

9 EXPLAINED



SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE

Polite reminder: Most adults who support a political party do so without necessarily being 100% in favour of EVERYTHING it represents.

JOANNE HARRIS, 50,800 followers; British author, most famously of *Chocolat*, which was made into a successful film. Arguing that "someone in Labour did a shitty thing in 2010 will not stop me from caring that the Tories are doing a shitty thing NOW."

Milk price hike may do little for Maharashtra dairy sector

Fadnavis's 70:30 formula, with farmers assured of 70% of proceeds, will hit state's already struggling co-ops, as key infrastructure issues remain unaddressed



IN FACT
BY KAVITHA IYER

EXPRESS EDITORS INTERPRET

FROM THE point of view of urban consumers, the week-long strike by farmers in Maharashtra affected two commodities, vegetables and milk, whose supply and prices were affected to varying degrees in cities across the state. A meeting between the farmers' leaders and a ministerial committee on Sunday ended with the declaration of India's biggest-ever farm loan waiver by a state government — a blanket waiver of all crop loans across the state, with minutiae and ceilings to be announced shortly.

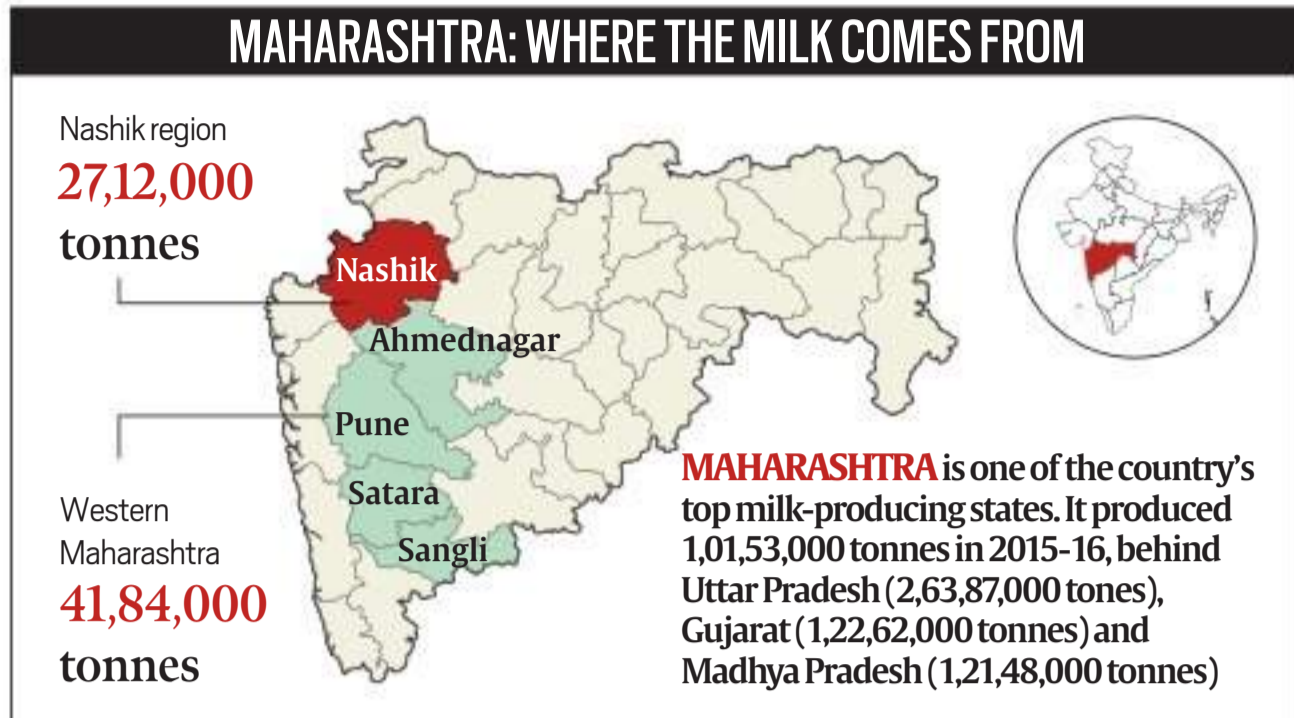
In response to another demand by farmers, the government also promised better prices to milk producers, a likely increase of Rs 2 or Rs 3 per litre. Maharashtra currently

pays Rs 24 for every litre of cow milk it procures — this is estimated to be revised to Rs 27. Once the government hikes its procurement rate, the others will simply have to follow suit, and do better.

Also, significantly, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis announced that milk societies would now have to adhere to a 70:30 revenue-sharing system as followed by sugar cooperatives, with farmers assured of 70 per cent of the proceeds, the rest being shared by milk-collecting societies and unions.

The cooperatives, already incurring losses or barely breaking even, will be dismayed by the new mandate. Unlike the Amul pattern, Maharashtra's cooperatives package milk under multiple brand names, each with its own costs for branding, marketing and overheads. Of Maharashtra's 14,921 cooperative dairy societies and 85 cooperative dairy unions, approximately 37 per cent and 29 per cent, respectively, are loss-making entities, most of them controlled by politicians.

Milk cooperatives have also been assailed by allegations of corruption — the most memorable in recent years has been the Mahanand brand, a venture of an apex body of district and taluka-level milk unions. Originally established to implement an Operation Flood-like programme in Maharashtra, the brand itself has been almost run to the ground, even as a PIL was filed a decade ago alleging deep-



rooted corruption in its operations. An administrator currently looks after Mahanand, with its board of directors dismissed. Mahanand was controlled by senior NCP leaders, as are several cooperatives across Western Maharashtra, where the state's milk production is the highest.

Given this situation, the Chief Minister's directive to milk cooperatives is a small political counter-punch bundled into the relief package for farmers. Corruption, inefficiency and wasteful expenditure in cooperative bodies will simply have to be curtailed.

Not surprisingly, former Mahanand chairperson Vaishali Nagawade of the NCP said the government should supplement Sunday's announcement for milk producers with a state subsidy. "States such as Goa, Haryana and Karnataka give milk farmers a subsidy. So if the union pays Rs 20 a litre, the state gives an additional Rs 2 or Rs 4, paid directly into farmers' accounts," she said.

"The subsidy can be funded through an animal husbandry tax imposed on milk coming into the state from outside Maharashtra. We procure milk from Nandini in Karnataka

and Amul in Gujarat, so why no tax on them?" Maharashtra sends milk to Goa, and pays such a tax, Nagawade said. Also, there was nothing in Sunday's announcement about how to control cheaper milk from other states, or a comprehensive milk policy that cooperatives have been seeking.

Ironically, while milk producers were among those celebrating on Sunday evening, the announcement may do little in the long term for the dairy sector, which is struggling despite Maharashtra being the country's fourth largest producer of milk.

Milk being a perishable commodity, profits from it are closely linked to accessibility of infrastructure, including a cold chain, pasteurisation facilities, processing units for milk powder, and more. Milk that is not chilled within four or five hours of production begins to curdle, which denies producers of thousands of litres every day in remote villages in Marathwada and Vidarbha, where dairies have not picked up profits that are available to milk of the same quality produced in Nashik, Ahmednagar or Pune.

"The government will eventually have to take a view of the entire situation," said D V Ghanekar, managing director of Gokul Doodh in Kolhapur in Western Maharashtra. "Maharashtra has lost important years after 1991. We have not woken up to the call of lib-

eralisation, not provided infrastructure, including cold chains and modern machinery, that is urgently needed for the sector. Babus cannot decide a price for produce; there has to be a pricing policy. There are, after all, international forces, national forces, factors such as production cost, market costs.

"Every drop of milk produced by our farmers should be poured into a government, private or cooperative dairy. Just declaring a price will not be enough."

Having declared Rs 27 a litre, the question is whether the government will procure butter and skimmed milk powder, should international prices crash. At the height of the 2016 summer, for example, amid a global oversupply of milk, farmers who got Rs 24 a litre at their doorstep in the previous year were suddenly not able to realise prices that were anywhere close. In remote villages of Marathwada, farmers availing free fodder and water at government-established cattle camps were selling milk for as little as Rs 16 or Rs 17 a litre — less than the price of a bottle of packaged water. The problems are varied and complex, ranging from access and transportation to the unorganised nature of their market. All of them were seeking a minimum support price for milk.

Sunday's announcement will mean little to them.

kavitha.iyer@expressindia.com

INTERVIEW: DR D T MOURYA

Zika is not priority, chikungunya and dengue bigger threats: NIV chief

Despite confirmation of three cases last month, Zika may not be a recent introduction to the country. The director of India's premier virology research laboratory explains to ANURADHA MASCARENHAS the nature of the public health concern from the mosquito-borne disease.

Zika is no longer a medical emergency for WHO. What is the situation in India?

The virus remains a threat. But the emergency was called off as the virus is here to stay, and long-term effort is required to address it. A rigorous surveillance programme must be in place to prepare for any outbreak of the virus. However, Zika is not a priority as compared to diseases such as dengue and chikungunya. In India, after testing approximately 35,000 samples, we have found three positive. This indicates that Zika is not as highly prevalent as dengue and chikungunya.

Doesn't India have the right climate and abundant mosquitoes that carry the Zika virus (ZIV)?

In urban settings, where the aedes aegypti (which carries the virus) is abundant, ZIV has the potential to cause an outbreak. However, in the absence of recent serological data from India, or virus isolations, it is difficult to predict the potential impact of ZIV in the country. Most people do not show any specific symptoms, and only one in five people infected may develop a mild disease. The most common symptoms are fever, rash, joint pain and conjunctivitis. Serious mortality and morbidity is not associated with this virus.

But we now have laboratory-confirmed cases of ZIV disease in the country.

When a pathogen is recognised as emerging in any part of the world, an alert goes out, and efforts start to detect its presence in other areas. Zika may not be a recent introduction to India — sometimes diseases are present but are not known. Back in 1953, NIV (then known as Virus Research Centre) had tested blood samples from localities with more than average rainfall against 15 viruses. Zika was one of them. In Bharuch district of the then Bombay state, Gujarat and Nagpur, antibodies against the virus were detected. Again, the Chandipura virus, associated with encephalitis, which had a high fatality rate among children in central India in 2003-04, was first recognised in the 1950s. Similarly, studies showed that the Crimean-Congo haemorrhagic fever (CCHF), which was identified in 2011 in India, had been present in the country for a long time. With such examples from history for arboviruses [viruses that are transmitted by mosquitoes, ticks, or other arthropods], it is difficult to predict the extent of Zika's impact.

Zika has been shown to trigger microcephaly (a birth defect where a baby's head is smaller than expected when compared to babies of the same sex and age) in babies born to mothers infected with the virus while pregnant. Is that a major concern?

Research has shown some link between ZIV fever and microcephaly in newborns by mother-to-child transmission, as well as neu-



No need to panic, says Dr Mourya. Sandeep Daundkar

rological conditions in infected adults, including cases of Guillain-Barre Syndrome (in which the body's immune system attacks part of the peripheral nervous system). But again, there are just three cases in the country, and two women who were infected delivered healthy babies. There is no need to panic. Research is under way worldwide on ZIV. In a paper published in the *Indian Journal of Medical Research* in May last year, I explained that answers to various questions will emerge only with time. This virus has lived a ubiquitous life for decades in tropical and equatorial zones, and the presence of antibodies has been reported in Africa and Asia. It has not shown dramatic evolutionary mutations, but the vector biology and disease pathogenesis of ZIV is far from clear. There are no data on birth prevalence of ZIV, and its possible relation with congenital infection in the country. Hence, the level of preparedness is being stepped up.

What steps can be taken other than those by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) towards enhanced human surveillance for ZIV?

Citizens have to ensure there is no mosquito breeding on their premises. Hospital-based surveillance is important but surveillance of mosquitoes is extremely challenging. There is need to impose penalties in case mosquito-breeding is found in buildings, societies or even homes. This is a tool in our hands to reduce the source of the disease.

Pune-based National Institute of Virology (NIV) conducts research on human viruses of public health concern, including re-emerging viruses such as Chandipura, H1N1, Japanese Encephalitis, Dengue, avian influenza, etc., all of which cause considerable mortality and morbidity. NIV confirmed India's first three cases of Zika virus infection — all in Ahmedabad. Edited excerpts from interview.

HENRY FOUNTAIN

BENEATH A forested patch of land on the Gulf of Bothnia, at the bottom of a steep tunnel that winds for three miles through granite bedrock, Finland is getting ready to entomb its nuclear waste.

If all goes well, sometime early in the next decade the first of what will be nearly 3,000 sealed copper canisters, each up to 17 feet long and containing about two tonnes of spent reactor fuel from Finland's nuclear power industry, will be lowered into a vertical borehole in a side tunnel about 1,400 feet underground. As more canisters are buried, the holes and tunnels — up to 20 miles of them — will be packed with clay and eventually abandoned.

The fuel, which contains plutonium and other products of nuclear fission, will remain radioactive for tens of thousands of years — time enough for a new ice age and other epochal events. But between the two-inch-thick copper, the clay and the surrounding ancient granite, officials say, there should be no risk of contamination to future generations.

"We are pretty confident we have done our business right," said Timo Aikas, a former executive with Posiva, the company that runs the project. "It seems the Olkiluoto (island) bedrock is good for safe disposal."

The repository, called Onkalo and estimated to cost about 3.5 billion euros (currently about \$3.9 billion) over the century or so that it will take to fill it, will be the world's first permanent disposal site for commercial reactor fuel. With the support of the local municipality and the national government, the project has progressed relatively smoothly for years.

That is a marked contrast to similar efforts in other countries, most notably those in the United States to create a deep repository in Nevada. The Yucca Mountain project, which would handle spent fuel that is currently stored at 75 reactor sites around the country, faced political opposition from Nevada lawmakers for years and was defunded by the Barack Obama admin-



Excavating equipment at the site of what will be the world's first repository for spent nuclear reactor fuel, deep in granite bedrock in Finland. Miikka Pirinen for The New York Times

istration in 2012.

Now, with the backing of the nuclear power industry — and with the retirement of Yucca Mountain's chief nemesis, Senator Harry Reid of Nevada — the Donald Trump administration wants to take the project out of mothballs. But its fate remains uncertain.

Experts in nuclear waste management say the success of the Finnish project is due in part to how it was presented to the people who would be most affected by it. Each community under consideration as a repository location was consulted and promised veto power should it be selected.

Aikas, who was involved in the Finnish site selection process beginning in the 1980s, said they learned very soon that they had to be very open with people. "This openness

and transparency creates trust." Officials who had concerns early in the process eventually came to see that the repository would provide property tax revenue and jobs.

The fact that Olkiluoto had experience with nuclear power — two of the country's four operating nuclear power reactors are on Olkiluoto, and a third plant is under construction nearby — helped.

Also, as early as 1983, Finland's national government established the principle that companies creating the waste are responsible for disposing of it. The government had only approval and regulatory roles. "It has always been important to resolve this spent-fuel issue and keep it in the hands of the power company," Aikas said.

THE NEW YORK TIMES

REGIONAL RIVALRY, GLOBAL CONCERN

Why Iran and Saudi Arabia's tensions lie at the heart of Middle East's political complexities

MAX FISHER & AMANDA TAUB

ONE OF the key aspects of the enormous complexities of the politics of the Middle East is the simmering cold war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The rivalry between those two regional powers can be seen like the secret decoder ring to the whole region. While it doesn't explain everything, it allows observers to get beyond individual events to see the patterns and strategies that connect them.

Last week, terrorists attacked Iran's Parliament and the tomb of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the worst act of terror that Iran has suffered in years. Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps, in a statement, blamed Saudi Arabia and the United States for the attack. On its face, that statement seemed odd: the Islamic State (IS) had claimed responsibility, and the Saudi monarchy is the IS's enemy, not its ally; the IS has, in fact, attacked Riyadh, the Saudi capital, several times.

But the real question here isn't whether the Revolutionary Guards' claim is accurate.



CCTV grab shows a terrorist entering Iran's Parliament building on June 7. The Revolutionary Guards have blamed Saudi Arabia and the US for the attack. IRIB/Handout via Reuters

It is whether the statement is a signal that the Iranian government, or at least the hardliners within the Guards, has seized on the attack as a way to justify and escalate Iran's rivalry with the Saudis. That could be a sign that tensions between the two countries are about to get worse — a prospect that many analysts find deeply worrying.

Iranian-Saudi tensions have already inflamed sectarian violence and fuelled multiple devastating conflicts throughout the Middle East. Those tensions go all the way back to Iran's 1979 Revolution. The new government's Shia ideology put it at odds with the Saudi monarchs, who saw Iran's revolutionary populism as a direct threat to their rule. So when Iraq's Sunni leader Saddam Hussein invaded Iran the next year, Saudi Arabia backed him. Iran and Saudi Arabia have seen each other as mortal threats ever since, and have tried to manage that tension by competing for regional influence.

After Saddam's regime fell in Iraq, opening a power vacuum, Iran supported the Shia militias that fought Sunni militants, stoking

the country's catastrophic civil war.

In Syria, Iran backs the administration of President Bashar al-Assad, a member of the Shiite Alawite sect; Saudi Arabia and other wealthy Gulf nations support rebel groups there. The resulting stalemate has killed hundreds of thousands of civilians and displaced millions more.

If Iranian-Saudi tensions escalate further, the consequences could be severe. And if that happens, the United States may have played a role. President Donald Trump has expressed particular concern about the Iranian government. During his recent visit to Riyadh, he met with a group of leaders from Sunni countries and called on them to isolate Iran. He seems to hope that kind of opposition will weaken Iran, lessening its interference in Syria and other nations.

But history suggests that this plan could backfire — that Iran may try even harder to increase its regional influence in order to counterbalance the attempts at isolation.

THE NEW YORK TIMES

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

POLICY BLIGHT

Fadnavis's loan waiver cannot address farm distress.
Solution lies in building rural infrastructure

MAHARASHTRA CHIEF MINISTER Devendra Fadnavis, it looks, has bought peace with agitating ryots by promising to waive off loans of all farmers in the state, irrespective of landholding size. But this is peace that would obviously come at a cost. Earlier this month, just when the unrest has started, Fadnavis had announced a Rs 30,000-crore waiver for 40 lakh-odd small and marginal farmers whose loans were overdue. The latest peace deal, hammered out with striking farmer organisations on Sunday, is supposedly a blanket waiver. That would, at an extreme, cover loans totaling an estimated Rs 1.14 crore made to all 1.36 crore farmers in Maharashtra. Even assuming the write-offs would be limited to full-time farmers — excluding government employees, professionals and others not dependent on agriculture as a primary source of income — and an individual cap of, say, Rs 1 lakh, the cost could well exceed Rs 50,000 crore.

But Maharashtra, we know, is not alone. Three months ago, the Yogi Adityanath administration in Uttar Pradesh had announced a Rs 36,000-crore loan waiver for small and marginal farmers, not as a response to any agitation but to fulfill a promise by Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself during the recent state assembly elections. It's a matter of time before other states — Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Punjab and Haryana seem most likely at the moment — would be forced to follow suit. There may be a host of conditions attached to such waivers, apart from a long time interval between the time of announcement, official notification and actual implementation on the ground. But either way, we are talking of states having to pick up a tab of Rs 2-3 lakh crore, over and above their combined annual fiscal deficit of Rs 4.5-5 lakh crore.

Now, there is no doubt that farmers in India are in a truly distressed state today. After successive droughts, this was a bumper crop year from which they should have benefited. Unfortunately, they were done in by low prices, for which demonetisation, it is now clear, was significantly to blame. But that brings us to the essential point: If farm indebtedness is a result of bad harvests or unanticipated price crash, isn't loan waiver, good or bad, only addressing the symptom rather than the disease? Assuming every deserving farmer would see his/her loan burden reduced by Rs one lakh — past experience with waivers point to tardy implementation, replete with faulty beneficiary selection — will it guarantee no repeat of the problem? We can be sure that Rs 2-3 lakh crore spent in rural roads, godowns, power supply, irrigation, agricultural research and crop insurance would generate farm incomes, which is the only sustainable antidote to indebtedness. If loan waiver was a solution, farmers shouldn't have had any problems after 2008 — when the last big Rs 72,000-crore package came from the UPA.

REPRINT THE BOOK

Gujarat government must withdraw textbook with objectionable epithet against Jesus Christ

AGUJARAT STATE School Textbook Board (GSSTB) textbook for Class IX students learning Hindi as a second language has a reference to Jesus Christ as a "haivan" (demon/monster). Christian groups have been demanding for a month that the Gujarat government withdraw the books in question. GSSTB has since removed the controversial adjective from the online version of the book. The government has claimed that it is a typographical error — that "bhagvan" was misspelt as "haivan" — and ordered an inquiry. However, it has refused to withdraw the textbook citing logistical issues. This is unacceptable. The textbook, which reaches thousands of students, must be recalled and new ones with the corrected text printed and redistributed.

Inter-community relations in Gujarat have been fraught for decades now. Christians, who make up less than half a per cent of the state's population, too have been targeted by fanatics. Through 1998 and 1999, churches and prayer meeting halls in The Dangs district were attacked and vandalised. Several other places of worship, including in Ahmedabad, were targeted. The Dangs, among the poorest districts in the country, has also been at the centre of "ghar vapasi" movements to "return" tribal Christians to the Hindu fold. Against this backdrop, referring to the fountain-head of the Christian faith as a "monster" should sharpen the polarisation and add to the insecurity of the Christian community in the state. Leaving it to teachers to tell the class that epithet in the textbook is an error may not necessarily ensure that the mistake is not internalised by the students.

The objectionable reference to Christ occurs in a chapter titled "Bharatiya sanskriti me guru-shishya sambandh" (the teacher-disciple relationship in Indian culture). Here, Christ is not discussed as a Semitic religious figure, but spoken about in the context of an aspect of his life and words that has a bearing on Indian culture. The text mentions that Christ as a guru loved and respected his disciples. This is a Christ who has evoked respect and admiration among many non-Christians in India as well. His teachings were a seminal influence on Gandhi. The cost of reprinting the textbook and the logistics of distribution pale against the potential damage the error can inflict.

KEEP IT IRRELEVANT

Why just three documentaries — major political pictures abhi tak baqi hain

DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKER SHAWN Sebastian has hit an abrupt interval with his film, *In The Shade of Fallen Chinara*, being denied censorship exemption by the central government. The government has also denied exemptions to two other documentaries, *March, March, March*, based on the JNU students' agitation, and *The Unbearable Being of Lightness*, which spotlights Rohith Vemula. Sebastian says these films have been blocked as they show socially relevant themes; he will approach the Kerala High Court now.

But Sebastian, don't despair — your film is not being singled out. You are, in fact, in exhaustive company for India is brimming over with "socially relevant" themes that will never be made into movies — seeking censorship clearance is a non-issue, as these films will be non-films. For instance, that searing movie on dynasty, where generations in a Congress Party-style "first family" live off one surname, one ancestor, one idea — of being entitled to unending worship. Neither will we see that sharp documentary on exactly what the RSS's role in the freedom struggle was, and whether that contribution — or the lack thereof — causes the right-wing group's irritation whenever "azaadi" is mentioned. We'll never see that slick flick on quick scams in Ma-Mati-Maanush land, just as we won't see that in-depth documentary on how not-so-hidden tigers terrorised Mumbai. And we will certainly never see that all-exposing documentary on 1984, or 2002, or any of the communal violence that reshaped our polity — and our nightmares.

Neither should these films ever be allowed, for cinema in India is about forgetting one's pains, not confronting them. Indian cinema makes us trill, "*Mere desh ki dharti*", not worry about why this is vanishing under our feet, in mining scams, land grabs and fraud allotments. After decades of official repression, we now like our films socially irrelevant; truth-seekers like Sebastian should give us a break.

Does Gandhi have a caste?



RAMACHANDRA GUHA

He had the ability to be of all castes
and no caste at all

IN MARCH 1922, GANDHI was arrested on charges of sedition. When he was produced in court, the magistrate, after the law then prevalent, asked the prisoner to identify himself by caste or profession. Gandhi answered that he was "a farmer and weaver". The magistrate was startled; so, he asked the question again, to get the same answer.

We have recently been reminded that Gandhi was born in a bania household. But, back in 1922, few, if any, banias were farmers or weavers; few, if any, are even today. Yet Gandhi's self-description was accurate; for in the Sabarmati Ashram, Gandhi did not trade, but he did spin daily and experiment with crops and livestock rearing. That statement to an Ahmedabad court was a striking example of Gandhi's lifelong commitment to making his caste origins irrelevant to his personal and public life.

This commitment was manifested early. In September 1888, Mohandas Gandhi, then just short of his 20th birthday, decided to sail to England to study law. This horrified his orthodox Modh Bania community, whose head warned Mohandas that he would be excommunicated if he travelled overseas. But the boy defied him and went anyway. In the days before his departure, recalled Gandhi in his autobiography, he was "hemmed in by all sides. I could not go out without being pointed and stared at by someone or other. At one time, while I was walking near the Town Hall, I was surrounded and hooted by them, and my poor brother had to look at the scene in silence".

Banias were, and often still are, obsessed with social taboos. Yet, while in London, Gandhi made so bold as to share a home and break bread with a Christian named Josiah Oldfield. Later, in South Africa, he and his wife Kasturba shared a home and kitchen with Henry and Millie Polak, he a Jew, she a Christian, both white. Johannesburg was then the most racist city in the most racist country in the world. By their remarkable act, the Gandhis and the Polaks defied both the casteism of Indians and the racism of Europeans.

In the satyagrahas he led in South Africa, Gandhi's closest associates were a Parsi named Rustomji, a Muslim named Kacchalia, and a Tamil named Naidoo. Watching him at

work, transcending all social boundaries, was his Jewish friend and housemate Henry Polak. In a vivid (but sadly unpublished) account of the passive resistance movement in South Africa, Polak wrote of its leader that, while "a Vaishnava Bania by birth, he is by nature a Brahmin, the teacher of his fellow-men, not by the preaching of virtue, but by its practice; by impulse a Kshatriya, in his chivalrous defence of those who had placed their trust in him and look to him for protection; by choice a Sudra, servant of the humblest and most despised of his fellow-men. It is said of [the seer] Ramkrishna that he once swept out the foul hut of a pariah with his own hair, to prove his freedom from arrogance towards and contempt for the untouchable outcast. The twice-born Prime Minister's son [Gandhi] has been seen with his own hands to purify the sanitary convenience of his own house and of the goals in which he has been interned."

Having spoken of Gandhi's ability to be of all castes and of no caste at all, Polak then stressed his ecumenism of faith: "Religion implies, for him, a mighty and all-embracing tolerance. Hindu by birth, he regards all men — Mahomedans, Christians, Zoroastrians, Jews, Buddhists, Confucians — as spiritual brothers. He makes no differences amongst them, recognising that all faiths lead to salvation, that all are ways of viewing God, and that, in their relation to each other, men are fellow-human beings first, and followers of creeds afterwards. Hence it is that men of all faiths and even of none, are his devoted friends, admirers, and helpers, and that, diverse in belief as is the community of which he has been the foremost figure, he is recognised as one who, in the last resort, may be looked to, to render impartial justice between man and man."

In South Africa, Gandhi was alerted to the horrors of untouchability by his Tamil friends. On returning to India in 1915, he established a "Satyagraha Ashram" in Ahmedabad. Early on, the Ashram took in a family from the Dhed caste of "untouchables", consisting of Dudhabhai, his wife Danibehn, and their baby daughter Lakshmi. When they arrived, there was much grumbling, not least from Gandhi's own family members. Kasturba herself was not happy with this decision to defy the or-

thodox. The Dhed family was prevented from drawing water from the common well, until Gandhi said, in that case, he would not avail himself of the well either.

Through the three decades of his work in India, Gandhi steadily and persistently attacked the practice of untouchability. To be sure, he moved in stages. While, in his own ashram, all members ate and mingled together regardless of caste, he did not at first advocate inter-dining or inter-mingling to society at large. However, as he grew more popular, and more sure of his public influence, he urged every Hindu not just to abolish untouchability from their minds and hearts, but to disregard matters of caste in where they lived, whom they ate with or befriended, and whom they married. (This evolution in his thinking is documented in a classic early essay by the Gandhi scholar Denis Dalton; it is also the subject of a forthcoming book by Nishikant Kolge, significantly entitled *Gandhi Against Caste*.)

Gandhi had four biological sons, all, like him, technically banias by birth. But of his two adopted daughters, one was born in an untouchable home (the aforementioned Lakshmi), while the other was an Englishwoman (Madeleine Slade, known as Mirabehn). In India, as in South Africa, Gandhi comprehensively disregarded caste and religious distinctions in his personal and political life. His closest friend was a Christian priest, C.F. Andrews; and he lived, and died, for harmony between India's two largest religious communities, Hindus and Muslims.

Like most Indian political parties, the BJP cannot and does not transcend caste or religion in its own practice. Dividing Dalits into Jatavs and non-Jatavs, dividing OBCs into Yadavs and non-Yadavs, dividing Indians into Hindus and Muslims, is how it seeks to win elections and remain in power. The reduction by the BJP president of Gandhi to his caste origins is therefore entirely understandable. It is another matter that Amit Shah's comment displays the wide, indeed unbridgeable, gulf between his moral universe and that of the man we call the Father of the Nation.

The writer is a Bangalore-based historian. His second volume of the biography of Gandhi will be published next year

BURDEN OF THE PAST

Sectarian rivalries in the Middle East colour responses to terror attacks in Iran



RAMIN JAHANBEGLOO

THE TERROR ATTACKS in Tehran on June 7, at Iran's parliament and Ayatollah Khomeini's shrine, which claimed 17 lives and left 42 people injured, happened just as President Rouhani settles into his second term. This is a difficult situation as he prepares to redefine his Middle Eastern policy, including Iran's engagement against the IS. The attacks raise the question of how the Rouhani government's perception of threats and anti-terror calculations may evolve.

The White House issued a statement that seemingly condoned the incident by holding Iran responsible for the terrorism it had faced: This was a slap in the face of moderates in the Iranian leadership who, after 9/11, expressed sympathy with the United States and offered to assist in the fight against al-Qaeda. It was also a show of disrespect to Iranians as a whole, many of whom lit candles at 9/11 vigils to express their empathy with the Americans. Surprisingly, in the same period as the IS attack against Iran, the US Senate advanced a new sanctions bill against the Islamic Republic, primarily targeting its ballistic missiles programme. This could further complicate the implementation of the Iran nuclear deal.

The messaging from the US to Iran, on the day of the attacks, could have focused on the mutual threat of the IS. This could have been an opportunity to explore cooperation in countering IS-radicalised militants op-

posed to both US and Iranian interests. Of course, it is no secret that President Donald Trump's hostile messaging to Iran follows his recent visit to Saudi Arabia and Israel. Rather than encouraging regional stability and dialogue, Trump allowed the visit to be turned into a Tehran-bashing contest.

As a response to the Saudi enmity against Iran, Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif accused Saudi Arabia of being linked to attacks in Tehran. Immediately after suggestions that the Saudis could have been behind the attack, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel Al-Jubeir denied the accusation. Questions remain about the number and nationality of the terrorists involved. Iran's Interior Ministry has put the number at six; the Revolutionary Guards announced that five attackers were involved, a number confirmed by the IS itself. Reza Seifollahi, deputy to the secretary of Iran's High National Security Council, said on TV that the assailants were Iranians who'd joined the IS and "worked with ISIS in the areas under its control in the region." It is hard to know how this IS attack against Iran will change Iranian foreign policy regionally, and to what level diplomatic tensions will escalate.

Let us not forget Iran's significant role in shaping the international politics of the Middle East: Acting as a balancing force in regional crises such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Lebanon; being situated between the two

major bases of global terrorism, that is, Afghanistan and Iraq; having important influence among Shiite factions in the Middle East's politics. All these put Iran among the first countries to be under terrorist threat.

In the past four years, Rouhani and his government made outreaches to the Gulf states a priority, but amid regional turmoil, their initiatives have landed off the mark. The powerful Iranian Revolutionary Guards is less interested in rapprochements: This view is seemingly shared by Iran's most powerful figure, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The reality is that, even before the Islamic revolution, relations with the Arab world had been a significant focus of Iranian foreign policy. Secondly, by its presence in Arab politics, Iran had balanced its relations with the great powers.

But now, rising anti-Shiite sentiment prevalent across social media in the Gulf states and anti-Iran media messaging will erode what little is left of Iranian soft power. Salafist jihadism will fuel new recruits — not only satisfied with targeting Shiites, but also Iranian interests.

The recent Tehran attacks indicate that the sectarian rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran is far from over.

The writer is professor and executive director, Mahatma Gandhi Centre, Jindal Global University



JUNE 13, 1977, FORTY YEARS AGO

PM-PHIZO TALKS

A FOUR-MEMBER DELEGATION of the Nagaland Peace Council led by Rev Kenneth Kurhevo has flown to London to be at hand when PM Morarji Desai meets A.Z. Phizo, leader of the remaining underground Nagas. The meeting is at Phizo's request. He hopes that from it will emerge a "final settlement" of the three decade-old Naga question. Before leaving for London, Rev Kurhevo and two other members of the delegation, M. Aram, who has been associated with peace efforts in Nagaland for more than 10 years, and Ramyo, a leader of the underground who had signed the Shillong accord, told this reporter that they were optimistic

about the meeting yielding positive results.

NOT AN ENCOUNTER

THE SECOND INTERIM report of the Civil Rights Committee says its investigations have revealed that the death of nine citizens in Guntur district during the Emergency were not a result of "encounters" between so-called Naxalites and the police, as alleged by the latter, but instead a cold-blooded murder of people who were in police custody. The nine-member Civil Rights Committee, headed by V.M. Tarkunde, was formed by Jayaprakash Narayan in April 1977, in order to look into the killings of 77 individuals in Andhra Pradesh which took

place during the Emergency.

HUMAN RIGHTS PANEL

THE SCOPE OF the Union government's proposal to set up a high-powered Civil Rights Commission at the Centre to look after the rights of minorities and backward sections is being widened. While the government is working on a bill to set up the commission at the Centre — it is likely to be presented to Parliament in this session — it now feels that similar commissions should be set up in the states as well. The Central Civil Rights Commission is likely to be headed by Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer of the Supreme Court who will continue to be on the bench.

Corridor of economic uncertainty

The Belt and Road Initiative could cost Pakistan its financial independence and turn it into a Chinese protectorate



CHRISTOPHE JAFFRELOT

LAST WEEK, THE Pentagon's annual report to the Congress forecast that China will build a military base in Pakistan in order to have in the subcontinent facilities akin to what Beijing is developing in Djibouti. These plans are well in tune with the proposals presented last month during the Belt and Road Forum (BARF) in Beijing in the presence of 29 heads of state. India skipped it because a section of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), infringes New Delhi's sovereignty as it passes through Kashmir. But the CPEC probably affects Pakistan's sovereignty even more, since this project is more than a corridor; it is an expansionist plan, as the military base singled out by the Pentagon also suggests.

China presents the BRI, also known as the One Belt One Road initiative (OBOR), as a connectivity project — hence, the reference to the old Silk Road and a new maritime silk road. But it is more than that, at least in the case of the CPEC. The CPEC does certainly imply the building of roads, railways and pipelines along corridors. The most well-known of these roads — that uses the Karakoram Highway — is already in operation between Kashgar and Gwadar. Six months ago, trucks began plying over the 3,200 km-long distance between the two cities for the first time.

But building roads, ports and railway linkages accounts for only \$11 billion of the CPEC project; a small part of the \$46 billion announced in 2016 when the first MoUs between China and Pakistan were signed (the total amount involved in the project seems closer to \$57 billion today). In fact, energy, with \$34 billion, gets the lion's share of the CPEC — hence, the nickname, China Pakistan Electric Cooperation. Out of the \$11 billion mentioned, besides the \$1 billion grant dedicated to Gwadar port (and airport), \$10 billion will come, not from FDIs, but through loans. The same ratio, it seems, will apply to the energy sector where dozens of thermal power plants (using coal mostly) will be built.

China may offer concessional rates to Pakistan, but Islamabad could still find the final debt unsustainable. Recently, Sri Lanka has alienated its financial independence along somewhat similar lines. Pakistani economists have come to the conclusion that over the next 30 years, the cost of the CPEC for Pakistan may amount to about \$90 billion. It may still be the best way for Pakistan to develop infrastructure, given the small amount of money left for this in the country's budget, after the deduction of the already enormous debt servicing and the funds allocated to the army.

But other implications of the CPEC need to be factored in. First, 29 exclusive economic zones situated in the corridors have apparently been reserved for Chinese companies. In March, for instance, the building of the Gwadar 300-megawatt coal power plant was awarded to a Chinese company without any bidding procedure. The master plan that was leaked to the *Dawn* goes even further.



CR Sasikumar

This long-term plan (LTP) was prepared in 2015 by the China Development Bank. It was revised in 2016 under the framework of the Joint Economic Cooperation Meetings, but the final version is not publicly available yet. Even if the old version is not fully accurate, it is at least revealing of the initial plans of the Chinese.

The LTP suggests that agriculture will be a major component of the CPEC. Thousands of acres of land were indeed supposed to be leased out to Chinese enterprises of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region for modernising Pakistani agriculture — and benefit from it too. Another sector in which companies of Xinjiang — the landlocked province Beijing wants to develop thanks to the CPEC — intend to invest in Pakistan is textile, in order to get raw material (including cotton). The LTP even refers to culture. It envisages the expansion, in Pakistan, of the bandwidth between both countries in order to use digital television terrestrial multimedia broadcasting as a cultural transmission carrier.

Opposition politicians have reacted to what one of them called the making of another East India Company. But this offensive has hardly made any difference. The PML(N) government is presenting the CPEC as one of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's main achievements, evident from the way the MoUs signed by Sharif and Xi Jinping in Beijing on the side of the Belt and Road Forum were publicised.

More importantly, the army, which is in the driver's seat, is killing not two but three birds with this project. First, the CPEC makes it legitimate for the army to grow more. A new division, the Special Security Division, has been created. Fifteen thousand men have been recruited and deployed to provide security to 34 projects, something the Chinese were asking for after the targeting of some of their engineers and workers (already, 10,000 Chinese work in Pakistan), in Balochistan in particular. Second, the CPEC allows the Pakistani army to relate even more directly to the Chinese government not just for security reasons, but also for economic matters. Third, the

China may offer concessional rates to Pakistan, but Islamabad could still find the final debt unsustainable. Recently, Sri Lanka has alienated its financial independence along somewhat similar lines. Pakistani economists have come to the conclusion that over the next 30 years, the cost of CPEC for Pakistan may amount to about \$90 billion. Twenty nine exclusive economic zones situated in the corridors have apparently been reserved for Chinese companies. In March, for instance, the building of the Gwadar 300-megawatt coal power plant was awarded to a Chinese company without any bidding procedure.

army can use the CPEC for developing what Ayesha Siddiqi has called the Milbus — the military business complex that gained momentum under General Pervez Musharraf and after. Civilians are resisting this development, but whether the government and business people supporting it can benefit from the CPEC as much as they expect remains to be seen. The army may also repress the Baloch nationalists even more forcefully in the name of economic security under the CPEC's umbrella.

While the Chinese protectorate over Pakistan that is in the offing will probably affect the economic independence of the country and strengthen the army's role in the public sphere, it may be a blessing in disguise as far as the Islamist threat is concerned. The jihadist connection of the Uighur Islamists is today one of Beijing's obsessions. China may, therefore, use its growing influence over the Pakistani army for eliminating groups with which it had been complacent till now. This approach may even result in additional interventions by Beijing in Afghanistan, a country in which China is also interested because of its mineral resources. After all, the BRI has been presented as being motivated by the quest for regional prosperity — the full name of the recent forum was Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation.

But this regional ambition will remain a dead letter if India is not on board. Xi has tried to defuse the apprehensions of China's neighbours, including India, by referring to the Panchsheel of the 1950s in his address to the BARF. But this overture would be more meaningful if Beijing recognised New Delhi's sovereignty over Arunachal Pradesh, stopped its incursions in the Himalayas, supported India's candidacy to the Nuclear Suppliers Group and endorsed, in the UN, the India-supported resolution designating Masood Azhar as a terrorist.

The writer is senior research fellow at CERIS-Sciences Po/CNRS, Paris, professor of Indian politics and sociology at King's India Institute, London

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Theresa May fought a deplorable election campaign which has left her without authority or credibility."

—THE GUARDIAN

Engaging an inward looking US

PM Modi will need to work out a new roadmap that will help India navigate relations with Trump's America



RAJA MANDALA

BY C. RAJA MOHAN

AS HE HEADS to the White House later this month, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has a two-fold challenge. One is to preserve the gains in the bilateral relationship with the United States over the last two decades. The other is to find ways to cope with the unprecedented turbulence in America following the election of Donald Trump as the president last November.

All of the recent predecessors of Modi and Trump — from Rajiv Gandhi to Narasimha Rao and Atal Bihari Vajpayee to Manmohan Singh in Delhi and Barack Obama, George Bush and Bill Clinton in Washington — have contributed to the transformation of India-US relations. In India, Modi devoted great personal and political energies to advance the partnership with the US. Even more important, Modi had sought to end India's long-standing ambivalence towards America by bringing a sense of self-assurance and realism to Delhi's engagement with Washington. As he told the US Congress during his visit to Washington last summer, India's "historic hesitations" in engaging America are now over.

Having brought India out of its defensive shell, Modi now finds he must deal with an America that is retreating into one. Trump's unexpected victory in the last presidential elections has pushed the United States onto a trajectory very different from the one that the world had got accustomed to since the middle of the 20th century. In Washington, large sections of the political elite and the permanent establishment are yet to reconcile with the surprise result of the 2016 election. Trump's personal and political styles have also contributed to the deepening of a rare political schism in Washington.

As the old policymakers in Washington disappear, Modi must devise a new map to navigate Trump's America. The traditional props that have framed India-US relationship over the last two decades — including those on shared democratic values and a common interest in Asian balance of power — can no longer provide an effective guidance to the Trump era.

Delhi has been wise to set a modest ambition to Modi's visit — of building a personal rapport with Trump. But the PM's talks with Trump will also be critical in shaping India's long-term national strategy in the emerging multipolar world. The PM's recent travels in Europe and Central Asia have already seen some first Indian steps in responding to Trump's impact on Eurasia. But getting America right at a mo-

ment when it is changing at home remains India's highest priority.

The quest for a multipolar world has been one of the central themes of India's foreign policy since the end of the Cold War. Although the rhetoric was all about multipolarity, the practice of the presumed partners in this enterprise — Beijing, Moscow and Delhi — was all about improving ties with the sole super power in Washington. Put another way, "multipolarity" was the insurance against potential problems with the "unipolar" moment. It was about creating some political leverage in their engagement with the United States.

The rapid rise of China, the assertion of Russia and the broader diffusion of power in the international system in the 21st century have indeed been chipping away at the unipolar moment. But what hastened the multipolar moment is America's internal political churn that propelled a rank outsider like Trump into the White House. Although China, Russia and India were eager to see limits on American power, none of them has been prepared for the prospect of American retrenchment.

Trump's surprise victory may have been inconsequential for Europe and Asia if he had stuck to the establishment world view. But his victory was in part due to his very questioning of the cost benefit calculus of America's expansive global role and the much vaunted Washington's leadership of the liberal international order.

Trump has challenged the value of America's Eurasian military alliances and demands that the allies do more if they want American protection. Trump has argued that the globalist policies of the US — from promoting free trade to mitigating climate change — have come at the expense of American workers. Trump has also declared that he is pulling America out of the business of promoting universal values and intervening in the internal affairs of other nations.

Ever since the Second World War, India had to deal with US internationalism. Under Trump, Delhi must learn to cope with American nationalists, who are asking "what's in it for me?". Since the end of the Cold War, Delhi has craved for a multipolar world. Thanks to Trump, its wish has come true. Modi's task in Washington is to get Indian diplomacy adapt to these twin changes in America.

In the seven decades since India's independence, it was Washington that set the agenda for bilateral relationship. With Trump, Delhi must figure out what it wants from America and what it is prepared to give in return. For many in Delhi this will be an awkward strategic moment. Modi, though, might want to see it as a historic opportunity to take the initiative and shape the terms of a new relationship with America.

The writer is director, Carnegie India, Delhi and contributing editor on foreign affairs for 'The Indian Express'

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

MATTER OF RIGHTS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Whose fight is it anyway?' (IE, June 12). To realise their agency, Muslim women, the educated among them in particular, must refuse patriarchal interpretations of the Quran.

G. Javid Rasool, Lucknow

WHAT ABOUT DEBT?

THE REFERS TO the article, 'Just why are the farmers rioting?' (IE, June 10). The author has a right to appreciate the rise of Prime Minister Narendra Modi vis-a-vis the RSS. But what about Modi's performance on his election promises? When pulses become dear, farmers do produce more of it, but the government does not stop imports, or support farmers by offering a higher MSP. The article argues that poverty is not a factor for suicides. Yes, but a debt trap is. Many farmers fall into debt traps as a result of wrong government policies.

Kishan Siraskar, via e-mail

INSULT TO GANDHI

RECENTLY, A SENIOR politician referred to Mahatma Gandhi as a "chatur bania". As a biological granddaughter of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, my natural reaction is of deep hurt. Mahatma Gandhi is the Father of the Nation. The senior politician should have had the wisdom to refer to Mahatma Gandhi as the greatest visionary of our times.

Tara Gandhi Bhattacharjee, via e-mail

CAUTION IS KEY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'The right balance' (IE, June 12). The Shanghai

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

To encourage quality reader intervention, The Indian Express offers the Letter of the Week award. The letter adjudged the best for the week is published every Saturday. Letters may be e-mailed to editpage@expressindia.com or sent to The Indian Express, B-1/B, Sector 10, Noida-UP 201301. Letter-writers should mention their postal address and phone number.

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DEEPENDER HOODA

When economics catches up

Lower MSP increases, rising input costs and debt have led to the farm crisis

ECONOMICS IS LIKE gravity. No matter how hard we try to defy it, it always catches up. Three years into the BJP government, farm economics has caught up. For armchair economists to dismiss farmer distress as politically motivated may be convenient, but we can't ignore the writing on the wall: We have a serious agrarian crisis. In the past three years, average hikes in the Minimum Support Prices (MSPs) for major crops have failed to keep pace with either what was achieved in the previous 10 years or the net inflation levels for these respective years. In the same period, profit margins based on MSP purchases of major crops, according to the government's own data, have collapsed. Finally, the outstanding farm loans have gone up by 55 per cent in the first 30 months of the Modi government.

The political-economy of the farm sector over the last few years explains the current crisis. The UPA decade (2004-14) saw stable annual increases in the MSPs: Paddy MSP went up from Rs 590 to Rs 1,400, indicating an annual increase of 13 per cent. Similarly, the average annual hike for wheat in this period was 14 per cent, arhar 22 per cent, moong 23 per cent and cotton 18 per cent.

During the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP promised a better deal for farmers. Most

importantly, along with the BJP's manifesto, it was Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself who promised a minimum 50 per cent profit margin on each crop by implementing the Swaminathan Commission's recommendations. Then, in a disappointing U-turn in February 2015, the Union government filed an affidavit in the Supreme Court terming the implementation of the Swaminathan Report "market distorting" and unfeasible.

Adding insult to injury, there has been a steep decline in the annual MSP hikes since 2014 compared to the UPA years: The average annual increases in MSP for paddy has dipped from 13 per cent to 4 per cent in 2014-17, wheat from 14 to 4 per cent, arhar from 22 to 6 per cent and moong from 23 to 5 per cent. Overall, the average annual MSP hike across major crops has collapsed from an average of 15 per cent in the UPA years to 4 per cent in the three years since 2014. Simply put for the salaried class: Would you prefer a 15 per cent annual salary hike or a 4 per cent one? That too when you were offered a big bonus in 2014 (the Swaminathan bonus!).

The increasing cost of cultivation (the government has not passed on the benefits of reduced global oil prices to the farmer) and low MSP hikes have hit the profitability of the

farmers hard. In 2010-11, a farmer made a 39 per cent profit on paddy (MSP Rs 950/quintal, production cost of Rs 670). This has fallen to 6.5 per cent and 6.7 per cent in 2015-16 and 2016-17 respectively. The same holds for all the other crops. It cannot be a coincidence that India recorded its highest economic growth in the years 2007-12 when our farmers earned the highest profits.

One result has been that the farmer has not been paying back his debt at historical rates. The total outstanding farm loans have ballooned from Rs 8.11 lakh crore in March 2014 to Rs 12.6 lakh crore — a jump of about 55 per cent over a 30-month period. Add the impact of demonetisation to the declining profit margins and growing indebtedness, and you have the recipe for a perfect storm.

On its part, facing massive backlash from the farmer, the government has come out with a seven-point agenda to double farmer income by 2022. This target itself is more rhetorical than substantive for two reasons. Firstly, it is less than ambitious — according to the rural income survey, between 2002-03 and 2012-13 the average monthly income per farmer went up from Rs 2,115 to Rs 6,426 — incomes have actually tripled in the 10-year period. Secondly, it is hardly realistic in the

present situation. Doubling farmer income by 2022 would need a 14 per cent agricultural income growth rate for the next five years which seems unachievable now given that 2015-16 growth number was just 1.2 per cent.

Finally, a slow-down in investment in our economy resulting in lower growth in sectors such as construction and manufacturing are a double-whammy for the hinterland. These secondary sectors have been the natural sectors for the migration of labour from the primary sector burdened with the increasing fragmentation of landholdings. With industry not in a good shape, and the farm economy in peril, the rural youth are restless. The distress is now boiling over.

The present government has two years left in office and we all want the crisis to be resolved at the earliest. The government has few options left, the time has come for it to consider implementing the Swaminathan Commission's recommendations in full, especially ensuring a minimum 50 per cent profit margin and a loan waiver like the one promised in UP. PR stunts and a helpful media might help in the short-term but economics and gravity can't be defied indefinitely.

The writer is a Congress MP