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SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE

I also congratulate @meira_kumar Ji for her campaign, which was in spirit of the democratic ethos & values we all are proud of.

NARENDRA MODI, Prime Minister, 31.8 million followers on Twitter. The PM congratulated President-elect Ram Nath Kovind, and tweeted he was "gladdened by the extensive support" for him "across various states". He thanked members of the electoral college.

People talk of suitability in service (with regard to reservations for SCs). There is no mention in the Constitution (of suitability). In politics, people elected from reserved seats never lack in performance. Why can't it be so in service as well?

RAM NATH KOVIND
IN RAJYA SABHA, SEPTEMBER 1, 1997

In the Constitution and as a political ideology, we say casteism is dangerous for this country... But when the time comes for ticket distribution and candidate selection, then the primary criterion is caste. We should develop a mechanism...

RAJYA SABHA, JUNE 5, 1998

President-elect Ram Nath Kovind at his home in Delhi after being felicitated by the Prime Minister. *Renuka Puri*

MEET THE PRESIDENT

Man whom no one dislikes

LIZ MATHEW & SHYAMLAL YADAV
NEW DELHI, JULY 20

LEADERS CUTTING across party lines were unanimous on Thursday that the new President of India is a low-profile politician, a deeply spiritual individual, and a perfect gentleman. He had never been in the headlines — either as a politician or as a Dalit leader — before being named the NDA's nominee. No one inside or outside Parliament had anything to say against him.

"Kovind*ji* has got 116 votes more than the votes of NDA, which means many voters went by their conscience and voted for Kovind*ji*. He got votes from all states, and the entire electoral college voted for him in Andhra Pradesh. He won more votes than expected from the Northeast too. This shows he is a President accepted by all," Bhupender Yadav, BJP general secretary, said.

Kovind has always worked silently, said several people who have watched him closely. BJP spokesperson Bizay Sonkar Shastri recalled how, as the party's Dalit Morcha leader, he had secretly given a cheque of Rs 11,000 to run the magazine *Dalit Andolan Patrika* which was struggling to find funds.

Savita, the wife of India's second Dalit president, worked for Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited (MTNL) in Delhi. She joined as Telephone Operator and took voluntary retirement as Chief Section Superviser in 2005. She was looking after 197 (special telephone enquiry services) at Kidwai Bhawan at the time. Said a woman employee of MTNL who has worked with Savita, "I worked as her subordinate for four years and at that time we knew that she was the wife of an MP. She is polite and of a very good nature."

Savita's father was a refugee who came from Lahore, and her parents lived in Lajpat Nagar when she married Kovind in 1974. Said their son Prashant Kumar, "All my maternal uncles and aunts *(mausis)* are settled in Delhi." Prashant, 41, is the elder among the Kovinds' two children. He has a petrol pump near the Air Force Station, Hindon, in Ghaziabad. Prashant has spent 18 years in the aviation sector, and until two years ago, was a Cabin Manager with Jet Airways.

"I am not in politics, and I am not interested in it," Prashant said. He went to Delhi's Sardar Patel Vidyalaya, and has a Diploma in Hotel Management from the Institute of Hotel Management, Catering and Nutrition, Pusa, Delhi. Prashant's wife, Gauri Kumar, is a teacher at the junior wing of Air Force Bal Bharti School on Delhi's Lodhi Road.

The Kovinds' daughter, Swati, is a Cabin Superviser with Air India. Swati went to Kendriya Vidyalaya in Delhi, and then did her Psychology (Hons) from Delhi's Lady Shriram College.

(Read a longer version on www.indianexpress.com)

EARLIER, IN RASHTRAPATI BHAWAN

Scholar, Teacher, Scientist, Diplomat

RAJENDRA PRASAD, 1950-62
A mind of his own

His relationship with Jawaharlal Nehru was testy — he held views that were completely contrary to the Prime Minister's, especially on issues that were dear to Nehru's heart. Prasad was opposed to the Hindu Code Bill, and in going for the inauguration of the rebuilt Somnath temple, disregarded Nehru's advice to not grace a religious event as Head of State.

SARVEPALLI RADHAKRISHNAN, 1962-67
Philosopher President

The philosopher, former teacher and diplomat lent a professorial touch to Rashtrapati Bhawan during his tenure. He left a lasting imprint on the national calendar — his birthday, September 5, is celebrated as Teachers' Day.

ZAKIR HUSAIN, 1967-69
First Muslim President

India's first Muslim President was the first Head of State who died in office. Hyderabad-born Husain was a prolific writer, a Rajya Sabha MP, and Governor of Bihar. He was India's second Vice-President, and a Bharat Ratna.

V V GIRI, 1969-74
Beneficiary of 'conscience vote'

He is best remembered for his role in the dramatic split in the Congress and the assertion of Indira Gandhi. In violation of the party's official decision to back Neelam Sanjiva Reddy, she called for a "conscience vote", and Congresspersons rallied behind the independent candidate, Giri.

FAKHRUDDIN ALI AHMED, 1974-77
Emergency President

Ahmed did not serve his full term, and is remembered most for being the President under whose signature the Emergency was declared. After the Emergency was lifted and Indira lost the elections, a debate began on the role of the President in the Indian system.

PRANAB MUKHERJEE, 2012-17
Liked across party lines

Mukherjee's vast administrative experience and encyclopaedic knowledge of India, procedure, convention and the Constitution, led to his being the copy-book President. There were times he spoke his mind, like on intolerance, at a time when the country was roiled by incidents such as the Akhlaq lynching.

NEELAM SANJIVA REDDY, 1977-82
Second-time successful

The poet and administrator from Andhra Pradesh who had lost as the official Congress candidate in 1969, entered Rashtrapati Bhawan without a contest in 1977. He was in Indira's first ministry, but won in 1975 on a Janta Party ticket.

GIANI ZAIL SINGH, 1982-87
Pushed the envelope the most

The President's relationship with Rajiv Gandhi was fraught — he went from being the man who had made up his mind to swear in Rajiv at a difficult time, to being the President who questioned virtually all the PM's decisions. His refusal, in 1986, to sign the Indian Post Office (Amendment) Bill — which he felt would amount to censoring personal mail — precipitated a crisis, and the Bill was subsequently shelved. Zail Singh pushed the powers of the Rashtrapati to the very extreme.

R VENKATARAMAN, 1987-92
President to four PMs

Venkataraman saw four PMs, three of whom he swore in. The lawyer, freedom fighter and member of the first Lok Sabha served as Minister for Finance and Defence in his career.

SHANKAR DAYAL SHARMA, 1992-97
Votary of 'largest party'

He took the call to invite the single largest party to form the government in 1996, giving the BJP, under A B Vajpayee, its first taste of power at the Centre.

K R NARAYANAN, 1997-2002
Backer of 'letter of support'

The first Dalit President ended up dissolving Lok Sabha twice. If his predecessor concluded that "single largest party" was the key to an invitation to form the government, he devised a criterion of "letters of support" from allies in case of a hung House. In the aftermath of the riots in Gujarat in 2002, Narayanan wrote letters to Prime Minister Vajpayee, the contents of which remain secret.

A P J ABDUL KALAM, 2002-07
Most loved Missile Man

India's Missile Man was a candidate on whom the Congress and BJP agreed. During his visit to Gujarat, the *veena*-playing and Gita-quoting Kalam was keen to be seen as his own man. He famously returned the UPA's Office of Profit Bill, prompting Sonia Gandhi's resignation as MP. He remains one of India's most loved Presidents.

PRATIBHA PATIL, 2007-12
She wouldn't let hang

The only woman President flew in a Sukhoi fighter in a *sari*. Although she never voiced her views on the death penalty, she never signed off on the hanging of any convict on her watch.

SEEMA CHISHTI

PRESIDENT IN THE CONSTITUTION

First citizen, Armed Forces supreme commander is not mere rubberstamp

PRADEEP KAUSHAL
NEW DELHI, JULY 20

B D JATTI was only Acting President — between February 11 and July 25, 1977, following the death of Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed — when he gave some anxious moments to the Janta Party government of Morarji Desai on its decision to dissolve the Assemblies of nine Congress-ruled states.

Jatti sought time to consider the matter. He felt the government's advice, in April 1977, was unprecedented and unwarranted. The Governors of these states had reported no breakdown of constitutional machinery to him, and he sought detailed information on the circumstances of the recommendation. Jatti did relent subsequently, mindful of the prevalent public mood against the Congress in the aftermath of the Emergency.

Notwithstanding the popular perception of the President as a ceremonial figure who occasionally rides a majestic horse carriage with state regalia, he can be far from being a pushover, if he so chooses.

"There shall be a President of India", says Article 52 of the Constitution, and explains, in the next Article, his role and position: "The executive power of the Union shall be vested in the President and shall be exercised by him either directly or through officers subordinate to him in accordance with this Constitution."

He appoints and removes high constitutional authorities, including the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers, judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts, Governors of states and Lt-Governors of Union Territories, the Attorney General, Comptroller and Auditor General, Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners, and Chairman and members of Union Public Service Commission.

He is the Supreme Commander of the Defence Forces, and appoints their Chiefs. The country declares war in his name. He can declare a state of Emergency on the recommendation of the Council of Ministers after satisfying himself that the country's security or financial stability is in danger.

Technically, Parliament comprises the President, Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. The President nominates 12 members to Rajya Sabha from amongst people having a special knowledge or practical experience in the fields of literature, science, art, cinema and social service. He convenes sessions of Parliament. The first session in every calendar year, called the Budget Session, begins with the President's address. In case of an impasse between the Houses during the legislative process, he summons a joint session to resolve the issue through a combined vote.

A Bill passed by both Houses becomes an Act after the President gives his consent. The government has to obtain prior sanction from him before introducing legislation for creating a new state, or making changes in the boundary or name of a state. Any Bill dealing with fundamental rights has to be cleared by the President in advance. He promulgates Ordinances when Parliament is not in session. He can ask the Council of Ministers to reconsider a Bill sent to him for consent; he has to, however, fall in line if the Council of Ministers sends it back to him. The same holds good with regard to the recommendation for the invocation of Article 356.

India's ambassadors and high commissioners represent him and foreign envoys present their credentials to him.

Article 72 vests in him the power to grant pardon to a convict. He can seek the advisory opinion of the Supreme Court on legal and constitutional matters, and on matters of national and the people's interest as per Article 143. He can ask the Attorney General to attend parliamentary proceedings and report any unlawful functioning to him (Article 88).

The President authorises the presentation of the union Budget. Money Bills can be introduced in Lok Sabha after his consent. He can take advances from the Contingency Fund of India. He constitutes a Finance Commission after every five years to recommend distribution of taxes among the Centre and states.

RELATIVE VALUES

Value of votes polled by the two candidates for President

	KOVIND	KUMAR
Parliament	3,69,576	1,59,300
Uttar Pradesh	69,680	13,520
Maharashtra	36,400	13,475
Andhra Pradesh	27,189	—
Tamil Nadu	23,584	17,248
Bihar	22,490	18,857
Madhya Pradesh	22,401	7,467
Rajasthan	21,414	4,386
Gujarat	19,404	7,203
Odisha	18,923	2,533
Telangana	12,804	2,640
Assam	10,556	4,060
Jharkhand	8,976	4,576
Haryana	8,176	1,792
Karnataka	7,336	21,353
Chhattisgarh	6,708	4,515
Others	16,427	84,389
Total	7,02,044	3,67,314
Percentage	65.65%	34.35%

MEIRA KUMAR got the most value of votes in West Bengal (41,223), followed by Karnataka, Kerala (20,976) and Punjab (11,020)

IN HIS VILLAGE

DJ vans and gulal, dreams of a 'VVIP chhetra' with college and hospital

Dancing in the streets in Paraukh village on Thursday. *Vishal Srivastav*

MAULSHREE SETH
KANPUR DEHAT, JULY 20

RESIDENTS OF Ram Nath Kovind's ancestral village Paraukh in Kanpur Dehat district celebrated in boisterous, earthy style as their "Babaji" was declared winner of the presidential election on Thursday.

Both the young and the elderly danced in the streets in pouring rain as loudspeakers on a decorated "DJ van" throbbed with popular Bollywood and Bhojpuri numbers. For hours, the procession crawled through the village, and all of its residents celebrated with *gulal*. Some 50 Muslim families took out their own DJ van, and roamed the lanes dancing to the music it belted out. At a temple next to the school that Kovind attended as a child, an *Akhand Ramayan Path* had been organised in his name.

Almost everyone from 72-year-old Jabri Prasad, who said he was a classmate of the President-elect, to teenager Vaishnavi Chauhan to village resident Mohd Ashkan, had their own version of *"vikas"* that they wanted from Babaji.

"Ab hum bhi VVIP chhetra mein ayenge na (Now, we too will be in a VVIP zone)," said *anganwadi* worker Pushpa Devi. Attached to the hope of membership of the *VVIP chhetra* is hope for a hospital, a degree college, good roads, drinking water, and a factory that could provide employment.

"Jabse Babaji ka naam aaya hai, baaees ghante bijli aane lagi hai. Ab sab badal jayega," said Class 9 student Vaishnavi. She hopes she will be able to go to college near the village; Jabri hopes for a hospital close by. The nearest one currently is 35 km away.

About 20 km away in Om Nagar locality of Jhinjhak town, in a congested lane in which four of Kovind's brothers have homes next to each other, a temporary tent had been erected and a big screen TV and music system rented, so that live updates from Delhi could be heard by the community.

Boxes of sweets were being circulated. Every visitor was stuffing Kovind's elder brother Pyarelal's mouth with sweets, ignoring his protests that he was diabetic. "I am happy and proud. He is a strict administrator," he told them. One of the younger members of the family shouted, *"Bihar ko baaees mahiney mein sahi kar diya.* (Lalu Prasad's son) *Tejashwi* (Yadav) *ko bhi."*

Rama Shukla, who lives next door to the Kovind family, said, "Our situation should change now. We used to get 22 hours of electricity as Jhinjhak is part of the Kannauj constituency of Dimple Yadav (wife of former Chief Minister) Akhilesh Yadav. But now we get less than 12 hours on many days."

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WORDLY WISE

THERE IS MUCH MORE TO BEING A PATRIOT AND A CITIZEN THAN RECITING THE PLEDGE OR RAISING A FLAG.

— JESSE VENTURA

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

PRESIDENT KOVIND

When balance between institutions is being reset, a nation looks to him for stability, continuity — and a moral presence

THAT RAM NATH Kovind would be elected the next President of India was foretold, given the NDA's numerical strength in the electoral college. That his election will be seen as the BJP sending out a message of Dalit empowerment and as the assertion of Sangh Parivar dominance of the country's power structure — it is for the first time that the country's president, vice president and prime minister are individuals politically groomed in the Parivar — is also no secret. But President-elect Kovind's real challenge starts where those statements end. It will be on him now, after winning an intensely political election, to seize the high ground above the fray. It will be his task and duty to ensure that his presidential tenure transcends the tokenism, or even the very powerful symbolism of being a Dalit president, that paved his way to Rashtrapati Bhavan.

This is a difficult — and interesting — time to be India's President. According to the Constitution, the president employs his discretionary powers in government formation in the aftermath of an uncertain electoral verdict. But it would be a miserly and narrow reading of the Constitution, indeed, that would disallow him an important place and role in between elections. Today, many of the established equations and certainties of India's polity are being unsettled and the balance between crucial institutions is being reset. There are concerns that the first single-party majority government in three decades could make the political executive much too dominant — vis a vis the judiciary, for instance. A battle of attrition may already be said to be underway, in fact, between the two institutions on the matter of their respective roles in judicial appointments. Then, there are apprehensions that a majoritarian triumphalism may be continuing unabated and unchecked on the ground ever since the 2014 verdict, setting the country's minorities, especially Muslims, on edge — on the day the result of the presidential contest was announced, Parliament was discussing the recurring episodes, across states, of mob violence and lynching in the name of the cow. A new balance, a new poise, may well be in the process of being struck in the polity and the economy, between institutions, between communities, between a nation's future and its real and imagined past. At a time of change and churn, it is especially important that the Indian Constitution, with its openness and flexibility — but also its basic structure — is in safe hands.

It will be President Kovind's responsibility to be the vigilant guardian of the Constitution and its values. He must know that a nation will look to him as an embodiment of stability and continuity — and, above all, as a moral presence. Even as he acknowledges the limits and constraints of his office, he will have many tools of intervention at his disposal — a signal, a nudge, a cautionary note. He must use them well. Congratulations, Mr President, and all the best.

HEED THE WARNING

The blockade that crippled life in Tripura since July 10 is over. But the state needs a lasting solution to its ethnic problem

FOR MORE THAN 10 days, since July 10, Tripura's connection with the rest of the country was severely restricted with the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT) laying siege to the national highway and the state's only rail head. The blockade led to a serious shortage of food, fuel and other essential commodities in the landlocked state. On Thursday, the tribal outfit, which has been demanding a separate state, "Twipraland" for nearly eight years, called off the blockade after the Centre assured IPFT leaders that it will hold talks with them. Tripura's essential commodities crisis might well be over. But there is no indication of an enduring solution to the discord. This does not bode well for the state which has a long history of tension between its tribal and non-tribal population.

The IPFT's demand for a separate state is a product of the anxieties fanned by the history of migration that began in the late 19th century when the royal family of the hill state encouraged Bengali farming communities to settle there. By the early 20th century, indigenous tribal communities had been reduced to a little more than 50 per cent of Tripura's population. Partition caused another upheaval in the state's demography. It led to an influx of refugees from the then East Pakistan paving the way for an ethnic conflict which was exacerbated when the 1971 war for the creation of Bangladesh led to another round of migration into Tripura.

However, welfare schemes for the state's indigenous people, attractive rehabilitation packages for former insurgents and regular elections to the Tripura Tribal Area Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) helped douse the fires of enmity between the state's tribal and non-tribal peoples. Tripura withdrew the AFSPA in 2015 — Prime Minister Narendra Modi lauded the state's success in tackling insurgency. But the unrest this month indicates that the political resolution to Tripura's ethnic problem requires more work. The IPFT was a fringe player in the state's politics till 2013, when it organised a highway and rail route blockade in Tripura. Last year, it mobilised more than 10,000 agitators to cut off the state's road and rail links with the rest of the country for more than a day. The tribal outfit's 10-day long agitation this month portends a return to the times when ethnic matters upstaged all other issues. The past 10 days should be a warning to the Centre and state governments that, in spite of the decade-long peace it has enjoyed, Tripura is still searching for a lasting solution to its ethnic problem. They must work together to bring it about.

FLY THE FLAGS

Why Karnataka alone? Flags for everyone would lend welcome colour to the national landscape

KARNATAKA HAD BEEN flying its state flag for half a century until 2012, when chief minister D.V. Sadananda Gowda took it upon himself to make it mandatory at state government premises. Indians take mandatory requirements very personally, and attentions of the high court followed, forcing the government to retreat. Now, the auspicious turmeric and vermilion flag is back in the news, providing another opportunity to wonder why states cannot have their own flags.

India is mightily uptight about the tricolour. Wrapping yourself in the flag is an offence, as fashion designers have discovered to their discomfiture. The very slightest slight to the emblem invites the unwelcome attentions of the police. Even variations in the dimensions of the flag are verboten. And now, here's a state demanding a competing flag.

Actually, the Kannada flag offers no competition, since it is a standard of cultural and linguistic identity rather than political identity, created during the language movement in the state. Of course, another language stir in the neighbourhood had transformed East Pakistan into Bangladesh in 1971. But the situations are scarcely comparable. East Pakistan felt neglected, while India is a confident federal nation where the states have enormous say in how the nation is run. The Centre should not feel threatened if states want to assert their cultural identity through emblems. India has become too uniform. Everyone eats dosa and butter chicken, dresses in the same nondescript clothes and watches serials made in the same dreadful style. A flag of their own could be a rallying point for states to assert their unique cultures. Jammu and Kashmir is the only state allowed to fly its own flag. Why should it have all the fun, even if only in one respect? The rest of India could feel left out.

Re-arming the law

In the wake of the new violence, the targeted killings bill must be revived and owned by all

UPENDRA BAXI

UTTERLY CONDEMNABLE IS the spate of targeted killings and communal violence associated mainly with the contexts of cow vigilantism, despite the Prime Minister's increasingly angry expostulation. Not all lynching is cow-protection related. Some acts are frankly little ethnic wars, some purely casteist attacks against the Dalits, some acts of dire violence on Muslims, and all are politically tolerated. The Opposition may insist that the larger percentage of cow vigilantism occurs in BJP-ruled states and the spokespersons of the ruling coalition may equally gleefully show that Opposition-ruled states also have a significant share of vigilante violence. Both sides may rightly agree that law and order is, and must, remain a state subject. But a constitutional power can never be a license for anarchy. Amid all the politicking, the question is: Where do the victims of such political violence go?

The favourite governance phrases today are: "Let the law take its own course" and "Do not take the law in your hands". Like all governance slogans, these appeal to common sense, old or emergent. The common sense is that a social order is based on the sovereignty of law and complete ouster of self-help. But what is to be done when political and governance cultures encourage self-help? The idea that private actors, galaxies of stormtroopers, are necessary to perform the labours of competitive politics is anathema to the basic structure of the Indian Constitution. In outlawing the Salwa Judum and invigilating the extra-judicial killings by Manipur police and armed forces, the Supreme Court of India has recently said this, and much more.

The difficulties besetting the due course of law are legion. First, the law may never take its course when the police refuse to file the FIR, despite the Supreme Court's insistence that they ought to. This means that the event did not occur in law, though it did in society. Second, delayed and faulty investigation, either due to workload or to covert or overt party pressures, may tend to defeat the proceedings. So may, third, the lack of effective legal representation and the postures of out-of-court settlement. Fourth, the endless judicial delays, and the total lack of political will to improve access to justice, betrays a structural indifference to the sufferings thus caused. Fifth, parliament response to specific proposals may be problematic: For example, the targeted violence bill, 2011, and the "honour" crimes bill as proposed by the National Women's Commission.

Conventional wisdom teaches us that a defining mark of a modern state is its monopoly over the means, methods, and ends of violence. In fact, theories of sovereignty and legitimacy of power are based on this first premise of monopoly over force. The use of force by individuals is permitted in self-defence and it may be invoked when force is used 'reasonably' and 'proportionately'. But as world histories of law show, lynching, stripping and parading, deadly ethnic and communal riots, and social boycotts are organised by heavily politically patronised groups which enjoy virtual impunity from the law. In these circumstances, the expression 'the law will take its own course' sounds cruelly hollow, unless the law is rearmed.

The main reason for the stalemate is the belief that existing laws are sufficient. This argument (I recall as a member of the committee of the Bureau of Police Research) urged that the enactment of a new law against atrocity was not justified when a cluster of offences (like conspiracy, murder, grievous hurt, arson and looting, and attempt) were already IPC offences. Fortunately, then, the idea of atrocity as a separate offence was recognised.

The current anxieties about lynching are much the same. Why enact afresh when an IPC cluster of separate offences can be invoked (though stripping and parading is not a specific offence). But lynching should now be recognised as integral to collective political violence. Its definition should be borrowed from targeted violence bill, which defines communal and targeted violence as meaning and including an "act or series of acts, whether spontaneous or planned, resulting in injury or harm to the person and or property, knowingly directed against any person by virtue of his or her membership of any group, which destroys the secular fabric of the nation". This definition is superior to the one recently proposed by an NGO named MASUKA. Its definition of a "mob" as comprising two or more persons ignores distinctions between a "mob", a "crowd" and a "group".

The targeted violence bill also adequately defines as punishable hate propaganda, atrocity, sexual assault, torture and creation/reinforcement of a hostile environment. The bill casts several duties on police and others, violation of which is a serious offence. The most important innovations are limiting impunity (superior orders do not constitute a defence unless they are lawful) and the creation of a national authority for harmony, justice, and reparations.

The targeted violence bill was prepared after years of effort by human rights and social activists, and vetted by legislative officials. In the wake of new violence, it now needs to be owned by all, including political parties who ought to pass it in the current session of Parliament.

Conventional wisdom teaches us that a defining mark of a modern state is its monopoly over the means, methods, and ends of violence. In fact, theories of sovereignty and legitimacy of power are based on this first premise of monopoly over force. The use of force by individuals is permitted in self-defence and it may be invoked when force is used "reasonably" and "proportionately". But as world histories of law show, lynching, stripping and parading, deadly ethnic and communal riots, and social boycotts are organised by heavily politically patronised groups which enjoy virtual impunity from the law. In these circumstances, the expression "the law will take its own course" sounds cruelly hollow, unless the law is rearmed.

The FBI idea of "sovereign citizens" is not permitted by the Indian Constitution. Gathering momentum after the 9/11 event, they were described as "anti-government extremists" who believe that even though they physically reside in this country, they are separate or "sovereign" from the United States and "they believe they don't have to answer to any government authority, including courts, taxing entities, motor vehicle departments, or law enforcement".

Such anti-government citizens do exist and must bear the full brunt of stricter laws and counterinsurgency forces. Why should the targeted violence bill not be enacted now in the face of lynching? If any notion of sovereign citizens who can be judge, jury, and executioner at the same moment gains further ground, the Indian state's monopoly over force will be jeopardised. By the same token, to name honest dissent as anti-government or even anti-national will begin to erode the foundations of democracy. The law should never be deployed as a programme of political revenge but always regarded as an instrument for social justice and orderly change.

The writer is professor of law, University of Warwick, and former vice chancellor of the Universities of South Gujarat and Delhi

TAXING BODY PARTS

GST on aids, appliances for disabled points to government's misplaced priorities

MURALIDHARAN

THE GST ON aids and appliances for persons with disabilities is a reminder of Nangeli's act of severing her breasts in protest against the Mula Karam or breast tax levied on women from lower castes in Kerala in the early 19th century. This reference is ingrained in the minds of every Malayali for its sheer unjustness — taxing a body part.

The same sense of injustice is evident in the decision to tax replacements for non-functional or partly functional body parts. Crutches, callipers, hearing aids, walking frames — all replacements, albeit artificial, for body parts along with a host of other aids and appliances which the disabled use — would attract a GST of 5 per cent. In comparison, items used to embellish your body, will attract less and in some cases, no GST. So, while kajal, kumkum, bindi, bangles and even human hair are not taxed at all, gold and diamonds will attract a GST of just 3 per cent. Furthermore, to please the devout, *puja samagri* like rudraksha, prasadam, panchamrut, cotton wicks etc. are also exempt from GST.

Unfortunately, items of luxury, whose deprivation causes no challenge to human existence are being prioritised instead of aids and appliances that are essential items for persons with disabilities for their daily routine, access opportunities of education or employment or enjoyment of other rights or the discharge of duties as a responsible citizen. The fact that without aids and appliances the disabled are deprived of all these and forced into a disempowered state of seclusion has been ignored.

Unfortunately, items of luxury, whose deprivation causes no challenges to human existence is being prioritised instead of aids and appliances that are essential items for persons with disabilities for their daily routine, access opportunities of education or employment or enjoyment of other rights or the discharge of duties as a responsible citizen.

The rationale for imposing a levy on items which are often out of the reach of the common disabled person is beyond comprehension. It is only after the interventions of the finance ministers of Kerala and Tripura, that the GST on these items was brought down to 5 per cent (except for cars) at the GST Council's June 11 meeting. Earlier, the proposed range was from 5 to 18 per cent.

The finance ministry's statement on July 4, issued after protests, declaring that the 5 per cent GST rates are "concessional", is both incorrect and misleading. Pre-GST, barring cars for the "physically handicapped", aids and appliances used by persons with disabilities did not attract any levy. Let alone a "concession", this is, in fact, taxing disability or rather a tax on walking, hearing, reading etc. The statement claims that the compelling reason for this is to enable the domestic manufacturer to claim input tax credit for raw materials used in the manufacture of these products and asserts this is a "win-win" situation for all concerned. This requires clarification.

First, items like Braille printer, refreshable Braille display and Braille note-taker, talking watches and clocks, audio labelling devices, DAISY players etc are entirely imported items and did not attract any taxes earlier. There are no domestic manufacturers of these products. Second, raw materials like aluminium extrusions, square tubes and round tubes of aluminium used in the manufacture of artificial limbs and many rehabilitation aids were exempt from the earlier tax regime. Third, it needs to be underlined that input tax credit is, in any case, merely a by-product of the tax channels' unification, the weeding out of redundancy and the cascading taxes rife in the system that existed earlier. Fourth, what the clarification does not mention is that there is a lower slab of 0.25 per cent for items like unpolished stones.

If the intent of the government is to protect the domestic industry, the spiel must be accompanied by concrete steps to help Indian manufacturers build capacity by way of a technology incubator and extend existing indigenous manufacturers' scattered production centres into a nation-wide network of distribution, customisation and servicing.

Lastly, the government sought to present July 1 as the most important day after August 15, 1947. But what was the involvement of the people in this exercise? No representative from the disability sector was consulted and their opinion sought on the potential impact that this may have on their lives. This is yet another illustration of where disability figures in the government's list of priorities.

The writer is secretary, National Platform for the Rights of the Disabled

JULY 21, 1977, FORTY YEARS AGO

INDIAN EXPRESS

Justice Sinha tells of 'offer' made to him

Accord with Japan on India's rural economy

Naga hostiles won't be spared: Desai

Baby declared dead in hospital found alive

Film industry's talks with Govt fail

CONGRESS CRUMBLING

THE RULING CONGRESS'S citadel in Meghalaya, a state in which it enjoys a considerable electoral and political presence, is crumbling with the spate of resignations, both from the organisational and legislative wings of the party in the last few days. Its base in Khasi Hills district has been rudely shaken with the resignation during last 24 hours of 117 prominent Congressmen, including the former PCC chief, Jerlie Tariang, the general secretary of the PCC, T.S. Roy and the two general secretaries of the Khasi Hills and West District Congress Committees, Stoshun Nongrumand and Polycyprus Lyngdoh respectively.

JAPAN ACCORD

THE PROSPECTS OF greater Japanese involvement in the economic development of this country have emerged as a result of a series of talks the Japanese foreign minister had with Central ministers. The visiting minister, Iiehiro Hatoyama, met Finance Minister H. M. Patel and Industry Minister, George Fernandes among others. Hatoyama assured Patel of Jap'n's willingness to help in the development of the rural economy of India. It was agreed in the meeting with Fernandes that experts from the two countries would identify in detail further areas of industrial cooperation including projects that can be taken up in third countries.

FILM TAX

THE DELEGATION OF film producers, which came to Delhi from Bombay to make the last-minute effort to persuade the Union finance minister to revise the enhanced excise levy on films to avoid a confrontation between the government and the film industry, returned tonight without any success. The delegation led by Sriram Bohra, president of the All India Film Produce's' Council met Finance Minister H.M. Patel, and tried to convince him that the scheduled excise levy proposed in the budget for the current year would cripple the film industry and throw lakhs of people out of employment.

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WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

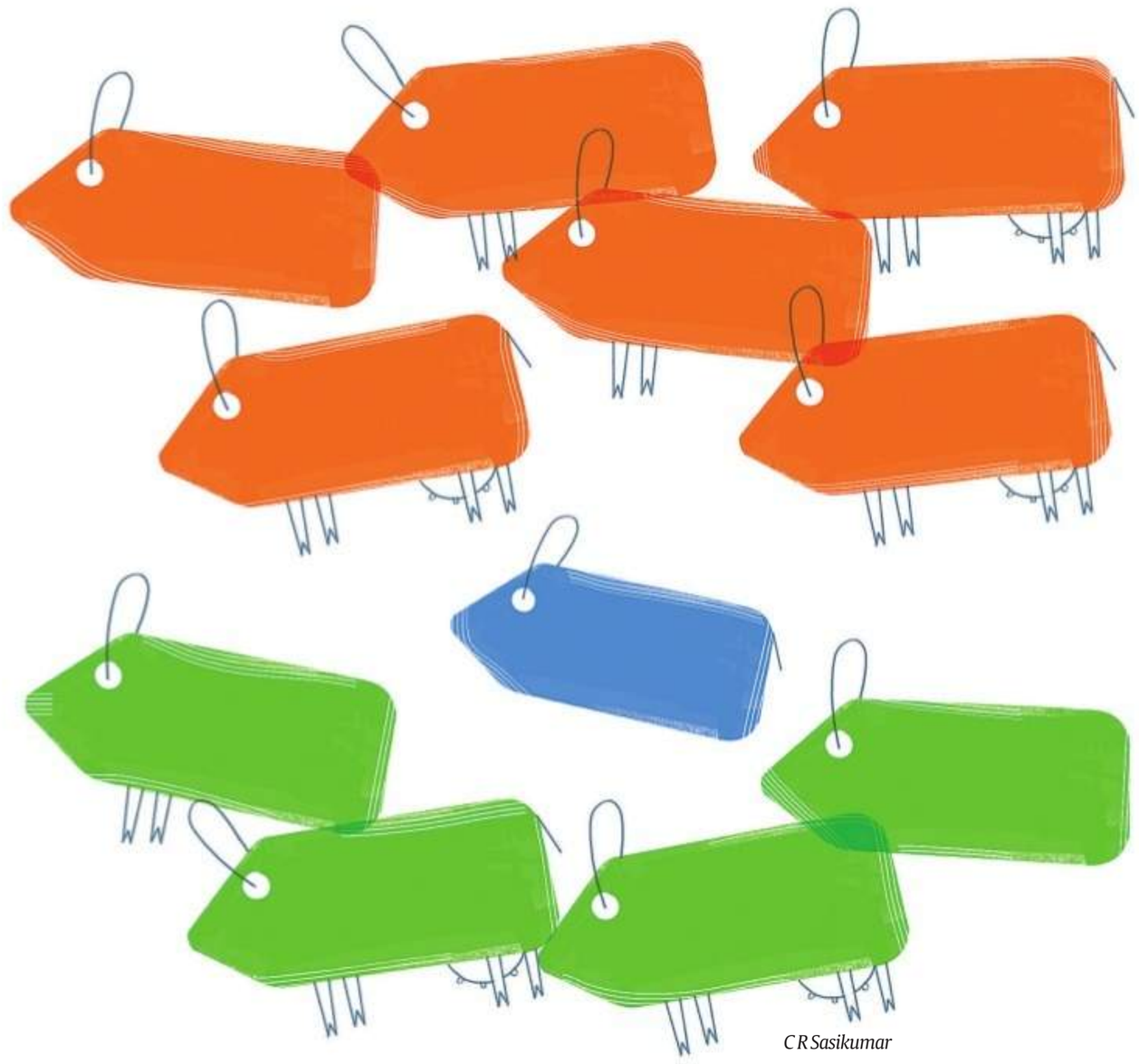
"A drumbeat of provocative words, outright threats and actions — from President Trump, some of his top aides as well as Sunni Arab leaders and American activists — is raising tensions that could lead to armed conflict with Iran".

—THE NEW YORK TIMES

Cow provincialism

There has never been disrespect for the cow in most parts of India, but there has been no magnificent obsession with it either

JANAKI NAIR



C R Sasikumar

NOW THAT THE BJP has sounded one more loud bugle in its Deccan campaign with its choice of M. Venkaiah Naidu for the Vice President of India, we would do well to take stock of the peninsula's links to virulent north Indian preoccupations. In a recent piece, the Malayalam writer Ramachandra Aluri had set the ball rolling by exceptionalising Kerala's practices of bull worship, meatarianism, and integrative local festivals of Onam and Vishu. We all know the state enjoys the longest history of religious co-residentiality in the sub-continent — possibly the world.

These are not matters to take lightly any longer, as we are all now under one or another kind siege. But the boot is really on the other foot: Karnataka too has had a long and warm, not to say creatively enriching, relationship with the bull. The examples of Kerala and Karnataka should be used to exceptionalise the region that has, not for nothing, been called the "cow-belt". (which is also, so to speak, the Hindi belt). The bull, despite its commonplace associations with a flaring-nostril masculinity and a stock market inexplicably on the rise, has powered not only the religious imagination but many representational forms, and suffused popular culture in ways that have produced respect and tolerance, rather than virulence and hatred.

Who does not fondly recall the man who appeared at the gate on a Saturday morning, belting out a tuneless grate on his *nadaswaram*, but making the decorated bull he brought along nod its bony head. What better name for the flowering *bauhinia* on Bengaluru parks and roads than "basavana pada", the bull's cloven foot, stamped on those exquisite leaves? And who has not admired and shown awe for those gigantic monolithic bulls that are scattered all over the Mysore/Karnataka region? They are the very image, despite their enormity, of placidity, faithfulness and dependability.

Such cultural signs apart, we would be hard pressed, particularly in Karnataka today, to find any historical equivalent of "cow-protection" movements that were the bane of the north in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. A concern for the well being of cows amongst the Sikh Kukas (Namdharis) in the 1860s was transformed by Dayanand Saraswati and the Arya Samaj into an anti-cow slaughter movement, which gained aggressiveness by the 1880s. "Rallying around the cow," to use the historian Gyanendra Pandey's memorable phrase, became a powerful tool in uniting Hindus divided by caste, ethnicity and class in Northern India, though not always successfully. The cow soon became a handy symbol, in the agrarian economies of Gangetic India, of maternity and fertility, in whose name petitions were written, songs were sung, plays were performed, and not least, violence was increasingly condoned. The riots that began from at least 1893 and are still with us today are among the most ambiguous legacies of that region.

In Mysore meanwhile, experiments with cow and bull breeding, for draught and milch cattle, and the pack bullock, were undertaken by the famous Amrit Mahal Department, thoroughly reorganised by the innovative Tipu Sultan, to become Mysore's pride and joy in the 19th century. "It is not unusual," said a Mysore tract on cattle in 1895, "for some well to-do men, from motives of charity, it being considered a meritorious act, to purchase [Doddadana] breeding bulls at their own cost and let them free. These bulls are also allowed free grazing by the villagers. They pay frequent visits to the neighbouring villages and attend to cows in season, keeping off inferior 'Nadudana' bulls." This gentle insemination programme gave way to artificial insemination using Danish semen which also first took shape in Mysore.

Clearly, some agrarian societies in India remained relatively untouched by the obsessive forms that cow-nationalism took in the northern, Hindi-speaking belt. Khadi wearing and some desultory learning of Hindi in jail, were the preferred modes by which Mysoreans chose to express their loyalty to the emerging Indian nation. There was an attempted empowerment of precisely those agrarian classes and castes through their aggressive incorporation into the modern world, of education and jobs, through policies of reservation and state support for industries. No single community was made to bear the burden or costs of that princely state's achievements or failings. Those legacies too are with us still.

> Every school child affectionately recalls Punyakoti, but the Shaivite, bull-worshipping cultures of southern India have not hegemonised the national imagination nor have the peninsula's meatarian cuisines transformed the plates and palettes of the nation through force.

So it is a very recent, and a very new nationalism indeed that has gripped the people of a region who had historically had been free of such preoccupations. Market forces, changed tastes and the televisual media alike have ensured that the salwar kameez, and "mehndi" and "sangeet" ceremonies, have marched into our lives, but these are at least colourful and relatively inoffensive. We cannot say the same about life-threatening cow nationalism.

There has never been disrespect for the cow in most parts of India, but there has been no magnificent obsession with it either. Every school child affectionately recalls Punyakoti, but the Shaivite, bull-worshipping cultures of southern India have not hegemonised the national imagination nor have the peninsula's meatarian cuisines transformed the plates and palettes of the nation through force. One lives in hope, then, that should Venkaiah Naidu win the vote, he will remain loyal to a provincial vision whose legacies urgently need to reach others, if only to teach them about the value and importance of difference. Meanwhile, a Geographical Index tag for cow-nationalism would go a long way in helping those wishing to put some distance between virulence and tolerance.

The writer teaches at the Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University

A new (agri)culture

The gains of the Green Revolution have long plateaued. Now, India needs to forge a different path, towards organic farming, micro-irrigation

PRASHANT BHUSHAN

IN THE last 20 years, according to the government's statistics, more than three lakh farmers have committed suicide in India. The situation of the farmers was never very good to begin with, but has been steadily declining and has reached its nadir right now. That is why we are seeing spontaneous eruptions of farmers' agitations in state after state across the country. Gradually, these spontaneous agitations are getting organised and now, a coordinated all-India farmers' movement is beginning to take shape which promises to be the beginning of one of the most significant farmers' movement in the history of this country.

The question is: What has brought the farmers to their present state of desperation? The roots of this crisis, in my opinion, lie in the Green Revolution and the policies adopted therein. The situation has also been exacerbated by the government's apathy towards the poor in general and towards farmers and rural folk in particular. The Green Revolution led agriculture towards chemical fertilisers, pesticides, irrigation through large dams and massive irrigation projects. This did lead to higher yields initially and, therefore, that period became known as the Green Revolution with most of the gains coming from the introduction of hybrid variety seeds.

However, with chemical fertilisers and hybrid seeds came the problems of resistance in pests and that led to the wider use of pesticides and also of higher potency. This infused poison in the food — especially for farmers, who also inhale the pesticides and, therefore, the higher incidence of cancer and other diseases — it also led to higher input costs and thereafter a gradual decline in productivity because of soil depletion. The chemical fertilisers added only a few chemicals like nitrogen, potassium and phosphorus to the soil without replenishing it with micro-nutrients and the pesticides kill even the soil bacteria. Eventually, the productivity started coming down and with greater use of pesticides, the input cost began to increase. Simultaneously, canals and canal irrigation also led to water-logging and a substantial part of the land became wasteland. In areas which were not irrigated by canals, there was a rise in the unregulated and unsustainable usage of tubewells to mine groundwater, leading its levels to fall rapidly. This led to even deeper tubewells, adding once again to the input costs for the farmers.

The Bhakra Dam was famously called one of the "temples of modern India" by Jawaharlal Nehru and has often been regarded as a boon to agriculture. Many large irrigation projects were thereafter taken up on similar lines, the most famous being the Sardar Sarovar project in Gujarat, which has been called the lifeline of the state by successive chief ministers. That project has taken up more than 90 per cent of Gujarat's irrigation budget for the last 50 years and today irrigates less than 2 lakh hectares of agricultural land which is roughly 10 per cent of what was promised. It still doesn't irrigate any part of Kuchh or Saurashtra — the arid regions for which it was supposedly made. If instead of this, even half this money had been spent on rain-water harvesting by giving every village of Gujarat a couple of crores for small check dams, every inch of agricultural land in Gujarat would have been irrigated many years ago.

On top of all this we now have repeated droughts and floods — problems that are compounded by climate change. We must also note that the government has fixed minimum support prices (MSP) for just wheat and rice, not for other crops and the MSP so fixed is just about adequate for farmers to meet their costs without giving even minimum wages for their own labour. The Swaminathan Commission had gone into this issue of MSP and had recommended that it should be extended to all crops and should be at least 50 per cent above the average cost price of farmers in each state. Despite a promise by the BJP in its manifesto to implement the Swaminathan Commission's recommendations, nothing has been done. In fact, there have been successive cutbacks in the funds allocated to the MGNREGA and other such schemes.

Payments for the loss of crops during droughts and floods have not been made despite loan waivers and the ever-greening of loans to big industrialists, who have defaulted on payments to the tune of thousands of crores, by banks. It is only after widespread agitations that some state governments have decided to waive loans to farmers.

However, this is only a temporary solution. If farmers are to be rescued from this crisis we desperately need to change the whole agriculture policy and move it towards organic farming, irrigation by rain-water harvesting and micro-water irrigation, shifting from chemical to organic fertilisers, which will also use less pesticides. It may be noted that contrary to popular belief, the government's data shows that the productivity from organically farmed lands is no less than those farmed with chemicals and pesticides. In addition, the Swaminathan Committee's recommendations must be implemented which will require a considerable amount of money. But that money has to be found. Some of it could come by way of discontinuing the subsidy on chemical fertilisers and some from stopping large irrigation schemes which come at a huge cost and deliver very little.

In India, 50 per cent of the people are still dependent, directly or indirectly, on farming. We cannot ignore their plight anymore. We have been sowing the seeds of the farmers' distress for a long time. Unless we quickly get our act together, we must be prepared to face the consequences. In any food crisis, it is the top of the food chain that suffers the most. In the case of farmer's distress, the top of food chain is us — the end consumer.

The writer is a senior lawyer

The invisible job

Gender-neutral family leave can curb the gendered nature of childcare

KARLA BOOKMAN

BEING A hands-on dad is cool these days. More fathers are vocal about how present they are in their kids' lives, and how much they split the burden of childcare. I applaud these fathers; research shows that involved fathers make an enormous difference in the future academic, emotional and professional success of their children. They're doing a lot and deserve to brag about it.

But what you may not have noticed is that their partners are frequently sitting to the side, quietly rolling their eyes (or sometimes obviously seething) at their partners' cluelessness. How is it that an entire cohort of well-intentioned fathers genuinely believes it is equally involved in parenting, when mothers feel the reality is wildly different? The answer lies in something feminists call mental load.

Mental load is the pressure, distraction, energy, and effort it takes to build and maintain a complex infrastructure; in this case, it's the mental acuity required to keep track of everything that keeps households running, and children healthy and thriving. Even for those mothers that have help, the coordination and management of these things is a full-time endeavour. Mental load isn't about how much time it takes to complete each of these individual tasks, it's the energy, focus, and strategic planning it takes to anticipate the medical, nutritional, and emotional needs of multiple people.

Picture this scenario: Dad leaves work early to attend his kid's football game. He's so hands-on! What a great dad! Mom also leaves work early to attend the football match. She's a great parent, too! But their contributions to this football match are usually drastically mismatched. In order to get the kid to that football match, Mom has also ensured the football uniform is laundered, foreseen the need for snacks, coordinated car rides to and from the match, scheduled and taken the kid to doctor's appointments for last week's twisted ankle and provided emotional support for frayed pre-game nerves. And she'll spend her time at the match cheering — but also mentally making grocery lists, planning this year's family holiday, remembering Nani is almost out of her medicine. oh, and revising tomorrow's presentation for a prospective client. Are you exhausted yet? She is.

This mental load goes unnoticed by fathers, under-valued by society, but virtually every mother I've talked to feels overwhelmed by it. Across countries, socio-economic and education levels, the burden of care management falls disproportionately on women.

The most common explanation for this highly gendered default arrangement is that women are required to be physically present in the first months of a child's life. They are the ones recovering from childbirth, and then nursing a baby. However, you need only talk to a few women who never breastfed, or couples who have adopted kids, to see that the gender divide in childcare has very little to do with whether someone gave birth a few months ago.

Another explanation that is frequently offered is one about efficiency. Household and childcare management can't be efficient, the argument goes, if two people split ultimate responsibility; there needs to be one person in charge. But if that were true, you would expect the manager role not to be so disproportionately skewed towards women. Furthermore, if this were really a question of efficiency, the household/childcare manager would be chosen based on organisational skills and managerial experience, not gender.

There is one way to curb the gendered distribution of childcare management: Gender-neutral family leave. From the first month of a couple's life as new parents, when the father goes back to work (usually within a few days), and the mother stays home for months, the cleavage between their roles begins. With gendered family leave policies, governments and companies are reflecting — and reinforcing — a societal expectation that men belong back at work and women at home with their kids.

The ripple effect starts with that expectation, and spreads fast. In no time, women are left struggling to re-enter the workforce, while their male counterparts don't (because, of course, someone is handling the management of the home for them). Some women take several years to adjust to the increased responsibilities of this mental load, and take a break from their professional lives. Those women who go back to work quickly find that the role of childcare manager is hard to shake after a few months of maternity leave, and so, they find themselves juggling two full-time jobs. Let's be clear. Women are not dropping out of the workforce, or struggling to keep up with their male counterparts, because they've taken time off: It's because they literally haven't had a single second "off." Carrying the mental load is a full-time occupation and largely accounts for the increasing number of professional Indian women who decide that the endless drain on their energy and capacity is unsustainable.

Gender neutral leave is the fastest and easiest way to state, as a society, that we expect men and women to equally share the responsibility of raising children. This statement has to be made at the earliest stages of a child's life, because by the time dad goes back to work within a week of a baby's birth, the care manager "hiring decision" has already been made. And even the most dedicated mother will admit care management is the only job she didn't apply for, but can never quit.

The writer is founder and editor of TheSwaddle.com

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

REFORMING ISLAM

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Islam's reform: Way to go' (IE, July 19). Dualism is inevitable during the evolution of a religion. Islam is no exception. Every verse can be comprehended with different perspectives. It is up to followers to derive meanings according to the needs of the time. The holy book asks us to question ourselves and think independently, instead of blindly following preachers.

Azaruddin Jamadar, *via e-mail*

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Islam's reform: Way to go' (IE, July 19). The author takes his argument for reforms in Islam too far. The reform should be a one-step process dealing with polygamy and triple talaq. Reform in Christianity was a long-drawn process. The same would be apt for its Abrahamic cousin "Islam".

Saurabh Raj, *Gandhinagar*

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Islam's reform: Way to go' (IE, July 19). I have gone through an English translation of the Quran. The verses convinced me that it was chiefly the work of Prophet Mohammed and not of Allah. So I was heartened to read the article. There is now a section of Muslim intellectuals who believes that the Quran "is not the Word of God". It is not infallible

Ratan, *via e-mail*

SECURITY ISSUES

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Call of the valley' (IE, July 19). The writer contends that the killings of militants and a reduction in infiltration indicate successes in resolving the Kashmir problem. The moot question, however, is what are the correct measures of success in an internal security situation. The government will be advised to follow a policy that wins the hearts and minds of the people.

Pushpal Singh, *Amritsar*

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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