocketed in 2021, partly as the population is highly mobile and also because Kerala let its guard down in key areas of surveillance. Testing, on the other hand, has been widespread, which helped reveal infections more transparently. Sustaining the edge on health care should be high on the policy agenda.

Another strength that needs to be sustained involves institutions,

building on the State’s grassroots organisation, participatory governance, and a free press. The Public Affairs Index 2020 ranked Kerala as the best-governed large State in 2019 on the basis of 15 indicators reflecting equity, growth and sustainability. Decentralised governance, a strong grass-roots-level network of Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA), volunteer groups, and Kudumbashree members helped in pandemic management. While there are lessons for others, Kerala needs to be more agile in public expenditure on health and developing local self-delivery systems.

The earth does matter

An asset that has turned into a worrying flash point is the State’s rich but fragile ecology that requires heightened protection. Decades of ecological degradation amplified the impact of the 2018 floods in Kerala that took away lives in 483 lives, displaced 14.5 lakh people, and cost over ₹40,000 crore. It is vital that the Madhav Gadgil Committee report is adopted with the minimal necessary modifications to protect vulnerable populations. The ecological disaster across the Western Ghats needs to be confronted and investments made to repair forests, river systems, water bodies, and flood plains. The State needs a bold programme of forest restoration in keeping with the commitments on forest cover made over 130 nations at COP26.

Kerala urgently needs to revive its network of rivers, their tributaries and streams. Sand mining needs to be stopped until the sandy riverbeds are restored. Water management calls for the periodic release of water from the dams, as indicated by the World Commission on Dams. This, together with

desilting of dams, could control the quantity of run-off into the dams and the need for sudden releases that exacerbate floods. Kerala’s supply of fresh water is being jeopardised by inadequate facilities for water containment. Water quality – and people’s health – are hurt by domestic waste and industrial effluents, calling for better water treatment.

Moment of change

A reinvigorated Kerala model will do well to recognise the symbiotic links among social outcomes, environmental management, and participatory governance, and take account of risk across these areas. It is time for revival. We must open our mental horizons to the world, outgrow our showman ideologies and create investment and business-friendly conditions for sustainable development.

One prerequisite for achieving sustainable development would be to change the perceptions of the State in its extremely politicised environment, especially the notorious *hathals* over marginal political issues, which have driven investment away. Political parties can differ on the precise policies and investments needed, but they must come together on a platform that transcends their differences. Sree Narayana Guru famously said, “*matham ethayalum, manushyan namanayalmathi*” – whatever his religion, it is enough that a person be good. Similarly, Kerala must say, “*rashtriyam ethayalum, rashtram namanayalmathi*” – whatever the politics, it is enough that the country be better.”

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Revisiting the politics of social justice in Uttar Pradesh

The regime in the State has no road map to genuinely empower the vast majority of marginalised communities



HARISH S. WANKHEDE

The astonishing rise of Hindutva politics, especially in the Hindi belt, has almost completely relegated the politics of social justice to the back burner. Till recently, it was the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) that emphatically raised the agenda of social justice and also mobilised the lower castes as influential participants in the electoral democracy of Uttar Pradesh. However, in the last Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, it must be noted that the BSP has witnessed a considerable drop in its vote percentage (from 30.43% in 2007 to 22.24% in 2017). And instead, it has been the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) that has emerged as a new ‘inclusive’ party, with a whopping 39% of the vote share. In the current phase of politics and elections, it is the BSP that appears to be inactive and irrelevant.

Key strategy

The right-wing party has been quite successful in engaging and bringing the socially marginalised sections into its fold by executing creative cultural strategies. However, the Yogi Adityanath government has not provided substantive welfare policies to satisfy the quest for social justice or to enable rapid economic development as far as the backward communities are concerned. The recent examples of Other Backward Castes (OBCs) leaders moving away from the BJP

is a hint that the socially deprived communities could be disillusioned with the BJP and might lend their support to the Samajwadi Party (SP) that appears to be promising in political terms. Such a shift could reinvent the politics of social justice in the State.

Politics of social justice, limits B.R. Ambedkar held the view that social justice is not merely a fair-fare policy framework. Rather, it is a dynamic tool to generate revolutionary political consciousness among socially marginalised groups. In the post-Ambedkar period, it was Kanshi Ram, the founder of the BSP, who reintroduced the agenda of social justice as a transformative political ideology.

Kanshi Ram utilised the ideas of social justice to highlight oppressive caste hierarchies and also inspired marginalised groups to build a robust political opposition. He argued that the national political parties retained their domination over legislative bodies by relegating the lower caste groups as a passive vote bank. He imagined that the socially marginalised communities could be united under a Dalit leadership (as Bahujan) and defeat the traditional ruling castes often represented as Mandavadi. He proposed that the replacement of the conventional ruling elites by a Dalit-Bahujan collective would bring about a revolutionary change in governance and policy matters.

Imagining the Dalit-Bahujan mass as the ruling class was a radical vision. And forming social and political alliances are the foundational requirements to achieve such goals. However, the stifling social and cultural divisions between



Dalits and Other Backward Castes

disallowed the possibility to organise a unified political front. The current vanguards of social justice politics have been criticised for a deep attachment to specific communal identities (like the BSP and the SP are often belittled as being the parties of the Jats and Yadavs, respectively) and alleged that the worst-off social groups (such as the Maha-Dalits and most backward castes) are not being given their legitimate space in electoral politics. Ironically, the lower caste parties often hesitate to join hands when it comes to pushing for an agenda of social justice (there is the well-known rivalry between the BSP and the SP) but find comfort in fighting independently or by forming alliances with the parties led by social elites. The right wing exploits the trust deficit between the Dalit-Bahujan groups and mobilises them on distinct cultural fronts.

Right-wing cultural politics

Since 2014, the BJP has launched a powerful rhetoric of development, and its corruption policies and tapped the euphoria of nationalism that often bewitches aspirational groups and motivates them to support right-wing politics. Most importantly, the maverick top leadership in the BJP effectively

controls the ship of propaganda and makes this party a dynamic force among the vulnerable social groups.

The right wing’s understanding of social justice is curated under a neo-liberal ideological prescription. It looks down on popular institutional practices to ensure social justice (mainly the reservation policy) as the state’s philanthropy, distributive mechanism, or lending some material dole to the deprived sections. Instead, the right wing underplays lower caste identities as being socially deprived classes and reprimands their assertion for social justice as being a disruptive force against Hindutva. The BJP crafts creative cultural strategies that perpetuate the domination of caste and class elites and motivates Dalit-Bahujan sections to find solace in the assertive communal Hindu identity. The domination of the social elites over political and public institutions is thus legitimised under the rubric of Hindu social harmony.

Importantly, the right wing engages with lower caste groups as a cultural and religious subject and exploits their association with Hindu rituals and traditions. The Hindu caste segments are depicted as remnants of Hindu civilisation; a new iconography and social history for each fragment are invented (like the evocation of Subhdev as the legend of the ‘Pasi’ caste). Such inventions are not only utilised to institutionalise the trust rupture between lower caste groups but also become a potent tool to propagate communal hatred against Muslims.

Parties such as the BSP and the SP have aspired to elevate the Da-

lit-Bahujan masses as the new political elites. Instead, the BJP’s Machiavellian cultural politics in Uttar Pradesh have been exploiting caste divisions to weaken the lower caste groups as militant participants in a Hindu ‘renaissance’ under the aegis of social elites. The Yogi Adityanath regime has no road map to empower the vast majority of impoverished people, distribute material, or end discrimination and political powerlessness. In the past, the rhetoric of inclusive growth or of Hindu unity may have impressed socially marginalised groups but such ideas have no power to liberate the poor and the vulnerable sections from their precarious social and class conditions.

A dignified presence

Hindutva’s hegemonic cultural politics can be defeated by reinventing the ideology of social justice. The proponents of social justice must demonstrate substantive accountability towards the vulnerable worst-off groups; and they also have to ensure their dignified presence in the mainstream political process. It is required that Dalit-Bahujan politics craft creative strategies to inspire the most vulnerable sections by building a prudent engagement with the cultural diversities and social identities. A dynamic interplay of social justice and socialism would be a lethal ideological weapon to defeat the communal politics of Uttar Pradesh.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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The NEET debate

The argument that some extend in favour of the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) is that it promotes merit. But one cannot turn a blind eye to the sad reality that it has been promoting the coaching industry that has no scruples when it comes to levying prohibitively high charges which in turn impact the poor and economically marginalised (Editorial page, “NEET is discriminatory, against social justice,” February 9).

The very commercial and profit-oriented intent of such coaching centres is manifest in the expensive

and self-promoting advertisements that they publish in the print media. Education has been reduced to a profiteering enterprise. Moreover, any attempt to impose a fit-for-all entrance examination of this kind, without taking into consideration the social, economic and territorial barriers that people are confronted with, violates the very sense of equity.

S. BALU,
Madurai

One wonders whether there is a hint in the article of ‘pressure’ from various owners (colleges) of private medical colleges who are

said to be losing revenue from seats that have been surrendered to the NEET pool. If there is concern about children from a rural background and government schools being unable to afford coaching, there are ways and means to disseminate training in an equitable manner. There can also be specialised coaching at the higher secondary level. Is it difficult?

P. UDAYAKATA,
Bengaluru

Counter point

The reality today is that it is ruling party which is pinning the country itself against democracy. There are examples to substantiate

this – events like the toppling of governments in (then) non-BJP States such as Madhya Pradesh and Goa by audaciously effecting defections. In a democracy, when a person captures power, he should ensure governance that also embraces all parties and their leaders.

MANOHARAN MUTHUSWAMY,
Chennai

■ The Prime Minister’s response to the Opposition’s criticism has been an all-out attack without any remedy for the problems highlighted. The strength of a democracy lies in a healthy debate and respect in Parliament between the people’s

representatives. People would like to see constructive outcomes from debates, and not personal scores being settled. The Government must acknowledge this reality.

SURASH BALAKRISHNAN,
Mississauga, Ontario, Canada

Lata Mangeshkar

The report about Pan Woliu from Beijing being fascinated

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

In a front-page story titled “Posts on Kashmir unacceptable: Centre” (February 9, 2022), Osaka Batteries was erroneously referred to as a Japanese company.

It is the policy of The Hindu to correct significant errors as soon as possible. Please specify the edition (date of publication), date and page. The Reader’s Editor’s office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-24182297/24182300 (11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday); Fax: +91-44-24182292; E-mail: readereditor@thehindu.co.in; Mail: Reader’s Editor, The Hindu, Kasturba Buildings, 859 & 860 Anna Salai, Chennai 600 002, India. All communications must carry the full postal address and telephone number. No personal visits. The Terms of Reference for the Reader’s Editor are on www.thehindu.com



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by the music of Lata Mangeshkar is a perfect example of harmony between diverse nations. The same can be said about Pakistan too where millions there are diehard fans of Lataji. It is politicians who divide us.

K.K. PREM KUMAR,
Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

It's time to take a relook at privatisation

Simply pursuing this path while utilising such proceeds for loan write-offs or populist giveaways will not do



FEROZE VARUN GANDHI

India's fiscal deficit (for the Centre) in FY22 is expected to be 6.8% of the GDP, or in layman's terms about ₹15.06 lakh crore. When considering the debts of States as well, this jumps to about 12.7% of the GDP (as of FY21). In comparison, the budgetary outlay for MGNREGA in FY22 was ₹73,000 crore, while the Ministry of Defence was allocated ₹2.78 lakh crore for FY22. Every year, the short-fall grows wider.

The reality of privatisation

There is consensus that privatisation is the panacea. Policymakers often cite the private sector's ability to grow faster. This can be true — studies indicate that the gap in growth (and service) between public sector undertakings (PSUs) with autonomy and private firms is not significant. One study highlighted that the famed British privatisation initiative of British Airways, British Gas, and the Railways led to no systemic difference in performance (T.T. Ram Mohan, February 2021); even now, private British trains can be significantly delayed by "leaves on the line". Evidence on performance after privatisation is even more mixed in developing countries. Of course, there are examples like VSNL and Hindustan Zinc, but growth post-privatisation is often due to multiple factors (for example, better funding under a private promoter versus a starved government budget, a better business cycle). Sometimes, the difference in a PSU's performance (and ability to generate tax revenue) is simply government apathy.

Privatisation as a revenue source has also offered paltry returns. As a state, we have sought to hook our generational wealth in PSUs for the past two decades, with limited success. The Disinvestment Commission, under the Ministry of Industries, was set up in 1996 to provide inputs on which firms to privatise in over a five-10 year period. However, this Commission was dissolved in 1999. A separate Department of Dis-



REUTERS

investment was set up under the Ministry of Finance and later upgraded to a full-fledged Ministry in 2001. It was downgraded back to a department in 2004.

Beyond the institutional set-up, privatisation as a policy has also singularly failed to raise significant funds — actual receipts from disinvestments have always fallen significantly short of targets. For example, in FY11, ₹22,846 crore was raised against a target of ₹40,000 crore; by FY20, ₹50,304 crore was raised against a target of ₹1 lakh crore (PRS India, 2021). In total, between FY11 and FY21, about ₹5 lakh crore was raised, that is, about 33% of just FY22's projected fiscal deficit (PRS India, 2021) — some of this, notably through stake sale to other PSUs. Given social and institutional constraints, India's ability to privatise firms will continue to be slow in the future (for example, BPL's long-awaited journey). Clearly, this is a lever that is unlikely to raise significant revenue. Perhaps it is time to consider other options.

Going forward, outright privatisation (as opposed to stake sale) may not necessarily make sense. Air India, a recently held auction of about 21 oil and gas refineries, three firms participating, of which two were PSUs; 18 blocks ended up with just a single bid. An additional push to privatise 12 rail route clusters attracted interest in just three routes, of which two bidders (again, in a

market on the edge, with interest rate hikes coming, this may also not be the right time).

There is also the challenge of valuation — for example, about 65% of about 300 national highway projects have been recording significant toll collection growth (>15%, since they have been in operation); any valuations of such assets will need to ensure they capture potential growth in toll revenue, as NHAI's highway expansion bears fruit and the economy recovers. Instead, the Maruti model is instructive — the government had a joint venture with the Suzuki Corporation, but ceded control, despite Suzuki having only 26% shareholding. In return for a push by Suzuki for greater exports from India and manufacture of global models in India. Exits from Maruti were conducted in small tranches, ensuring a better valuation for the government. Empirical evidence highlights that stake sales are considered a preferred route (about 67% of all PSU sales in about 108 countries between 1977 and 2000 were conducted via this route), as it gives time to ensure price discovery, allowing improved performance to raise valuations over time. Beyond revenue raising, there are serious social consequences with privatisation. PSUs have been significant generators of employment in the past, with multiplier effects — there were about 348 CPUS in existence in 2018, with a total investment of ₹16.4 trillion (Srivastava, Vinay K., March 2021) and about 10.3 lakh em-

ployees in Central Public Sector Enterprises (in 2019). A push for privatisation is a push for mass layoffs, in a period of low job creation.

Greater concentration of public assets in select private hands is also a medium-term concern. In India, about 70% of all profits generated in the corporate sector in FY20 were with just 20 firms (in comparison, the situation in FY19 was about 15%). Across sectors, a whiff of oligopoly is emerging — cigarettes continue to be dominated by a single player (with ~77% market share in FY21), paints has one entity with ~40% in FY21, airports now has a new operator with about six airports plus a 74% stake in the country's international airport, while telecom has just three players left. Such concentration, mixed with privatisation of public assets, is likely to lead to higher usage fees (already being seen in telecom) and inflation, coupled with a loss of strategic control.

Selective PSU reform

Perhaps, another avenue of selective PSU reform could be considered. In China, for the past few decades, growth has been led by corporatised PSUs, all of them held under a holding company (SASAC), which promotes better governance, appoints leadership and executes mergers and acquisitions. Such PSUs that have scaled up are market leaders. In Singapore, the Ministry of Finance focuses on policymaking, while Temasek (the holding company) focuses on corporatising and expanding its PSUs (for example, Singtel, PSA, Singapore Power, Singapore Airlines) towards a global scale. A PSU with greater autonomy, with the government retaining control via a holding firm, can also be subject to the right incentives (T.T. Ram Mohan, February 2020). Surely, Indian PSUs could aspire to be as large and efficient as the Chinese ones.

The time has come to take a relook at privatisation. Simply pursuing this path, while utilising such proceeds for loan write-offs or populist giveaways in the election cycle, will not do. A hunt for immediate revenue should not overshadow the long-term interest of the ordinary Indian.

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Relief for BJP, headache for SP

The two new fronts in U.P. may split votes and provide some relief for the BJP, which has witnessed a stream of exits



URMILESH

The recent resignations of several prominent Other Backward Classes (OBC) leaders from the Yogi Adityanath Cabinet and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have not only dealt a severe blow to 'Hindutva politics' in Uttar Pradesh but have also understood to have galvanised the Samajwadi Party (SP)-led Opposition alliance. The excitement in the Opposition is not without reason, as the BJP in recent times has never witnessed such large-scale resignations, that too in a State where it has been in power with an overwhelming majority. All those who resigned described 'Hindutva politics' as being against the interests of the Dalits and backward classes. The BJP was put in a defensive position. But the formation of two 'Bahujan fronts' seems to have provided respite to the party. The first front, called Bhagidari Parivartan Morcha, was formed by All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) leader Asaduddin Owaisi, Jan Adhikar Party president Babu Singh Kushwaha, and Bharat Mukti Morcha leader Vaman Meshram. Mr. Kushwaha was expelled from the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in 2011 and was also accused in the National Rural Health Mission scam. The second front, Samajik Parivartan Morcha, was formed by Bhim Army chief Chandrasekar Azad, MP's Rajkumar Saini and Baburam Pal and others and comprises 35 groups. Earlier, after his negotiations with Akhilesh Yadav failed, Mr. Azad accused the SP president of insulting him and Dalits by not giving them a respectful number of seats. He then announced that he would contest from Gorakhpur against the Chief Minister. This came as a surprise to the SP as it was already planning to field one of its local leaders against the Chief Minister in Gorakhpur and wanted the support of most of the Opposition parties. It turns out that Mr. Azad did not consult any Opposition party regarding his candidature from Gorakhpur and, meanwhile, also formed a new front.

Political implications

The two new fronts cannot be ignored even if there is no established party involved in them, except the AIMIM. The leaders involved in these fronts have their own caste base and will therefore make a discernible impact. Before discussing their influence, let us first understand a few points about them.

First, it is not a mere coincidence that these fronts were announced only after the resignations of OBC leaders. Second, the leaders of these fronts have justified their actions by referring to the widespread 'nepotism' prevailing in traditional Opposition parties (SP, BSP and Rashtriya Lok Dal) that forced them to look for a 'new path'. Third, the mass base of the leaders of these fronts has never been tested. These parties have not contested all the seats in U.P. earlier. Unlike leaders like Swami Prasad Maurya, who resigned from the BJP due to pressure from his social base, the leaders of these two fronts cannot even claim that their supporters forced them into the decision of forming a separate front. The truth is that most of their supporters wanted them to fight the election by joining larger anti-BJP fronts. When leaders such as Mr. Azad and Mr. Kushwaha tried and failed, they distanced themselves from the larger anti-BJP Opposition alliances with the excuse that they were not given enough tickets.

Mr. Azad contested the Bihar Assembly election in 2020 and lost to the BJP. In a way, Mr. Azad is like Mr. Owaisi, who goes anywhere to contest an election irrespective of whether he has any organisation or political base. In Bihar, Mr. Azad joined hands with Pappu Yadav's party. They earned the 'vote katwa' (splitting votes) tag. They contested more than 150 seats together but did not win a single seat. Mr. Azad's new front in U.P. just called 'vote katwa' or will it achieve some political success?

As far as the Owaisi-Kushwaha-Meshram front is concerned, there is speculation already about the political equations of these leaders. Mr. Kushwaha was Minister twice in the Mayawati government, but then went to jail, allegedly for corruption. Cases related to some of these alleged scams are still pending in courts. A few years ago, he left the BSP and joined the BJP. But there was so much dissent about his induction that he had to quit the party. He then wrote to the then BJP president Nitin Gadkari and appealed to him to keep his membership on hold for a while. This shows that he has no ideological disagreement with the BJP. Similarly, Mr. Saini, who has joined hands with Mr. Azad, was a BJP MP from Kurukshetra for many years. Therefore, it is not without solid basis that these two fronts are being considered as a 'political relief' for the BJP and a 'headache' for the SP-led alliance. Whether the voters of U.P. reject these fronts or provide them with some consolation prize remains to be seen.

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STATE OF PLAY

It is advantage DMK and its allies

The DMK-led combine has remained intact while the AIADMK has lost yet another ally

T. RAMAKRISHNAN

Elections make or mar alliances. In recent months, the AIADMK, which was ousted from power in the State in May last year after a 10-year reign, would have realised the value of this saying.

If the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK), which fought the Assembly elections together with the AIADMK, left the alliance in September, weeks ahead of rural local bodies elections in nine districts, it was the turn of another ally, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), to leave the coalition in the run-up to the February 19 civic polls, covering 12,838 wards in 649 local bodies, including 21 municipal corporations.

While there was some bad blood between the two parties after the PMK chose to walk out of the alliance in the case of the BJP, there has been no apparent rancour, even though the development arose as a sequel to the failure in seat-sharing talks. In fact, even when the BJP's floor leader in the Assembly, Nainar Nagenthiran, made a scathing attack against the AIADMK a few weeks ago, the State unit president K. Annamalai immediately sought to make amends with the senior ally. His explanation seemed to have been approved by the AIADMK too, as the party's spokesperson and former Fisheries Minister D. Jayakumar asserted that the failure to reach a mutually acceptable accord on the sharing of seats of the urban local bodies had nothing to do with Mr. Nagenthiran's observation.

The main difference between the two parties, which at times called themselves "natural allies", was over the number of seats to be earmarked for the national party. While the AIADMK did not want to go beyond 10% of the seats, the BJP, which was provided with 9% of the wards in the previous local bodies polls, had demanded 20% in general. The AIADMK would have been prepared to give a greater share of seats in

namakkal district, as the DMK did for the Congress, but it was not ready to accommodate the BJP's demands in the Coimbatore and Tiruppur districts in the western region, one of its traditional bastions. However, what remains unanswered is why the Dravidian major chose to adopt such a tough stand despite not having any ally of considerable strength. One possible explanation is that it is desperate to shake off the tag of being the BJP's 'B team', which its adversaries have attached to it.

The BJP, which has been struggling to expand its footprint in the State, views the current round of local bodies polls as an opportunity to make its presence felt. Perhaps, this was why a large number of union ministers, ranging from secretaries of district units to members of the core committee, preferred to go it alone even before the seat-sharing talks with the AIADMK broke down. One important reason for this is that the party wants to test its real strength in urban areas, where the elections are going to be held.

The eventual political fallout of the development is not hard for anyone to guess. The DMK-led combine has remained intact and if one is to go only by arithmetic strength, its electoral prospects appear bright. But polls are decided not merely on the basis of arithmetic. Political chemistry, inter-party coordination within a formation, and cohesion in the ranks of the lead party of any alliance are equally important. There are reports of discord among the constituents of the front led by the ruling party with regard to seat-sharing. Also, the DMK faced a controversy recently over the distribution of free Pongal gift hampers through the public distribution system. But with the Opposition camp divided, it is now advantage DMK and its allies.

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DATA POINT

Can the world champions make the cut?

In the nail-biting Under-19 World Cup final on February 5, India secured the trophy for the fifth time by beating England. But for the two matches missed by captain V.V. Dhruv and vice-captain S.K. Rasheed due to Covid-19, the Indian team largely stuck to the same XI in the tournament. The team did not drop a single game in the series. In an interview with Sportsstar magazine, Rasheed said that winning the World Cup is memorable, but he continues to chase his dream of playing for senior Team India in Test cricket. What are the chances of these players making it to the senior team after such a dominating display at a young age? Of the 44 players who were part of the playing XI in the four Under-19 World Cup finals won by India, only 14 players went on to represent the senior team. Of them, only six could play at the international level for a long time.

By Jasmin Nihalani and Vignesh Radhakrishnan

SOURCE: ESPNCRICINFO

How to read the tables In the tables, ● indicates player not debuting for the Indian team in any format; ● indicates making a debut but not playing for a long period (minimum 10 Tests or 25 ODIs or 30 T20Is). ● indicates players who entered the senior team and were able to make meaningful contributions. ● indicates players who entered the senior team and have potential to play for a long time											
Year won WC: 2000											
Name	Debut or not?	Year of debut	Debut in Test	Debut in ODI	Debut in T20I	Tests played	ODIs played	T20Is played	Last match		
AM Dave	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	'06	AD Nath	N
M Kaif	Y	'00	'00	'02	-	13	125	-	'06	B Aparajith	N
NK Patel	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	'15	UBT Chand	N
A Ratna	Y	'02	'02	'02	-	6	12	-	'02	P Chopra	N
RS Ricky	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	'08	Harneet Singh	N
Manish Sharma	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	'06	K Pasi	N
RS Sodhi	Y	'00	-	'00	-	-	-	-	'12	SK Patel	N
SJ Srivastava	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	'10	Ravikant Singh	N
MB Tripathi	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	'04	Sandeep Sharma	Y
Y Venugopal Rao	Y	'05	-	'05	-	-	16	-	'06	GH Vihari	Y
Vuvraj Singh	Y	'00	'03	'00	'07	40	304	58	'17	VH Zoi	N
Year won WC: 2012											
Name	Debut or not?	Year of debut	Debut in Test	Debut in ODI	Debut in T20I	Tests played	ODIs played	T20Is played	Last match		
AD Nath	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	'21	ABhishek Sharma	N
B Aparajith	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	'21	HM Desai	N
UBT Chand	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	'20	Manojit Kalra	N
P Chopra	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	'21	KL Nagarkoti	N
Harneet Singh	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	'20	R Parag	N
K Pasi	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	'16	AS Roy	N
SK Patel	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	'21	PP Shaw	Y
Ravikant Singh	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	'19	Shivam Mavi	N
Sandeep Sharma	Y	'15	-	'15	-	-	-	-	'15	Shiva Singh	N
GH Vihari	Y	'18	'18	-	-	-	-	-	'22	Shubman Gill	Y
VH Zoi	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	'19		
Year won WC: 2008											
Name	Debut or not?	Year of debut	Debut in Test	Debut in ODI	Debut in T20I	Tests played	ODIs played	T20Is played	Last match		
AK Argal	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	'15	ABhishek Sharma	N
SP Goswami	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	'21	HM Desai	N
Iqbal Abdulla	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	'21	Manojit Kalra	N
RA Jadeja	Y	'09	'12	'09	'09	57	168	55	'21	KL Nagarkoti	N
S Kaul	Y	'18	-	'18	'18	-	3	3	'19	R Parag	N
T Kohli	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	'21	IC Porel	N
Y Kohli	Y	'08	'11	'08	'10	99	258	95	'22	AS Roy	N
MK Pandey	Y	'15	-	'15	'15	-	29	39	'21	PP Shaw	Y
PJ Sangwan	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	'21	Shivam Mavi	N
TM Srivastava	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	'20	Shiva Singh	N
SS Itwary	Y	'10	-	'10	-	-	3	-	'10	Shubman Gill	Y
Year won WC: 2018											
Name	Debut or not?	Year of debut	Debut in Test	Debut in ODI	Debut in T20I	Tests played	ODIs played	T20Is played	Last match		
ABhishek Sharma	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	'21	PP Shaw	Y
HM Desai	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	'21	Shivam Mavi	N
Manojit Kalra	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	'21	Shiva Singh	N
KL Nagarkoti	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	'21	Shubman Gill	Y
R Parag	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	'21		
AS Roy	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	'21		
PP Shaw	Y	'18	'18	'20	'21	5	6	1	'21		
Shivam Mavi	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	'21		
Shiva Singh	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	'18		
Shubman Gill	Y	'19	'20	'19	'19	10	3	-	'21		



Vuvraj Singh

Mohammad Kaif

Ravindra Jadeja

Virat Kohli

The Hindu

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 10, 1972

Dangerous message

From an Editorial

President Nixon's observations, in his annual foreign policy message to the U.S. Congress, on the recent Bangla Desh developments will make no contribution to the restoration of friendly relations between his country and ours. On the other hand they can only raise the doubt if he is really anxious at this time to end the eye of the storm in Peking, to work for the reversal of the downward course Indo-American relations have followed since the Bangla crisis erupted. For his latest observations, despite all the overwhelming evidence against his old assumptions that has come to light in the last few weeks, reveal the same old anti-Indian bias plus a few more new insinuations against India. He is prepared for "a serious dialogue with India" in the future of Indo-US. relations but such a dialogue, it seems, will depend on India "having an interest in maintaining balanced relationships with all major powers" and "on the posture that South Asia's most powerful country now adopts towards its neighbours on the sub-continent." The insinuation here is clearly that India does not now have such "balanced relationships" and that it is in the Soviet camp and that its bona fide vis-a-vis the neighbouring countries are yet to be proved. If India is to prove these bona fides to Mr. Nixon's satisfaction, to restore friendly relations with his Administration it would appear to be an impossible task, judging from his present frame of mind which seems firmly made up against India.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO FEB. 10, 1922

Flogging in jails

Lahore, Feb. 10: The following press communique has been issued: The attention of the Punjab Government has been drawn to an article headed, "A contradiction" which appeared in the issue of Young India dated 26th January 1922. From this article it might be inferred that political prisoners have been flogged in the Punjab jails. The Punjab Government desires to deny categorically the implication that political prisoners have been flogged in jails. The prisoners referred to in communique of December 16th were all of them convicted of crimes which were not of political character and the reason for their punishment was contumacious refusal to work and inciting other prisoners not to work. No political prisoner has been flogged for any offence.

Text & Context

NEWS IN NUMBERS



Cash seizure in U.P.

6.38 In ₹ crore, the unaccounted cash seized by the Noida Police ahead of the elections in poll-bound Gautam Buddha Nagar of Uttar Pradesh. Over one lakh litres of illicit liquor and 177 illegal firearms have also been seized from the western district since the model code of conduct was implemented on January 8, officials said on Wednesday. Chitlans under CrPC sections 107 and 116 have been issued to 22,287 such people, while 695 have been bound under CrPC section 110(G). **P11**

Charges against police

1,439 The number of personnel belonging to the seven central police organisations who are facing criminal charges. About 200 others have also been slapped with corruption charges, Union Minister Nityanand Rai said on Wednesday. He added that among those who were facing criminal charges, 481 belonged to the BSF, 401 belong to the CRPF, 325 belonged to the Sashastra Seema Bal, and 278 were from the Central Industrial Security Force. **P11**

Steel sales rise

20 The percentage rise in steel sales reported by Jindal Steel and Power in January 2022. Sales volume increased year-on-year to 6.95 lakh tonnes, as compared to 5.81 lakh tonnes in January 2021, the company said. Marginal improvement in rake availability during January, resulted in export shares rising to 31%, from 28% in December last year. Managing Director V. R. Sharma said that the Government's push in infrastructure and increase in outlay for capital expenditure will support growth for steel, cement and related sectors. **P11**

Covid cases decline

17 The percentage by which global COVID-19 case counts have declined in the last week according to WHO. The weekly epidemiological report from the U.N. health agency, released on Tuesday, shows that the Omicron variant is increasingly dominant, making up nearly 97% of all cases tallied by the international virus-tracking platform known as GISAID. Just over 3% were of the Delta variant. The WHO reported more than 19 million new cases of COVID-19 and under 68,000 new deaths during the week from January 31 to February 6. **P11**

A delayed dream

16 The number of years American snowboarder Lindsey Jacobellis had to wait to get her gold medal at the Winter Olympics after the "shocking silver" she earned in Italy in 2006. Alone in the clear, Jacobellis could have practically crawled to the finish line in 2006. Back then, a 20-year-old Jacobellis, grabbed her board on the second-to-last jump before the finish line. Inexplicably—and some say inexcusably—she fell and settled for a silver. Now 36, she finally earned her gold in China. This was Lindsey's fifth Olympics. **AP**

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

EXPLAINER

The coups in West Africa and the regional response

What have been the reasons for the rising number of military takeovers in Africa and West Africa in particular?

THE GIST

Between 2020 and 2022, there already have been 6 successful military coups and 3 failed ones. Burkina Faso became the fourth country to be suspended by the African Union for the breakdown of democracy by such coups after Guinea, Mali and Sudan.

In Burkina Faso, the military takeover in January 2022 took place after months of unrest due to anti-Government protests demanding the resignation of President Kabore. The unrest in Burkina Faso has been attributed as a fallout of the violent conflict organised by jihadist groups in Mali that began in 2012, that has since engulfed the entire Central Sahel region. President Kabore's regime used the military to quell the jihadist groups in the country, but with several instances of militant abuse and violent massacres happening, the jihadist threats only grew with some civilian support leading to the eventual takeover.

The Economic Community of West African States announced sanctions on Mali seeking to discourage further coups, but this did not deter the coup in Burkina Faso. Regional and international actors should focus on reforms that could help governance in these countries rather than just military strategies.

SRINIVASAN RAMANI

The story so far: In the 35th African Union Summit featuring the heads of State and governments, the head of the AU's Peace and Security Council, Bankole Adeoye raised concerns over the increasing wave of military coups in the continent, especially in West Africa. This had led to an unprecedented number of member States being suspended from the bloc recently.

What has been the trend with coups in Africa recently?

Just a few weeks prior to the Summit, Burkina Faso became the fourth country to be suspended by the African Union after President Roch Marc Christian Kabore's regime was toppled by soldiers. Earlier, Guinea, Mali and Sudan were also suspended because of similar putches that had occurred in the respective countries. This set of recent coups in the continent reversed a falling trend in military coups over the years. A report in the BBC quoted research by Central Florida and Kentucky Universities to point that the number of successful coups fell from 26 in the 1960s to 18 in the 1970s to 22 in the 1980s to 16 in the 1990s to 8 in the 2000s to 8 in the 2010s, but with several instances of militant abuse and violent massacres happening, the jihadist threats only grew with some civilian support leading to the eventual takeover.

Clearly the AU has been alarmed by the increasing frequency of military coups in the continent and have raised concerns about the rising number of suspensions of countries that have experienced these.

What explains the recent military coups in West Africa?

The reasons for the military coups that occurred recently in two of the three countries, Mali and Burkina Faso are related. In Burkina Faso in West Africa, the military takeover in late January 2022 took

place after months of unrest due to anti-Government protests demanding the resignation of President Kabore. A report by the International Crisis Group (ICG) detailed that after these demonstrations took a violent turn in Ouagadougou and Bobo Dioulasso, the country's two largest cities, a group of soldiers demanded the replacement of the chief of staff and director of the National Intelligence Agency besides the need for more troops to fight against jihadist groups that had wreaked terror in the region and for relief and care for wounded soldiers.

Within a couple of days, these actions by the soldiers turned into a putsch with their forcing President Kabore to sign a handwritten resignation letter and the formal takeover of power by a new junta called the Patrotic Movement for Safeguard and Restoration (MPSR). These moves were similar to what transpired in Mali where armed forces staged a mutiny and captured power from president Ibrahim Boubacar Keita in August 2020.

The unrest in Burkina Faso has been attributed as a direct fallout of the violent conflict organised by jihadist groups in Mali that began in 2012 that has since escalated and engulfed the Central Sahel region encompassing Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. A UNHCR briefing in January 2022 by its spokesperson mentioned that 2.5 million people fled their homes following the conflict with 2.1 million of them displaced by late 2021. The total number of internally displaced people in Burkina Faso alone has risen to 1.5 million by the end of 2021. The conflict in Burkina Faso peaked when a series of massacres took place including in Solhan in June 2021 when 160 villagers were killed. The fact that pro-coup crowds gathered in Ouagadougou to support the junta's putsch suggested that there was deep discontent with President Kabore's regime as the army waded in to capture power. Military coups have also not been uncommon in Burkina Faso. The ICG report points out that military regimes have held power in 48 out of 61 years since the

country's independence.

President Kabore's regime sought to use the military to quell the jihadist groups in the country that included both local and regional militias, but with several instances of militant abuse and violent massacres happening, the jihadist threats only grew with some civilian support. After a lull in the violence following a ceasefire with two major jihadist groups, the violence returned in a brutal fashion with one outfit, the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (NINM) in particular being responsible for it. With several people affected by the violence and security forces complaining about the lack of adequate Government support, the regime's popularity waned and this soon led to the coup.

The Guinean coup d'état occurred on 5 September 2021 when forces led by military leader Mamady Doumbouya captured the President Alpha Conde after gunfire in the capital city, Conakry and announced the dissolution of the Government and the Constitution. In Guinea's case, Mr. Conde, the country's first democratically elected President had changed the Constitution by referendum to allow him to continue for a third term. This move had precipitated protests in the country which led to a Government crackdown on the protestors as well as an economic crisis. Yet again the military took advantage of a crisis to capture power and announced the dissolution of institutions and the Constitution.

How have regional and international actors reacted to these coups?

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) announced severe sanctions on Mali on 9 January, 2022, and announced the dissolution of institutions and the Constitution. Experts believe that the three new military regimes in Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso, will now seek to coordinate ties among themselves to resist pressure from the ECOWAS and other international actors. The suspensions by the AU were also to put pressure on the juntas to call for a return to



democratic institutions and a constitutional order. ECOWAS would be the nodal authority that will strive to engage the new leaders in a dialogue process to seek a faster transition away from military rule.

The French led military intervention in Mali has sought to help the State defeat its jihadist threats but tensions have risen between the post-coup Government and the mission. With a purely military approach to tackle the jihadist threat not paying dividends in terms of halting the conflict, international actors would need to consider a course correction that focuses on reforms that could help governance in these countries in West Africa rather than just military strategies.

Reign of chaos: People gather in support of a coup that ousted President Roch Kabore, in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, on January 25, 2022. **REUTERS**

EXPLAINER

Understanding the new Central Media Accreditation Guidelines

How has the earlier policy been amended? What are the provisions under which a journalist's accreditation may be withdrawn?

ANURADHA RAMAN

The story so far: The Government has issued a slew of rules for the media under a new policy on accreditation for journalists. The Central Media Accreditation Guidelines-2022 have outlined the conditions for withdrawal of accreditation if a journalist acts in a manner prejudicial to the country's security, sovereignty and integrity, friendly relations with foreign states, public order or is charged with a serious cognisable offence. Most of the provisions are drawn from Article 19(2) of the Constitution which prescribes the restrictions to free speech guaranteed to every citizen of the country and are understood to serve as guidelines for the press and media.

How is this different from the past? For one, the guidelines prepared by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting are more in the nature of prescriptions rather than prescriptions. In laying down the conditions for withdrawal of accreditation, they serve more as censorship rules rather than guidelines. Previous guidelines were more general in nature and did mention that accreditation would be withdrawn if found to be misused. In the new guidelines, there are 10 provisions under which accreditation to a journalist can be

withdrawn.

How are they proposed to be implemented?

As per the guidelines, the Government of India shall constitute a committee called the Central Media Accreditation Committee chaired by the Principal DG, Press Information Bureau (PIB), and comprising up to 25 members nominated by the Government to interpret the guidelines for withdrawal of accreditation.

Why are these guidelines a matter of concern?

In 2020, the Paris-based Reporters Without Borders (RSF) ranked India 142nd among 180 countries on the World Press Freedom Index 2020. Though freedom of the press is not explicitly stated in the Constitution, the ambit of freedom of expression under Article 19 of the Constitution has been generally understood as having laid down the template for a free press in the country with subsequent pronouncements of courts ensuring it. These guidelines, point out experts, carry the threat of coming in the way of the functioning of a free media. Besides, they carry the risk of delegitimising reports, especially of an investigative nature. Any report critical of the Government could now be seen as prejudicial to the interests of the country



and it will be left to the interpretation and discretion of the Central Media Accreditation Committee to read the guidelines and decide what is defamatory while denying accreditation to a journalist.

How do journalists get accredited?

A journalist with a minimum of five years as a full-time working journalist can apply for accreditation to the PIB, a process that is completed after a mandatory security check from the Ministry of Home Affairs. Any journalist working with a newspaper which has a daily circulation of 10,000; news agencies with at least 100 subscribers and digital news platforms with 10 lakh unique visitors can apply. Accreditation helps in access to

government offices and to special events and media outlets organised by the Government of India. Some Ministries like Home and Defence and Finance allow access only to accredited journalists.

Have there been attempts in the past to regulate the media?

Several attempts have been made by successive governments to keep the media in check by proposing guidelines more in the nature of censorship. As recently as 2018, the PIB, which functions under the I&B Ministry, had proposed a Fake News Guidelines under which accreditation could be cancelled if the journalist was seen as peddling content that was fake. This was seen as a move by

the Government to counter other government offices and to special events and media outlets who had called out the Government and the political leadership for putting out fake content. The order was withdrawn under pressure. More recently the Government proposed a series of rules under the IT Act to check digital news content.

State Governments like Kerala and Rajasthan had come out with their own versions of proposed rules which were withdrawn under pressure and criticism. The most infamous move to control the press before the advent of private news channels was by former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi when he proposed the Defamation Bill in 1988. Under pressure from a unified media and several sections of the public, the Bill was withdrawn.

THE GIST

The Government has issued The Central Media Accreditation Guidelines-2022 which outline the conditions for withdrawal of accreditation if a journalist acts in a manner prejudicial to the country's security.

The new rules in laying down the conditions for withdrawal of accreditation, serve more as censorship rules rather than guidelines. This is concerning as the Paris-based Reporters Without Borders (RSF) ranked India 142nd among 180 countries on the World Press Freedom Index 2020.

In 2018, the PIB, had proposed a Fake News Guidelines under which accreditation could be cancelled if the journalist was peddling content that was 'fake'. This was seen as a move to counter independent media outlets who had called out political leadership for putting out fake content.



No refuge: Migrant workers and their families walking to return home on the Mumbai-Nasik Highway on May 11, 2020. • ROY CHOWDHURY A

FROM THE ARCHIVES

No relief for the nowhere people

Policy responses to the migrant crisis reinforce the idea of two Indias

RAVI SRIVASTAVA

THE GIST

■ The labourers – men, women and children – are the classic nowhere citizens of India. They have no rights and entitlements in the areas in which they work and are also denied entitlements in the villages to which they belong. They have been invisible in policy discourse and there are no firm estimates of their numbers. Data from the National Sample Survey and the India Human Development Survey (IHDS) show that these migrant labourers are mainly from rural areas and belong to the poorest socio-economic classes. They form the largest section of child, bonded and trafficked labour.

■ The lockdown has exposed India's labour market which operates through informal employment relations. We know that nearly 81% of wage workers even in non-agricultural sectors do not have any contract with their employers and enjoy no security of tenure. With the Government's sudden lockdown, wages for jobs already carried out remain unpaid. The Government side-stepped its major responsibility of paying short-term and circular migrants in the informal wage economy could number 60-65 million. About 40% of these migrants work in the construction sector and 15% in agriculture. The rest are engaged in manufacturing, transport, and other services. With accompanying family members, their numbers would not be less than 100 million. About half these labourers are inter-State workers. We exclude in this estimate longer-term circular migrants who also work in the informal wage economy and as self-employed workers in the urban economy.

■ India needs a unified labour market and universal social security system which can ensure security, safety, and dignity to all workers.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a statement in the Lok Sabha accused the opposition and the Delhi State government of forcing migrants out of their workplace States and into their hometowns which according to him, increased the spread of the COVID-19 virus in these areas. This has led to strong reactions and bitter counter arguments on social media. In this article dated May 4, 2020, Ravi Srivastava explains how migrant labourers with no social security nor tenured work faced the entire brunt of the sudden nationwide lockdowns.

Jamalo Makdam, 12, died on April 18 walking back from the chilli fields of Telangana to her home in Chhattisgarh. She and a group of other workers decided to return home on foot, as many migrant workers did, after losing their jobs, incomes and even accommodation following the announcement of nationwide lockdown. Her journey ended in death, possibly due to electrolyte imbalance and exhaustion, said health officials.

In the past month, migrant workers have died, been lathi-charged, herded into shelters with minimum facilities, sprayed with dangerous chemicals, and denied entry into their home villages by the dominant elite. These reports and images have seared our conscience.

No rights and entitlements

The labourers – men, women and children – are the classic nowhere citizens of India. They have no rights and entitlements in the areas in which they work and are also denied entitlements in the villages to which they belong. Not surprisingly, they have been invisible in policy discourse. There are no firm estimates of their numbers. Estimates prepared by this author and updated from various sources suggest that short-term and circular migrants in the informal wage economy could number 60-65 million. About 40% of these migrants work in the construction sector and 15% in agriculture. The rest are engaged in manufacturing, transport, and other services. With accompanying family members, their numbers would not be less than 100 million. About half these labourers are inter-State workers. We exclude in this estimate longer-term circular migrants who also work in the informal wage economy and as self-employed workers in the urban economy.

Data from the National Sample Survey and the India Human Development Survey (IHDS) show that these migrant labourers are mainly from rural areas in poor regions and States, and belong to

the poorest socio-economic classes. Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes are over-represented among them. They form the largest section of child, bonded and trafficked labour. They predominate in activities that are characterised by three Ds – dirty, dangerous, and difficult – and consistently face a fourth D – discrimination. Nearly 70% of migrants work in urban and peri-urban areas in and around growth centres in States in the north, west, and south of the country. Industry and employers are bemoaning, for the first time, the fact that activities in a number of crucial sectors and industries will not see revival without these workers.

The lockdown imposed by the Government has exposed the deep fault lines in India's labour market which operates in a sea of growing informal employment relations. We know that nearly 81% of wage workers even in non-agricultural sectors do not have any contract with their employers and enjoy no security of tenure. Many do not even know their final employer. The IHDS tells us that half the migrant labourers are hired through contractors. Their condition shows the dismal state of implementation of labour regulations, particularly with respect to inter-State migrants.

With the Government's sudden lockdown decision, wages for jobs already carried out remained unpaid. A large percentage of migrants remained saddled with debt taken as advances from their employers, contractors, or landlords. The Government's announcement of a tepid relief package on March 26 did not address any of the concerns of this section as the frail social security net largely does not cover them. Crucially, the Government side-stepped its major responsibility of paying compensatory wages to the informal workers for the lockdown, putting this onus on employers who are already hit hard by the lockdown.

As for migrant workers tried to move to their homes, the Government responded with a strict State and inter-district lockdown and ordered placing migrant workers in quarantines-cum-shelters, and the detention of workers who remained on the move. In a status report submitted to the Supreme Court on March 31, the Government argued that the movement of these workers to rural areas constituted a serious risk of spread of COVID-19, a fact that has remained unsubstantiated.

By the end of the first week of April, the Government submitted that about 6.3 lakh workers were in shelters run by governments in different parts of the country, while another 4.5 lakh were in shelters run by NGOs and others. Nearly 10 million workers were receiving food

assistance through governmental and non-governmental sources. About 5 lakh to 6 lakh workers had reached their source States. As a matter of fact, reports from the ground suggest that a large proportion of intra-State migrants had trudged back home so the total returnees was probably closer to 25 million. At present, with about a million migrant workers in shelters or quarantines, at least 20 million such workers are still stranded at worksites or living in hovels. Most of these, as successive surveys attest, have not been able to avail of any food or cash assistance, and are on the brink of starvation.

Shifting the burden

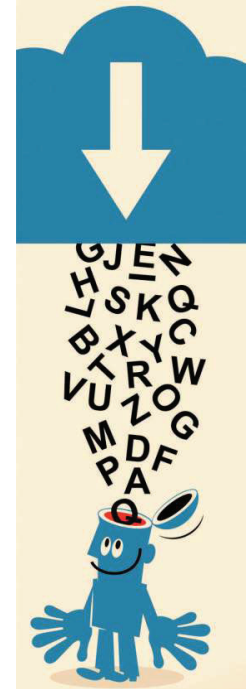
On April 19, the Indian government issued a standard operating protocol on movement of stranded labour, permitting the movement and employment of stranded migrant workers in worksites only within the States in which they were involuntarily detained in shelters. On April 29, the Central government issued another notification finally permitting stranded labourers and populations to travel inter-State to their homes only by buses. On May 1, the Railways were permitted to run special trains for migrants with coordination and costs being borne by the States and, in some cases, fares being paid by the hapless migrants. The receiving States, it must be pointed out, are precisely those which have the weakest fiscal capacity. The ensuing confusion and delay has also increased the plight of the migrants.

It goes without saying that it must be the responsibility of the Centre to coordinate the movement of the stranded populations by trains, air and buses, and to provide adequate resources, not only for transportation, but also for wages and food requirements of all such workers whose loss of jobs and incomes followed the national lockdown.

The fight against the pandemic can only be based on a vision of a society that is inclusive, equitable, and non-discriminatory.

India needs a unified labour market and universal social security system which can ensure security, safety, and dignity to all workers. Pandemics do not recognise artificial walls between living spaces and work spaces, and both have to be able to provide basic amenities and access to health security to all. However, it seems that current policy responses to the crisis and towards the migrants are still embedded in a short-sighted framework that recognises and reinforces the idea of two Indias.

Ravi Srivastava, former Professor of Economics at JNU, is now honorary Director of the Centre for Employment Studies, Institute for Human Development, Delhi



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

"Good morning, sir."

"Good morning."

"You went to Coimbatore last week, isn't it sir?"

"Yes, I did. I had some work there. You seem to know all about my movements. Incidentally, your use of 'isn't it' in this context is not correct. You tend to say 'isn't it' after every statement. But there are some rules regarding this. 'He is going' is a statement. You can say 'He is going, isn't he?' Isn't he is called a question tag. The question has been tagged on to the statement made earlier. A tag, as you know, is a label pinned to something. A question tag is added to a statement. If the statement is in the affirmative, the question tag should be in the negative. Example: Ram is a fine fellow, isn't he?"

If the statement is in the negative, the question tag should be in the affirmative. Ram is not going there, is he? It is not good, is it?"

I will give some more examples. You yourself will be able to see that there is a regular pattern in all these.

They are not coming, are they? They are coming, aren't they? Jane was unhappy, wasn't she? Jane wasn't unhappy, was she? She can come, can't she? They have money, haven't they? Ram came last night, didn't he? He wants coffee, doesn't he? He doesn't want coffee, does he? You shouldn't borrow it, should you? You should go there, shouldn't you? It is a nice house, isn't it? He will go, won't he? He will not go, will he? He has received it, hasn't he? He has come, hasn't he? He drank a lot, didn't he? He drank a lot, didn't he?"

"Question tags are used in conversation. Only the contracted forms like 'isn't', 'can't', 'won't' are used in tag questions. The question actually is not a question. It seeks your approval. That's all. When you write, you must put a comma before the tag question. By the way 'comma' has two m's. With a single 'm', it will go into a coma."

"Coma reminds me of a friend of mine, sir. He was admitted to hospital last week. He was really dangerous. Now he is better."

"I am happy to hear he is better now. I hope he win be all right soon. By the way, no one is dangerous when he is ill. I suppose what you meant was your friend's condition was dangerous. People can be dangerously ill. They are not dangerous. It is not the individual but the illness that is dangerous. We pray that they come out of danger. I hope you understand. I'll pray for your friend's speedy recovery."

"Thank you, sir. Goodbye".

"Goodbye"

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THE DAILY QUIZ

The nominations for the 94th Academy Awards ceremony, scheduled to be held on March 27, have been announced. Test yourself on the nominees for this year.

1 This film has secured 12 nominations, including Best Picture, and its director has become the first woman to be nominated for best director twice. Name the film and the director.

2 Thanks to nominations for best picture and original screenplay, which actor-filmmaker has become the first person to be nominated in seven different Oscar categories but is yet to win, however?

3 A new retelling of this romantic drama that won 10 Oscars six decades ago has got seven nominations and its legendary director has topped up nominations 18 and 19. Name the film and the director.

4 Will Smith has been nominated for Best Actor for essaying the role of the parent of which legendary sporting siblings?

5 What does the title CODA, the comedy-drama film that has been nominated for three Oscars, stand for?

6 Name the number by Billie Eilish and Finneas O'Connell that has been shortlisted for Best Original Song Oscar.

7 A couple who have been married since 2010 are in the running for the Best Actor and Actress honours albeit for roles in different films. Name the two.

8 One of the films for 'Best International Feature' is from a country neighbouring India. Name the film and the country.



9 Which film that shows the relationship between the leading stars of classic sitcom has got three nominations? • MIRA

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

Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. International Lawn Tennis Challenge was played between USA and Britain (British Isles), 2. Design and crafting of the wonderful trophy, 3. France and Great Britain with 10 triumphs each, 4. South Africa as India gave a walkover because of the former's apartheid policy, 5. Roy Emerson, 6. Nicola Pietrangeli (Italy), 7. Play for two countries. The trio has also donned Hong Kong colours, 8. Spanish footballer Gerard Pique, 9. Australia's Harry Hopman, who won the cup an unmatched 16 times as player-coach.

Only respondent to get all the answers correct: Srijaam Kalingaray



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Not so uniform

Education institutions must not impose homogeneity on students in garb of dress code



PARINITHA SHETTY

DIALOGUE IN SECRECY

By upholding ban on Media One, on basis of material in sealed envelope, Kerala HC has gone against Supreme Court verdicts

THE KERALA HIGH Court's verdict dismissing Media One TV's petition challenging the Union government's order barring its transmission, after the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) refused the Malayalam channel security clearance for renewing its licence is deeply troubling. The court's decision is entirely based on an assessment of the "material" submitted by the government in a sealed envelope.

The reasoning in the 18-page verdict appears to be a dialogue between the state and the judiciary in secrecy even as a petitioner stood before the court alleging violation of fundamental rights. "Once the State is of the stand that the issue involves national security, the court shall not disclose the reasons to the affected party," the verdict states, justifying perusal of the ministry files in a secret envelope. While it is worrying that the government flatly refuses to justify its actions before the court, it is even more disquieting when the judiciary does not ask questions of the executive. The few reasons to justify the denial of security clearance without giving the channel an opportunity to be heard are vague and do not give any indication about the communication between the judiciary and the executive. The court seems to have gone by the "conclusions of the Committee of Officers and other responsible officers of the MHA" to rule that "Information and Broadcasting is a sensitive sector". However, the idea that the judiciary and state can exclude the citizens from democratic spaces, when their rights are at stake, goes against the fundamental precepts of the rule of law.

In a recent string of verdicts, the Supreme Court has insisted that the government follow the raised bar in bringing evidence to the court while invoking the national security argument. In the 2020 decision in *Anuradha Bhasin v Union of India*, the SC held that "no absolute immunity for national security grounds has been carved out. In the 2021 interim order, directing an investigation into the alleged use of Pegasus spyware on citizens, the Supreme Court said that the "mere invocation of national security won't render the Court a mute spectator". Ignoring such precedents, the Kerala High Court has held that "that in a situation of national security, a party cannot insist for strict observance of the principles of natural justice". Indeed, a substantive examination of issues when national security is involved is often beyond judicial competence and is the domain of the executive. But a procedural test, checking whether the action was taken under powers granted by Parliament and whether the state has used its powers proportionally to the risk envisaged, is very much within the ambit of the Constitution. Constitutional courts, as the watchful guardians of the fundamental rights, must ask questions of the state, especially in cases of national security.

PLAY BY RULEBOOK

Tamil Nadu governor must not delay assent to anti-NEET bill. Doing so will invite suspicions of overreach

THE TAMIL NADU government is standing its ground on the promise to scrap the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET). Less than a week after the governor returned to the state that frees the state's medical colleges from the compulsion of admitting students through NEET, a special session of the Tamil Nadu assembly has re-adopted the bill — a first for the legislature. That's as strong a signal as the elected government can send to the governor about its intent. In returning the bill, Governor R N Ravi had flagged several concerns, and said it was "against the interests of students, especially (those from) rural and economically poor students of the state". But the Constitution is unambiguous about what the governor must do now — according to Article 200, once the bill is sent to him for the second time, he must give his assent, and send it onwards to the President.

There is much that is questionable about Tamil Nadu's position on breaking away from the NEET. The all-India test was conceived as a way out of longstanding problems with the medical admission system, from multiple entrance examinations to corruption. The fear that a section of Tamil Nadu's students might not perform well can be addressed if the state government invests resources and attention to modernising the curriculum. But while those may be grounds for the governor's reservations, constitutional propriety demands that he must act on the advice of the council of ministers of an elected government. It must be remembered that scrapping the NEET was a part of the election manifesto of the DMK, and that the bill enjoys support from other major parties of the state, including the AIADMK. Seen in this light, the Tamil Nadu government's displeasure at what it considers the governor's uncalculated critique and his "big brother" attitude is not entirely without basis. Given the long history of governors being used by strong central governments to chip away at the federal compact and the more recent Centre-state tussles over several issues, from the jurisdiction of the BSP to IAS service rules, Ravi's action might invite suspicions of overreach, when he should be acting as a bridge between the state and the Centre.

The future of the NEET exemption bill is, of course, uncertain. It sets up the state government on a path of confrontation with the Centre. The bill needs the President's assent for it to become law. But while those contestations and debates will take their own course, the Tamil Nadu governor must play by the rulebook.

KHABAR LAHARIYA'S STORY

Rural women speaking their mind on camera: This is a compelling story that needs a wider audience

A FILM ABOUT the grassroots news organisation Khabar Lahariya has become the first from India to be nominated for an Academy Award in the Best Documentary Feature category. This alone is worth celebrating, considering the challenges of this filmmaking format, especially in India — few resources, low return on investment and, outside of a handful of international platforms, very little recognition. But an additional reason for celebrating the nomination of *Writing with Fire* is its subject: Directed by Rintu Thomas and Sushmit Ghosh, the film offers a window into the life and work of the Dalit women who run Khabar Lahariya, and the obstacles they overcome — from unhappy husbands and unfriendly crowds to lack of funds and inexperience with technology — as they report on issues that matter the most to the communities they serve.

Twenty years after it was born as a newspaper, first published in Uttar Pradesh's Bundelkhand region, Khabar Lahariya continues to challenge popular notions about what journalism in India could and should be and for whom it is meant. The women who work at the organisation — which made a successful digital-first pivot in 2016 — have to wage a constant battle with the prejudices of caste and gender to pursue and bring to light stories of administrative neglect, crimes against women. In doing so, they frequently put their lives on the line — not just for asking tough questions or being out at all hours, often in hostile environments, but also simply for being Dalit women.

At a time when even a section of journalists working under relatively easier and more privileged circumstances have turned away from the stories that matter, it is heartening to know that the women of Khabar Lahariya carry on undaunted. Since 2002, they've worked hard to spotlight issues and stories that rarely get attention. That the world should now watch and honour Khabar Lahariya's own story is only right.

I WRITE AS a teacher who for many years has taught students in Mangalore, a sharply polarised region in Karnataka that is seeing bitter clashes over a dress code in educational institutions. My students have come from different religions, castes and nations. They spoke different mother tongues, ate different kinds of food and wore different kinds of clothes and ornaments. Some wore the markers of their married status, some wore the habit of their religious order, some wore the clothes that denoted their geographical location, some wore the symbols of their religion and caste, and all conformed to the protocols of gender. These differences in appearance and beliefs and practices of thinking and speaking and eating and appearance, never ever disturbed our sense of belonging to a classroom community.

In many ways, the classroom of a government educational institution is truly representative of the society within which it is instituted, since it provides democratic access to students from all sections of society. Moreover, it acknowledges that our society is hierarchically organised and that children from marginalised communities need to be given additional support and provided privileged access to the classroom and the social capital of education. The coming together of many social worlds within these classrooms makes it a location of perpetual epistemological disruption. Here, learning takes place not only through the protocols of institutionalised pedagogy but also through the many ways in which we go astray of ourselves, as we dialogue with that stranger who is a classmate, a student, a teacher and who slowly becomes a member of a classroom community that we build together. And how we structure and inhabit this community will inform all our future possibilities of living together as social groups.

This inclusive nature of the classroom space is one of its greatest contributions to the process of learning. It is this accommodation of the variety of social locations from which our students come that has contributed to the civil discourses and debates and conversations through which the process of thinking is initiated. It is these conversations that take place across the

lines of gender and caste and religion and nationality that inaugurate the process of critical questioning. Learning, as an inherently disruptive process, always goes astray of the etiquettes of academia. Classroom conversations can reposition the participants in a radically egalitarian practice of speech. Such a conversation demands a difficult translation of social ontologies, a disorientation of knowing, a process of becoming unfamiliar to oneself. It is through such conversations that education becomes a radically transformative process of recognising the common vulnerability of all human beings and the mutual care and support that we owe each other if we have to survive as a species.

When the classroom becomes a space where students are disciplined into a narrow uniformity, then learning becomes a means of straitjacketing the body and the mind. When the uniformity of the classroom is shaped by political considerations and implemented through the authority of political power, then teaching is replaced by indoctrination and learning is replaced by unthinking parroting of political ideologies. When education becomes the handmaiden of hate, the creativity and joy that sustain the great variety of life are destroyed. When teachers become the gatekeepers of bigotry and parochial political interests, they forfeit their right to the trust and responsibility that a community places on them to guide and shape its future possibilities.

When the classroom is used to catalogue, classify and exclude, it inaugurates a future of insane hate and mindless cruelty. Such classrooms become the laboratories of those who have lost the sanity that is required to sustain human existence through the mutuality of kindness and love. In such classrooms, students are instrumentalised into votes and reduced to the colour of the shawls they drape across their shoulders or the scarves they wear over their heads. They are taught the mistrust of hate and trained in the violence of anger. Then, educational institutions will shut their gates to students who fail to display the uniformity of the uniformised body. And in the classrooms, teachers will close up the processes of thinking, wondering and questioning. And edu-

cational institutions will shut down the processes of learning and teaching and experimenting with the many ways in which we can build an equal, inclusive, compassionate and intelligent society.

Hence, it has become incumbent on us to initiate classroom dialogues and listen to the faltering, almost illegible, voices that are in a constant struggle against invisibility. I have struggled for a friendship with my students that could only be achieved by disrupting the classroom hierarchy of knowing and learning. I have tried to listen to the polyphonic social rhythms of their voices. I have tried to understand their speech through the grammar of their speech, and not mine. My students have shown me great generosity by bringing their words to the classroom. They have listened and spoken and argued with a civility that was disinterested and without rancour. They have constantly pushed me to the precarity of uncertainty.

Together we have maintained the dissonance of knowing and being. We have wrestled with texts that have shaken us and made us forever uncomfortable. We have together unpacked the orders of meaning and the canons of knowledge. And we have done this as companions, as friends, as equals. We have translated the multiple social worlds to which we belong, to each other. We have initiated a process of difficult listening and faltering speech. We have experimented at shaping enabling, egalitarian specialisations of the classroom. Sometimes it has been an exhilarating process and sometimes a frustrating one. I thank the generations of students who have shared with me this process of learning the order of the world, excavating the genealogy of its making and interrogating the politics of its being. Without your companionship and your speech, this could never have been done. Let us protect this classroom, that we shaped together, from all onslaughts and guard it even as the world which should sustain it seems to be falling apart.

The writer is professor, department of English, Mangalore University



FIROZ BAKHT AHMED

DON'T DIVIDE THE CLASSROOM

Hijab issue in Karnataka cries out for constitutionalism

WHERE WAS THE "hijab issue" just a few months ago? Why has it suddenly erupted? These are important questions that we need to address as it's unfortunate and of great concern that young men and women are being divided along religious lines. A dispute over uniforms has been blown out of proportion by being politicised and communalised. A matter between the administrators of educational institutions and the community should not be turned into a mandir-masjid kind of a wrangle. We have seen enough of them and they have sapped a lot of the nation's energy.

Justice Krishna S Dixit of the Karnataka High Court has rightly emphasised that the court will have to decide the issue early as it is not a happy scene to see students marching on the roads every day. He has underlined the primacy of the Constitution over hot-headed emotions. Voices of sanity and reason must get primacy over those advocating an impassioned approach.

The protesting young women in Karnataka say that wearing "hijab" is their personal choice and key to their religious practice. That matter is also being contested in the court but in an educational institution, it's rule, and not just personal choice,

that has to be followed. Interestingly, regarding the dress code, a cleric of Hyderabad once issued a "fatwa" (Islamic decree) that it was un-Islamic on the part of Saudi Muslims to play tennis in skirts and she must use a "nabag" and cover her legs. A judge was a pious Muslim at home where she covered her face with a "hijab" but while on duty on the bench, she didn't. There are several examples like her. Many Muslim women are working in hospitals, with the government, as players and pilots. It's not possible to work in a hijab. These Karnataka girls, too, will be our future doctors, justices, teachers, pilots.

In the Udupi controversy, the girls are being crushed by a grip between the college administration as well as the custodians of Islam who, in the name of secularism and Constitution, are fanning the flames. On the other hand, are ministers like Giriraj Singh, who too have not left a stone unturned by calling the deteriorating law and order situation "Ghazwa-e-Hind" (capturing of India by Muslims).

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Each institution has a set of rules and regulations, norms and values. In a school or

college, religious identity should not be the defining identity. An important question to ask is: Where are the other girls who are comfortable entering the classroom without the hijab and who wear it once they leave the school? The protesters are few, the silent students are many.

All those drawing and deepening the dividing lines over "hijab", chanting Jai Shri Ram and Allah-u-Akbar as a rallying cry, are comfortable entering the classroom without the hijab and who wear it once they leave the school? The protesters are few, the silent students are many.

All those drawing and deepening the dividing lines over "hijab", chanting Jai Shri Ram and Allah-u-Akbar as a rallying cry, are comfortable entering the classroom without the hijab and who wear it once they leave the school? The protesters are few, the silent students are many.

It's high time that the government steps in and calms the waters lest the Opposition put the BJP government in the dock for fanning the Hindu-Muslim divide. As always, that has been a plank for the Opposition and it's time to wake up if this government wants India to make the "Vishwa Guru."

The writer is former chancellor, Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad



FEBRUARY 10, 1982, FORTY YEARS AGO

SNAP POLLS

THE CONGRESS-HIGH command is thinking in terms of snap polls for the Andhra Pradesh Assembly. In the normal course, the state is due to go for polls in February next year, along with Karnataka. However, the high command seems to favour early polls in both states along with West Bengal, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. Kerala may also be clubbed if the high command feels the Karunakaran ministry will survive. Though the idea of early polls was considered, a decision was not taken by the high command as it was awaiting the decision of the Election Commission on the allegedly inflated voters' list in West Bengal.

KERALA SPEAKER

KERALA ASSEMBLY SPEAKER A C Jose exercised his casting vote seven times to enable the Karunakaran Ministry in surviving its second trial of strength in the assembly on Tuesday. The ruling side and opposition voted at 70 votes each when the motion of thanks to the governor's address and the opposition's amendments were put to a vote. The Speaker gave his casting vote on each occasion to the government, amidst shouts of "shame" by the opposition and the thumping of desks by members of the ruling parties, before the amendments were rejected. The motion of thanks was finally adopted and the House adjourned to meet again on March 25.

The line-up was the same as on the previous occasion when the House rejected the opposition's no-confidence motion against the Government.

DUTT WITH ANTULAY

FORMER MAHARASHTRA CHIEF MINISTER AR Antulay on Tuesday declared in Bombay that the Pratibha Patilshah would continue to function "because of its laudable objectives to help creative artists in all fields". Talking to journalists, Antulay said that two more trustees — Daji Bhatawadekar, a well-known Marathi stage actor and Sunil Dutt, Bombay Sheriff — had been inducted into the trust.

13 THE IDEAS PAGE

Possibilities Down Under

Jaishankar's visit to Australia provides opportunity to strengthen Quad and boost New Delhi's ties with Canberra



AMITABH MATTOO

AS INDIA'S External Affairs Minister, S Jaishankar enters the "old" Quad of the University of Melbourne on Friday morning, he will be greeted with what some may find to be an intriguing jugalbandi of the tabla and the aboriginal wind instrument, the didgeridoo. And even before he begins his conversation with academics on the future of the Indo-Pacific at the University's Australia-India Institute, he will have — in keeping with cultural protocol — acknowledged the Wurundjeri people, the traditional owners of the land, an overture that signifies contemporary Australia's many parallel realities.

It is this new Australia — coming to terms with its difficult past, almost confident of its future in Asia and yet bound to the Anglo-Saxon world — that offers New Delhi the possibilities of the most enduring partnership in the region: friendship based on the very first principles that mould relationships, a convergence of values and of interests. While the relationship has all but transformed in the last decade and a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership has been forged, it still requires leadership and political navigation if the vast promise has to translate into a sustainable reality. This ambition must be the centrepiece of Jaishankar's agenda.

But Jaishankar's visit is beyond the bilateral; what draws him for his first visit to Melbourne, in his current role, is the meeting of the Quad Foreign Ministers from Australia, Japan, United States and India, in person after more than two years. As the foreign ministers of this new, still-unblemished ally arrive in Australia, a region that geographers of the old Empire had once described as the Antipodes — so distant and different as it was to their world — they do so in the realisation that this is the new centre of gravity and gravitas of international politics and the quest for balance and resilience in the face of strategic competition; of economics, markets and supply chains; of the battle against common challenges, including climate change, cyber security and Covid; and of ideas and innovation for a more habitable planet.

Understandably, Melbourne, voted consistently as one of the most livable cities on the planet, recovering its joie de vivre after the pandemic — with a robust multiculturalism that includes a China Town and a Little India — is the natural setting this week for the critical discussions about these challenges to our planet and to the future of our region and beyond.

Bilateralism and multilateralism have not come easy for India. It is tempting to forget history, even be amnesiac about recent times, in the flood of affection that prevails today between New Delhi and Canberra. But it was just over a decade ago, in February 2010 that a prominent Indian news magazine ran a cover story on "Why the Aussies Hate Us" as attacks on Indian students in Melbourne led to a nadir in bilateral relations already at a low after Canberra's ferocious



C.R. Sankum

response to India's nuclear tests in 1998.

Today, however, it is difficult to find a single significant issue on which India and Australia have positions dramatically different from each other, and this convergence transcends the partisan divide in Canberra.

The Indian diaspora is finally coming of age in Australia; the population of Indian-born people has doubled in the last decade, and for the last five years, India remains the top source of skilled migration. The tourist and student traffic from India, which had been impacted by the sealing of Australia's borders because of Covid, should revive after the full opening of borders later this month.

The one bridge that is still to be built is of a robust bilateral economic relationship. Corporate Australia still finds it difficult to do business with India and the "champions" for the business relationship (identified by Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) need to really position themselves in the vanguard of the relationship.

However, niggardly bureaucrats from both sides have prevented an even "early harvest" minimal free trade agreement (termed in bureaucratese as CECA — Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement) from being signed despite political will and many deadlines. This agreement must be concluded at the earliest.

The bilateralism merges seamlessly into the multilateral agenda for the Quad, which formally or on the sidelines, will spend much of its time devoted to Beijing, its belligerence, its revisionism and its revanchism across the region. India and Australia have both been victims of the persistent wolf-warrior diplomacy of Xi Jinping's China.

The concern about China has been aggravated by the increased levels of economic dependence on China. Recall that India, Australia and Japan had agreed to reduce their dependence on China and diversify supply chains through Supply Chain Resilience

Initiative (SCRI). The three countries had met in September 2021 to set in place mechanisms for trade diversification, to reduce their dependence on Chinese markets for medical supplies and other finished goods during the pandemic. While the jury is still out on the long-term success of SCRI, prima facie the dependence on China has not reduced in any significant manner even while the overall trade deficit has increased.

While the agenda of the Quad is broad, the challenge is to remain focused on the Indo-Pacific, its stability, and not be distracted, for instance, by the shenanigans of Vladimir Putin's Russia in Ukraine or prematurely anticipate a military alliance being forged because of the flirtations of Xi and Putin, two of the most unlikely candidates for a serious relationship or even a tentative ally.

Regions are markers of geography but also constructions of a cartographic imagination. You imagine your neighbourhood as much as by where you are positioned, as by where you want to be. Your geographical compass, in sum, reflects your threats and your opportunities, your ambitions and your vulnerabilities — a distinct weltanschauung.

On his first visit to Australia as India's External Affairs Minister, S Jaishankar, will have the opportunity to put a real imprimatur on two relationships that he has helped to craft: The Quad and bilateral ties with the government in Canberra. What is now vital is to demonstrate that these partnerships can truly deliver on transforming the reality on the ground by giving the Quad real substance and the Indo-Pacific a fighting chance at stability despite now predictable Chinese subversiveness.

The writer is Professor at JNU and University of Melbourne and former Founder-Director of the Australia India Institute

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Whether or not the world warms to these Games, even the IOC may one day come to wonder if they were really worth it. And though Beijing wanted the Olympics, and still considers them useful, they do not look like the Olympics that it wanted."

—THE GUARDIAN

Ambitious, yet measured

Budget will spur growth, while taking care of equity aspects and remaining well within the available fiscal space



RAJIV KUMAR

THE UNION budget for 2022-23 is a landmark budget. It lays the foundation for taking the country towards a technologically frontline economy with world-class infrastructure that is seamlessly integrated and connects the farthest corners of the country with a multi-modal logistics network. This is its unifying framework as the government attempts to lift the economy to a higher growth trajectory of 8-8.5 per cent in the coming decades.

There is unanimity across all shades of economic opinion that the current policy imperative is to generate employment at a massive scale. This must translate to the objective of fostering a higher growth rate that is shared across all geographic regions and by all income classes. The budget's underlying philosophical premise is that the higher growth will be triggered only by an upswing of private investment, especially in employment-intensive areas. The government's role is a supportive one, to facilitate such private investment growth through world-class infrastructure, green energy and adequate supply of required skills. The budget has also attempted to catalyse private investment by a massive increase in public capital expenditure. Moreover, states have also been encouraged to allocate greater resources to infrastructure development by making Rs 1 lakh crore available in interest-free 50-year loans to those that undertake such outlays.

This large dose of public capital expenditure is expected to "crowd in" private investment, thereby setting up a virtuous cycle of investment-enhanced employment, incomes and consumption leading once again to another bout of private investment as capacities are fully utilised. Let me add that better quality and expansion of infrastructure, including access to energy, ensures that the benefits of rapid growth percolate faster to lower-income segments. It reduces inequities and improves opportunities. Plus, the employment intensity of the infrastructure and construction sectors is on average five times that of other sectors. So, such public capex triggers private investment, helps generate employment and spread the benefits of growth over a wider set of beneficiaries.

This growth orientation of the budget was essential to pull the economy decisively out of the shadows of the pandemic-induced shock. In pursuit of this higher growth objective, the finance minister has not hesitated to lift the fiscal deficit rise marginally to 6.9 per cent of the GDP in 2022-23. The fiscal hawk should note that as growth takes hold and is sustained above 8 per cent, all ratios that are relevant to the rating agencies will improve and will pose no risk of a credit ratings downgrade. Those who, sometimes mistakenly, simplistically correlate fiscal

deficit with higher inflationary pressures would do well to recognise that the present inflation, still within RBI's tolerance range, is not demand-driven. It is a result of supply-side bottlenecks and constraints. As these constraints are addressed by improvements in logistics and rebuilding of supply chains, inflationary pressures will soften. Therefore, the budget's laser-like focus on growth and as a corollary on employment generation is just what was required.

The budget, however, is not single-mindedly growth-oriented. It does pay sufficient attention to improving the lives of those at the bottom of the pyramid and the MSMEs. By allocating Rs 60,000 crore for the Jal Jeevan Mission it will ensure that another 3.8 crore households will receive tap water to add to the 5.5 crore who have already been benefited. With Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, this will transform the lives of crores of citizens who received scant attention during previous regimes. The affordable housing programmes will further improve ease of living. It has several other allocations that will contribute to improving the lives of the poor. An increase of 12 per cent in the education sector budget, which has received more than Rs 1 lakh crore for the first time. People in the aid and relatively poor Bundelkhand region, spread across UP and MP, will see a glimmer of hope of sustained growth as the Betwa link finally takes off. Five more such river links have been identified and will hopefully spur inter-state cooperation to bring them to fruition.

For MSMEs in the contact-intensive hospitality sector, the budget has earmarked Rs 50,000 crore of the emergency credit link guarantee scheme. The scheme's allocation has been raised to Rs 5 lakh crore and the period extended to March 2023. These collateral-free funds will greatly help MSMEs access cheap credit. The sector will also receive an additional boost with the revamping of the CGTME scheme, which will ensure additional credit of Rs 2 lakh crore for micro and small enterprises. These measures will broaden the growth impulse and ensure that employment generation activity is spread across the country.

The budget takes bold steps to usher in an era of chemical-free, ecologically-friendly natural farming in the country. A start will be made by encouraging natural farming on a five kilometre-wide corridor along the Ganges. This will generate income and employment along its entire course while sustaining the environment.

It is worth pointing out that the budget has once again adopted a conservative approach towards resource mobilisation possibilities by keeping tax buoyancy to just about one. This is normally higher especially during the upswing of the pandemic cycle. Such conservatism gives us the fiscal space to respond effectively to any emergency which may have to be faced in these uncertain times. It is always better to have some firepower in store rather than be strapped for resources. The budget does well to spur growth while taking care of equity aspects and remaining well within the available fiscal space.

The writer is Vice Chairman, NITI Aayog. Views are personal

The litigation labyrinth

Archaic laws, cases that drag on, unclear verdicts bedevil legal system



BIBEK DEBROY

THIS COLUMN is about three cases from January 2022.

The Supreme Court (SC) decided a case in January 2022 and the judgment made it to the headlines. If a Hindu man dies intestate (without a will), the daughter can inherit her father's self-acquired property. Gurunatha Gounder (I) had two sons, Marappa Gounder and Ramaswamy Gounder. Marappa Gounder died before his elder brother, Marappa, who also died a long time ago, in 1949. A minor point was raised about whether Marappa Gounder died in 1949, or in 1957.

Why is that timeline important? Because the Hindu Succession Act was passed in 1956 and it governs intestate succession among Hindus. This bit, about the year of Marappa's death, was examined by a trial court (judgment of 1994) and the Madras High Court (judgment of 2009) and both courts decided Marappa died in 1949, not 1957. The SC saw no reason to question that established fact. Nor was another fact questioned: In 1938, Marappa bought the property through his own resources. It wasn't joint family property. He could have dealt with it as he chose, had he left a will. Unfortunately, he died intestate. Marappa Gounder had only one daughter, Kupayee Ammal, and no sons. She died in 1967 and left no children. Ramaswamy Gounder had one son and four daughters. The son was Gurunatha Gounder (II). The daughters were Thangammal (dead now), Ramayeeammal

(dead now), Elayammal and Nallammal. Thangammal, dead now, was the original plaintiff, who applied for partition.

When Marappa Gounder died, who should inherit his property? Should it be Kupayee Ammal, the only daughter? Or, since she was a woman, should it be Ramaswamy Gounder's son, Gurunatha Gounder (II)? When Kupayee Ammal died, who should inherit the property? Should it be Gurunatha Gounder (II) and his heirs, or should his four sisters also have a share?

The SC decided: "Applying the above settled legal proposition to the facts of the case at hand, since the succession of the suit properties opened in 1957 upon the death of Kupayee Ammal, the 1956 Act shall apply and thereby Ramaswamy Gounder's daughters being Class-I heirs of their father too shall also be heirs and entitled to 1/5th share in each of the suit properties." Incidentally, Gurunatha Gounder (II) is also dead. Most of the original parties are dead, including not just the one who first asked for the partition, but the original appellant.

Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav celebrates 75 years of India's Independence and we are setting out a template for India in 2047. Does it seem right that an issue of inheritance that should have been settled in 1949, or in 1967, is being settled in 2022? Imagine the mess in enforcing what the SC has decided. Lawsuits of fathers (or mothers) devoted on sons and daughters; up to the third or fourth generation.

Part of the mess is because of the complicated nature of inheritance and succession laws, even more so if the individual dies intestate. There are constitutional issues, one part of the Constitution vis-à-vis another. Despite the issue being controversial, we can't possibly deny we don't have a framework for personal laws suitable for a 21st century India. Add to that long delays in settling disputes, overload in the admission of cases and even the language of judgments.

Consider another recent case from Mumbai, the one where the metropolitan magistrate acquitted Shilpa Shetty of obscenity and indecency charges. In 2007, at a promotional event, Richard Gere kissed her and FIRs were filed in Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. Those FIRs were primarily under the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act and Sections 292, 293 and 294 of IPC (Indian Penal Code). I think anyone who reads those statutes and sections should agree, (a) those FIRs shouldn't have been lodged; (b) even if there was an FIR, the case shouldn't have been admitted in court; (c) it shouldn't have taken 15 years to decide. Police and courts should have better things to do. Shouldn't we be more discriminating about what cases are admitted in courts?

On language and plain English, I am repeating myself. (I have written about it in the past.) I am repeating myself because such incidents recur, especially in Himachal

Pradesh, though Justice Sureshwar Thakur has now moved elsewhere, to the Punjab and Haryana High Court.

In January 2022, two judges of the SC couldn't understand a judgment authored by Thakur in 2017 and had to ask whether it was written in Latin. January 2022 wasn't the first time. (There was incomprehension in the past too.) There were similar examples for the Himachal Pradesh High Court in April 2017, December 2018 and March 2021.

In most organisations, people learn from past mistakes. But there is the need to be careful about the Contempt of Courts Act of 1971. When we hear "contempt of court", we tend to think of civil contempt, where a court's judgment or direction is not complied with. But that 1971 statute also has provisions on criminal contempt. Any act that "scandalises or tends to scandalise, or lowers or tends to lower the authority of, any court" is criminal contempt. "Scandalising" is neither contempt by interference, nor contempt by disobedience. We inherited this expression from Britain. In 2013, following a Law Commission Report (2012), the UK's Crime and Courts Act, said, "Scandalising the judiciary (also referred to as scandalising the court or scandalising judges) is abolished as a form of contempt of court under the common law of England and Wales."

The writer is chairman, Economic Advisory Council to the PM. Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POLITICAL GAME

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Motion of attack" (IE, February 9). The contemporary Indian political scenario is governed by realpolitik, unlike real, issue-based politics that marked parliamentary debates during Jawaharlal Nehru's era. As noticed in Rahul Gandhi's observations on the President's address and the prime minister's reply, confrontation and one-upmanship are employed, in which the key issues get blurred. Opinions are treated as facts, facts are treated as unproven allegations and arguments have displaced logic and understanding. Content-wise, both Gandhi and Modi excelled in using rhetoric, selective data and misused self-assertions. What made the difference was in presentation skills. As long as this gap of articulation will persist between the PM and the opposition, the PM will win.

Y.C. Choudhary, Pune

POOR ARGUMENT

THIS REFERS TO the article, "Controlling women's bodies" (IE, February 9). The people who put forth the argument that criminalisation of marital rape may result in false accusations have failed to understand one of the basic principles of our criminal justice system — 1,000 culprits may escape but one innocent person should not be punished. Another flaw in the argument is the assumption about "false accusations". They are a phenomenon that can occur in all kinds of crime. Should we de-criminalise fraud, theft, etc,

IDEAS ONLINE

ONLY IN THE EXPRESS

● LATA MANGESHKAR, HEROINE OFF-SCREEN: AAKSHI MASREE

for the fear of false cases? All the actions that are morally incorrect should certainly be made legally punishable. Though categorised under the "offences affecting the honour of a woman", rape not only breaches the dignity of a woman but also soils the social fabric of our community.

Aerika Singh, Chandigarh

REGULATION NEEDED

THIS REFERS TO the article "Undermining polls" (IE, February 9). The influence of the outcome of various opinion polls on the electoral process has been a subject of popular debate. The credibility of the procedure employed by the surveying organisations and the role of the commissioning media house in shaping the outcome of the opinion polls needs to be regulated. In the absence of necessary statutes to regulate the opinion polls, the EC can only take a few steps in this regard.

Sudip Kumar Dey, Barasat

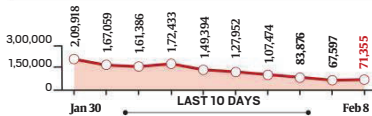
TRACKING INDIA'S COVID CURVE

DASHBOARD, AS ON FEB 9

700
DAYS SINCE
PANDEMIC
BEGANNew cases
71,355Active cases
8,92,818Deaths
1,217

Weekly CFR: 0.33% | Overall CFR: 1.26% | Total deaths: 5,05,279

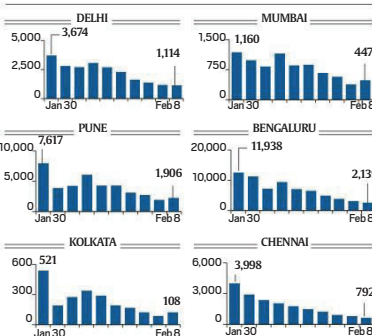
NEW CASES, DAILY



SURGE IN THE STATES

State	New cases	Active cases	Deaths	Weekly positivity
Kerala	29471	2,84,437	824	33.92%
Maharashtra	6107	96069	62	8.19%
Tamil Nadu	4519	90137	37	6.77%
Karnataka	4452	72448	51	9.26%
Rajasthan	3411	37278	16	11.95%

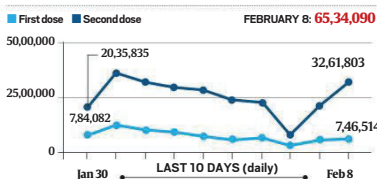
CASES IN THE CITIES, LAST 10 DAYS



TOTAL TESTS	74,46,84,750
TESTS ON FEB 9	17,76,629
WEEKLY POSITIVITY	6.37%
OVERALL POSITIVITY	5.70%

INDIA TOTAL DOSES 170,87,06,705

(Adults 1st dose: 90,16,70,652; 2nd: 73,16,05,796; 15-18 age group 1st dose: 5,04,94,313; 2nd: 92,19,707; precautionary: 1,57,16,237)



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SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

Unemployment report card

Government has said more than 25,000 died by suicide due to unemployment or debt during 2018-20. A look at the state of employment in poll-bound states, and trends among youth, the educated, and women.

UDIT MISRA

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 9

ON WEDNESDAY, during the debate on Budget 2022-23, the government informed Rajya Sabha that more than 25,000 Indians died by suicide due to either unemployment or indebtedness between 2018 and 2020. According to the data, suicides among the unemployed have been increasing and touched a high (3,548) in 2020. The growing stress due to unemployment is in line with the persistently high levels of unemployment — acknowledged even by the government's own annual surveys, known as the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS).

However, unemployment is not evenly distributed across the population. Data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) show that unemployment in India: ■ is highest among the youth; ■ rises with educational attainment; and ■ is higher among women.

So where do the poll-bound states stand on these metrics?

Instead of looking at just the unemployment rate (number of unemployed expressed as a percentage of the labour force), which fails to take into account the shifts in labour force participation rate (number of people demanding work expressed as a percentage of the total working-age population), this analysis will look at the employment rate in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab. In other words, the tables detail the total population belonging to the concerned category and the total number among those who have a job. The ratio is calculated as the employment rate (i.e. total employed expressed as a percentage of the total population in that category) to help us compare the state with each other as well as the national average.

The data have been compiled for three time periods: ■ September-December 2016 (as it provides the picture just before the start of the Assembly term)

■ Sept-Dec 2019 (as it provides a comparable picture before the Covid pandemic)

■ Sept-Dec 2021 (as it is the latest available data and provides a clear 5 years of trend)

Of the five states going to polls, CMIE has not compiled data for Manipur.

UTTAR PRADESH: On all three counts — employment levels among the youth, among the educated and among women — Uttar Pradesh is not only far behind the national average but has also seen a sharp decline over the past five years.

UTTAR PRADESH (SEPT-DEC EACH GIVEN YEAR)

TABLE 1: AMONG THE YOUTH (AGE 15-29)

	Total population (mn)	Total employed (mn)	Emp rate (%)
2016	62.07	15.39	24.79
2019	66.22	13.57	20.49
2021	70.99	12.17	17.14

TABLE 2: AMONG THE EDUCATED (GRADUATE+)

	Total population (mn)	Total employed (mn)	Emp rate (%)
2016	18.97	9.30	49.02
2019	19.83	9.92	50.03
2021	18.09	7.91	43.73

TABLE 3: AMONG WOMEN (AGE 15+)

	Total population (mn)	Total employed (mn)	Emp rate (%)
2016	68.91	2.65	3.85
2019	77.37	2.15	2.78
2021	80.73	1.51	1.88

PUNJAB (SEPT-DEC EACH GIVEN YEAR)

TABLE 1: AMONG THE YOUTH (AGE 15-29)

	Total population (mn)	Total employed (mn)	Emp rate (%)
2016	76.67	25.02	32.63
2019	81.96	23.48	28.71
2021	86.99	20.08	23.08

TABLE 2: AMONG THE EDUCATED (GRADUATE+)

	Total population (mn)	Total employed (mn)	Emp rate (%)
2016	30.20	14.5	48.01
2019	33.10	14.60	44.11
2021	31.94	13.63	42.67

TABLE 3: AMONG WOMEN (AGE 15+)

	Total population (mn)	Total employed (mn)	Emp rate (%)
2016	10.66	0.59	5.53
2019	11.13	0.34	3.05
2021	11.36	0.13	1.14

Source: Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy Pvt Ltd & Express Research

As far as women are concerned, UP has always been behind. In the last five years, this situation has become even worse. While the population of working-age women went up by 12 million, the number of women with a job halved from the already paltry number of December 2016. Less than 2% of all women belonging to the working-age population (15 years and above) have a job.

PUNJAB: Youth employment rates in Punjab are much better than the national average but the fact remains that they have been coming down over the past five years. While the total youth population has gone up by 10 million (or 1 crore), the number

with jobs has come down by 5 million.

Similarly, the employment rates both among graduates (and above), as well as women, have fallen sharply. Much like UP, the employment rate among women in Punjab was also quite low five years ago, but it has fallen below even UP's level.

GOA: Past analysis of RBI data has shown that Goa is one state where per capita incomes have contracted (instead of growing) over the past five years. As such, it is not a surprise to find a rather precipitous decline in the youth employment rate.

In December 2016, the youth population was 4.05 lakh. Of these, 1.71 lakh had a job. But over the last five years, even though the youth population has shrunk by a lakh, the number of young people with a job has shrunk to just 30,000. In percentage terms, the fall in employment rate — from 42% to 10% — is the steepest in the four states considered here.

The situation is much better if one looks at graduates and those with a higher education. But the employment rate in 2021 (49%) is far lower than what it was in 2016 (62%) and is now below the national average.

The proportion of working-age women with jobs, too, has plummeted in Goa — from 27% to 3%.

UTTARAKHAND: This is yet another

state where the youth employment rate has taken a massive hit. The employment rate among youth, which was already quite low (22%), has gone down one-fourth (just 5%) over the past five years.

However, the employment rate among the highly educated has increased — from 46% to 50% — and, in this regard, Uttarakhand is an outlier.

But employment for women again follows the broader trend of a collapse — from 8% to 2%.

Why does youth unemployment matter? In the recently released Global Risks Report, the World Economic Forum pointed out "Widespread youth disillusionment" as one of the main risks for India.

By "widespread youth disillusionment", WEF refers to "youth disengagement, lack of confidence and/or loss of trust of existing economic, political and social structures at a global scale, negatively impacting social stability, individual well-being and economic productivity."

Scenes of young people demanding jobs in UP, the most populous state in India, are a pointer that unemployment may well be a key deciding factor for many voters, especially the young, the educated, and women.

Geomagnetic storm that killed Starlink sats

— in a single solar event has been described as "unheard of" and "huge".

Solar storms/flares

Solar storms are magnetic plasma ejected at great speeds from the solar surface. They occur during the release of magnetic energy associated with sunspots ('dark' regions on the Sun that are cooler than the surrounding photosphere), and can last for a few minutes or hours. The solar storm that described the satellites occurred on February 1 and 2, and its powerful trails were observed on February 3.

"The emerging data suggest that the passing of the latter part of the storm, with its high density core, possessed speeds higher than what was recorded during the storm's arrival — something we did not expect," said physicist Prof Dibyendu Nandi, head of the Centre of Excellence in Space Sciences India (CESSI) at the Indian Institute of Space Education and Research (IISER), Kolkata.

The storm was unusual, unexpectedly massive, and of a kind not seen in the recent past, Prof Nandi said.

Effect on Earth

Not all solar flares reach Earth, but solar flares/storms, solar energetic particles (SEPs), high-speed solar winds, and coronal mass ejections (CMEs) that come close can impact space weather in near-Earth space and the upper atmosphere.

Solar storms can hit operations of space-dependent services like global positioning systems (GPS), radio, and satellite communications. Geomagnetic storms interfere with high-frequency radio communications and GPS navigation systems. Aircraft flights, power grids, and space exploration programmes are vulnerable.

CMEs, with ejection speeds with matter travelling at millions of miles an hour, can potentially create disturbances in the magnetosphere, the protective shield sur-

rounding the Earth. Astronauts on spacewalks face health risks from possible exposure to solar radiation outside the Earth's protective atmosphere.

Predicting solar storms

Solar physicists and other scientists use computer models to predict solar storms and solar activities in general. The February 1-2 phenomenon that knocked out Starlink's satellites was predicted on January 29.

"Current models are capable of predicting a storm's time of arrival and its speed. But the storm's structure or orientation still cannot be predicted," Prof Nandi said.

Certain orientations of the magnetic field can produce a more intense response from the magnetosphere, and trigger more intense magnetic storms.

With the increasing global dependence on satellites for almost every activity, there is a need for better space weather forecasts and more effective ways to protect satellites.

Governor's powers, friction with states, and why this happens often

DEEPTIMAN TIWARY

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 9

LAST WEEK, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee blocked Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar on Twitter. She said she was "forced" to do so because of his "unethical and unconstitutional" statements and accused him of treating government officials like "his servants". Dhankhar responded with a series of tweets on the "essence and spirit of democracy" and saying the CM's move was "against constitutional norms".

Days earlier, the Tamil Nadu government had taken exception to Governor R N Ravi's Republic Day speech articulating the benefits of NEET, the medical entrance exam. Tamil Nadu has passed a Bill to exempt the state from NEET; Ravi has sent it back to the state. These are two of many examples of friction between states and Governors.

What is the law on Governor-state relations?

Although envisaged as an apolitical head who must act on the advice of the council of ministers, the Governor enjoys certain powers granted under the Constitution, such as giving or withholding assent to a Bill passed by the state legislature, or determining the time needed for a party to prove its majority, or which party must be called first to do so, generally after a hung verdict in an election.

There are, however, no provisions laid down for the manner in which the Governor and the state must engage publicly when there is a difference of opinion. The management of differences has traditionally been guided by respect for each other's boundaries.

What have been the friction points?

In recent years, there have been largely about the selection of the party to form a government, deadline for proving majority, sitting on Bills, and passing negative remarks on the state administration.

In November 2018, then J&K Governor Satyapal Malik dissolved the Assembly amid indications that various parties were coming together to form the government. This paved the way for the Centre to later bifurcate state

into two Union territories, by considering the Governor as the government.

In November 2019, after a hung verdict in Maharashtra, Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari invited BJP leader Devendra Fadnis and administered him oath as CM. This government lasted just 80 hours. Six months later, Koshyari refused to nominate CM Uddhav Thackeray to the Legislative Council, leading Thackeray to meet PM Narendra Modi and demand the issue be decided in West Bengal. Dhankhar has often commented on law and order and political violence. Ravi, in his previous stint as Nagaland Governor, had criticised affairs of the state and allegedly interfered in administration.

In December 2020, Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan turned down a request to summon a special sitting of the Assembly to debate the three central farm laws.

Following the Karnataka polls in 2018, Governor Vajubhai Vala invited the BJP to form the government and gave B S Yeddyurappa 15 days to prove majority. Challenged by Congress and JDS in the Supreme Court, it was reduced to three days.

Is such friction recent?

Allegations of the Centre using the Governor's position to destabilise state governments have been made since the 1950s. In 1959, Kerala's E M S Namboodiripad government was dismissed based on a report by the Governor. Several state governments have been dismissed since then, including 63 through President's Rule orders issued by Governors between 1971 and 1990. These include the Biju Debnath Singh government in Haryana (1967); Virendra Patel government in Karnataka (1971); M Karunanidhi government in Tamil Nadu (1976); B S Shekhawat government in Rajasthan and SAD government in Punjab (1980); Janata Party governments in UP; Odisha, Gujarat and Bihar (1980); N T Rama Rao government in Andhra (1984); and Kalyan Singh governments in UP (1992, 1998). These became less frequent during the coalition era at the Centre and the emergence of strong regional parties.

Why does this happen?

"Because Governors have become political appointees," said NALSAR chancellor and

constitutional expert Faizan Mustafa. "The Constituent Assembly envisaged Governor to be apolitical. But politicians become Governors and then resign to fight elections."

Constitutional expert Alok Prasanna of Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy said: "The CM is answerable to the people. But the Governor is answerable to no one except the Centre. You can suggest it with ideas of constitutional morality and values, but the truth is there is a functional gap in the Constitution."

There is no provision for impeaching the Governor, who is appointed by the President on the Centre's advice. While the Governor has 5-year tenure, he can remain in office only until the pleasure of the President.

In 2001, the National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution, headed by retired C J M N Venkatchaliah and set up by the Atal Behari Vajpayee, said, "...because the Governor has his appointment and his continuation in the office to the Union Council of Ministers, in matters where the Central Government and the State Government do not see eye to eye, there is the apprehension that he is likely to act in accordance with the instructions, if any, received from the Union Council of Ministers. Indeed, the Governors today are being pejoratively called the 'agents of the Centre'."

In the Constitution, there are no guidelines for exercise of the Governor's powers, including for appointing a CM or dissolving the Assembly. There is no limit set for how long a Governor can withhold assent to a Bill.

What reforms have been suggested?

From the Administrative Reforms Commission of 1968 to Sarkaria Commission of 1988 and the one mentioned above, several panels have recommended reforms, such as selection of the Governor through a panel comprising the PM, Home Minister, Lok Sabha Speaker and the CM, apart from fixing his tenure for five years. Recommendations have also been made for a provision to impeach the Governor by the Assembly.

No government has implemented any of these recommendations.

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