

THE EDITORIAL PAGE

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Deal with the new Kabul

Demonising Taliban will be counterproductive. India should know power of ethno-nationalism



M K BHADRAKUMAR

SOMETIME AGO, PROFESSOR Paul K Piff, a social psychologist at Berkeley, with an avid interest in the power of money over human interaction, gave a TED presentation titled "Does money make you mean?" The conclusion reached by a research team that worked under him was that as people's levels of wealth increases, their feelings of compassion and empathy go down, and their "feelings of entitlement, of deservingness, and their ideology of self-interest increases."

The problem of inequality haunts interstate relationships too. Certainly, one way of looking at the Taliban's interim government in Afghanistan is that it is an inevitable outcome of the United States, a privileged player in a rigged game through the 20-year period of war, regarding the Taliban with disdain.

The US got away with moralising to cover greed and self-interest, and with breaking laws whenever it suited it. It told off the International Criminal Court which sought to look into the US's war crimes. The Pentagon ordered the departing US contingent to "demilitarise" Kabul airport's assets. That was followed by the appalling Resolution 2593 passed by the UN Security Council dictating a code of conduct for the Taliban. And then, there was the hectoring by Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

Pashtunwali, or the way of the Afghans, promotes hospitality, love and forgiveness and tolerance (even to the enemy) — but it is also famous for robust self-respect. The singular message coming out of the interim government packed with hardliners and ex-Guantanamo detainees is that the Taliban will not defer to Washington. It is an act of derision as much as stubborn defiance. This must be understood. The restrained reaction by the state department to the interim government (which includes 14 ministers under sanctions and doesn't have a single woman as minister) suggests that the Taliban message has gone home.

The heart of the matter is that the Taliban keenly sought US recognition but can also do without it. Granting "legitimacy" isn't the sole American prerogative anymore in the present international environment. Cuba

and Iran lived without it for decades. So, the Taliban will keep its promises, but of its own accord. After all, it did keep the 20-month-old promise not to take American lives — notwithstanding the US retraction on the release of thousands of Taliban cadres, lifting of UN restrictions on Taliban leaders, formation of the transitional government, resumption of air strikes and, finally, the unilateral shifting of the timeline for withdrawal of troops. The Pentagon concedes that the Taliban nonetheless cooperated in the evacuation at Kabul airport.

Among regional states, China and Iran have read the tea leaves correctly. Russia took a detour somewhere and began meandering, losing its sense of direction, but trust it to figure out a course correction. Pakistan avoids patronising attitudes. If there was any trace of triumphalism in ISI chief Lt Gen Faiz Hameed's performance in the lobby of Kabul's five-star Sarena Hotel, it was probably meant to tease his Indian counterpart.

Afghanistan's needs are elementary. Its subsistence economy is not looking for nanotechnology from the US or the Raspberry Pi computer from the UK. Its reconstruction remains very basic as of now — roads, highways, transport, healthcare, foundational services and structures in public health and education, capacity building, job creation, etc. This is best sourced from countries with relevant development experience. Afghanistan is estimated to have mineral wealth worth around \$3 trillion, which can generate a substantial income, if only peace is restored quickly. China's help, which the Taliban is banking on, will make all the difference. Simply put, the circumstances are vastly different from the 1990s. That the US is having such a difficult time in comprehending this home truth belies logic.

The Panjshir victory was no fluke. In political terms, Panjshir is an amazing crucible — a population of just 1.75 lakh (in a country of 40 million people) and yet such self-defeating factional politics. The void after Ahmad Shah Massoud's assassination 20 years ago is still being contested. Meanwhile, the curtain is coming down on the era of war-

lordism that had given verve to the erstwhile Northern Alliance. Suffice to say, the US prognosis of ISIS and apocalyptic predictions of imminent civil war are driven more by propagandistic considerations. The Taliban attaches the highest importance to internal security, as the appointment of Sirajuddin Haqqani as interior minister testifies, and he will be ruthless in stabilising the security situation. Make no mistake, Washington will deal with Sirajuddin sooner rather than later.

As for neighbouring countries, each has specific interests but all would agree that border security, drug trafficking and regional stability are overriding concerns. None of them wants Afghanistan to become a revolving door for international terrorists. Such a regional climate precludes the possibility of any of the neighbouring countries acting as "spoilers" or undermining Afghanistan's stability and security. Equally, the UN agencies cannot afford to ignore the humanitarian concerns. Even western countries grudgingly acknowledge the need to engage with the authorities in Kabul. What else is needed for Taliban's "international legitimacy"?

The Indian policies are at a crossroads. Continued bandwagoning with the US makes no sense. Indian diplomacy should harmonise with the regional capitals, including Beijing, which can be a natural ally on issues of terrorism. Breathing life into the RIC platform can be a pragmatic next step. The paradox is, with Delhi's "Kabul option" having plummeted to ground zero, Pakistan's comfort level may improve now.

The bottom line is that India's vital interests remain to be secured. Therefore, the nascent conversation with the Taliban must be carried forward. Afghan sensitivities must be borne in mind, in words and deeds. Demonising the Taliban can only be counterproductive. India should know the puissant potency of ethno-nationalism. Indeed, constructive attitudes at the UNSC can generate equity.

The writer is a former diplomat who worked on the Iran-Pakistan-Afghanistan desk in the Ministry of External Affairs

WAITING FOR CHANGE

Low increase in wheat MSP makes economic sense. Major reform of MSP regime, other agri reforms, await their political moment

A 40% INCREASE in the minimum support price (MSP) of wheat, to Rs 2,015 per quintal, is the lowest since the Rs 20 hike for the 2009-10 crop. From a purely economic standpoint, this makes sense. At 56.48 million tonnes (mt) as on August 1, public wheat stocks stood way above the 51.33 mt, 43.59 mt, 40.86 mt and 30.06 mt for the same date of the preceding four years. Together with 44.46 mt of rice, it adds up to almost 101 mt of stocks — this, after the record quantum of free/near-free grain distributed under the post-Covid relief package. Simply put, there's too much wheat and rice in government godowns today. Economic logic dictates that the government should freeze, if not reduce, the MSPs of both cereals and also cap the total quantity procured — ideally, to half of the 103 mt-plus (60 mt rice and 43 mt wheat) bought from last year's crop.

But political compulsions — assembly polls are due in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab — may rule out any major reform of the current MSP procurement regime, which incentivises production of crops already in surplus and also requiring more water than those (oilseeds and pulses) that the country significantly imports. One shouldn't rule out the so-called state advised price (SAP) of sugarcane in UP, too, being substantially raised ahead of the new crushing season from October. Given that the Congress government in Punjab has only recently revised its SAP upwards, from Rs 295-310 to Rs 345-360 per quintal, it is unlikely that the Yogi Adityanath-led BJP administration in UP won't follow suit. Both UP and Punjab had, interestingly, frozen their cane SAPs, after having last increased them by a paltry Rs 10/quintal (to Rs 315-325 and Rs 295-310, respectively) in the 2017-18 season. Now, with state elections hardly five months away, it would be too much to expect any rational pricing policies discouraging cultivation of surplus, water-guzzling crops that also militate against dietary diversification; the poor need to consume foods richer in proteins and micronutrients rather than mere carbohydrates and sugar.

The much-delayed yet necessary reforms in Indian agriculture — moving away from input and crop MSP subsidies to per-acre/per-farmer transfers, focusing on production cost reductions and investing more in public farm R&D and infrastructure — are well known. The Narendra Modi government's farm laws — which seek to end the monopoly of state-regulated agricultural markets, allow private buyers to contract directly with farmers and remove stocking limits on produce — are, no doubt, well-intended. But whether in expending too much political capital on these laws, it has boxed itself into a corner with regard to undertaking the more substantial reforms remains to be seen. For now, at least, that seems to be the case.

THE UNEASY CAMPUS

A playbook of confrontation shrinks spaces at Visva Bharati. Vice-chancellor must course correct before it causes more hurt

A BATTLE FOR control is playing out at yet another public university. The Visva Bharati university's decision to expel three students last month for "disorderly conduct" during a protest in January has led to the most recent round of student agitations on the campus. The university administration responded to the stand-off by moving the Calcutta High Court, asking for deployment of police personnel to quell the protest. While the court had earlier prohibited protests by students near academic blocks in the university, on Wednesday, it revoked the rustication orders against the three students, finding the punishment "excessive and disproportionate". It also remarked on the dissatisfaction among the faculty members over the "high-handedness" of the vice-chancellor.

The university administration headed by vice-chancellor Bidyut Chakraborty has, indeed, shown an unwise appetite for confrontation with students and faculty. Since November 2019, 22 staff members (faculty members and non-teaching staff) have been suspended, and 150 show-cause notices issued to employees. The reasons for disciplinary action have ranged from faculty members writing a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi against alleged irregularities at the central university to visiting the house of a fellow teacher. Since he took charge in 2018, Chakraborty's decisions — from scrapping the Poush Mela held every winter to declaring Nobel prize-winning economist Amartya Sen an encroacher and requesting the deployment of CISF on a university campus whose beginnings lie in Rabindranath Tagore's expansive vision of openness in learning — have only sharpened the fault lines. The vice-chancellor's office has refused the task of moderation and negotiation; instead, it has played a role in turning disagreements into a question of order and security. The dissent of faculty members and students has been met with a heavy hand. Disputes have been sought to be framed as a face-off between a "tough" administrator, backed by the Centre, holding out against an "unruly" campus. Given the long history of politicisation of higher education in Bengal, it is not hard to spot the proxy battle between the BJP-ruled Centre and the state government. But given the consequences of a similar playbook of confrontation at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, it is safe to say that it is the university that will pay a price.

Besieged they might be, but public universities still play a vital role in shaping citizens in a democracy. Tagore's ambition for Santiniketan was to create an institution of free spirits, where learning was not deadened by fiat of authority or a homogenising ideology. Vice-chancellor Chakraborty must reflect on the distance between that vision and the ongoing tussles — and course correct.

THE TASTY TRUTH

Purified water for chai? No thanks, and let's have some slightly fermented golgappe ka paani, please

YOU COULD FIGHT over the best way to make chai — how much milk to add, what leaves to use, whether to use ginger or cardamom. But the one thing everyone can agree on is that no homemade cuppa comes close to the *tappi-wale bhaiyya's* fragrant, full-bodied "cutting", served hot in a chipped glass. And while you could study your favourite chai vendor's tricks diligently, one reason you can never get that exact taste could be down to something as basic — and as overlooked — as the water.

As it turns out, purified water is not ideal for chai-making. It may even be to blame for the sweet, milky, brown liquid that you end up drinking in place of the strong, refreshing brew that you crave. Researchers at ETH Zurich have found that certain minerals responsible for water hardness can cause a film to appear on the surface of tea, thus trapping aromas that might otherwise escape and cause a depletion of flavour. Meaning that the purer the water, the less tasty your tea.

This, of course, vindicates those who have long held that "pure" is not "best", especially as far as food is concerned. And it could explain why, despite the proliferation of "Bisleri" chaats and artistically plated, upmarket versions of bhelpuri and vada pav, we would rather crowd around our favourite purveyor of street food, who accepts cash with the same food-stained hands that he uses to cook. As many have theorised — those with weak stomachs may stop reading here — the grime and sweat that find their way into much-loved roadside snacks are part of their flavour profile and, whether you admit it or not, among the reasons you keep going back for more. Pure water? Pshaw! Let's have some slightly-fermented golgappe ka paani, please.

THE OTHER SHARED CRISIS

India, Germany must deepen cooperation to tackle climate change



MARIA FLACHSBARTH AND NORBERT BARTHELE

FOR OVER A year now, India, Germany and the entire world have been in crisis mode. The Covid-19 pandemic has left no country untouched. It is safe to say, we will either beat Covid-19 worldwide or not at all.

The virus briefly drew attention away from another crisis — climate change and its impact. In South Asia and Europe, we have become used to extremely hot weather, flooding, dramatic depletion of groundwater tables and drought. Climate change could even stop the world from achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

We have agreed that global warming must be kept to well under 2 degrees Celsius and, if possible, to 1.5 degrees. Back in December 2015, 195 countries joined in Paris to sign an ambitious climate agreement. Each of those countries must deliver on their responsibilities. Climate change, too, is a crisis that can only be beaten worldwide or not at all.

India is one of few countries that looks set to deliver on the national goals it set itself as part of the Paris agreement. Compared to other G20 countries, its per capita emissions are very low.

At the same time, India must bear in mind the development interests of its large population. We firmly believe that sustainable growth and climate action go hand in hand. India now has the opportunity to make its massive investments in infrastructure over the next 15 years climate-smart and climate-resilient. This will also protect the interests of the most vulnerable sections of the population. Without India, the world will not be able

to fight climate change. Without India, we cannot achieve the SDGs. That means that India has a leading international role to play in the global race to sustainability.

The EU has adopted an ambitious Green Deal to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 and to decouple economic growth from consumption of natural resources. Germany recently adopted laws on reducing greenhouse gases more quickly, achieving climate neutrality by 2045 and stopping the use of coal for electricity production by 2038.

As Deputy Ministers in Germany's Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, we come to India with the greatest confidence in the country's political process and to learn from India. We see our responsibility as an industrialised country to both forge ahead with greening our own economy and also support other countries.

In 2015, India's Prime Minister and Germany's Federal Chancellor agreed to further strengthen the two countries' strategic partnership. On this basis, Germany and India have succeeded in building up a cooperation portfolio worth almost 12 billion euros. Already, nine out of 10 measures support climate goals and SDGs together.

Indo-German development cooperation focuses on three areas: The transition to renewable energies, sustainable urban development and sustainable management of natural resources. As a pioneer of energy transition, Germany is offering knowledge, technology transfer and financial solutions.

Over half the Indian population will live in cities by 2050. Our cooperation efforts support Indian policies to find sustainable solutions for this growth challenge in the face of limited urban resources and climate change.

The pandemic has shown global supply chains are vulnerable. Yet, when it comes to agriculture and natural resources, there are smart solutions that are being tested in India and Germany for more self-reliance, including agro-ecological approaches and sustainable management of forests, soils and water. Experience in India has shown that these methods also boost incomes for the local population and make them less dependent on expensive fertilisers, pesticides and seed. We look forward to deepening the work in this area. This is related to international health policies. Through a One Health approach, which looks at the close connections between human and animal health within their shared environment, we want to help tackle the challenges posed by population growth, increased mobility, shrinking habitats, industrialised farming and intensive animal husbandry.

Ultimately, we believe that global climate goals and the SDGs can only be achieved through cooperation between governments, the private sector, science, and civil society. India and Germany have innovative economies and many highly-trained people. We should harness that potential even more.

The writers are deputy ministers, German Ministry for economic cooperation and development

SEPTEMBER 10, 1981, FORTY YEARS AGO

ANTULAY RESPONDS

THE MAHARASHTRA CHIEF Minister A R Antulay told the Legislative Assembly on August 9 that he had submitted his resignation letter to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi the very day the controversy started over the collection of funds for the Indira Gandhi Pratibha Pratishtan and other trusts. In his 50-minute speech in reply to the five-hour debate on the charges of corruption raised by the Opposition, the CM did not refer to several specific points. He concentrated his attack on the former chief minister Sharad Pawar, the BJP leader Hashu Advani and Mr Goenka (an obvious reference to Ramnath

Goenka, Chairman of *The Indian Express* Newspapers). Referring to the allegations levelled by the Opposition, he said that when they were in power, "their deeds out-matched" his.

MANASAROVAR

THE FIRST BATCH of 18 Indian pilgrims left on a visit to Manasarovar Lake and Kailash Parbat, the famous Hindu shrines in Tibet, after a gap of 19 years. The Chinese government had placed a ban on Indian pilgrims in 1962. They were given a send-off by a large crowd that included UP Chief Minister V P Singh.

JAGAT NARAIN SHOT

JAGAT NARAIN, A former MP and founder-editor of the *Hind Samachar* group of newspapers, was shot dead by three assailants near Ladhawal on the outskirts of Ludhiana. The three alleged killers have been arrested, according to Punjab CM Darbara Singh.

CENSORSHIP IN POLAND

CENSORSHIP WAS IMPOSED for the first time in Poland since the Solidarity Independent Union Federation began five days ago. Not a single newspaper published Solidarity's statement.



13 THE IDEAS PAGE

I am the other in my homeland

A narrative built around cultural symbolism, religious difference and historical injustice is being used to demonise Muslims, undermine their right to equal citizenship



ABDUL KHALIQ

INDIA RUNS THROUGH my veins. It is the core of my being, my home, indelible and irreplaceable. Far from being a mere geographical space, it evokes a sense of belonging and emotional bonding that encompasses family, friends, custom and tradition. It is the precious locus of good and bad times, where my fondest memories and hopes reside. It is where I have found community and brotherhood in a many-splendoured, multicultural ethos. But of late, it makes my heart ache.

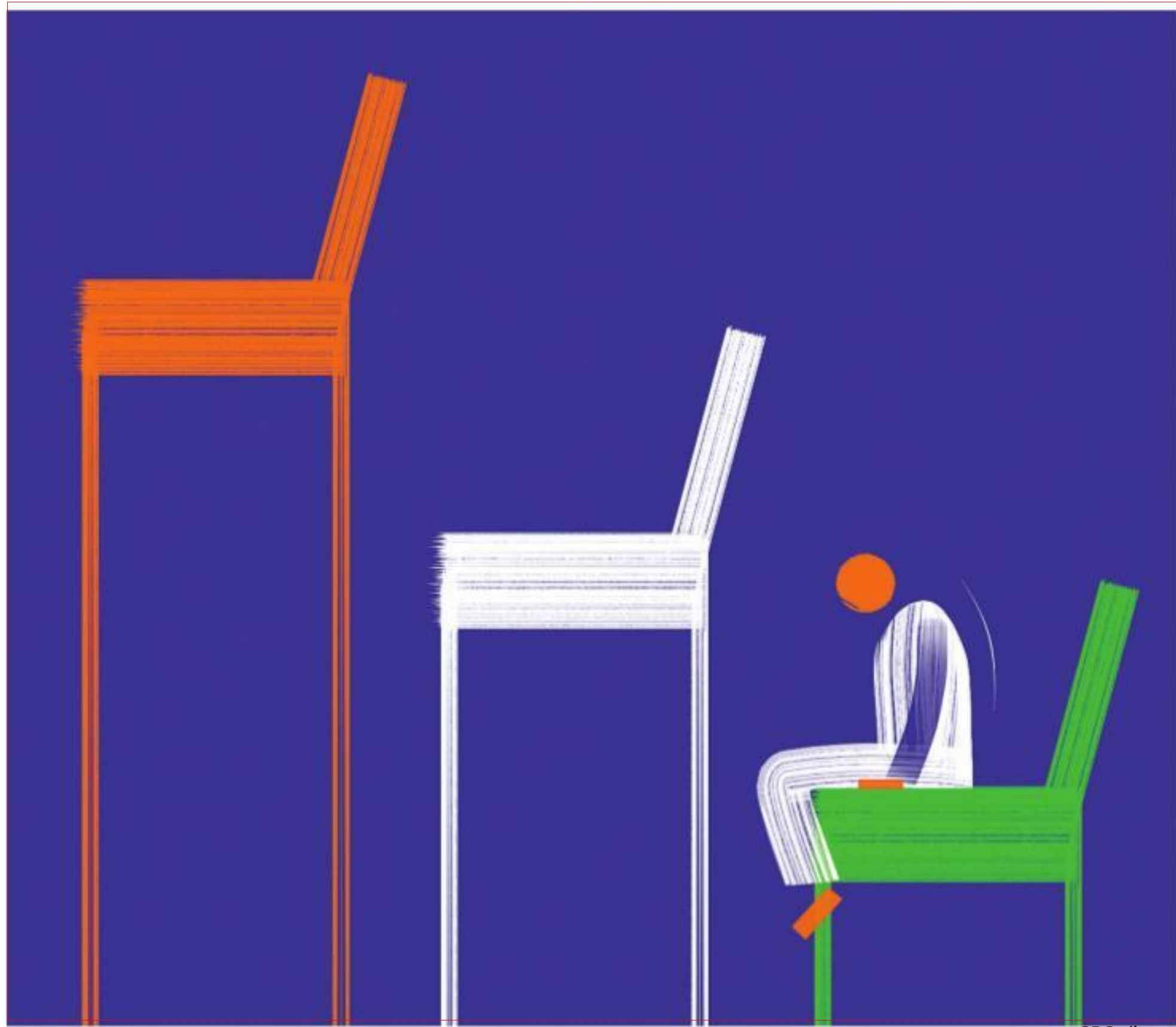
I am an Indian but the fact that I am a Muslim threatens to undermine my claim to equal citizenship. A narrative built around cultural symbolism, abrasive religious differences, historical injustices, ethnocentrism has become a potent rallying point for demonising and stigmatising an entire community. The contestation of what constitutes Indianness has peaked in the last few years and by the looks of it, the idea of India as homogenous, exclusive and Hindu, where minorities live on sufferance as second-class citizens is here. What terrifies me is that rampant systemic discrimination against Muslims has taken root and will not easily go away.

The Supreme Court has recently emphasised the critical democratic need for speaking truth to power. Chief Justice N V Ramana underscored the importance of the independence of the judiciary, stating that it "cannot be controlled, directly or indirectly by legislature or executive, or else rule of law would become illusory". Mighty words indeed. However, when confronted with the first real test of its determination to uphold democratic norms, the topmost judicial body chose expediency over justice.

As the SC collegium pats itself on the back for the appointment of nine judges to the SC in one go and for digging in its heels on 12 names for high courts, its ignoring of the legitimate claims of a Muslim candidate has gone largely unnoticed.

Chief Justice of Tripura, Akil Kureshi, is ranked second in the all-India list of seniority for judges of high courts. His ostensible crime is that as a judge in the Gujarat High Court, he gave two judicial verdicts that incensed the powers that be, but also enhanced his reputation as a fiercely independent judge. By ignoring his legitimate claims, the Supreme Court has reinforced the belief that majoritarian sentiment holds sway in the institutions of governance.

In the US, the most brazen example of a racist system is the mass incarceration of blacks who are sent to prison at more than five times the rate of whites. The main worry for those concerned with criminal justice reform is that many individuals are punished not solely because of their crime but because of the colour of their skin. Our criminal justice system too is heavily skewed against the Muslim. The latest NCRB data shows that Muslims, who make up 14.2 per cent of the population, comprise 16.6 per cent convicts, 18.7 per cent undertrials and 35.8 per cent detenus. But, of course, say the baiters, Muslims are more prone to crime than others. Sadly, this



C R Sasikumar

kind of unattested prejudice is what the Muslim faces today.

So, let's get to the specifics. The communal riots in Northeast Delhi in February 2020 were the most awful expression of man's inhumanity to man. By all accounts, including that of a team of three former Supreme Court judges, Muslims bore the brunt of the mayhem. Official figures bear this out — 53 dead, of whom 40 were Muslims, and 85 per cent of property damaged belonging to Muslims.

It is the surreal distortions and manifest bias of the police investigations that are deeply troubling to the minority community. Even as the investigations were underway, the Special Commissioner of Police, in an order to officers heading the probe teams, stated that arrests of some Hindu youth had caused "a degree of resentment among the Hindu community". The order further named two Muslim youth, stating that there is resentment among the Hindu community at alleged police inaction "against the two". Shorn of bureaucraticese, the CP's letter was a call to go easy on Hindus and to fix Muslims.

The subsequent criminal case filed against the CP was decided in his favour on the grounds that 535 Hindus and 513 Muslims had been charge-sheeted and hence it could not be construed that his order fanned prejudice. Although Muslims were disproportionately targeted, the chargesheets were evenly handed out between the two communities, an inversion of justice that is par for the course in today's India.

The Tablighi Jamaat case is another scandalous communal witch-hunt, aided and

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abetted by the entire executive. A year on, the courts are still unravelling the iniquities in these investigations.

The past ghosts of our history are being resuscitated to intensify the alienation of the Muslim. Partition Horrors Remembrance Day is endorsed as a fitting commemoration of the suffering of Hindus and Sikhs at the time of Partition. The comparable suffering of Muslims is sought to be erased. To equate Partition with the Holocaust, where six million innocent Jews were victims of the Nazi horror, is a degenerate correlation. But then, as George Orwell points out, "every nationalist is haunted by the belief that the past can be altered... material facts are suppressed... events which ought not to have happened are left unmentioned and ultimately denied."

A leading social scientist has lamented the plight of Muslims who "have been subjected to the untold misery of being excluded from the idea of the public". There is hardly any public outrage at their wretched situation. Even allegedly secular political parties are averse to giving them overt support and solace. Segregated, they live in a mind-numbing environment of prejudice and hostility, victims of everyday cruelty. At a time when parallels are being drawn between the horrors of Partition and the Holocaust, the Muslim is left dreading the thought that his beloved homeland is becoming like the Heimat of Germany in the 1930s.

The writer is a former civil servant and Secretary-General of Lok Janshakti Party. Views are personal

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"If Mr Bolsonaro continues in power, it will not only worsen the climate emergency by further imperilling the Amazon; it will embolden and encourage extreme rightwing populism elsewhere."

—THE GUARDIAN

Helping Mumbai weather change

The city's climate adaptation plan should evolve through a democratic process, be sensitive to needs of the most vulnerable



NIKHIL ANAND AND LALITHA KAMATH

MUMBAI IS drafting an ambitious Climate Adaptation Plan (MCAP). This is a much-needed exercise that matters not just for Mumbai's environment, but for the future of the city itself.

At the launch event in the last week of August, Municipal Commissioner Iqbal Chahal recognised the urgency, and warned of the coming climate catastrophe. "We've seen in maps that by 2050, 70 per cent of A/B/C/D wards will be taken by the sea", he said in a widely publicised remark. It would be "very dangerous" he said, for the city to ignore nature's signals, and neglect climate planning: "It cannot be a number two priority."

We commend the city's administrators and politicians for standing united on this important goal. We also believe that to make a successful plan, the city must learn from other environmental and planning efforts in its recent past. As an urban planner and an anthropologist of urban infrastructure and environment, we make five recommendations.

First, climate change planning is not a luxury, nor is it merely a supplementary activity to protect the urban environment for a privileged few. Climate adaptation planning is necessary to protect all citizens from cyclones, storm surges and floods of our climate-changed present. As such, environment minister Aaditya Thackeray is correct in insisting "we need a climate lens for every decision in the city" — be it for buildings, land use or urban infrastructure.

As the city seeks to mitigate its emissions and adapt to new climate risks and vulnerability, all its existing and future infrastructure needs to be subject to careful climate tests. For instance, does the city's electricity grid, metro, or coastal road mitigate or increase carbon emissions, flooding and storm surges? How resilient is the urban infrastructure to the catastrophic storms and cyclones of our climate-changed present?

Second, the municipal corporation should not miss the forest for the trees. While climate mitigation and adaptation initiatives are separately identified across six sectors in the MCAP process, technocratic solutions recommended for one area need to be considered across other sectors for their impacts to be fully understood. For example, while the government of Maharashtra's initiative to expand the EV transport infrastructure is significant, the success of this step depends on the decarbonisation of the city and state's energy infrastructure. EV technology is only as green as the energy that powers the grid, and Mumbai's grid is currently powered by coal. The increase of EVs in the city would increase dirty emissions from coal thermal power plants. The interventions being proposed as part of the MCAP inhabit a complex urban network and should be considered in an integrated manner.

Third, the MCGM needs to build an effective process for ongoing climate change planning rather than focus only on creating the fixed product of a climate plan. Different neighbourhoods and socio-economic groups within the city face different climate challenges. The eastern suburbs, for instance, face a greater risk of flooding due to a substantial portion being on reclaimed lands. Broad-basing the plan would help to ground it in the specific challenges and coping practices employed in different localities. It would also allow for making course corrections that might be needed due to the evolving and unpredictable nature of the crisis we face. Responding effectively to the diverse climate challenges faced, therefore, calls for building a robust, decentralised process that connects broader principles of the MCAP to specific ward-level systems and plans, challenges, and networks of community organisations working on the ground.

Fourth, a climate adaptation plan will only make a difference to Mumbai if it is made with and for a majority of its residents. The city's elected government needs to take the lead to democratise the process. An important step in opening up the plan is coordinating with the many government agencies that are involved in running different parts of the city.

Mumbai has already benefited from such a consultative process in the past. The preparation of the most recent Mumbai Development Plan (2014-34) catalysed several civic campaigns and collaborations, and substantial, although uneven, participation at the ward level. This participatory process, we have argued, offered a more democratic approach to creating knowledge and planning standards based on people's lived experience. Mumbai's climate change planning can productively build on the accumulated planning literacy, and networks of people planners created through this process.

Finally, and perhaps most critically, this cannot be a plan whose costs are borne disproportionately by the majority of citizen that live and work in the city's informal settlements. For instance, in response to flooding of the Mithi river in 2005, slum-dwellers on one side of the river have been threatened with displacement and evictions for years now while more powerful businesses on the other riverbank are not touched.

The uneven and unfair distribution of environmental burdens in Mumbai's recent past has undermined public confidence in environmental plans and actions in the city. They have obscured the fact, made starkly visible in the pandemic, that urban development and flourishing for anyone depends on a healthy environment for everyone.

Therefore, if the main goal of the MCAP is to increase the ability of the city to withstand environmental disasters in the present and near future, then it can only succeed if it ensures that all residents, particularly the city's most vulnerable, can secure safe, healthy and resilient housing, public space and urban infrastructure in the city. This is very ambitious, no doubt. But that is also what makes it worth doing.

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LAKSHMI PURI

A win at UN high table

India's presidency of UNSC delivered outcomes, responded in real time to Afghanistan

INDIA HAS a history of memorable "August presidencies" of the United Nations Security Council. During its 2011 presidency, events in Libya posed a diplomatic challenge. Exactly 10 years later, a geopolitical earthquake in Afghanistan challenged the presidency.

India passed the test with flying colours. Maintaining calm, India focused on safeguarding and advancing its national interest and the global public goods of counterterrorism, peace and security. What set our 2021 presidency apart was the highest-level engagement and leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He laid out India's vision and vowed to give "voice" to the unrepresented in a new multilateralism. He made history by becoming the first PM of India to chair and address the UNSC, and that, too, to mobilise on an urgent matter of global concern — maritime security.

The Indian presidency delivered the highest number of outcomes (14), with five full-fledged resolutions on the situation in Afghanistan, Somalia, the Middle East, Mali and the UN peacekeeping operations, four presidential statements (PRST) including on West Africa and Sudan, and five press statements — three responding in real time to developments in Afghanistan, including the Kabul airport terrorist attack.

India organised events around three signature themes of maritime security, peacekeeping and counterterrorism to build a new international consensus and to update the

rules of the game. The August 9 event was pathbreaking in evolving a holistic concept of maritime security, the role of UNCLOS, the freedom of navigation — a sensitive topic given China's muscle-flexing in the South China Sea. The outcome advanced Indian security interests while contributing towards a new international maritime security order.

The event on "Protecting the protectors: technology and peacekeeping" resulted in the first-ever resolution on accountability for crimes against peacekeepers and the first PRST on technology upgradation for peacekeepers. The External Affairs Minister chaired an event on "Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts", bringing focus on the continued terrorist threats and attacks, the early conclusion of the Comprehensive Convention against International Terrorism, and India's eight-point action plan — all to reinforce the just-revised UN Global Counter Terrorism Strategy.

India's consultative power was deployed on issues like Myanmar, Mali and Somalia, Middle East, Ethiopia, Haiti and DPRK. But its diplomatic sagacity and agility were tested most by the developments in Afghanistan.

Significantly, the UNSC Resolution 2593 adopted on August 30 responded to serious concerns about Taliban-ruled Afghanistan becoming a haven for terrorist groups and getting a free run to mount attacks on neighbouring countries and the world. It demanded that Afghan territory not be used to threaten or at-

tack any country or to shelter or train terrorists, or to plan or finance terrorist acts.

It identified individuals and entities designated by the UNSC resolution 1267 — which, for India, includes the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) — and the importance of combating terrorism in Afghanistan, noting relevant commitments of the Taliban.

Other major benchmarks included the Taliban allowing safe evacuation of foreigners and abiding by its August 27 statement that Afghans will be able to travel abroad at any time and exit via any border point. It urged all parties to allow full, safe, and unhindered access to the UN and all humanitarian actors for relief activity, donor support to Afghanistan and major Afghan refugee-hosting countries and respect for international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians.

The Taliban was asked to uphold human rights, including those of women, children and minorities — which in India's case bears on the well-being of Hindu and Sikh Afghans. All parties were asked to seek an inclusive, negotiated political settlement, with equal participation of women, and safeguard the gains of the past 20 years on the rule of law and human rights.

India was thus able to ensure that the UNSC Resolution 2593 laid down some fundamental benchmarks to guide the international community on calibrating its relations with the emerging Taliban

regime and setting standards of behaviour and policy for it, if it is to win diplomatic recognition and economic and political support.

France and the UK have warned that the Taliban government will be judged on the implementation of the resolution. For Russia, it was a moment of sweet revenge to see the US relive its own humiliating withdrawal from Afghanistan. China used the resolution for grandstanding as the new, benign superpower, supporting Afghanistan against "hegemonists".

Both Russia and China sought to portray themselves as champions of the Taliban, refusing to support a resolution that "turned the tables on Taliban" when the US's "20 years failed occupation" and "its hasty withdrawal" were the culprits. On counterterrorism, they wanted a balanced approach to include their terrorists of concern, including the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM).

Given these objections, that India was able to persuade them not to veto the resolution and only abstain, was a diplomatic win. All UNSC members praised India's presidency and acknowledged the value added by India in building bridges in the midst of polarised UNSC dynamics, strengthening its claim for permanent membership.

The writer is former assistant secretary-general of the United Nations and deputy executive director of UN Women

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

REFLECTION NEEDED

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Tyranny of propriety' (IE, September 9). It is indeed disquieting to notice the arbitrary norms and lack of transparency governing the legal profession. Of late, certain aspects like the collegium system and recusal from hearing cases have been criticised by bar members. The use of contempt charges, increasingly deployed in recent years, serves to reinforce the hierarchy where dissent and critical thinking are punished. Surely, our judicial system is strong enough to gracefully accept and reflect on criticism.

Ila Railkar, Mumbai

BIRTHDAY BASH

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'BJP to roll out 3-week Happy Birthday PM booster shot for party and govt' (IE, September 9). The three-week long multi-pronged campaign, including the distribution of ration bags with the PM's picture, is clearly being undertaken with the view that this will strengthen the impression that PM Narendra Modi is "gareebon ke masiha". However, the flipside is: will it erase the people's memory of the travails that brought things to such a pass that makes them dependent on "largesse" instead of earning dignified livelihood through participation in nation-building? Amid the economic distress brought on by unemployment and inflation, this birthday party reminds one of the media blitzkrieg

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"India Shining campaign" of 2004 by the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government.

LR Murmu, Delhi

HOPE THWARTED

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Old ghosts return' (IE, September 9). All those who assumed that 20 years was a long time for the Taliban to gain some sense would be utterly disappointed by the composition of the new Taliban government. Barring China and Pakistan, not many countries have responded to this development but sooner or later the world has to take a stand. Till that time, the Taliban has kept them on tenterhooks.

Bal Govind, Noida