FARMERS’ REVOLT

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RURAL REVOLT

Farmers in the BJP-ruled States of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh, distressed by demonetisation and government inaction, rise in revolt and spoil the Narendra Modi government's ambitious third anniversary celebrations.

BY VENKITESH RAMAKRISHNAN AND PURNIMA S. TRIPATHI
POLICE AND PARAMILITARY personnel in action after farmers throw vegetables on the road during a protest at Shajapur in Madhya Pradesh on June 8. (Right) Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan greets Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Kisan Mahasammelan at Sehore in February 2016.

HUMONGOUS WAS THE WORD USED WITH pride by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders to describe the plans for the third anniversary celebrations of the Narendra Modi-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government when they were announced in mid May. The multidimensional celebrations that were to be conducted from May 25 to June 15 by the BJP, the ruling coalition and the government were programmed to start with the launch of the eponymously named event, MODI, or Making of Developed India. It was to be followed by Modi’s address to the nation from Guwahati, the capital of Assam where the BJP was elected to power for the first time in 2016. The celebrations were to continue in 900 cities and towns across the country, with the Prime Minister himself participating in the events in Bengaluru, Delhi, Jaipur, Kolkata, Pune and other major cities. The plans visualised included Modi writing two crore letters and sending 10 crore SMS messages to common people, front-page advertisements in 400 newspapers across the country displaying Modi’s visage and listing his government’s achievements, 30- and 60-second advertisements on television and radio on all the 22 days of the celebration period, and 300 multimedia exhibitions in various States. Apart from this, each Union Ministry launched hundreds of booklets titled “Then and Now (UPA and NDA)”, evidently to highlight how the country had marched ahead under Modi’s regime. The agriculture sector, with particular emphasis on the so-called farmer welfare programmes initiated in the past three years, is given special focus in the booklets.

This self-aggrandisement project ran to the satisfaction of the various organisers for about a week,
that is, until June 1, the day farmers’ organisations in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra started separate agitations raising some common demands and a few region-specific ones. The common demands were farm loan waiver and a hike in minimum support prices (MSP) in tune with the promise made by the BJP governments at the Centre and in the two States. The BJP had promised during the campaign to the 2014 Lok Sabha elections that it would implement the recommendations made by the National Commission on Farmers chaired by M.S. Swaminathan in its report submitted in 2006. The report had suggested that the MSP incorporate a 50 per cent profit margin on input cost.

Significantly, the government’s promotional programmes did not make any reference to its pre-election promises on the agricultural front and its failure to fulfil them. Instead, the report card sought to focus on the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), the near compulsory crop insurance implemented in the past two years, and the large amounts allocated for irrigation projects to help farmers who depend on monsoon rains. The promotional booklet also talked about the government’s ambitious rural development initiatives aimed at doubling farmers’ incomes in real terms by 2022 and uniting the fragmented markets to achieve the goal of “one nation, one market”.

However, barely a week after the commencement of the farmers’ agitations, the grandiose third anniversary celebration plans were in a shambles, thoroughly exposing the hollowness of the government’s claims, especially about enhancing the rural economy and boosting farmers’ interests. The eventful one week witnessed intensification of the agitations in the two big States, with farmers dumping milk and vegetables on roads and damaging vehicles, resisting attempts by the police and the security forces to quell them. The escalated violence resulted in the killing of six farmers in police firing at Pipliya Mandi near Mandsaur in Madhya Pradesh on the night of June 6 (see report from Mandsaur on page 9). The news of the killing spread across not only Madhya Pradesh but also several other States, where farmers launched protests to express their solidarity with the farmers of Madhya Pradesh, to extend their sympathies to the families of the slain farmers, and to raise their own demands.

The initial responses from the BJP leadership, including Chief Ministers Devendra Fadnavis of Maharashtra and Shivraj Singh Chouhan of Madhya
Pradesh, were to brand the agitations as politically motivated vandalism sponsored by the opposition Congress and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). They continued to insist that the farm sector was successful under the Modi regime and that the farmers’ agitations were entirely unwarranted. So much so that both the leaders either refused to initiate talks with farmers’ representatives or sought to be selective about which farmer organisation and leaders to invite for discussions.

But none of these tactics succeeded. The developments since June 1, including the Mandsaur killings and the nationwide response it evoked, put the two Chief Ministers on the back foot. Both Chouhan and Fadnavis succumbed in different ways to the pressure exerted by the agitation. While Fadnavis announced a loan waiver for farmers with less than two hectares of land, Chouhan, after launching a dramatic indefinite fast to bring peace and calm down the agitating farmers, announced that purchasing farm produce at rates lower than the MSP would be treated as a crime.

While these announcements led to a truce of sorts between the agitating farmers and the government agencies, leading to a state of relative peace, there is no guarantee that the resentment in the two States and in the farm sector in the rest of the country will subside. Already, farmers in Haryana have launched an agitation demanding loan waiver. In Maharashtra, Raju Shetti, leader of the Swabhimani Shetkari Sanghatana, one of the leading organisations in the agitation there and a political ally of the BJP in the State, has issued a warning that farmers will wait only until July 25 for the government to fulfil its promise. “If the promises are not kept, the agitation will resume with greater vigour,” he said.

In Madhya Pradesh, too, there are signs of farmer organisations regrouping to launch a more concerted movement. Reports from Hoshangabad district highlighted the suicide of two farmers who were unable to repay the loans they had taken from private moneylenders. This, apparently, has added to the unrest in the State.

**Political Brinkmanship**

Commenting on the state of play, Anupam, leader of the Swaraj Abhiyan, an organisation that has been taking up farmers’ issues consistently, pointed out that the promises made by Fadnavis and Chouhan and the Union government had not adequately addressed the underlying short-, medium- and long-term factors that had forced farmers to take the path of agitation. “These leaders have been dictated by political brinkmanship throughout, and this does not help in finding lasting solutions to farmers’ grievances. The current announcements fall in the same bracket,” Anupam said. This point was underlined in the course of the developments in June. In fact, the demand for loan waiver came up in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra because the Prime Minister himself spearheaded this
brinkmanship during the campaign for the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections when he promised loan waiver for farmers in the State if the BJP was elected to power. Such was the rhetoric that Modi said the loan waiver would be the first decision of the new Cabinet. He also said the Union government would contribute towards the expenditure incurred by the loan waiver. The BJP was elected to power in the State and the new government, under Yogi Adityanath, was forced to live up to this rhetoric and announce loan waiver. It is this that triggered the current phase of farmers’ agitations in other States. The Uttar Pradesh government is, however, finding it difficult to implement its decision, which has resulted in growing resentment on the ground (see Uttar Pradesh story on page 19).

The government’s failure to address real and concrete factors relating to farmers’ distress was evident from the way the movement built up in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. In both the States, the agitation gathered strength not in areas where there was crop failure but in places where crops were abundant but farmers were denied remunerative prices. For instance, Madhya Pradesh saw growth in the area under tur (arhar) dal, soya bean and onion cultivation as the farmers got a good price for these crops in the previous years. “The hype over pulses and onions last year made farmers sow these crops in abundance, but the market crashed this year. Tur dal, which was selling at around Rs.10,000 a quintal last year, came down to Rs.3,000 this year; onion, which was selling at Rs.40-50 a kilogram last year, did not even fetch Rs.4-5,” said Sudheer Gupta, the BJP Member of Parliament from Mandsaur, underscoring some finer details. Madhya Pradesh farmers were also aggrieved that the State government was propagating falsehoods about the farming sector. The Shivraj Singh Chouhan government had been claiming a 20 per cent growth in agriculture in the past five years. (The government received the Krishi Karman award (excellence in agriculture) five years in a row for this.)

Sajjan Singh Verma, former Congress MP from Dewas, said: “This was like rubbing salt into the farmers’ wounds. On the one hand, farmers were agitated that the crop was not fetching them the expected returns, the cost of production had gone up, and the promises of loan waiver and power and water charges waiver were not materialising, and on the other the government was putting itself for a bumper agriculture growth. This was a tailor-made situation for a flare-up such as the one witnessed in Mandsaur.”

The BJP Chief Minister and the rest of the party leadership have also sought to underplay the role of the Prime Minister’s demonetisation drive in creating agrarian distress. On June 7, a day after the Mandsaur killing, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) released its second bimonthly “Monetary Policy Statement” of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), indicating how the demonetisation drive had caused a state of panic in the farm sector. The statement noted: “Propelled by significantly higher arrivals in mandis relative to the seasonal pattern, prices of vegetables also fell markedly from July (2016) and bottomed out in January 2017, with fire sales during the demonetisation period accentuating the fall. The seasonal uptick that typically occurs in the pre-monsoon months has been muted so far. In the fuel group by contrast, inflation surged across the board. Prices of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and kerosene rose in sympathy with international prices even as the subsidy was set on a path of calibrated reduction. Fuel used by rural households rose for the third month in succession, narrowing the wedge between fuel inflation facing rural and urban households.... The abrupt and significant retreat of inflation in April from the firming trajectory that was developing in February and March has raised several issues that have to be factored into the inflation projections. First, it needs to be assessed as to whether or not the unusually low momentum in the reading for April will endure. Second, the prices of pulses are clearly reeling under the impact of a supply glut caused by record output and imports. Policy interventions, including access to open trade, may be envisaged to arrest the slump in prices.”

Clearly, the RBI highlights the enhanced arrivals in mandis and fire sales during the demonetisation period as two major factors leading to the falling prices. But there are no signs of accepting or addressing this factor even as quick-fix suggestions are bandied about in the name of pacifying distressed farmers.

Pointing out the determined refusal or inability to address comprehensively issues pertaining to the farm sector, Dr Krishan Bir Chaudhary, president of the Bharatiya Krishak Samaj, told Frontline that while measures such as loan waiver might bring temporary relief to farmers in the respective States, larger policy initiatives were required to bring lasting stability to the farm sector. “There is need for substantive policy initiatives and incentives in the sector. The single most important thrust of these initiatives and incentives should be to rescue the farming sector from the predations of the corporate sector and their interests. This predation has been marching on and on over the past two and a half decades. Governments after governments and political parties after political parties have asserted they understand the dynamics and perils of this predation, but at the level of policy and governance they have all played the facilitator role to the deprivations of these forces. The big question is whether any government will show the political will to take on this problem and thus protect the farmer and through that the country itself,” he said. Chaudhary is also of the view that as things stand now, there is not much hope for this fundamental course correction.
Mayhem in Mandsaur

The Shivraj Singh Chouhan government remained complacent as resentment was building up among the farmers of Madhya Pradesh over the unremunerative prices of farm produce. Then came Mandsaur to wake it up. BY PURNIMA S. TRIPATHI IN MANDSAUR

AN OUTBURST OF INDIGNATION FROM members of the farming community, who had been loosely gathered for a protest at Pipiya Mandi near Mandsaur in the Malwa region of Madhya Pradesh on June 6, spiralled out of control. Blood and thunder followed.

Farmers’ resentment had been gathering strength for some weeks in the State. Distressed farmers had called for a 10-day agitation from June 1 to draw the government’s attention to their plight: abundant crops but low returns. On June 6, thousands of farmers gathered at Pipiya Mandi to stage a protest. Soon they went on the rampage, forcing shops, particularly vegetable shops, to down shutters. The agitation quickly spread to Indore, Dewas, Shajapur, Sehore, Bhopal and other places in the State. The government was not prepared for such a massive agitation. On June 5, completely unaware of the storm that was brewing, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh
Chouhan had announced, in the presence of some farmers affiliated to the Bharatiya Kisan Sangh, that the farmers had called off their agitation in the State.

The next day, angry farmers blocked the national highway, torched buses and trucks, looted and set fire to shops and forced the closure of markets, especially fruit and vegetable mandis, in order to cut off supply to the cities. The police and paramilitary forces opened fire on the stone-throwing farmers, killing five of them instantly and injuring several others. One farmer succumbed to injuries three days later. What prompted the firing is a mystery. On camera, the District Collector, S.K. Singh (who was subsequently transferred), denied giving orders to open fire. The Home Minister also said no order had been given to open fire. The situation in Mandsaur was so volatile that the government imposed a curfew.

The government tied itself up in knots explaining the whole situation.

The Home Minister, who was in denial mode, admitted after two days that the police had indeed opened fire. The Collector and the police chief were immediately replaced and the government announced a compensation of Rs.5 lakh each to the family of those killed in the firing. It subsequently increased the compensation to Rs.10 lakh and again to Rs.1 crore. All this, however, only added to the farmers’ angst because senior Ministers continued to maintain that farmers were not on an agitation in the State as there was no issue at all for an agitation and that it was a conspiracy by the Congress to defame the BJP government.

The farmers, based on the previous years’ experience, had sown and reaped a bumper harvest of pulses, soya bean, onions and wheat. But the prices crashed following a glut in the market, forcing them to hold on to huge stocks of the produce, which was not fetching them even a fraction of the production cost. This resulted in a situation where the farmers began to dump truckloads of onions on the roads because they did not have the storage capacity and no agency was ready to purchase the produce. Farmers became restive and demanded that the government declare a minimum support price for the produce and buy pulses, onions, soya bean and wheat from them at remunerative prices.

Resentment kept simmering. These were localised agitations, but these did not evoke any response from the government. Then one farmers’ organisation sprang out of the blue, held parleys with Shivraj Singh Chouhan, and the Chief Minister promptly declared, on June 5, that the “farmers” had accepted his offer of Rs.8 for a kilogram of onion and decided to withdraw the stir. This infuriated the agitating farmers as the new outfit had not even been a part of their agitation. They announced that they would intensify the agitation, and on June 6 tried to force a complete bandh. During an attempt to force the closure of shops at Pipiya Mandi as part of the bandh, a few traders beat up some farmers, who then went on the
rampage. They started throwing stones, looted and burnt passing trucks and buses and almost lynched a jawan of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) forcing his colleague to open fire, in which a farmer was killed. When the news of the death spread, farmers gathered near the Pipliya Mandi police station in protest. Soon things started getting out of control and the police opened fire killing four farmers.

Six farmers, who were wounded in the firing, were taken to MY Hospital in Indore. Dashrath Gayri, a farmer from Jalodia village in Mandsaur, told Frontline that farmers resorted to stone throwing, and chaos prevailed as the police lathi-charged and beat them up. He said the police firing began without a warning.

When this correspondent visited Mandsaur, there were telltale signs of a violent agitation. Trucks carrying cars and bikes and heavy machinery lay gutted along a two-kilometre stretch on the Mandsaur-Neemuch highway. There were at least 16 trucks, some of which were still smouldering, and flames could be seen leaping out of them. Even private cars were not spared. “They were simply torching everything that came in their way,” said Lalchandra Saini, a dhaba owner on the highway, who was witness to the violence. His shop, too, was damaged by the rampaging crowd.

The violence at Pipliya Mandi had its echo elsewhere in the State. Four Volvo buses were torched on the Bhopal-Indore highway, arson and mayhem was witnessed in Shajapur and Dewas, and in Sanchi an ugly situation erupted, but the administration managed to control it.

Senior officials, who were roped in to control the situation, admitted to Frontline that “this was big time intelligence failure because an agitation of this scale must have been planned elaborately, it could not have been done overnight”. They also admitted that the Chief Minister’s kid-glove treatment in the beginning worsened the situation. “He kept saying ‘jyada sakhti mat karo [do not be too strict]’, a senior official told Frontline. Government officials said the Chief Minister erred in his judgement because he simply could not believe that farmers, who are relatively well off in the Malwa region, would actually go on the rampage.

Most of the farmers belong to the Patidar and Dhakad communities. Hardik Patel, who had mobilised Patidars in Gujarat successfully, has made several visits to Madhya Pradesh in the past three months. Shiv Kumar Sharma, who has emerged as the face of the farmers’ agitation in Madhya Pradesh, had his own reasons to be upset with Shivraj Singh Chouhan.

He was the head of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh-affiliated Bharatiya Kisan Sangh in the State and had successfully organised two massive farmers’ protests, in December 2010 and in May 2012, highlighting their problems. However, he was removed from the post at the behest of the Chief Minister. He now heads the Rashtriya Kisan Mazdoor Mahasangh, which is mobilising farmers across the country. Since these activities were taking place over a period of time, Shivraj Singh Chouhan should have been more alert, but he was complacent in his belief that he was popular with farmers, being a farmer himself.

Like everywhere else in the country, farmers in Madhya Pradesh are in distress. Not getting remunerative prices is their biggest complaint. According to senior government officials, demonetisation has had a cascading effect on the farm sector because rural banks do not have enough cash and even if farmers sell their produce through the government machinery, their payment is received in the form of cheques, which take days or months to be encashed. Compensation for crop loss is not paid in cash. Officials admit that these factors do add up to the farmers’ distress and cause resentment to build up.

Although BJP leaders are at pains to prove that the Congress was behind the unrest in view of the Assembly elections next year, the Congress had a minimal role in the Mandsaur agitation and only tried to gain some media visibility and make some political capital out of the situation. Party vice president Rahul Gandhi’s sudden burst of energy during his visit to Mandsaur was more of a knee-jerk reaction.

The Mandsaur violence is simply an outcome of the mismanagement by the Shivraj Singh Chouhan government. In his bewilderment, the Chief Minister took resort to a fast and an emotional appeal to the farmers.
Bumper problem

With low market prices and little help from the government, Rajasthan’s farmers, especially garlic producers, are in a financial mess in a good crop year. BY T.K. RAJALAKSHMI IN KOTA

GARLIC CROP STACKED UP at a farmer’s house in Kota.
RUMBLINGS OF DISCONTENT WERE PALPABLE in Kishanpura Takia in Kota district, Rajasthan. The village, with a population of 5,000, was holding on to its harvested garlic crop, refusing to take it to the mandi. Eighty per cent of the households had cultivated garlic, and stacks of garlic bulbs were stored in every house. The farmers refused to accept the minimum intervention price of Rs.3,200 a quintal announced by the State government on June 14. They said they would not settle for anything less than Rs.4,000 a quintal. They argued that the government offered Rs.3,200 for the best-quality garlic and that not all of the produce would be bought at that rate. Last year, one quintal of garlic fetched Rs.8,000. One farmer, Suresh Chand, told Frontline that they would hold on to the produce until November, hoping to get a better rate. “After that, the crop will begin to sprout and it will be of no use for us or the consumer,” he said. The farmers said they were not keen on deploying labour to clean the garlic as that would mean an additional cost. They would hold on to the crop until the government declared a price that covered the cost of production.

Anger had been growing as the government refused to intervene when prices crashed owing to a glut in the market. The Agriculture Minister had reportedly taunted farmers by saying that he had not asked them to bring their produce to the mandi. In fact, garlic farmers had taken their crop to the Pipiliya Agricultural Produce Marketing Centre at Mandsaur in Madhya Pradesh, the epicentre of farmers’ unrest in that State. The other markets they approached were Neemuch (also in Madhya Pradesh) and Kota. Last year, one kilogram of garlic fetched Rs.105 at the Neemuch Agricultural Produce Marketing Centre. This year, the Neemuch market offered Rs.40 for 1 kg of the crop.

“If the government is interested in defusing the farmers’ anger, it must give a proper price for the garlic crop,” cultivators of Kota district, who were on an indefinite protest, said. They had gathered under the aegis of the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) and the Kisan Sangharsh Samiti, a broad coalition of farmer and peasant organisations. The banners at the venue of the agitation showed that it was not just loan waiver but issues such as crop price and forcible land acquisition that were agitating the farmers. The new notification on cattle trade was an additional sore point.

SPILLOVER EFFECT

The police firing on farmers in Mandsaur had its spillover effect in Rajasthan. The issues confronting farmers in Rajasthan were not dissimilar. So, the solidarity they expressed with their counterparts in Madhya Pradesh was not a contrived response. In fact, all farmers’ organisations in Rajasthan, cutting across political affiliations, declared their support to the agitating farmers in the neighbouring State. In Kota district, three organisations, broadly affiliated to three political streams, declared their intent to take on the State government.

“The minimum intervention price of Rs.3,200 a quintal offered by the government was merely to assuage the farmers; the government was planning to procure only 10,000 tonnes of the 10 lakh tonnes produced, that is 1 per cent of the total produce,” he said. The bulk of the harvested garlic was of middle-level quality. High-quality garlic could not be produced as the seeds were not of high quality and there were no extension services.
quintal last year, fetched only Rs.4,000. Amra Ram, president of the AIKS, said mustard and groundnut, too, were purchased at much below the MSP despite the Minister of State for Finance, Arjun Meghwal, announcing that the government would buy groundnut at MSP rates. “When Uttar Pradesh could announce loan waiver, why not the other States?” asked Amra Ram. He said all the 25 Members of Parliament from Rajasthan belonged to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) but not one of them had spoken in favour of farmers.

Harish Chandra, a cultivator, told Frontline that his onion crop matured in May, but he opted for distress sale as the price offered was low. He threw away a substantial quantity of the unsold crop. “In 2015, I got Rs.60 a kg; this year, it was Rs.3 a kg. Traders have storage facilities so urban consumers like you pay three times what we get for our crop,” he said. The government does not offer storage facilities for onions.

“Farmers should decide the price of their produce, not politicians,” a farmer protesting in Kota said. There were complaints that farmers had been compelled to buy fertilizers from private agencies owing to the unavailability of fertilizer supplies with cooperative societies. Implementation of the recommendations of the National Commission on Farmers chaired by Dr M.S. Swaminathan, relating to a pricing and procurement policy [that the MSP should be 50 per cent more than the weighted cost of production], has become a common demand in every farmer homestead. “The Pay Commission revises the pay scales of government employees regularly. Why does the recommendation of the only commission set up for farmers get ignored?” a farmer asked. Farmers say agriculture is an “udyog” (industry) and they ought to be given social security benefit like pensions.

MSP REQUIRED, NOT LOAN WAIVER

Farmers have huge debts and not all their loans are from cooperative banks. The loan limits are low in cooperative banks and not all banks extend loans to the maximum limit of Rs.1.5 lakh. The mismatch between the loan repayment period and the harvesting period is another reason for loan defaults. All loans have to be cleared by September and March while crops are sold in the markets in January and June. More importantly, farmers take loans from various sources, even from commission agents. “They take loans from fertilizer suppliers, pesticide suppliers, commission agents, and cooperative banks. The majority of the loan goes for pesticides,” said Duli Chand. The figures of indebtedness covered only the banks and cooperative societies, not the other sources from where loans were sourced. The demand for loan waivers, while important, comes from a limited area. Guaranteeing an MSP is more important than loan waivers for most farmers.

The crisis is not over yet. Farmers are expecting a bumper pulse crop this year and are apprehensive that another round of distress selling will follow.
United action

Maharashtra farmers drive a hard bargain, forcing the Devendra Fadnavis government to concede their demand for farm loan waiver. By LYLA BAYADAM

NOT SINCE THE SHETKARI SANGHATANA’S agitation in 1982 for remunerative prices for primary milk producers in Maharashtra has there been a united farmers’ action on the scale that the State witnessed in early June. So when the Devendra Fadnavis government conceded the farmers’ demand for a waiver of farm loans on June 11, it was a vindication of their just demands.

Numbering about 1.37 crore, farmers are possibly the largest single group of toilers in Maharashtra and yet they have none of the clout that would normally be associated with such numbers. Instead, they are among groups that are the most invisible and thus the most exploited by the state. The worst affected are those who own less than two hectares of land; they constitute about 78 per cent of the farming community. These small and marginal farmers practise rain-fed agriculture since the majority of the irrigated land in Maharashtra is owned by big and corporate farmers. Already caught in a debt trap, these farmers are unable to borrow from cooperative societies as the cooperative banks that lend money to these societies are bankrupt, the political powers that control them having siphoned off the money.

Although small farmers are eligible for crop loans, they do not get loans for agricultural infrastructure. One

FARMERS THROWING vegetables on a road in Nagpur during a protest as part of the Maharashtra bandh on June 5.
THE Devendra Fadnavis government’s first reaction to the largely spontaneous farmers’ strike in Maharashtra was casual. But escalating events such as the rasta roko and the dumping of produce and milk on the roads, the June 5 Maharashtra bandh, the June 6 killing of farmers in police firing at Mandsaur in Madhya Pradesh, and the June 8 Nashik convention where a decision to stage a rail roko agitation on June 13 was made, all played a part in forcing the government to view the matter seriously.

After an initial attempt, Fadnavis left the negotiations to a group of Ministers headed by Revenue Minister Chandrakant Patil. The team negotiated with a 35-member core committee consisting of representatives from farmers’ organisations.

On June 11, Patil took aside six members of the core committee to have a heart-to-heart talk to resolve the crisis that began on June 1. Dr Ashok Dhawale, joint secretary, All India Kisan Sabha, was one of the six. In an interview to *Frontline*, he spoke about the inner workings that helped resolve the crisis and what the way forward should be. Excerpts:

**This has been a successful strike. How seriously do you think the government will take farmers’ issues now?**

Yes, it has been an unprecedented 11-day strike by the peasants of Maharashtra. And the outcome of it in the form of a farm loan waiver and an increase in milk price has been historic. All the credit must go to the united struggle of farmers of the State. As we can see, the struggle for a loan waiver and for remunerative prices is spreading to other States. The government will be forced to take farmers’ issues seriously as a result of this experience. However, it is not the State but the Central government that decides the minimum support price [MSP] for various crops. So the State body will have only a limited role.

**What is the plan of action to have the Swaminathan Commission Report implemented? Should there not be a mandatory buying guarantee like the old cotton monopoly scheme?**

You are absolutely right. The Narendra Modi government came to power in 2014 on the promise that it would implement the Swaminathan Report. It has not kept that promise.

Implementation of the report is the responsibility of the Central government. The AIKS has begun efforts to bring together all farmers’ organisations throughout the country to build a powerful movement for the implementation of the Swaminathan Report, which has other excellent recommendations besides the key issues of remunerative prices and a buying guarantee.

**Some observers say loan waivers are not a long-term solution.**

In the present situation of deep agrarian crisis, when nearly four lakh debt-ridden farmers have committed suicide in the past 25 years since the advent of neoliberal policies, loan waivers will certainly provide the much-needed relief to the peasants.

**How did the tide turn in favour of farmers at the meeting with Ministers?**

The reasons for this were as follows. The June 3 announcements were rejected by the peasantry and the strike continued. The June 5 Maharashtra bandh, in support of the just demands of the farmers, was a smashing success and an eye-opener. The June 6 brutal police firing in Mandsaur was a grave warning of the shape of things to come. The farmers’ unity and their fighting spirit were on display at the joint State convention at Nashik on June 8, and the State-wide rail roko and rasta roko call for June 13 given at that convention unnerved the government.

**Farmers have received support from the Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM) and the Bharatiya Kisan Sangh (BKS). What does it say about the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government, two of whose affiliates are against its policies?**

The BJP-Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh combine is notorious for its forked tongue, with its different organisations speaking in different voices.

The so-called support to farmers by the SJM and the BKS falls in this category. We need not read too much
into this. At crucial junctures, they always fall in line with the dictates of their parent body.

**How easy will it be for farmers to get new credit since cooperative banks are in the doldrums?**

The government should make determined efforts at all levels to revive the cooperative banks and get them out of the doldrums. The banks and the Central and State governments must enhance the quantum of rural credit substantially. The present scandalous situation, where a large part of rural credit is cornered by the corporates and the rich, must be reversed. Poor and medium farmers must be given priority in bank and institutional credit so that they are not pushed into the arms of rapacious moneylenders, as is the case now.

**Should cooperative land mortgaging banks not be revived so that loans are given for agricultural infrastructure too?**

Yes, their revival is necessary.

**The agrarian crisis is a complex situation. The appearance of a solution can be quite different from the reality that farmers face. What are the fundamental and systemic changes that are required for a long-term revival of the agriculture sector?**

That is a cardinal question. First, it is clear that the present agrarian crisis has been aggravated by the neoliberal policies. Peasants, agricultural workers, the working class, the middle class have all been adversely affected by these policies. These policies need to be dumped and an alternative trajectory of development needs to be put in place. Second, in all agrarian policymaking on vital issues such as inputs, prices, credit, employment, food security, irrigation, power, crop insurance, markets, cooperatives, infrastructure and social security, the best interests of the millions of toiling farmers and agricultural workers must be clearly made the focal point, not the best interests of corporates, landlords and the urban and rural rich. Third, the land issue must be squarely addressed.

Unjust and unnecessary land acquisition from farmers for the corporates must be stopped. The Forest Rights Act must be implemented stringently as has been done by the Left Front government of Tripura. The vital question of land reforms must be brought back on the agenda. But all this requires political will, which the ruling classes can never summon owing to their very class nature.

Hence, while united struggles for winning the demands of the peasantry must be intensified now and in the future, in the long run, it is only a systemic political change that can ensure a systemic agrarian change.

A farmer summed up their plight thus: the bank would refuse to provide a loan to dig a well because there is no guarantee that it can reclaim the well, whereas it would give a loan to buy a motorcycle.

The economist and former State Planning Commission member Professor H.N. Desarda said: “There is a subterfuge here. To be eligible to borrow you have to pay back, but obviously the farmer cannot pay back. So he borrows from moneylenders so as to be eligible to get bank loans.”

In the past few years, there seems to have been some attempt to assist the farmers. The Congress Chief Minister Prithviraj Chavan had suggested smaller check dams and wells to manage and use water resources locally and to raise groundwater levels. Digging of wells gave the work under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act a boost. The plan was good on paper but did not work well. Chavan’s term was beset with problems of a coalition government. The Congress was defeated by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the 2014 Assembly elections.

During the election campaign, Prime Minister Narendra Modi promised to implement a minimum support price (MSP) for farm produce, but when Fadnavis took over as Chief Minister he did not honour the promise and instead launched the Jalyukt Shivar Abhiyaan, a promise to make Maharashtra drought-free by 2019. The scheme was not different from Chavan’s plan (which in itself was a mere reiteration of what farmers had been doing for generations). Fadnavis used film stars to add appeal to his water project.

Fadnavis has tried to tackle the farmers’ issue in the way he knows best, that is, politically. After the elections, he coopted the Swabhiman Shetkari Sanghatana, a powerful farmers’ organisation, by appointing one of its leaders, Sadabhau Khot, as Minister of State for Agriculture. The plan was good on paper but did not work well. Chavan’s term was beset with problems of a coalition government. The Congress was defeated by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the 2014 Assembly elections.

The real trigger was, of course, the government’s unwillingness to set an MSP for tur (arhar) dal (see *Frontline*, March 26, 2017). Farmers saw this as the ultimate betrayal. The bumper harvest was a blessing after two years of agricultural drought. In the previous season, tur dal growers were given higher support price because of a scarcity, and this had encouraged them to expand the area under tur cultivation. The bumper harvest raised crop and the government’s inability to buy much of the yield led to a crash in prices. Farmers were forced to sell their produce at Rs.2,500 a quintal when they had been promised Rs.5,050 a quintal. Although procurement began, it was so slow that about 1,000 quintals are yet to be paid for despite farmers holding the tokens that are issued as proof of purchase.

The farmers launched a full-fledged State-wide
protest on June 1. They gave the government adequate notice, but Fadnavis seemed to rely on politicking rather than understanding and resolving the situation, thereby displaying his naivete, like many in the BJP, on rural matters. A source, who requested anonymity, said Fadnavis’ “lack of knowledge in these matters is embarrassing… he is like a boy in a school debate”.

The Chief Minister had not banked on the opposition rallying around and joining the protest or on the vociferous support of the BJP’s alliance partner, the Shiv Sena, to the agitating farmers. In any case, both were politically motivated moves. The previous Congress-Nationalist Congress Party government shied away from implementing the reports submitted by the National Commission on Farmers chaired by M.S. Swaminathan between 2004 and 2006.

In his initial dealings with farmers, Fadnavis had said that the State could not afford to waive loans. But, his government has pledged to install a statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji at a cost of Rs.3,600 crore in the sea, not wanting to offend the powerful Maratha lobby. True, there is a huge difference between Rs.3,600 crore and the Rs.31,000-crore debt of small and medium farmers, but the question of principle in this cannot be dismissed. Desarda pointed out that the Centre was willing to write off a likely Rs.4 lakh crore debt of the telecom sector, but farmers, who are not organised in the political sense, were sidelined.

The main victories the agitating farmers achieved were an immediate blanket loan waiver for those owing less than two hectares, with the option of immediately applying for a fresh loan. Milk sellers would get 70 per cent of the selling price. They now get only Rs.20 a litre, while milk is sold to the consumer at Rs.50-60 a litre. All police cases against activists and farmers, except those who indulged in looting, were withdrawn immediately. Further discussions would be carried out by a 10- or 12-member committee, consisting equally of farmers’ representatives and government officials. The government, however, deflected the main issue of implementing the Swaminathan Commission report by saying that the Centre had to take a decision on it.

Fadnavis, however, promised to lead a delegation to the Centre to argue for the implementation of the reports. The farmers set July 26, two days after the start of the monsoon session of the Assembly, as the deadline to implement the promises, failing which they would resume the protest.

While the points above are crucial, hard-headed bargaining is needed to make systemic changes such as adding a buying guarantee clause to bolster the Swaminathan Commission report, reviving land mortgage banks since they provided loans for agricultural infrastructure, modernising irrigation techniques, and rescuing the cooperative system from politicians.

Desarda said: “It is not kaarj maa[debt waiver] but kaarj mukti [freedom from debt] that is required.” For this, he suggested remunerative prices for produce linked to guaranteed purchase by the government, minimum wages for agricultural labour, and reintroduction of the Employment Guarantee Scheme as a notional guarantee. “It should be like the fire brigade; ideally there should be no fire but if it occurs there should be someone to put it out,” he said.
THERE IS LITTLE DOUBT THAT ONE OF THE triggers of the farmers’ agitation across India in May and June was the decision of waiver of farm loans by the Yogi Adityanath-led Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in Uttar Pradesh at its very first Cabinet meeting on April 4. The Chief Minister claimed that his government was fulfilling the promise made by the BJP during the election campaign.

“If Uttar Pradesh can do it, why not our government”, was the refrain that came up, almost immediately, from farming communities in other parts of the country. The refrain gathered momentum in the next one month and culminated in intense agitations in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra and relatively lesser shows of resentment by farmers in Rajasthan, Haryana and Punjab. Following this, the BJP governments in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra announced waivers. But, even as these developments were taking place, the farmers of Uttar Pradesh, the first beneficiaries of the farm loan waiver of 2017, debunked the government’s announcement with varied epithets such as “sleight of hand”, “treachery” and “downright chicanery”.

Responses to the scheme obtained from different parts of the State, including the agriculture-intensive western Uttar Pradesh, almost unanimously reflected this sense of indignation.

The farmers are rankled by several aspects of the waiver scheme, including its conception and implementation. To start with, the waiver was confined to crop loans up to Rs.1 lakh that small and marginal farmers sourced from banks in the financial year 2015-16 to procure seeds, fertilizer and pesticides. Second, only outstanding farm loans until March 31, 2016, are being waived. The impression that the BJP leadership, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, gave during the campaign for the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections, was that there would be a comprehensive waiver of agricultural loans. There was no reference to confining the scheme to a particular section of the farming community. The tweaking, both in terms of the category and the time frame, has certainly not gone down well with large sections of the farming community.

Fateh Singh Bhatti, a farmer based in Harnauti village of Sikandrabad area in Bulandshahar district of western Uttar Pradesh, called the scheme “downright chicanery concocted by vile administrative and political barons”. Bhatti was more annoyed with the time frame set for loan waiver than with the classification restricting it to small and marginal farmers. The farmer, who has been cultivating both grains and vegetables for a long time, pointed out that the time frame had been set in such a manner as to exclude a large number of debt-ridden farmers from the scheme.

Bhatti said: “Crop loans in Uttar Pradesh are of two categories. One category is loans disbursed by banks for a nine-month term at an interest rate of 3 per cent. If you

A FARMER SPRAYING pesticides in his potato field in Moradabad district of western Uttar Pradesh.
do not repay them in nine months the interest jumps to 9 per cent. Obviously, loans of a longer term and higher interest of 9 per cent is not preferred by farmers. So, the normal practice among small and marginal farmers is to opt for the nine-month loan and somehow repay, even taking personal loans at usurious rates, before the cut-off period. Of course, they would take yet another loan later, for the next nine months. Normally, nearly 90 per cent of the farmers take the loans in May and June, before the sowing of the kharif crop in July. In February and early March, the farmer gets some money from the rabi harvest and he makes it a point to repay the loan taken the previous year. So, honest farmers who want to sustain their vocation in the long term take these short-term loans, repay them and take loans again. Only habitual defaulters would be found to be having an outstanding loan in March. Evidently, this scheme has been devised by a devious brain that knows about this behaviour pattern of farmers. In my estimate, only four or five hand-picked farmers in each block will benefit from the waiver scheme and scores of needy will be left out. No doubt, they are playing games with honest farmers while promoting defaulters and a culture of loan defaults.”

Pravesh Sharma, a sugarcane grower from Bhainswal in Shamli district, pointed out that though the scheme was announced in early April, no initiatives were taken by the administration or the banks to implement it. “Who knows when they are going to make a concrete move in this direction? If the track record of payment of arrears to sugarcane farmers is any indication, it is bound to be a long-drawn process.

Suresh Kumar Rana, Minister for Sugarcane Development, who hails from Shamli, has been claiming that the payment for sugarcane growers has touched record highs under this government, but the fact of the matter is that we are still being paid arrears from January and February. If this is what they call record, you can imagine how this government will function in the normal course.” Sharma did not hide his disappointment with the way in which the Adityanath government was going about fulfilling its tasks and responsibilities.

**ABSENCE OF RESOURCES**

Large sections of the bureaucracy Frontline interacted with pointed out that while it was indeed the duty of the official machinery to facilitate the fulfilment of the ruling party’s election promises, its government cannot conjure up resources for it at will. Officials of the Departments of Finance and Agriculture said that resource generation for this purpose had become even more cumbersome following the decision of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh to announce loan waivers.

A senior Finance Ministry official in Lucknow told Frontline: “Earlier, there was hope, albeit faint, that the Centre would help out with some allocation, especially because the Prime Minister himself was involved in propping the loan waiver idea in the campaign. But after Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh followed suit with the scheme and the emphatic statement of Finance Minister Arun Jaitley that State governments will have to find their own funds, Uttar Pradesh is practically in a quandary.” While a plan and budget for the loan waiver is yet to be drawn up formally, initial estimates are that the schemes would cost the State exchequer Rs.30,729 crore. Writing off non-performing assets (NPA) accumulated by commercial and cooperative banks in the agriculture sector would add Rs.5,630 crore to the expenditure. So, the total amount to be spent on this count would be Rs.36,359 crore.

The Uttar Pradesh government plans to float a farmers’ relief bond corresponding to the composite farm loan waiver amount to generate funds for the scheme. Officials admit that the scheme, if implemented properly, would benefit only one-fourth of the small and marginal farmers of the State. Government and bank records show that as on March 31, 2017, the total agricultural loan outstanding in Uttar Pradesh was Rs.1,30,000 crore. In March 2016 it stood at Rs.1,21,000 crore. Since the base figure is accounted for as it existed in 2016, the proposed scheme involving Rs.30,729 crore would meet approximately 25 per cent of the total outstanding agricultural loan of Rs.1,21,000 crore accrued in 2015-16.

In terms of population, the proposed scheme is to benefit about 86 lakh of the estimated 2.15 crore small and marginal farmers of Uttar Pradesh. The total number of farmers in the State is estimated to be 2.3 crores. Apart from this, the proposed scheme will involve writing off the agricultural sector NPAs of about seven lakh farmers. Thus, the total number of beneficiaries under the scheme would be approximately 43 per cent of the small and marginal farmers of the State. Naturally farmers like Bhatti are angry.

“You have devised the scheme to deliberately leave out 57 per cent of the small and marginalised farmers. So you claim that you have fulfilled your election promise though the majority will get no benefit even if that the project is implemented in a foolproof manner,” Bhatti said, adding that Uttar Pradesh may well see the emergence of Mandsaur-like situations, since the hope generated by the loan waiver announcement was fast crumbling even as the farmer was getting a price that was far from fair for his produce.

“The Adityanath government is fortunate in that there are no spirited farmers’ organisations with militant leadership in the State like in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. The existing organisations lack credibility and tenacity. But the sense of hurt that thousands of farmers in Uttar Pradesh feel will not subside for long,” Bhatti stated in a tone of finality.
THE ANGER OVER THE KILLING OF SIX farmers in Mandsaur by the Madhya Pradesh Police had its resonance in Punjab and Haryana. Various farmer and peasant organisations held peaceful protests to express their solidarity with the farmers of Madhya Pradesh and also highlight their long-pending demands. Apprehensive of a Mandsaur-like situation, intelligence agencies in Haryana circulated a communique among their personnel to keep an eye on “solidarity protests” in the State. The communique dated June 9, which is available with Frontline, contained names and numbers of farmers’ leaders and their organisations, who as per the Intelligence Department had the “potential to create violence” in the State.

The All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) in both Haryana and Punjab and other farmers’ organisations such as the

**Diminishing returns**

Farmers’ organisations in Punjab and Haryana are determined to continue their agitation. **BY T.K. RAJALAKSHMI**

Farmers block the national highway in Ambala, Haryana, on June 16, during a protest against the police firing on agitating farmers at Mandsaur.
Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU), perceived sometimes as representing big landed interests, organised and led protests in both the States and submitted memoranda with a list of demands. The issues ranged from loan waiver to timely procurement and purchase by state agencies of food and cash crops at minimum support price (MSP) rates or wherever applicable, market intervention scheme rates, implementation of the recommendations of the M.S. Swaminathan Commission on crop pricing, the consequences of the ban on cattle trade imposed by the recent Central government notification and harassment of farmers by self-styled cow vigilantes. Farmer representatives *Frontline* spoke to in Haryana and Punjab said the protests against the ban on cattle trade would pick up in the coming months as farmers were agitated with the government notification.

“The issues faced by farmers across the country are the same. For the past three years, farmers have had a tough time. It is the commonality and gravity of the issues that has compelled opposition parties to take them up,” Inderjit Singh, vice president of the Haryana unit of the AIKS, told *Frontline*.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in Haryana was particularly unresponsive to farmers’ issues, it was felt. The agitation for reservation by a section of the Jat community in 2016-17 was a reflection of the agrarian and unemployment crisis in the State. On March 8, farmer and peasant organisations with broad Left affiliation organised a rally in Chandigarh and requested an appointment with Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar. Inderjit Singh said a representative of the Chief Minister announced at the rally that an appointment would be arranged. But it never happened.

Although an MSP was fixed for several crops, farmers were forced to sell their produce at lower rates. For instance, while the MSP for mustard was Rs.3,700 a quintal, farmers sold it at Rs.3,300-Rs.3,400. The MSP for bajra, a coarse grain, was fixed at Rs.1,260 a quintal, but it was purchased by agencies at Rs.1,100. Delays in purchase and the multiple conditions placed by the purchasing agencies were some of the reasons for farmers selling below the MSP. From the farmers’ point of view, it amounted to distress sale as they could not keep the crop for long. The lack of storage facilities and the absence of procurement by state agencies compelled farmers to accept whatever rate private commission agents offered; the rates invariably failed to cover the production cost. On the other hand, the consumer was charged three or four times the rate offered to the farmer.

High costs of fertilizer, diesel and pesticides had pushed farmers across the two States into high indebtedness. At a macro level, the conversion of agricultural land for non-agricultural purposes rendered several families landless and reduced farm productivity. “The government has been encouraging distress sale of land and it is solely responsible for farmers losing interest in agriculture,” said Inderjit Singh.

Non-remunerative prices for crops are among the major reasons for the growing lack of interest in agriculture. Cotton prices, for instance, used to be Rs.7,000 a quintal 15 years ago. The rates have remained unchanged. For some varieties of paddy, no MSP has been declared. The rates are decided by grain trader cartels. For a certain variety of Basmati rice, for which the consumer pays Rs.100 a kilogram (Rs.10,000 a quintal), the farmer receives Rs.1,500-Rs.2,000 a quintal.

There are other issues, too. With the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government at the Centre unable to get the amendments to the Land Acquisition Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013, passed in Parliament, the BJP government in Haryana created “e-Bhoomi portals” to encourage voluntary sale of land by farmers for government projects developed by the Haryana State Industrial Development Corporation. The ostensible objective of the portal was to prevent distress sale of land and also to enable hassle-free sale of land by landowners.

The biggest scam was the much-touted Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), the crop insurance scheme launched by the NDA government. “It should be called the Pradhan Mantri Farmer Barbadi Yojana,” said Inderjit Singh. There was a huge gap between the money
collected as premium and the amounts disbursed towards claims. Figures tabled in Parliament revealed that while the premium collected by insurance companies in 2016-17 was Rs.21,500 crore, what was disbursed was only Rs.714.14 crore, which was 3.31 per cent of the total premium collected. In Haryana, three private insurance companies were given the responsibility of collecting premium. One of the demands of the AIKS is that premium be collected by State insurance agencies and that it be voluntary. It has been left to the States to implement the PMFBY. Interestingly, the scheme is not applicable in Punjab.

In September last year, officials of the Haryana Agricultural and Farmers’ Welfare Department, who had been instructed to undertake a crop damage assessment or crop cutting experiment as part of the PMFBY, went on a strike saying that it was not their responsibility but that of private agencies. They also cited manpower shortage and lack of resource as reasons for refusing to under-

In Punjab, the spate of farmer suicides, which began in 2010, has continued unabated. Indebtedness has been one of the primary reasons for farmer suicides. Suicides and indebtedness were the main issues in the recent Assembly elections. During the campaign for the February/March Assembly elections, the Congress promised to waive farm loans. After coming to power, the party constituted a committee of experts headed by D.T. Haque, former Chairperson of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP), to assess the total debt and to suggest mechanisms for loan waiver, as promised in its election manifesto. The committee, which was constituted on April 16, was to have submitted its report in two months. Farmers’ organisations have been reminding Chief Minister Amarinder Singh of his electoral promise. However, it is well known that State governments do not have the resources to waive loans. Yet, what is more important than loan waiver is that farmers get their due for their crops.

Sukhwinder Sekhon, general secretary of the Punjab unit of the AIKS, told *Frontline* that 70 farmers had committed suicide in the first half of this year. Most of these deaths occurred in the Malwa belt comprising the districts south of the Sutlej and constituting 69 Assembly constituencies. A condolence resolution for the deceased farmers was moved in the Assembly, which was an official acknowledgement of the crisis.

Despite the grim situation, the purchase price quoted for the crops was much below the MSP. For instance, the MSP for sunflower seeds (for the production of sunflower oil) was fixed at Rs.3,950 a quintal but the farmers received Rs.2,700 a quintal from the traders. Likewise, the MSP for maize, which was Rs.1,240 a quintal, was procured by traders in the range of Rs.800-900 a quintal. Punjab farmers are demanding a hike in the current limit on crop loans by government agencies. The Amarinder Singh government had promised that agricultural lands of farmers who did not repay their loans would not be auctioned, but Sekhon said the government should ensure that these farmers were not denied loans in the future.

He expressed concern over a concerted campaign by some sections that the groundwater was depleted owing to its overexploitation for agriculture. He said it was industrial units that had depleted and polluted groundwater to dangerous levels. None of the dyeing units and other industries that used water has installed water treatment plants. The units release the effluents to the ground thereby contaminating the groundwater. “We have been told to undertake crop diversification. But the MSP has not been fixed for the diversified crops,” Sekhon said.

As in Haryana and Rajasthan, farmer organisations of various hues in Punjab are determined to raise their concerns in the coming months. The police firing on farmers at Mandsaur has provided the impetus for a renewed agitation.
IN TAMIL NADU, 70 PER CENT OF THE population is engaged in agriculture in one capacity or the other. Farmers and farm labourers are in distress because farming activities have virtually come to a standstill in the State as a result of drought. The farmers have demanded of the Central and State governments an “acceptable drought relief” package besides a satisfactory minimum support price (MSP) for their crops.

They blame the agricultural policies of the State government and the Centre for their plight. Faulty implementation of various infrastructure and welfare schemes meant for the farm sector, coupled with unresolved inter-State river disputes, the worst-ever monsoon failure for two consecutive years in 100 years or so, and demonetisation are among factors that have crippled both rain-fed and irrigated agriculture. The State normally receives an average annual rainfall of 921 millimetres against the national average of 1,200 mm and has a gross irrigated area of 33.94 lakh hectares, 79 per cent of which is under food crops.

For its part, the Centre hit the farmers with a double whammy. The November 8, 2016, demonetisation of Rs.500 and Rs.1,000 notes reduced the currency-dependent farm-based rural economy to a shambles. Even as the farmers were trying to recover from the setback, a second blow was dealt in the form of fresh notifications under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Regulations of Livestock Markets) Rules, 2017, banning the sale of animals of slaughter in cattle markets.

A shortage of cash in the aftermath of demonetisation was reflected at the major cattle markets in Erode and other districts in Tamil Nadu, with business down by more than 50 per cent. The failure of monsoon had made fodder dearer, forcing farmers to resort to panic sale of livestock. The lack of cash flow meant that agriculturists could not buy seeds and fertilizers and pay wages to labourers, thus forcing them to turn to moneylenders who promptly flocked to the agrarian belts. Tamil Nadu, according to a Government of India report, recorded a 29 per cent year-on-year drop in overall crop sowing until February 2017. The report further claims that rice cultivation was undertaken on 29.55 lakh acres (one acre = 0.4 hectare) last year and 17.95 lakh acres this year. The coverage area of pulses, cereals and oilseeds, too, has dropped significantly.

The repeated failure of the monsoons resulted in crop loss and a fall in farm incomes and a bulging debt burden, which led to the farmer, faced with a blow to his dignity, to take his own life. Though different farmers associations and the media claim that about 150 farmers have committed suicide in the past six months, the State government maintained that only 17 had committed suicide because of agrarian distress. “The rest were suicides for reasons other than farming distress, and due to heart attacks,” it said.

Amid this distress came projects such as the drilling of oil wells, as part of the Centre’s Discovered Small Fields policy, in the Cauvery delta region and Pudukottai district. Local farmers feared that drilling-related activities would ruin agriculture, besides polluting groundwater. Experts and activists, however, blamed the suicides...
on drought and demonetisation. “Though drought has been the main reason for farmers’ suicides, demonetisation cannot be brushed aside,” said K. Balakrishnan, president of the Tamil Nadu Vivasayigal Sangam, affiliated to the Communist Party of India (Marxist). He said demonetisation was a severe blow to farmers. “They could neither withdraw money from the banks nor take loans from cooperative banks; they could neither sell their produce nor purchase inputs for their crops. The rural economy has been totally shattered,” he said.

Nearly 40 deaths were reported from the Cauvery delta region where almost all farmers depended on loans from agricultural cooperative banks, the primary source of rural lending.

“The cooperative societies and rural banks went cashless. The farmers did not know whom to approach to tide over the crisis. And drought came with a vengeance. Today agriculture in Tamil Nadu is in total distress,” Balakrishnan said. The present crisis has affected not only the Cauvery delta, which has missed the kuruvai paddy crop for the second consecutive year owing to low storage levels in the Mettur reservoir, but also the entire State.

“It is time for us to evolve a holistic approach to the entire issue. Farmers demand good price for their produce. The government must come forward to implement the recommendations of the M.S. Swaminathan Commission report. The report suggests that the cost of cultivation plus 50 per cent as profit should be fixed as the basic price for a produce,” said S. Ranganathan, general secretary of the Cauvery Delta Farmers’ Welfare Association. With the Cauvery being a “deficit river”, he said the implementation of the Cauvery Management Board would solve many issues relating to agriculture, a suggestion other farmers’ representatives endorse.

In January, after assessing the situation, the Tamil Nadu government declared the State as “drought-hit” and dispatched its Ministers to the districts to assess the situation. It released over Rs.2,000 crore as relief, but farmers claim the amount is measly compared with the magnitude of the distress. The Madras High Court directed the State government to waive all cooperative farm loans irrespective of the size of the landholdings.

Contrary to the situation on the ground, the State government’s agricultural policy note for 2016-17 is dripping with optimism. It hopes to “usher in a Second Green Revolution”.

The crisis prompted the farmers to take the issue to the national capital. A group of farmers from Tamil Nadu sat in protest at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi for 41 days, with a set of demands that included a Rs.40,000-crore drought relief package, farm loan waiver, MSP for their produce and the setting up of the Cauvery Management Board. The agitation was called off on April 23.

P. Ayyakannu, president of the National South India River Linking Farmers Association, who led the stir, said their objective in displaying human skulls, symbolically eating mice, rolling naked on the road, and threatening to drink urine, was to shock the collective conscience of the nation.

Talking to Frontline in Chennai recently, the 70-year-old activist said farmers were being treated like beggars and slaves and were viewed as extremist elements whenever they protested. “We are fighting for our rights, which have been neglected for long. No one cares about us when we die in the fields. As our agitations in Tamil Nadu did not evince the response we expected, we shifted the venue to the national capital to make everyone understand our anguished living today,” he said.

Ayyakannu said farmers from Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab supported their agitation in New Delhi. “In fact, we provided the spark to the farmers’ stirs across the country today. We formed an All India Kisan Coordination Committee on May 21 so that farmers’ bodies across the country could unite and fight under a single banner. I am one of its conveners. The committee will chalk out its plan of action soon,” he said.

He staged a two-day stir in Chennai on June 9 and 10. The agitation was withdrawn after Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami’s promise to intervene in the issue. Although the protest has been suspended, it highlights the precarious agrarian situation in the country in general and Tamil Nadu in particular. Farmers have urged the State government to take immediate corrective measures to prevent further loss of lives. Several fora, including the Makkal Adhigaram [People’s Power], attribute the farm crisis to the Centre’s move to “corporatise” the farm sector. To condemn this and to discuss other livelihood issues concerning farmers, it is organising a conference in Thanjavur on August 5.

The last time New Delhi witnessed a farmers’ agitation was in 1988 when five lakh farmers from Uttar Pradesh laid siege to the national capital. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi readily agreed to look into their demands. Prime Minister Narendra Modi did not meet the Tamil Nadu farmers despite repeated requests.
THE CASCADING EFFECT OF DEMONETISATION coupled with a lack of market support has forced potato growers of Assam to resort to distress sale of their produce even as consumers in the capital city of Guwahati have to cough up Rs.20 a kilogram for the vegetable.

Last year, potato growers of Gingia in Biswanath Chariali subdivision in northern Assam’s Sonitpur district were forced to dump their produce on the streets as prices collapsed following demonetisation, which resulted in shortage of currencies of smaller denominations. Potato growers were forced to sell at Rs.1 a kg and huge stocks in cold storage remained unsold.

This year, potato growers of Mandia in lower Assam’s Barpeta district, most of them landless peasants, have been forced to resort to distress sale of their produce at Rs.2 to 3 a kg. Residents of Mandia allege that heaps of harvested potatoes are rotting along the village roads.

About 10 kilometres off the district headquarters town of Barpeta, Mandia is the largest hub of potato farming in the State.

The Agriculture Department has attributed the dip in potato prices to bumper yield following the introduction of two new varieties, Kufri Pukhraj and Kufri Khyati. The yields of these two varieties were found to be much more than the traditionally used varieties. In formal crop-cutting experiments conducted in Marigaon district, the yield was estimated at 23,700 kg a hectare, much more than the estimated 16,000 kg a ha recommended in the Assam Agricultural University’s package of practices. The new varieties became popular among
the farmers because of their higher yield,” states a report of the Department of Horticulture.

Official statistics tabled on the floor of the Assembly show that the State requires about 40 lakh tonnes of potato every year. However, the production of potato for 2013-14 and 2014-15 stood at 11 lakh tonnes and 17 lakh tonnes respectively. The State procures 20 to 25 lakh tonnes from other States to meet its requirements.

PROCUREMENT POLICY

Tafizuddin Ahmed, a member of the State council of the Assam State Kisan Sabha (ASKS) affiliated to the All India Kisan Sabha, however, punched holes in the procurement policy of the Bharatiya Janata Party government in the State.

He said: “Farmers are dependent on potato seeds brought from Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, which involve transportation cost. Illegal syndicates operating en route also increase seed procurement cost. Besides, most farmers are landless and they have to take land on lease for growing potato. The cost of cultivation is rising due to non-availability of fertilizer subsidies. Potato growers have to buy fertilizers at market prices from private suppliers. These suppliers often supply poor quality fertilizers that harm the plants. On the other hand, the price of medicine required to treat blight in potato has been soaring every year at 20 to 30 per cent. All these have increased the cost of potato cultivation. Ironically, there are no buyers for potatoes from these growers at remunerative prices. There is no cold storage for farmers to preserve their produce. Landowners mount pressure on potato growers to harvest potato and clear the land for paddy cultivation. The farmers are left with no option but to harvest potato even though buyers pay just Rs.2 or 3 a kg while the cultivation cost is Rs.9 a kg. So, they incur loss of Rs.6 to 7 a kg and have to pay the land owners the lease amount and repay the loan taken to purchase fertilizers, pesticides and medicines.”

He said the ASKS had been mobilising farmers and demanding that the government procure the produce so that the growers need not go for distress selling.

Tafizuddin said when the government announced its decision to spend Rs.1 crore to procure potato at Rs.5 a kg from the growers, the farmers demanded that the Assam State Agricultural Marketing Board (ASAMB) meet the cost of the bag (50 kg each) and its transportation from the field to the main road so that the farmers’ burden is reduced.

Data on the ASAMB website show that it purchased 10,940.25 quintals from Gingia and 6,083.30 quintals from Mandia with Rs.1 crore received from the Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs department.

Sharing his bitter experiences, Kamal Hassan, a potato grower of Bordoloni village in Mandia, said his family had grown potato on 90 bigha (1 bigha equals 7.5 hectares) taken on lease. Erosion caused by the Brahmaputra forced the family to shift from Gorola village in Baghbor area to Mandia about 28 years ago. An Arts graduate, Kamal said they could not sell potato grown on 20 bigha, while the potato grown on the remaining 70 bigha was sold for more than Rs.6 a kg.

“Potato is cultivated on more than 50,000 bigha of land in Mandia. The yield per bigha this year was 30 quintals. This works out to a total production of 15 lakh quintals in greater Mandia area this year. Against this total production, the government’s procurement was a meagre 5,000 quintals. On the other hand, the farmers stocked potatoes and did not sell the crop to private potato traders hoping that the government procurement at the rate of Rs.5 a kg will fetch them at least Rs.2 to 3 a kg more. However, after the government procurement stopped at just 5,000 quintals, a huge quantity of potatoes remained unsold and rotted,” he added. The farmer said that apart from the ASKS, other organisations such as Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti and the Assam Mandia Krishak Mahasabha had been raising the issues of the affected potato growers.

Elaborating on the crisis facing the potato growers, Kamal pointed out that the production cost of potato for each bigha was around Rs.28,500, which included Rs.2,600 for ploughing, Rs.4,500 for fertilizers, Rs.4,500 for purchasing five bags of seeds (1,500 per bag), Rs.1,000 for planting the seeds, Rs.2,000 for buying vitamins, Rs.1,000 for pesticides, Rs.2,000 for disease-resistant medicines, Rs.3,000 for harvesting and Rs.8,000 for payment of lease amount to landowners. Against the total production cost of Rs.28,500 for each bigha, the Mandia potato growers earned only Rs.6,000 to Rs.9,000 a bigha. He said though the government fixed the procurement price at Rs.5 a kg, the farmers actually got Rs.4 as they had to spend Re.1 in purchasing the bag, packaging, loading and transporting the produce to the procurement centre.

Making matters worse for the farmers, the per bigha yield of a popular government certified paddy variety (No. 837) grown on the same plots after potato is harvested was only three to five maunds (one maund equals 37 kg) this year against the normal production of 30 to 40 maunds. However, the government seems to be least bothered, Tafizuddin and Kamal feel.
Turning sour?

India’s thriving dairy sector, which provides farmers with an alternative source of income, is beset by challenges, including the government’s new restrictive rules on cattle trade. By ANUPAMA KATAKAM
THE DAIRY SECTOR, WHICH HAS LARGELY been a stable one providing farmers with an alternative source of livelihood, is now facing challenges from the current agrarian crisis and the new rules restricting sale of cattle. Farmers and industry experts said that this could severely jeopardise the sector.

India was the world’s top milk producer in 2015-16 with 155.5 million tonnes. Dairying is an integral part of the farming system and shares a symbiotic relationship with agriculture.

“Recent announcements by the Centre have been very detrimental to cattle farmers and this will have an adverse impact on milk production,” said Sunil Sonawane, a farmer in Kolhapur district, Maharashtra. “The advantage with milk is that in case of crop failure or any agrarian crisis, most farmers will have a few cows and buffaloes that bail them out. Sale of milk helps tide over difficult situations and provides an extra income if the crop is successful. If this source of income is put at risk, which they are doing with the new cattle sale regulations, the farming community faces a very bleak future,” he added.

The new rules prohibit the sale of cows in animal markets for slaughter and to non-agriculturists. This will deprive the farmer of the income that traditionally came from selling non-milch and ageing cattle. Agriculturists are now the only ones permitted to buy cattle, but they will not be interested in non-milch or ageing animals, which are of little use to them. Feeding and maintaining livestock involves substantial costs and if an animal is of no use, the already distressed farmer is left with a massive liability.

“We will have to stop keeping cows if we cannot sell them to traders. We keep cows because the milk collected gives us a little money to run our day-to-day lives. If we get more, it helps maintain the land. The sale of animals sometimes pays for marriages, tuition, college fees, etc.,” said Sonawane, who owns three cows and a few buffaloes. “When they banned the sale of cows to slaughterhouses in order to ban beef, we felt the loss. This new rule adds further problems,” he added.

Savitri Salunke owns two cows which she keeps in the famous tabelas (milk yards) of Mumbai. She earns about Rs.600-650 a day from each cow. The monthly take-home amount after paying rent and animal maintenance would be approximately Rs.15,000 per animal. “What will we do when the cow stops producing milk?” she asked. “An old cow can get us between Rs.15,000 and Rs.20,000. Now we will have to take whatever the trader gives us. I have no bargaining power left.”

She added that buying a milch animal costs about Rs.80,000. Dairy farmers make the purchase because the return on investment is very good and reasonably quick. “If the economics are not favourable, we will not purchase cows or buffaloes henceforth,” she said.

According to the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB), an estimated one crore farmers are engaged in dairy farming. Most of them are small or marginal farmers owning two to five milch cows. The new cattle regulations could potentially affect a staggering number of farmers.

“Why would our government want to shoot itself in the foot? The fallout of the new rules will really affect the milk industry, which is thriving,” an analyst said.

India’s milk production has been growing at over 4 per cent per annum since 2000 and is projected to touch 160 million tonnes in 2017, according to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

On no account can we afford to let milk production decline, said Mohan Jadav of the Gokul Cooperative Milk Union in Kolhapur. “The milk industry is a lifeline for lakhs of farmers. If the cooperative they belong to is doing well, then as members profits are divided among them. It is an added income,” he said.

An executive with a private dairy in Baramati said: “India’s milk consumption has increased with the introduction of a range of dairy products. Yogurt and flavoured milk, for instance, are new to the Indian palate but have found consumers. Tetra packaged milk is considered more hygienic by the higher income strata and the demand apparently is increasing. India may be the largest producer of milk in the world. Its consumption, however, is almost entirely domestic. There is potential for the industry to become a significant exporter and a global player. These new rules will affect milk [prospects].”

SILVER LINING MAY FADE

In these times of agrarian distress, the milk industry has been a silver lining for lakhs of farmers. However, experts believe that unless close attention is paid to a few critical areas, the lining could fade. To begin with, the issue of procurement price needs to be addressed. Farmers have been demanding an increase in the price, which is Rs.21-24 per litre across States. Jadav said raising input costs and low procurement prices were pushing farmers into debt.

During a strike in Maharashtra in June, dairy farmers protested by pouring milk on the streets and demanded an increase in the procurement rate. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said that the rate would be revised to Rs.27 a litre from July onwards.

Jadav said this would provide some relief to the farmers. However, it may come as a minor blow for cooperatives. While Gokul is among the more profitable ones, there are several in the State which are incurring loss or barely breaking even. “Another issue is paying the farmer on time. We have a 10-day cycle and ensure they get their payments accordingly. Not all cooperatives or even private companies are regular on this front. It must be very clearly understood that the farmer is dependent on these small amounts. It is part of the cooperative model and it must be followed strictly.”
While the cooperative model has been extremely successful in most States, post-liberalisation the sector has taken a few hard knocks. To begin with, some of them posted losses owing to blatant mismanagement and the inability to keep up with economic reforms. The entry of private players led to competition in the milk sheds (regions designated to a particular dairy cooperative), which were later protected by government regulations. Still, private companies put the cooperatives at risk.

Furthermore, the new entrants in the milk sector introduced products that took the market by storm. Different types of cheese, yogurt and flavoured milk, which were new to the Indian home, were happily embraced by urban and rural households. Many of the larger cooperative dairies had developed brands of their own, such as Nandini, Gokul, Sagar, Aavin and Warana. They need to step up to the plate by riding the new trends or remain as collection centres subject to the vagaries of the market. Clearly, sensing new trends and the market potential, the bigger cooperatives have moved forward by modernising and entering the market with their own brand of dairy products. The smaller ones, however, are lagging behind and, as a result, doing little for the farmer members.

Jadav pointed out that since milk was a perishable commodity, the cooperative would lose not just milk but profits if the supply/cold chain and other infrastructure were not sound. For instance, big dairies with deep pockets have put these systems in place, as a result of which farmers in the western region of Maharashtra benefit. However, those in Marathwada and Vidarbha are left with thousands of litres that cannot be used because of poor facilities. The farmer may still get his payment but the cooperative runs into losses and eventually that will affect the farmer who may be a member of the union.

Dairy cooperatives are committed to supporting the farmer, and private companies claim they do but in reality they do not. If the demand was low, Jadav said, the private player would not pick up the milk. This, once again, affected the farmer, he pointed out.

“Goa, Karnataka, and Haryana give their cooperatives a subsidy. For Rs.20 a litre given by the dairy, the State government adds another Rs.2 or Rs.4, which is paid to the farmers directly,” said Vaishali Nagawade of Maharashtra. She told mediapersons after the government announcement on hiking the procurement rate that this would not only help the farmer but the cooperatives too. She added that cheaper milk coming from other States into the big dairies in Maharashtra had also added to the problems of struggling cooperatives. “The State government should impose a tax on this and give the benefits to the farmer,” she said.

**CONSUMPTION ON RISE**

India’s per capita consumption of milk is 97 litres a year, compared with 285 litres in the United States. Yet, consumption is growing at a healthy 4.5 per cent annually, compared with just 1.5 per cent in the West, according to the USDA. “The market is massive in India and dairy should be given a huge boost,” an analyst said.

The government has been introducing a series of schemes to encourage the dairy sector. For instance, loans are given for the purchase of high-yielding milch cattle and for expanding herd sizes. Additionally, farmers are urged to modernise and improve fodder and nutrition of the animals. “While in theory this is a good move, with so much flux in agriculture, farmers end up trapped as they spend so much but do not gain in the same proportion,” said the analyst.

The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government introduced the Rashtriya Gokul Mission in 2014 which focusses on improving the genetic potential of indigenous breeds. The average milk yield of indigenous cattle and water buffaloes is 2.5 kilograms and 5.2 kg a day respectively, while the figure for exotic/crossbred cattle is 7.2 kg. However, the upkeep of crossbreds was substantially higher, an agriculture expert said. “We need to encourage indigenous livestock for the long term,” he added.

Meanwhile, the NDDB is implementing phase I of the National Dairy Plan (NDP I) in 18 States, which stretches across the period between 2011-12 and 2018-19. NDP I is focussed on increasing milk production and productivity of animals through support in areas such as breeding services and animal nutrition. The programme also aims at enhancing village-level procurement systems such as milk weighing, testing, collection, and cooling, as well as extension services and dairy cooperative development.

The country’s three-tier cooperative dairy system (comprising village-level cooperative societies, district-level unions and State-level federations) has been a champion at protecting producer prices and regulating consumer prices. The country boasts 96,000 local dairy cooperatives, 170 milk producers’ unions and 15 State cooperative federations.

However, when India’s neoliberal reforms identified dairy as a high growth sector, the policies shifted focus from the small farmer and became industry-centric. In 2011, the government allowed the entry of foreign dairy players with 100 per cent foreign direct investment in food processing, including milk and milk products, and also provided several tax breaks to them. “This shook up the socio-economic model of dairy and if there is a long-term vision for the sector, it does not include the small farmer,” an agriculturist said.

Operation Flood, or the “White Revolution” launched in 1970, transformed India from a milk-deficient nation into a milk-surplus one. It was the world’s largest dairy development programme. In 30 years it doubled milk available per person and made dairy farming India’s largest self-sustainable rural employment generator. The ideology was that milk would not be just mass-produced but produced by the masses.

However, if the problems of the dairy sector are not taken seriously, it could have far-reaching consequences. What took decades to build could collapse in a matter of years.
COVERAGE STORY

Big backlash

The Centre’s notification imposing restrictions on cattle sale leads to widespread resentment and charges of undermining States’ rights and interfering with the dietary habits of specific communities. BY T.K. RAJALAKSHMI

THE MAY 23 NOTIFICATION OF THE MINISTRY of Environment and Forests and Climate Change under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (PCA) Act proscribing the sale and purchase of bovine species has caused widespread anger in the farming community, which is already reeling under huge levels of debt. The notified Rules (Regulation of Livestock Market Rules 2017, and the Care and Maintenance of Case Property Animals Rules 2016) are the latest challenge to livestock owners and cattle traders who have been at the receiving end of self-styled vigilante and cow protection groups since the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) came to power in 2014.

The most recent incident of cow vigilantism happened in Rajasthan’s Barmer district on the night of June 11 when officials of Tamil Nadu’s Animal Husbandry Department were accosted and beaten up by around 50 vigilantes for transporting livestock, all legally purchased and accounted for. The animals—cows, bulls and calves—had been purchased from villages in Jaisalmer for breeding purposes. The miscreants attempted to set fire to some of the vehicles and a few of the officials suffered serious injuries.

The memory of the April 1 murder of a Mewat agriculturist by cow vigilantes as he returned from a cattle fair in Rajasthan was still afresh in people’s minds when the Centre’s notification came, followed by the vigilante attack. The closure of slaughterhouses and abattoirs in Uttar Pradesh on flimsy grounds had already impacted the sale of cattle for slaughter, compounding the distress of people, especially in the northern region, whose livelihood depended on agriculture, livestock and the meat industry.

The notification was challenged in various courts, including the Supreme Court. The Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court granted a four-week stay on the notification on May 30. The State Assemblies of Kerala and Meghalaya passed unanimous resolutions demanding the withdrawal of the notification. The governments of West Bengal, Karnataka and Tripura also declined to abide by it.

The resolution passed by the Meghalaya Assembly on
June 12 stated that the notification would “impact the economy of the State and the food habits of its people”.

MEGHALAYA RESOLUTION

Tabled by Chief Minister Mukul Sangma, it said: “This House takes a strong note of the shortcomings and infirmities in these Rules” and “resolves that the same may be withdrawn by Government of India with immediate effect so as to maintain the federal and secular character of our Constitution or be faced with a situation where the law prohibits some activity while the everyday life practices it on a large scale due to harsh economic realities, a situation surely to be avoided at all costs.” The notification, the resolution stated, went way beyond the scope of the preamble of the PCA, 1960, and thus infringed upon the rights of States to regulate the items that are in the State List.

Media reports quoted Mukul Sangma as saying that “beef was an integral part of the dietary habits of tribals of Meghalaya” and that prohibition of the sale and purchase of cattle for slaughter would affect the livelihood of 79 per cent of households in the State.

On June 15, the Supreme Court, hearing a clutch of pleas challenging the notification, sought a reply from the Centre within two weeks. During a brief hearing, the Central government, through the Additional Solicitor General, said the notification was aimed at the “regulation of cattle trade” and that there was already a stay on the notification granted by the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court.

ASSURANCES

Perhaps sensing the negative feedback from farmer organisations and protests in various States, including in the north-eastern region, Union Minister for Law and Justice Ravi Shankar Prasad clarified that the government would not bring any law that would interfere with the eating habits of any similarity. Assurances were made by Union Ministers Rajnath Singh and M. Venkaiah Naidu.

Farmers’ representatives told Frontline that in Punjab and Haryana almost every farmer kept livestock. Even some landless labourers owned cattle. In Punjab, an All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) functionary said, in cattle fairs that were held every month in every district the sale of unproductive cattle had gone down drastically. Traders who used to come from Meerut and Kolkata to pick up unproductive livestock stayed away fearing vigilantism at the State border, he said.

Farmers’ representatives have pointed out that while cow vigilantism has been on the rise, cow protection laws have been strengthened in BJP-ruled States with strict penalties, and slaughterhouses have been closed for lack of proper licences. The Central government, they added, had no plan to deal with the menace of wild animals and stray cattle, both of which caused great harm to standing crops and human beings.

Some of them termed the notification as ridiculous. Inderjit Singh, vice president of the AIKS in Haryana, said the price of the much-valued high-yielding Murrah buffalo had come down because of the slump in bovine trade. It is common knowledge that the male calf is not of much use except for insemination purposes. It made practical sense for livestock owners to keep the best stock for breeding and sell the rest for slaughter. “The clauses are outright stupid. One of them says medicines cannot be given orally without consulting a veterinary doctor. Where are such doctors in villages today? There are several traditional experts who treat animals based on local knowledge and such treatment has been found effective,” said Inderjit Singh.

The notification also had sections that prohibited the decoration of the animal or colouring of the horns, both of which were part of traditional celebrations during festivals.

In Rajasthan, the Bhairon Singh Shekhawat-led BJP government in 1995 enacted a law that banned the sale of male calves that were over three years old. A male calf ceases to be one after three years, maturing into a full-blown bull, and was of little use to farmers apart from being unaffordable. Subsequent Congress governments did little to revoke the ban. Commercial farming was a hitherto unknown concept for farmers in Rajasthan and 95 per cent of the State’s agriculture was of the subsistence type. Livestock rearing and selling was the only way the farming community stayed afloat. AIKS president Amra Ram said most of the Congress leaders did not say anything against the Central government notification.

One of the main petitions challenging the notification and admitted in the Supreme Court was from Hyderabad. The petitioner, Mohammad Abdul Faheem Qureshi, president of the All India Jamiatul Quresh Action Committee, contended that various State governments had spoken out against the notification. According to reports, on May 31, Tripura Agriculture and Animal Resources Minister Aghore Debbarma said that “the new cattle trade and slaughter rules are against the interests of the people. We will not implement them.” Reports also said that on May 30 Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah announced that it was not mandatory to follow every notification issued by the Central government and that the matter was a State issue.

THE QURESHI JUDGMENT

The petition quoted a judgment of a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court (M.H. Qureshi vs State of Bihar, AIR 1958 SC 731), which held as follows: “The maintenance of useless cattle involves a wasteful drain on the nation’s cattle feed. To maintain them is to deprive the useful cattle of the much-needed nutrition. The presence of so many useless animals tends to deteriorate the breed.”

Faheem Qureshi’s petition contended that State laws that provided for a total ban on the slaughter of bulls and bullocks had been quashed by the Supreme Court and that any freedom under Article 19 could be restricted only by a law made by the legislature and not by a delegated executive fiat that had no sanction in the parent Act. “The
The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act did not perceive slaughter of animals for food to be an act of cruelty.

complete ban of sale or purchase or resale of animals would cast a huge economic burden on the farmers who find it difficult to feed their children today but would be required to feed the cattle as it is an offence under the Act of 1960 to starve an animal or to fail to maintain it," stated the petition.

The 1960 Act provided exceptions where slaughter of animals for food was not perceived to be an act of cruelty. The Act also did not prohibit or restrict the slaughter of animals for food or for religious sacrifice or the sale of animals for the same, the petition stated. The Rules were also violative of Article 29 of the Constitution that protected the cultural identities of communities.

The petition contends that the Rules contravene the main Act and that changes to the main Act cannot be effected by an executive fiat but only by the legislature. It contends that under Section 29 of the Act the animals could be forfeited on a second and subsequent conviction only, whereas the new Rule 8 was inconsistent and overriding of Section 29 of the parent Act as it empowered the magistrate to deprive the accused of ownership of animals and forfeit seized animals to an infirmary, pinjrapole, the SPCA, an animal welfare organisation or a gaushala on first conviction or on pleading guilty. Similarly Rules 8 (2) and 3 (b) were also inconsistent with Section 35 of the Act as they prohibited the owner to have the interim custody of his own animals during pendency of litigation and even after being acquitted he would lose the amount deposited for transporting, care and maintenance of animals which may exceed the cost of the animal due to long pendency of the case in the court," contended the petitioner.

Equally significantly, restrictions on the sale of cattle specified under various subsections of Rule 22 "prohibited the owner of a young animal to bring to an animal market" a young animal, defined under 2 (o) of the new rules as one under the age of six months. Pointing out various inadequacies in the rules, especially those that imposed restrictions on sale, purchase and maintenance of cattle, the petitioner contended that "it was an unreasonable and illegal restriction which prohibits the cattle trader to trade for the purpose of breeding and rearing."

Second, Rule 22 (b) (iii) "unconstitutionally prohibited the sale of cattle for slaughter imposing an absolute ban on the purchase of the animal in the cattle market for slaughter. Third, the petition stated, Rule 22 (c) unnecessarily "imposed a condition upon the most educationally backward class community of India to furnish a declaration to the Animal Market Committee and to retain it for a period of six months from the date on which it is furnished [and] on demand made by an Inspector at any reasonable time during that period produce such declaration and allow a copy of it or an extract from it to be taken". Fourth, Rule 22 (d) (ii) (iv) (v) (vi) (vii) imposed an "absolute ban upon the cattle trader to buy and sell the animals in the cattle markets and permitted only the agriculturist on production of their revenue records and with a declaration not to sell the animal within a period of six months from the date of purchase".

This, the petitioner said, was an act of discrimination against cattle traders as it imposed "unconstitutional restrictions from using the cattle markets for the trade of cattle", which was their "ancestral and traditional occupation being carried on from their ancestors with no other skills to get employed or adopt any other profession". It was a forceful imposition (Rule 22 (v)) on the agriculturist "to maintain the cattle for a minimum fixed period of six months after purchase irrespective of his financial liabilities towards his family members". Rule 22 (e) (i) (iii) mandated that the buyer of the cattle should be an agriculturist and could sell the cattle after six months to any other buyer who should also be an agriculturist and the purchased animals shall never be sold for the purpose of slaughtering even if it does not remain a useful animal. This was yet another imposition, as per the petition.

The petition also raises several moot points pertaining to the principle of federalism, which several State governments, too, have raised. It says that the fields of legislation concerning "markets and fairs" and "preservation or protection and improvement of stocks" fell within "entry 28 and 15 of the State List and thus it was only the State legislature that was empowered to make laws on the said fields of legislation". The parent Act itself does not deal with the regulation of markets for sale of animals or their slaughter, and the Central government could not make the rules entering into "fields of legislation occupied by the State legislature by their respective enactments", it contends. As an illustration, the petition points out that "States, District Municipalities Act and the Panchayat Act permit a person to hold animal markets".

VIOLATIVE OF RIGHT OF CHOICE

The Rules, contended the petition, were ultimately violative of the right of choice of food, privacy and personal liberty under Article 21 of the Constitution, and the ban on slaughter of animals for food would deprive citizens of the right under the said Article.

The matter may or may not be settled by courts, but what is eminently clear is that the agrarian community is none too happy with the notification. If the strong reactions from several State governments and BJP functionaries in some north-eastern States are a barometer of the general mood, the prudent option for the Central government seems to be to withdraw its contentious and divisive notification.
SLAUGHTERHOUSES ACROSS INDIA ARE under severe duress. The once-thriving meat industry has been pushed to the edge. Three key policy decisions of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) can be held responsible for this state of affairs. First, the demonetisation initiative in November 2016 placed severe constraints on the cash-based rural economy. Despite the tall claims of the Digital India programme, the reality on the ground was that there was no connectivity. “The nearest ATM is seven kilometres from our village and that too does not have cash half the time,” said a farmer from Bihar who used to sell his old or infirm cattle in the cattle market which would then make their way to one of the many abattoirs in north India. But demonetisation brought such trade to a halt for several months, reducing even middle-income farmers to penury. The National Sample Survey Organisation’s latest estimates pegged the monthly average income of a farmer in the country at less than Rs.6,500 a month. Selling a buffalo used to bring in Rs.20,000 to Rs.30,000. This enabled the farmer to have access to several months’ income in one go. With the new rules, a farmer will not only lose this income but will have to spend more to feed unproductive cattle. “We don’t have money to feed our children, how will we take the burden of feeding cattle?” said a farmer from western Uttar Pradesh.

Second, fulfilling his election manifesto, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath led a crackdown on Uttar Pradesh’s illegal slaughterhouses in March, bringing the entire meat business in the State to a grinding halt. There were reports of licensed units not being allowed to function. Those who applied for renewing existing licences were shown the door by the authorities without giving any reason. Lakhs of people associated with the trade were left in the lurch. The worst hit were the poorest of the poor—daily-wagers who transported cattle, cleaned abattoirs and were involved in other menial labour around the trade. While thousands of butcher shops without licences shut down, those that were perfectly legal operated at less than half the capacity as the supply of raw material dried up. As cow vigilantes, animal rights activists and the police patrolled the streets, fear of harassment and physical violence spread, and farmers, transporters and buyers were wary of carrying on the

An industry in crisis

Controversial policy decisions and the activities of cow vigilantes have hit the abattoirs in the country hard, adversely affecting not only meat exports but the entire rural economy. BY DIVYA TRIVEDI

BUTCHERS play cards at a slaughterhouse in Lucknow during a strike to protest against the crackdown on abattoirs and meat shops in Uttar Pradesh, on March 31.
trade. In the past one year, more than 10 cases of lynching of cattle traders by Hindu right-wing mobs have been reported. In many of the cases the police were mute spectators.

Abattoirs in other States too were affected. As the supply of buffaloes stopped, an abattoir in Kolkata had to shut shop. Set up by the Kolkata Municipal Corporation, it was touted as the first fully automated abattoir in the country. States such as Jharkhand that did not have a single abattoir were badly hit. Farmers in these States were left with the choice of either taking their cattle across State borders and risk being lynched or postpone the sale indefinitely. As it became dangerous to travel with cattle, transport costs went up. If the supplier had to pay off a vigilante, the police or animal rights activists for safe passage, the cost was built into the buyer's purchase price, making the entire exercise costly. As a result, consumer prices in several places shot up. The fallout was that consumption of chicken soared. Reports indicated that several wedding parties had to be cancelled because of the unavailability of meat.

**ILL-THOUGHT-OUT MOVE**

Third, the BJP government at the Centre banned the sale of cattle for slaughter at animal markets through a notification under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960. The definition of “cattle” was expanded to include buffaloes, bulls, cows, bullocks, steers, heifers, calves and camels. And, cattle could only be sold to another farmer. This decision might turn out to be the most ill-thought-out one by the BJP government after the demonetisation drive, feel experts. India is a key player in the international market for buffalo meat, and its entire economy stood threatened with this decision. The major buffalo meat-producing areas are Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Punjab. Buffalo meat was exported to more than 70 countries across the world, with Vietnam, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) being the main markets.

There are about 3,600 slaughterhouses in India, according to the Agricultural & Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA). There are 24 meat-processing plants, with 13 export-oriented units engaged in the export of meat products. In addition, there are a few animal casing units engaged in collecting, cleaning, grading and exporting sheep, goat and cattle guts.

Before the brouhaha over the ban on selling cattle for slaughter, the government acknowledged that the export of animal products (buffalo meat, sheep and goat meat, poultry products, animal casings, milk and milk products, honey, etc.) made an important contribution to the Indian agricultural sector. Citing Ministry of Food Processing Industries data, Nirmala Sitharaman, Minister of State in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, said in December 2015 that the meat-processing industry was worth Rs.5,026 million. “The recent trend in India is to establish large abattoirs-cum-meat processing plants with the latest technology. India has already established 10 state-of-art mechanised abattoirs-cum-meat processing plants in various States based on slaughtering buffaloes and sheep,” said an APEDA statement. In 2015-16, India earned Rs.26,685 crore and in 2014-15, Rs.29,289 crore from buffalo meat export. In 2016-17, the earnings fell to Rs.26,307 crore. The exporters either bought carcasses from abattoirs or purchased unproductive buffaloes directly from weekly animal markets. India was also a leading supplier of halal meat to Islamic countries. With 57 per cent of the total buffalo population of the world in India, the country was considered home to some of the finest breeds of buffaloes. It figured among the largest exporters of bovine meat, sending competitively priced frozen buffalo meat to 65 countries, claimed exporters.

With the onset of Ramzan, meat exporters had to deal with delayed and slumped exports in what is otherwise the busiest and most profitable season for them. The Allana Group, one of India’s largest exporters of processed food products and agro commodities, exported its products to over 85 countries and claimed to be one of the largest net foreign exchange earners in the country, with a turnover of Rs.3,500 crore during 2008-09. It had been exporting halal meat for 45 years. For the first time in decades, this year its business suffered a setback of Rs.700-800 crore compared with the previous year. Speaking about global competition, Fauzan Alavi, spokesperson for Allana, said that despite costs going up, the company was unable to sell at a higher rate abroad. “Business is down by 11 per cent, which is huge for our industry. Overseas, the Brazilian and Australian currencies have devalued, and therefore we are unable to sell at a higher price,” said Alavi. He also wondered how the government intended to double farmers’ income without providing an impetus to livestock farming. “It is said that 300 million poor families in the world survive on income generated from sheep and goat. India has so much livestock potential, which we must not overlook. The government waiving loans of farmers cannot be a permanent solution. If the government really wants to give freebies, they should give sheep, goat and lamb. There is 100 per cent buyback there. Livestock is like a cash crop today and animal husbandry is the way to go.”

Mohammed Aqil Qureishi, president of the Buffalo Traders Welfare Association in Delhi, said that the business had suffered a 40 per cent slump after the announcement on the ban of sale of cattle for slaughter. An abattoir in Ghazipur, run by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, had the capacity to handle 2,000 buffaloes and 3,500 sheep and goats a day but was functioning much below capacity, he said. “The abattoir was renovated by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi with an investment of Rs.200 crore, but look at it now,” he said. Farmers who come from all over north India to sell their cattle would be the worst hit by this move of the government, followed by consumers in Delhi, he said. “Contrary to popular belief, 80 per cent of the people in Delhi are meat eaters. If the supply to slaughterhouses stops, where is the meat going to come from to cater to these customers?”
No skin in the game

The new rules banning the sale of cattle for slaughter at animal markets have taken a huge toll on the leather trade, which provides livelihood to lakhs of people and functions as a crucial component of the livestock ecosystem. By Ravi Sharma

FARHAN QURESHI’S FAMILY HAS BEEN IN the business of trading in raw skins and hides for over three generations. Based out of a small town in southern Maharashtra, Farhan and his associates are in regular touch with butchers, slaughterhouses and smaller traders within his State and in Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Karnataka—wherever there is substantial consumption of meat. Scouting for raw hides (skin of cattle) and skins (of sheep and goats), Farhan plays a crucial role in helping slaughterhouses get rid of hides and skins and supplies the leather industry with its chief raw material. His biggest customers are the 410-plus tanneries located in Tamil Nadu’s Vellore district, which account for over 40 per cent of India’s leather production.

The Vellore cluster of tanneries and leather industries, which are located primarily in five small towns in the district—Ambur, Ranipet, Vaniyambadi, Melvisharam and Pernambut—employs over 100,000 people directly and another 250,000 indirectly and clocks an annual sales turnover of around Rs.5,000 crore. Besides the tanneries, the five towns also house around 120 shoe factories, 25 jacket-producing units, 20 units manufac-

TANNED hide ready for dispatch at a tannery in Ambur, Tamil Nadu.
turing leather accessories such as handbags and suitcases, and 10 industrial, riding and fashion glove companies. At Pernambut, over 50 units use buffalo hide to produce shoe soles, the only ones to do so in the country.

The region exports leather products worth around Rs.2,800 crore annually and several major global brands, such as Clarks, Cole Haan, Florsheim, Guess, Hush Puppies, Tommy Hilfiger, and Timberland, have strong business links with factories in the region. But all that is set to change as uncertainty looms large over the sourcing of raw skins and hides.

Already stymied to a large extent by the enactment, in March 2015, of the Maharashtra Animal Preservation (Amendment) Act, which broadened the ban on the slaughter of cows to include bulls and bullocks (which had been allowed earlier based on a fit-for-slaughter certificate), traders like Farhan have now been further hit after the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change on May 23 notified the stringent Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Regulation of Livestock Markets) Rules, 2017, under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, wherein, among other stiff regulations, the sale and purchase of cattle at animal markets for the purpose of slaughter are banned.

The new rules threaten to push the slaughtering of cattle for meat and the supply of the primary byproduct, raw hides, further underground. Traders like Farhan continue to source and deliver raw hides even from Maharashtra but have now been forced to negotiate with elements from a regional, jingoistic, right-wing political party.

Traders told this correspondent that they had to pay a certain amount of money (some say Rs.20,000) for “protection” for every truckload of hides and skins. Besides the goons of corrupt political outfits, overzealous animal lovers who want every domesticated animal taken to an animal shelter, corrupt officials and cow vigilantes pose additional problems for traders like Farhan. The vigilantes may publicly declare their love for animals and beat up hide/skin transporters, even occasionally setting on fire a fully laden truck or two, but they are more than willing to look the other way if the right deal is struck.

All this has meant uncertainty and irregularity of supply, higher landing costs, and loss of business for the $12 billion Indian leather industry. According to the Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry’s Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics, in 2016-17 the sector exported leather and leather products worth $5.66 billion and was among the top 10 foreign exchange earners.

**Leather Trade**

According to the Council for Leather Exports (CLE), an autonomous non-profit body founded in 1984 that functions under the aegis of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the Indian leather industry is “bestowed with an affluence of raw materials” as India, with 20 per cent...
of the world’s cattle/buffalo population and 11 per cent of the goat/sheep population, produces around three billion square feet of leather annually, which accounts for 10 per cent of the world’s leather requirement. Raw hide traders are unable to procure material to supply to tanneries primarily because butchers are also feeling the heat of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Regulation of Livestock Markets) Rules, 2017. With the new rules stating that cattle cannot be sold at animal markets, a sense of fear hangs over both meat markets and village cattle fairs.

When this correspondent visited a couple of weekly fairs at villages close to the town of Krishnagiri in Tamil Nadu, the apprehension and uncertainty were all too evident. There were hardly any cattle. Although the Madurai bench of the Madras High Court had granted on May 30 a four-week interim stay on the implementation of the rules banning the sale of cattle for slaughter in animal markets, there was no denying the fact that most cattle traders and butchers were terrified to admit that animals were being bought or sold for slaughter.

Mohammed Ghausali, a cattle trader from nearby Jolarpettai, who bought two rather famished bullocks for Rs.10,500 after protracted bargaining, said the government’s rules were unfair and sounded the death knell for his livelihood. “I earn hardly Rs.200-300 when I strike a deal. Farmers only sell their cattle when they are in dire need of money and also when the animals are past their prime. How will a farmer look after an aged animal?” he said. Agriculturists who were looking to sell their bullocks echoed Ghausali’s views. S. Govindan from Mallapadi said: “It costs over Rs.100 a day to feed the animal. Water is also an issue. A tanker of water costs us Rs.800. Will the government compensate us for all this?”

Saleem Sheikh, a cattle trader from Ambur who has been sourcing cattle from animal fairs for over 30 years and who occasionally slaughters them for the meat and sells the hides, said: “How can I go to villages and directly buy cattle from the farmers? How will I know who wants to sell? It will be too time-consuming and impractical.” With reports of vigilantes forcefully freeing animals, many agents are also afraid of leaving with the cattle they have bought.

No slaughter means no hides and skins for Vellore’s...
tanneries and leather industry. The tanners are a worried lot. Hides and skins from animals slaughtered at abattoirs are bought by traders who cure them with salt for 10 to 14 days. The raw pelts are then dispatched to tanneries in lots either by piece or by weight, where they are tanned either with chemicals like ammonium sulphate, chrome tanning salts and sulphuric acid, or by the East India company in the early 1800s, where the tanning is accomplished using ingredients like lime, tanning bark from shrubs and trees like the pungam, avaram, konnam, velam, myrobalan, and vegetable oils like pungam oil. Once tanned, the semi-finished leather is processed further at finishing units before it becomes finished leather and sent to the leather factories to be made into shoes, jackets, bags, shoe uppers, gloves, and so on.

According to tanners and experts from the leather industry, the Union government’s decision will be counterproductive since it will push the trade underground and increase the price of raw hides and skins. A tanner who deals in hides said: “We generally used to avoid buying the hides of female cattle since the fibres in the pelt would have expanded and become loose owing to pregnancies. The hides of calves were also avoided since they are small. In any lot of, say, 10 hides [the average size of each piece being 18 to 20 sq ft], at the most you could find one piece that was small. Butchers had a choice of animals. There was an inbuilt safety mechanism. Today, without that choice, butchers will slaughter the first animal they get. And it is not that hides aren’t coming at all. They are coming from Kerala and West Bengal. And since there is no duty on finished leather, hides are being smuggled in from Bangladesh.”

On an average, around 5,000 skins (each costing under Rs.200) or 1,000 to 1,600 hides (average cost between Rs.600 and Rs.1,200 a piece depending on the size and quality) are loaded on to a truck. A raw hide can weigh anywhere between 10 to 30 kilograms. Once tanned, the semi-finished hide commands an average price of Rs.150 per sq ft, with the price varying depending on the quality and size. The bigger tanneries in Vellore are capable of processing 10 truckloads a day, but given the high risks of goons and inspections, transporters demand that they be paid even before the consignment lands at the tannery, and some are even refusing to ship raw hides and skins.

According to Ramesh Prasad, joint secretary of the South India Tanners and Dealers Association, the new rules have caused enormous suffering to the industry. “Fear of the new rules is preventing animals from being brought to the animal markets. While earlier we used to get 100 hides, we are now getting 10. Production over the last 30 days has halved. I am trying to balance the shortfall by using imported hides. But then importers have immediately hiked their price by $3 a kg,” he said.

Most of the associations and trade bodies have made a representation to the government to roll back some of the rules. Said Faiyaz Ahmed S. M., Secretary of the Ambur Tannery Association: “We have requested that the Central notification extending the restrictions on cow slaughter to buffaloes be relaxed. Buffaloes are not of religious significance to people of any particular faith. If this is not done, over 50 units that process hides for shoe soles will collapse.”

V. Sundar, general secretary of the North Arcot District Tannery Workers Union, said this “could become a law and order problem, since the micro-economy of the district will also collapse”. K.R. Vijayan, who runs a tannery at Ranipet, added: “The rules do not ban slaughter of cattle, but there are so many restrictions. And going to an animal market and buying an animal for slaughter is not possible. I have started working with imported leather from Brazil and Argentina. There is no alternative.”

Terminating the newly notified rules as akin to “placing a wedge in the natural livestock ecological system”, N. Shafeeq Ahmed, chairman of the Indian Finished Leather Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said that farming, the meat industry and the leather trade were all part of the same ecosystem. He explained: “It depends from which part of the ecosystem you take the animal and for what purpose. Every part of the animal is used right across society, and up to the bones. If you stop or place a wedge in the system, it will fall apart, with disastrous consequences. There is no clarity on the new notification. The government is banning the sale of cattle in the animal markets. From where will butchers buy their animals? The practice has been for traders to buy the animals and then resell it to the butcher.”
Unrest in the hills

After years of relative peace, memories of the prolonged and violent agitation for Gorkhaland are revived and north Bengal teeters on the precipice. BY SUHRID SANKAR CHATTOPADHYAY

THE uneasy truce between the Trinamool Congress government of West Bengal and the Gorkha Janamukti Morcha (GJM) of the Darjeeling hills has been shattered. The GJM, which for the last six years had kept the separatist agitation in the hills at bay, launched on June 8 the most violent agitation seen in recent years, requiring the Army’s intervention to contain the situation. The following day, the GJM called a 12-hour bandh in the hills and announced an indefinite shutdown of government and public offices from June 12. On June 15, after GJM supremo Bimal Gurung’s house was raided by the police and a huge cache of arms was recovered, the GJM announced an indefinite total bandh in the hills. After six years of relative peace, memories of the prolonged and violent agitation for a separate State of Gorkhaland were reawakened.

In a clearly premeditated action, thousands of GJM supporters launched an attack on the afternoon of June 8 barely 200 metres from the Governor’s House in Darjeeling town, where Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had just finished holding a Cabinet meeting. (It was the first Cabinet meeting to be held in Darjeeling in 45 years.) For over two hours, they threw stones and bombs at the police and burnt public vehicles. According to reports, 12 police vehicles and a public bus were torched and more than 50 police personnel were injured. The police countered with baton charges and tear-gas shelling. All the while, the Chief Minister and her 31 Cabinet Ministers, who were in Darjeeling to announce development work done in the hills, remained confined to the Raj Bhavan. The State government thought it necessary to requisition the Army, and as of June 13, six columns of Army personnel were stationed in Darjeeling.

The GJM declared a 12-hour shutdown on June 9, with the promise that more intense agitation would follow. In order to allay the worries of tourists in Darjeeling, Mamata Banerjee delayed her return to Kolkata and was out in the streets interacting with local people.
The violent outburst was the culmination of a simmering feud between the State government and the GJM over the last few months. The discontent found an outlet when the Chief Minister announced in May a new language policy making Bengali compulsory in the school curriculum as a second or third language. The GJM’s response was to declare a two-day strike in the schools in the hills on June 1 and 2. Mamata Banerjee yielded, saying Bengali would not be made compulsory in the schools of Darjeeling and in certain areas of the Terai and the Dooars (the foothills). But the GJM remained on the path of agitation.

For the GJM, this was an opportunity to reassert its position of supremacy in the hills in the face of rising opposition and the onset of an anti-incumbency sentiment. Its image took a beating in 2010 when Madan Tamang, leader of the Akhil Bharatiya Gorkha League (ABGL) and an outspoken critic of GJM supremo Bimal Gurung, was hacked to death in broad daylight, allegedly by GJM activists. Following the establishment of the autonomous Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) in 2011, the GJM’s demand for a separate State of Gorkhaland appeared to have lost steam, particularly since it shifted its agitation to Delhi, opting for a strike-free environment in the hills to facilitate development and peace after nearly three decades of continuous strife. The GJM’s opponents saw this as a serious compromise on the promise of Gorkhaland, and for the first time an erosion was detected in the party’s support base. The Trinamool Congress’s increasing presence in the hills was, if not a threat, a source of irritation for Gurung. A separate group emerged in Kalipong with friendly ties with the Trinamool, under the leadership of Harka Bahadur Chhetri, a former heavyweight member of the GJM. In this background, the municipal elections held in May must have given cause for concern to the GJM. The Mirik municipality in the hills elected the Trinamool to form the board—something that was inconceivable earlier.

As the GJM continued its agitation, Mamata Banerjee accused the organisation of trying to drive a rift between Bengali- and Nepali-speaking people. She even threatened the GJM leadership at a public rally in Mirik: “Those who have the murder case of Madan Tamang pending against them have the audacity to threaten me. It will take me just one minute.... But I do not believe in vindictive politics.” Many felt that this challenge to Gurung’s supremacy in the region left the GJM with no option but to react with a display of muscle power. Gurung said: “She [Mamata Banerjee] is the Chief Minister of West Bengal. I am also an elected leader, chief minister of the hills. If she can show her power, so can I.”

The GJM blames Mamata Banerjee for the deterioration of re-
relations between the two parties. “The State government’s high-handedness and its policy of suppression over the last six years compelled us to resume the agitation for Gorkhaland in the Darjeeling hills,” GJM general secretary Roshan Giri told Frontline. Once again demanding a separate State, the GJM declared an “indefinite agitation”. Beginning on June 12, all government offices in the Darjeeling hills, including the State’s revenue-generation centres such as electricity bill-payment counters, will remain closed; banks will work only on Mondays and Thursdays. Courts and emergency departments and services have been exempted.

Giri said: “The closure is only for government offices. Hotels, shops, transport, schools and colleges are all open. We assure the tourists that they are welcome in Darjeeling. We will also be organising regular processions and torchlight rallies demanding Gorkhaland.” On the eve of the strike, however, Bimal Gurung gave cause for alarm by saying that tourists could stay behind in Darjeeling at their own risk. The situation took a turn for the worse on June 15 when the GJM declared an indefinite bandh following a raid on Bimal Gurung’s house. “We had information that the GJM was gathering arms and accordingly raids were conducted. We recovered bows and arrows, three or four firearms and a large amount of cash. We do not think any peace-minded person will store such arms,” said Akhilesh Chaturvedi, Superintendent of Police, Darjeeling. Roshan Giri, however, claimed that the bows and arrows were for archery practice.

A POLITICAL COMPULSION
The unrest in the hills has been a setback for Mamata Banerjee. After assuming power in 2011, she brought back peace in the hills—Lepcha, Tamang, Sherpa, Bhutia, Limbu, and so on—and thus prised away some support for the Trinamool from the grip of the GJM. But Gurung’s show of strength proved that the GJM was still the most dominant force in the region. It is clear, too, that the demand for Gorkhaland continues to be the most vibrant and unifying political call in the hills.

The revival of the Gorkhaland demand has also taken the wind out of the opposition’s sails. Sandip C. Jain, editor of The Himalayan Times, said: “The moment the GJM revived the issue of Gorkhaland, it blew away all opposition parties. Whatever gains they may have made over the last few years will now be reduced to insignificance.”

At an all-party meet called by the GJM on June 13, most of the local parties, including the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) and
the Gorkhaland Rajya Nirman Morcha, the Communist Party of Revolutionary Marxist and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), set aside political differences and pledged to fight for Gorkhaland. Only the ABGL and the Trinamool were absent in the meeting. Interestingly, the GNLF, founded by Subhas Ghisingh, who began the Gorkhaland movement in the mid 1980s, was for long the Trinamool’s electoral ally. “The GNLF wholeheartedly supports the demand for Gorkhaland. We should go according to the wishes of the people,” said Neeraj Zimba Tamang. Admitting that his party was in an electoral understanding with the Trinamool, Tamang clarified, “The GNLF will stand with anyone who raises the demand for Gorkhaland.”

**NOT THE GJM OF OLD**

Notwithstanding the renewed aggressiveness of the GJM, the current agitation shows that the organisation is no longer able to take any extreme measure lest it alienates the masses further. It announced an “indefinite agitation” but stopped short of a total shutdown. After several years of stability in the region, Gurung did not wish to risk the people’s ire by shutting down the tourism industry, the mainstay of the region’s economy. He was finally compelled to call an indefinite bandh when he was cornered following the raid on his house. “The State government forced it on us. This was a political movement, not a law and order problem,” said Roshan Giri.

The State government has stepped up pressure on the GJM by ordering a special audit of the funds that went not only to the GTA but also the three hill municipalities of Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Kurseong. The GJM has turned to the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA), with which it has a political understanding. Giri said: “We have requested the Centre to intervene on our behalf. Our president wrote to the Home Minister on June 10 and the Prime Minister on June 11. We have written that we are no longer satisfied with the GTA.”

With GTA elections due in July, the last thing the GJM wants now is to put itself in a corner. Many feel this is a desperate effort by the GJM to retain power in the hills and defer the GTA elections, as the possibility of losing in the elections is not as remote as it would have been considered earlier.

“Bimal Gurung has proved that he is still the big boss in the hills, but he is absolutely clueless about what to do next. If he backs down, he will appear weak; and if he intensifies the agitation, the people may just get fed up with yet another prolonged period of deprivation,” an informed political source from Darjeeling said. As of June 15, with the hills once again heading for a prolonged period of violence and agitation, it remains to be seen how the GJM leadership can find a solution that will bring about stability in the hills without appearing to compromise on the issue of Gorkhaland.
IN THE BIG LEAGUE

India’s successful maiden launch of its heaviest launch vehicle, built entirely indigenously to put into orbit its heaviest satellite yet, signals ISRO’s arrival on the global stage for developing cryogenic engines for launch vehicles. BY T.S. SUBRAMANIAN

“TOWARDS Sustained Self-reliance in Accessing Space” announced a huge poster on a wall in the cabin of S. Ramakrishnan, the first Project Director of the Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle—Mark III (GSLV-MkIII). It was October 2002 and only five months earlier, in May, the Central government had approved the development of the GSLV-MkIII. Frontline was visiting the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) in Thiruvananthapuram, on whose vast campus was situated, by the seashore at Thumba, a small building that housed Ramakrishnan’s cabin on the ground floor where the GSLV-MkIII project was taking shape. The massive vehicle, as I saw in the poster, was called “gsLVM3”, or launch vehicle Mark 3, India’s “Next Generation Launch Vehicle”.

On October 2, 2002, K. Kasturirangan, then Chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), had formally constituted the GSLV-MkIII project with Ramakrishnan as Project Director. The primary objective was to develop a launch vehicle that would put a four-tonne satellite into the geosynchronous transfer orbit (GTO, with a periapogee of about 180 km and an apogee of about 36,000 km). The rocket would be a “totally new, powerful animal”, Ramakrishnan told Frontline on that 2002 visit.

Fifteen years later, the gigantic GSLV-MkIII D1, weighing 640 tonnes, roared into the sky at 5:28 p.m. on June 5 from its launch pad at Sriharikota in what was its first developmental flight (D1). The heaviest rocket that ISRO has built was well and truly on its way to making history as its two strap-on motors, each guzzling 200 tonnes of solid propel-
stage in the mission that lasted 16 minutes and 20 seconds can be gauged from the fact that its engine performed with precision for 10 minutes and 40 seconds (640 seconds). Of the total velocity of 10.5 km a second needed to put the 3,136-kg GSAT-19 into the GTO, the cryogenic engine contributed more than 5 km a second.

The triumph signalled India’s self-reliance in space technology with a robust, cost-effective vehicle made possible by its mastery over the cryogenic technology that is needed to put heavier communication satellites into their initial orbit.

The GSLV-MkII rockets, with indigenous cryogenic engines, could put satellites weighing 2.2 tonnes into a GTO. Now ISRO does not have to depend on Arianespace to put its four-tonne satellites into orbit. The GSLV-MkIII can also put satellites weighing 10 tonnes into low-earth orbits. The vehicle can carry a crew module with two or three astronauts into space or even segments of a space station.

The just-concluded mission about 20 seconds and the strap-ons and the core liquid stage produced 800 tonnes of thrust, worked with gusto. “Strap-on motors’ performance normal”, “L-110 [liquid engine] ignited” came the voice from the Mission Control Centre (MCC) situated seven kilometres from the launch pad. “Strap-on motors separated”, “L-110 performance normal”, “heat shield separated”, “plus four minutes”, and “L-110 core stage separated” were the other announcements from the MCC. Then came the announcement that everyone was waiting for: “Cryo MCC. Then came the announcement that “GSAT-19 [the satellite] has separated”.

It was a remarkable success for a totally new vehicle on its debut flight. As ISRO’s top brass stressed, it was a vehicle built indigenously from scratch: its strap-on motors, its core liquid stage, its cryogenic upper stage and the ogive-shaped payload fairing (heat shield) with a massive diameter of five metres. Each of these was conceived, designed, developed, realised and tested in India. Each of the three stages was the largest that ISRO has built so far. The crucial cryogenic upper stage had no reference to the Russian cryogenic engines of the GSLV-MkI series of vehicles. At 640 tonnes, the GSLV-MkIII D1 was 50 per cent heavier than GSLV-MkII, which weighed 414 tonnes.

The 43.43-metre-long GSLV-MkIII D1 had a simple configuration with only three propulsion stages. The two solid strap-on motors, called S-200, clung on to the core liquid stage, called L-110, on either side. The liquid stage, four metres in diameter, used more than 110 tonnes of liquid propellants. Above the core liquid stage sat the cryogenic stage called C-25, which used 28.3 tonnes of cryogenic propellants, that is, liquid oxygen and liquid hydrogen in the mission. On top of the cryogenic stage sat the GSAT-19 surrounded by the payload fairing, which was 10.3 metres tall and five metres in diameter.

The importance of the cryogenic stage in the mission that lasted 16 minutes and 20 seconds can be
nication transponders" that have “no physical presence” and are “virtual transponders”. It uses multiple frequency beams to send down data and is hence called a throughput communication satellite. The satellite carries a payload called Geostationary Radiation Spectrometer (GRASP) to study the nature of charged particles and the influence of space radiation on satellites and their electronic components.

Tapan Misra, Director, Space Applications Centre, ISRO, Ahmedabad, which made the payloads in the satellite, called it “a game changer communication satellite for India”. The satellite was tantamount to a constellation of six or seven communication satellites of earlier generations.

P.K. Gupta, Project Director, GSAT-19, called the satellite “a test laboratory in space” because it carried 15 critical technologies that would be validated during its lifespan in space. These technologies would form the mainstay of the next generation, heavier satellites. GSAT-19 was integrated at the ISRO Satellite Centre, Bengaluru, whose Director is M. Annadurai.

It was a networking of various ISRO centres and industries that led to the GSLV-MkIII D1 mission’s success. The VSSC designed the vehicle because all the systems, including the S-200 stage, the L-110 stage and the C-25 stage are new”. The C-25 stage with its cryogenic engine called CE-20 underwent only two tests—it was fired for 50 seconds on January 25, 2017, and it underwent a full, flight-duration test for 640 seconds on February 17. “We started work from scratch on this cryogenic engine. It is not similar to the cryogenic upper stage of GSLV-MkII. It has no reference to the Russian cryogenic engines used in the GSLV-MkI flights. It is a totally indigenous cryogenic engine,” Ramakrishnan asserted.

ALL-NEW VEHICLE
In an interview to Frontline in his office at the VSSC on May 27, Sivan explained why the GSLV-MkIII D1 was a totally new vehicle and why ISRO developed it. While the PSLV could put a 1.1-tonne satellite into the GTO, the GSLV-MkII, with an indigenous cryogenic upper stage, had double that capacity. However, 10 years ago, building a new class of communication satellites that weighed four tonnes became the norm.

“Augmenting the capacity of the existing vehicles will not solve the problem. Doubling the capacity is huge. So we had necessarily to go in for a new vehicle,” Sivan said.

ISRO was clear that the new vehicle should be able to reduce the cost of the launch. “The cost of the launch vehicle may be more, but it should be able to take a heavier satellite into orbit so that the cost of launching per kg of satellite will come down. This was the main criterion,” Sivan said.

Secondly, the vehicle’s design should be simple and it should be a reliable vehicle. Reliability entailed that the vehicle should have the minimum possible number of propulsion stages to put a four-tonne satellite into orbit.

LOCATIONAL CONSTRAINT
An area of major concern was the launch constraint imposed by the location of Sriharikota, India’s space port. The launch had to take place eastward from the island to put a communication satellite into the GTO. This did not offer “full freedom” because after the vehicle cleared the Bay of Bengal, the Indonesian land mass appeared on the scene. The launch vehicle debris—from the jettisoned stages—should not be allowed to fall over Indonesia.

Sivan said: “We had seen that when the vehicle reached a velocity of more than 5 km a second, the Indonesian land mass came in. So we had a requirement of designing a launch vehicle that will have a capacity of reaching [a velocity of] 5 km a second. But it is the lower stages that should produce that velocity of 5 km a second. We then needed one more stage which will produce another 5 km a second of velocity. There can-
not, however, be an intermediary stage. [A total of 10.2 km a second velocity is required to put a four-tonne satellite into the GTO.] After the vehicle crosses the land mass, its stages should not come down. They should continuously burn and go into orbit. That means we should have a stage that should give another 5 km a second after the vehicle crosses the land mass. So we had to necessarily go in for a cryogenic stage that will give 5 km a second at a stretch and carry the four-tonne satellite into orbit. To put a 2.2-tonne satellite into orbit, we had a cryo stage with 12 tonnes of liquid oxygen and liquid hydrogen. But to put a four-tonne satellite into orbit, we needed a cryogenic stage which will use 25 tonnes of propellants. That is how the C-25 stage came into the picture.”

In other words, while the vehicle’s lower stages will provide a velocity of about 5.2 km a second, the cryogenic stage will provide another

Swadeshi success

BEHIND the success of the GSLV-MkIII D1 lay 15 years of developmental efforts of the vehicle’s massive strap-on motors, the core liquid stage and the crucial cryogenic stage. At 640 tonnes, it is the heaviest vehicle ISRO has built so far. It required the setting up of brand new infrastructure facilities at various ISRO centres, chiefly the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC), Thiruvananthapuram; the Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre (LPSC), Valiamala, 30 km from Thiruvananthapuram; the ISRO Propulsion Complex (IPRC) at Mahendragiri near Nagercoil in Tamil Nadu; and the Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC) at Sriharikota.

The mission also led to ISRO fabricating a payload fairing, or heat shield, that was five metres in diameter and 10.7 metres tall, the largest composite hardware realised by ISRO so far. It protects the satellite inside during the vehicle’s ascent into the atmosphere.

When the mission turned out to be a spectacular success on June 5, a big slice of the credit belonged to the IPRC. A key centre for the mission, it had realised, tested and qualified the vehicle’s cryogenic stage (C-25) and the core liquid stage. Besides, it was here that the cryogenic and liquid propellants needed for the mission were made. “Our ISRO Propulsion Complex is the “Jet Propulsion Laboratory [JPL, Pasadena, U.S.] of India,” declared P.V. Venkitakrishnan, Director, IPRC. “It is a world-class facility in terms of its integration centres and massive test stands. These facilities are tailor-made for India. They cannot be copied from elsewhere and set up here,” he told Frontline on May 30, six days before the launch.

According to S. Ramakrishnan, the first Project Director of GSLV-MkIII, as early as 2000 the Launch Vehicle Design Group (LVDG) at the VSSC was giving shape to the GSLV-MkIII. The LVDG’s report described the GSLV-MkIII as “a vehicle capable of launching four to 4.5 tonnes into GTO or about ten tonnes into low-earth orbit. The vehicle will use efficient boosters and stages with state-of-the-art materials and design methods to realise a rugged, least-cost and reliable launcher.”

The payload fairing that encases the four-tonne satellite has a diameter of five metres. “It was the first time we were going to make a payload fairing with a diameter of five metres. But there were no facilities in India, including machining works, to handle a heat shield of such a diameter and height,” said Venkitakrishnan, who was associated with the GSLV-MkIII D1 development from its inception to the end at the VSSC, the LPSC and the IPRC.

The entire infrastructure for a vehicle of this mass and size had to be developed for the first time, and Indian industries rose to the occasion. They included private industries such as Walchandnagar Industries Limited (WIL); Larsen & Toubro; Godrej; MTAR Technologies Private Limited, Hyderabad; and public sector undertakings such as MIDHANI, Hyderabad; and HAL, Bengaluru.

MIDHANI equipped itself to handle the four-metre class hardware for the liquid L-110 stage which was developed by 2006. “It was done in record time,” said Venkitakrishnan. Drawings, civil works, equipment facilities, hardware fabrication and validation of hardware were all done in four years. By 2010, the LPSC had developed the massive core liquid stage, and the big test stand in the IPRC had fired and tested it. The static test of the two solid booster motors were done at Sriharikota. By then, Ramakrish-
5 km a second. Thus, the entire vehicle would generate a velocity of 10.2 km a second to put a four-tonne satellite into the GTO.

Since ISRO wanted to build a vehicle with a minimum number of stages and minimum complexity, "we prepared a configuration with two S-200 strap-on motors around the core liquid stage which uses 110 tonnes of liquid propellants and a third, cryogenic upper stage which uses 25 tonnes of propellants. This configuration can carry a four-tonne satellite into GTO," Sivan said. In fact, the core liquid stage had two Vikas engines.

(In comparison, the GSLV-MkII had seven propulsion motors: four liquid strap-on motors around the core solid stage, then the liquid stage, followed by the cryogenic upper stage to put a 2.2-tonne satellite into orbit.)

Sivan added: “Thus, we configured a simple system with the general requirement of reducing cost, 2002.”

Here, V. Narayanan, Project Director, C-25 Cryogenic Project, and Associate Director, LPSC, said: “We are one of the few countries to have developed this cryogenic technology. The cryogenic engine used in the GSLV-MkIII D1 mission was totally indigenously conceived, designed, developed, realised, tested and qualified. This gives us a great advantage.”

After the GSLV-MkIII D1 success, Venkitakrishnan said: “In 2002, we were wondering how to make the heat shield with a diameter of five metres, how to make the machines for it and so on. This vehicle had more swadeshi elements than any other vehicle. The superalloys and strategic materials needed for the vehicle were made here.

All the machines were conceived, designed and realised by our industry. We have gone on the right path from the beginning in 2002.”

T.S. Subramanian
increasing reliability, using the systems already developed and taking less development time. All these combined together, we arrived at this configuration.”

“We have two strap-ons in GSLV-MkIII which are among the most massive strap-ons in the world,” said S. Somanath, Director, LPSC. “Though they are called the strap-ons, they are the primary propulsive stages. They provide the entire lift-off thrust. Unlike in the PSLVs and the GSLVs, the strap-ons in GSLV-MkIII are the primary propulsion stages. That way the basic design of the vehicle is different.”

But the introduction of such big boosters, each of which used more than 200 tonnes of solid propellants, entailed problems. In the PSLVs and the earlier GSLVs, the performance of the strap-on motors “was not very critical” to the mission and “a slight difference in their performance would not make an issue”, the LPSC Director said. However, in GSLV-MkIII D1, since the two strap-on motors were extremely powerful, their performance was very critical to the mission and they had to produce identical thrust. “The entire vehicle will topple if the thrust-level is not identical. They have 400 tonnes of propellants. Their matched performance is very critical,” said Somanath. The thrust differential should not exceed plus or minus ten tonnes.

What also set apart GSLV-MkIII D1 from the PSLV and the earlier GSLVs was “the philosophy” of the core liquid stage taking over from the two strap-on motors. All the three fire together for some time before the solid strap-on motors burn out and the core liquid stage fully takes over. What happens is this: after the S-200s erupt into life on the ground at T-minus zero, the L-110 starts firing one minute and 54 seconds later. The three together fire for 26 seconds before the two strap-ons separate.

The liquid engine continues to fire until five minutes and 17 seconds after the blast-off.

Somanath said: “When the four motors are working together, we have algorithms which can make use of all four nozzles. Two solid motors are working. Two liquid Vikas engines in the liquid stage are working. All of them are under control. The moment the S-200s are shut down, you have to change the algorithm and transfer the control to the liquid stage motor. It should be done smoothly, without any jerk or problem.”

What made the GSLV-MkIII D1 different was that instead of using explosive separation bolts or springs to push down/jettison the spent stages, ISRO used six small motors in each of the strap-on stages to kick out the spent solid stages. “Here we cannot use the springs because the motor weight itself in each strap-on is 35 tonnes. We have, therefore, used six small motors in each strap-on to push the 35 tonnes away. The motors have to be fired at the moment the strap-ons have to be separated,” the LPSC Director said.

G. Ayyappan, Mission Director, emphasised that after the LVM3-X/CARE mission in December 2014 “we made this vehicle more robust in terms of aerodynamics”. As the launch vehicle climbs into the atmosphere, it experiences turbulence, so ISRO developed a new kind of payload fairing, called ogive payload fairing, to protect the satellite inside. Ayyappan explained: “During the atmospheric phase of the flight, the loads experienced by the vehicle are directly proportionate to the dynamic pressure and the angle of attack. Our aim was to reduce as far as possible the dynamic pressure and the angle of attack so that the vehicle will have a smooth passage through the atmosphere.”

Sivan called the atmospheric phase of the flight “very crucial for any launch vehicle mission”. As the launch vehicle ascends the atmosphere, its velocity builds up fast. But the atmospheric density comes down. Winds would be large. The dynamic pressure acting on the vehicle would be the maximum. When the loads acting on the vehicle are large, the disturbance will try to tilt the vehicle. “When this disturbance is trying to tilt the vehicle, the vehicle’s control systems will work in the opposite direction to correct it. So a breaking effect will be there. The vehicle will break as if it were a stick,” the VSSC Director said.

Besides, the ebb and flow occurring over the vehicle will create a lot of acoustic noise. The acoustics will be so high that they could harm the sensitive instruments in the satellite which is seated inside the payload fairing. It should be ensured that the acoustic level outside the vehicle is benign. So the payload fairing of the GSLV-MkIII D1 was modified, after the LVM3-X/CARE mission in December 2014, to withstand severe aerodynamic loads. “Our aim was that internal acoustics for the satellite should be benign. The payload fairing was changed to an ogive-shaped curve,” Ayyappan said. The normal “straight-on” nose cones of the strap-on booster stages were modified to slanted types. “The shape and size of the payload fairing and the head-end segment of the solid motors were modified so that there will be minimum disturbances acting on the vehicle. The launch vehicle was thus made more aerodynamically robust,” said Ayyappan, who is also the Project Director, GSLV-MkIII.

As P.V. Venkitakrishnan, Director, IPRC, Mahendragiri, said, the GSLV-MkIII D1 turned out to be “a grand vehicle in terms of everything”: in its high-performance cryogenic engine, the smooth functioning of its two solid strap-on motors, the firing of its liquid engine and, of course, its capability to put a four-tonne satellite into GTO. And, above all, in terms of realising the dream of “sustained self-reliance in accessing space”.  

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The Labour Party’s showing in the recent election in the United Kingdom well and truly debunked the widespread assumption that a left-wing party would not be able to engage with the wider electorate. Jeremy Corbyn will take over as Leader of the Opposition from a position of strength.

BY VIDYA RAM IN LONDON
IN EARLY OCTOBER 1994, A YOUNG, CONFIDENT and energised Tony Blair, who had just been elected leader of the Labour Party, took to the stage at the party’s conference in the seaside city of Blackpool to convince the party to make a major break with the past by revising its constitution. The biggest change would involve eliminating Clause IV in which was enshrined the party’s commitment to the “common ownership of the means of production”, which the party had maintained since 1918. This was essential, he said, for a “modern party living in an age of change. It requires a modern constitution that says what we are in terms the public cannot misunderstand and the Tories cannot misrepresent.... The next election will offer us the chance to change our country, not just to promise change, but to achieve it—the historic goal of another Labour government. Our party, new Labour; our mission, new Britain. New Labour, new Britain.”

The move caught many off guard, but the party’s National Executive Committee accepted the changes the following year. While Blair’s rhetoric impressed and convinced many in the party, there were sceptics. Speaking to the BBC, while others enthused, Jeremy Corbyn, a young and bushy-bearded MP then, expressed his concerns about the lack of detail in Blair’s speech and the direction of his commitments. “I can understand the desire for good presentation, but we are slightly missing the point. People on low wages, the unemployed and the desperately poor, they need to know Labour is going to deliver those things and is prepared to take the economic and taxation decisions or we will lose them.... I want to see a much stronger commitment to the welfare state.”

Blair’s vision for the party triumphed, and his electoral success three years later, in May 1997, seemed to bolster his insistence that to succeed, Labour needed to “reinvent” socialism and move decidedly to the middle ground. It is a perspective that remained dominant within the parties for well over a decade afterwards, even after Blair’s personal standing took a drastic hit from his stubborn commitment to take the country to war against...
Iraq despite strong public opposition. Critics, of course, remained, such as the Socialist Campaign Group, and left-wing candidates such as John McDonnell and Diane Abbott regularly stood for elections in leadership contests, with little success.

In an interview with the BBC last year, McDonnell recalled the moment that Corbyn was persuaded to stand, albeit reluctantly. The resignation of Ed Miliband, following Labour’s poor showing in the 2015 general election, triggered a leadership contest, and various left-wing groups within the party held a meeting to mull their options. McDonnell admitted to being sceptical of whether it would be worth fielding a candidate, convinced they would face a “crushing defeat”, but the groups eventually decided to do so. When McDonnell, who had stood twice previously, declined, as did Diane Abbott, everyone looked to Corbyn, who had never done so and who then agreed to saying: “Oh, go on then.”

The impact of that decision is being felt across Britain as the Labour Party’s “shock success” in the snap general election on June 8 shook the consensus held within the party and across the country that left-wing politics remain fringe and would relegate the party to the political wasteland.

This was a view that persisted from the time Corbyn made it onto the ballot (partly thanks to some MPs who did not agree with his politics but thought it important to have a “token” left-wing candidate on the list). In July 2015, as polls showed Corbyn taking the lead in the leadership campaign, Blair appealed to Labour members to reject the “traditional leftist platform” of Corbyn. “Don’t for heaven’s sake move back,” he said, advising those who wanted to follow Corbyn to “get a heart transplant”. The cover of The Economist in September 2015 after Corbyn thrashed his opponents in the Labour leadership contest was “Backwards, comrades”, warning that he was leading Britain’s Left into a political time warp.

The Conservatives won the largest number of seats, but theirs was a hollow victory as they lost 13 seats, leaving them dependent on the Far-Right Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) of Northern Ireland to form the government. The validation that Prime Minister Theresa May had sought for her party’s direction on Brexit and beyond is nowhere in sight. The Labour Party by contrast gained 30 seats, and Corbyn has increased its share of the vote more than any other of the party’s leaders in any election in post-War Britain. The Labour’s vote share rose 9.5 per cent, which is just shy of Clement Attlee’s 10.4 per cent swing in 1945. It succeeded in taking constituencies that had been Conservative for decades, such as the south-eastern historic town of Canterbury, which had voted for Brexit. Perhaps most emblematic was the Labour victory in the London constituency of Kensington, which had always been Conservative.

Perhaps most emblematic was the Labour victory in the London constituency of Kensington, which had always been Conservative.

The vicious assault, and at times barrage of downright lies, that followed was unwarranted and unprecedented. In a study published by the London School of Economics that examined coverage of Corbyn from September 1, 2015, to November 1, 2015, academics concluded that Britain’s press had moved from being a political “watchdog” to an “attack dog” and raised “serious ethical questions as to the role of the media in a democracy”. The report said that Corbyn was “represented unfairly by the British press through a process of vilification that went well beyond the normal limits of fair debate and disagreement in a democracy. Corbyn was often denied his own voice in the reporting on him and sources that were anti-Corbyn tended to outweigh those
that support him and his positions. He was also systematically treated with scorn and ridicule in both the broadsheet and tabloid press in a way that no other political leader is or has been. Even more problematic, the British press has repeatedly associated Corbyn with terrorism and positioned him as a friend of the enemies of the U.K. The result has been a failure to give the newspaper reading public a fair opportunity to form their own judgements about the leader of the country’s main opposition.

Over the course of the months that followed, Corbyn faced criticism even from former supporters, particularly over his failure to stand on a platform with Conservatives campaigning to remain in the European Union (E.U.) in last year’s referendum. Owen Jones, a left-wing activist, political commentator and early supporter of Corbyn, was one of those to voice his concerns. Writing for the website Medium last year, he warned that the Labour Party was missing opportunities to cut through to the electorate. “A clear coherent message that would resonate with people who aren’t signed up left wing activists that addressed people’s everyday problems and aspirations has yet to be created,” he wrote. Richard Murphy, a prominent tax justice campaigner and early supporter of Corbyn, wrote a scathing piece on the rise and fall of “Corbynomics”, warning that his team had left the impression that “they had created a movement that hates what’s happening in the world and can get really angry about it, but then has not a clue what to do about it”. Many who had been willing to work alongside him within

A DEMONSTRATION IN LONDON on June 10 against the Conservative Party’s alliance with the Democratic Unionist Party.
the party deserted. Writing for the online publication “LabourList”, the MP Seema Malhotra explained that she was leaving the Labour shadow cabinet because she believed the country needed new and “strong leadership”.

Even after Corbyn survived a vote of no confidence, the scepticism remained, so convinced was the British political establishment that Labour under Corbyn was bound for failure. “The collapse of the Labour Party means that we face a prolonged period of uninterrupted and unchecked Conservative government at Westminster,” said Nicola Sturgeon, leader of the Scottish National Party, when she announced plans to push for a second referendum on Scottish independence in March.

In April, the Liberal Democrat leader Tim Farron declared his intent to make his party the main opposition party and described Corbyn as the “worst leader in British political history”.

When the election was declared on April 18, many decried the cynical move by the Conservatives, assuming it was not a case of whether they would have a landslide, but by how much. The campaign proved a decisive moment for Corbyn and his supporters, now seasoned political operators, who had learnt from the repeated attacks upon them. It offered Corbyn the opportunity to do what he was perhaps best at: talking directly to the public and setting an agenda free from the strictures of parliamentary politics. His down-to-earth, approachable and earnest manner, which had sometimes been ridiculed in Parliament (his decision to base Prime Minister’s Questions around questions sent in by the public was also ridiculed by some, particularly on the right), proved to be just the thing on the campaign trail and was in contrast to Theresa May, whose ham-handed attempts to engage and talk to people across constituencies failed to pay off. A striking example of this was an interview conducted with the chief reporter of The Plymouth Herald, a local newspaper of the port city on England’s south coast, which went viral. Writing about his three-minute interview with the Prime Minister, after she had “chatted with fishermen earnestly at the nets and buckets”, the reporter concluded she had given him “absolutely nothing”. His questions were highly specific (and non-confrontational) and addressed issues such as concerns about the impact of cuts to the military on the local economy, but her answers were infuriatingly generic and unconvincing.

POLICY DISASTERS
While a series of political U-turns and policy disasters (including over social care for the elderly, which hits a core Conservative constituency) made Theresa May’s attempts to look “strong and stable” increasingly come across as questionable, her positioning of herself as a “bloody difficult woman” with regards to Brexit negotiations rang alarm bells across the country, suggesting that the Conservatives had greatly misread the mood of the people, anxious over the terms under which the country would exit the E.U. Her open declaration that she would not participate in any head-to-head debates at the start of the campaign initially looked confident but rapidly backfired as it fed into the picture being built up by Labour and other opponents that she was not willing to debate because she was on shaky territory. Her explanation of why she did not participate in a BBC debate—which Corbyn joined at the last minute—was widely ridiculed as she suggested it was because she was getting on with the process of preparing for Brexit (many pointed out this was hypocritical given it was she who had forced Britain into the election, with the result due less than two weeks before Britain began negotiations).

Corbyn by contrast was in his element, drawing large crowds as he toured the country pledging to create a government that would serve “the many not the few”. A clever online strategy spread Corbyn’s message via social media while parodying the Conservatives and their attempts to attack him. “Weak and Wobbly” was the response to Theresa May’s “strong and stable” play, and in
the days running up to the election, the hashtag #last-minute Corbyn smears poked fun at the attempts by the Conservatives and the media that supported them to frighten voters away from Corbyn. But perhaps what was most decisive of all was Corbyn’s engagement with the wider party and in drafting the party’s manifesto. The manifesto was a radical one, committing Labour to reintroducing public ownership of key infrastructure (essentially going back on the rejection of Clause IV) and raising taxes for corporations and those with salaries of over £80,000. Corbyn and his team relentlessly targeted the years of austerity that had pounded the public and hit education, health care and even the police (an issue that proved particularly in tune with public sentiment following the three terrorist attacks that had taken place in the country). He did not shy away from difficult political discussions, such as raising questions about Britain’s interventionist foreign policy just days after the attack on the Ariana Grande concert in Manchester, which killed 22 people. The election was called purportedly over Brexit but became about something much bigger, thanks to the Corbyn campaign.

At the same time, he gave way on issues that many in the “mainstream” of the party felt strongly about, such as committing the party to renewing Britain’s nuclear deterrent Trident. Corbyn deftly rejected criticism that he had given up on his principles, pointing out that it showed that he listened, learnt and engaged with his party. As the party rapidly closed the gap in the polls, many previous critics began to speak out, some cautiously in favour, some more wildly ecstatic. Writing in The Guardian, Calum Campbell—the son of Alastair Campbell, Blair’s former adviser and campaign strategist—enthused about a leader he had once thought would lead the party to electoral disaster. “What this campaign has shown is just how out of touch I was. Britain is a country that is desperate for change.” “Like father like son though fair to say his enthusiasm >mine!” tweeted Alastair Campbell, who earlier this year had described Corbyn’s leadership as a “car crash”.

“He’s had a very positive campaign and he has grown in his leadership and as an electoral campaigner,” said Seema Malhotra, on the campaign trail. “People have seen the policies of the Labour Party and that is having quite an impact in terms of changing the conversation. We are at a changing point now where we’ve seen Labour acting with tremendous unity in this campaign.”

Ahead of the election, many had argued that the results would depend heavily on turnout, given the high levels of support for Corbyn among the young. The turnout of 68.7 per cent (2 percentage points higher than in 2015) suggests that this did indeed contribute to Corbyn’s victory, but it alone cannot explain the failure of the Conservatives to take on Labour in its heartlands in the north (a part of the country that Theresa May visited on a number of occasions) or Labour’s success in some traditional Conservative territory. The Conservatives lost six seats in London alone and failed to fully exploit the collapse of the UK Independence Party elsewhere in the country as some of its supporters shifted to Labour (though analysis has suggested the vote did by and large move to the Conservatives).

The coming weeks will be a crucial time for Corbyn and his team. With the assumption that a left-wing party would not be able to engage with the wider electorate well and truly debunked, Corbyn will take over as Leader of the Opposition in a far stronger place than ever before. While the media attacks, particularly from the tabloids, are likely to continue unabated, he will probably be less hindered than in the past by opposition from within his own party, which unified behind him, to a certain extent at least, in the weeks leading up to the election. Theo Bertram, a former adviser to Blair and Gordon Brown, wrote in “inews”: “A decade working for Blair and Brown taught me that Corbyn would lose. I’m so happy I was wrong …for Labour, it is time to reconcile the inspirational and pragmatic: not make them enemies of each other.”

There will be challenges, of course. Immediately after the election, the divisions over Brexit resurfaced as McDonnell’s insistence that Britain would in all likelihood be unable to remain in the single market was publicly challenged by others in the party. With the Conservative leadership now on the back foot, particularly over its decision to ally with the DUP, whose stance on issues ranging from climate change to abortion deeply troubles many even within the Conservative Party, and Theresa May facing great personal pressure, Corbyn and his team are more confident than ever before. They have rejected the suggestion of coalitions and plan to present a vision for Britain’s future in an “alternative” Queen’s speech when Parliament reopens later this month. Corbyn may not have been the one to have driven to Buckingham Palace to seek the official invite to form the government, but it is the political gauntlet that he and his team have thrown down that the rest of the political establishment, the Conservatives and beyond, will have to respond to.
Qatar in crisis

A tripartite alliance of Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Israel, with the blessings of the U.S., seeks to isolate Qatar accusing it of sponsoring terrorism and supporting Iran, but its real grouse is that the Gulf state backs groups such as Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood. BY JOHN CHERIAN

THE ONGOING ATTEMPT BY SAUDI ARABIA and its allies in the region to isolate and undermine the Emirate of Qatar has the blessings, at least for the time being, of United States President Donald Trump. Behind the scenes, Israel is encouraging Saudi Arabia in its dangerous game of provoking a war against Iran. The immediate trigger for the latest crisis involving Qatar was an alleged speech made by the country’s Emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, in which he questioned the wisdom of a confrontation with Iran. In his speech, which Qataris claim was hacked, the Emir is said to have praised the role of resistance movements such as Hamas and Hizbollah.

KUWAIT’S EMIR Sheikh Sabah al Ahmad al Sabah with Qatar’s Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani in Doha, Qatar. Kuwait’s Emir travelled to Qatar to help mediate an end to a crisis that has seen Arab nations cut off ties with the tiny energy-rich nation.

Qatar’s support for Hamas is well documented, but Hizbollah and Qatar are on opposite sides in the war in Syria. Qatar, like Saudi Arabia, adheres to the conservative Salafi version of Sunni Islam, which considers Shias as apostates. Hizbollah, a Shia political party, is part of the government in Lebanon. Qatar was accused of paying “ransom money” to the so-called Shia terror groups in
Iraq. In the second week of June, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said that the $500 million ransom Qatar paid to secure the release of 25 Qatari hostages was lying in the Iraqi Central Bank. Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies had insisted that the money was paid directly to a Shia militia.

The main charge against Qatar is that it is not faithfully implementing the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) line on isolating Iran. The other charge is that the tiny emirate continues to provide assistance and succour to terrorist groups. But the real grouse of Saudi Arabia and its main allies in the region is that Qatar continues to back political movements and parties such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas. Israel, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Egypt and a few other countries consider them terrorist groupings. On a visit to Paris in the second week of June, the Saudi Foreign Minister, Adil al-Jubeir, once again raised the demand that Qatar should cut off all relations with the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas. Hamas, which won the Palestinian legislative elections held in the Gaza Strip and West Bank in 2006, is in power in the Israel-blockaded Gaza, and affiliates of the Muslim Brotherhood are active in the politics of Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan and other Arab countries. Most of the top leadership of the Brotherhood in Egypt are incarcerated, with many of them facing the death sentence.

Saudi Arabia was particularly unhappy with the Qatari government’s support to the short-lived Mohamed Morsi-led Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt and Brotherhood-affiliated parties after the success of the Arab Spring revolution there. The Muslim Brotherhood was voted to power in Egypt in 2012 but was ousted from power soon after. Political observers maintain that if free and fair elections are held once again, the results will be the same. The Brotherhood has explicitly forsworn terrorism. The previous Barack Obama administration in the U.S. had done business with the Brotherhood.

The other major demands Saudi Arabia has made on Qatar include its immediate severance of diplomatic relations with Iran, expulsion of Hamas and Muslim Brotherhood operatives from the emirate, and suspension of the Al Jazeera network. Qatar and Iran share the giant South Pars gas field, the biggest in the world. Cooperation in the hydrocarbon sector is crucial for both the countries. Besides, many of the Gulf emirates such as Oman, Kuwait and, for that matter, Dubai would like to have good relations with Iran. Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi, which controls the UAE with its immense oil-generated wealth, are currently driving the GCC’s foreign policy.

Saudi Arabia and its allies in the GCC made their move against Qatar soon after Trump’s visit to the region. The move to isolate Qatar, at least on the surface, appeared surprising as the country hosts one of the biggest U.S. military bases in the region. More than 10,000 U.S. servicemen are based there. The Al Udeid airbase is the biggest U.S. Air Force base in the region. The forward headquarters of the U.S. Central Command (Centcom) is also located in Qatar. The Pentagon has maintained that the base has been crucial to the U.S. military in its operations in Syria and Iraq. Even as the U.S. Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, was busy trying to effect a truce among the Gulf kingdoms, issuing statements on the need for a negotiated settlement to the stand-off, Trump undercut him by tweeting a second time that Qatar was guilty of aiding terrorists.

Trump, it seems, has bought the Saudi view hook, line
and sinker that Iran is the principal sponsor of terrorism in the region and that Qatar is not far behind. In fact, Trump gave a good character certificate to Qatar after his meeting with the Emir during his visit to Riyadh in May. “Our relationship with the country [Qatar] is extremely good,” he declared. Trump said he had good discussions with the Emir, and high on the agenda of discussions, according to him, was the sale of “beautiful American-made weapons”. Qatar, which is already brimming over with weapons of all kinds, did not sign a multibillion-dollar deal with the U.S., unlike Saudi Arabia. Immediate ostracism followed, with Trump discovering that Qatar was in fact an aider and abetter of terrorism all the time.

In 2011, Trump described Saudi Arabia as the “world’s biggest funder of terrorism” and added that it was using “our own petrodollars to fund terrorists that seek to destroy our people while the Saudis rely on us to protect them”. After Saudi Arabia inked the $110-billion arms deal during his visit to Riyadh, it has suddenly become a good guy in the eyes of the multibillionaire President.

The former Vice President, Joe Biden, had in a speech at Harvard said that “the Saudis, the Emirates, etc. were so determined to take down [Bashar al-] Assad and essentially have a proxy Sunni-Shia war that they poured hundreds of millions of dollars and tens of thousands of tonnes of military weapons into anyone who could fight Assad, except the people who were being supplied were Al Qaeda and al Nusra and the extremist elements of jihadis coming from all over the world”.

The U.S. State Department has been arguing that an alliance of the Gulf states is important for the goal of combating Iran and defeating the Daesh in Iraq. But Trump seems to be of the view that Qatar, the world’s biggest gas exporter strategically located near the Straits of Hormuz, is of no real consequence. In fact, he issued two back-to-back statements that Qatar was aiding and funding terrorism. The last presidential statement was issued immediately after Tillerson urged calm and the easing of the economic blockade imposed unilaterally against Qatar by Saudi Arabia and its allies.

Qatar has a population of around three million, of which more than two million are foreigners, most of them workers from the Indian subcontinent. The gas-rich emirate is completely dependent on food imports to feed its populace. With its land borders sealed by Saudi Arabia and its neighbours prohibiting the use of their airspace for transportation of goods, Qatar has been pushed to a corner. Almost all its food and other basic necessities used to come through Saudi Arabia. Now Qatar is forced to airlift food from Turkey and Iran.

German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel has been forthright in his criticism of Trump’s role in the new crisis in the Gulf. He attributed the escalation of the dispute to the dangerous “Trumpification” of regional politics. “Such a Trumpification of relations with one another is dangerous in a region that is already rife with crises,” he said in an interview with a German newspaper. Germany,
along with Turkey and Iran, is openly supporting Qatar in its stand-off with Saudi Arabia. Germany and Turkey are members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). The U.S. and the United Kingdom, the two major arms suppliers and backers of Saudi Arabia, are also part of the military alliance. Any military move against Qatar could create serious ruptures not only in the Gulf alliance but also in the Western military alliance. Turkey has a small military base in Qatar and is rushing additional troops to the emirate.

Egypt is angry with Qatar for its continued backing of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Al Jazeera network, which Egyptians claim is a mouthpiece for the Brotherhood. Interestingly, even the Maldives has broken diplomatic ties with Qatar and is supporting Saudi Arabia. Riyadh has invested heavily in the tourism industry in the country whose present government is pursuing an Islamist agenda. Israeli policymakers are happy with the latest developments in the Gulf as Saudi and emirati policies in the region have now started working in tandem with theirs. Iran is now their common enemy along with Hamas and Hizbollah.

After the terror attack in Tehran in the first week of June, the White House did not even have the courtesy to send a straightforward message of condolence to the people of Iran. Its statement instead implicitly blamed Iran for the act of terror. “We underscore that states that sponsor terrorism risk falling victim to the evil they promote,” the statement said. The attack was the first of its kind since the late 1980s to hit the Iranian capital. Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif called the White House statement “repugnant”. The Daesh claimed responsibility for the attacks. The Iranian authorities pointed out that the attacks had taken place after Trump’s visit to Saudi Arabia.

The Qataris, like Saudis and the emiratis, have vehemently denied any links with terrorist groups. Most of the kingdoms in the Gulf region, barring Oman, have been active players in the efforts to undermine the secular governments in the region. All the three countries supported terrorist groups in Libya, though many of them are on opposing sides now. Saudi Arabia and its allies prefer groups linked to the al Nusra Front while Qatar and Turkey prefer to route their money and weapons to the Daesh and groups associated with it. Qatar is not the only state challenging Saudi Arabia for influence in the region. The UAE, though a staunch ally of Saudi Arabia in Syria, Libya and other places, is trying to carve out its own zone of influence in Yemen, Libya and the Horn of Africa.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE are, however, united on the question of seeking regime change in Qatar. They are apparently on the lookout for somebody from the royal lineage to replace the current dynasty. An abortive attempt was made in 1996. Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Thani said his country “will never surrender” to the demands made by its Gulf neighbours. He has visited Russia, Germany and other countries to mobilise support. He said Qatar had more friends, “more than others think”. The senior counterterrorism adviser to the Qatari Emir reiterated that the “policy of domination and control” of the country’s neighbours would not succeed. The spat within the GCC shows no sign of abating, especially after Saudi Arabia and its allies released a “terror blacklist” of 56 individuals. Figuring in the list were senior Qatari royals and former Ministers along with exiled leaders and clerics sympathetic to organisations such as Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Arab street will not have much sympathies for any of the protagonists involved in the latest Gulf crisis. The key players involved are to a large degree responsible for the dire humanitarian situation in Syria, Iraq and Yemen. The Saudi bombing and blockade of Yemen has led to the worst humanitarian crisis the world is facing today. In Syria and Libya, Qatar was in the forefront of arming and funding extremist groups. Qatar was the first to cosy up to Israel. Now it finds itself a target of Israeli machinations. Ten U.S. legislators, who received more than $1 million for more than a year from a lobbying firm having links with Israel, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, sponsored a piece of legislation that threatens to impose sanctions on Qatar for supporting the “Palestinian terror”. Pro-Israeli groups such as the Foundation for Promoting Democracy have now started openly campaigning for Saudi Arabia and the UAE. This tripartite alliance could come out in the open if Qatar falls.
Russian nexus

The focus of Donald Trump’s opponents is on the alleged Russian role in the presidential election; they are apparently not interested in the larger issue of corruption in international business of which he is a product. BY VIJAY PRASHAD

UNITED STATES PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP is struggling to edge away from an issue that has dogged him since his victory in the presidential election last year—Russian interference. On June 8, former Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director James Comey went before the Senate to make several incendiary claims. Comey said that Trump had lied to impugn the reputation of the FBI (and Comey) and that he—Comey—had documented each meeting with Trump to make sure that the President’s lies did not go unchallenged. Comey said that he had given details of these meetings to a friend so that the press could be alerted. Finally, Comey said that he was fired on May 9 not because of his incompetency, as Trump argued, but because he refused to shut down the probe on Russian interference in the U.S. election.

What Comey did not say, and what the new Special

Diary from Trumpland
Prosecutor Robert Mueller (formerly of the FBI) will not investigate, is that Trump’s world of international business is steeped in corruption. It is normal for Trump to hold meetings with people of dubious reputation and to raise finances and political capital from all quarters. International arms deals and real estate deals are well known for the bribes and intimidation involved in them—this is what is normal in the world of business. Trump’s entanglements from this world of international business are now on display, but it is not this world that will be indicted. It is a much smaller problem, namely whether the Russian government meddled in the U.S. election. Far graver issues—the stranglehold of corruption over international business—remain outside any investigation.

RUSSIAN INTERFERENCE
In the clearest statement from Comey yet, he said: “The Russians interfered in our election during the 2016 cycle. They did it with purpose. They did it with sophistication. They did it with overwhelming technical efforts.” A day after Comey gave his testimony to the Senate Intelligence Committee, Trump told the press in his laconic style: “No collusion, no obstruction, he’s a leaker, but we want to get back to running our great country.” Trump’s lack of concern for the possibility of Russian interference in the U.S. election struck many observers—why did he not utter even the most meaningless phrases about his concern for the integrity of the electoral process and his support for the work of the special counsel who is looking into these matters? Trump preferred to defend himself unequivocally. Attacks directed at Comey and the defence of his person were all that was on offer.

The question of Russian interference in the U.S. election will refuse to dissipate. It is what drives the Democratic Party, which has seized on this issue as the Achilles heel of the Trump presidency. Other issues are, of course, to be considered as points of debate, but the Democrats see this issue as posing a particular vulnerability for Trump. It has certainly divided the country and provided the focus for the Democrats to deny Trump any legitimacy. Trump’s evident frustration with the inquiry led him to ask Comey to drop the investigation and then to fire Comey. This provided the Democratic Party with more ammunition against Trump, whose intemperate manner does him no favours. With each outrageous tweet or statement, Trump gives the Democrats more evidence of his illegitimacy.

Behind closed doors, the contours of the investigation are being drawn up. Leaks suggest that Special Counsel Mueller will not probe too closely into Trump’s own family, notably his son-in-law Jared Kushner, who has extensive ties to the Russian oligarchy. Rather, the investigation will be content to remain at the edges of the Trump team, with the main focus being on advisers such as General Michael Flynn who have already been set aside. Last December, Kushner, now Trump’s adviser, met with the head of Vnesheconombank, Sergei Gorkov. This bank has been on the list of institutions under U.S. sanctions since 2014. If Kushner discussed any business activity with the bank, he is liable to spend 20 years in a U.S. prison. It has been suggested that Kushner only met

PRESIDENT TRUMP at a press conference on June 9 in Washington.
with Gorkov to open a channel of communication with Russian President Vladimir Putin. In March, Gorkov released a routine statement that Kushner had met him in his capacity as CEO of Kushner Associates and not as a Trump official. FBI officials had been eager to pursue the Kushner link to Russia. But there was pressure on them not to open that scab. Whether the new investigation by Special Counsel Mueller will be able to go after Kushner is crucial.

WHIFF OF CORRUPTION

Outside the parameters of the Russia probe sit other uncomfortable business deals that carry the whiff of corruption. The Donald Trump Foundation and the Eric Trump Foundation, both charitable entities, have been accused of criminal tax evasion. The work of these foundations has also leaked into the Russian interference investigations.

Trump’s lawyer, Michael Cohen, who is on the board of the Eric Trump Foundation, was involved in trying to broker a peace deal for Ukraine. Cohen entered Trump’s world as a man who could bring in finance from Russia and Ukraine for the Trump organisation. A few days after Trump’s inauguration as President, Cohen met the Ukrainian parliamentarian Andriy Artemenko in New York City. Artemenko gave Cohen some documents to deliver to Flynn, who was Trump’s National Security Adviser at that time. Artemenko, a close friend of the Cohen family, told the Ukrainian press that he had been working with the Cohens since 2016 on a peace deal. It is the murkiness that inflames the scandal. Cohen has business interests in Ukraine’s ethanol industry and would gain from a less tense environment in the region. Artemenko made his money in arms deals and is using political influence to better his own portfolio.

NORMAL CORRUPTION

The Artemenko-Cohen story is just one more seam in a rich mine of corruption. If the Special Prosecutor decides to put on his miner’s helmet and enter the bowels of these linkages, he will need a sensitive canary to check for noxious gases. What he might find is not merely that the Russians tried to influence the U.S. elections through cyberwar and through money paid to valuable players in the Trump team. That is the tip of the iceberg. It is what the Democrats would like the Special Counsel to concentrate on. It would merely indict Trump for his collusion in election tampering. But far more is at stake here, which Special Counsel Mueller does not have the authority to investigate.

Trump is the first international businessman to be the head of government in the U.S. All previous Presidents since the Second World War have been either public servants (even military officers) or professional politicians. None came to the White House directly from the world of business, let alone international business. The world of international business is stricken with political corruption, with finance raised often from disreputable corners and with large bribes paid to politicians on a routine basis. The World Bank Institute recently said that over $1 trillion was paid in bribes each year, ten times the amount provided for development aid. “Corruption is the cancer of globalisation,” said Angel Gurria, the head of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), in 2007. Little has changed.

CRITICISM OF THE FCPA

Long before his entry into the White House, Trump spoke often against the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA), which, in its own modest way, tries to crack down on the business of international corruption. Trump has called this a “horrible law” and has vowed to weaken it. As President, Trump set aside a rule that prevented U.S. energy companies from paying bribes. The FCPA was passed in 1977 to prevent U.S. corporations from using their financial muscle to gain political influence overseas. Defence behemoth Lockheed paid bribes to politicians from West Germany to Japan, with $3 million paid to Japanese Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka through the offices of the underworld’s Yoshio Kodama on behalf of Lockheed. Exxon paid millions of dollars to the Christian Democratic Party to secure benefits for its partner Esso Italiana. The FCPA did not stop this behaviour, but it did make it more inconvenient for U.S.-based international corporations to operate in the normal manner, namely through bribes and political intimidation.

In 2012, Trump went public with his criticism of the FCPA. “Now every country goes into these places and they do what they have to do,” Trump said. What he meant is that international businesses are able to pay bribes and finance their activities with illicit money. This, for Trump, is normal as it is indeed normal in the world of business. What the Russia probe reveals is not so much Russian interference in the U.S. elections as the normal world of sleaze and corruption. This is the world that produced Donald Trump, petrodollars mingle here with the ill-gotten gains of the Russian oligarchy, swilling in the pigsties of U.S.-based international corporations. Trump cannot understand the outrage at his dealings, murky as they are, because these are normal in the world of big business. But he can be comforted with the news that Special Prosecutor Mueller and the Democrats are not interested in this much deeper root of corruption. It is enough for everyone to dance around the question of the hacks and the meetings. If anything, the investigation might reaffirm an old saw: that Russia, and only Russia, is too corrupt for international business. What it will not adopt is a new saw: that international business is too corrupt for the world.
India, along with Pakistan, becomes a full-fledged member of the SCO, an umbrella organisation to promote cooperation in trade and counterterrorism efforts. Will it join OBOR next?

BY JOHN CHERIAN

INDIA AND PAKISTAN FORMALLY BECAME members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) at the summit of the grouping held in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan, in the second week of June. The two countries had enjoyed observer status in the organisation for many years and have now been elevated to full membership. Iran is the next country that is expected to join the grouping in the near future. The original members of the grouping that was established in 1995, initially known as the Shanghai Five, were Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. It was rechristened SCO after Uzbekistan joined the grouping in 2001. Originally, the SCO was viewed as a security pact and as an emerging rival to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). But in recent years it has evolved into an organisation more preoccupied with counterterrorism and the promotion of economic cooperation and trade.

With India and Pakistan now part of the grouping, the SCO has emerged as one of the biggest organisations of its kind in the world, with three significant world powers, Russia, China and India, under its umbrella. Forty-four per cent of the world’s population, 25 per cent of the world’s gross domestic product (GDP), and three out of five BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) countries are part of the SCO. The primary focus of the grouping at this juncture is on counterterrorism and other security-related concerns. The SCO has established a Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), headquartered in Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan. Chinese President Xi Jinping, speaking at the SCO summit, emphasised that “security is the prerequisite for development”. In a signed article written for a Kazakh paper, he pointed out that the SCO had “put in place cooperation mechanisms on combating terrorism, separatism, extremism, drugs and transnational crimes”.

In recent years, the militaries of SCO member countries have participated in joint exercises. Russian officials have talked of the Indian Army joining such exercises in the future. With Pakistan too a member now, it would be quite a diplomatic feat to get the armies of all member...
HEADS OF GOVERNMENT of the eight full members of the SCO in Astana on June 9: (from left) Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Presidents Shavkat Mirziyoyev (Uzbekistan), Xi Jinping (China), Nursultan Nazarbayev (Kazakhstan), Vladimir Putin (Russia), Emomali Rakhmon (Tajikistan), Almazbek Atambayev (Kyrgyzstan) and Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

countries to participate in military exercises organised under the auspices of the SCO. Both India and Pakistan were admitted under the strict unwritten condition that they keep their bilateral disputes out of the SCO arena. With Central Asia becoming the crossroads for pipelines and international trade routes, the SCO will be paying even more attention to its economic agenda. When the SCO was formed, the five original members had pledged to enhance regional economic cooperation. That goal has since become a reality in most countries of the Central Asian region.

The One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative of the Chinese government saw the enthusiastic participation of all the states in the region and beyond. Only one country, India, along with Bhutan, has given OBOR the pass. Bhutan has really no choice in the matter as its foreign policy is dictated from New Delhi. All the leaders attending the SCO summit in Astana, barring the Indian Prime Minister, supported the OBOR initiative. The declaration issued at the end of the summit “praised the results of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation” that was held in Beijing in May this year. The leaders spoke “in favour of their implementation, including by means of coordinating international, regional and national projects aimed at cooperation in maintaining sustainable development based on the principle of mutual respect, equality and mutual benefit”. President Xi said that the SCO would put in place bilateral security mechanisms for OBOR to ensure the security of gas pipelines and big infrastructure projects in the region.

In his speech, Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif specifically welcomed the Chinese President’s suggestion of a five-year treaty of good neighbourliness to be signed by all the SCO members. The expansion of the SCO, Sharif said, had come at an “opportunity”, noting that it coincided with the launch of OBOR and the consequent transformation of the global economic landscape. “In Pakistan, we are diligently implementing the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which is a flag of the OBOR,” he said. “What is more, these mega projects will benefit the entire SCO community.”

WORLDWIDE BACKING OBOR now has the backing of most countries worldwide. Even the United States and Japan, which were supposed to be India’s all-weather allies in their opposition to OBOR, sent high-profile delegations to the OBOR summit held in Beijing in May. Japan’s Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, declared that Japan was willing to cooperate with China on OBOR. The Japanese government, like its right-wing counterpart in India, is of the view that OBOR is a tool to advance China’s strategic and economic goals. But at the same time, Tokyo has realised that by not jumping onto the fast-moving OBOR train, it would be left to play second fiddle to China in the Eurasian region, besides losing out on lucrative business opportunities in high-speed rail and infrastructure projects. OBOR plans to connect Asia and Europe by both land and sea. India’s membership of the SCO could signal the first step, albeit hesitant, to joining OBOR.

At the Astana summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi once again raised the issue of “territorial integrity and sovereignty” while referring to the grand infrastructure projects being planned for the region. India has objected to the $50 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) infrastructure project, which is an important component of OBOR, as being intrusive on India’s sovereignty. The only route possible for goods to be transported to and from China is through the road and rail network passing through the “disputed territory” of Gilgit/Baltistan, which is part of Pakistan-administered Kashmir. Beijing has repeatedly tried to convince India that the passage of the railway through the territory does not in any way signal a change in its Kashmir policy.

The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), which India wants to develop, can be done much better in coordination with OBOR. India’s attempts to develop the Iranian port of Chabahar have, reportedly, run into problems, accentuated by the Donald Trump administration’s growing military and economic threats against Tehran. The nearby port of Gwadar, meanwhile, is all ready for business and is a key hub of the OBOR initiative. Chabahar was supposed to be
India’s gateway to the Central Asian market. India had committed $500 million for the development of the port after the Barack Obama administration lifted the sanctions on Iran last year. As of now, only Chinese firms are bidding for contracts to supply heavy machinery for the Chabahar project. European companies are reluctant to bid for the tenders, fearing future moves by the Trump administration against Iran.

Although the Prime Ministers of both India and Pakistan were present at the summit, Modi and Sharif did not meet for talks on the sidelines, like they had during a previous SCO summit in Ufa, Russia, in 2015. Surprisingly, the Chinese President also did not schedule a meeting with Sharif, given the fact that the two countries are the closest of allies. It has been speculated in the media that the Chinese side was conveying its displeasure over Islamabad’s handling of terrorism, especially in the restive province of Balochistan. Two Chinese school-teachers were kidnapped and later killed by Daesh (Islamic State) terrorists in the first week of June, just before the SCO summit in Astana. Peace and stability in Balochistan is crucial for the success of the CPEC/OBOR project.

Modi did, however, have “cordial” talks with Xi. It was the first meeting between the two leaders after India’s refusal to participate in the OBOR summit in Beijing. The Indian government is still miffed with China’s reluctance to give it entry into the exclusive Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). Modi conveyed to the Chinese President the important need to respect each other’s “core concerns”. According to the Indian External Affairs Ministry spokesperson, Modi told the Chinese leader that the two sides should strengthen communication and cooperation in international affairs. He conveyed India’s gratitude for China’s help in India’s inclusion in the SCO. The Prime Minister acknowledged that it would have been difficult to get SCO membership without the backing of China. China no longer expects reciprocity from India in the form of a membership in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), where India is the major power. China has observer status in SAARC at present. The SCO, unlike SAARC, seems more cohesive. SAARC is not even able to hold annual summits. Indian Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar told the media in Astana that the “entire spectrum of bilateral relations” was discussed during the talks between Modi and Xi.

Speaking to the media after his meeting with Modi, Xi Jinping said that given the profound and complex political changes that the world was witnessing, China and India, as the world’s fastest growing economies, “should pay more attention to cooperation and go ahead with each other as partner”. He said that the two countries should also boost trade and investment cooperation. It was a thinly disguised invitation to India to rethink its reluctance to join the OBOR initiative. Xi was careful to avoid giving the impression that he was trying to arm-twist the Indian government in any way. He said that his country would be willing to cooperate with India within the SCO format. The Chinese side said that it would not beg any country to join OBOR. “We are willing to see the initiative help build a cooperative platform for countries along the route, but China does not need to beg any countries, Japan and India included, to join the initiative,” said Global Times, a newspaper that is known to be close to the authorities in Beijing.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry was slightly less diplomatic while describing the Modi-Xi talks. Its spokesperson said in Beijing that both countries “should also address sensitive and major issues”. She went on to add that the two sides should strengthen the complementarities of development strategies and press ahead with major cooperation projects in areas such as energy and railways. The spokesperson also stressed the need for cooperation between the two countries to speed up connectivity and infrastructure development in the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) corridor. The OBOR initiative has many important projects in this corridor. The logical next step for India should be to join OBOR and be part of the international mainstream.
SECRET LIVES
IN A NATURE RESERVE

THE BARN OWL. The species is threatened outside protected areas.

ANANT ZANJALE
IT was the waning-moon fortnight in October, and it would be another two hours or so before the moon would shine. We were driving through a pure sal patch at the Kanha Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh, when the headlights of our vehicle fell on an Indian, or black-napped, hare, often wrongly called a rabbit, an animal that does not occur in the Indian subcontinent. Startled by the light, the sprinter darted along the straight forest road, zigzagging in quick leaps, freezing strategically with amazing suddenness, and then resuming the dash again. This fascinating and vulnerable creature has large eyes that are positioned to allow for excellent broad-field vision and are adapted to its crepuscular (dawn and dusk time) and nocturnal activity patterns. I stopped the vehicle and watched the lagomorph, a group of plant-eaters and among the most hunted animals outside protected areas, disappear into the pitch darkness. The local belief is that once you see a hare, you do not see any other animal in the jungle. Fortunately, I had already seen three of the four almost leopard-sized cubs of the tigress T65, also known as Neelam, some time ago on the way.

A well-conserved, verdant forest, with densely foliaged tall trees, thick undergrowth and grassy plains stretched all around me in many different shades of darkness, extending refuge to some awesome and iconic and so-called lesser, but also amazing, creatures. Amid the seasonal fragrance of the forest, the relaxing and hypnotising chorus of cicadas and crickets, the rustling leaves and the soft calls of a nearby barred jungle owlet, I wondered about the significance of these commonly unseen species in the field of biodiversity conservation. These animals, big and small, are generally overshadowed by their “big brothers” in popularity, but they do lead interesting lives, anthropomorphically speaking, and play important roles in a wildlife ecosystem.

A habitat is home to a wildlife population, including all big and small species, and essentially includes the space, food, cover and shelter required for its survival. Depending upon the food and other habits of an animal species, it may require more than one habitat type for its existence. It is, therefore, desirable that there is good
A verdant forest area in the Kanha Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh.

Neelam the tigress and her cubs crossing a waterbody.
intermixing of different habitat unit types and that they are well distributed and not clumped into one area. This ideal situation helps animals minimise energy loss. The landscape of Kanha offers the full spectrum of habitat types, which require periodic monitoring and managerial interventions to remain healthy and sustain these populations. There are broadly three habitat types: forest, grassland and water. A finer classification of habitats could be given as follows: sal forest, miscellaneous forest, miscellaneous forest with bamboo, grassland, grassland with groves, large clearings, forest-grassland edges, riparian (along water streams), and water itself in different waterbodies. Kanha supports a wide range of microhabitats that are different from the pronounced and extensive habitats. Trees, including snags, which are dead and dying trees, offer rot holes, nesting sites and crevices. Some special habitat sites with geomorphological origins, such as caves, dens, overhangs and bouldery aggregates, have a significant bearing on lesser faunal species. There are also many identified aquatic wildlife species, either vertebrate or invertebrate, that live in water for most or all of their life. Such species occur in and around waterbodies of the protected area.

Kanha supports thousands of animal species that coexist in natural segregation on the basis of ecological niche partitioning in terms of food habits, habitat types and other specific ecological needs. Nature has helped these species evolve different hunting/feeding strategies and mobility patterns to reduce competition between them. For instance, the hunting techniques of a tiger, a leopard or a pack of wild dogs are quite different. Tigers stalk large-sized quarry through stealth. While leopards usually go for small-sized prey and also kill common dogs and goats near villages, wild dogs chase and kill their prey. Similarly, different herbivore species have different food preferences and foraging tactics. Some are grazers, while others are browsers and coarse feeders. Likewise, smaller species have their own food habits and ecological niches that help lessen competition among them.

**SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL**

Kanha supports several endangered faunal species, including those listed in the Red List of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and in Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. Besides the most talked-about “big brothers” such as carnivores like tigers, leopards and wild dogs and herbivores like gaur, barasingha, sambar and chital, Kanha is home to a wide range of the so-called lesser faunal species: 325 species of birds; 30 of mammals; 40 of reptiles, including 25 of snakes and 15 of lizards; 15 of frogs; around 500 of insects, including moths and butterflies; 115 of arachnids; and several species of crustaceans, molluscs and fish. There are also a large number of smaller life forms belonging to different phyla and classes of the animal kingdom. Although attention is focussed mainly on the management of the larger mammals in the tiger reserve, the less iconic wildlife species have their own ecological roles and importance in the Kanha ecosystem and their protection.
A LEOPARD FAMILY on the lookout for prey. It is unusual to see an entire family of this elusive and solitary animal.

SLOTH BEAR CUBS taking a ride on their mother’s back, a rare sighting.
AN INDIAN PANGOLIN with its characteristic self-protective large scales.

THE HONEY BADGER. It is an omnivore with very sharp teeth.

AN INDIAN PYTHON and porcupine. Pythons sometimes eat porcupines, only to die later.

AN INDIAN HARE uncomfortably close to an Indian python.
**The Small Indian Civet.** A mostly arboreal species, it is nocturnal and an omnivore.

**The Palm Civet.** This variant of the species has characteristic white patches.

**A Porcupine Mother-Young Duo.** Porcupines are large rodents with quills for self-defence.
A JACKAL making off with an animal leg.

THE RUSTY SPOTTED CAT. One of the smallest wild cats, it lives on trees and rocky hides and is found only in India, Sri Lanka and Nepal. Mostly nocturnal and elusive, it feeds on small-sized prey. It is also hunted for food in several areas.

THE HYENA. It is an amazing animal with powerful jaws and strong teeth.
A SMALL PACK OF WILD DOGS at a sambar kill.

A COMMON MONGOOSE mother with her young.

A SMOOTH-COATED OTTER near a waterbody. It is a critically endangered species.
emanates from overall conservation efforts, the tiger being the umbrella species for all these lesser animals. All these species are distributed at Kanha over time and space. While some species are diurnal, others are nocturnal or crepuscular. Each animal has its own bio-rhythm, which is a recurring cycle in its physiology and daily functioning, such as sleeping, waking and also emotional responses. Some cryptic species have camouflaged bodies or colouration as an anti-predator strategy. However, this could also be a strategy among predators to confuse and deceive prey species. Some of the lesser species remain arboreal most of the time, while others live in burrows, tunnels and thickets. Most of these species remain elusive even to those who patrol the protected area day and night, let alone tourists.

While it is easy to see and photograph large animals, lesser faunal species are elusive and difficult to monitor using normal conservation methodologies. Nowadays, a nature reserve is expected to document evidence of the presence of as many species as possible. Even data on presence/absence can provide important ecological information on the protected area. And there is no better evidence than photographic documentation. Besides, it is also interesting to get a peek into the secret world of creatures and gain insights into their behaviour when they are alone. Monitoring large animals through regular photography while staying hidden can serve the purpose to some extent as can long hours of video shooting after habituating the target animals. For small, cryptic and nocturnal animals, systematically designed camera traps have become popular but, of course, they have their limitations. These cameras trap images of animals and record dates and time and even distribution patterns of different species. Kanha has a network of around 450 camera traps. The cameras function day and night, snap all the animals passing in front of their field of view and store the images on a memory card. The card is removed periodically and its contents are downloaded.

WAYS OF ANIMALS
The tiger is extremely photogenic, equally peripatetic, with almost fixed routes for movement, and provides ample opportunity for general photo-monitoring. The more interesting and insightful images include those of mother and cubs, playful cubs, and animals at kill. These images bring out a wide range of emotions: the tenderness and concern of a mother, the cheerfulness and carefreeness of the cubs, and the famed aggression and ferocity of a tiger, the spirit of the Indian jungle.

Unlike tigers, leopards, which may be called the “ghost cats” of the plains, are mysterious and elusive. With their rosette-patterned body markings, they are perfectly camouflaged. It is extremely unusual to see an entire family, with a male, female and cub. Even sightings of a male-female pair are not common. Solitary by nature, they hunt small-sized prey at night. They also lurk in the vicinity of habitations and prey upon dogs, small cattle and pigs.

The wild dog, or dhole, ranks third in the predator
THE CHANGEABLE HAWK EAGLE with a mongoose that it has hunted.
A MALE SLOTH BEAR rubbing his back against a tree trunk for chemical communication with breeding females.
hierarchy of the Kanha ecosystem. Excellent runners, fearless and ruthless, with highly collaborative social groups, dholes are also known as “whistling hunters” as they emit a continuous high-pitched yelping sound that resembles whistling to keep the members of a pack together. Their sense of smell is highly developed. Watching the pack kill an animal is a rare sighting. The endangered striped hyena is a poorly understood carnivore species. Basically a nocturnal scavenger, the animal lives off carrion and carcasses of cattle and ungulates. Its food habits restrict its distribution to near human habitations, and the core zone of the tiger reserve hardly offers sightings of it. Although the buffer zone has a number of villages, sightings of this amazing animal, with its powerful jaws and strong teeth, are not frequent.

A long muzzle, a body covered with dense hair, a well-developed sense of smell, and poor eyesight and hearing are some of the distinguishing features of the sloth bear. An omnivore, it feeds on termites, ants, roots, tubers and fruits. It is an expert tree climber, and the males rub their bodies against trees to chemically communicate with breeding females. The mother is extremely protective of her cubs, and it is an interesting sight to see cubs taking a piggyback ride on their mother’s back. The small Indian civet and common palm civet belong to the Viverridae family. The Indian civet is generally an arboreal nocturnal omnivore, also referred to as “toddy cat”. It feeds on fruits, small mammals and insects. As the cat is fond of honey, it is said to have a sweet tooth. It lives in hollow trees, burrows and in thickets. The common palm civet is ring-tailed, with three to five lines on its back. This cat is solitary, generally arboreal, and prefers nocturnality. It feeds on rodents, lizards, birds, snakes, fruit and roots. Camera traps have shown that it also comes down from trees to hunt.

The mouse deer is rarely sighted in the core zone. It is regarded as the smallest deer in India. Neither sex has antlers, but it has long canines. The animal usually makes its den in a tree hollow and is very shy, with no vocalisation. The Indian, or long billed, vulture has been categorised as “critically endangered” because of its rapidly declining population. These birds are important scavengers and are an essential part of the food chain. Carcasses of domestic animals treated with certain veterinary drugs are reported to be responsible for its decline. Consequently, Indian vultures have disappeared from many of their traditional natal areas in the country.

The honey badger, also known as ratel, is an omnivore that feeds on honey bee larvae, roots, scorpions, snakes, eggs, birds and small mammals. It also scavenges. The animal has very sharp teeth and tough body skin and is active during the day and the night. It digs burrows in the ground to rest in. The Indian giant squirrel is a canopy dweller that feeds on a wide range of plant parts and comes down only to drink water. It builds multiple globe-shaped nests, or dreys, for sleeping in and as nurseries. These amazing mammals are seriously threatened outside protected areas.

Rakesh Shukla is Research Officer, Kanha Tiger Reserve.
A BARKING DEER PAIR at a watering hole. It is a mostly solitary animal.

INDIAN VULTURES feeding on a sambar deer carcass.
This book not only makes a timely appearance but does so with a bang. It is 50 years since Aloys Arthur Michel’s definitive work *The Indus Rivers: A Study of the Effects of Partition* was published. In 1973, the leader of India’s negotiating team, Niranjan D. Gulhati, published his able work *Indus Water Treaty: An Exercise in International Mediation*. One hoped for a comparable work by a Pakistani scholar. Dr Ijaz Hussain has provided such a work, eminently. His work covers the period from 1947, beginning with Sir Cyril Radcliffe’s dishonest award, to 2016. It has detailed analyses of issues from the perspective of international law besides the politics of the affair.

New issues have arisen since the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) was signed at Karachi on September 19, 1960, by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and President Mohammad Ayub Khan. The book covers them all. 1. The dispute over the Salal Dam on the Chenab, which was resolved by an agreement in 1978 (pages 215-221). 2. The Wullar Barrage on the Jhelum River (India obstinately calls it the Tulbul Navigation Project; it sounds better), which is part of the agenda of the charter of July 31, 1987. It now falls under the Comprehensive Bilateral Dialogue (pages 202-229). The author believes “there are indications that India is ready to make adjustments to the design of the barrage which may facilitate an agreement” (page 229). 3. The Baglihar Dam on the Chenab River in Doda district of Jammu (pages 229-272). A neutral expert was appointed under the treaty, whose decision on February 12, 2007, the author angrily contests. “Why did Pakistan lose the case?” he asks and proceeds to provide a myriad of causes. First, an engineer’s “strong bias” and “secondly Pakistan lost because its delegation, including the legal counsel, mishandled the case. Thirdly, it did so because its delegation behaved impolitely towards the neutral expert who reacted by deciding against it.” This is a typical comment the like of which one does not find in works of scholarship. Such questions abound. The patriot’s subtext is—Pakistan should never lose a case; it is always right. Ijaz Hussain’s Indian counterparts held similar views. As for the dispute, it seems to have run its course. 4. The Kishenganga Dam on the Kishenganga, a major tributary of the Jhelum River in Kashmir (pages 281-301). It involves diversion of water from a dam site of Kishenganga through a 22-kilometre tunnel to another tributary of the Jhelum, the Bonar Nallah. This diversion will change the course of the river by about 100 kilometres before it joins it through the Wullar Lake near Bandipore in the Baramulla district. The Kishenganga is known as Neelum after it enters Azad Kashmir. The dispute was referred to the International Court of Arbitration (ICA) under the treaty.

India sought to build the dam in furtherance of its Kishenganga Hydroelectric Project (KHEP). Pakistan contended that the diversion would *inter alia* adversely affect the operation of the Neelum-Jhelum Hydroelectric Project (NJHEP), which it sought to build on the Neelum river downstream of the KHEP. Involved were two distinct issues—the diversion and the depletion, which would bring the reservoir level of run-of-river hydroelectric plants below dead storage level. This is permissible only in an emergency.

On December 21, 2013, the court gave its final award. (A partial one was given on February 18, 2013.) The diversion was upheld. On the second issue, depletion, Pakistan’s objection was upheld. This is of greater consequence. Professor John Biscoe of Harvard, a former World Bank adviser, opined: “The
Baglihar decision would appear to have provided India with a green light to build these projects with as much live storage as they chose (as long as they classified it as ‘for sediment flushing’). What is enormously important is that the ICA has, according to early press accounts, addressed this issue head-on and, de facto, concluded that the Baglihar finding in this regard undercut the central compromise of the Indus Waters Treaty, was wrong and should not be applied to future projects. The ICA has apparently ruled that the design and operation of Indian hydropower projects on the Indus, Chenab and Jhelum cannot include more live storage than allowed under the IWT, even if the justification for such storage is silt management.

“This finding is of far greater significance than the one-off (and correct, in my view) finding relating to Kishanganga. It restores the central protection—put into question by the Baglihar finding—which Pakistan had acquired when Nehru and Ayub Khan signed the IWT in 1960.”

He also said: “The cumulative storage of these dams will be large, giving India an unquestioned capacity to have major impact on the timing of flows into Pakistan. Using Baglihar as a reference, simple back-of-the-envelope calculations suggest that once it has constructed all of the planned hydropower plants on the Chenab, India will have the ability to effect major damage on Pakistan.”

The United States Senate Foreign Relations Committee’s report issued in 2011 endorsed this assessment: “The number of dams under construction and their management is a source of significant bilateral tension. ... While studies show that no single dam along the waters controlled by the Indus Waters Treaty will affect Pakistan’s access to water, the cumulative effect of these projects could give India the ability to store enough water to limit the supply to Pakistan at crucial moments in the growing season.” The Modi government is well aware of this opportunity.

5. The Nimoo Bazgo Dam on the Indus in Leh and the Chutak Dam on its tributary Sunn in Kargil. Both projects were completed (pages 311-312).

6. India intends also to build four hydroelectric projects on the western rivers, which the treaty assigned to Pakistan—Ratle, Myiar, Lower Kalnai, and Pukal Dam. The Ratle Dam is located on the Chenab in Kishtwar between Dul Hasti and Baglihar (pages 315-316). It bids fair to become a sore issue.

The author discusses each of these cases in detail, setting out the arguments of both sides, Pakistan and India, with full references, maps and graphs. His comment at the end of his survey is that “there are indications of corruption” (page 115). Such comments and worse mar a scholarly work.

For good measure, the book covers in useful detail India’s river disputes with Nepal (the Kosi, Gandak and Tanakpur agreements and the Mahakali treaty) and with Bangladesh (the Farakka Barrage). It did Nehru no credit when he denounced, on March 26, 1956, the Barcelona Convention and Statute concerning the Regime of Navigable Waterways of International Concern, 1921. The Teesta River Dispute is unresolved. The Sir Creek Dispute between India and Pakistan, ripe for solution, is also discussed (page 412). So is Afghanistan, on which Ijaz Hussain flies off at a tangent to level charges against India.

He rightly complains of conformism in the Indian media (pages 414-415). But is the media in Pakistan any different? It is clear that in his scholarly pursuits, objectivity never figured and, worse still, maturity eluded him. The comments quoted earlier reveal that. This quote reveals his mentality. It is the U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson’s remarks on Nehru, whom he called “slippery” and “a monumental snob”, in addition to observing that he “[l]ikes to be surrounded by beautiful and dumb women, the more beautiful and the less intelligent, the happier”. The relevance of this cheap remark in a work on the Indus Waters Treaty could be evident only to one like Ijaz Hussain.

He goes to some length to establish deficiencies in other books on the subject. Political comments reveal ignorance, besides partisanship. Sample this gem: “The Muslim League apparently accepted the ‘other factors’ formulation in the hope of getting Calcutta without ever suspecting that the British and the Congress leadership would reach a secret understanding to award the famed city to India.”

Calcutta had a mere 23 per cent of Muslims. The entire district had 32.5 per cent. The author is obsessed with conspiracies by others and lapses by Pakistan’s representatives.

None of this is reason for neglecting the book. It is a work of solid scholarship. The author went to great pains. He toiled hard in the Library of Congress and the archives of the World Bank, which mediated in the dispute since 1952 and is a party to a couple of key provisions of the treaty. The bibliography lists the documents he consulted. To appreciate this work of labour, the reader must separate the chaff from the wheat. He
will find the wheat well-grown and nutritious.

The narrative begins from the 19th century and picks up speed with Radcliffe—boundary by award. “The genesis of the water dispute over the Indus Basin is found in the award that the Punjab Boundary Commission rendered. The Congress party and the Muslim League leadership had instructed the latter ‘...to demarcate the boundaries of the two parts of the Punjab on the basis of ascertaining the contiguous majority areas of Muslims and non-Muslims. In doing so, it will also take into account other factors’. The division of the Punjab was a very tedious affair because the province had been developed as a single unit which included the common irrigation and hydro-electric system. There were large tracts of land in the Punjab that the rivers Ravi and Sutlej irrigated. The headworks of the Ravi River was located at Madhopur in the district Gurdaspur, whereas that of Sutlej was situated at a place called Ferozpur in an area known by the same name. According to the 1941 census, district Gurdaspur was a Muslim majority area as three out of its four tehsils had a Muslim majority (Gurdaspur 51.1 per cent, Batala 55.06 per cent, and Shakargarh 51.3) and only Pathankot had a non-Muslim majority (77 per cent). However, Gurdaspur, Batala, and Pathankot were allocated to India and only Shakargarh came to Pakistan. Similarly, the headworks of Sutlej were also located in the Muslim majority area as its tehsils had Muslim majorities (Ferozpur 55.2 per cent, Zira 65.2 per cent, and Fazilka 75.12 per cent). However, the award, in violation of the partition principle outlined above, allocated Ferozpur and Zira tehsils to India.” There is a thorough and excellently documented discussion of the origin and course of the World Bank’s mediation.

The treaty divides “the Indus rivers” and allocates three rivers called the “western rivers” to Pakistan (the Indus, the Chenab and the Jhelum) and three called the “eastern rivers” to India (the Sutlej, the Beas and the Ravi). It allocates all the waters of the eastern rivers “for unrestricted use” to India. Pakistan is under obligation not to interfere with the waters of the Sutlej Main and Ravi Main or their tributaries when they flow through Pakistani territory except for domestic, non-consumptive, and certain limited agricultural uses. Similarly, it allocates all the waters of the western rivers “for unrestricted use” to Pakistan. India is under obligation not to interfere with them while they flow on Indian territory except for domestic, non-consumptive, and certain limited agricultural uses as well as generation of hydroelectric power. The treaty allows India to build a maximum of 3.6 MAF storage on the western rivers within specified parameters whose details are laid down in Annexures C, D and E. It provides a detailed procedure for conflict resolution.

During the massive military build-up by India on the Line of Control in Kashmir and on the international border with Pakistan, the then National Security Adviser, Brajesh Mishra, covertly...
instigated a media campaign for the abrogation of the IWT. First, one editor splashed this demand as news on his paper’s front page. Two bogus defence “experts” and two former High Commissioners to Pakistan constituted the pack. The author recalls that “a former Indian High Commissioner to Pakistan warned: ‘Should we not consider measures to deprive Pakistanis of the water they need to quench their thirst and grow their crops? Should we not seriously consider whether it is necessary for us to adhere to the provisions of the Indus Waters treaty?’” He was one G. Parthasarathi. His views reflected more than lack of professionalism, for, the treaty cannot be abrogated legally or politically. The advocacy of use of water as a weapon reflects a barbaric outlook.

The treaty is not one bit unfair to India as Michel pointed out at page 8 of his book in 1967. “In agreeing to recognise Pakistan’s right in perpetuity to virtually all the waters of the three western rivers (Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab), India was really giving away only one stream, the Chenab, that she could really use herself (by diversion into the Ravi or Beas).

India & CPEC

A PERUSAL of the record of the negotiations on the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) in Ijaz Hussain’s book suffices to expose the utter falsity of India’s avowed reason for its refusal to adhere to China’s Belt and Road Initiative, namely because one link, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), passes through Azad Kashmir. As Liu Jingsong, Minister and DCM of the Chinese Embassy, recalled in a speech on April 21, 2017, “The China-Pakistan Karakoram-Kunlun Road was built in the 1960s and put into use in the 1980s. Therefore, it is no fresh news for India that China and Pakistan’s transportation connections and related cooperation surpass the Kashmir region” (News from China, Embassy of the People’s Republic of China, May 2017, page 53).

Ijaz Hussain records how the Kashmir dispute was bypassed in the negotiations leading to the signing of the IWT. “The parties tried to bypass the dispute over Jammu and Kashmir through this article in the settlement of the water dispute. With this perspective, the provision became handy and was inserted in the draft Treaty. William B. Iliff, the chief negotiator on behalf of the World Bank, acknowledged this fact in a letter that he addressed to N.D. Gulhati [the leader of India’s delegation] in these words: ‘My recollection of the understanding reached in the course of our conversation with the Indian authorities in Delhi is that … India was concerned that the actual construction of a reservoir [in Azad Kashmir] should not carry an implication that India’s sovereign rights in Jammu and Kashmir were in any way or to any degree eroded. I therefore wished to find a formula that would therefore protect her in this respect…. The general principle underlying the Bank approach was that neither party should, on the one hand, seek to gain, in or from the Water Treaty, any support for its own general position on the Kashmir issue, or, on the other hand, should seek to erode the general position of the other party.’”

He explains how this was done. “They decided not to mention any work that Pakistan was constructing in the disputed territory nor provide any indication that India had agreed to it. Despite this understanding, the issue of constructing dams and reservoirs in Azad Kashmir [by Pakistan] presented considerable drafting difficulties. [Jawaharlal] Nehru feared that if he gave formal consent to the construction, for example, of the Mangla Dam, Pakistan might construe it as a waiver, by India, of its claim of sovereignty over Azad Kashmir or what India termed as Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). In this vein, he referred to the protest that India had already lodged with the United Nations against the construction that Pakistan had already undertaken. Iliff tried to show a way out of the impasse by suggesting a clause in the proposed treaty along the following lines: ‘Nothing in this Treaty should be construed as prejudicing the rights or claims of either India or Pakistan in any territorial dispute.’ Nehru disagreed with the proposed text on the grounds that India did not consider Kashmir a territorial dispute. It was, in his view, an Indian territory which Pakistan had illegally occupied. He felt, however, that it was possible to devise a formula to take care of this problem. Subsequently, Pakistan and India successfully negotiated the following text during the London talks.” This was on December 9, 1959.

Article XI of the Treaty says: “(1) It is expressly understood that (a) this Treaty governs the rights and obligations of each Party in relation to the other with respect only to the use of the waters of the Rivers and matters incidental thereto; and (b) nothing contained in this Treaty, and nothing arising out of the execution thereof, shall be construed as constituting a recognition or waiver (whether tacit, by implication or otherwise) of any rights or claims whatsoever of either of the parties other than those rights or claims which are expressly recognised or waived in this Treaty.”

The parties were determined to settle and
She was gaining undisputed possession of the waters of the three eastern rivers (Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej) in perpetuity after the transition period ends in 1970 or at the latest in 1973. These are the rivers that are really useful to India, and the Indus Waters Treaty gives her the right to dry them up entirely if she so chooses.”

Ijaz Hussain does a service in pointing out the new factor of climate change and environment, devoting the whole of chapter 7 on the subject; the discussion is based on good research.

With Modi as Prime Minister, the belligerence of 2001-02 acquired a menacing colour. He has publicly declared that India will make the maximum use of those treaty provisions that give it some rights on the western rivers for the construction of the run-of-river hydro-power plants—that is, eat away the treaty. The author cites one “secret cable sent by Mulford, the U.S. Ambassador in New Delhi on 5 February 2005, which stated that ‘there are several hydrological dams planned for Indian Kashmir that might be questioned under the IWT’, he expressed the fear that ‘in-

agreed to put a non-issue out of the way. India has other reasons for not joining China’s Belt and Road Initiative. The CPEC through Azad Kashmir is a false excuse for a wrong decision.

Gulhati confirmed Ijaz Hussain’s account in his memoir *Indus Water Treaty*. He wrote: “The broad basis of the discussions, initiated with the participation of the Bank, had set forth: ‘The water resources of the Indus basin should be cooperatively developed and used in such manner as most effectively to promote the economic development of the Indus basin viewed as a unit. The problem of development and use of these waters should be solved on a functional and not a political plane, ... independently of political issues.’ The objection to planning of works in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir territory was thus not consistent with either undertakings and, although my colleagues and I had not made any commitment, on behalf of India, the Mangla dam had featured prominently in several informal discussions between the Bank group and us; government having been kept fully informed. The studies made by us of the potential of the Mangla dam had convinced us, since early 1957, that this would provide the most economical arrangement for rabi replacements.” Economics prevailed over politics.

Thus, “a realistic view was taken about the Mangla Dam, the construction of which was being undertaken by Pakistan in spite of Indian protests. I was authorised to furnish to the Bank our detailed comments on Pakistan’s London plan along the lines indicated by me in my note to the Cabinet Committee. I was also permitted to put forward a plan of our own which would adequately provide for replacement but taking care to see that no work included in this plan should lie in Pakistan-held Kashmir territory, in order that there should not be any implied recognition by us of Pakistan’s rights to undertake construction in this territory. Thus the danger from within was warded off, and my colleagues and I once again took up, in right earnest, our fight for the use in India of the waters of the Eastern Rivers earlier assigned to lands that were now in Pakistan and of all the surplus in those rivers. A few days later, on 11th October, 1958, Eugene Black and Iliff met the Prime Minister Nehru.” An understanding was reached.

In fact the matter was almost resolved at an earlier stage. “At an early stage of the discussions relating to the draft of the treaty, some guiding principles were accepted to enable discussions to proceed smoothly: In the light of the disagreement between India and Pakistan on the status of Jammu and Kashmir, it was agreed that effort be made to write the treaty in such manner as to bypass the problem of Jammu and Kashmir. There was no other way to reach agreement that would be accepted by the two parties. It was thus agreed, at Iliff’s request, that neither party should, on the one hand, seek to gain, in or from the water treaty, any support for its own general position on the Kashmir issue, or, on the other hand, seek to erode the general position of the other party.

“As Mangla dam was part of the Pakistan plan, in the light of Indian objections to its construction in Pakistan-held Kashmir territory, it was decided that there should be no mention in the treaty of any work to be constructed by Pakistan and no indication that India had agreed to, or had any responsibility in regard to, any such work. On 9th August, 1959, when discussions were in progress in London, India lodged her third protest to the Security Council about the construction of the Mangla dam. Iliff told me that Black was much perturbed by this action, but he was assured by the Government of India that this renewal of protest did not, in any way, alter the understanding reached between Black and the Prime Minister in New Delhi.

“In conformity with the principle of good neighbourliness, it was agreed that, in making use of the waters allocated to it, each party would seek to avoid any action which might cause ‘material damage’ to the other party; the term ‘material damage’ was not defined as what might be material under one set of circumstances might not be in so different set of conditions.”

A.G. Noorani
Kashmir & IWT

KASHMIR’S leaders were kept in the picture fully on the Indus Waters Treaty, as N.D. Gulhati recorded: “Advantage was also taken, during my visit to New Delhi in the first half of August, to review the provisions of the treaty with its annexures with representatives of the State governments of Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab and Rajasthan as well as with Secretary, Law Ministry.”

Daniel Haines goes further in his book *Indus Divided*. “During the 1950s, water policy was part of New Delhi’s steps to integrate Jammu & Kashmir State more closely into the Indian Union. As early as 1949 Niranjan Das Gulhati, a senior engineer in India’s Ministry of Works, Mines and Power and later (from 1954) leader of the water dispute negotiating delegation, advocated incorporating Kashmir rights on existing and future withdrawals from the Jhelum and Chenab in any settlement with Pakistan on the canal waters dispute. Gulhati’s recommendation rather contradicted contemporary Indian assertions that the canal dispute was about Punjab alone. When the 1954 Bank Plan proposed assigning the western rivers (Indus, Jhelum and Chenab) to Pakistan and the eastern rivers (Ravi, Sutlej and Beas) to India, the Ministry of States wrote urgently to Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed, Jammu & Kashmir’s Chief Minister. It stressed the need to coordinate a case for protecting Jammu & Kashmir’s existing and future uses of the Jhelum and Chenab (the Indus main channel flowing wholly outside Indian-held territory). Ordinarily, State governments of the Indian Union had a limited role in the Indus negotiations, and both India and Pakistan expected Kashmir to be a water supplier rather than consumer. On this occasion, though, the Ministry wanted information on Jammu & Kashmir’s (small-scale) existing and projected water needs so that the delegation in Washington DC could represent these as part of the total Indian requirement for river waters in the Indus Basin.”

This reveals a lot, indeed.

Now, 60 years later, when the Kashmir dispute has assumed different dimensions, formulations similar to Article XI of the IWT can be worked out, provided there is a will to join the Belt and Road Initiative. A.G. Noorani

dia’s dams in Jammu and Kashmir have the potential to destroy the peace process and even lead to war. Again, the Intelligence Community Assessment report issued in 2012 has put on notice that “[p]hysical infrastructure, including dams has been used as convenient and high publicity targets by extremists, terrorists, and rogue states threatening substantial harm and will become more likely beyond the next 10 years. Finally, a group of more than twenty U.N. bodies in March 2009 warned that given the rising tension over the water issue between Pakistan and India the world would be perilously close to its water war” (pages 427-428).

Ayub Khan’s account of the internal debate in Pakistan on signing the IWT provides a textbook lesson for statesmen in all such situations. It deserves to be quoted in full: “But before I write of the negotiations with Eugene Black, I should like to describe the confrontation that I had with our own technical experts and administrato rs. I sensed that they did not fully realise the gravity of the situation and were asking for [the] moon when we were in a position of weakness all along the line. They were also trying to dictate policy and were trying to take up extreme positions. Some thirty or forty of them were as assembled in Government House, Lahore, where I addressed them. I said: Gentlemen, this is of far reaching consequences to us. Let me tell you that every factor is against Pakistan. I am not saying that we should surrender our rights but, at the same time, I will say this: that if we can get a solution which we can live with, we shall be very foolish not to accept it. Now when I say that, I am in fact saying to myself because I shall have to take the responsibility for the solution. The responsibility does not lie on any one of you, so let me tell you very plainly that the policy is going to be mine. I shall consult you whenever I am in doubt regarding technical details, but if any one of you interferes with policy, I shall deal with him myself. This problem, if not tackled properly, may mean the end of the country. I mean every word of it. So, don’t let any one make any mistake about it....”

“When one is dealing with a sensitive problem of this nature, one has to be realistic and judge the situation dispassionately in order to formulate a rational approach. Very often the best is the enemy of the good. We abandoned the chase of the ideal and accepted what was good after a careful and realistic appreciation of the overall situation. Had we not done that, we might have drifted into a conflict at a time when many factors were against us. The basis of the agreement, therefore, as far as we were concerned, was realism and pragmatism. Emotions had no place in it, nor could they be allowed to have any place where the future and safety of millions of people depended on a solution.” (Ayub Khan; *Friends, Not Masters*; pages 109-110 and 112.) These words should be inscribed on the table of every leader who makes policy.

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Talking ties

The author seeks to explore the potential synergy between China and India and how it can change the course of geopolitics.

BY K.P. FABIAN

THE author, Pisupati Sadasiva Suryanarayana, has worked as foreign correspondent of The Hindu for 35 years and is currently Editor (Current Affairs) at the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) in Singapore. His book is on a theme of enduring significance, rendered even more relevant by the current tensions in the bilateral relations between India and China. His purpose is to explore the potential synergy between China and India and to figure out how it can be exploited and how the course of geopolitics might change if it is exploited.

In his foreword, Ambassador Tommy Koh of Singapore says that after the United States-China relationship, the China-India relationship is the second most important bilateral relationship in the world. There was a time when India and China together accounted for almost half of the world economy. Koh believes that the two economies are likely to become the two largest ones in the future.

The reader will note that for Koh it is China’s bilateral relations, whether China-U.S. or China-India, that matter above those of others. Is there an element of Sinolatry (worship of China), rather fashionable these days, in such a world view?

The author, “thinking the unthinkable”, has conceptualised the idea of a “China-India Smart Zone as a shared mindset that might become a postmodern sequel to the old geocultural Indochina, the two being completely distinctive, though”.

There are, in all, six chapters and three appendices. The titles of the chapters and their sequencing show the thoroughness of research and presentation: Sunrise Powers of the Twenty-First Century, Ideologies of the Heart and the Mind, Interests and Concerns, Synergies and Power Politics, A Creative Scenario, and Talking the Walk Towards. The appendices are China’s Perspective on India, India’s Perspective on China, and An Internationalist Perspective on China-India Ties.

The author has devoted many pages to discussions on the origin, meaning and relevance of Panchsheel. First proclaimed in 1954, Panchsheel is an ideology. Zhou Enlai and Jawaharlal Nehru “purveyed them as products of the cerebral—as well as emotional—inelligence of both their countries”. It is “conceivable” that the adoption of Panchsheel reflected the first attempt at generating “diplomatic synergy”.

Vice President Hamid Ansari, speaking in Beijing on June 28, 2014, on the 60th anniversary of the enunciation of the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence, essayed a re-interpretation of Panchsheel “in the globalised context of the 21st century”. To quote Ansari: “We need a new paradigm for global action. Our destinies are intertwined. Our quest is, should be, for a framework in which opportunities and challenges for the betterment of our societies exist. In this endeavour, Panchsheel can act as a catalyst to help us better coordinate our efforts, enhance mutual understanding, share development experiences and tackle transnational threats more effectively.”

The reader might wonder why the two countries cannot “better coordinate their efforts”, “enhance mutual understanding”, and so on without invoking Panchsheel all the time. After all, foreign policy is based on interests. Younger readers might wonder why there is so much ceremony and fuss about Panchsheel. For the 50th anniversary, K.R. Narayanan, former President, went to Beijing. Why is it that no anniversary is celebrated in India to which a VIP from China comes?

In fact, the author fails to raise fundamental questions about the motivations of the two proponents of Panchsheel, namely, Mao Zedong’s China and Jawaharlal Nehru’s India. Mao honestly believed that political power came from the barrel of a gun. For him, politics was war without bloodshed and war was
politics with bloodshed. Why did Mao, with such ideas, sign Panchsheel, which agreed more with Nehru’s idea of inter-state relations?

China, when it was planning and building a road through Aksai Chin, a territory it knew India claimed, wanted to lull India into believing in China’s benevolent and pacific intentions. Once the road was completed and after Nehru granted asylum to the Dalai Lama in 1959, it was time to let India know where it stood.

PERPLEXING
The author’s historical narration is at times perplexing. “Within five years of the founding of the PRC [People’s Republic of China], Chairman Mao of the Communist Party of China (CPC), and Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai devised a strategy of befriending India” (emphasis added). The reader would like to know why China waited for five years and what it was doing during those five years.

In July 1949, Liu Shao-chi in an article under the title “Nationalism and Internationalism” described newly independent countries such as India, Burma and a few others as “colonies and semi-colonies”. Nehru went to the U.S. weeks after the foundation of the PRC on October 1, 1949, and told President Harry Truman of his intention to recognise the PRC. Nehru explained that the PRC was not a threat to peace in Asia and that the U.S. should accept the political realities. Truman resented what he was told and rejected Nehru’s request for financial assistance.

World Culture published in China reported that Nehru had gone to the U.S. to express his “willingness to accept the role of the principal slave of U.S. imperialism in the Far East in the campaign against Communism” (emphasis added). The insults continued, but Nehru urged the United Nations to seat China as a permanent member of the Security Council. China never thanked India for championing its cause. It assumed with the arrogance of the “Middle Kingdom” that there was no need to express gratitude. China was permitting India to serve it. Young readers would have expected the author to put India-China relations right from 1949, including the 1962 war, in a proper historical context.

Often the author tends to see the history of India-China relations through a lens made in China. The discussion on the genesis of the 1962 war is unsatisfactory and will leave a young reader rather confused. It is not suggested that the author should surrender to patriotism and give an account that puts all the blame on China. A holistic account of the 1962 war should have been given. There were mistakes on India’s part, but essentially Mao, as he clarified later, resented Nehru’s granting asylum to the Dalai Lama and wanted “to teach [Nehru] a lesson”.

The author raises a few questions about Panchsheel, and some of them are rather odd. One such question is, Did China violate Panchsheel in 1962? The answer is incomprehensible: “In those historical circumstances, Mao’s withdrawal from India after the Himalayan War left open the question of China’s adherence to the letter and spirit of the Five Principles” (emphasis added).

The author has argued that since Mao’s “Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution” from May 1966 to October 1976 “completely overshadowed” Panchsheel, its restoration by Deng Xiaoping in 1988 is of great significance. The argument does not hold. The author makes the mistake that many Indian scholars, and even the Indian government, have made from time to time: to think textually rather than contextually. If official announcements are to be taken seriously without taking note of intentions and actions, analysis gets paralysed.

The author discusses R2P (Responsibility to Protect) and argues that the R2P concept, “as systematised by the U.N., is based on safeguards against wilful external interventions in the internal affairs of any sovereign state”. The reader will find it difficult to agree, considering the aftermath of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) intervention in Libya, which currently has three governments and two parliaments. The West “justified” the intervention by invoking Security Council Resolution 1973.

On page 267, the author says: “As I visualise, a key economic issue to be watched, going forward, will be whether India will remain a Least Common Denominator (LCD) country and whether China will sustain itself as a Macro Economic Denominator (MED) country.” Frankly, the reader would have appreciated some explanation of LCD and MED.

The first appendix is an interview with Ambassador Luo Zhaohui, in which he gives a Chinese perspective on India. He talks at length without saying anything much. The next one is an interview with Shyam Saran, former Foreign Secretary, easily the best part of the book.

The last appendix is the interview with Ambassador Koh, who reiterates his well-known views on the growing importance of Asia, meaning China.

Obviously, China does not believe in practising the “smart diplomacy” advocated by Suryanarayana. Otherwise, why is China making so much fuss about India’s entry into the Nuclear Suppliers Group? The author is reluctant to say in plain English that Nehru tried to mobilise the sympathy between India and China and failed. We know why that happened. If China wants to mobilise the sympathy, it should show its willingness through action and not words. This central point he has missed out. The author is not alone in this regard.

Ambassador K.P. Fabian is author of Diplomacy: Indian Style.
THE year 1942 was of great consequence not only for India but for the world. It saw the turning of the tide in favour of the Allies in the Second World War. The editor rightly remarks that the year, and a few days before it, “deeply affected the course of events in India in 1942”.

Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941, brought the “unsinkable aircraft carrier”, the United States, into the war. Hitler’s attack on the Soviet Union in 1941 also strengthened the Allies. This significance was lost on Gandhi, who was “affected” by Japan’s advances, which were sure to reach and destroy the British ships Prince of Wales and Repulse off the coast of Thailand on December 10, 1941. On December 7, it invaded the Philippines. On January 15, 1942, came the surrender of the British naval base in Singapore. On January 20, 1942, Japan invaded Lower Burma. The Allied counter offensive was mounted only in early 1944.

“One-third of the population have left Madras [now Chennai]” by road and rail, an official report said. There was an exodus from Bombay [now Mumbai] as well. As in Bengal, there were fairly large-scale withdrawals from banks in Mumbai. Gandhi and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel believed that Japan would win the war. Jawaharlal Nehru flatly disagreed.

The volume covers the efforts of Sir Stafford Cripps to secure a comprehensive settlement among all the three major parties—the British, the Congress and the Muslim League. Its basis was independence after the war, an interim set-up, and an elected Constituent Assembly with an option to the Provinces to secede by a vote of their legislatures and a plebiscite if its vote for the Union was less than 60 per cent.

The Congress rejected it and launched the Quit India Movement. It wreaked havoc and failed dismally and predictably. Gandhi had sent Madeleine Slade (Mira) to the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, before the Quit India resolution was passed. He was surprised and disoriented by his arrest. “The last throw of the gambler” had failed. Massive arrests of Congressmen left the field open to the Muslim League and the Communist Party of India (CPI) led by the brilliant P.C. Joshi.

One Congress leader stood out in bold defiance, the wise Chakravarti Rajagopalachari. He was for conceding Pakistan, thus throwing the ball in Mohammad Ali Jinnah’s court—what now? Apart from Rajendra Prasad, Rajaji had done his homework. Punjab and Bengal would have to be partitioned on religious lines if Pakistan was accepted. Rajaji’s plan envisaged a district-wise decision. In 1942, this would have led East Punjab’s Muslim landlords to leave the League. The volume has an intelligence report that said the Congress had plans for the partition of Punjab if it left the Union. Jinnah knew he could not get all of Punjab. An early concession would have prevented much bloodshed. Jinnah misled his followers. He also opposed the Quit India resolution. The volume has a whole chapter on him and on all the major themes, including student politics, the Congress Socialist Party and organisations of women and Dalits. The volume contains much hitherto unpublished material and is indispensable for any student of India’s history.

The Governor of Sind, Sir Hugh Dow, shrewdly predicted on March 22, 1942, that Jinnah would accept a Centre if he were given dominance in Punjab and Bengal. He accepted the Cabinet Mission’s Plan of May 16, 1946, which gave him that to
Muslim League was ready to accept Cripps’ proposals of March 29. Rajaji wrote to Gandhi on July 2 after a meeting with Jinnah to say that he was “genuinely desirous of a Congress-League settlement and would welcome negotiations for that purpose”. Rajaji had held four interviews with Jinnah lasting over 14 hours. Sadly, we do not have their transcripts. He wrote to the Congress president, Maulana Azad, four days before the Quit India resolution of August 8, 1942: “We have no right at this juncture to plunge the country into disorder.”

Morally, Rajaji was superior to Gandhi; intellectually, to Nehru. He was as good an administrator as Patel but more far-sighted and liberal, and he was wiser than Azad. There is not a single definitive scholarly biography of the man. Vallabhbhai Patel publicly predicted on July 29 that the Quit India Movement “will be short and swift and will be finished within a week... no Indian would remain aloof from the coming struggle.”

The volume contains a good record of the CPI’s change of policy—how after Hitler’s attack on the Soviet Union an “imperialist war” became a “people’s war”. The British lifted the ban on the CPI after N.M. Joshi provided assurances on its behalf. Particularly useful are the excerpts from the famous Deoli Thesis hammered out in jail.

P.C. Joshi raised the CPI to heights it never reached after he was ousted as general secretary in 1948. The ones who followed bickered relentlessly in Marxist jargon.
Hungarian author Gábor Lanczkor on the cultural and political landscape in his country, on history, and what it means to be a poet and writer today in Hungary. BY MARGIT KÖVES

GÁBOR LANCZKOR was born in 1981 and belongs to a generation of Hungarians who grew into adulthood during the political changes of 1989-90, availing themselves of the opportunities that the new political system and Hungary’s eventual entry to the European Union offered, such as academic scholarships throughout Europe, the freedom to travel abroad (even if in modest circumstances), a new-found personal freedom, changes in lifestyle and personal relationships, and the ability to voice one’s opinion, though he also remains aware of the insecurities of the system today. The changing cultural and political landscapes of Hungary and Europe have facilitated the birth of outstanding works, such as this year’s Oscar-winning short-form documentary, Sing, the 2016 Oscar-winning foreign-language

“In my writing based on my Indian experiences, my goal was to avoid being ‘postcard-like’. It’s a trap for Europeans to regard India simply as an ‘exotic’ country....”
film, *Son of Saul*, Ildikó Enyedi’s Berlin Biennale award-winning *On Body and Soul*, Krasznahorkai’s *Baron Wenckheim’s Homecoming*, and recent works in art and culture that have catapulted Hungary to the centre at the international level.


This is Lanczkor’s eleventh book: prior to *Sound Odyssey*, he had published four volumes of poetry, four novels, two children’s books, and his doctoral thesis on ekphrasis, entitled *You Can’t Live There*, a quotation from John Ashbery’s poem, on the poetic description of works of art by Rainer Maria Rilke and John Ashbery as well as Hungarian poets Lajos Kassák and György Somlyó.

The first part of *Sound Odyssey*, “Table”, mainly comprises poems which have not yet been published in Hungary in book form, while the second part, “Goya’s Deaf House”, comes from an earlier collection in 2008. The third part is “Sound Odyssey”, and the fourth, “Coins from Amrita”, is made up of Lanczkor’s poems about Amrita Sher-Gil.

In “Coins from Amrita”, some poems speak in the voice of Amrita Sher-Gil, and some in the voices of family members. As Lanczkor noted in his readings at the Ambedkar University in Delhi, at Delhi University, and at the Hungarian Information and Cultural Centre in New Delhi, he sought to write about his sometimes-overwhelming Indian experiences in the voice of Hungarians or Europeans who lived and worked in India. Lanczkor has visited India eight times, after the first one as a tourist in 2002.

In 2016, he was invited to the Long Night of Literature, organised by the Cultural Institutes of the European Union. Excerpts from an interview he gave *Frontline*:

**How do you see Hungary’s position within the European Union?**

We are a country of just 10 million people, so we don’t really have any political or economic significance. At the moment, I can’t imagine anything better for Europe than this type of union, but, as it’s a democratic community, in tough situations when quick decisions are desired, some disadvantages can clearly be seen.

**You were born a few years before the upheavals of 1989. What did it mean for your family?**

I was born in 1981, so I experienced the final days and the fall of the soft dictatorship that was János Kádár’s regime as a child. I grew up in Szombathely, a city near the Austrian frontier and I remember well when the border was opened and we could go trekking deeper into the hills there, since the highest point in Transdanubia is just at the Austrian border. Sir Winston Churchill probably thought he was being very witty when he coined the term *iron curtain*, but for me, to see rusting rolls of barbed wire along forest paths wasn’t funny at all. It was a pure material truth—history without meaning, as I later interpreted it for myself. I think the reserved, distanced way in which I observe politics is rooted in these early experiences.

**Your poem “We Proceeded” reflects a specific political attitude that is characteristic of Hungary and Eastern Europe. A sceptical, distanced relationship is expressed in “We Proceeded”, where the contemporary merges with Odysseus’ journey. Another poem, “The Table”, begins with the lines “I cannot be/A humanist.” Humanism has been part of Hungarian culture since the rule of King Matthias in the 15th century, when the first publisher, András Hess’s printing house, came into being, soon after Gutenberg, along with Renaissance palaces, and the libraries themselves, among them the famous Corvina Library. In the poem, I connect the concept of humanism to Hungary and Europe’s past. There is no doubt that Europe was built on cruel conquest and exploitation of the rest of the world. In that sense, the whole concept of humanism is in crisis.**

In the course of your talk in Sahitya...
Akademi last year, the issue of history came up. How do Hungarians deal with history? What are the dividing lines in Hungarian society? Yes, it did come up. I have the sense that history in India means something different from what it does in Europe. If you look at architectural styles as imprints of who has been in power, in India you don’t see significant differences between temples built in the 14th and the 18th century—but compare a Gothic and a rococo building. I have the feeling that Europe, and Hungary as part of Europe, have a rash or hasty relationship with their history. The 20th century in my country was an extremely tragic one: the First World War, the Austro-Hungarian empire falling to pieces and the Hungarian kingdom losing more than 60 per cent of its traditional territory.

In the Second World War, we watched the Germans kill half a million Hungarian Jews; the Hungarian state collaborated with the Nazis. Then came the dictatorship, backed by the Red Army. Far too many historical traumas, too many injuries to those who were opposed to the regime, souls who suffered under these regimes; and others who reaped benefits. The dividing lines in our society now look like the sharp edges of a broken mirror.

Last year, László Nemes Jeles’s film “Son of Saul” won an Oscar; the film takes place in Auschwitz. This year, a documentary film, “Sing”, by Kristóf Deák, won an Oscar. The film “About Body and Soul”, directed by Ildikó Enyedi, won first prize at this year’s Berlin Biennale. What role does the Holocaust and Hungary’s participation in the Second World War (when Hungary was an ally of Nazi Germany) play in the Hungarian consciousness? How do you see authoritarianism and its acceptance in the public atmosphere? This is what “Sing” and “About Body and Soul” are about.

I haven’t seen Sing and About Body and Soul yet, so can’t speak about them. I live in a tiny village with my family, so in the last few years, I haven’t been to the cinema at all. I saw Son of Saul on a rare occasion, and it is a memorable film. It had a cathartic effect on me, and I still clearly remember stepping out of the movie theatre after I saw it in Tapolca. This community near Lake Balaton had a sizeable Jewish population, and 98 per cent of those Jews were killed. Their synagogue was turned into a cultural space. I felt the beautiful landscape there also belonged to the Jews.

Some time ago, I saw another short film by the same director, László Nemes Jeles, titled With a Little Patience, which is also related to the Shoah [the Holocaust]. I liked it very much because of its fine manner and its minimalism. It’s definitely necessary to talk about the Holocaust, but it’s an extremely hard task to do it in an artistic way. Many who have tried, and keep trying, end up with some form of kitsch. Even Imre Kertész considered himself a “Holocaust clown” after receiving the Nobel Prize for his novel Fatelessness. I really like Kertész and found this statement of his to be a courageous one.

**ROLE OF POETRY**

You and your wife, Krisztina Lanczko-Kocsis, came to India last year on a project called Poetry and Community: Art and Music in Hungarian Literature. What is the role of art and poetry in your lives? I don’t have a regular job other than writing and my wife is also on maternity leave at home with our younger daughter, who was born last year. Living as we do in a village which is far away from the capital, we have a very atypical life, I would say. We don’t have a television; we only have the Internet in the house. We get one weekly newspaper; that’s it. It’s not compulsory to go crazy in Hungary, not even these days. That’s the role of poetry and music in our life.

In your lecture at the Sahitya Akademi, you spoke about a new seriousness and a new objectivity as defining features of Hungarian poetry. Who are the important new poets? Yes, I spoke about the labels we receive from critics, just to elucidate our relationship to the previous generation of poets. My favourite young poets are Roland Orcsik, who came to India in October for the Long Night of Literature, Márói Nemes Z., Dénes Krasznahorkai, Marcell Szabó and Máté Sirokai.

The world knows the names and perhaps the work of Hungarian writers, for example, Kertész, Péter Nádas, Péter Esterházy and László Krasznahorkai. Besides them, who are the other important new writers? János Térey writes great narrative poetry, poems in verse, like Vikram Seth. And I like Árpád Kun’s latest novel a lot. Unfortunately, none of them have been translated into English yet.

Like Péter Esterházy (1950-2016), you speak about being a Catholic, and saints such as Philip St Neri and the Catholic Church figure in your
I connect the concept of humanism to Hungary and Europe’s past. There is no doubt that Europe was built on cruel conquest and exploitation of the rest of the world.”

work in an unorthodox way. In an interview you gave, you spoke about yourself as an anarchist Catholic, and in your last novel, “River Goddess”, the priest, Gellei, discovers that he is homosexual and has sex with a hermaphrodite.

From a certain point of view, I worked in quite a naive way as a young poet—one can still be a great poet without reflecting on one’s own status during the writing process. It was after publishing three volumes of poetry that I started to write my first novel, and I suddenly realised that I’d need to recall my religious experiences as fiction.

Of course, this was strongly connected to the subject of the novel, insofar as it tells of a miracle performed by a 17th century Italian saint, San Filippo di Neri. Born Catholic, the only possible way for me to reach the spiritual core of my existence was through my own religious experiences. Though, I must admit, I haven’t practised religion for quite some time. To answer the second half of your question, artists such as Caravaggio and half of your question, artists such as Ervin Baktay, Alexander Csoma de Ko rós, whom I knew back home and with whom I became much closer after my travels in the subcontinent. They were at home not only in India and Hungary, but they managed to build a corridor between the two, which still exists as a space in its own right.

What is the literary establishment like in Hungary? Is it easy for a new poet to publish his or her work? Are there large publishing houses? Are books selling well there?

In Hungary, there are two societies which help young writers and poets. They organise readings for those just starting out, and more importantly, they publish the books of the youngest generation of poets. These volumes are not meant to be best-sellers, but to encourage authors to find their voices. After publishing a successful volume—which is what I would call one that is well-reviewed by critics—the next step is the more difficult one: finding a large publishing house. Cultural life in Hungary is still financed by the state through state institutions, but this support is ever-decreasing, and those publishers who are able to promote and distribute their books widely rely on the market and that means the authors must often make some compromises in order to gain popularity. But I see that our approach functions better than the one in India, where poets depend entirely on private individuals and their networks.

What is the relationship between politics and literature in Hungary?
now? Is there any direct influence or subordination?
Not where I'm coming from, but in the world of theatre, especially in the countryside, yes. In this sense, the situation has become worse in the past five years.

What is the contact between Hungarian literature and literature in other languages like? Are foreign literatures well known in Hungary?
Until the political transformation of 1989, poetry in translation was a busy and well-paid industry in Hungary, but since the end of the 1980s, that has changed entirely. Following the global trend, most Western poetry collections sell in very small numbers in today's Hungary, which means many important contemporary poets are not being translated into Hungarian.

Where is your village, Balatonhenye, different from other villages? What are Hungarian villages like? Are traditional occupations still alive?
Our village is set in a picturesque valley near Lake Balaton. Many of the old country estates there were turned into summer residences for relatively wealthy families from Budapest. In winter, we are just a few more than a hundred people. As for traditional occupations, wine cultivation is still very much alive in the region, and a few of the locals raise animals, mainly chickens and pigs. Our region is supposed to be one of the wealthiest ones, but the natives of Balatonhenye live much below the Central European [living] standard. It would take too long to explain how and why this happened, but I'll say that, for the past 25 years, the Hungarian countryside has been in agony. My paternal grandparents are from a village just north of Balatonhenye, but there, there's no lakeshore and no summer residents coming from the capital. That village is now nearly 90 per cent inhabited by the elderly, as my father's generation left it behind for good. I remember 30 years ago there was at least one cow in most courtyards, and now? There's not a single one in the entire village.

Are you considered a sort of stranger in Balatonhenye?
Not really, maybe just a bit, but only as a poet, and not as a person. As a child, I spent a lot of time with my grandparents, so I can speak the local dialect and know how to communicate with the people of the Henye area. Whenever the county newspaper publishes something about me, I can feel that the villagers are proud of that.

The name of your band is Médeia Fiai, the Sons of Medea. An experimental play about the death of Tibor Hajas (1946–80), the avant-garde artist, is structured like a classical Greek play. How do you relate to the classical era? And what is the project of Theatre of Landscape Wounds?
For me, all of these things hang together: my poetry, my prose, the band, my private music project, which is called Anarchitecture, and the Theatre of Landscape Wounds, which is an intentionally long-term series based on the interplay between poetry, theatre, performance, and photography. It's a project with Szabolcs Varga, who is a photographer. For the European avant-garde, and the later neo-avant-garde, classical Greek culture remained and remains an important source of inspiration. I believe that Hungarian literature did not tolerate avant-garde poets and phenomena much; for example, Lajos Kassák (1887–1967), who was a talented artist in addition to being an important poet and novelist. The élite founders of the journal West (Nyugat) chose to ignore him, as did the Hungarian literary movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Artistic experimentation by Miklós Erdély (1928–68), Tibor Hajas and their circle was suppressed by the establishment. For Sophocles, and for Tibor Hajas as well, it was just reality that all of these things just mentioned worked together, though one need not bundle them up and call them by a single name, for example avant-garde; just live with them. Margit Köves teaches Hungarian language and literature at Delhi University. Her research work deals with cultural exchanges between India and Hungary.
FROM being a pioneer in the early days of film-making, Marathi cinema slowly faded away until it was almost out of sight for the larger viewing public, relegated to the zone of regional cinema with all its negative connotations. But the past few years have seen a spectacular resurgence, with directors making films that are thought-provoking and relevant and with an ethos that appeals to a far wider public than most regional language films manage to achieve.

It was in 2004 with the release of Shwaas that hope surged for the Marathi film industry. Shwaas was based on the true story of a grandfather who, at the expense of his own eyesight, tried to save his grandson who was diagnosed with retinal cancer. Not only was the film a box-office success, it was rated highly by critics. It won the Golden Lotus Award and the President’s medal for best film (the first Marathi film to win this was Shyamchi Aai in 1950). Shwaas went on to be nominated as India’s official entry to the Academy Awards and was ranked sixth in the Best Foreign Language Film category.

The jinx broken, the industry went into an upswing. There was a
surge of interest and big media players started financing Marathi films and Marathi television channels fuelled public interest by replaying old classics. In 2009, Paresh Mokashi’s Harishchandrahi Factory, which was about Dadasaheb Phalke’s struggle to make his 1913 film Raja Harischandra, was India’s entry to the Best Foreign Language Film category at the Academy Awards.

The following year saw the release of debutant Ravi Jadhav’s Natarang, the fictional story of a labourer who realises his dream of setting up his own theatre company. The film fired the public’s imagination and was a blockbuster. After this, the films rolled out fast—Vihir, Deool, Fandry, Court, Kaksharsh, Yellow, Dr Prakash Baba Amte... some award-winning and all lapped up by audiences nationwide; Marathi had moved beyond the traditional Marathi-speaking audience.

Then, in 2016, two films rocked the industry. Sairat and Natsamrat did not just wow audiences, they were the highest grossing Marathi films of all time. Nagraj Manjule’s Sairat saw box-office takings cross the Rs.100-crore mark, while Mahesh Manjrekar’s Natsamrat raked in Rs.50 crore.

Apart from being the highest grosser among Marathi films, Sairat, which means wild, follows certain traditions established by Marathi film-makers over the decades. A romantic musical drama, it plunges into the debate on inter-caste marriages. The young couple in the film are very much in love and, of course, defiant of social norms. To that extent the story could be considered similar to any Bollywood theme, but where it veers off drastically is in the treatment. In Marathi cinema today, storylines do not follow formulas. Issues are dealt with seriously and often with penetrating intellect. Similarly, in the choice of casting, unlike Bollywood which is in the grip of the star system and gigantic budgets, Sairat cast completely unknown faces in the lead roles.

As always, the budget is the biggest hurdle. The budget for making a Marathi film would probably be what Bollywood would spend on the pre-movie publicity of a single film, but this is changing. About five years ago, Mahesh Manjrekar made Kaksharsh, a hauntingly beautiful period drama that dealt with events and their outcomes in the family of a Chitpavan Brahmin living in the Konkan region. Visually stunning and with strong production values, the film reportedly cost Rs.1.4 crore, but its strong storyline paid off and it earned about Rs.14 crore.

In 2012, Lai Bhaar was made for Rs.7 crore, a huge figure in the Marathi film world, and its returns, at about Rs.40 crore, were also impressive. Producer Riteish Deshmukh’s risk-taking paid off. The film was different from the usual in that it was an action-packed one and seemed to appeal to a larger and younger audience. Around the same time, Timepass was made with a budget of Rs.2 crore and brought its producer upwards of Rs.30 crore. Dr Prakash Baba Amte was made with Rs.2.5 crore and returned Rs.12 crore to its producers.

The Maharashtra government offers considerable assistance to Marathi cinema. The films are tax-free in the State and are also offered a Rs.40 lakh subsidy if the proposed film retains its regional identity. Additionally, says writer, journalist and critic Shanta Gokhale, the State “partially funds the second film of a director. The first serves as a track record that warrants State funding. It has made a rule that every cinema house must screen a Marathi film for a minimum of four weeks a year.”

Besides, tickets for Marathi films are much cheaper, averaging at about Rs.100. And multiplexes have given an added boost to Marathi films because of their profit-sharing business model. Shanta Gokhale says, “Multiplexes make screening Marathi films more viable because the seating capacity is small.”

Subtitles are now frequently used, thereby widening the audience base. But Shanta Gokhale holds another viewpoint here: “Marathi films still don’t get seen so much by non-Marathi audiences despite their being subtitled. It is only when the English language press wakes up to the merit of a film here and there that non-Marathis go to see it. This happened with Nagraj Manjule’s Sairat. The amazing thing is that even the Mumbai editions of newspapers don’t carry reviews of Marathi films.”

The Marathi film industry has been energised and film-makers who were so far operating in very confined circumstances have got some breathing space now. Enthused by the response of filmgoers, directors are exploring never-before ideas like shooting in foreign locations. The new generation of films have been shot in London, Dubai, Malaysia,

FROM Sandeep Sawant’s “Shwaas”.

FROM
‘Focus is on good, strong story’

Interview with film critic Shanta Gokhale. BY LYLÀ BAVADAM

WRITER, journalist and critic Shanta Gokhale spoke to Frontline on the decline and revival of Marathi cinema, how strong story content is its backbone and how Marathi films “promoted reformist values” while Hindi films were “largely escapist”. Excerpts:

After being a pioneer in cinema, when and why did the Marathi cinema industry go into decline?

The first decline came during the Second World War. Raw film stock had to be imported. It was felt that the Hindi cinema had a wider reach, so it got a major share of the stock that was available. The wider reach of Hindi films was not only because Hindi was more widely spoken. Prabhat Films had already been catering to this larger audience by making Hindi versions of their Marathi films like Kunku (Duniya Na Mane), Manus (Aadmi) and Shejari (Padosi). An equally important reason was that Marathi films promoted reformist values while Hindi films were largely escapist and, for that reason, more appreciated.

Another reason was that Hindi films were often financed by black money, to which middle-class Marathi film writers and directors had no access.

Despite this, good films continued to be made in Marathi with writers like G.D. Madgulkar and G.R. Kamat, who later wrote hit films for Raj Khosla. These catered to the educated, urban middle class. However, as more and more industrial labour poured in from the coastal areas and the interior regions of the State, they brought with them tastes that could not be satisfied with middle-class fare. The content of Marathi films was adapted to the new audience’s tastes, with most films being about poor farmers and cruel moneylenders, the spice being provided by lavani, the erotic song-and-dance form of Maharashtra.

The reason for the decline in the 1980s was because of the preference of the Marathi youth for the glamorous Hindi film which overshadowed its regional poor relation.

Soon, only elderly people were watching Marathi films. But a pair of directors, Mahesh Kothare and Sachin Pilgaonkar, invested in advanced technology and made glamorous films that aped Hindi films.
Bangkok and Mauritius. But, as Shanta Gokhale says, the tradition of a good storyline continues. “Strong stories are important. Today they are also slickly made. The younger film-makers, many of them trained in FTII [Film and Television Institute of India] (like Umesh Kulkarni) and many who have been making television serials (like Ravi Jadhav, who made the hit films Natwarang and Balgandharva), bring high production values and technical sophistication to their work. This appeals to the new audience.”

Pointing out the slickness of Sairat, she says: “Its music was recorded at Sony Scoring Studios in Hollywood with the composers Ajay-Atul conducting the orchestra. Natwarang and Balgandharva were also very slick and that was half the reason for their wild success. But if the budget is small, film-makers are willing to tailor their expenses to it. And if the film is really good, it doesn’t make a difference. But the same can be said about the new Hindi films like Masaan which are made on small budgets.”

Bollywood remains the uncontested leader with its humongous budgets and superstar cult, but fortunately it is not the benchmark. Authenticity of milieu, challenging stereotypes, questioning, empathising with the underdog, casting aside preconceived notions and exploring—these are some of the factors that magnetically draw audiences to this new wave of Marathi cinema.

These films entertained the young urban middle-class person but not the labour class. This class got a film director who came from the same background as them. Dada Kondke churned out films and raked in the money, even entering the Guinness Book of World Records. So, the small audience for Marathi films got divided age-wise and class-wise. This could not be economically viable for too long.

This was the story of Marathi cinema’s gradual decline until the 1990s.

Is there a certain snobbery among Marathi directors that made them shun commercial cinema with all its associations of being mindless and pure entertainment?

It wasn’t so much snobbery as knowing what the audience they were catering to would appreciate. Marathi people understand Hindi, so Hindi films were always there to give them that kind of entertainment. And Marathi people did see those films too. But seeing a Marathi film about subjects and stories that they would never see on the Hindi screen was a special pleasure. The strong story content that this audience wanted came because very often film directors adapted well-known novels to the screen. This trend continues even today.

Some of the most successful Marathi films like Natwarang and Shala are based on short stories or novels or at least real-life stories like Shewaas, which was the second Marathi film to be sent for the Oscars. The first had gone 50 years before. That film, Shyamchi Aai, was also based on a set of stories written by the socialist leader Sane Guruji [Pandurang Sadashiv Sane]. Even Govind Nihalani’s Ardh Satya, which became such a hit, was based on a Marathi short story.

How difficult is it to find financiers for a Marathi film?

It has become easier these days. People from different walks of life who have money to spare put it into a film after their heart. Satish Manwar’s fine film Gabhricha Paus was financed by an Indian from the Merchant Navy. Films have been financed even by doctors. And now Zee TV finances them, so do Mukta Arts, Ravi Rai and other non-Marathi producers.

Is there a mindset among Marathi film-makers about what their cinema should portray? Most Hindi film directors go for the standard formulas, but that is not so in Marathi cinema, where issues seem to matter.

Marathi film-makers go for a good, strong story. Entertainment for its own sake doesn’t interest them. And yes, the tradition to focus on issues in films is very old.

For the last 20 years or more Sumitra Bhave and Sunil Sukthankar have been making issue-based films.

Their latest, Kaasav, is about how to deal with depression. It won the national award this year for best feature film, beating Dangal. It hasn’t been released yet.

It is fascinating that the actors and directors are [by usual standards] “small” actors, serious actors, actors from the stage, and yet it is they who make Marathi cinema so exciting. And they are making money. It is almost as if they are defying the whole Bollywood model.

The money they make is not in the same class as that of the stars of Hindi films. But they do take forward the tradition of Marathi theatre and cinema of total commitment to the art. Money is never a big issue if the story is good and the role is challenging.
OBITUARY

Sentinel of democracy

Era. Sezhiyan (1923-2017), though not the archetypal Dravidian leader, was one of the last custodians of Dravidian ideals and remained a staunch advocate of parliamentary democracy, federalism and social justice throughout his life. BY AAZHI SENTHILNATHAN

THE passing away of Era. Sezhiyan, or Era as he was affectionately called by his friends in the corridors of Parliament, signals the end of an era. On June 6, Sezhiyan breathed his last at the age of 94 in Vellore, Tamil Nadu, where he had spent his last years. While the demise of Jayalalithaa and the exit of M. Karunanidhi from active politics have already caused a void in Tamil politics today, the impact of Sezhiyan’s departure is different in nature: He was one of the last custodians of Dravidian ideals and one of the original faces of the movement that completed its centenary just a year ago. This disciple of C.N. Annadurai, the founder-leader of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), was respected by many as a great champion of Tamil causes in the face of an increasingly unitarised centre in New Delhi for more than three decades (from the 1960s to the 1980s) and as a parliamentarian par excellence.

Sezhiyan was not an archetypal Dravidian leader. In fact, he ceased to be a “Dravidian leader” in the late 1970s itself when he became a key figure in the Janata Party that took shape under the leadership of Jayaprakash Narayan (JP) during the Emergency. Known for his integrity and clean image, Sezhiyan was indeed an outlier in Tamil politics for quite a long period. Nonetheless, as an intelligent face of the Dravidian movement, a political strategist for the DMK during its emergence as a strong political force, a fearless opponent of Indira Gandhi during the Emergency, a responsible leader of the opposition in Parliament and later, a great advocate of parliamentary democracy, Sezhiyan’s legacy will last long. At a personal level, he had been a friend, guide and philosopher for those who were fortunate enough to be associated with him.

Sezhiyan had a remarkable life, though a chequered one. Born on April 28, 1923, in Thirukkannapuram in Thanjavur district,
Tamil Nadu, he was a gold medallist in the secondary school (SSLC) examination in 1939 and graduated in mathematics and statistics from Annamalai University, Chidambaram, one of the academic nerve centres of the Dravidian and Tamil revivalist movements in those days. Sezhiyan and his elder brother, V.R. Nedunchezhiyan, associated themselves with E.V.R. Periyar’s Dravidar Kazhagam and later with its political offshoot, the DMK. The brothers, whose original names were Narayanasami and Srinivasan, rechristened themselves as Nedunchezhiyan and Sezhiyan in keeping with the trend then thanks to the Self-Respect Movement, when many Tamils shunned their Sanskrit names and caste surnames and opted for secular and classical Tamil names. When Nedunchezhiyan emerged as one of the top-rung leaders of the DMK and became the No. 2 in the party with Annadurai (Anna) at the top, Sezhiyan positioned himself as one of the trusted lieutenants of Annadurai, who liked him for his extraordinary grasp of political ideas and meticulousness in drafting policies.

Sezhiyan entered Parliament in 1962 after winning the election from the Perambalur constituency in central Tamil Nadu. He won again in 1967, this time from Kumbakonam. It was in the 1967 Assembly election that the DMK captured power in Tamil Nadu, riding the crest of the wave of the anti-Hindi agitation of 1965. He continued to be a Member of Parliament, either in the Lok Sabha or the Rajya Sabha, until 1984.

**ROLE IN PARLIAMENT**

Sezhiyan was a staunch believer in parliamentary democracy, and his role in Parliament was threefold: defending parliamentary democracy, opposing despotic tendencies in the Union Cabinet and being a proponent of the various political objectives of the Dravidian movement.

Sezhiyan was the voice of the DMK in Parliament and consistently fought for the State’s rights. In 1962-63, when the DMK decided to drop the demand for a separate Dravida Nadu, the party was in pressing need of an alternative goal. Sezhiyan was one of the key persons in Team Anna (others included Karunanidhi and Murasoli Maran) and helped shape the idea of State autonomy as an alternative agenda for the party. In 1969, when the DMK government under Karunanidhi appointed the P.V. Rajamannar Committee to study Centre-State relations and propose a viable model for State autonomy, both Maran and Sezhiyan provided valuable inputs to the Committee. Sezhiyan’s views on the subject, delivered during a debate on the Anti-Secession Bill in Parliament, is quoted often even today: “Delhi is known to be the graveyard of many empires. Let not... one more graveyard be dug here by this measure.”

In the 1970s, Sezhiyan established himself as a parliamentary strategist. He mastered parliamentary conventions and questioned the treasury benches when they attempted to breach them. Many a time, he stalled what looked like easy passing of budgets and won cases in the court on constitutional disputes. As Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee (1971-73), he presented as many as 96 reports and fought a related case in the Madras High Court and won it. However, he never forgot his home State. In the early 1960s, when the anti-Hindi agitation was about to spread all over the State, Sezhiyan was one of its key fighters in Chennai and New Delhi. Later, in 1974, he fought the Union government vigorously when the small island of Katchatheevu in the Palk Straits was transferred to Sri Lanka.

However, he had to wait till 1975-77, when the Emergency was imposed, to unleash his strategies and skills as a great defender of democracy. Tamil Nadu and India saw a different Sezhiyan. The Member of Parliament from a “regional” party suddenly became a powerful opposition leader with a pan-Indian reach and significance. It was in this period that Sezhiyan started to drift away from the DMK, joining the ranks of the Janata parivar under JP, whom he loved and respected deeply. JP made him the Convenor of the National Committee for Review of the Constitution and the People’s Union for Civil Liberties. Unsuccessful attempts of Indira Gandhi’s Emergency regime to arrest Sezhiyan, his escapes from them and his fiery speeches in Parliament on the excesses that rattled Indira Gandhi herself made him a star among the fledgling Janata parivar. When the opposition collective defeated Indira Gandhi in the 1977 general election, Sezhiyan made a major shift in his political life. He quit the DMK and became one of the founder-members of the Janata Party. He later became a member of the Janata Party’s National Working Committee and the Parliamentary Board. However, he was defeated in the Lok Sabha election in 1977. The next year, he returned as a member of the Rajya Sabha, thanks to the support of the M.G. Ramachandran-led AI Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) in Tamil Nadu.

**POLITICAL SHIFT**

However, shifting his base from Tamil Nadu to Delhi midway through his political career was considered one of the factors that sealed his political future in the State. He did not seem to have many options before him then. If the pull factor for his foray into national politics was JP, the push factor was Karunanidhi and Murasoli Maran strengthening their positions within the DMK. In the post-Annadurai period, his brother Nedunchezhiyan, once considered Annadurai’s successor to head the DMK, broke ranks with the Karunanidhi-led DMK and joined the AIADMK. Sezhiyan, too, found his position becoming untenable in Tamil Nadu and chose to stay in Delhi, which he had become comfortable with by then. In 1984, when, as a candidate of the Janata Party, he lost to Vijayananthimala Bali, an actor-turned-politician from the Congress, in the South Chennai constituency, Sezhiyan’s innings in the State almost came to an end.

Though his political experiments with the Janata Party did not bring him any success, he continued with it. In 1988, he was, again, a founder-
member of the Janata Dal, along with V.P. Singh. He was considered instrumental in the party implementing the recommendations of the Mandal Commission report after it formed the government as a constituent of the National Front in 1989, with V.P. Singh as Prime Minister. But after the short life of the Janata Dal government, Sezhiyan quit the party in 1996. Meanwhile, as a senior politician, Sezhiyan was offered ministerial berths, governorships and Ambassador posts. He chose not to accept any of them. After quitting the Janata Dal, he was with Ramakrishna Hegde’s Lok Dal for some time as its vice president. Losing faith in party politics and disappointed over all the Janata tamasha, Sezhiyan quit active politics in 2001.

SHAH COMMISSION REPORT

However, he began engaging with civil society on various issues of political and social importance, and hit the headlines again in 2010 when he unearthed and published the Shah Commission Report, which exposed in detail the “misuse and abuse of power” by the Congress government under Indira Gandhi during the Emergency. The Janata Party government had constituted the Justice J.C. Shah Commission in 1978 to inquire into the excesses committed during the Emergency. Everyone believed that the three volumes constituting the report had gone missing, and even researchers and authors were not able get hold of copies of the report. It was believed that the Indira Gandhi government, when it returned to power in 1980, had systematically recalled and destroyed all copies of the report. A review, written by Sukumar Muralidharan, of The Life of Indira Nehru Gandhi by Katherine Frank, in Frontline says: “As a family with strong sense of its own destiny, the Nehrus were once fastidious record keepers. Yet during Indira Gandhi’s later tenure as Prime Minister, the family proved eager to efface certain aspects of the public record. An instance is the J.C. Shah commission of inquiry into political excesses during the Emergency—many hours of tape recordings of the depositions before the commission have been lost and it is believed that not one copy of its final report has survived within the country” (“The Indira enigma”, Frontline, May 11, 2001).

In 2010, Sezhiyan discovered copies of the report in his own home library and decided to publish it. The historical document was published as Shah Commission Report: Lost, and Regained (by Aazhi Publishers, to which this writer belongs). When it hit the bookstores in the winter of that year, political and legal circles in the country also rediscovered Sezhiyan. It was, undeniably, a high point in his life and one of his finest contributions to the Indian political discourse.

Sezhiyan published another gem, Parliament for the People, a compilation of his speeches in Parliament in 2011. In Tamil, he had already published a collection of his columns and articles, Samudhaaya Needhiyil Arasiyal Adippadai, and a wonderful biographical sketch of M.K. Thiyagaraja Bhagavatir, the first “superstar” of Tamil cinema. Sezhiyan’s Tamil was rich but fact-based, very different from the colourful style used by the communicators of the Dravidian movements. It was not surprising because he and his brother Nedunchezhiyan had published Mandram, a popular Tamil literary and political magazine, in the early years of their political careers. He was also a regular contributor of well-researched scholarly articles to Frontline.

Sezhiyan, in a way, was a gift of Tamil Nadu to India. Along with himself, he took to New Delhi the political ideas of state autonomy, social justice and welfare economics—major ideas that defined the affirmative and constructive political possibilities in Tamil Nadu in the last 50 years of Dravidian regimes. When most MPs of national parties from Tamil Nadu became subservient to Delhi, Sezhiyan was always the representative of Chennai in New Delhi, even during his Janata Party days. During the last phase of the war in Sri Lanka in 2009, Sezhiyan circulated a booklet containing images and facts about the war crimes committed by the Sri Lankan armed forces among the MPs of both houses of Parliament and urged them to raise their voices against the pro-Sri Lankan stance of the Manmohan Singh government.

He also attracted criticism now and then. Dravidian and Left intellectuals did not take kindly to his relatively close links with right-wing elements who were inherently opposed to the Dravidian ideology. He was often questioned over his rather naive bias towards the AIADMK, particularly at a time when Jayalalithaa’s brutal and corrupt ways of governance shocked the people of the State. These traits were considered inexplicable in a person like Sezhiyan, especially given the ideas he stood for.

Despite such inconsistencies, Sezhiyan still stands tall among the leaders of Tamil Nadu who contributed to its modern history. He was unflinching in his commitment to the principles of constitutional democracy, federalism, State autonomy, responsive and responsible governance and social justice-oriented model of development. And his contributions did not stop with mere words but extended to action. A complete life by any measure.

Aazhi Senthilnathan is one of the publishers of Era. Sezhiyan and federal coordinator of Campaign for Language Equality and Rights (CLEAR), a language rights movement in India. Email: zsenthil@gmail.com
IN 2015, a picture showing 11 Kashmiri youths posing with AK-47 rifles went viral on social media. Standing in the centre of the group was their inspiration, Burhan Wani, who changed the complexion of the militancy in Kashmir and reignited the anti-India movement even at the people’s level. When he was killed in 2016, Kashmir erupted in an unprecedented unrest that locked down normal life in the Valley for about six months. Nearly 100 people, mostly young, were killed, thousands were injured and scores were blinded with pellets. It was a new Kashmir: this time people did not hide their emotions and rallied behind the militants.

On the face of it, Burhan Wani’s death did not faze the Hizbul Mujahideen, the indigenous militant organisation that had made a comeback after over a decade. The group that rallied around Burhan Wani had been hit by loss of cadre and affected by the preference Pakistan gave to organisations dominated by foreigners. Getting the local people to join the ranks of the organisation apparently led to “popular” support for militancy in general. Security managers in the Valley were taken aback in October 2015 when over 30,000 people turned up for the funeral of Abu Qasim, a Pakistani who led the Lashkar-e-Taiba in Kashmir.

Of the 11 young faces in that photograph who gave impetus to militancy in south Kashmir and attracted more youths into their organisation, nine have been killed. Sabzar Ahmad Bhat, who was a close confidant of Burhan Wani, was the ninth in the group to be killed. His journey was also one that owed much to atrocities committed by the security forces. He was motivated to join the Hizbul Mujahideen after Burhan Wani’s brother Khalid Wani was killed by the Army in the forests of Tral in 2015. Khalid Wani was not a militant but had, presumably, gone to see his brother. Though Sabzar Ahmad Bhat was picked to succeed Burhan Wani, he refused, paving the way for Zakir Musa to become the head of the organisation. Musa recently stirred a controversy when he announced that his organisation would hang Hurriyat leaders for talking about a solution to the Kashmir problem that was not based on religion. As the outrage against his statement from the average Kashmiri became palpable, he modified his words, sparing Syed Ali Geelani.

Another member of the group, Tariq Pandit, has surrendered, and
only Saddam Paddar is still free. Like most new recruits, the 32-year-old had never crossed over to Pakistan for arms training, and had been charged with stone-pelting before he joined the organisation. He hails from the highly volatile Shopian district and is now seen as a possible candidate to head the Hizbul Mujahideen in the Valley since Zakir Musa’s “fate” is not known given that the organisation, which operates under supreme commander Salahuddin in Pakistan, has also distanced itself from his views.

Notwithstanding the fact that the Hizbul Mujahideen suffered two successive major losses in 2016 and 2017, it still has the highest number of militants in its ranks. In south Kashmir alone, according to official sources, there are 112 militants, 99 of them locals.

The biggest cover the militants have is the people, who give them shelter and food and even help them escape from the security forces. Over a decade ago, local support to militants was waned and that was why their numbers had dramatically gone down. Today, the people of the Valley support the militants openly and it is obvious when people throw stones at the security forces during operations and come out in large numbers for their funerals. The practice of holding a shutdown when militants are killed is also back, and the Joint Hurriyat is finding it difficult to avoid it lest its leaders invite the wrath of the people.

Going by official figures, 282 militants are active in Kashmir today. Compare this with how deep-rooted militancy was in the mid 1990s, and one wonders what makes today’s armed resistance so powerful that it gets the full attention of New Delhi’s security establishment. A hysteria has been built up around the new-age militancy by both the security establishment and the national media (mostly TV channels), and their provocative approach is pushing more people into the ranks of militancy. Take, for example, Chief of the Army Staff General Bipin Rawat’s defence of the use of a Kashmiri man as a human shield and his description of the situation in Kashmir as a “dirty war” that needs an innovative approach. This raises questions about the state’s ability to deal with a situation when similar situations were handled without such fanfare in the mid 1990s. No doubt, the dynamic of public support has changed, but it is a “war” that is being waged in Kashmir. Defence Minister Arun Jaitley recently said that there was a “war-like” situation in Kashmir and General Rawat talked about treating stone-pelters on a par with militants.

**DIFFERENT SCENARIOS**

Even as it appears that Kashmir is lost to militancy and the hard-line approach is to “crush” it, the scene is very different from what it was in 1996. Looking at what the Government of India told Mehbooba Mufti in reply to her question in Parliament in 2014, a comparison with the situation in 1996 seems out of place and also ridiculous. On August 8, 2014, she asked “whether the number of militants operating in the State of Jammu & Kashmir has decreased since 1995 and whether the government has any proposal for the withdrawal of security forces for the civilian areas of the State”. In response, the Home Ministry said that the number of militants operating in the State of Jammu and Kashmir had decreased since 1995 and whether the government has any proposal for the withdrawal of security forces for the civilian areas of the State. In response, the Home Ministry said that the number of militants operating in the State of Jammu and Kashmir had considerably decreased since 1995. “There were 6,800 (approx) militants of different tanzeems active during the year 1996 in the State which has, however, reduced to 240 and 199 in the years 2013 and 2014 (January), respectively.” However, a former commander of a militant group says that the number of militants operating in 1995-96 might have been around 8,000 to 10,000.

According to official data, in 1995, around 4,390 militants were arrested and 1,332 were killed. In 1996, about 3,453 militants were arrested and 1,332 were killed. The highest number of militants killed was in 2001; a total of 2,421 were killed and with it militancy started declining. As 9/11 changed the world view about the Kashmir insurgency and Pakistan began to be engaged on the Afghanistan front, the number of infiltrations decreased so much so that the Army described 2015 a zero-infiltration year.

Apart from the support they seem to be getting from the general public, today’s militants seem more committed than those who became militants in 1990, when all roads led to Rawalpindi. In most cases, a militant today has actually graduated from being a stone-pelter first. To begin with, the space for stone-pelters opened up because of the vacuum created by the absence of political engagement to address the larger issue. And the way the police have gone after them has consequently herded them into the ranks of militants.

With a bigger symbolic loss, the Hizbul Mujahideen may find it difficult to move on, though it has the numbers. But as long as people rally behind it, it will continue to make the state uncomfortable; two attempts by the Army to corner its members in Shopian backfired since the Army feared collateral damage. South Kashmir becoming the capital of militancy is the result of many complex realities, and pushing people to the wall on the political front is one of them.

But south Kashmir is also in the news because the militants themselves choose to be seen in public through social media. Burhan Wani became a poster boy for the militants as he repeatedly used social media though, as a senior police officer wrote soon after his killing, “he had not fired a single shot”. Compared with the south, the situation is grimmer in the north, where there are, according to the police, 141 active militants, of whom 118 are foreigners and 23 locals. They, however, stay away from social media and do not hype up their presence. That is the stark difference between militancy in the north and in the south.

Whether the government can afford to use the stick alone to end the current phase is difficult to say, but more than any action of the government it is the “war” as it is portrayed by TV channels that is causing more damage on the ground.
ON June 9, in a show of solidarity, mediapersons converged in the capital to speak out against what they felt was an attack on the freedom of the press. The immediate context for the meeting was the raids by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on the properties and homes of the owners of NDTV and the registration of a first information report (FIR) on June 2 based on a complaint (dated April 28) by a former employee of the media organisation. The FIR alleged criminal conspiracy, cheating and misconduct by NDTV's founder-owners and some unknown officials of ICICI Bank. The allegations pertained to transactions that had taken place in 2008-09 and non-repayment of a loan from a private bank. The CBI later clarified that the case related not to non-repayment or default of a loan but to the “wrongful gain of Rs.48 crore” to the promoters, Prannoy Roy, Radhika Roy, and RRPR Holdings Pvt. Ltd, and a corresponding loss to ICICI Bank “arising from their collusion and criminal conspiracy”. It urged the media to telecast and publish the full text of the clarification which it released on June 6. It seemed that the government was keen to correct the perception that it had not engaged in any wrongdoing and had been impartial in its inquiry.

Gagging the media

The CBI raids on the promoters of NDTV are yet another indication that the government of the day is intolerant of media dissent and is quite amenable to using the law selectively to silence it.

BY T.K. RAJALAKSHMI
Senior journalists and former editors, including some present and past Members of Parliament, spoke out against the raids and condemned the CBI for the attacks on the freedom of the press. Journalists such as H.K. Dua, Arun Shourie, S. Nihal Singh, Kuldip Nayar and T.N. Ninan spoke on the dangers of a compliant media and a totalitarian government. It was a bygone era redux for some of them who had fought through the draconian clampdowns in the years of the Emergency and also resisted the Defamation Bill introduced by the Rajiv Gandhi regime. They also underscored the need to defend the idea of a democratic and secular India.

The Central government did not agree that the raids were an attack on freedom of speech or an attack on the freedom of the press. The CBI defended its action in a detailed statement issued to the media, stating that it was not an attack on the freedom of the press as the raids were not conducted in any registered office of the media house, its studio, newsroom or premises connected with media operations but in the offices and premises of the promoters. The distinction, if any, was nebulous. And in a further clarification, the investigating agency said that it “fully respected the freedom of the press” and was “committed to the free functioning of news operations”.

Somewhat defensively, the country’s premier investigating agency explained in its statement that it was not a case of non-repayment of a loan but one where the bank concerned took as collateral the entire shareholding of the promoters in NDTV and accepted prepayment of the loan at a reduced interest rate, from 19 per cent a year to 9 per cent, thereby causing a loss of Rs. 48 crore to the bank and a wrongful gain to the promoters. The CBI statement spoke of “unknown officials” of the bank who had sought through the draconian clamdowns on the press during the years of the Emergency and also resisted the Defamation Bill introduced by the Rajiv Gandhi regime. They also underscored the need to defend the idea of a democratic and secular India.

He said that in furtherance of press freedom under Article 19 (1) (a), the CBI should have, as a matter of constitutional requirement, first inquired from the owners or promoters what they had to say in the matter before conducting a raid. He also referred to the famous quote of the Lutheran pastor Martin Niemoller, underscoring the prime sentiment of the quote which was the need to “speak up”.

Union Information and Broadcasting Minister M. Venkaiah Naidu, who is also in charge of the Urban Development Ministry, denied that the raids symbolised an attack on the freedom of the media. Akin to the argument given by the CBI, especially the part relating to the “freedom of the press”, he told news agencies that there were no raids on the offices of the channel as the CBI had not entered the premises of its newsroom or TV studio, the searches were carried out through a court warrant, the law was taking its own course, there was no witch-hunt, and the Roys should comply with the due process of law.

The difference, if any, seemed to be one of delicate semantics. It is difficult to understand how the newsroom could be dissociated with the principal promoters and founders of the channel. It is inconceivable that a raid on the private home of the owner-promoter can be dissociated from and unaffected by what goes on in the newsroom owned by the owner-promoter.

It is another matter that according to the World Press Freedom Index 2017, compiled by the Reporters Sans Frontieres and which was released recently, India slipped by two points to be ranked 136 among 180 countries.

In its first statement on June 5, the channel said: “This morning, the CBI stepped up the concerted harassment of NDTV and its promoters based on the same old endless false accusations. NDTV and its promoters will fight tirelessly against this witch-hunt by multiple agencies. We will not succumb to these attempts to blatantly undermine democracy and free speech in India. We have one message to those who are trying to destroy the institutions of India and everything it stands for: we will fight for our country and overcome these forces.”

NDTV claimed that the loan had been repaid and furnished proof of its claim on its website. It also claimed that it was a victim of a witch-hunt. In an updated statement, it said that the raids were a “political attack on the freedom of the media”, indicating that these were no ordinary raids and that there was a clear political intent behind it. Expressing surprise that the CBI had registered an FIR without even conducting a preliminary inquiry, it said: “NDTV and its promoters have never defaulted on any loan to ICICI or any other bank. We adhere to the
highest levels of integrity and independence. It is clearly the independence and fearlessness of NDTV’s team that the ruling party’s politicians cannot stomach and the CBI raid is merely another attempt at silencing the media. No matter how much the politicians attack us—We will not give up the fight for freedom and the independence of media in India."

The complainant, according to the NDTV statement, was a disgruntled former consultant and the FIR was based on a “shoddy complaint”. It also said that the complainant himself had not acquired a single order from any court. According to the CBI, the complainant was a former NDTV consultant and director of Quantum Services Private Limited who had filed complaints with the Enforcement Directorate and the Directorate General of Income Tax alleging that there was transfer of ownership and collusion of income tax officials and that the bank itself was involved in a conspiracy to conceal the true acquirer of NDTV.

At the meeting organised by journalist organisations, Prannoy Roy said that the charges were flimsy and concocted. “They are telling us: we will fix you even if you are innocent,” he said. He added that the principal complainant was a tool being exploited (by the government) and that the complainant’s mother herself was not supportive of his actions as in her opinion the Roys were “good people”.

Prannoy Roy said that his criticism was not against the CBI but against the “politicians who wanted to manipulate, eviscerate and disembowel our institutions”. He also said he was open to any inquiry but it should be time-bound and transparent. He claimed that he and his wife had not “bribed one person, nor touched one cent of black money” all their lives. All their houses, he said, were bought with “white” money.

He denied the charges of money laundering involving GE and NBC made by the Income Tax Department in Delhi. The department alleged that NBC’s investment of $150 million in an entertainment wing of NDTV in 2008 was a sham transaction and that NDTV had sent the money through hawala and that the money was round-tripped to NDTV. The government lawyers had sought 21 adjournments at the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal, with the result that the basic case was not being heard. In a shocking disclosure, he also said that NDTV had been accused of running a prostitution racket.

In December 2016, responding to a complaint on a private website where it was alleged that NDTV’s promoters had allegedly floated shell companies to evade tax, the media house responded thus: “Not one rupee has ever been siphoned from NDTV by anyone or its promoters, as you allege. Rigorous and regular audits conducted by top global firms establish this, the most recent of which were carried out every year and are published and circulated widely. In addition, NDTV has conducted forensic audits of the highest standards. These audits are part of our commitment to exemplary corporate governance, but of course their findings contradict your wild and groundless accusations. Too bad.” The charges of tax evasion were raised by a journalist who was also a co-convener of the Swadeshi Jagran Manch.

The latest raids by the CBI have raised several questions other than the timing of the action. The alleged transactions took place some eight years ago, but the bank has not filed a single complaint. The propriety of the CBI in entertaining a complaint by a third party is difficult to digest. On June 1, a day before the CBI registered its FIR, an anchor of the television channel and the channel were accused by a BJP spokesperson of having an “agenda” while conducting a discussion on the Centre’s notification banning the sale of cattle for slaughter at village markets. The anchor asked the BJP spokesperson to leave the show.

In November 2016, NDTV India, the channel’s Hindi counterpart, was forced to undertake a 24-hour blackout by the Information and Broadcasting Ministry following allegations of having disclosed sensitive information during the anti-terrorist operations at Pathankot. Not many in the media believed that this was the case, although the channel had to abide by the recommendation of an inter-ministerial committee. This was the first instance of invoking the amended programme code of the Cable Television Network Rules that prohibited live coverage of anti-terrorist operations. The new clause, Rule 6(1)(p), which came into effect in March 2015, says: “No programme should be carried... (which) contains live coverage of any anti-terrorist operation by security forces wherein media coverage shall be restricted to periodic briefing by an officer designated by the appropriate government, till such operation concludes.”

The issue undoubtedly goes beyond NDTV or any media house. The June 9 meeting was not just about any single media house; it was also not about the law being allowed to take its own course, a fact that everyone agreed was indisputable and self-evident. It was the expression of an angst that was all-pervasive for many reasons.

The issue at hand is also the growing perception that the government of the day seems to be intolerant of media dissent and is quite amenable to using the law selectively to silence it.
Bars are back

THE wheel has turned full circle again in Kerala with the State government’s decision to roll back the liquor policy of the previous United Democratic Front (UDF) administration, which aimed at introducing total prohibition in the State in stages within a decade from 2014.

As part of the policy, the UDF had closed down 712 foreign liquor bars run by private hoteliers in August 2014, in addition to 10 per cent (or 78) of the total retail outlets of the State Beverages Corporation, or Bevco, which runs all liquor retail shops in Kerala and controls wholesale liquor sale to bars. It allowed bars to continue to function only in five-star hotels (about 20). Each year thereafter, it had said, 10 per cent more of the Bevco outlets would be shut down.

The Left Democratic Front (LDF) government, which just completed a year in office, has termed it an impractical policy and decided to allow all hotels in and above the “three star” category to run bars. This should mean the reopening of the 712 bars that had been shut down in what was seen as an impulsive act by the then Chief Minister, Oommen Chandy, amidst intense political rivalry within the Congress party and its ruling coalition (“Old wine, new bottle”, Frontline, September 3, 2014)

The LDF says it believes that the only way to help people kick the habit is through awareness campaigns that can help them get rid of their craving gradually, and not through prohibition. Therefore, it believes “in making liquor available till then under stringent norms”.

Other highlights of the new policy are as follows:
(a) licences, including those for beer/wine parlours, given under the foreign liquor rules, will continue to be granted to all legally eligible applicants; (b) restaurants that have the necessary licence will be allowed to serve IMFL or beer/wine in their banquet halls if they remit a prescribed fee; (c) all liquor (including beer and wine) outlets located within 500 metres of State and national highways (which were shut down following the recent Supreme Court order) would be allowed to relocate to a suitable place within the same taluk on condition that the workers who lost jobs when the outlets had to close down are re-employed; (d) international and domestic airport lounges would also be allowed to serve foreign liquor.

The government has also decided to raise the minimum age limit for consuming liquor from 21 to 23 and retain the three-litre limit for the maximum quantity of foreign liquor a person can purchase from retail outlets. The working hours of bars have been cut by half an hour a day to 12 hours (from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m). In the outlets catering to the tourism sector, the timings would be from 10 a.m. to 11 p.m.

The licence fee for bars has been increased to Rs.28,000 from Rs.23,000 and for retail liquor outlets run by Bevco and Consumerfed to Rs.4 lakh from Rs.3 lakh. There is no change in licence fee for most other outlets, including clubs, beer/wine parlours, beer retail outlets, pubs, military clubs and canteens.

The new policy document approved by the State Cabinet on June 8 said that reducing the availability of liquor without bringing down the craving for it among people had led to the spread of illicit liquor and narcotic and psychotropic drugs, as was evident from the “phenomenal increase in Excise cases” in the State following the closure of bars in 2014.

While 12,904 Abkari cases and 847 NDPS (Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances) cases were registered during 2013-2014, the numbers rose to 25,332 and 3,835 respectively in 2016-17. “This shows that as long as the craving for liquor exists in society, total prohibition would remain an impractical task,” it said.

It also claimed that the closure of 712 bars and 78 retail outlets by the UDF government had not helped much in bringing down liquor consumption, with merely a 7 per cent
drop in IMFL sales alone being registered in “2015-16 as compared to the figure in 2010-11”. During the same period, there was an 80 per cent rise in the sale of beer. So, it said, “if combined consumption of IMFL and beer is considered, there has only been a net increase in liquor consumption”.

The policy document said the UDF’s Abkari policy had created a serious crisis in the tourism industry, a major revenue earner for Kerala, with tourist arrivals falling from 8.1 per cent to 7.06 per cent after it became operational. In the same period, tourist arrivals in India as a whole had risen from 5.9 per cent to 10.2 per cent. MICE [Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Conventions, Exhibitions and Events] Tourism, which registered a growth rate of 9.1 per cent in 2013, fell to 4.8 per cent in 2014 and was a mere 0.6 per cent in 2015.

As the Frontline Cover Story in the April 15, 2015, issue explained, the UDF’s unlikely war on alcohol was more a result of political circumstances than one of sound deliberation. However, those who question the new LDF policy’s rationale, including leaders of the UDF and the influential Kerala Catholic Bishops’ Council, say that contrary to the ruling Front’s claims, the impact of the curbs imposed by the earlier government had actually proved beneficial for the State.

For example, they say, though the number of Excise cases registered went up in the past two years, the quantity of illicit liquor and narcotic substances seized in Excise raids actually went down. Similarly, though the consumption of beer and wine did increase in the State, the total volume of liquor sales went down by 7.47 per cent, unlike claims to the contrary made by the government.

Moreover, the number of tourists coming to Kerala and the total revenue from the tourism industry actually went up as per the figures of the Tourism Department itself, unlike what is claimed by the LDF in the policy document, they said.

In sum, the LDF has removed all curbs on the legal sale of liquor in Kerala, including the ban on issuing fresh bar licences imposed in 2011 and the requirement that new liquor outlets could only be launched with the permission of the local body concerned.

It is well known that liquor is a commodity that is taxed heavily and it is the State government that gains the most from the legal sale of liquor. According to an estimate, before 2014, 23 per cent of the State’s revenue came from the sale of liquor. For example, the revenue from alcohol stood at Rs.10,615 crore in 2014-15, up from Rs.40.74 crore in 1987-88. Unrecorded sale and consumption is believed to be double the recorded figure.

It is yet to be known how much revenue the new policy would bring additionally to the State. The cash-strapped State stands to gain much from the LDF policy.

But the real impact of the new policy will be understood only when benefits in terms of revenue, its effects on the tourism industry and the creation and sustenance of jobs are balanced against the ill effects that the free availability of liquor will have on a society where alcohol consumption is one of the highest in India.

R. Krishnakumar

V.M. SUDHEERAN, former State Congress president, addressing members of the anti-liquor people’s front before they took out a march to the Assembly against the LDF government’s liquor policy, in Thiruvananthapuram on June 8.
End of student unions

THE Trinamool Congress government has brought out an order that will not only curb the powers of student union bodies in colleges and universities but also make them apolitical and with no financial powers. The move is also aimed at checking campus violence. The order has come as a huge shock to academic circles because it can break the backbone of the students’ movement in the State’s politics.

The West Bengal Universities and Colleges (Composition, Functions and Procedure for Elections to Students’ Council) Rules, 2017, issued by the Department of Higher Education, lays down a uniform system for elections to student bodies and for their composition and functioning. The rules say that “the Students’ Council of colleges and universities shall not use any banner or emblem of any political party in any manner during election or campaigning” and that “every student contesting in the election... shall be identified by his own name, class or section and roll number and nothing else”. The term student union has been replaced by student council.

Election to these councils will be held every two years instead of every year. The notification brings about huge changes in the composition of student bodies. In the case of colleges, the president and vice president of the council will be nominated by the principal/vice principal/teacher in charge of the college from amongst other teachers. The general secretary, two assistant general secretaries and a maximum of five assistant secretaries will be elected by the class representatives who will be elected directly by the students of all classes.

For universities, the president and two vice presidents will be nominated by the Vice Chancellor from amongst the teachers of the university. The general secretary, assistant general secretaries and not more than 10 assistant secretaries will be elected by the class representatives. The notification makes it clear that the elected student representatives will have no say in financial matters, as the treasurer both at the college and university levels will be a teacher or an official nominated by the principal or the Vice Chancellor respectively.

The new rules are based on the system St. Xavier’s College, Kolkata, follows. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had on one occasion said: “I think holding elections every year [in colleges and universities] is a waste of energy. I will ask the Education Minister to find out whether the St. Xavier’s model can be adopted.”

The new rules did not go down well with a large section of the student community. Madhuja Sen Roy, president of the West Bengal unit of the Students’ Federation of India (SFI), the students’ wing of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), believes that in the present socio-economic scenario nothing can be apolitical and that this is nothing but another way to silence the opposition’s voice within a college campus. “It is no secret that over the last few years the Trinamool Chhatra Parishad [or TMCP, the Trinamool’s student wing] has been causing mayhem over collection of funds in colleges, particularly during admission time. This they could do only by forcefully capturing the unions. Instead of taking action against those students, the whole student community is being denied the right to control union funds. This is an insult to the student community. The students’ union is the platform for students to express their views and opinions. The union’s main work is to place the demands of the students to the authorities. Under these new rules, that space for

MEMBERS OF THE SFI and other student unions during a protest in front of Calcutta University, a file picture.
the students will not be there,” Madhuja told Frontline.

It is an undeniable fact that barring a few colleges and universities, the TMCP has complete control in most institutions in the State. Time and again, there have been allegations of rigged elections on campuses, and in many instances, opposition student unions have not even been allowed to contest. Violence on the campus has been on the rise steadily, and in places where the opposition is absent, vicious infighting within the TMCP has been a constant source of embarrassment for the ruling party. In fact, many political observers feel that the notification is also aimed at keeping in check the factional feuds within the ruling party.

Many feel that the State government’s move to remove politics from colleges to address the issue of violence during college elections is just a way for it to obtain total hegemony over student politics. “While it is good that a much-needed uniformity is being brought about in the composition, function and elections of student councils, this notification is not enough to address the issue of political violence within the campus. That channel still remains open for criminalisation of politics within the campus as mainstream political parties can still indirectly pull strings from behind,” Debasish Sarkar, Principal of Chandannagar College and a national executive committee member of the All India Federation of University and College Teachers Organisation, told Frontline.

In the culture of West Bengal’s politics, student movements have been crucial in creating and grooming the political leaders of the future. Some of the important political figures in the State, including Mamata Banerjee and former Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, made their bones initially in student politics. Many feel that denying those who are of voting age the right to exercise their political freedom does not bode well for society. “We are the young generation. If at this impressionable age we remain disassociated with politics and our political thoughts and ideas are not allowed to find expression, then how do we speak for ourselves later in life?” said Gitashree Sarkar, an SFI leader at Jadavpur University.

“This is a social engineering measure, which along with the new West Bengal Higher Education Act, 2017, seeks to destroy higher education in the State and strip teachers and students of their dignity and the right to dissent. The latent agenda is to dismantle and privatise the education sector,” said Suchetana Chattopadhyay, an assistant professor at Jadavpur University.

Suhrid Sankar Chattopadhyay

MAHARASHTRA CHIEF MINISTER Devendra Fadnavis presenting the award.

R.K. RADAHKRISHNAN, Associate Editor, Frontline, is the recipient of the Mumbai Press Club’s RedInk media award 2017 in the politics (print) category. The award-winning article was a two-part series on how major political parties systematically bribed voters in Tamil Nadu ahead of the May 2016 Legislative Assembly elections. The series published in the issues dated July 22 and August 19, 2016, was chosen by an eminent panel of judges comprising former Supreme Court judge Hemant Gokhale, Economic & Political Weekly Editor Paranjoy Guha Thakurta and former Additional Solicitor General of India B.A. Desai.

The award carries a memento, a certificate and Rs.75,000. Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis handed over the award at a function at the National Centre of Performing Arts in Mumbai on June 7.

The Mumbai Press Club instituted the prestigious National RedInk Awards for Excellence in Journalism seven years ago to promote best practices among journalists and encourage good-quality writing, fair play and high ethical standards.

The menace of cash for votes in an election is nothing new in India. But there have been few focussed studies to establish the extent of bribery during elections. Radhakrishnan began working on the cash-for-votes story in January 2016, almost five months ahead of the elections. The enticements had begun by then and continued through the campaign. After an exhaustive study, he asserted that “228 constituencies in the State witnessed large-scale, organised distribution of cash to voters”. As proof, he gathered all first information reports filed during the election process and relied on interviews with candidates, their agents and even voters.
**BEEF BOGEYMAN**

India’s meat consumption is dominated by poultry and mutton, with beef a distant third. However, beef exports continue to grow, raising questions about the Centre’s true intent in restricting cattle slaughter.

**By RAMESH CHAKRAPANI**

India’s meat consumption is dominated by poultry and mutton by a wide margin, with beef coming a distant third, according to data from the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation for 2015-16. At the same time, the country was the world’s top beef exporter (technically caraboeef, or meat of the water buffalo) in the first 11 months of 2016, shipping 1.22 million tonnes, according to Beef Magazine, a United States-based industry publication. In this context, the Centre’s move to restrict the sale of cattle for slaughter at village markets while leaving exports untouched raises questions about the true intent behind the new rules.

The value added by meat to the livestock sector in 2015-16 was Rs.1,50,598 crore, with poultry accounting for 46.4 per cent (Rs.69,888 crore), followed by mutton at 34.8 per cent (Rs.52,345 crore) and then beef at 15.4 per cent (Rs.23,232 crore). Pork had the lowest share of the major meat categories of 3.4 per cent.

**Livestock sector’s output and value added Rs. crore at current prices**

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<tr>
<td>Value of output</td>
<td>4,87,751</td>
<td>5,61,109</td>
<td>6,44,256</td>
<td>7,41,774</td>
<td>8,12,352</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gross value</td>
<td>3,27,301</td>
<td>3,75,254</td>
<td>4,31,348</td>
<td>5,08,779</td>
<td>5,64,712</td>
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<tr>
<td>Net value</td>
<td>3,22,150</td>
<td>3,69,220</td>
<td>4,24,423</td>
<td>5,01,070</td>
<td>5,56,636</td>
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**Source:** Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation

**Livestock matters**

India was the top beef exporter in 2016, with Jan-Nov shipments up 4% at 1.22 million tonnes.

Vietnam accounted for 46% of India’s total volume, up from 40% in 2015.

Livestock contributed 24.6% of gross output value of agriculture, fishing & forestry in 2014-15.

India is home to 58% of the world’s buffalo population.

Buffalo meat (caraboeef) industry provides raw material for leather, pharma, poultry feed, special lubricants, etc.

Indian caraboeef is 93% chemically lean, blends well with other ingredients for value added products

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**Livestock sector’s output and value added Rs. crore at current prices**

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<tr>
<td>Milk group</td>
<td>3,27,767</td>
<td>3,72,172</td>
<td>4,23,146</td>
<td>4,95,850</td>
<td>5,50,171</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meat group</td>
<td>96,219</td>
<td>1,14,817</td>
<td>1,36,311</td>
<td>1,54,173</td>
<td>1,63,175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eggs</td>
<td>16,633</td>
<td>19,658</td>
<td>22,705</td>
<td>24,404</td>
<td>26,430</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation

**Value added by meat to livestock sector in 2015-16 Rs. crore**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Meat type</th>
<th>Value added</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poultry</td>
<td>Rs. 69,888</td>
<td>46.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutton</td>
<td>Rs. 52,345</td>
<td>34.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beef</td>
<td>Rs. 23,232</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pork</td>
<td>Rs. 5,133</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Rs. 1,50,598</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
cent (Rs.5,133 crore).

The biggest contributor to the livestock sector was the milk group, accounting for a lion’s share of Rs.5,50,171 crore, while the meat group was a distant second at Rs.1,63,195 crore.

According to a June 2016 report by the United States Department of Agriculture, the emergence of private, export-oriented processors in India to meet the requirements of developing markets played a key role in helping the country emerge as a significant player in the global beef trade. The report also projects that India’s exports will continue to post strong growth in the coming years. The Centre’s latest rules will only serve to strengthen the hands of exporters while upsetting the balance in rural economies already reeling under agricultural duress.
In a policy trap

While farm loan waivers are a must to address the symptoms of a crisis, they will not solve the long-standing agrarian crisis, which reflects the deeper crisis of neoliberal economic policy itself. By C.P. Chandrasekhar

They are by no means new to India. But the spate of farm loan waiver announcements, either voluntary or made under pressure, from Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led State governments suggests that the ruling party has been forced to recognise the agrarian crisis. Farmers are burdened with excess debt and, given the returns from farming, there seems to be little hope that most of them will be able to extricate themselves from that web of debt. If the problem had afflicted one or a few farmers, it would have been ignored. But the crisis in focus afflicts the majority.

So starting with the waiver of loans of up to Rs.1 lakh
outstanding with small and marginal farmers in Uttar Pradesh, in keeping with an election promise, the “waiver wave” has spread to Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, where the governments have been forced by farmers’ agitations to accede to generous packages. In both States, the governments concerned held out against the demands saying they were not financially feasible and offered some minor concessions instead. But farmers were unwilling to accept these even when their “leaders” were willing to settle. The argument seemed to be that if the Uttar Pradesh government can set aside Rs.36,000 crore to settle loans, other governments can do that much or more.

CONTAGION EFFECT

Soon, embarrassed by the strength of the movements launched by the farmers and their resilience, the Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh governments had to cave in. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan of Madhya Pradesh had to end the drama of an indefinite fast aimed at restoring peace and buy peace with a loan waiver announcement that was similar in scale to what Uttar Pradesh had done. It is inevitable that this wave will now extend to other States, as a contagion effect. The reality of the agrarian crisis and farmer solidarity have put the fear of the voter into the politicians.

Efforts will, of course, be made to dilute or turn back the waiver programme. The way the waiver promises have been worded gives cause for scepticism about the intentions of the governments concerned. The Rs.1 lakh ceiling in Uttar Pradesh will definitely exclude a substantial number of affected farmers and had not been specified as a condition when the waiver slogan was being used to mobilise voter support during the Assembly elections. In Maharashtra, the scheme is being made applicable only to so-called “genuine farmers”, or those whose only source of income is farming. Since the accumulated debt is a symptom of a crisis in farming, to expect farmers to have only farming as their source of income is self-contradictory. So, whether the announcements of waivers, which many farmers and those advocating their cause see as inadequate, will be implemented in full will be known only in time. But as of now, farmers in many regions seem determined not merely to have their debt wiped clean but also to get the government to adopt measures that will prevent a recurrence of the crisis.

The current round of loan waivers must be seen in the context of a long-run reliance on this measure to appease farmers dogged by crises that burden them with unserviceable debt, which often makes them desperate enough to commit suicide. For example, the United Progressive Alliance government waived loans amounting to Rs.60,000 crore in 2009, in the run-up to parliamentary elections. Since then, there have been quite a few State-level initiatives, including a 2014 waiver to the tune of Rs.17,000 crore in Telangana implemented by the Telangana Rashtra Samithi government and a scheme granting a waiver of Rs.5,780 crore (which the Madras High Court hiked by a further Rs.1,980 crore) announced by Jayalalithaa of the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in Tamil Nadu in 2016.

BETWEEN FISCAL REFORM AND POLITICAL EXIGENCY

The response of the commercial, banking and policymaking elites to these waivers has been that it is a form of “populism” not in keeping with the requirements of diligent banking and a prudent fiscal policy stance. Reserve Bank of India Governor Urjit Patel said in April that a loan waiver “undermines an honest credit culture. It impacts credit discipline. It plugs incentives for future borrowers to repay. In other words, waivers engender moral hazard.” Also, he said, each round of waiver adds to the fiscal deficit at the Central or State level, especially the latter. Assuming this process will continue until the 2019 general election, Bank of America Merrill Lynch has estimated that waiver sums will add up to Rs.2,57,000 crore.

FARMERS AND ACTIVISTS

of the Vidarbha Rajya Andolan Samiti celebrating after the Maharashtra government announced a loan waiver for farmers, in Nagpur on June 12.
crore, or 2 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP), by that date. If that is financed with borrowing, the ratios of the fiscal deficit and public debt to GDP will cross levels considered inviolate by the advocates of fiscal reform. This was what Urjit Patel was referring to when he said: “We also need to create a consensus such that loan waiver promises are eschewed. Otherwise, sub-sovereign fiscal challenges in this context could eventually impact the national balance sheet.”

But with electoral victory and political credibility under threat, the BJP, despite its staunch commitment to neoliberal fiscal and banking reforms, has had to relent. The expectation is that State governments will issue special bonds (such as the Kisan Rahat Bonds in Uttar Pradesh) and that the Centre will exempt these from the requirements set by the Fiscal Responsibilities and Budget Management Act even though this would be a violation of the law and the tenets of fiscal “reform”. As a result, an elite that was celebrating the “bold reformism” of the Narendra Modi government is forced to complain, but perhaps not with the vigour it would have displayed if some other government were in power.

S I G N S O F S P R E A D I N G
The problem the government faces is that the protests relating to the agrarian crisis are not confined to opposition leaders, a few journalists and sundry academics. If that had been the case, those arguments would have been ignored. The protesters also did not take the gruesomely passive decision to commit suicide rather than face the ignominy of being proceeded against or prosecuted for debt default. The protests are ones in which farmers in some States have come out to assemble, march, blockade and even go on strike by refusing to commence cultivation. The fact that these protests were showing signs of spreading across the country made matters worse. And they were not being withdrawn either in response to tall promises without concrete offers or in response to the drama of an indefinite fast for peace that was quickly withdrawn after negotiations with BJP-linked or BJP-inspired farmers.

In the event, however reluctantly, the BJP led by Modi and Arun Jaitley has had to go back on its claim to be more ardent adherents of a “modern”, neoliberal economic policy regime. Loans are being waived, moral hazard is being flirted with and the tenets of neoliberal fiscal reform are being grossly violated. The reason for this is the intensity of the problem at hand, which demands immediate resolution given growing farmer anger. The severity of the long-ignored rural debt problem hardly bears emphasising. The large number of farmer suicides and the periodic bouts of farmer protests had made it clear that the problem of low incomes or negative returns and unsustainable debt was widespread. Hence, any small shock was enough to destabilise the farming community. Among other factors, such a shock was delivered by indifferent or bad monsoons in 2013-14 and 2014-2015 and by demonetisation, which affected farmers extremely adversely since it was imposed between two seasons and affected the sale of one crop and the sowing of another. This made an unbearable burden impossible to endure, leading to the protests that are forcing the hands of both the Central and State governments. Hence, the waiver wave.

I N H E R E N T P O L I C Y C O N T R A D I C T I O N S
If there was reason to believe that a waiver was a magic bullet, a one-shot resolution, then opposition from even the elites might have been weak. But as the periodic waiver announcements mentioned above suggest, the problem does not just go away. This is because of the contradictions inherent in a neoliberal policy regime that prevent resolution of the farmer debt problem. The principal constraints set by fiscal conservatism have reduced budgetary allocations to the food economy. As a result, the government has been loath to implement the M.S. Swaminathan Commission recommendation that the minimum support price (MSP) should be “at least 50 per cent more than the weighted average cost of production” so as to improve the profitability of agriculture production. Moreover, procurement even at the MSPs offered has not always matched farmers’ desire to sell to the government. Cuts in subsidies that have limited the spread of the public distribution system and reduced offtake have discouraged procurement for distribution. Investments in drainage and flood control have been squeezed, and the system of extension services has been allowed to decay. All of these have adversely affected productivity and raised costs. And on top of this the neoliberal policies of deregulating input prices, curtailing subsidies and freeing imports and lowering import tariffs have been imposed, subjecting agriculturists to rising costs and competition from low-cost imports. In the event, the viability of crop production has been eroded. Farmers borrow to undertake production but are unable to garner the income needed to be viable. Borrowing increases until default becomes unavoidable. While it becomes necessary to address the debt burden and write off defaulted loans, the problem of excess indebtedness will not go away unless the other problem of the unviability of crop production because of the impact of neoliberal policies is addressed.

The difference between the two resolution requirements is that while a loan waiver scheme can be presented as a one-shot scheme with attendant violations of neoliberal fiscal policy rules, restoring viability requires a retreat from the framework of neoliberal policies in the medium term. So the first is preferred if unavoidable. But since such a resolution does not address the basic causes of the crisis confronting farmers but merely treats an extreme symptom, the problem of unsustainable agrarian debt recurs sooner or later.

Seen in this light, farm loan waivers while a must to address the symptoms of a crisis are no resolution to the agrarian crisis. The crisis reflects the deeper crisis of neoliberal economic policy itself. That, however, is a truth the BJP governments at the Centre and in States are unwilling to face up to.
IT HAS BEEN A LONG SUMMER OF DISCONTENT for farmers. Across the country, they have erupted in anger at the manner in which they have been short-changed. In fact, the seeds of discontentment were sown last winter, on November 8, when the Prime Minister embarked on his demonetisation adventure. The collapse of agricultural commodity prices has been unprecedented in the annals of independent India. Never before have prices of all commodities collapsed simultaneously in such a spectacular fashion. And, while all this has been happening, the emperors in New Delhi watched the tragedy unfold. They have now been woken from their reverie by the victims of this great tragedy across the country. What is truly striking is the fact that the protests have rocked the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-ruled States, which were to be the main deliverers of the “achhe din” promise that Modi invoked on his way to power three years ago.

Though the epicentre of the recent protests were

MEMBERS OF THE Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) protesting against the policies of the Central government and in solidarity with the farmers’ agitation in Madhya Pradesh, in New Delhi on June 15.

Rajasthan (against a power tariff hike), Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, events in recent weeks have shown that they have spread far and wide across the country. The governments of Haryana, Jharkhand and Gujarat are already bracing themselves for protests by farmers as they broaden the range of issues that agitate them. For example, struggles on issues such as land acquisition and infringement of land as well as forest rights, and restrictions on cattle trade are also gathering momentum. Rural discontent is now being channelised into tangible forms of protest as an audacious pan-Indian movement develops.

The Narendra Modi government’s response is on predictable lines. The manner in which protests by
drought-hit farmers from Tamil Nadu were treated in Delhi was a pointer to what farmers could expect from this government. The gunning down of six persons in Mandsaur district (Madhya Pradesh) recently has only strengthened the perception that this regime is anti-farmer.

DEADLY DEMONETISATION
Demonetisation happened just before the rabi sowing season, giving a serious jolt to farmers, for whom cash is the primary mode of transaction. The All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS), which organised a kisan sangharsh jatha at the time, was witness to the misery caused by the move. Peasants were losing incomes on a massive scale because of the price crash and loss of perishable crops, especially fruits and vegetables. Agricultural workers lost employment and wages owing to reduced agricultural activity and non-payment of wages for work done. The collapse in demand resulted in the destruction of vegetables, fruits and perishables. Farmers were unable to buy essential commodities and agricultural inputs. The AIKS had warned then that the rural economy would be thrown into disarray and normal trade relations would be irreparably damaged.

What started with demonetisation did not end even after a semblance of “normalcy” returned. Prices continued to be in free fall, resulting in more misery being piled on the hapless peasantry. Never before have prices of all commodities fallen so drastically and without any signs of recovery in the near future. The Reserve Bank of India acknowledged this in its recent Monetary Policy Statement by conceding that the prices of vegetables fell markedly and bottomed out with “fire sales” during the demonetisation period. The November misadventure of Modi, clearly, provides the backdrop for the present wave of protests, even if it is not the exclusive reason.

It is true that rainfall has been better this year. But rains alone do not make or break agriculture. For instance, more acreage was devoted to pulses, but the import of pulses from Africa (notably Mozambique) killed the farmers’ hope of getting a better price. Meanwhile, the reduction of import duty on wheat, ostensibly to check inflation, has hurt the peasantry. Prices of most agricultural commodities are now at levels far below the government-announced minimum support price (MSP), even as production and input costs have soared.

The very notion of the MSP as a support mechanism has been rendered a farce because it is not backed by physical intervention by the government and its agencies. The MSP remains purely notional because the state has not intervened actively in the mandis, purchasing agricultural commodities at the price it had committed itself to supporting. Betrayal of farmers’ interests may have taken many forms in recent times, but this is the most direct and brutal let-down of the peasantry.

MAKE IN MOZAMBIQUE
Arhar dal farmers in Gulbarga told this writer early this year that there was a ceiling on procurement and only Grade A was provided the MSP of Rs.5,050 a quintal. Farmers are forced to sell other grades to private traders at a price as low as Rs.4,000 a quintal. It is notable that the cost of production calculations for the 2016-17 kharif marketing season by the State Agricultural Departments in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Karnataka are Rs.5,722, Rs.6,841 and Rs.5,100 a quintal respectively. The MSP, calculated on the basis of weighted average cost of production and other factors, falls far below even the cost of production in these States. The MSP suggested by these States were Andhra Pradesh–Rs.8,583; Telangana–Rs.10,261; and Karnataka–Rs.6,500 a quintal. Ironically, a government which talks of “Make in India” is actually furthering “Make in Mozambique”!

Meanwhile, the government is urging Indian companies to shop for land in sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere in order to expand contract farming of pulses. India has entered into a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Mozambique to import one lakh tonnes in 2016-17 and double it to two lakh tonnes by 2020-21; it is obvious that Indian buccaneers stand to take a fairly large slice of this opportunity. The government has decided to import arhar dal from Mozambique, while assuring farmers there provision of quality seeds, equipment and technology and procurement at an MSP level of Rs.5,050 a quintal. The entire cost of carriage, transportation and storage would also be borne by India. Contrast this largesse with the utter neglect of procurement from Indian farmers at a committed price.

The import duty on wheat, which was 25 per cent until September 2016, was initially reduced to 10 per cent and exactly a month after demonetisation, on December 8, totally done away with. The wheat contracted from
while the MSP announced is Rs.1,470 a quintal, the prices even further. The case of paddy is no different; India experiences a good harvest, has brought down policy-induced dumping from other countries, even as far below the Indian MSP of Rs.1,625 a quintal. The Ukraine is currently priced at Rs.1,329-1,431 a quintal, which was way below the MSP of Rs.1,625 a quintal. The absence of procurement centres forces farmers to sell at Rs.800-1,100 a quintal in large parts of north and eastern India. The cost of production of both wheat and paddy is also much higher than the official MSP. In the age of information technology, when news spreads fast and across distances in no time, the fact that Kerala procures paddy at Rs.2,200 a quintal makes farmers elsewhere ask the natural question as to why their States do not come forward to do so too.

**CRASHING PRICES**

The AIKS team that visited Mandsaur recently found a situation of acute distress as prices of most crops had crashed and were about 60 per cent below last year’s prices. Soya bean, which fetched Rs.5,000-6,000 a quintal last year, got only Rs.2,200-2,400 a quintal. Chana dal, which fetched up to Rs.9,000-10,000 a quintal was now going for only Rs.4,000 a quintal. Similarly, the best quality wheat was fetching only Rs.1,200 a quintal, which was way below the MSP of Rs.1,625 a quintal; last year, it ranged between Rs.1,900-2,000 a quintal in the open market. Farmers complained that the government purchased at the MSP only for a little over a month and not throughout the season. Garlic prices fell from Rs.13,000 a quintal to Rs.1,000 a quintal and methi from Rs.9,000-10,000 a quintal to Rs.3,000-2,200 a quintal. Moreover, after demonetisation, traders are paying 2 per cent less for cash transactions. The team found bags of the best quality of garlic with a farmer unsold because it was not fetching even Rs.10 for a kilogram while the cost of cultivation was around Rs.30 a kg.

The AIKS teams found farmers in a pathetic situation in different parts of the country. Flowers like marigold were dumped as they did not fetch even Rs.2 a kg, tomatoes were dumped on the streets and vegetables were left on the field as the prices were not enough even to meet picking costs. A recent media report in a financial daily noted the plight of a farmer in Haryana selling 43 quintals of potatoes at the local wholesale mandi for Rs.900. After paying labour charges and agents’ fees, he was left with just Rs.380—the potatoes had fetched him a paltry 9 paisa a kg while the cost of production was at least Rs.3 a kg. In the wake of such distress, despite many representations, deputations and peaceful protests, the government stubbornly refuses to pay heed.

The BJP government has done little to stabilise prices and assure farmers remunerative prices. Farmers in Mandsaur categorically said that they did not need loan waivers if they were paid remunerative prices for their produce. This sentiment was echoed by farmers across the country. In reality, reducing the cost of production by providing production-enhancing technologies and quality inputs at subsidised rates, and assuring procurement at remunerative price will go a long way in addressing farm distress. Loan waivers are, at best, a palliative that can provide temporary relief to a small section of farmers. Tenant farmers, small and marginal farmers, agricultural workers and the landless rarely benefit from it unless there is a comprehensive Debt Relief Commission which goes into formal and informal sector loans. Unless basic and structural issues are addressed and comprehensive state intervention is made at the levels of production, procurement, processing and marketing, with adequate emphasis on cooperatives, loan waivers will be the easy way out for the political establishment.

**LITANY OF BROKEN PROMISES**

The BJP had come to power riding a wave of popular discontent against the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, promising that it would usher in “achhe din” for farmers and put an end to farm suicides. Increased public investment in agriculture and rural development, a minimum of 50 per cent profit over the cost of production, cheaper agricultural inputs and credit, latest technologies for farming and high-yielding seeds, linking of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) to agriculture, a national land use policy to protect farmers’ interests and food security, farm insurance scheme to take care of crop and income losses, expansion of rural credit facilities, irrigation facilities, a price stabilisation fund, welfare measures and more were promised. What more could a farmer ask for? The fact that the BJP had made tall promises in the States, including loan waivers, had also raised expectations. Three years down the line, each of the promises made to the farmers and the rural poor stands betrayed.

Data from the National Crime Records Bureau on farm suicides showed that a total of 12,602 persons involved in the farming sector had committed suicide in...
2015. Suicides by farmers rose 42 per cent between 2014 and 2015. Despite the obvious under-reporting, these figures show an increasing trend when compared with 2013 and 2014. BJP-ruled Maharashtra saw an unprecedented 4,291 suicides; the BJP-ruled States of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh accounted for 6,535, or more than half of all farm suicides in India. Suicides by farmers in National Democratic Alliance (NDA)-ruled States accounted for 7,723 suicides (61.28 per cent of all farm suicides).

Farmers’ hope for prices recommended by the M.S. Swaminathan Commission, an expectation utilised to the hilt by Modi, was the first promise to be put in cold storage. The government also filed an affidavit in the Supreme Court stating that it was impossible to fix MSPs recommended by the commission, that is, at least 50 per cent above the cost of production. The blatant manner in which the most popular promise was shelved and trivialised as a mere election jingle has not gone down well with the peasantry. It was followed by an undisguised attempt at facilitating a corporate takeover of land through a draconian Land Acquisition Ordinance, which saw the first signs of a united resistance, forcing the Central government to temporarily hold back and change strategy to push it through BJP-ruled States.

Two consecutive years of drought had led to massive losses and the government response was seen as insensitive. Allocations to MGNREGA were also drastically cut, leading to mounting arrears of wages and the average days of work generated getting as low as only 34 days. The government merged different insurance schemes and came out with the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana with a lot of hype. Schemes for irrigation, price stabilisation, welfare measures and other promises also left a lot to be desired.

**SPREADING PROTESTS**

The spate of peasant movements and the broader issue-based unity that is successfully being built towards coordinated action against BJP governments at the Centre and in the States is a pointer to changing times. The protests are providing a basis to build a broader consensus for the fight against policies responsible for the agrarian distress and the loot of forests, land and resources. This, clearly, is a warning bell for the BJP regime and the Prime Minister. The first instance of such a broad issue-based unity was witnessed in the struggle against the Land Acquisition Ordinance when the AIKS played a role in bringing together organisations of the peasantry, agricultural labour, oppressed sections and civil society groups under a banner called Bhoomi Adhikar Andolan. It played a significant role in building a movement against the ordinance and forced the BJP government to retract.

In the days ahead, the peasantry’s struggle is likely to spread; efforts are also on in States such as Jharkhand to unite them with Adivasis against the attempts to tamper with the two tenancy laws that were won after the uprisings of Birsa Munda and Sido Kanhu against the British in the 19th century. Solidarity action against attacks on workers’ rights, women, Dalits and Adivasis and the barbaric attacks by vigilante gau rakshaks and restrictions on cattle trade are also increasing.

Even those who were ideologically and politically with the regime are now raising questions. The BJP has sought to paint these protests as leaderless on the one hand and, on the other, claim that they are stoked by the Congress—both of which are far from the truth. It is but natural for opposition parties to articulate demands of farmers in such circumstances; in fact, that is their duty. But the fact of the matter is that a constituency that stood with the BJP for the past 15 years in Madhya Pradesh, for over two decades in Gujarat and during the last elections in Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Haryana is turning restive. Splitter groups from the Bharatiya Kisan Sangh (BKS) and Swadeshi Jagran Manch, which were the BJP’s core support base, are in revolt. Notably, one of the rallying points of the movement in Madhya Pradesh was the Rashtriya Kisan Mazdoor Sangh and its leader, Shivkumar Sharma “Kakkaji”, the erstwhile president of the BKS, the farmers’ wing of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. He is openly recanting and rueing his association with the Sangh today.

The erstwhile Sangh ideologue K.N. Govindacharya and those associated with the Swadeshi Jagran Manch and the BKS are also turning trenchant critics of the BJP government’s agricultural policies, especially its penchant for free trade agreements. Raju Shetti of the Swabhimi Shetkari Sanghatana, who was elected as a Member of Parliament from Maharashtra with NDA support, is one of the faces of the protests in the State. He went on a yatra to repent for having enlisted farmers’ support to make the BJP victorious.

The AIKS united the peasantry and organised massive mobilisations against the decision of the Vasundhare Raje-led BJP government in Rajasthan to hike electricity prices by 40 per cent. The unprecedented mobilisation forced the government to withdraw the decision. In Maharashtra, preceding the recent wave of protests, the AIKS had organised massive mobilisations that helped in popularising the demands of the present struggle. Notably, the Maharashtra Kisan Sabha State Secretary, Dr Ajit Nawale, was unanimously elected as the convener of the joint struggle committee. There undoubtedly is an organised resistance being built in Madhya Pradesh, which, after Mandsaur, has seen an outpouring of solidarity. On June 16, a day of coordinated protests was observed across the country by different organisations in solidarity with Indian farmers.

Whether these rounds of protests snowball into a wider resistance against the policies that have undermined livelihoods in agriculture remains to be seen. But it is undeniable that the Indian peasant has clearly signalled that he/she has joined the fight against the ruinous policies that have taken farm livelihoods in India to the very brink.

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MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE, IT IS THE TIMING of the current, almost nationwide, farmer agitation that is strikingly unique. It has erupted in a year when the farm sector seems to have achieved all the cherished objectives: an above 5 per cent growth rate and record production not only in foodgrains but also in fruits, vegetables and dairy products. It has come at a juncture when the Union government has claimed successful implementation of various schemes for the agriculture sector. But the fact of the matter is that beyond all these seemingly positive factors, there is grave economic distress in the rural areas in general and in the farming community in particular. It is a crisis that marked the advent of economic policies of liberalisation in the farm sector and has persisted right from the early 1990s. This growing distress amidst bombastic growth figures is something that cannot be wished away just by saying “acche din” are here. At many levels, the two principal demands of the agitating farmers—loan waiver and implementation of the M.S. Swaminathan Commission recommendations, which provide for a 50 per cent profit margin on input cost—not only summarise this grave economic distress in rural areas but also point to the probable solution of the problems.

These problems were well identified by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the principal constituent of the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) at the Centre and the ruling party in the majority of the States. A remunerative price with a 50 per cent profit margin was included in the BJP’s election manifesto in 2014. It said that once in power, the party “will take steps to enhance the profitability in agriculture, by ensuring a minimum of 50 per cent profits over the cost of production, cheaper agriculture inputs and credit; introducing latest technologies for farming and high yielding seeds and linking MGNREGA [Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act] to agriculture”. The loan waiver concept was addressed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself at various meetings during the election campaign in Uttar Pradesh. It was probably felt, at that time, that the economic plight of farmers after two successive droughts necessitated such a measure. Evidently, both the issues that form the root cause of the current farmer agitation were in the radar of the BJP for a considerable period of time.

But then, having matters in the radar is not enough. The schemes that one devises on the basis of one’s understanding need to generate a sense of benefit in the targeted sections of the population. A closer look at the various schemes announced, sought to be implemented, and celebrated as great success by the Modi government as part of its third anniversary celebrations will highlight this mismatch. This close analysis will also show that what the government has been touting as positive and potentially successful initiatives in agriculture relate, in fact, to problems and liabilities for farmers which can be undone and set right only by the farming community itself in the long run. In all probability, the think tanks guiding the Modi government also know this. That seems to be the major reason why the government is not comfortable with a public debate on these issues and the so-called initiatives relating to them. Antics like the beef ban and the blanket ban on sale of cattle for slaughter that have been propped up need to be seen in the context of this discomfort over focused discussion. They are diversionary tactics and fairly successful ones at that.

Now, for a closer look at the schemes, starting with...
crop insurance. At its core, it has nothing to do with increasing farmers’ income but is just a risk coverage for which farmers are paying a premium. It could even be argued that the real beneficiary is the government since the risk of paying compensation in case of crop losses due to drought or flood or other natural calamities has now shifted from the treasury to the insurance companies. The loser is the farmer since he or she has to first cough up a premium in order to be eligible for insurance, whereas earlier he or she was not paying a single penny and the government was doling out compensation from the National Calamity Relief Fund (NCRF). The premium has been cleverly designed in terms of percentage to hoodwink farmers, whereas it should have been fixed on a per-acre basis.

Under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), crop insurance is compulsory for farmers availing themselves of loans in notified areas and voluntary for non-loanee farmers. A farmer has to pay 2 per cent of the premium fixed by the insurance company for all the crops grown during the kharif season and 1.5 per cent for rabi crops. However, for horticultural and commercial crops, it is 5 per cent. The remaining amount of the premium is subsidised by both the Centre and the States under a 50:50 plan. Since these are the initial years of implementation, the government exerts tremendous pressure on the insurance companies to make the scheme look successful, though, on the ground, farmers are seeing through all this. The issue-based and focussed farmers’ agitations in Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh against the compulsory deductions of insurance premium from crop loans and the manner in which the Central government was forced to issue directions to the Uttar Pradesh government to exempt sugarcane crop from the PMFBY scheme are instances of farmers seeing through the glitz.

Moreover, the scheme is hardly a novel idea but a continuation of the “apni mitti pahchano” (identify your soil) concept. The government claims that more than 400 mandis (markets) have been linked to the portal. That is precisely the reason why the prices of the same commodities with the same standards are different in two locations even if the distance between them is just 50 km. According to government data, 45,45,850 farmers, 89,934 traders and 46,411 commission agents are registered on the eNAM platform. Recently, the government mooted an idea of not allowing sale of produce priced below the minimum support price (MSP) in eNAM. However, the idea was dropped in the wake of opposition from within, which cited it as interference in free market economy. What the Centre could not do, the Madhya Pradesh government was able to achieve. It announced trading below MSP a crime, following widespread resentment among farmers owing to low crop prices that led to violent protests, but without any administrative backup.

Another scheme that has found prominence in terms of the Modi government’s agriculture initiatives is the soil health card. This scheme, launched in a hurry without any homework being done, has been trumpeted as something that would change “earth into gold”, but the result does not reinforce the claims. The scheme is akin to employing quacks in every village to attend to the medical and health needs of the people without any arrangement for medicines.

The concept is good, but it is a long-term and permanent project which will only start producing results after 20 years if implemented seriously and effectively. The government did not have the equipment to test soil conditions on such a huge scale. Nor were trained technicians available. Moreover, farmers do not know what to do after getting the soil health card. Where do they buy the “medicines” to treat the soil? Who will spend the money? Is there a guarantee from the government that their produce will increase? Unless and until these basic questions are addressed, the soil health card scheme will be an utter failure. Gujarat had apparently achieved 100 per cent coverage under the scheme when Modi was the Chief Minister, but did it make any positive impact on the farm economy? There is no concrete data to prove this. Moreover, the scheme is hardly a novel idea but a continuation of the “apni mitti pahchano” (identify your soil).
scheme set in motion by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government.

Another much-advertised scheme is the use of neem-coated urea, which is, again, a continuation of a UPA scheme, and it has nothing to do with productivity at the farm level. Instead, it only checks the industrial use and smuggling of urea to neighbouring countries. The government initiated the “Price stabilisation fund” in the 2014-15 Budget to protect farmers from market volatility, but the allocation of just Rs.500 crore showed a lack of seriousness and understanding of the problem.

Interestingly, the contradictions in agriculture policy formulation are stark and visible. On the one hand, the government has been talking about “doubling farm income by 2022” through integrated farming. It has also identified allied activities to be covered under integrated farming, which include poultry, animal husbandry, fisheries and beekeeping, to name a few. India has been the world’s largest exporter of buffalo meat over the past four years, displacing Brazil from the top. But there have been sustained efforts to derail this sector’s growth, using the political ideology of the ruling party. First came the ban on slaughterhouses in Uttar Pradesh, the largest exporter-State, based on the argument that it needed to be verified whether the slaughterhouses were legal or not. Then came the ban on selling cattle at cattle markets for the purpose of slaughter, and cow vigilantes have made inter-State movement of cows and buffalos literally impossible. On the same basis, the government also discontinued the successful “Kamdhenu scheme” of the previous Akhilesh Yadav-led Samajwadi Party government that had made Uttar Pradesh the top milk producer in the country.

**MAKING DAIRY FARMING UNSUSTAINABLE**

These stringent rules will render dairy farming uneconomical and unsustainable. The average age of a buffalo or cow is about 16 years, of which three to four years are pre-reproductive and four to five years are post-reproductive. As per the estimates of the Animal Husbandry Department, the average daily cost of feed for a cow or buffalo is Rs.80. Moreover, half of the population of cattle is male, and it is of no use in mechanised agriculture. How can a farmer survive if he or she is asked to rear unproductive animals and is not allowed to sell them? Selling unproductive cattle for slaughter is an integral part of dairy farming, which makes it commercially viable. The impact is visible now in Haryana and Uttar Pradesh where unproductive animals have become pests destroying crops, and the farmer feels helpless. More importantly, poultry farming and dairy have not been considered agricultural activities and have been brought under the ambit of the Goods and Services Tax.

The export-import policies in agriculture trade, based on knee-jerk reactions, are, again, working against the interest of farmers. The imposition of a minimum export price to protect the interests of consumers, though it was brought in earlier, has resulted in a skewed policy paralysis against farmers’ interests. If Indian agricultural products have a demand outside, any curb at any period will negate the efforts of exporters, who put in a lot of effort to build a market for their products. Thankfully, there has been no export ban on any agricultural commodity during the three years of the NDA government. But, at the same time, there have been no concerted efforts to boost it further and this has resulted in negative growth in export of farm commodities.

The problems in the farm sector are complex, but the solution is simple, and that is bringing about parity of agriculture produce with industrial products and services, the farmer with the economic worker, and farming with other enterprises. The UPA government had formed a panel under the chairmanship of a current member of the NITI Aayog, Prof. Ramesh Chand, who was then Director of the National Institute for Agricultural Economics and Policy, with representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture, the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP), State governments and farmer bodies. It had rightly identified the problem as follows: “Price shocks have become frequent.... The pressure to meet family expenditure, to meet the necessities of modern life, has been forcing farmers to embrace risky ventures by using borrowed funds. Risks unleashed by market forces and price crash in many cases are leading to agrarian distress and sad situations like farmers’ suicides.” The panel had presented recommendations as well, but, like other reports on agriculture, failed to attract the current government’s attention.

The current nationwide farmers’ agitation after a year of record production and 5.2 per cent growth is a wake-up call for politicians and policymakers to initiate a structural reform so as to provide a “minimum income guarantee” to farmers, like the MGNREGA does with labourers. A loan waiver, as many economists and experts argue, can only be a temporary measure but necessary to correct past imbalances. But the future needs remunerative and deficiency pricing. In short, the Modi government needs to move in on the agricultural sector, as in other areas of governance, beyond empty rhetoric towards clear policy formulations and implementation. Cosmetic rechristening and restructuring of programmes of old governments will not help in this suggested policy course correction. The current situation and its political ramifications also ring a warning bell for the BJP as far as the 2019 general elections are concerned. Already, its ally, the Shiv Sena, and the Swabhimani Shetkari Sanghatana, led by Raju Shetti, Member of Parliament, along with large numbers of landowners and farmers, are opposed to the current line followed by the Modi government. It is equally important to recall the finding of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS)-Lok Niti survey that among landowners and farmers in agricultural areas, more than 50 per cent had voted for the NDA in the 2014 Lok Sabha election.

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CLIMATE CHANGE

A lot of hot air

President Trump’s speech announcing the withdrawal of the U.S. from the Paris Agreement on climate change was short on facts, and he took the opportunity to take potshots at India and China. BY R. RAMACHANDRAN

“WE are getting out.” With these words United States President Donald Trump on June 1 ended speculation about how and when the leader of the world’s largest democracy would put his presidential campaign rhetoric of quitting the Paris Agreement on climate change into an executive decision. The announcement was, therefore, not surprising.

That it was coming soon had become apparent when the G7 leaders issued a joint communique at the Taormina Summit in Italy on May 27. Only a few minutes before it was released, Trump had tweeted: “I will make my final decision on the Paris Accord next week!” The communique, in which six other heads of state and the European Union (E.U.) reaffirmed their commitment to climate change action, said: “The USA is in the process of reviewing its policies on climate change and on the Paris Agreement and thus is not in a position to join the consensus on these topics.”

Under U.S. law, the President, acting on bestowed executive authority or by an Act of the Congress, can annul the U.S.’ participation in an international agreement regardless of how it became party to the agreement. This is not the first time that the U.S. is pulling out of an international climate agreement. It withdrew from the Kyoto Protocol on the grounds that emerging economies did not have quantified emission targets. The argument now is that the Paris Agreement is unfair to the U.S. and its people.

“[I]n order to fulfil my solemn duty to protect America and its citizens,” Trump said in his White House statement of June 1, “the United States will withdraw from the Paris Accord... but begin negotiations to re-enter either the Paris Accord or [to build] a really entirely new transaction on terms that are fair to the United States.... And if we can, that’s great. And if we can’t, that’s fine.”

PURE THEATRE

Technically, the U.S. cannot withdraw from the agreement for a period of three years from the date on which it came into force. The agreement, which was negotiated by 195 parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) on December 12, 2015, in Paris, came into force on November 4, 2016, just five days before Trump was declared President-elect. Also, according to Article 28.2 of the agreement, even if the Trump administration were to submit a written notification on withdrawal to the U.N. Secretary-General on the very day of expiry of the three-year period, the notification could take effect only after a year from that date, which means that a U.S. withdrawal can take effect at the earliest on November 4, 2020. But the next round of U.S. presidential elections would...
have got under the day before. So, even if Trump wants to return to the negotiating table, it can only be under the next U.S. government. This grand announcement to the world is, therefore, pure theatre.

**NO TO STARTING ALL OVER**

More significantly, none of the 148 countries (of 195) that have ratified the agreement to date is even remotely interested in renegotiating it. In fact, from the statements of various leaders, including close allies of the U.S., it is clear that no one wants to start all over again. Indeed, there is all-round reaffirmation of strong support for the agreement, which, in any case, is already much diluted from the original foundational principles and intent of the UNFCCC that were articulated when climate negotiations began two and half decades ago in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

But what is of significance from the perspective of keeping global warming below an increase of 2 °C by the year 2100—the main goal of the agreement—is not so much the technicality of the U.S.’ withdrawal but the impact of the U.S. not implementing even the weak commitments (called the Nationally Determined Contributions, or NDCs) it has made under the agreement. Since even without a formal withdrawal, pledges under the Paris Agreement are voluntary and non-binding, this was a matter of concern at the 12-22nd Conference of Parties (COP22) to the UNFCCC in Marrakesh, Morocco, in November 2016. The COP22 began just two days before the impending Trump victory and three days after the agreement came into force. In fact, in January 2014, long before his election campaign started, Trump tweeted: “This very expensive global warming bullshit has got to stop. Our planet is freezing, record low temps, warming bullshit has got to stop. Our leader Fund [GCF] which is costing the U.S. a vast fortune.” But soon after he assumed office, Trump had already set in motion the rollback of several federal policies and regulations put in place by the Barack Obama administration to meet the NDC obligations under the Paris Agreement.

Having bent over backwards to accommodate the U.S. since COP15 in 2009 in Copenhagen, all other Parties to the convention now have egg on their faces with this denouement of the U.S.’ farcical participation in climate negotiations. They yielded to the U.S.’ manipulations to serve its selfish interests and accepted its proposal of a weak, bottom-up and legally non-binding architecture, where every party says “I will do what I can”, and let the earlier Kyoto Protocol’s top-down and legally binding framework put in place in 1997 fall by the wayside.

In a bid to ensure that the U.S. remained at the negotiating table, the parties yielded to the many concessions it pushed through and ended up with an agreement in Paris that had virtually abandoned the basic tenets of the UNFCCC itself, which requires that developed economies—on whom the historical responsibility rests for causing disproportionate carbon emissions during industrialisation (accounting for 77 per cent of historical emissions) and the consequent global warming—should bear the larger share of mitigation and the financial burden in the present global fight against climate change. Now the U.S., which until recently was the biggest emitter of greenhouse gases (GHGs), has quietly walked out, leaving other countries to carry the increased mitigation burden that Trump has put on them. With China’s rapid growth in renewables and its carbon emissions showing significant slowing down, the U.S. under Trump may well re-emerge as the world’s biggest polluter.

The Paris Agreement, Trump declared, disadvantaged the U.S. “to the exclusive benefit of other countries.... The bottom line is that the Paris Accord is very unfair, at the highest level, to the U.S.” Nothing can be further from truth considering that the U.S. was the chief architect of the underlying framework of the Paris Agreement. Moreover, whatever commitments it had made under the agreement were totally voluntary, were in no way “imposed” on it, and are very weak in any case.

According to its pledges, the U.S. will reduce its carbon emissions from 2005 levels by a mere 26-28 per cent by 2025. But what the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) demands of developed countries, on the basis of science that takes into account historical, current and future emissions, is 25-40 per cent reduction below 1990 levels if GHG concentrations in the atmosphere are to stabilise so that the temperature increase is limited to 2 °C, the guardrail to prevent the catastrophic consequences of climate change.

From 1990 to 2005, U.S. emissions actually rose by 17 per cent, making its Paris commitments just 9-11 per cent from 1990 levels. In comparison, the E.U. made a commitment of “at least 40 per cent” reduction from 1990 levels. In reality, therefore, the U.S. is greatly advantaged compared with the E.U. If Trump wanted to scale down the U.S.’ commitments, he could have done so without making the grandiose pronouncement of withdrawal from the agreement, which is a non-starter.

Historically, the U.S. is the largest contributor to climate change, responsible for 21 percent of the accumulated stock of carbon in the atmosphere. It is the second-largest contributor (with 14.34 per cent share, after China’s 29.51 per cent) to the current flow of global carbon emissions. It is also well known that with the current Paris pledges, the global temperature rise by the end of century will be about 3.3 °C, which means countries need to ramp up their commitments a great deal more, not lower them.

**FINANCIAL COMMITMENT**

Trump referred to the financial commitments under the GCF required of...
developed economies as a “draconian burden.” The financial implication of the Paris Accord on developed countries is an annual contribution totalling to a baseline figure of $100 billion a year to assist developing countries to fight the consequences of global warming and climate change, which are not of their making. But GCF contributions to date have been $10.3 billion, just one-tenth of the baseline figure. Of this, the U.S. had committed $3 billion but has so far contributed only $1 billion.

When viewed in per capita terms, the U.S. pledge, far from being a “vast fortune”, ranks 11th in the list of contributing developed countries. According to GCF data, the U.S’ pledge works out to only $9.44 compared with Japan’s $11.8, the United Kingdom’s $18.77 and Sweden’s $59.31, which tops the list. The amount of $1 billion already paid in to the GCF works out to just $3 per capita, which is a little more than South Korea’s $2. In his federal budget, Trump has already removed funding for the UNFCCC and the GCF, which means the U.S. will not add to the $1 billion that it has already contributed.

On economic costs to and lost jobs in the U.S. owing to the Paris Agreement, Trump quoted highly suspect figures from a study of a well-known right-wing organisation called the National Economic Research Associates (NERA). Some time back, NERA published studies for the American Coalition for Clean Coal Electricity, an organisation representing the interests of the coal industry, and reports against the Clean Air Act and the Mercury and Air Toxics Standards. These reports projected huge economic and job losses in the U.S. and have been freely used by climate change deniers, fossil fuel lobbies and Republican politicians to further their agenda against any kind of domestic climate change regulatory action by the U.S.

Another gem from the Trump speech is his claim that even if all nations implemented their commitments under the Paris Agreement to the full it would produce only the “tiny, tiny amount” of 0.2 °C reduction in global temperature by 2100. The truth, however, according to projections by the IPCC, is that global warming will shoot up by more than 5 °C if it is business as usual. The agreement seeks to pull it back below 2 °C, but given the extremely unambitious emission reduction commitments by most developed countries, all the pledges will limit the increase to only about 3 °C. This is still a reduction of 2 °C and not just 0.2 °C as Trump would like the world to believe.

**STATEMENTS AGAINST INDIA AND CHINA**

Having once called climate change a conspiracy and hoax perpetrated by China, he found in his June 1 speech another opportunity to make sweeping and false statements about China and India. “For example,” Trump claimed, “under the agreement, China will be able to increase these emissions by a staggering number of years, 13. They can do whatever they want for 13 years. Not us. India makes its participation contingent on receiving billions and billions and billions of dollars in foreign aid from developed countries… China will be allowed to build hundreds of additional coal plants. So we can’t build the plants, but they can, according to this agreement. India will be allowed to double its coal production by 2020…. We’re supposed to get rid of ours.”

What are the facts? Under the convention, emissions from developing countries are allowed to grow to meet their development goals but at a rate that progressively slows down, peaks and then declines. China has projected 2030 as its peaking year, but all indications are that emissions are likely to peak much earlier than that. As regards India, it has never said that its mitigation commitments under its stated NDCs would be conditional on receiving foreign money. In fact, India has already put in place many actions towards emission reduction, and these have been funded entirely from the nation’s own resources.

Ten days before Trump made his unfounded claims about India and China, The New York Times said in an editorial: “Until recently, China and India have been cast as obstacles, at the very least reluctant conscripts, in the battle against climate change. That reputation looks very much out-of-date now that both countries have greatly accelerated their investments in cost-effective renewable energy sources—and reduced their reliance on fossil fuels.
It’s America—Donald Trump’s America—that now looks like the laggard…. [T]he tangible progress by the world’s number one producer of greenhouse gases (China) and its number three (India) are astonishing... and worth celebrating.”

CLIMATE ACTION TRACKER
A new study on China, India and the U.S. by Climate Action Tracker (CAT), which was released in Bonn, Germany, on May 15, provides the quantitative basis to this editorial perspective. “China’s coal consumption,” the CAT study summary said, “has declined in three consecutive years (2013 to 2016), and the outlook is for a continued slow decline. India has stated that planned coal-fired power plants may not be needed and with announced policies—if fully implemented—it would see a significant slowing down in the growth of CO₂ emissions over the next decade. Both China and India look set to overachieve their Paris Agreement climate pledges…. This stands in contrast to the decisions of the U.S. administration under President Trump, who appears intent on going in the opposite direction.”

“Together,” the summary added, “the positive developments in India and China have a significant impact on the projected growth global of GHG emissions—on the order of a roughly 2-3 GtCO₂ [billion tons of CO₂] reduction in 2030 compared to projections made just last year. They significantly outweigh the potentially negative effects on emissions from the Trump Administration’s proposed rollbacks in the USA of around 0.4 GtCO₂ in 2030.”

It further noted: “[India’s] new Draft Energy Plan—issued in December 2016—projects that despite the increasing electricity demand, no new coal-fired power plants, apart from those that are already under construction, would be needed after 2022…. As a result, the Draft Energy Plan predicts an electricity capacity from renewables by 2027 as high as 57 per cent, which is much higher than the 40 per cent by 2030 stated in the Indian NDC to the Paris Agreement. If the Draft Energy Plan is implemented, we estimate that emissions in 2030 in India would be around 1.0 GtCO₂ lower than our estimate of currently implemented policies. This moves India closer to what is necessary to achieve the long-term temperature goal of the Paris Agreement.”

“China,” the CAT summary statement said, “is set to overachieve its contribution to the Paris Agreement by a wide margin. With continued coal abatement, total GHG emissions are likely to be around 1 to 2 GtCO₂ lower in 2030 compared to our previous estimate…. China is accelerating its pace of limiting and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and moving closer to what is necessary to achieve the Paris long-term temperature limit although a gap still remains.” Despite all this data about China and India before him, Trump went ahead and made absurd charges against them.

OVERTURNING POLICY OBJECTIVES
Since Trump took office, the U.S. objectives for climate policy at the federal level articulated under the Obama administration have been completely overturned. In January 2017, Trump announced his “America First Energy Plan” under which he said that he would eliminate “burdensome regulations on our energy industry” and promised to revive the U.S. coal industry. On March 28, Trump issued an “Executive Order [EO] on Energy Independence” on the basis of which he started the process of “suspending, revising and rescinding” many policies and initiatives that had been put in place to reduce fossil fuel consumption and GHG emissions, including the Clean Power Plan (CPP). He also repealed Obama’s Climate Action Plan. It had provided an overarching guidance framework for U.S. climate policy. A number of measures had already been implemented, including fuel efficiency standards for vehicles, efficiency improvements in the building sector, and hydrofluorocarbon emission reductions. “With activities set in motion by the Trump administration,” the CAT statement said, “the USA is likely to fail to meet its NDC by a wide margin.”

The CPP is a regulation that aims to bring down carbon emissions from the power sector by 32 per cent from 2005 levels by 2030. It was key to Obama’s strategy to meet U.S. commitments under the Paris Agreement. Trump has also eliminated funding for the CPP. In response to the EO, the U.S. Environment Protection Agency has given notice that it is reviewing the CPP and, if appropriate, will take steps to revise or revoke it. If it is scrapped and is not offset by other commensurate actions, U.S. emissions by 2025 will be higher by 3.4 per cent, observed the CAT study.

As Robert Stavins, the Albert Pratt Professor of Business and Government, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, remarked in his June 5 article “Why Trump Pulled the U.S. out of the Paris Accord” in the journal Foreign Affairs: “Truly, Trump’s decision to withdraw the nation from the Paris climate agreement was not based on science or sound economics, but on a confused, misguided, and simply dishonest desire to score some short-term political points with his voters. What he sacrifices in the long term will be immensely more difficult for the country to win back at the ballot box: authority, credibility, and influence.”

BRANDEN CAMP/AP
IT sector

THE mass retrenchment in the IT sector is undesirable (Cover Story, June 23). While acknowledging the sea change IT is undergoing, the resource-rich IT giants should think about utilising their human resources in alternative ways. With the recent changes in the requirements for the H-1B visa likely to affect their prospects, the IT giants have become jittery. Let them not forget that their empire expanded through the efforts of their employees.

C. CHANDRASEKARAN
MADURAI, TAMIL NADU

ALTHOUGH the Indian IT industry, the employer of millions of people, is not on an irretrievable slippery slope, it is facing a dismaying downturn. The Cover Story showed that the “Trump factor” was only the proverbial straw on the camel’s back. Robotic process automation, artificial intelligence, cloud storage, specific nature of India’s IT prowess, and so on have contributed to the slowdown. It seems that the IT industry’s “hire and fire” policy, almost an accepted norm for the sector, has been replaced by the intimidating practice of “scare and fire”.

AYYASERI RAVEENDRANATH
ARANMULA, KERALA

Cow slaughter

SELF-STYLED cow vigilantes are taking the law into their own hands in the name of cow protection and spreading mayhem and panic among farmers, traders and others (“In the name of cattle protection”, June 23). The notification banning the sale of cows for slaughter will increase sectarian violence, and there will be further communal polarisation, which is what Hindutva activists are really after. Since Yogi Adityanath became the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, these vigilante groups have become more aggressive and there are periodic assaults on innocent people across the country.

N.C. SREEDEHARAN
KANNUR, KERALA

THE notification appears to be unilateral and against the federal structure of the Constitution. Cattle owners sell their unproductive animals and buy new ones using the proceeds of the sale. The sale of cattle is essential for leather units and other industries, which will be in crisis if the sale of cattle stops. There will be an impact on States’ revenue earnings. Although the Centre is authorised to issue any notification it chooses to, it cannot force State governments to implement them. It needs to keep the federal structure of the country in mind. In the instant case, the correct procedure was not followed. “Gau rakshaks”, reportedly enjoying the patronage of the ruling dispensation, are being overzealous in this matter.

JAYANT MUKHERJEE
KOLKATA

Justice Karnan

THE misdemeanours of Justice C.S. Karnan are condemnable (Cover Story, June 9). But the Supreme Court’s order convicting and sentencing him was against the principles of natural justice and was nothing but an exercise of jurisdiction that is not vested in the court.

The gag order against the press was an assault on the freedom of speech and expression. One Justice Karnan cannot shake people’s confidence in the Supreme Court. But the court’s knee-jerk reaction certainly did shake people’s confidence in the higher judiciary. The collegium system needs to be replaced with a transparent system to ensure that the Karnans of this world cannot don the robe of judges.

PURUSHUTTAM ROY BARMAN
AGARTALA

Caste violence

THE atrocities perpetrated on Dalits in Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh, was both shocking and disturbing and made me wonder whether we are really in the computer age (“Targeting Dalits”, June 9). Such well-orchestrated attacks can be attributed to the growing antipathy and intolerance of vested interests towards social and political empowerment of Dalits and are a grim pointer to the entrenchment of caste prejudices in society. The lackadaisical attitude of the State administration and the law enforcement agencies in dealing with the perpetrators of the crime added insult to injury.

Amendments to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act that would accord stringent punishment to the perpetrators of such heinous acts would go a long way in serving as an effective deterrent. A country cannot aspire to be a superpower if its marginalised and underprivileged sections are perennially discriminated against and oppressed.

B. SUresh KUMAR
COIMBATORE, TAMIL NADU

Feluda

I FEEL happy that Feluda is still well remembered (“Ray’s alter ego”, June 9). I have read all the Feluda stories. It was so good to read them, and it is truly sad that there are no new Satyajit Ray stories to read.

MADHAV RAHUL B.
CHERTHALA, KERALA

Islam

TODAY, there is a fundamental misunderstanding of Islam in the world (“Facets of political Islam”, June 9). There was a need for a book that would bring out the real facets of the Islamic character and the dirty hands of Wahhabian extremists. I believe that Fazzur Rahman Siddiqui’s work on political Islam will serve both these purposes well.

MUHAMMED SHIBIL V.
KODUVALLY, KERALA

CORRECTION

The interview with NASSCOM president R. Chandrashekhar (“Of uncomfortable truths”) in the issue dated June 23 wrongly carried the name and photograph of R. Chandrasekaran of Cognizant. The error, committed at the stage of editing, is regretted.

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