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WORDLY WISE

ASTRONOMY COMPELS THE SOUL TO LOOK UPWARDS AND LEADS US FROM THIS WORLD TO ANOTHER. —PLATO

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

A vacuum in the Valley

If Kashmiriyat wanes, what could take its place?
Amarnath yatra attack raises a grim spectre



SUHASH PALSHIKAR

COMING TOGETHER

Widespread condemnation of the attack on pilgrims to Amarnath shrine carries a message for PDP-BJP government

CONDEMNATION OF THE attack on the Amarnath yatra has come from across the political spectrum. It is, however, doubtful whether the fragile political consensus on the issue of condemnation will transform into mature comprehension of what is at stake. Of course, media reports have pointed to the very special nature of the yatra and its reception by Kashmiris. Here is a more than century-old extraordinary tradition of a place of worship cared for by two different communities — even in the midst of violence and contestations over as critical a question as the political status of the Kashmir Valley. From that point of view, the attack is not only exceptional, but uncharacteristic.

The Amarnath shrine and the interfaith cooperation built around it represent not just the syncretic traditions of Kashmir, they also represent mutual respect and the lived practice of separating the religious from the political. The attack has challenged those fundamental tenets — of human decency and respect. It is indeed ironic but, often, those who raise a fight in the name of freedom or religion or identity end up denying freedom, refuting religion and disallowing identity — first to others and subsequently to their own members. In this sense, the attack on the Amarnath yatra, though despicable, need not surprise us.

Ever since the Pandits were hounded out of the Valley, this dimension of Kashmir's separatist movement operating on the precipice of a religious divide has been on display. The targeting of the Pandits signified a departure from the discourse of Kashmiriyat. The 1990s ushered in the element of religion as a key factor in the Kashmir issue. An attack like the latest one underscores the deep schisms that the Kashmir struggle experiences. It is another instance that indicates the failure of the Kashmiriyat platform. Of course, even "separatist" and militant organisations have expressed dismay over the attack and one would wish to believe that this dismay is genuine. However, the attack has made it clear that just like the "discredited" politician from the Valley, the pro-Kashmiriyat outfits are losing the script. They have no control over the situation. Recent events in the Valley would endorse this surmise.

During the stone-pelting that attracted national attention, one witnessed an absence of politics in Kashmir. In fact, the develop-

ments in J&K over the past three years have produced a vacuum in the Valley. There is no authentic voice either on the side of the official or government forces or on the side of the separatists. Just as the state forces are mired in ultra-nationalism, separatists are content with only disruption. Dialogue is the first casualty. Thus, from the keenly contested assembly elections in 2014, we have suddenly managed to push the Kashmir Valley into a land of non-politics. It is this production of vacuum that the attack really brings to the forefront.

Beyond the agony over the deaths of devotees and the anguish over the inability to avoid such attacks; beyond the political correctness of condemnations, this attack needs to be seen as part of the narrative that has been taking shape in J&K and in the country. The narrative may be characterised as one of empty and shrill nationalism. In the Valley, it has resulted in the isolation of the forces of Kashmiriyat. Instead of Kashmiriyat, a mindless violence against state authorities seems to have enveloped the Valley. The Amarnath attack represents the contempt sections of the militants have for Kashmiriyat and also the confusion that marks the Valley over the question of its identity.

The weakening of the Kashmiriyat platform bodes ill for everyone, except perhaps the pro-Pakistan militants. India's military may well be equipped to fight a bloody war against the enemy across the border and its generals may be itching for a flash point. But killing an enemy is different from killing those whom one claims to be their own. From this perspective, the decimation of pro-Kashmiriyat groups is perhaps the most serious setback witnessed over the past three years. No amount of hawkish postures and surgical strikes can compensate for that. The Amarnath attack is a grim reminder of this reality. But beyond this statist understanding, the significance of the attack on the yatra extends to India's resilience as a national community.

If we isolate the issue of this attack as one that is specific to Kashmir, we might be able to understand the nuances of the attack and also think of "security" solutions. However, the attack needs to be understood in conjunction with and in the broader context of India's nationalism. That challenge is multifold.

Despite the syncretic context of

Amarnath, the attack is bound to be seen as an attack on the pilgrims who belong to one religious community. The fact of longstanding support by Kashmir's Muslims to the yatra would quickly fade from memory and the attack on the yatra would constitute the folklore of Muslim aggression. The pilgrims who go back to their towns and villages would carry the scars of the attack as also the disruption of the narrative of syncretism. That disruption would not just malign Kashmir, it would put into question all claims to syncretism and plurality. In this sense, the attack would not merely disrupt the yatra. In fact, the yatra may still go on — both this year and in the future too. But the memory of the attack would have already jeopardised the possibility of a narrative of peace, plurality and co-existence.

We are presently in the midst of constructing a militaristic narrative of force, coupled with machismo, hatred and suspicion. In that sense, the disruption of the narrative of the authentic Indian self and nationalism is already underway. An attack like this one will only feed into that moment of disruption. The tales of fear and apprehension that the pilgrims would carry back with them would be swiftly converted into raw material for unsettling local social relations, replacing them with the new narrative of the non-tenability of the mingling of diverse communities. It is a moot question if our parties have the will or courage to argue that this attack is not only an exceptional incident but also a challenge that needs to be met beyond the security discourse. Will our parties have the commitment and the confidence to tell countrymen to take pride in the co-existence of different traditions and faiths? Because the attack challenges the idea of inclusion and the principle of co-existence as much as — perhaps more than — our nation-state.

When people die without provocation, there is also a death of ideas and principles. Moments such as this one are not only moments of being scandalised by death; they are equally, even more fundamentally, moments cautioning us about the receding boundaries of the politics of possibilities.

The writer taught political science at Savitribai Phule Pune University and is currently chief editor of 'Studies in Indian Politics'

MALABAR SIGNALS

India's participation in naval exercises in Indian Ocean Region reiterates its commitment to safeguard its maritime interests

ASTENSIONS WITH China remain unabated on the Sikkim border, India, Japan and the US began the annual maritime exercise, Malabar, in the Bay of Bengal on Monday. This is the Indian Navy's biggest ever participation in the exercise: Nine warships, including aircraft carrier, INS Vikramaditya, and a Kilo-class submarine, along with Long Range Maritime Patrol Aircraft P8I. The US Navy has a matching participation — the aircraft carrier USS Nimitz, USS Princeton, destroyers USS Kidd, Howard and Shoup, an attack submarine and one Long Range Maritime Patrol Aircraft P8A — while the Japanese brought in JS Izumo, a helicopter carrier, and the missile destroyer, JS Sazanami.

But it is not merely about the numbers. It is also about the naval platforms being fielded for the exercise. India has never fielded the P8I and INS Vikramaditya in any exercise; in fact, the US Navy had requested for the Russian-built aircraft carrier's participation last year but it was declined by the Indian side. A handful of navies operate aircraft carriers globally — China is still learning the ropes of operating an aircraft carrier — and for India to do joint training with the US using its sole aircraft carrier signifies a greater degree of cooperation and confidence in the bilateral relationship. The P8I aircraft is a variation of the American P8A aircraft and the Indian side will only learn from the Americans. It will bring out that India is unable to optimally utilise the asset, which is bound to reopen the debate over India signing the two pending foundational agreements with the US.

As the three navies exercise in the Indian waters, the elephant in the room — or the dragon in the sea — is China. The Chinese have already issued a statement about their exercise and their intelligence gathering ship, Haiwixing, had entered the area earlier this month, to keep track. It had responded very strongly in 2007 when five countries had participated in Malabar. This time, Australia was keen to be a participant but Indians vetoed the proposal because of its earlier acquiescence towards China. India, however, would be hoping that China will get the message, that its forays in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) won't go uncontested. China has been flexing its muscle in the IOR and the Indian Navy has been stretched in trying to monitor the increased Chinese movement. A successful Malabar would further drive home the Indian commitment to safeguard its maritime interests.

PEOPLE POWERED

In a world overrun by machine intelligence, it is encouraging to see the public playing crucial roles

THE CITIZEN ZOO is celebrating a decade of distributed, citizen-driven astronomy, in which it has reordered scientists' ideas of how science should be done. Long before the word "crowdsourcing" became fashionable, the project used volunteers from the world over to examine telescope images of distant galaxies. Apart from classifying galaxies and examining their development over aeons, these citizen scientists have identified new kinds of celestial objects and established that our own galaxy is not dormant, as it was canonically believed to be. The Milky Way is littered with thousands of objects which are up to something.

In recent years, the observations and knowledge of crowds are being harnessed in ways that would have seemed dangerous and heretical to earlier scientists and custodians of wisdom. The trailblazer was SETI@home, the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence's distributed computing project, which harnesses the idle resources of home computers to listen for possible extraterrestrial radio signals from deep space. Every day, almost 3 lakh home computers connect to SETI at Berkeley to deliver computing power of 617 teraflops, which is faster than many defence supercomputers. However, SETI@home only taps into the computing resources of citizens. Using the liberal philosophy which has driven the support system of the open source movement, in which computer users responsibly help each other, Wikipedia uses volunteer editors to change the way in which knowledge is curated. By making the daring assumption that people are generally responsible, and by setting up a self-correcting mechanism for editorial control which is more reliable than was expected, it has created the world's biggest encyclopaedia.

As we are groomed for a future when machines will apparently take over all human functions, from book-keeping to facial recognition, projects like Galaxy Zoo are good news. For years yet, perhaps, humans will continue to make sense of some kinds of data much faster than computers.

LOST IN THE SPECTACLE

Questions about economy, GST are drowned in the din on showier issues



YOGINDER K. ALAGH

THE GLOBAL CONTEXT is changing with political parties having a strong religious identification and conservative economic policies are guiding events in countries like India, the US and to an extent, Britain. On the other hand, liberal regimes are flourishing in France and, for some time now, in Canada.

The *New York Times Magazine* recently carried an issue on the Constitution of the United States of America. In India, the Congress was remembering the Freedom Movement in the resurrection of the *National Herald* and their triumvirate of Gandhi, Nehru and the indomitable Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. The NYT issue on the American constitution made the interesting point that James Madison had pushed through a constitution document, which was not really a reflection of the dominant political mores of the period and that the framers of the constitution and the government "were so conscious of their break with the past that they knew they had to sneak it past the bodies that had authorised their meeting, the states that had sent them as delegate to Philadelphia. The delegates were authorised only to propose reforms to the Articles. But it was clear from the outset that most of them wanted to scrap the Articles together."

Much of the same was true about our country. It is also true that in addition to the

triumvirate, B.R. Ambedkar was also clearly drafting a constitution, which was ahead of the standards of a majority of his countrymen, yet was accepted in the excitement of the early years of Independence.

There is no question that, at present, there is considerable tension including tendencies to violence. But behind the antagonistic sloganeering, there is in actual practice, considerable give and take so that the system continues to function. And yet, when leaders make the point in a very explicit manner — like when the US president says in a sharp tone he will change the structure — there is palpable tension. This is also true of India.

The interesting aspect of all this in our country is that in the rarefied world of idealistic politics the focus is taken away from more mundane aspects like policies for economic growth. It is obvious the newspapers are not going to carry the story of the deceleration in industrial growth and sobering analysis of recent CSO data by people as differently located as me and my friend, Rahul Bajaj. Prime Minister Modi's discussions with President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu take away the urgency of debating falling private and public investments, low manufacturing growth, low EMI declared in early July and the rest of it.

There is also no time to discuss the GST.

The GST, being a value added tax, is a step in the right direction and in the long run will help the economy. This happens only if there is a real value added tax with a single rate or maybe one for essentials like food and medicines, and another for the rest as in other countries. The original GST was structured this way. But if you have five rates, a large part of the messiness of the past is brought back. Interested groups will then lobby for transfer from one rate to the other and the elegant simplicity of the GST is lost.

Five rates bring back the sales tax since it is likely that five rates would include a large part of the taxed economy even now. It also happened probably for a more unifying reason which is the tax officials do not believe in the real argument for the GST — that the lower rate would give them more revenue. Statements by officials at the highest level that if prices don't behave then the government will not tolerate the market and will use the stick to jail traders took away all the elegance of the GST.

Markets work with supply elasticity, not the *danda*. It's still not too late to promise that things will be simplified as soon as possible and we will get a real GST.

The writer, a former Union minister, is chancellor, Central University of Gujarat

JULY 12, 1977, FORTY YEARS AGO

SHAH COMMISSION

JUSTICE J.C. SHAH said at a news conference that his commission would not only inquire into the excesses committed during the Emergency but also the circumstances which led to its promulgation. Spelling out the commission's tasks and parameters within which it intends to function, Shah said his commission had the power to compel attendance by anyone, although he hoped that it would not have to do so. When asked at what stage of his work he would summon Indira Gandhi before the commission, Justice Shah said he had still not looked into the 9,000-odd complaints that had been received by the Commission during the last couple of weeks.

He added that "if it is necessary, I will summon her". He made it clear that it was not the objective of the commission to indulge "in any witch-hunting or to cater to the private feuds of individuals or groups or to enter into conflicts of political group. The commission, he said, will endeavour to document the various types and patterns of cases of excesses, misuse and abuse of authority so that an authentic account of what exactly happened during the days of Emergency and the period shortly preceding it may be easily available.

GEORGE'S PLAN
INDUSTRY MINISTER GEORGE Fernandes mooted the idea of workers taking over the

management of sick industrial units. He asked trade union leaders to come forward with suggestions on the running of these units by the workers. Fernandes referred to this new concept of workers' sector in what he termed was "loud thinking on the government's approach to sick units".

J&K DY CM

JAMMU AND KASHMIR Chief Minister Sheikh Abdullah nominated revenue and agriculture minister, Mirza Afzal Beg, as deputy chief minister. He said in the present state of his health he felt that for some time he may not be able to take the full load of work alone.



The demonisation of Aadhaar

It is unfortunate that many sincere social workers, activists, and economists are not able to see through it



AJAY BHUSHAN PANDEY

THE ARTICLE BY Aruna Roy and Nikhil Dey ("Excluded by Aadhaar," IE, June 5) and a few other recent pieces in *The Indian Express* have criticised Aadhaar on the ground that it is leading to large-scale exclusion of the needy and deserving from the benefits of several schemes. With due respect to the critics of Aadhaar, their claim is neither based on legal positions nor on the facts on ground. They need to be reminded that, not so long ago, huge sums of money in welfare schemes meant for poor were being siphoned away through ghost entities and duplicates and as a result, genuine beneficiaries suffered.

Fake PAN and ghost bank accounts and shell companies helped in large-scale tax evasion, money laundering and the generation of black money. Efforts of the government to weed out these ghost entities had only a limited and transient impact. These entities were resilient and would soon reappear in much larger numbers. Aadhaar was conceptualised to address this malaise and was given a statutory basis in 2016 through the enactment of the Aadhaar Act, which enables the government to make Aadhaar mandatory for welfare schemes and services.

The critics claim that the government's notifications mandating Aadhaar in schemes like the PDS, MGNREGA and mid-day meals have led to denial of benefits to the vulnerable sections of society. They have cited a few instances of elderly people being denied food rations because they did not have Aadhaar or their fingerprints could not be authenticated since their fingers had worn with age. An impression is sought to be created that Aadhaar is responsible for the exclusion of such beneficiaries and therefore is anti-poor and should be discarded. It is a classic case of barking up the wrong tree. Aadhaar has been given to more than 115 crore people. More than 99 per cent adults in the country are covered under it. Notwithstanding such high coverage, the Aadhaar Act mandates that not even one person be denied benefits because of the lack of Aadhaar. Regulation 12 of the Aadhaar (Enrollment and Update) Regulations enjoins the agency requiring Aadhaar to enroll its beneficiary and provide him benefits till he has Aadhaar. The Aadhaar Act also provides statutory protection to those who are unable to authenticate fingerprints because their fingers have worn with age or other reasons such as technical faults and connectivity failures. Section Seven of the Aadhaar Act mandates "delivery of benefits through Aadhaar authentication or furnishing proof of possession of Aadhaar number".

It is, therefore, absolutely clear that in case a person has difficulty in getting his fingerprints authenticated on a machine, he can provide a copy of his Aadhaar card and receive the benefits till the system is rectified. The field agencies have been instructed accordingly through notifications issued by the government. In spite of this, if a person is denied because he does not have Aadhaar or he is unable to biometrically authenticate the information, it is a violation of the government's instructions. Such violators have to be punished. But to claim that Aadhaar is responsible for the denial of benefits is akin to blaming the Reserve Bank of India's currency system when a few merchants refuse to accept the new Rs 500 notes from customers. Needless to say, such offences have to be dealt with by the local law enforcement agencies.

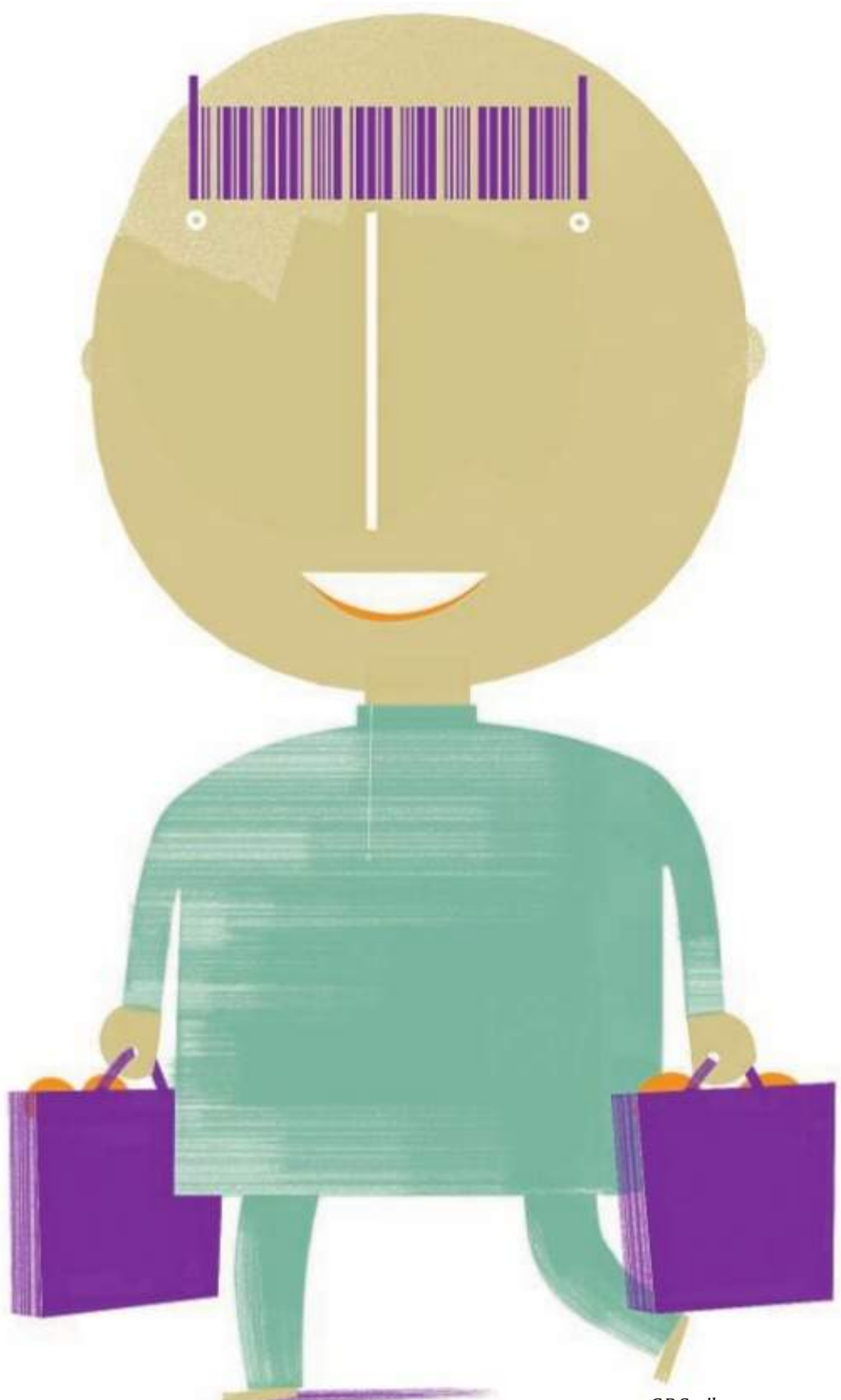
Some critics of Aadhaar demand that benefits be not denied to those who are unwilling to enroll for Aadhaar. This plea is certainly not tenable under the Aadhaar Act, which stipulates that Aadhaar enrollment

can be made mandatory for the grant of benefits. Therefore, if one does not want to enroll for Aadhaar, he has to make a conscious choice of foregoing the benefits. The plea of the critics is akin to a case where someone, on the basis of the fundamental right to freedom of movement under the Constitution, insists on driving a motor vehicle without applying for a driver's licence. Isn't the state, which is spending lakhs of crores of taxpayers' money on welfare schemes, entitled to use a credible identification system like Aadhaar to ensure that the benefits go only to genuine beneficiaries? Have we not heard stories about how people would often be turned away from ration shops on the pretext that the stock had finished? Since now, benefits will be distributed through Aadhaar authentication, it will be much harder to fudge records and deny genuine beneficiaries. Under the Aadhaar regime, everyone involved in the delivery system is subject to a greater accountability. The citizen is also empowered because it is harder for anyone to impersonate him and deny his rights.

Aadhaar has saved the government more than Rs 56,000 crore during the last three years by removing fakes and duplicates. Critics who dispute these figures may refer to the World Bank's Digital Dividend Report 2016 which has estimated that Aadhaar could annually save the central government US \$11 billion if used in all welfare programmes. The efficacy of Aadhaar has also been questioned on the ground that it has not been able to curb quantity and quality frauds and check corruption by the service providers — for example, some fair price shop dealers continue to give poor quality foodgrains or give less quantities to the beneficiaries even after Aadhaar authentication.

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CR Sasikumar

One needs to understand that Aadhaar is not a magic bullet or cure for all the ills of our society. It cannot be challenged on the ground that it is not able to solve a problem fully. In fact, the Supreme Court in its recent PAN-Aadhaar judgment held that the introduction of Aadhaar in the tax regime cannot be denounced just because the deep-rooted menace of tax evasion needs to be tackled by multiple actions — each individual action considered in isolation may not be sufficient. Similarly, Aadhaar only authenticates the beneficiary's identity; other abuses and transgressions have to be addressed by the appropriate agencies of the state.

We also need to be aware that the beneficiaries of the erstwhile leaky system would do everything possible to demonise Aadhaar. They would try to deny benefits to the deserving and put the entire blame on Aadhaar. There are stories — and videos — in social media about Aadhaar leading to large-scale denial, about old and poor people being deprived of their rations and pensions, a ration shop dealer being made to climb up a tree to make his biometric authentication machine work. It is unfortunate that many sincere social workers, activists, and even economists are not able to discern the sinister designs of such people. It would have served the country and the poor better if the conscientious objectors of Aadhaar had seen through this pernicious design and directed their objections to the violators of Aadhaar rather than Aadhaar. They need to understand that Aadhaar is an instrument of empowerment and not a tool of exclusion.

The writer is the Chief Executive Officer of Unique Identification Authority of India

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The Sino-Indian relationship is complicated. Beijing is more powerful yet unwilling to face a confrontation with New Delhi. But we must have enough tools to deter India from provocations."

—GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA

A midnight pledge, 70 years later

PM Modi's July 1 speech, at the special Parliament session to bring in GST, was also about a nation and its tryst with destiny



ANIL BALUNI

IT IS NOT common for special sessions of Parliament to take place at midnight. On such rare occasions, the prime minister's speech is looked forward to with enthusiasm. PM Narendra Modi's speech to mark the roll-out of the GST was no exception. At midnight on July 1, when India saw the birth of an economic revolution, PM Modi was the statesman par excellence. Seated between President Pranab Mukherjee and Vice-President Hamid Ansari (both elected when the UPA held office and who had close links with the Congress before that) as well as H.D. Deve Gowda (his becoming PM in 1996 prevented the BJP from forming the government at the Centre), Modi listed how the GST will usher in a new economic order that will benefit every Indian.

Minutes after he spoke, there were comparisons with speeches by other prime ministers. But the comparison with Jawaharlal Nehru's speech on August 15, 1947 was the most obvious.

How did the two prime ministers compare in their addresses at the temple of democracy at midnight, 70 years apart? The central premise of Nehru's speech — tryst with destiny — differs greatly from Modi's central idea — a pledge of determination. The hallmark of Nehru's speech was his style. Few leaders could have matched Nehru's eloquence and flair. Every word, every line, had a lesson. Modi's speech, in contrast, had the PM's style and flair but also signaled his determination and provided a direction to the nation. The PM assured the nation that the GST is a step in the right direction and also pointed to the path ahead. He led from the front in saying that 125 crore Indians will together make the GST successful and overcome all its shortcomings.

Modi expressed reverence towards freedom fighters. The names he took included M.K. Gandhi, Vallabhbhai Patel, B.R. Ambedkar, Rajendra Prasad, Maulana Azad, Sarojini Naidu and J.B. Kripalani. None of them had anything to do with the ideological movement the PM is rooted in. Nehru's speech did not name any of the great leaders of the freedom movement, who were also his colleagues.

Modi said that the GST was about the combined strength of "Team India", which consists of the Centre and the states. This includes chief ministers from parties other than the BJP or NDA. There is no mention of such teamwork in the 'Tryst with Destiny' speech.

The languages in which Nehru and Modi spoke reveals a lot about their in-

tended audience. Nehru spoke in impeccable English — his command over the language could have put the British to shame. Modi spoke in Hindi. It is undeniable that more people in India understood Modi's speech compared to those who could understand Nehru's address 70 years ago. The reasons are obvious — Hindi is understood by far greater numbers than English. In 1947, the number of those who could understand English was fewer. In the non-Hindi speaking areas, the regional languages held more sway than English.

Could it be that Nehru's intended audience was not the people of India but the British, or a more global audience in general? Would it be unfair to ask that when a prime minister is speaking from Parliament, the target audience should be the people of the country? Nehru wrote *The Discovery of India* but Modi's short but loaded speech on July 1 gives a true sense of "discovery of India". He mentioned our celebrated history and envisioned a brighter tomorrow. He spoke about our freedom fighters and also about harnessing the dreams of youngsters.

Modi spoke about the vitality of India's economic integration and why the time has come to unify the country economically. He elaborated on the urgency of delivering what the poor of India deserve, but have been denied for 70 years. He highlighted the need for India's eastern part to get the opportunity to lead the nation's economic resurgence.

The PM enumerated the advantages the GST will afford to trade and commerce, the boost it will give to the railways, the impact it will have on the ease of doing business and Digital India. These themes encapsulate the spirit of a new and buoyant India, ready to take on the world. In contrast, the speech on August 15, 1947 offered little glimpse into the strengths, aspirations and complexities of the nation, at a time when these facets should have been listed with more clarity and leadership.

The Congress boycotting the GST special session, despite other opposition parties attending it surprised every Indian. The GST has become a reality due to efforts by people across the political spectrum. Did the Congress's absence have anything to do with Nehru's August speech on August 15, 1947?

At a time when comparisons seem to make the best discourse, it was not unusual for people to compare India's first and current PM speaking in Parliament. Both addresses give a peek into the men, their temperament, their ability to credit others and their skill to combine style with substance.

On August 15, 1947 we began a journey premised on our tryst with destiny. Seventy years later, on July 1, we begin the journey of economic unification and independence not merely with the blessings of fate but with the skills and strengths of 125 crore Indians, guided by a robust and confident leadership.

The writer is head, BJP media cell

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

PLEA FOR PEACE

NO WORDS ARE too strong to condemn the dastardly attack on pilgrims to the holy shrine of Shri Amar Nath ji. This is the antithesis of what was known as "Kashmiriyat" and of the great religion that the attackers claim to be espousing. Immediate action needs to be taken to identify the attackers and deal with them suitably. My deepest condolences to the families of those killed and prayers to Lord Shiva that the injured return to health. It is tragic that the attacks took place despite repeated assurances that the entire yatra route had been "sanitised" and also that intelligence reports had indicated that such attacks were imminent. Mufti Mohammad Sayeed Sahib's well intentioned attempt in the light of the split electoral verdict to bring together what he called the North Pole and the South Pole on the basis of the Agenda for Alliance is in a shambles. Considering the situation that has developed in the last few months, the next step has to be the immediate imposition of the Governor's Rule so that the entire security, political and regional situation can be re-visited and, after careful consideration, decisions taken as to how to proceed in the future. I appeal to the entire country to remain calm and refrain from any action that might further promote violence.

Karan Singh, New Delhi

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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edge, even more.

Chanchal Nandy, Burdwan

BRING PEACE

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Terrorists gun down 7 Amarnath pilgrims in Kashmir's Anantnag' (IE, July 11). The horrific attack must be strongly condemned. It is time for political parties to offer meaningful suggestions to bring peace to the Kashmir Valley.

Maqsood Khan, via email



VIEW FROM THE RIGHT

BENGAL VIOLENCE

THE EDITORIAL IN *Organiser*, "In Whose Name Is This", comments on the recent violence in Basirhat tehsil of West Bengal. Terming it a "very dangerous sign", it says that "this is not the first time Islamic fundamentalists in Bengal have made the mockery of the law and order situation". "What is happening in Bengal," it says, "is not by accident but by design". It contends that "Islamic radicals of Bangladesh always found it convenient to establish their networks in bordering districts of Bengal, thanks to the appeasement politics of earlier Left Front government and now the Mamata Banerjee-led TMC government".

These fundamentalists are "flaming these jihadist tendencies" in West Bengal. It then argues that "the devious designs of power politics and pseudo intellectualism have unfor-

tunately categorised the violence and lynchings also on secular and communal lines".

Intellectuals, who raised the "protest banners of #NotInMyName barely a week ago", have "surprisingly gone silent on this brazen mobocracy". "One can understand that the electoral compulsions of 'secular' parties, but when it comes to media and intellectuals it is very difficult to understand in whose name they are promoting this lynching of our nation," it concludes.

JITTERY CHINA

THE COVER STORY OF *Organiser*, 'Jittery China Locks Horns', says the "Chinese incursion in Doklam plateau in Bhutan is a calculated move which came to spotlight when Prime Minister Narendra Modi was away on a foreign visit". "The move is apparently aimed at dissuading India from working shoulder-to-shoulder with America," it says.

It notes that the agreement between Modi and US President Donald Trump "on countering the North Korean weapons of mass destruction programme" has made "China livid which morally supports the ruthless dictatorship of Kim Jong-un". "Moreover", it says, "India snubbed the

Chinese after it skipped the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) meeting in Beijing which has further alienated China".

Countering the recent Chinese reminder about the 1962 war, it says that "if history is so sacred then China should also remember how its attack on the Nathu La and Cho La in 1967 was repulsed by the Indian Army".

FAKE NEWS

AN ARTICLE IN *Panchjanya* reacts to a recent media report that Ahmedabad's Jama Masjid, which consists of "152 pillars of Hindu style", is a "picture of harmony". Describing the report "an obscene joke with Hindus", it says "everybody knows that this Masjid is built on the remains of ancient Hindu and Jain temples". "This mosque was built after demolishing a Bhadrakali temple," it contends, adding that when Ahmad Shah captured Gujarat province in 1411, there was a fort along the Sabarmati, "which had a beautiful temple of Goddess Bhadrakali". Shah destroyed the temple in 1423 and converted it into Jama Masjid. There are several such temples that were converted into mosques by Muslim aggressors. Slamming the news report, it says: "Unfortunately, (the

secular media is constantly attacking the Hindu faith."

CHURCH'S INTOLERANCE

ORGANISER HAS AN interview with rationalist Sanal Edamaruku, who had to flee India in 2012, "thanks to the intolerant and powerful Catholic Church". His "crime" was he "exposed" the fraud of a church. "In early March 2012, a Catholic church in Mumbai claimed that the steady drips from the toe of a statue of Christ at their premises were holy water and it was a miracle," he says in the interview. However, he proved it was "the trapped toilet water" that "raised through the small pores on the wall", then "climbed up through the cement base of the Christ statue, leaked through the nail hole on the statue of the crucified Christ". As he exposed the "miracle", the church filed criminal cases against him.

He also claims that "the Left politicians have not taken interest in my case". They "do not touch extremism, intolerance or fundamentalism of the Catholic church or Muslim organisations as they consider them their potential vote bank," he says.

Compiled by Ashutosh Bhardwaj



PAPER CLIP

FLAGGING INTERESTING RESEARCH

TACKLING POVERTY

AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Published in *Agricultural Systems*, July 2017

AUTHORS: Boru Douthwaite and Elizabeth Hoffecker

Don't merely teach; for the best results, work together

IT IS better to teach someone to fish than to just give them fish, goes the adage. New research from international nonprofit WorldFish and MIT has gone a step further and shown that working with fishermen to help develop better fishing methods works even better. Involving local people in figuring out how to improve their farming and fishing methods provides more lasting and widespread benefits than just introducing new technologies or methods, the researchers showed.

The researchers focused on two different examples — fishing in lakes and rivers in Zambia, and growing the fibre crop abaca in the Philippines.

In Zambia, refrigeration facilities and ice are scarce, and nearly one-third of the fish caught are spoiled before reaching the market. A lot is dried or smoked, but they are vulnerable to insects and rodents, and are subject to damage during transportation.

In addressing the challenge from spoilage, a much bigger challenge emerged: overfishing. Stakeholders were not working together, and mistrust between communities thwarted attempts at doing so.

So the researchers started out working on the technical challenge of reducing spoilage, which built relationships that allowed them to tackle the bigger challenge. The participatory research process included meetings of different stakeholders including government officials, NGOs, researchers, and residents, which were followed by village-level workshops in 10 communities. This resulted in establishing three ongoing working groups to tackle different aspects of the issue: fisheries co-management, establishing cooperatives and other economic associations, and postharvest processing.

The overall process led to four significant outcomes, none of which had been planned or anticipated initially — developing a locally sourced fish-processing method (salting), developing a value chain for the salted fish from harvest to market, creating working groups that could continue to evaluate and improve innovations in the fishery, and improving relationships among the different groups involved. In the end, this led to a growing consensus about the need to prevent overfishing.

In the Philippines, abaca farmers had been facing a virus that threatened to greatly diminish their harvests. The government wanted to eradicate all infected plants, but farmers were distrustful. Even when a new, virus-resistant variety of the plant was developed, they weren't willing to make the switch, as they considered the new varieties inferior for fibre-making.

The researchers enlisted the farmers in a process of experimentation. Several hybrid varieties were developed, and the local farmers tested them in their fields. And because they were involved in the process, they were much more receptive to the results.

EXCERPTED FROM MIT NEWS

Himalayan roadblocks in BRO's path

India says Chinese road construction in the strategic Doklam plateau has serious security implications for it. But as India's national auditor laid bare in a report submitted in March, New Delhi's effort at building its own roads along the China border has been sputtering and inefficient. SOFI AHSAN unpacks the CAG's conclusions.

THE ONGOING standoff at the Bhutan tri-junction in the Sikkim sector was triggered by an attempt by China to build a road through the Doklam plateau that Beijing and Thimphu both claim. The plateau overlooks Tibet's Chumbi Valley, a Himalayan passage-way into which the Nathu La pass opens, and which is of great strategic importance for India's 'chicken's neck' sector connecting the Northeast to the mainland.

Over the decades, China has aggressively built road and rail infrastructure close to the 4,000-km disputed border with India, a project that India has only recently begun to make efforts at matching on its side. The building of roads, intended to facilitate movement of troops and military hardware in the event of a border conflict has, however, made slow and uneven progress. In its audit of 'Construction of Indo China Border Roads by Border Roads Organisation' submitted to Parliament in March 2017, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India reported that as of end-March 2016, most roads were incomplete — and the completed ones were unfit to carry heavy equipment, including weaponry.

How many roads is India building along the border with China?

In 1997, the China Study Group, a policy body headed by India's National Security Advisor, identified strategically important border roads required for brisk and easy movement of troops to the northern and eastern frontiers. In 1999, the Cabinet Committee on Security approved the Group's proposal for the construction of 13 roads, to be completed by 2006 — a deadline that was subsequently extended to 2011. In 2007, a sub-committee headed by the Director General of Military Operations

(DGMO) identified 33 General Staff (GS) roads as 'Indo China Border Roads' or ICBRs. Another 27 roads were identified by the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) in consultation with the DGMO. Of these total 73 ICBRs, 61, with a total length of 3409.27 km, were to be constructed by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO), the body that builds and maintains roads infrastructure in the border areas.

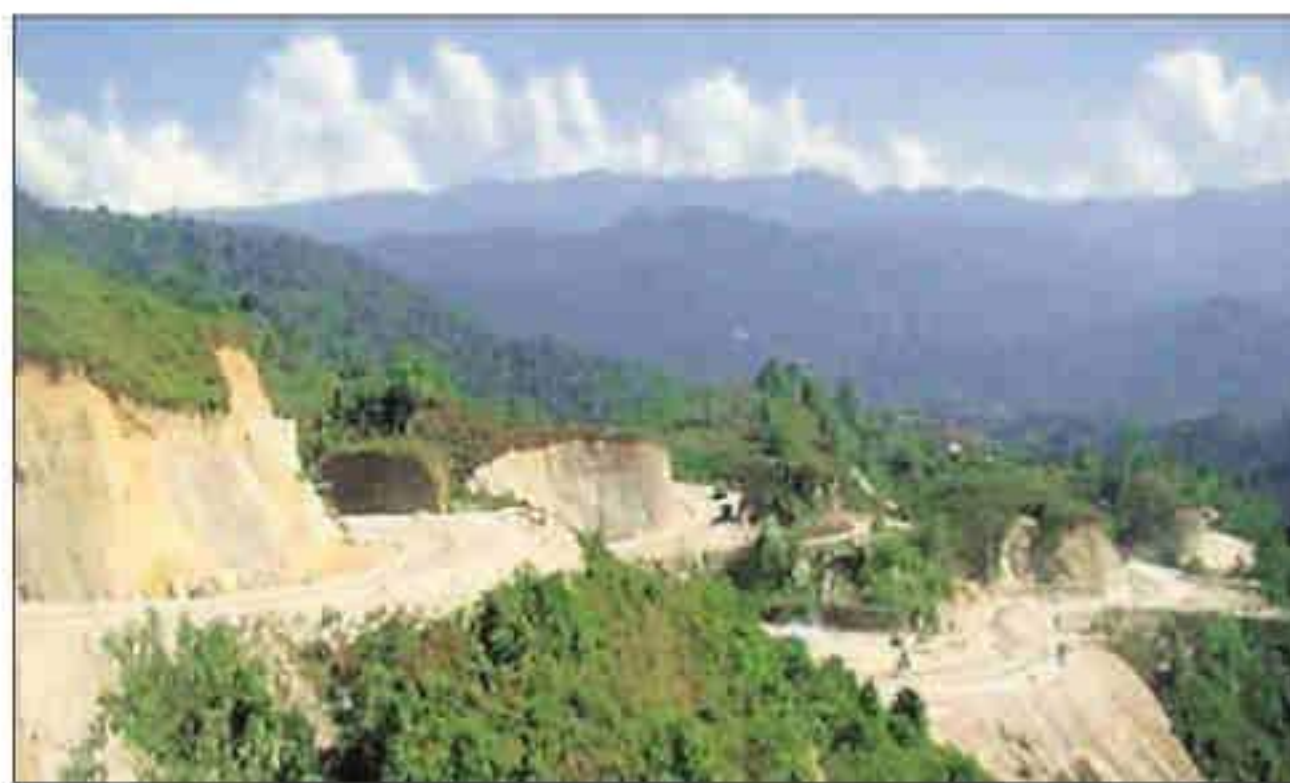
So, what did the Auditor find?

Sixty-one ICBRs should have been completed by 2012, but on March 2016, after spending 98% (Rs 4,536 crore) of the estimated cost of Rs 4,644 crore, only 22 roads (36%) were complete. The Auditor studied 24 ICBRs in detail and found that six of the completed roads "were not fit for running of specialised vehicles or equipments". Seventeen roads on which Rs 1,797.28 crore had been spent by March 2016, were of substandard quality.

The roads are spread across five states — Arunachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Sikkim. According to the report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence, presented to Parliament in March, the 39 incomplete ICBRs will be completed only by 2020 — provided the works progress on schedule. Of these 39 under-construction roads, 16 are in Arunachal Pradesh, 12 in Uttarakhand, eight in J&K, two in Sikkim and one in Himachal Pradesh.

But what has caused the delay?

Before beginning work, BRO conducts a "Reconnaissance, Survey and Trace Cut" (RSTC) to determine the route alignment, prepare project documents and make project estimates. The Audit found the RSTC was



(Top) Formation cutting in progress on BRO's TCC-Taksing Road; panoramic view of the Joram-Koloriang Road under restoration by BRO. BRO web site

in many cases "not carried out properly as the gradient, soil classification, alignment of the road taken at the time of carrying out RSTC were at wide variance with the conditions encountered during the execution".

Another major reason, the Audit found, was the delay in submission and approval of the Annual Works Plan each year from 2011. With approval for funds and manpower projections awaited, works were begun on the basis of *ad hoc* estimates. Estimates and annual targets were revised

after six months of execution of works, but the revised targets too could not be met in 2012-13, 2013-14 and 2015-16.

Besides affecting strategic preparedness, what other problems are the delays causing?

The CAG said many stretches were abandoned because of a change in the alignment of roads midway through the construction. The Border Roads Development Board (BRDB), which controls the pursestrings for

the BRO's work, had told the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) in 2012 that works worth Rs 100 crore had been rendered useless because of such problems. "The works executed have been manipulated in papers with financial irregularities of several crores of rupees and that it was reflective of increasing corruption and lack of accountability in BRO," the BRDB said in its report.

Faulty execution of construction works has caused heavy losses to the exchequer, the CAG said. Because of "improper RSTC and lack of supervision of work" on the strategic DSDBO (Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldie) road, running parallel and close to the Line of Actual Control in Leh, for example, the exchequer had suffered losses of Rs 277.19 crore, the Auditor said.

An internal inquiry carried out by BRDB between June 2010 and August 2014 revealed serious financial and technical irregularities in the construction of roads. Courts of Inquiry in these cases were not finalised even after the passage of between two and eight years, the CAG said.

Another loss has been that of human lives. As work dragged on in higher altitudes and bad weather conditions, 21 General Reserve Engineering Force (GREF) personnel and 48 Casual Paid Labourers (CPLs) were killed in work site and military transport accidents between April 2012 and March 2016. Prolonged deployment of personnel in difficult areas without any means of communication with their families, lack of adequate medical support, and non-availability of entertainment facilities had affected their physical and psychological health, the Auditor said.

And what is the official explanation for the delay?

The Director General, Border Roads provided the following reasons for failing to achieve targets in the building of ICBR roads: high altitudes, reduction in the efficiency of vehicles and equipment due to extreme atmospheric conditions, problems in funding, non-availability of vehicles, equipment and plants, and the closure of roads for six months. The Auditor said the "reasons are not convincing as these aspects of terrain and climatic conditions" were to be taken into consideration while preparing annual plans.

(The CAG's report is available online.)

Understanding Nitish Kumar's difficult choice: ambition for 2019 or pragmatism for 2020?

The legal squeeze on Lalu has put the CM in a bind. He must weigh his options both in the Opposition and as an ally of BJP, albeit on renegotiated terms



IN FACT

BY SANTOSH SINGH

EXPRESS EDITORS INTERPRET

RAIDS BY the CBI and Enforcement Directorate at the homes of Lalu Prasad and members of his family last week have left Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar with the difficult choice of either continuing with the RJD chief, who will play the political victim, or opening talks with the BJP about terms and conditions for the 2019 Lok Sabha and 2020 Bihar Assembly elections. For now, though, Nitish seems happy to go slow as he watches the moves of other stakeholders — the RJD, Congress and BJP.

There has been speculation about Rahul Gandhi offering Nitish a "respectable and important" position in the Congress-led Opposition ahead of 2019. But being the co-

ordinator — whatever the actual designation may be — of Opposition parties may not be good enough for Nitish to stay on in the company of Lalu and his corruption-tainted family. He would have to surrender his moral authority to talk against corruption, and on his demand, made last month, that states be given the power to act under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act. Nitish's clean image is his USP and the source of his bargaining power — and as the BJP turns up the heat on his deputy Tejashwi Yadav, the pressure on the Chief Minister to take a stand will escalate rapidly.

The BJP is impatient to hear from him. Some Bihar leaders of the party, such as Ashwini Kumar Choubey, have been talking of a "Plan B" — possibly getting Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath to campaign more in the state — but the BJP will certainly be more comfortable with 'Plan A', which is built around Nitish for both 2019 and 2020. For the Lok Sabha polls especially, Nitish could be a very important player for the BJP to secure victory.

And yet, Narendra Modi's robust and overbearing BJP isn't the party of A B Vajpayee and L K Advani that Nitish has dealt with earlier. This BJP is likely to insist on setting the terms of engagement, and Nitish has already declared he is not a "pichhlaggu" — one who follows blindly. His ego battle



Continued political association with the corruption-tainted Lalu Prasad Yadav and his family threatens to damage Nitish Kumar's hard-earned USP and, indeed, the source of the Chief Minister's power to bargain — his clean image. PTI

with Modi is probably over, but he may still have a few inhibitions to shed before getting into bed with the BJP again. He would be acutely aware that once he decides to go with the BJP, the door to backing out might be shut forever — he will, therefore, bargain extremely hard.

The BJP has the promise of a friendly Centre to offer — something that Nitish has never had as Chief Minister (if one discounts his seven-day government in 2000). He may also get a good number of seats to contest in 2019 and, should the NDA return to power, possibly a bunch of ministerial berths. There

is even the outside chance of a Deputy Prime Ministership.

But the Chief Minister does not seem to have given up on the Grand Alliance in Bihar or, indeed, an Opposition alliance at the Centre — not just yet. An indication of this may be his blow-hot, blow-cold approach towards the Congress — blaming it for the current "mess in the Opposition" one day, and asking it to "set the agenda for the Opposition" on the very next. Also, his repeated announcement, without any provocation or apparent reason, that he is not a candidate for PM, could be intended to signal

to the Congress that he is the Opposition's best bet against Modi in 2019.

To be sure, Nitish has a reputation for conducting his politics simultaneously on parallel tracks — for Bihar at one level, and as a player in national politics on the other. But now, impending action by law enforcement agencies against Lalu and his family are sully his good image by association, even as a role of significant importance in the Congress-led Opposition has been slow in coming. The JD(U) did not find a place in the SP-Congress alliance for the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections, and the Congress failed to react to Nitish's early move for a consensus candidate for the presidential election. He and Sitaram Yechury had proposed the name of Gopal Krishna Gandhi at the DMK meeting in Chennai at the beginning of June, but the Congress did not discuss it at all — only for Gandhi to be named the Opposition's candidate for Vice President on Tuesday.

The Mahagathbandhan has now had some time to ponder upon its future. In taking the time to think through his options, Nitish has also given the Congress and BJP time. As of now, the Chief Minister seems to be veering towards a reboot of his politics — keeping aside his national ambitions for 2019 and taking a pragmatic view for 2020, most probably with BJP as alliance partner. The offer is very much there from the old associate — only the conditions and timing of getting back together may have to be negotiated afresh.

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When will GST take firm root? How reliable is GSTN portal?

GST has been rolled out, but by when do you think we can expect a fully functional 'one nation, one indirect tax' regime in India? Secondly, what are your views regarding the reliability of the digital portal GSTN?

VAIBHAV MANOCHA, CHANDIGARH

Ask the EXPRESS

YOUR QUESTIONS ON GST ANSWERED

ated a single common market. As far as uncertainties about the procedures are concerned, a number of administrative measures have been taken to clarify matters. A number of GST helplines and GST Sewa Kendras have been created in both the state and central tax departments across the country.

The implementation of the entire GST regime is underpinned by a robust technological system created by the GSTN. All tax returns are required to be submitted online. The system, developed by Infosys, has been tested and has been found to be satisfactory. A two-month relaxation period has been



Wholesale traders in Kolkata (above) and several other cities have been protesting against the GST. PTI

given, during which time the system is expected to settle down. This would mean that the tax returns in the regular format for the

month of July would need to be filed only by September 20. In the interim, the taxes for the month of July could be paid by August 20, based on the self-declared turnover in a simple format, which could be reconciled in subsequent months.

REVENUE LOSSES?

Will GST result in a loss of revenues for the states? How will the states be compensated for this loss?

LALIT LONARI, BHUSAWAL

As per the agreement reached between the Centre and the states in the GST Council, the states have been guaranteed a revenue growth of 14% on the revenues collected by them in 2015-16. Any shortfall of revenues based on this normative growth target would be compensated by the Centre. In other words, a 14% growth of revenue will

be guaranteed for a period of five years, and this compensation guarantee has been built into the Constitution Amendment Bill.

MULTIPLE TIERS

In case of a three-tier distribution or higher, will the middlemen also have to pay GST?

RIMIKA PRASAD, NEW DELHI

The design of the GST is based on the principle that the entire value chain from raw material to retail would be subject to a dual GST, where the Centre and the states concurrently levy GST irrespective of the number of tiers. Compliance would be ensured through a self-policing system in which the buyer would buy goods and services only from a compliant supplier because only then can he avail of tax credits indicated in the tax invoice.

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