



Hack it if you can

The EC's challenge to political parties to prove EVMs can be hacked is a welcome move

The electronic voting machine has been under strong scrutiny ever since it was deployed in the 1990s. The Indian EVM is a singular instrument with its dependence on standalone hardware-firmware-led machine components to register and tally votes – it is not reliant on computer software or networked components. Questions have been therefore raised about the possibility of EVM-tampering either by the introduction of malicious code (trojans) that could override the logic embedded in the chip, replacing its chip, or manipulating the communication between the ballot and the control units through remote signals or equipment. The Election Commission has evolved improvements over time to address these concerns, and has strengthened technical and administrative safeguards to prevent any manipulation. The steps include time-stamping of key presses, dynamic coding in second-generation machines besides tamper-proofing and self-diagnostics in the third-generation machines that are now being deployed. A strict administrative protocol involving first-level checks after manufacture, randomised deployment, sealed strong rooms for storage, and conduct of mock polls has been instituted. The EC has pledged the universal deployment of voter-verifiable paper audit trails beginning 2019. VVPATs will add another layer of accountability, allowing voters to verify the choice registered on the ballot unit in real time, and the machine-read vote tallies post-election.

These steps have obviously not satisfied some political parties which have used the logic of machine fallibility to claim that their recent electoral losses were a consequence of EVM tampering rather than actual voter choice. The Aam Aadmi Party recently demonstrated what it claimed to be a possible hack of the EVM by the introduction of a trojan on to an EVM prototype; it said that, therefore, it was possible to manipulate all EVMs by the replacement of its motherboard (to accommodate a chip that carried a built-in trojan). This critique does not stand scrutiny considering the EC's technical and administrative safeguards that prevent trojans or the mass manipulation of EVMs. The EC's challenge to political parties to participate in a hackathon on June 3, to test out manipulation of EVMs with the various safeguards in place, is welcome. The scepticism of some political parties apart, there is definitely a case for constantly improving EVM design and security features in order to completely rule out any sophisticated tampering attempt, howsoever difficult it is to carry it off considering the strict administrative safeguards in place. The more transparent the EC is about demonstrating the robustness of its safeguards and its determination to improve them further, the greater will be the public's trust in the electoral process.

Message from Riyadh

Trump adopts the Saudi line on West Asia, reversing the Obama outreach to Tehran

Donald Trump was particularly critical of Saudi Arabia. He attacked its treatment of gays and women and slammed the Washington establishment for taking "their money". He had also vowed to ban Muslims from entering the U.S. and, upon becoming President, actually issued an executive order banning people from seven Muslim-majority countries from coming to the country. (The order was later blocked by the courts.) But by choosing Saudi Arabia as his first overseas destination as President, Mr. Trump has signalled that his administration will retain the Washington establishment line towards West Asia. So while addressing leaders from over 50 Muslim countries in Riyadh on Sunday, he was extremely careful not to hurt the kingdom's sensibilities. He called for unity in fighting terrorism and said "Islam is peace". He noted Saudi Arabia's attempts at "empowering women", overlooked its disastrous military operation in Yemen and assailed Iran for fuelling "the fires of sectarian conflict and terror". He also signed a \$110 billion arms agreement with the Saudis. The message Mr. Trump is sending from his Saudi visit is clear: His administration will re-endorse Saudi Arabia, along with Israel, as a key pillar of America's West Asia policy and ignore criticism of Riyadh's human rights violations at home and interventions abroad. America will also supply its rich Arab allies advanced weapons: the defence industry at home will obviously benefit from such deals, creating more jobs.

Mr. Trump may be trying to kill too many birds with one stone. The Saudi-American partnership, that dates back to King Saud's visit to Washington in 1957, has only grown in strength over the years. Barring occasional criticism, U.S. Presidents have largely overlooked allegations of rights abuses in Saudi Arabia and deepened ties in the energy and defence areas. But President Barack Obama, while steadily expanding the defence partnership between Washington and Riyadh, had tried to balance America's interests between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Despite reservations from Saudi Arabia and Israel, his administration went ahead with the Iran nuclear deal. The logical next step of the nuclear deal should be bettering ties between Washington and Tehran. The major cause of instability in West Asia is not just Iran, as Mr. Trump mentioned in his speech, but the cold war between Iran and Saudi Arabia. If Mr. Trump wants to be peacemaker and make West Asia a more secure place, he has to reach out to both sides and appeal to them to dial down the tensions that have already spilled into Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and Iraq. Instead, he appears to have taken sides. The Saudi petrodollar muscle is hard to resist for an American President desperate to create more jobs at home. But merely supplying weapons to Riyadh and its allies will not bring peace to West Asia, or help defeat terrorism.

Iran votes for reform

But President Rouhani's challenges, domestically and with the U.S. and Arab neighbours, are just beginning



RAKESH SOOD

After a difficult campaign, President Hassan Rouhani won a crucial second term in Iran's presidential elections held on May 19. A high turnout of 73% helped him score a convincing victory over his principal challenger Ebrahim Raisi, a conservative cleric, in the first round itself, winning 57% of the votes compared to Mr. Raisi's 38.5%. More than two-thirds of Iran's voters are in urban areas and most of them are Rouhani supporters; therefore as voting hours got extended to midnight indicating a high turnout, the mood in the Rouhani camp turned jubilant.

A difficult campaign

In 2013, Mr. Rouhani had campaigned and won on a platform that focussed on bringing sanctions to an end, which he was able to achieve in July 2015 with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), a nuclear agreement concluded with the P-5 + 1. The sanctions relief has had a positive impact on the economy with oil exports up and GDP growth hitting 6% last year though expectations were higher. In a TV debate in the run-up to the election, Mr. Raisi described the JCPOA as 'a cheque that Rouhani had failed to cash'.

Opinion polls had favoured Mr. Rouhani, because Mr. Raisi, though close to the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, was considered a relative newcomer to politics. However, concern grew when Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, a former Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) pilot and the Mayor of Tehran since 2005, withdrew from the race in support of Mr. Raisi, who had spent most of his life in the judiciary before being appointed custodian of the shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad last year. He also controls Astan-e-Quds Razavi, one of the wealthiest



foundations, and is seen a possible successor to the present Supreme Leader who is 77 and in poor health.

Therefore Mr. Rouhani's decisive victory is a shot in the arm for the moderates coming after the elections in February last year for the Parliament and the Assembly of Experts where the moderates and the reformists had registered significant gains.

Rouhani's constraints

However, given Iran's complex governance structures, President Rouhani will have to tread carefully as his powers and those of the directly elected 290-member Parliament are constrained by the non-elected authorities. The key power centre is the Supreme Leader who is appointed by the Assembly of Experts and in turn appoints the heads of radio and TV, the armed forces and the IRGC, the Supreme National Security Council, the 51-member Expediency Council and the higher judiciary. He also chooses six members of the powerful Guardian Council, with the other six nominated by the judiciary. The Guardian Council in turn vets candidates for all elections, presidential, parliamentary and the 88-member Assembly of Experts. It cleared only six candidates out of the more than 1,600 who filed nominations for the presidential contest; rejections included former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's nomination. In addition, it approves all legislation passed by Parliament to ensure its consistency with Islamic jurisprudence. A dispute between Parliament and the Council is re-

solved by the Expediency Council. The Assembly of Experts is directly elected and its primary role is to appoint the Supreme Leader, critical during Mr. Rouhani's second term.

Mr. Rouhani's principal challenge will be to sustain economic growth and nudge the reform process forward in order to tackle unemployment, currently running at over 12%, and higher among the youth. He has promised to expand individual and political rights, enlarge women's role and ensure greater accountability. Some of these will be challenged. While his victory margin is a clear endorsement for reform, the Supreme Leader will play a critical balancing role. It is interesting that, in his immediate remarks, he praised the Iranian people for the impressive turnout, but did not congratulate the winner.

In foreign policy, Mr. Rouhani will present the image of a moderate and more outward-oriented Iran. He is no stranger to Iran's complex politics. From 1989 to 2005, he was Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, reporting to the Supreme Leader, and handled the nuclear negotiations during 2003-05. During this period, he also served a term each as Deputy Speaker of Parliament and as member of the Expediency Council. Following Mr. Ahmadinejad's election in 2005, he quit. After being elected in 2013, he persuaded the Supreme Leader to shift responsibility for the nuclear negotiations to the Foreign Ministry and let Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif take the lead. In addition to managing his

home front, the other challenge for Mr. Rouhani will be to keep the JCPOA going in the face of the U.S. Congress's and now President Donald Trump's declared hostility.

Dealing with Trump

During the election campaign, Mr. Trump had called it the 'worst deal ever' and threatened to tear it up as soon as he was elected! Subsequently, he seems to have modified his position, realising perhaps that it is not just a bilateral agreement with Iran but also includes Russia, China, the U.K., France, Germany and the European Union. In April, the Trump administration certified that Iran was abiding by its obligations but Secretary of State Rex Tillerson added that a 90-day policy review would be undertaken in view of 'Iran's alarming ongoing provocations'.

More recently, on May 17, the Trump administration continued the sanctions waiver (under Section 1245 of the National Defense Authorization Act 2012), needed every 120 days even while imposing sanctions on seven Iranian and Chinese individuals and entities on account of missile proliferation activities. In April, a slew of human rights related sanctions were imposed. In mid-June another waiver, this time under the Iran Freedom and Counter-Proliferation Act, will need to be renewed if the JCPOA is to be sustained. These are necessary because in 2015, the Republican-dominated Congress rejected the JCPOA and U.S. President Barack Obama used executive authority to waive U.S. sanctions but these waivers need to be renewed periodically.

The JCPOA was the outcome of protracted negotiations over more than a decade, during which Iran had steadily built up its nuclear capabilities, especially in the enrichment domain, and in 2015 was estimated to be only months away from acquiring enough Highly Enriched Uranium to produce one device (approximately 25 kg) though Iran consistently maintained that its programme was exclusively for peaceful purposes. Given deep suspicions however, the JCPOA with its extensive inspection and reporting obligations

was the best way to prevent Iran from developing a military nuclear capability for the next 10-15 years. Opponents say that while cheating is unlikely, they fear that Iran will retain its nuclear appetite after abstaining during the 10-15 year period and resume its activity once the inspection obligations expire.

The Saudi factor

Perhaps the most troubling problem is the new embrace of Saudi Arabia that was in evidence during Mr. Trump's visit. It raises the prospects of greater U.S. involvement in the war in Yemen and can push relations with Iran into a confrontation. In 2016, there were 19 'incidents at sea' between U.S. and Iranian vessels in the Persian Gulf. The most serious was in January 2016 when the IRGC held two U.S. vessels and 10 servicemen, accused of trespassing in Iranian waters. The crisis was resolved within hours, thanks to some quick phone conversations between U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Mr. Zarif. That link is missing today.

It is all the more ironic because Iran is the one country that is opposed to the Islamic State. Yet the U.S. is keener to bless the Saudi-created Islamic Military Alliance to Fight Terrorism, a grouping of 41 Sunni nations, under the command of former Pakistani Army Chief, General Raheel Sharif. It remains unclear what the role of this coalition is, to fight the IS or Iran or in Yemen, or to secure the Gulf monarchies!

For the last quarter century, the U.S. practised dual containment of Iran and Iraq, a policy that suited both Israel and Saudi Arabia. Mr. Obama's push for the JCPOA was driven by a desire to extricate U.S. policy from this stranglehold and expand options. If a return to the Saudi embrace creates additional tensions and a collapse of the JCPOA, it could push Iran to cross the nuclear threshold with much wider regional implications. Mr. Rouhani's challenges are just beginning.

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The united states of Myanmar?

Various models of federalism are on the table at the Panglong conference



NEHGINPAO KIPGEN

Myanmar is to hold the second round of the 21st Panglong Union Peace Conference in its administrative capital, Nay Pyi Taw, from May 24 to 28. A major issue at the meet will be the question of federalism.

During the government-led Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC) meeting in Nay Pyi Taw on May 12, the committee agreed in principle to grant the seven states and seven regions permission to draft their own constitution on the condition that they would not break away from the country.

The UPDJC, headed by State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, includes representatives from the ethnic armed groups, political parties and the government. The Panglong conference is likely to discuss the question of self-determination and the drafting of the Constitution by states and regions.

Rooted in history

The question of federalism or autonomy in Myanmar goes back

to the pre-Independence era. It is an important historical issue which unified and divided the country. The idea of forming a union government that would give equal status to all citizens brought together different ethnic groups at the Panglong conference of 1947. It has also divided the country psychologically and emotionally when the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League, the first elected government after Independence, failed to fulfil the political aspirations of the ethnic non-Burmans.

When the non-Burman ethnic groups pushed for autonomy or federalism, alongside having a weak civilian government at the centre, the military leadership staged a coup d'état in 1962. Though incorporated in the 1947 Constitution, successive military governments construed the use of the term 'federalism' as being anti-national, anti-unity and pro-disintegration. Until as recently as 2011, when the State Peace and Development Council military government allowed the Union Solidarity and Development Party led by President Thein Sein – himself a former military general – to form a quasi-civilian government, one could land in jail for advocating federalism.

With gradual democratisation, the Thein Sein government accepted the concept of federalism, one

of the core principles of the ongoing peace process with the country's ethnic armed groups.

As a pro-democratic party, the National League for Democracy has been supportive of a federal government. But nobody really knows what type of federalism Myanmar will eventually have.

Opinions on different federal systems such as symmetric federalism, asymmetric federalism, dual federalism, cooperative federalism and creative federalism have been discussed by policy makers and scholars.

Symmetric federalism could be a major problem since the Bama or Burman majority dominates the seven regions plus the union territory of Nay Pyi Taw. Even if the majority Burmans propose such arrangement, the minorities may oppose it on the ground of being politically disadvantageous.

Asymmetric federalism may be opposed by some minorities who feel that they would be outnumbered. Many within the ethnic minorities feel that the majority Bama/Burman/Myanma group

should be given only one state in line with other ethnic groups to establish genuine federalism.

Dual federalism may be acceptable to the federal government, but the states may find it too invasive or intrusive.

Cooperative federalism, though an ideal solution for some, is an unlikely arrangement as it could lead to a power stalemate between the state and federal governments, making it difficult or even impossible to reach a compromise over important pieces of legislation.

Creative federalism could be a problem to implement if the two governments are unable to reach a consensus.

Due to the scattered population of several ethnic groups, the other concept widely discussed is a non-territorial federalism. In other words, self-determination should not be confined to a well-defined territory.

Possible solution

The non-territorial federal structure could be a possible solution, well suited to the demands of some ethnic groups. On the other hand, it could also be a source of conflict

between different ethnic groups and even constrain relations between the state and regional governments which have a mixed population.

Given the hybrid nature of the political structure, there is also a danger that the government or the military leadership would push for a 'Myanmar Way to Federalism' similar to the idea of 'Burmese Way to Socialism' during the days of the Burma Socialist Programme Party government led by General Ne Win, or something along the lines of a "flourishing and disciplined democracy", as enshrined in the 2008 Constitution.

The ethnic minorities envision a federalism which is based on an equality of rights for all ethnic groups and a guarantee of a certain degree of autonomy over their people, territories and resources.

It is a positive development that the government has allowed not only the use and discussion of federalism but also the drafting of a Constitution by individual states and regions. Such a development may be construed as a case of Myanmar moving forward in its pursuit of a federal government.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

A Kashmir 'solution'

Home Minister Rajnath Singh talking tough about ending Pakistan's relentless sponsorship of terrorism is welcome. However, his assertion that the government would not fail to find "a permanent solution" to the Kashmir issue is a bit of grandstanding. The rise in violence in the Kashmir Valley needs to be addressed carefully with patience and diligence. Sounding a battle cry will be of little use in a war of nerves. Provocations from the enemy should not decide the course of action for India ("Will find permanent solution to Kashmir issue", May 22).

DR. D.V.G. SANKARANARAO, Nellimarla, Andhra Pradesh

Sunshine in solar

It is incorrect to say that the tariff structure as far as solar power is concerned is not remunerative ("Green energy target tough, say officials", May 22). A standalone rooftop solar plant of 3kW installed even five years ago will fetch a decent return of 6-8%; this return is also tax free. The reasons that officials have cited for rooftop installations not getting traction such as a terrace "being used to dry clothes and host parties" are gross exaggerations. Elevated solar installations are possible without blocking terrace space. A major reason for the net metering scheme not taking off is the non-availability of two-way meters. Local electricity

departments lack knowledge and awareness of solar installations. The staff are also not enthusiastic or motivated enough to explore solar options. As far as subsidies are concerned, it is relatively easier to get them in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Gujarat when compared to Tamil Nadu. A 1 kW on grid costs about ₹65,000 to ₹70,000 in these States as against ₹80,000 to ₹90,000 in Tamil Nadu. A 30 kW rooftop unit installed recently in a residence in Hyderabad cost ₹ 16,00,000 under the net metering scheme. The first month's savings worked out to be ₹40,000; the payback period is about 3.5 years.

D. SURESH, Chennai

Down to the wire

Mumbai Indians (MI) may be the winners of the 10th edition of the Indian Premier League, but the true winner was Rising Pune Supergiant (RPS). It emerged from the bottom of the points table to work its way up to the finals even as fancied teams such as Sunrisers Hyderabad, Kolkata Knight Riders and Royal Challengers Bangalore bit the dust. If not for the absence of key players such as Ben Stokes and Imran Tahir – Lockie Ferguson and Adam Zampa were poor substitutes – RPS would have steamrolled MI. I also feel that all auctioned players must be made to complete their IPL formalities before moving to the national team so that the fabric of team

composition does not suffer.

R. SHANKARAN, Tiruchi

The way MI batted was disappointing and the match soon had signs of being one sided. But it was team effort that won MI the trophy. It was a perfect

finish to the IPL which even a neutral fan like me watched with bated breath. For a mediocre team, making it to the final was in itself a great achievement.

NAGARAJAMANI M.V., Hyderabad

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CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

A sentence in the report headlined "Stalin questions Modi-OPS meeting" (some editions, May 22, 2017) read: "Everyone is aware of the problems of farmers; 200 of them had committed suicide. But the Chief Minister gave appointment to Mr. Panneerselvam, who today is just an MLA." It should have been Prime Minister.

An International page report headlined "Non-EU parents have residency rights: court" (May 14, 2017) erroneously referred to Kamal Rahman, head of the immigration group at law firm Mishcon de Reya in London, as Mr. Rahman in subsequent references. It should have been Ms. Rahman.

It is the policy of The Hindu to correct significant errors as soon as possible. Please specify the edition (place of publication), date and page. The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300 (11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday); Fax: +91-44-28522963; E-mail: readerseditor@thehindu.co.in; Mail: Readers' Editor, The Hindu, Kasturji Buildings, 859 & 860 Anna Salai, Chennai 600 002, India. All communication must carry the full postal address and telephone number. No personal visits. The Terms of Reference for the Readers' Editor are on www.thehindu.com

An unequal burden

The Paris Climate Agreement recognises that all countries have responsibilities. However, the developed world needs to shoulder the major funding requirement



SUJATHA BYRAVAN

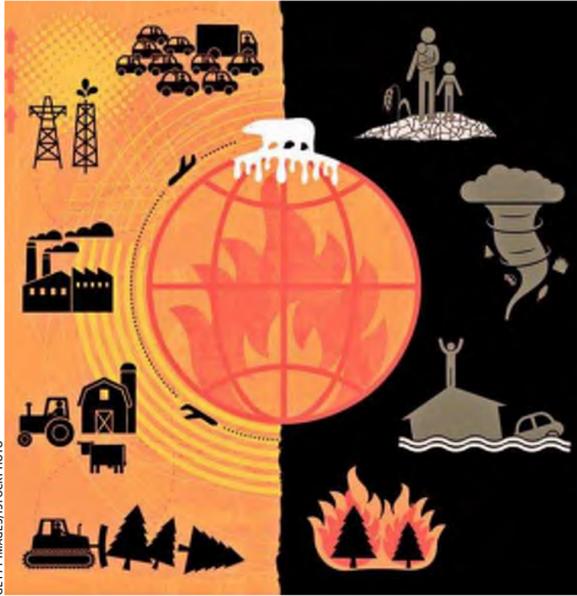
The Paris Climate Agreement (PA) was signed in December 2015 in an attempt to limit the release and the effects from greenhouse gases (GHGs) in the atmosphere. Ahead of the meeting, various countries developed and submitted pledges or national commitments, referred to in climate parlance as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), which are effectively the actions each country is now required to take. The Conference of the Parties-22 (COP-22) in Marrakesh in November 2016 continued discussions on the implementation of the PA and specific aspects continue to be deliberated upon in interim meetings such as the recently concluded one in Bonn.

For about three-fourths of the 165 listed NDCs, implementation of pledges is conditional upon assistance on the finance and technology fronts. These countries depend on help from industrialised economies to build capacity for implementation.

Keep in mind that even if all the NDCs were implemented, estimates show that the planet would warm up by about 3°C from pre-industrial temperatures – well above the goal of staying below a 1.5°C or a 2°C rise. This implies that all the NDCs ought to be implemented, and the support required should be provided, so that countries can build the trust and confidence needed to further raise the bar for future targets. Such periodic raising of the stakes is built into the process of PA implementation, which would collapse without support.

Improving energy efficiencies across various sectors and expanding the use of renewables are among the necessary activities that will enable us to move along low-carbon development pathways. But we have to go well beyond that and shift to a radically different pattern of living that no longer involves GHG emissions. Up-front capital investments are crucial for sustainable futures, and without them poorer countries have few options.

Recent policy actions by U.S. President Donald Trump indicate that the



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U.S. may not be able meet its own NDC targets. This by itself is a threat to keeping global warming within safe levels. However, further danger is also posed by the fact that under Mr. Trump Washington is not likely to fulfil its obligation to provide support for the implementation of NDCs by other countries. Therefore, not just the U.S., but other countries too may fail without the means to implement their proposals.

The Green Climate Fund

The Green Climate Fund (GCF) is an international mechanism set up at the Conference of the Parties-16 (COP-16) in Cancun in 2010. As per the international agreement, advanced economies should provide an annual assistance of \$100 billion, through public and private sources, by 2020 – the deadline is now extended to 2025. The fund currently has pledges worth \$10 billion from various developed countries and there is a commitment to fund projects that enable the lowering of emissions and help in dealing with the effects from climate change.

India, early in its NDC statement, had estimated a requirement of \$2.5 trillion to carry out its climate actions until 2030. However, it is clear that the least developed countries,

small island states and African countries, which are all very vulnerable to the effects of warming and have contributed little to the GHGs, ought to receive the first priority.

In April 2017, the GCF Board approved eight projects for a total funding of \$755 million. The number of projects they have supported now adds up to 43, and the total amount is \$2.2 billion in GCF funds that have a value of \$7.3 billion, if one were to include co-financing.

A project to rejuvenate tanks and enhance renewables in Odisha was recently approved by the GCF for \$34 million. While this is but a small fraction of the required funding, it is expected to improve climate resilience in 15 of the most vulnerable districts of the State. The GCF has the ability to bear risks, support innovation and leverage its own funds for further support, therefore making it a vital agency for poor countries. While there are some reports that private funding for the GCF will increase, these are not likely to support adaptation and will focus on actions that bring returns on investments. Thus, funds from advanced economies remain crucial.

In January, former U.S. President Barack Obama transferred \$500 million to the GCF. This was the second

payment towards the fulfilment of a \$3 billion pledge made in 2014. So far, more than 40 countries, including a few developing economies, have made contributions to the GCF, the major contributors being the U.S., Japan and the U.K., but still the U.S. pledge is only \$9.41 in per capita terms – many times lower than that of several European countries.

These recent transfers neither fulfil the U.S. pledge nor its obligations as the largest cumulative emitter of GHGs. If Mr. Trump is unwilling, perhaps Congress could approve the funds. Countries in Europe will need to pick up the slack, along with other private contributors. Constraints in the flow of funds will prevent even the minimal level of support to deal with climate change.

Stocks and flows

With regard to emissions, it is useful to think of them in terms of stocks and flows. Stocks are what are there in the atmosphere and flows are what are released annually. It is true that China now leads in the annual emissions, but these appear to be plateauing. The U.S. is a close second, and India a distant third. Still, India's emissions are a tenth of those of the U.S. in per capita terms.

The stocks in the atmosphere, released since the fuelling of the industrial revolution, led to immense prosperity for many countries, which have subsequently become the advanced economies. When the world calls for funding for the GCF, it only asks these nations to deal with problems they have caused. It is not the responsibility of a poor fisherman in Bangladesh or a woman in Sub-Saharan Africa or an islander who loses her house to storms in the Pacific to bear the burden of emissions from rich countries.

The fact that all countries have responsibilities has been recognised in the Paris Agreement and we are all pulling the ship, but the rich countries, especially the U.S. and European nations, have to do their fair share for the world to set along a new path towards zero emissions. India or any other developing country simply recommitting to implement its NDCs will not accomplish much, since without help we cannot go far and need the assistance that is owed to us.

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Death of patronage?

Voters are no longer swayed by freebies and symbolism

PRADEEP CHHIBBER
RAHUL VERMA

This is a long mea culpa to the India voter. We underestimated you once again. The scale of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s victory in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections was expected least of all by academics and intellectuals. Many of us in the Western academia believe (despite the usual hemming and hawing and footnotes qualifying arguments) that voters in the Global South are not creatures of ideas. They are driven by baser instincts. For them, some rupees, samosas, liquor, few gifts and the promise of jobs is all one needed to win their votes.

To describe this system of exchange between politicians (patrons) and voters (clients), political scientists and economists use concepts like patronage, clientelism, and vote buying. Our understanding, given the acceptance of patronage thesis in academic circles, is that the better and bigger patron wins elections. It is no surprise then, that a few weeks before U.P. elections, many academics and leaders of the Samajwadi Party and the Congress were convinced that their alliance was much ahead in the race.

Getting it wrong

This optimism was based on many reasons. Akhilesh Yadav was extremely popular and ubiquitous on television. The media heralded him as an agent of change who dared to take on the old guard, even within his own family. And the SP-Congress alliance had the social arithmetic in its favour. But, the most important reason for the optimism among many observers was that Mr. Yadav had followed the patronage regimen by rule book. He had not played usual caste politics but had wooed voters through direct giveaways and this seemed the path to victory.

Mr. Yadav's campaign team created his image of a leader who would take along everyone. In his five years as Chief Minister, his administration wooed every possible community of voters with pure patronage. In the very first meeting of the U.P. Cabinet after the results of the 2012 Assembly elections, his government announced an unemployment allowance of ₹1000 per month to everyone over 35 years of age and laptops and tablet computers to students who passed the class 12 and class 10 examinations. It also gave financial assistance of ₹30,000 to Muslim girls who passed class 10.

In the next five years, his government, through the Samajwadi Pension Yojana, gave pension benefits to over 5.5 million residents. The party offered free smartphones to over 25 million people after the elections of 2017. When the fallout associated with demonetisation of currency notes led to a slowdown in registrations for the smartphone scheme, the government not only extended the deadline for registration, but also set up a dedicated helpline to address any issues during registration process.

The SP also rewarded many groups with symbolic measures as well. To honour luminaries of specific communities, the government declared public holidays on the birth anniversary of former Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar; Maharshi Kashyap Jayanti and Maharshi Nishadraj Jayanti; Hazrat Ajmeri Garib Nawaz Urs; Maharana Pratap Jayanti; and Karpoori Thakur Jayanti.

By all accounts then, the SP government should have comfortably returned to power given this level of patronage. Yet, there was collectively a 12 percentage-point swing in votes away from the two parties and the alliance won only 54 seats in a house of 403 legislators. The proponents of patronage theory, however, would argue that for it to become an effective strategy of winning votes, the patron must follow some rules like effective targeting of benefits; giving information about who gave these benefits (credit claiming); presence of brokers who could help the patron in monitoring and sanctioning (of those beneficiaries who did not vote in favour).

Mr. Yadav's government meticulously targeted different demographic profiles through these schemes. Pensions targeted housewives; the Kanya Vidya Dhan focussed on young women; the housing scheme was for the poor; the unemployment allowance was for middle-aged men; the laptops were for first-time voters; the irrigation schemes and the farm loan waiver were supposed to get the votes of farmers. Did beneficiaries actually receive the benefits? Survey data from Cicero Associates and Lokniti-CSDS show that these schemes did reach the intended beneficiaries. Were people made aware of these schemes? According to news reports, the SP government handed out pamphlets and special campaigns were run on TV, radio and social media highlighting the flagship programmes.

No correlation

According to Cicero's data, voters in U.P. were more likely to approach local leaders (or brokers) connected with the SP for any work as they believed that government officers were more likely to listen to leaders associated with the ruling party. However, there was no correlation between who voters were likely to approach for their work and which party they indicated they would vote for. And this is not just a U.P. story. Even in Tamil Nadu, widely considered the pioneer in the passing of freebies, we found little support for the idea that votes are solely tied to patronage in a survey experiment conducted during the 2011 elections.

The results from U.P. and Tamil Nadu fatally damage the characterisation of Indian voters as motivated solely by patronage. The question is, can academics like us let go of our view that citizens are homo economicus and therefore votes are bought and sold?

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SINGLE FILE

Minimum government?

The NDA is yet to deliver on the promise of market reforms it made in 2014

PRASHANTH PERUMAL



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power in 2014 with the lofty promise of "minimum government, maximum governance". Mr. Modi had flayed the decade-long rule of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government for its mindless populism.

"The government has no business to be in business," he said, well before kick starting his 2014 campaign. Not surprisingly, many expected

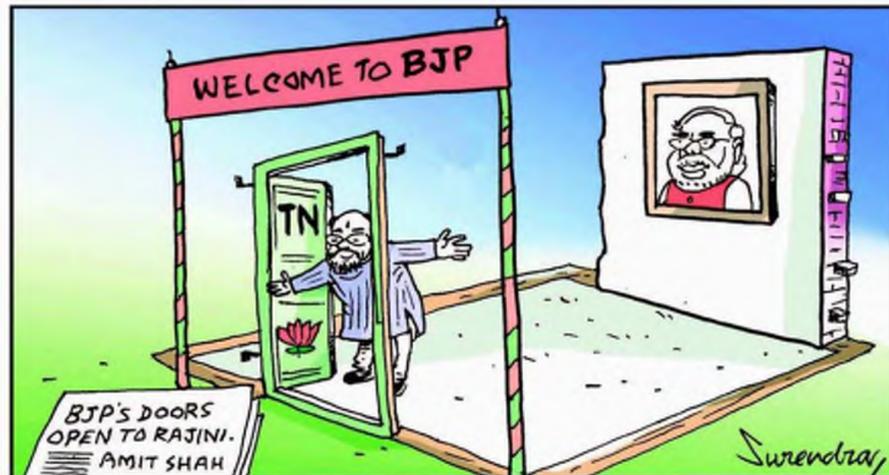
tough economic reforms from him.

However, the policies adopted by Prime Minister Modi have been more populist than pro-market. In the latest Budget, the government provided the highest-ever allocation of ₹48,000 crore to the UPA's flagship Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). In February, the PM promised farm loan waivers in Uttar Pradesh, and the State government soon delivered on it. States like Bihar and Andhra Pradesh have also been recipients of the Centre's special welfare packages.

Apart from such populism on the fiscal side, Mr. Modi's track record in pushing through crucial labour and land reforms has been no better. Industrial labour is still governed by outdated laws that prevent hiring, and landowners still cannot freely sell their land for industrial purposes (they can still be forced to sell to special interests though). A free agricultural market is still a distant dream as farmers cannot freely sell their produce, while powerful traders protected from competition can still dictate prices. Foreign investors continue to be terrorised by retroactive tax laws, while 'Make in India' continues to serve as an excuse for protectionism. The Goods and Services Tax (GST) that did away with tax competition between States is being celebrated, even as it has failed to lower tax rates.

The demonetisation of high-value currency notes last year showed that the government is free to play around with the rupee, while the unsavoury exit of former Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Raghuram Rajan showed that India is far from having an independent central bank. Not surprisingly, India is ranked as a "mostly unfree" economy in the Heritage Foundation's Index of Economic Freedom, which measures the economic freedom citizens enjoy from the clutches of government, and its ranking has dropped steadily since 2014, from 120th to 143rd.

The classical liberal idea of limited government was all about a government that limited its role to the protection of life and property of citizens. Such a government had no authority to impose taxes to fund massive welfare schemes, tinker with the currency, or enforce barriers against free commerce. Naturally, both populism and crony capitalism would die under such a "night-watchman" state, while free markets rapidly raised the living standards of the masses. The success of such a form of government is evident in places like Hong Kong and Singapore. Unfortunately, Mr. Modi's policies are as far from limited government, as they are from his election promises.



CONCEPTUAL

Plausible deniability

POLITICS

Essentially a stratagem to ensure that no muck sticks, this clause is often proffered to shield persons occupying high office from adverse fallout when a scandal, controversy or instance of corruption is exposed. The defence then put out is that the person in question is too high in the chain of command to be in the know of actions of his or her subordinates, and is thus not personally responsible. With no evidence to prove it otherwise, the denial becomes plausible. Unsurprisingly, the term was coined to ring fence senior CIA and administration officials in the 1960s from the agency's murky activities in other countries.

MORE ON THE WEB

Slideshow: Wheels of luxury
<http://bit.ly/wheelsofluxury>

ABSTRACT

Nurture over nature

Study indicates that genetic factors are not a key determinant in explaining stunting in Indian children

SRINIVASAN RAMANI

A continuing paradox about India's growth story in the last two decades, which have seen a substantial reduction in poverty, is the persistence of poor performance on the health count. A measure that is used to assess individual health is height based on the understanding that early-life nutrition invariably helps in adults becoming taller and that taller adults enjoy better health and therefore better living and productivity.

While considerable academic literature exists on reasons for the high rates of malnutrition and on other factors responsible for shorter height of children in India, there has also been dissenting opinion of late that suggests that genetic factors are more salient in explaining this.

A useful paper by Caterina Alacevich and Alessandro Tarozzi, published on April 23 on the Centre

for Economic Policy Research's policy portal voxu.org comes up with crucial research findings that provide evidence against "the importance of genetic factors in explaining the disappointing growth performance of Indian children".

Indians in the U.K.

The authors use data from India's National Family and Health Surveys and the Health Survey of England to look at the heights of children and adults of Indian ethnicity living in England and compare them with those of children and adults living in India. They find that ethnic-Indian adults were on average 6-7 cm taller than those living in India, which could indicate a positive selection of migrants coming over to England. But ethnic Indian adults in England are also less tall than British "whites". Interestingly, when they look at young ethnic-Indian

children in England who are between two and four years old, they notice that not only are they taller than children in India, they are as tall as British "white" children. This leads them to conclude that the healthier socio-economic environments in England have enabled Indian children to rapidly catch-up to the "standards observed" for other children, giving filip to the argument that "nurture" is a more important determinant of changes in the height of children than genetic factors.

The authors point to some caveats in their study – they are unable to explain gaps in heights after puberty between ethnic Indians and whites in England and suggest that there is some degree of genetic factors that could come to play in adolescence. They also do not look into reasons related to nutrition, natal care, maternal care etc. in depth.

FROM THE HINDU ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MAY 23, 1967

Death toll in Kuppam rail disaster is 62

The casualties in the crash of the Island Express at Kuppam railway station last night [May 21] have risen to 62 passengers dead and 63 others injured. First reports had said ten were killed and 50 others injured as the train from Bangalore bound for Cochin Harbour ran into a sand hump at the station. Kuppam is a halt for the train and it is believed the train, running at good speed, could not be stopped due to failure of the brake system. In the accident the engine and the three bogies next to it jumped rails near the outer cabin of the station. Actually the second carriage which was a third class-cum-luggage van bogie was separated from the others and it fell on its side.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MAY 23, 1917

Governor da Costa's retirement

News of the resignation of His Excellency Senhor Couceiro da Costa, Governor-General of Portuguese India, and of his approaching departure for Portugal is received with widespread regret amongst the inhabitants of Portuguese India. His Excellency long ago completed his term of office which was extended. He has been anxious to retire from India in view of his ill health and it was only in deference to the wishes of his political chief and personal friend ex-Premier Senhor Almeida that he consented to continue in office till the end of the war if his health permitted it. On the fall of Sr. Armeides cabinet, Sr. Couceiro da Costa tendered his resignation to the new ministry.

DATA POINT

Kept in the dark

About 37% of Indian schools did not have electricity connection till last year. Schools in the eastern, northeastern and central States were the worst off. A State-wise look:

