

The Indian EXPRESS

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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Journey of Ram Nath Kovind



RAM MADHAV

His candidacy for president is being viewed in terms of his caste identity alone. This is an injustice

THE FINAL FRONTIER

India can ill afford to miss its date with the Goods and Services Tax this time

WITH THE CLOCK ticking on the planned roll-out of the Goods and Services Tax on July 1, the government and the GST Council have been furiously at work. At its meeting on Sunday, the Council eased the norms for filing detailed transaction wise returns in the initial months of July and August — by pushing that requirement to September and settling for a simple return in the interim besides setting the rates on lotteries of state governments at 12 per cent of face value and 28 per cent for those authorised by states but run by private entities. The Council has also revised the levy for restaurants inside five-star hotels to 18 per cent, from the earlier slab of 28 per cent and the operational framework and rules for an anti-profiteering authority which will arbitrate on whether a company needs to reduce prices if its products gain from lower GST rates. That would mean reimbursing money to consumers or depositing it in a separate fund if it is established that a firm has indulged in profiteering.

A few more issues need to be ironed out, such as rules for e-waybills. But for now, the government appears determined to go ahead with what many term as the country's most ambitious indirect tax reform. Doubts have been raised on the level of preparedness for the new taxation regime at various levels — trade, industry, state governments and the IT network. India's bigger corporates may be better positioned or equipped to handle this but the ones struggling are small and medium firms for whom the migration to a new regime will lead to a huge burden. Finance Minister Arun Jaitley has, however, said that over 81 per cent of the taxpayers liable for GST have already registered with the Goods and Services Tax Network or GSTN while making the point that the government was mindful of some of the problems having given industry the leeway of 42 days before filing returns.

Jaitley has said that the country doesn't have the luxury of time to defer the implementation of the GST yet again. He may be right about that. India's first date for a GST roll-out was eight years ago, on April 1, 2009, during the UPA regime when Pranab Mukherjee was finance minister. One can fault the homegrown model for building a common national market for goods and services because of multiple and high rates — a far cry from the simple design originally envisaged. But as India meets its trust with destiny on the midnight of June 30, in keeping with the government's grand roll-out plan, it is important that many of the distortions are corrected down the line, once the new system stabilises and with as little disruption to economic activity as possible. The stakes are high, coming as it does quickly after demonetisation.

BAD FOR HEALTH

Move to replace gelatin-based capsules with those made from plant products is not guided by medical reasons

A NOTICE ISSUED by a health ministry expert committee in the first week of June signals the government's intention to usher major change in India's pharmaceutical sector. It invites comments from stakeholders about replacing widely-used animal parts-based gelatin capsules with those derived from cellulose. Currently, 98 per cent of the Indian pharmaceutical industry uses animal parts-based capsules. But the government has been pitching for "vegetarian capsules" for the past two years. However, there is little medical — or commercial — reasoning behind this proposal. By all accounts, a switch over to cellulose-based capsules could jeopardise the government's recent initiatives to make medicines accessible to all.

In 2015, the scientific committee which advises the Drug Controller General of India (DGCI) gave an in-principle approval to the shift to cellulose-based capsules. In an e-mail last year to the joint secretary, health ministry, the DGCI pitched for "vegetable capsules for vegetarian society". The DGCI's vegetarian fetish found support from the Women and Child Development Minister Maneka Gandhi. In a representation to the health ministry last year, she argued, "In a country where there are millions of people, this hurts religious sentiments and many people avoid medicines that are in a capsule form". The health ministry's latest notice is in response to this representation.

The ministry has overruled the reasoning of its premier advisory agency, the Drug Technical Advisory Board, which had dismissed Gandhi's representation on the grounds that: "Unlike food, drugs are not taken as choice but are prescribed by doctors to save lives and marking them as vegetarian or non-vegetarian is not desirable". Industry, too, is sceptical of the move. It has argued that the gelatin capsules have been in use all over the world for more than 180 years. Questions have also been raised about the viability of cellulose-based capsules. In a representation to the DGCI last year, the PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry cited the huge economic cost of the switch, which may also impact accessibility of medicines. "The investments required to be made for manufacturing cellulose-based capsules are substantial and will require planning and time," the industry body argued. It reckons that the cost of raw material required to make cellulose capsules is "approximately four times that of gelatin and the manufacturing cost of cellulose-based capsules approximately three times the cost of gelatin capsules". The health ministry's June notice invites opinions from industry, NGOs and medical bodies. But the government will do well to guard against pandering to "religious sentiments" on health matters.

PRIVACY OF CYBORGS

Harvard's decision to rescind admission based on Facebook posts sparks questions on shifting nature of the public sphere

THE LINE BETWEEN a personal prejudice and an act of public bigotry has become even more difficult to discern in the age of social media. Earlier this month, Harvard University decided to revoke the admission of 10 incoming students for allegedly offensive Facebook posts against minorities, the Holocaust and victims of sexual assault. Much of the debate following the decision has centred around the right to free speech, and the institution's right to exclude those it feels can poison its diverse atmosphere. But Harvard's decision also throws up another ethical dilemma.

It is very improbable that Harvard, or any other elite (and elitist) institution of its size and history, has not had members with privately held prejudices. Also, would the students whose admission was cancelled say the things they did in an admission essay or interview? The punitive action against the students hinges on two factors: That they held bigoted beliefs and they expressed them publicly. However, the degree to which social media platforms are "public" is far from clear. A personal Facebook account is, in its barest form, a virtual simulation of your private social network. Would Harvard rescind students' admission based on an off-colour statement made at a party? Social media has evolved since its inception, as have its users. Rather than a mere tool to stay connected they have become a display and extension of the people that use them, and the algorithms used by Facebook, for example, amplify the message.

Proto-cyborg personalities that the internet has moulded, the part of ourselves we put out on a platform like Facebook, is neither wholly public nor wholly private. There has already been a political and ethical cost to this state of limbo — fake news travels through "personal" accounts, even influencing election results. The debate emanating out of Harvard will continue as the delineation between the public and private shifts and evolves.

"MAINE JAISE SWAYAM safalta paayi, vaise tum log bhi mehnat karo (Just like I achieved success on my own, you should work hard for it too)". These words of Ram Nath Kovind, the NDA's nominee for president, to his nephew, quoted in a report in *The Indian Express*, aptly sum up the man in question. Kovind, besides many other things, is self-made.

From a humble village, Paraukh near Kanpur, to Parliament and Supreme Court in Delhi to Raj Bhavan in Patna, Kovind's journey has been that of a committed and dedicated party activist and social worker. He joined the RSS and Jana Sangh and later graduated into an active leader of the BJP in Uttar Pradesh.

Kovind is a lawyer by training. He served as the government's standing counsel for more than a decade in the Supreme Court. Having cleared the civil services exams, he opted out when he couldn't get into the coveted IAS cadre and was offered the allied services instead. He became a Rajya Sabha MP in 1994 and remained in the House for two terms until 2006. During his tenure in the Rajya Sabha he had the rare distinction of addressing the United Nations as a member of the Indian delegation in October 2002. Colleagues in Parliament remember him as a gentle, soft-spoken and yet a focused person. He served in the BJP in several capacities as the president of the SC Morcha and party spokesman.

In a caste-obsessed polity, Kovind's caste identity becomes an important debating issue with some reducing it to the BJP's "political outreach" while some others see it as a political "masterstroke". Kovind's identity as a Dalit is certainly a matter of fact. He belongs to a lower middle class family of farmers. His rise to become a nominee for the post of the first citizen of India is a tribute to the power of our value system and democracy.

Dalit aspirations in our country need

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newer representation and leaders like Kovind represent that new leadership. They represent the new age Dalit thinking centred on developmental activism of an empowered community. Seeing their social identity as integral to the larger national identity is the hallmark of this newly empowered Dalit leadership. This integrationist thinking is the product of the long years that leaders like Kovind have spent in imbibing the One Nation One People ideology of the BJP and its parivar.

But to limit the discourse to Kovind's caste identity alone will be a great injustice not only to the man but also to the political maturity of our nation. Kovind is not going to be the first or last Dalit to occupy the 340-room red sandstone building of the British era called the Rashtrapati Bhavan. K.R. Narayanan occupied that palatial building for five years from 1997 to 2002. Like Narayanan, Kovind also is a well-read and accomplished leader.

Comparisons that are being made about the nominee and some former presidents are unfair and uncalled for. The office of president has largely been non-controversial in all these decades barring a couple of unsavoury episodes. Given his nature and temperament, Kovind is expected to fit smoothly into the job. The vast exposure to global politics that he acquired through travels to more than a dozen countries as part of the parliamentary delegations would also come in handy for him, as the president is also expected to receive global leaders.

Returning to Narayanan, it is important to recall what had happened in 2000 when he visited Paris. "An untouchable in Elysees" is how the French media had chosen to report the state visit of the Indian President. *Le Monde* was the only French newspaper to be given an interview by President Narayanan, and it again headlined the interview with his caste.

The Indian side, including the president himself, was thoroughly shaken and embarrassed by this outrageous portrayal of Narayanan's humble beginnings in a most tactless and mocking way by the French media. The French establishment was forced to issue regrets and an apology.

The rise of K.R. Narayanan and Ram Nath Kovind to the highest position in India should be a matter of pride both for their personal identity as well as the nation's collective will. When Dr Zakir Hussain became Vice President of India some enthusiasts had gone up to him to congratulate him. "A Muslim like Hussain becoming the Vice President of India shows how successful our secularism is", they said. Dr Hussain reprimanded them saying "the true success of secularism is when a Muslim becomes the Vice President of India and yet nobody comes to congratulate him as a Muslim, and people see him only as an Indian."

"Our politics is groupish, not selfish", laments renowned social psychologist Jonathan Haidt in *The Righteous Mind*. Group identities become important and defining. That leads to stereotypes and, eventually, to more divisions. We end up making great national figures into small group leaders. As a consequence, the loss is to the entire nation, as we have already seen in the case of Narayanan.

If at all Kovind represents any section, it is that of the majority of India — rural, agrarian, economically and socially underprivileged. It is the same section that Prime Minister Narendra Modi represents. He too was sneered at by some Lutyens' intellectuals as "chaiwala". But both Kovind and Modi represent the true India — Marx's proletariat and Socrates' philosopher rolled into one.

The writer is national general secretary, BJP and director India Foundation



KARAN THAPAR

THE MAN WHO WON'T BE PRESIDENT

L.K. Advani would have been the most fitting Sangh Parivar choice for the post

THE BHARATIYA JANATA Party's decision to choose Ram Nath Kovind as its candidate for president raises three questions and I'm not sure if the answers will please Messrs. Narendra Modi and Amit Shah: Who is Mr Kovind? Why was he chosen? And is he the most fitting member of the Sangh Parivar for this high office?

For all his unblemished career as an advocate, a two-term Rajya Sabha MP and, most recently, Governor of Bihar, Kovind is for most of us an unknown entity. He may well be a good and principled man but is that sufficient to be President of India? Should not the person chosen have distinctions that are widely recognised so that he can be said to adorn the office rather than simply occupy it? The President has no political powers but he does have enormous influence and he is the symbol of our nation. He, therefore, needs to be someone we look up to and not a person we have questions about. However, despite these doubts, there is clearly one good reason why Kovind was chosen. He's a Dalit and, therefore, represents the party the BJP wishes to become. As its strives to shed its elite Brahmin image, Kovind is the quotidian man-of-the-masses face it hopes will appeal to the voters it seeks to attract.

This is a political decision every party has a right to take even if it's somewhat of a gamble. One can differ with the BJP's calculations but that is hardly convincing grounds for disagreeing with the choice. However, it's the answer to the third question that

could provide grounds for believing Kovind is the wrong pick. This is because there is a more fitting member of the Sangh Parivar who should have been its choice — Lal Krishna Advani. I have several reasons for making this claim. Let me, briefly, mention the really important ones. To begin with, Advani is highly distinguished and this is widely acknowledged. He's therefore one of the best-known faces of the BJP. Many believe he's the architect who laid the foundation for the party's political success. And in his personal life he's lived by admirable moral standards. He would certainly have adorned the office.

Second, choosing Advani would have shown that Modi has put behind him and even forgotten the differences he has with him including, in particular, Advani's opposition to his candidature for prime ministership in 2013. That would have been an act of magnanimity that could have proven Modi's large-heartedness. Actually, it might even have established he was the greater man of the two. Third, although some opposition parties are supporting Kovind many more might have supported Advani. Some would have voted for him because of his differences with Modi. Others because of their earlier association with him and undoubted respect. Mamata Banerjee and Nitish Kumar almost certainly fall into the second category, whilst it's conceivable that Sonia Gandhi might have been persuaded to fit herself into the first. There's a fourth reason too. I'm sure choosing Advani would have

had greater resonance with the BJP's membership as well as its wider support base whilst choosing. Kovind might easily make some, if not several, question why it wasn't them.

Let me however end with a personal reason for preferring Advani. For me it proves he has the moral quality necessary to be President of India. In 1990, when he was Leader of the Opposition and I was an unknown journalist, I interviewed him for *Eyewitness*, a video magazine I edited at the time. A short time later, when I next met him, I asked what he thought of the interview. He tersely replied he had been told it was a travesty. Then he abruptly turned his back and walked away.

Stunned by this behaviour I sent him a VHS of the interview and asked him to see it for himself. I was confident he had been misled. Weeks or months went by without any response. In fact, I gave up expecting one. Then, suddenly, late one summer evening the phone rang. It was Advani. "Karan, I've just seen the interview and there was absolutely nothing wrong with it. I was clearly misinformed. However, I'm too old to make that excuse and I'm afraid I behaved badly when we last met. I'm ringing to apologise." A man who has the wisdom and courage to say sorry is someone I would trust to safeguard our democracy and our values as President.

The writer is president of Infotainment Television and a TV anchor

JUNE 21, 1977, FORTY YEARS AGO



POLLS IN THE VALLEY CARRYING AND STORING of weapons, stones, brickbats and missiles have been banned throughout the Kashmir Valley for a period of three months. The prohibitory order comes in the wake of Union Home Minister Charan Singh's declaration that everything possible will be done to ensure that the Assembly elections are free and fair.

DESAI ON A-BOMB PRIME MINISTER MORARJI Desai said in an interview that he would resign if India manufactured an atom bomb. Speaking to a Bonn-based conservative daily in Paris, Desai said, "I will give it to you in writing that we

will not manufacture nuclear weapons. Even if the whole world arms with the atom, we will not do so."

JANATA TUSSE IN UP A CONTEST FOR the leadership of the Janata legislature party in UP appeared inevitable. The likely candidates are Ram Dhan and Ram Naresh Yadav, both Lok Sabha MPs from Azamgarh district. While Yadav was sponsored by the Bharatiya Lok Dal and Jana Sangh factions, Ram Dhan was supported by Janata treasurer, C.B. Gupta. Janata general secretary Nanaji Deshmukh and Health Minister Raj Narain arrived in Lucknow and held talks with the Janata MLAs.

REBELLION IN BOMBAY WHILE 20 CONGRESS MLAs announced their decision to quit the party, Chief Minister Vasantao Chavan, in a bid to save the organisation, was meeting former chief minister, S.B. Chavan at the latter's residence in Bombay. It is understood that the dissidents are unwilling to accept any resolution other than a change in the leadership of the legislature party.

NAXAL DEATHS JUSTICE VASHISTHA BHARGAVA, retired judge of the Supreme Court, is to probe the killing of Naxalites in Andhra Pradesh in "police encounters".

Much in a name

The Margaret Court Arena controversy touches upon a key question plural democracies must deal with: What should be the correct response to the demand for the renaming of public places?



PETER RONALD DE SOUZA

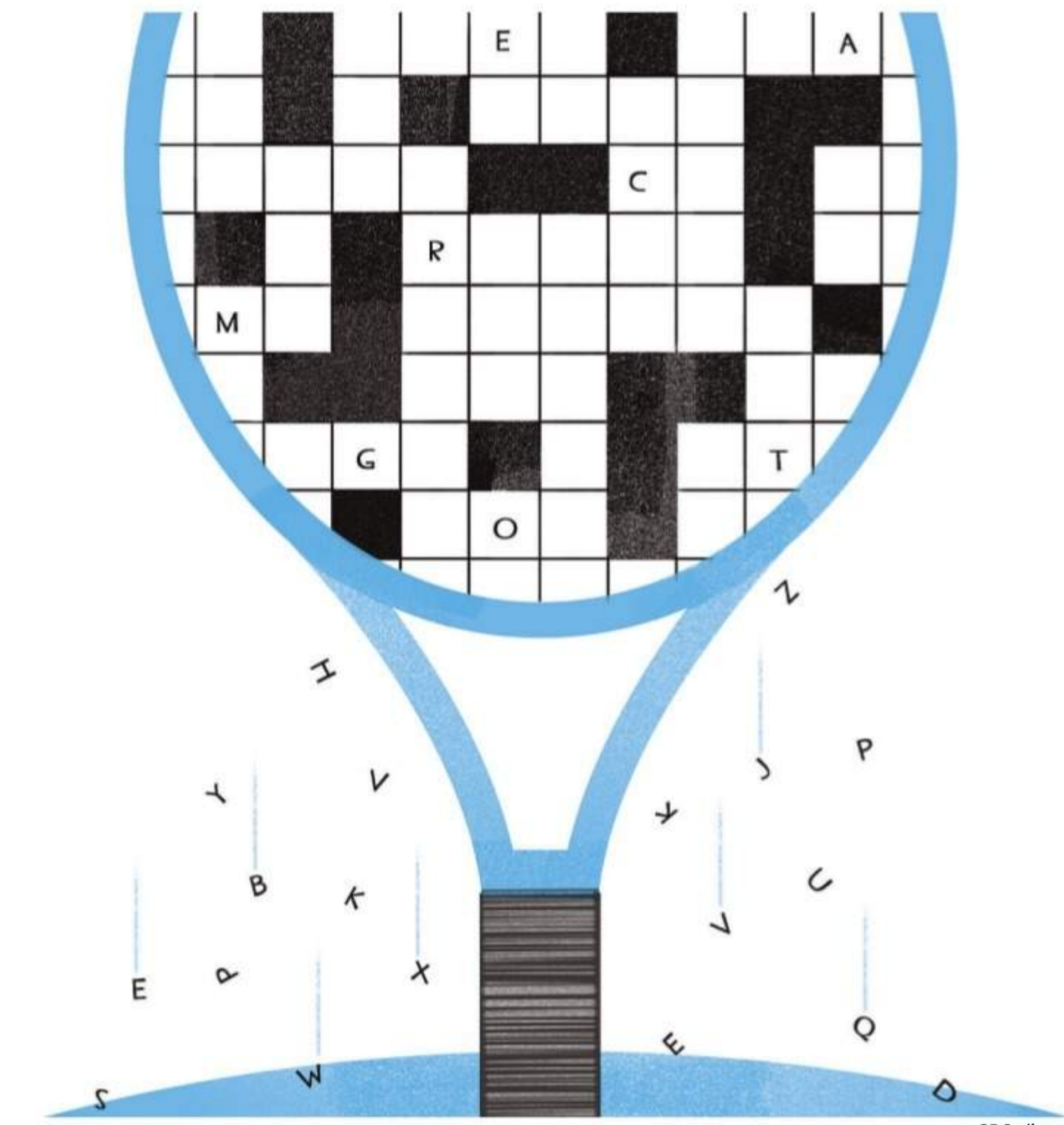
LAWN TENNIS LEGEND Margaret Court, in a letter published in *The West Australian* newspaper, criticised Qantas for becoming an active promoter of same sex marriages. Court stated that she would never travel by the airline again. This incensed another tennis great, Martina Navratilova, who posted on the blog #wrongsideofhistory "Margaret — you have gone too far. Shame on you", prompting her to join the chorus to rename the Margaret Court Arena. Court is now a senior pastor of Victory Life Church in Perth and believes that marriage can only be a union between a man and a woman. Navratilova, who is gay, is a campaigner for marriage equality. Incidentally, Court has won 24 Grand Slam titles from 1960 to 1973 which has not been surpassed. For this stupendous achievement, and for her services to Australian tennis, the complex, in 2003, was named Margaret Court Arena.

This ideological battle between two of tennis' greatest players brings us right away to the key question that plural democracies such as ours have to deal with: What is the correct response to the demand for renaming?

In the past, a building, road, bridge, station, airport, etc. were named after persons in honour of their contribution to public life. A Victoria Terminus in Mumbai has become Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus. Aurangzeb Road has become Dr Abdul Kalam Road in Delhi and Connaught Circus has become Rajiv Chowk. In the US, they are removing statues to leaders of the Confederate movement because of their support for slavery while in Oxford they are keeping theirs. The movement to remove the statue of Cecil Rhodes who was accused of the massacres and exploitation of black Africans as he amassed his wealth was unsuccessful because Oriol College, which was a beneficiary in his will, risked losing about £100 million if the statue was removed. They defended their decision stating that "the statue should remain in place and that the college will seek to provide a clear historical context to explain why it is there".

Many issues emerge that need to be considered in these frequent contests concerning memory and honour. In most such acts of honouring, the primary issue is politics seen as a process of nation-building or as legitimacy conferring. Regimes gain when they honour the stalwarts of their political ideology. Another reason is the seduction of financial contributions from those honoured to the respective institutions. US universities have mastered this art of naming buildings, chairs, centres, etc in return for endowments. The Mahindra Humanities Center at Harvard was set up with a grant of \$10 million from the Mahindra family. The third major factor is achievements in a range of fields, from music to science, military gallantry to sports. The Margaret Court Arena belongs to the third.

If naming is to honour, is renaming to dishonour? What are the grounds of withdrawing that honour, that is, some dishonourable action in the same domain where the honour was bestowed or even an action in a domain remote from the area of honour? Must we always take the full life of the person to be honoured, when making our decision, or should it be only in the area of excellence? Does Gandhiji's family life matter when we bestow on him the title of Mahatma? Can areas be kept separate, sports from politics, sports from religion, such that the performance in one should be judged only by its own standards of excellence and not also be the standards of the other? Or should the totality be taken



CR Sasikumar

into account? Margaret Court's views on gay marriage have prompted a call to withdraw the honour given to her for her tennis. Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull responded to only one of these questions when he said, "whatever people think of her opinion on gay marriage, she is one of the all-time greats and the arena celebrates that". He endorsed the separation thesis.

But the issue requires us to go beyond the "separation" thesis without falling into the "totality" thesis as is being argued by some. We need to look at the controversial issue and debate what a proportional response to it would be if we are to retain our commitment to being both fair and ethically correct. For example, Yale University, in contrast to Oriol College's decision to keep the Cecil Rhodes statue, has agreed to rename Calhoun College because he was a white supremacist and supporter of slavery. We must accept that changed times, and changed public values, demand such renaming.

With respect to the Margaret Court Arena controversy, the two institutions that have official links with the venue, and with the sport of tennis, did take a public stand. The Melbourne and Olympic Parks organisation tweeted that it "does not support Margaret Court's comments and we remain committed to embracing equality, diversity and inclusion; from our fans to our colleagues who deliver the events people love to attend". No ambiguity in its support for marriage equality. Tennis Australia took an equally clear position. "As a legend of the sport, we respect Margaret Court's achievements in tennis and her unmatched playing record. Her personal views are her own, and do not align with Tennis Australia's values of equality, inclusion and diversity". These two public pronouncements, I believe, have met the conditions of the doctrine of proportionality. Margaret Court has

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now the awkward task of positioning herself vis-à-vis her favourite institutions. Such positioning, vis-à-vis general principles, is what liberal democracy requires from all citizens. Each one must calculate the cost to themselves of the stands they wish to take.

The demand to rename the arena, however, appears to go beyond a proportional response. It seeks to honour only those from within its own ideological camp. There are hints of a totalitarian attitude here. I say this for the following reasons. First, Court must be entitled to her beliefs just as Navratilova is entitled to hers. Second, the holding of these beliefs must not cause direct harm to others. Third, society must be willing to accommodate a diversity of such beliefs since that is the character of a plural society. Beliefs must be allowed to compete for supporters in a free marketplace of ideas. From the social media marketplace, and from the official positions taken by the two official organisations, Court seems to be losing the battle for support. Four, ideas held in one domain should not be used as a basis for judgement in another domain where they have no traction unless they are deeply offensive and erode the core of the social compact. White supremacism is one such example. Does Court's belief belong to this category of views? I am not so sure since first of all they have had no impact on the tennis court and secondly they do not translate into state policy. From their public pronouncements it is clear that public authority is moving in the direction of marriage equality. So even though I support Navratilova's position on gay rights her demand to rename the Margaret Court Arena is out of proportion. She has hit the ball out of court. Advantage Margaret.

The writer is professor at the Centre for the study of Developing Societies. Views are personal

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"A US-centered perspective, which is built on the belief that the US could absolutely dominate China-US relations, is arrogant and distorted."

—GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA

The invisible women farmers

Agriculture cannot survive without them. But they are invisible in the current conversation on the agrarian crisis



MRINAL PANDE

AN EX-COMPANY executive-cum-economist turns to the anchor during a discussion on the farmers' agitation. "Overpopulation is destroying the farming activity. There are simply too many mouths to feed and the farms are shrinking. We must look to the urban areas for creating new jobs," he says. The man at the local *paan* shop tells no one in particular: "Yaar, none of the farmers' children want to dirty their hands anymore. They wear jeans and own mobiles. They will sell the land as soon as they inherit". A respected Hindi anchor turns to a farmers' representative, "Kaka (uncle)", he says, "Our agriculture minister is out somewhere performing yoga *asanas* with some baba as our farmer brothers suffer. What do the farmers really want from the government?" Kaka thinks for a bit. "The farmer has traditionally never wanted anything from a government except a fair support price," he says.

What do these pictures and dialogues have in common? They have males talking to males about what is being seen as a totally male problem, to be tackled by males. By now one is used to such responses from people about the enormous churn going on in our farming communities. They are only reacting to and repeating messages such as the ones above. What can life as a woman farmer, daily-wage labourer mean if women were to start talking?

As women who came of age in the campuses of the Sixties, many of us avidly read the first ever (1974) national report on the state of India's women, *Towards Equality*, cover to cover. It revealed, in no uncertain terms, that the rural agricultural sector was the biggest employer in India. However, unlike male farmers and cultivators, their female counterparts remained doubly burdened during their peak productive period with their reproductive role seen as fundamental to their gender while the duties it entailed were socially created. So even as women laboured in fields, they continued to have and rear children almost single-handedly, the report showed.

Nearly two decades later, working with a group of women on *Shram Shakti* (the first government report on India's women workers in the unorganised sector), this fact was reconfirmed. The farm sector, even in 1989, employed the largest number of women workers both as cultivators and daily-wage labourers. But women remained outside the formal definition of "worker" in the census reports.

Cut to the 21st century. The latest census figures list only 32.8 per cent women formally as primary workers in the agricultural sector, in contrast to 81.1 per cent men. But the undeniable fact remains that India's agricultural industry, which employs 80 to 100 million women, cannot survive without their labour. From preparing the land, selecting seeds, preparing and sowing to

transplanting the seedlings, applying manure/fertilisers/pesticides and then harvesting, winnowing and threshing, women work harder and longer than male farmers.

Maintaining the ancillary branches in this sector, like animal husbandry, fisheries and vegetable cultivation, depends almost solely on women. So where are these women while the male farmers and their *kakas* furiously debate the future of farming, loans, subsidies and irrigation matters? Men get more than their share of visibility on TV, in governmental publicity material and within the banking sectors but millions of women farmers have no spokesperson from their ranks.

The primary reason for this is that they are usually not listed as primary earners and owners of land assets within their families. So getting loans, participating in *mandi* panchayats, assessing and deciding the crop patterns, liaising with the district officials, bank managers and political representatives and bargaining for MSPs (minimum support prices), loans and subsidies, remain male activities.

Over the last decade, as farming became less and less profitable and small and marginal farmers began migrating to cities, rural jobs for full-time women daily-wage labourers (those who do not own land but work at least 183 days in a year in someone's farm) in the agricultural sector have shrunk alarmingly. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employee Guarantee Act, that employed many of them in the interim period, has been curtailed sharply by the government that proclaims "*sabka saath sabka vikas*" as its basic mantra. According to a recent study by the Evidence for Policy Design at Harvard University's Kennedy School, there has been a drop of almost 11 per cent in women's participation in the workforce.

When confronted with these facts, the usual laconic response has been: "Oh but why do you wish women to be stuck perennially in these low pay low visibility jobs as farm labourers? Most of our educated young women do not wish to work in farms. They can now be teachers, nurses, *Asha didis*". If only it were so. The same study also reveals that with so many well-educated men also competing for these white collar jobs, rural girls in urban homes, armed with a mere school certificate cannot find jobs. They must also have a college degree. So the vast sea of farmers' faces on our TV sets shows no female leaders. If they appear, they do so as sobbing widows and mothers of farmers who killed themselves or were killed by police bullets.

At a time when fundamentalism and neo-fascism are on the rise and unfettered consumerism and trade treaties are eroding old communities and threatening the environment, when measures like the ban on animal slaughter are impacting the dairy industry and destroying jobs, diseases due to the contamination of earth and water are erupting everywhere can we afford to sustain gender barriers between human beings unquestioningly? When not just the politicians and media persons but also the farmers regard the impoverished sea of women farmers as a faceless void, they deny them their humanity while diminishing their own.

The writer is a Delhi-based journalist and former chairperson of Prasar Bharati

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

WELL SAID

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Specially Pakistan' (IE, June 20). You have beautifully put in words what a majority of us feel but wouldn't say openly for the obvious reasons: "Sports often panders to the parochial, but Pakistan is a team that can elevate those who watch it." How true! Thank you for articulating what many of us — all patriotic Indians — feel.

Arjan Thadani, Pune

THE KOVIND GAMBIT

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Kovind is NDA's surprise President pick' (IE, June 20). By announcing Bihar Governor Ram Nath Kovind as the NDA nominee for President, the BJP has killed many birds with one stone. The decision will, to a large extent, treat the wound that had been festering over issues like the suicide of Rohith Vemula and atrocities against Dalits due to "bovine protection". Kovind is a moderate Hindu who believes in RSS's philosophy. He will not only appease the RSS but also help broaden the party's Hindutva base.

Buddhadev Nandi, Bankura

JOBS NEEDED

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'A dark satire' (IE, June 20). The farmers' agitation is a battle for survival. No matter how good the yield or how remunerative

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

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the price, it is impossible for small and marginal farmers to sustain themselves. The answer is jobs that are just not available. Talking about a booming economy does not help those who do not have enough to keep body and soul together.

S.K. Agarwala, Delhi



VIEW FROM THE RIGHT

EMERGENCY REVISITED

THE EDITORIAL IN *Organiser*, Reminding the real Emergency, "revisits" the "most horrific phase in democracy of Bharat on its anniversary". "Many politicians and some media persons," it says, have recently "hurled allegation of 'creating Emergency like situation' against the present dispensation". However, it is "necessary to remind the real horrors of Emergency" to those who "may not be able to connect with the draconian period".

The editorial details the instances under which the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared the Emergency following her conviction by the Allahabad High Court "in a case related to electoral malpractices". "More than eight democratically elected State governments led by non-Congress parties were toppled on a single day," it notes,

pointing that "strict censorship was imposed on the Press and any form of protest" was curbed through "financial restrictions or brutal force". "Several foreign correspondents were removed and accreditation of more than 40 reporters was withdrawn," it notes, adding that "even social and patriotic organisations like the RSS was banned and thousands of *swayamsevaks* were arrested". "If this was the real Emergency, then what is it that we are experiencing today?" the editorial asks, contending that any comparison of the present situation with the Emergency is flawed.

OLD AND NEW IN SCIENCE

AN ARTICLE IN *Organiser* lists the achievements of ancient science in India. It cites a 2016 UNESCO conference where Manjul Bhargava, a mathematician at Princeton University, demonstrated "how the ancient Sanskrit poets, artists and Hindustani classical musicians discovered many mathematical theorems for the first time in history". Ancient Indian seers "were not engaged in knowledge production as we characterise it today", but adhered to "dharma and spiri-

tual practices" as they made "significant discoveries in all forms of *gyan* and *vigyan*". "However, any manifestations of pride in the ancient glories of the Bharat turn Marxists and proclaimed secularists against it," it says.

It is because "since the ancient period is only Hindu, Vedic, and Sanatani in its origin and character, consenting to their mastery in different walks of life would be a threat to future-oriented ideologies". It counters a recent "attack against the Hindu past" by Meera Nanda in her book, *Science in Saffron: Skeptical Essays on History of Science*. Scholars who are "against the concept of nationalism and national culture have started arguing that knowledge and other forms of cultural, economic, and social features were not isolated and peculiar in civilisations". "The process of circulation (of ideas) in the integrated global history cannot brush aside the question of 'origin'," the article contends.

SHAMING THE MEDIA

THE EDITORIAL IN *Panchjanya* comments on the recent developments in Indian media, including the raids on NDTV. Lalu Prasad's alleged threat to a journalist, and the audac-

ity of an absconding businessman who told reporters in London, "Keep dreaming about lakhs of pounds". These three incidents have shamed the media, and ironically the accused are those who, until recently, held a prominent place in the media. It is no surprise that people are now asking difficult questions of the media, it says, arguing that giving headline space to wrong people eventually led to the situation.

Taking note of a recent news report, the editorial says many in the media sat on the tapes of Lalu Prasad conversing with Shahabuddin until they were released recently. Vijay Mallya was deep in debt, but media took cognisance of his omissions only when "he fled the country" after the BJP came to power. It means that while the cases have surfaced now, the stains are fairly old. The editorial praises the BJP government that has been running a campaign "against black money and corruption". The noises made by "prominent persons" must be seen through the mirror of financial irregularities. People like Mallya know that their days are over, and they will now be made accountable.

Compiled by Ashutosh Bhardwaj



SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE

It's only a matter of time until the Queen says 'for Christ's sake I'm asking him with the beard to take over. And he wants me abolished'

MARK STEEL, British author, columnist and comedian; 141,000 followers on Twitter. On the current turmoil in British politics.

16 EXPLAINED

Twin studies forecast deadlier and more sweeping heatwaves in India and world

Tiny temperature rise can make mass deaths twice as likely; unchecked emissions can expose 3/4ths of humanity to deadly heatwaves

KABIR FIRAQUE
NEW DELHI, JUNE 20

THE HEATWAVES that preceded the ongoing monsoon, with Odisha in particular witnessing a series of heat-related deaths, are likely to get deadlier and more frequent as temperatures rise across the globe. Two new studies, one of these specific to India, present an alarming picture of growing populations being exposed to heatwaves, with a greater likelihood of death.

The India-specific study, published in *Science Advances* on June 7, has found that even a small rise in temperature can make mass heat-related mortality events several times more likely. A rise of just half a degree in summer mean temperatures, it found, raises the probability of 100 or more heat-related deaths 2½ times.

The other study, published in *Nature Climate Change* Sunday, has found that almost a third of the world's population is currently exposed to deadly climatic conditions for at least 20 days a year. This is going to get worse: even if greenhouse gas emissions are drastically reduced, half the world's population will be exposed to such conditions for 20 days a year by 2100. And if the emissions continue to grow, it will expose three-fourths of the population.

The publication of the study coincided with the Donald Trump administration's decision to pull the United States out of the Paris climate agreement to cut down on emissions. "Of course, addressing climate change requires major commitments by all countries, and it is appearing to be a daunting task," said earth system scientist Amir AghaKouchak, Mazdiyasi's university colleague and co-author of the study, in reply to a question.

The other authors include a civil engineer each from IITs Bombay and Delhi.

"While it would be great if all countries can work together on the solution," AghaKouchak told *The Indian Express*, "still all countries can work toward their own adaptation plans including raising awareness (e.g., people should be educated on what they should and should not do during extreme events), and improving local infrastructure to cope with extremes (e.g., access to air-conditioning in case of heatwaves)."

Larger populations vulnerable

The newer study analysed reports published between 1980 and 2014, and found 783 cases of excess heat-related mortality from 164 cities in 36 countries.

Based on the climatic conditions of those events, the researchers identified a global threshold beyond which temperature and humidity levels become deadly. Using a web-based app, the researchers counted the number of days in a given year when climatic conditions cross this threshold.

In Delhi, for example, the app forecasts that the threshold will be crossed on 81 days in 2100 even if strong mitigating circumstances come into play (figure 2a). In 2000, Delhi had crossed the threshold on 63 days. In the absence of any reduction in emissions, it will cross the threshold on 131 days in 2100 (figure 2b).

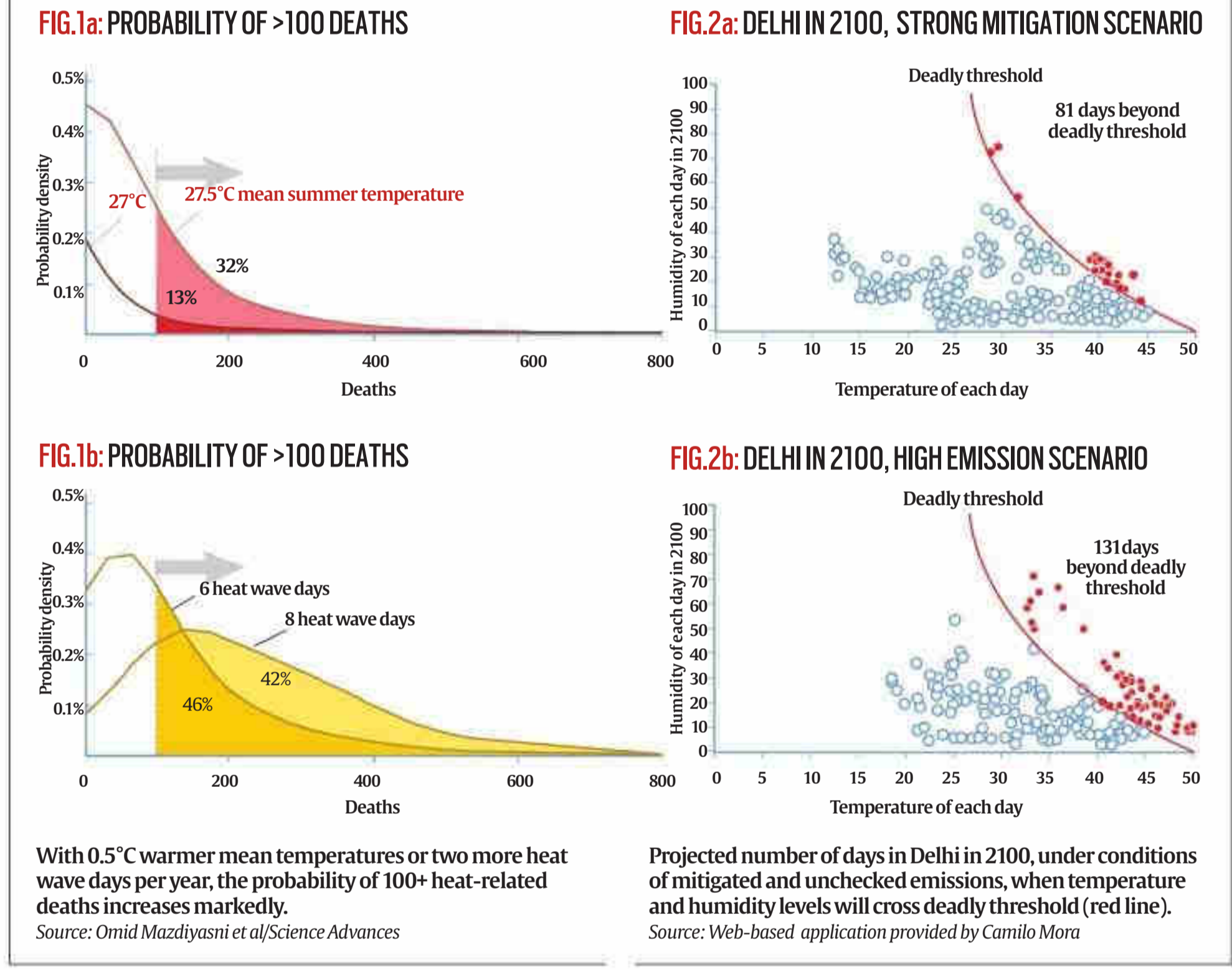
Worldwide in 2000, over 30% of the world's population was exposed to 20 or more days when conditions surpassed the deadly threshold. In 2100, 47% of the population will be so exposed in the most aggressive mitigation scenario, which will go up to 74% if emissions continue to grow.

"Our attitude towards the environment has been so reckless that we are running out of good choices for the future," said lead author Camilo Mora, a geographer at the University of Hawaii, who provided *The Indian Express* with materials of the study.

"Many people around the world are already paying the ultimate price of heatwaves, and while models suggest that this is likely to continue to be bad, it could be much worse if emissions are not considerably reduced," the university website quotes Mora.



Protecting themselves from the sun on a hot June afternoon in Gurugram. PTI



With 0.5°C warmer mean temperatures or two more heat wave days per year, the probability of 100+ heat-related deaths increases markedly. Source: Omid Mazdiyasi et al/Science Advances



Heat haze at Sydney airport, November 2006. Reuters File

a plane can carry are often restricted when temps are very high. How much so depends on the temperature, airport elevation and the length of the available runways. And getting off the ground is only part of it: once airborne, planes have to meet specific, engine-out climb criterion, so nearby obstructions like hills and towers are another complication. Larger jets, with more powerful engines, have higher maximum operating temperatures. Boeings can operate at temperatures up to 126°F (52°C), and Airbuses, 127°F, or 53°C, Phoenix-based *The Arizona Republic* quoted American Airlines as saying in its release. Even so, larger jetliners too are affected — China's Hainan Airlines recently changed the departure time of its Las Vegas-Beijing flight to the middle of the night for the duration of the summer, so it doesn't have to cut down on its load. Former Director General of Civil Aviation Kanu Gohain said temperature is a very important parameter to consider while calculating the take-off weight of an aircraft. "If the temperature is high, the runway length

required will be longer. This happens because air density is low when temperature is high, leading to lower power generation," he said.

"We usually calculate weight against the particular length for a smooth take-off. Delhi airport sometimes registers high temperature — this is when flights are cancelled or the weight is adjusted. Airlines typically use 'WAT' aircraft performance cards, which stands for Weight, Altitude and Temperature, to help aircraft operate smoothly," Gohain said.

An official with a private airline in India told *The Indian Express* that every aircraft has performance limitations that also depend on factors other than the weather. For example, carriers catering to Patna and some other airports, where the runway is short, fill their planes only up to 80% of capacity to enable them to take off without problems.

Aircraft with single engines, or even smaller, double-engine planes, face performance issues in hot weather, officials said. "When the temperature is very high, it affects the engine performance, especially at the time of take-off. That is the basic problem," an official in Air India's engineering department said. High temperatures also increase the risk of tyre bursts, the officials said.

Too hot to fly — why?

SUNNY VERMA
NEW DELHI, JUNE 20

AMERICAN AIRLINES, the world's largest carrier by fleet size, revenues and destinations served, cancelled nearly 50 regional flights out of Sky Harbor International Airport in Phoenix, Arizona, as the day temperature was forecast to touch 120 degrees Fahrenheit (nearly 49 degrees Celsius) on Tuesday.

American media organisations quoted a release from American Airlines saying the Canadian-built Bombardier CRJ aircraft used by its American Eagle regional services were not certified to fly in temperatures higher than 118°F (48°C).

The cancelled flights — due to be operated by Skywest and Compass airlines under the American Eagle brand — were mostly scheduled to leave or land in Phoenix between 3 pm and 6 pm, when temperatures

are the highest.

The US National Weather Service has warned of "excessive heat" across southwestern USA Monday through Wednesday, and Phoenix is in the middle of what local media are calling a "hellscape" heatwave.

Extreme heat alters the density of air, making it thinner. Thin air prevents generation of required 'lift', and makes it more difficult for aircraft to take off. Thus, as it gets hotter, planes need progressively longer runways and greater engine power to reach the speeds needed to become airborne. In these situations, airlines often put restrictions on onboard weight, and offload cargo and fuel to become lighter.

Back in 2013, *Business Insider* quoted pilot and author Patrick Smith explaining how this works: "Hot air is less dense. This affects the output of the engines as well as aerodynamic capabilities, increasing the required runway distance and reducing climb performance. Therefore the amount of passengers and cargo

(Not) in name alone: Why Athens objects to Skopje in EU, NATO

JAMIE MULLICK
NEW DELHI, JUNE 20

LAST WEEK, Macedonian Foreign Minister Nikola Dimitrov arrived in Athens to formally request the government of Greece for help in Macedonia's bid to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the European Union (EU). The move was part of efforts to settle a 27-year-old naming dispute between the two nations that has led to Athens stonewalling all efforts by Macedonia to join the two organisations.

In 2004, over 13 years after its independence from Yugoslavia, the Republic of Macedonia had submitted its application for membership of the EU. The EU accepted the application (and those of five other countries) in 2005, but Greece objected — saying Macedonia's name implied a territorial claim on the northernmost Greek province of the same name.

The name game

The ancient Greek kingdom of Macedonia, which existed from the mid-7th century BC to the mid-2nd century BC, was largely located in what is now the Macedonian region of northern Greece. However, ever since it declared independence from Yugoslavia in 1991, the predominantly Slavic nation of Macedonia has been claiming the official name of Republic of Macedonia. And Greece has been provoked into accusing it of deliberately appropriating cultural symbols and personalities from ancient Greek history to support its claim to the name.

When Skopje joined the United Nations in 1994, objections from Greece ensured it was formally inducted as the "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", or FYROM.

This question of nomenclature was a constant irritant in the relations between the two countries during the nine-year rule of former Macedonian Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, who built his support base on heavy nationalist rhetoric that rejected all of



Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias with his Macedonian counterpart Nikola Dimitrov in Athens. Reuters

Greece's demands. But under the administration of new Prime Minister Zoran Zaev, who was sworn in on May 31 at the head of a coalition of parties, the Macedonian stance has softened.



Zaev has taken a much more conciliatory approach towards Athens, and even attacked Gruevski's attempts at provoking Greeks by building monuments dedicated to figures from ancient Greece, such as Alexander the

Great. Zaev has also promised to create a "politics of joint European future" by getting Macedonia into the EU and NATO.

Greek demands
Over the past three decades, Greece has been accusing its northern neighbour of "cultural theft". In the early 1990s, Greece blocked Macedonia's southern border, in part to protest Skopje's use of the Vergina Sun, a symbol from the gravesite of the ancient kings of Macedon, on its flag. But in what it said was a major compromise, Athens consented, in 2007, to the use of the word "Macedonia" by Skopje, as long as it was used with a geographical qualifier such as "Upper", "Northern" or "New".

Closing in on a solution

The new Macedonian government has made significant progress in recent weeks towards speeding up its bid for EU membership. Ethnically divided Macedonia sees the settlement of the dispute as a means to enter into relationships with big western pow-



Technicians inspect the back of the Kepler telescope's primary mirror. Ball Aerospace via The New York Times

Loneliness set to end? Kepler spots 200 new possible planets

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
WASHINGTON, JUNE 20

NASA's Kepler space telescope has spotted 219 new potential planets, of which at least 10 are near-Earth size with conditions suitable for hosting life.

This brings the total number of planet candidates identified by Kepler to 4,034, of which 2,335 have been verified as exoplanets.

Out of the roughly 50 near-Earth size habitable zone candidates detected by Kepler so far, more than 30 have been verified.

The new data is the most comprehensive and detailed catalogue release of candidate exoplanets, which are planets outside our solar system, from Kepler's first four years of data. It is also the final catalogue from the spacecraft's view of the patch of sky in the Cygnus constellation.

The results using Kepler data suggest two distinct size groupings of small planets. Both results have significant implications for the search for life.

The final Kepler catalogue will serve as the foundation for more study to determine the prevalence and demographics of planets in the galaxy, while the discovery of the two distinct planetary populations shows that about half the planets we know of in the galaxy either have no surface, or lie beneath a deep, crushing atmosphere — an environment unlikely to host life.

"The Kepler data set is unique, as it is the only one containing a population of these near Earth-analogues — planets with roughly the same size and orbit as Earth," said Mario Perez, Kepler programme scientist in the Astrophysics Division of NASA's Science Mission Directorate.

"Understanding their frequency in the galaxy will help inform the design of future NASA missions to directly image another Earth," Perez said.

The Kepler space telescope hunts for planets by detecting the minuscule drop in a star's brightness that occurs when a planet crosses in front of it, called a transit. This is the eighth release of the Kepler candidate catalogue, gathered by reprocessing the entire set of data from Kepler's observations during the first four years of its primary mission. This data will enable scientists to determine what planetary populations — from rocky bodies the size of Earth, to gas giants the size of Jupiter — make up the galaxy's planetary demographics.

One research group used the Kepler data to make precise measurements of thousands of planets, showing two distinct groups of small planets. The team found a clear division in the sizes of rocky, Earth-size planets and gaseous planets smaller than Neptune. Few planets were found between those groupings.

Using the W M Keck Observatory in Hawaii, the group measured the sizes of 1,300 stars in the Kepler field of view to determine the radii of 2,000 Kepler planets with exquisite precision.

For debt-stricken Greece, the end of the quarrel holds out the promise of relief as its crisis-wracked economy gets the chance to explore businesses in the Balkan peninsula. During a visit to Brussels last week, Zaev said he wanted his country to join the NATO and EU "in the shortest possible time". He suggested that Macedonia would be open to using the name it currently uses in the UN. "We will try all possible measures to move Macedonia to membership," he said.

In Athens, Zaev's Foreign Minister struck a conciliatory note: "I'm here to ask for your support," Dimitrov, who was at one time Skopje's negotiator with Greece over the name, said. "I'm convinced that you have the leverage in your hands and this leverage can help towards closing the way [for this issue]."

In return, Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias said Athens would support Macedonia's bid for the EU "in every way, once the name issue has been resolved... That is a prerequisite and I believe we must, and can, work towards a good compromise benefiting both sides."