



## Local matters

Issues of livelihood, governance should shape poll campaigns in Maharashtra and Haryana

Politics is set to take the centre stage in national debates with the announcement of Assembly elections in Maharashtra and Haryana, though there was hardly a lull after the Parliament election earlier this year. The BJP is in power in both States currently, in Maharashtra with its oldest and most combative ally, the Shiv Sena. In 2014, the BJP got its first Chief Ministers in both the States, reaping the reward for some audacious political moves. In Maharashtra it gambled away its alliance with the Shiv Sena and contested separately to win 122 seats compared to Sena's 63. The Sena lost its position as the alliance leader in the post-poll alliance, and that reality will now be formalised in a pre-poll alliance. In Haryana, the BJP dramatically rose, assembling a non-Jat social coalition and later reinforcing it by appointing a non-Jat CM in Manohar Lal Khattar. In Maharashtra too, the party's political strategy involved the appointment of a non-Maratha as CM – Devendra Fadnis. In both States, the Prime Minister's popularity provided further momentum to the BJP's rise, which continued into 2019. The track records of the State governments can be debated but the party's advantage over its political rivals is evident.

The disarray in the opposition ranks, which is partly a reflection of the underlying social factors including deep communalisation of the polity in both States, is the biggest advantage for the BJP. In Maharashtra, the Congress-NCP alliance had long become a bastion of dynastic politics and vested interests. The BJP's strong-arm tactics has contributed to furthering the existing vulnerabilities of the alliance. In Haryana, the Opposition is split into three – the Congress, the Indian National Lok Dal and another breakaway faction of the party. These groups are in the grip of the dominant Jat community, which gives a tremendous starting advantage to the BJP. The Congress, under pressure from former CM Bhupinder Singh Hooda, replaced its State Chief Ashok Tanwar, a Dalit, just ahead of the poll announcement. Altogether, the Congress's messaging has been uninspiring for its crucial social base of disadvantaged groups. Despite these remarkable advantages, the BJP has shown a tendency in recent weeks to stir up controversial issues. In Haryana, the CM wants to implement the NRC; in Maharashtra the government is, unlinked to the NRC, planning detention centres for undocumented people suspected to be immigrants. The BJP has also sought to bring issues such as the hollowing out of Article 370 into the campaigns. As two industrialised States, Haryana and Maharashtra must be at the centre of any effort to infuse fresh momentum in the country's sagging economy. Not surprisingly, these States are also hosts to migrant communities. A sharp focus on governance and economy at the State level in the forthcoming campaign will be helpful not only for Maharashtra and Haryana but for the entire country too.

## Seeking to secure

The move to link Aadhaar with GST registration is a tentative step in the right direction

Ever since the Centre and the States passed the landmark legislation in 2016 adopting a single countrywide Goods and Services Tax (GST), the federal council that is tasked with overseeing all the regulatory aspects of the indirect tax has had its hands full. From recommending the rates that could apply to various products and services, to deciding on what could be tax exempted, the GST Council has had the onerous task of laying out the policy framework for administering the tax in a manner that benefits all stakeholders – the governments, the consumers and the suppliers along the value chain. Given the complexity of the legacy taxes that GST subsumed and replaced and the teething troubles of operating a new tax system, ensuring optimal outcomes has proved an abiding challenge. A significant concern relates to the loopholes that unscrupulous operators have sought to exploit, whereby revenue that ought to have accrued to the Centre and the States has leaked while allowing these elements to derive illicit profits. And the scale of some has been breathtaking. Earlier this month, the Directorate General of GST Intelligence and the Directorate General of Revenue Intelligence conducted a pan-India joint operation, which saw about 1,200 officers simultaneously conducting searches at 336 different locations. In the process they unearthed a network of exporters and their suppliers who had connived to claim fraudulent refunds of Integrated GST, with more than ₹470 crore of input tax credit availed being based on non-existent entities or suppliers with fictitious addresses. A further ₹450 crore of IGST refund is also under review.

It is against the backdrop of such cases, and the fact that frauds totalling up to a staggering ₹45,682 crore have been detected since the roll-out of the tax in July 2017, that the GST Council has decided "in principle" to recommend linking Aadhaar with registration of taxpayers. In its 37th meeting in Goa on Friday, the council also agreed to appraise the possibility of making the biometrics-based unique identifier mandatory for claiming refunds. Already the GST Network – the information technology backbone on which the whole tax system runs – has made it mandatory for new dealers registering under the composition scheme for small businesses to either authenticate their Aadhaar or submit to physical verification of their business, starting January 2020. The council too needs to follow the network's lead and move swiftly to recommend mandatory linking for refunds, especially since that has proved to be the main source of most frauds. In a becalmed economy, neither the Centre nor States can afford to forego even a rupee of revenue that is due to the public coffers.

# The nationalist hindrance to climate actions

The UN Climate Action Summit is likely to hand out hard lessons about climate politics in an era of nationalism



NAVROZ K. DUBASH

Can global diplomatic jawboning backed by an upsurge of popular youth mobilisation shift the hard economic and political calculus of nations? Today's global Climate Action Summit, convened and energetically backed by the United Nations Secretary General, seeks to pull off just this feat. It seeks to spur national pledges and action to address climate change in the face of mounting information that the community of nations is doing too little, and too late. How likely is this effort to be successful? And what are India's stakes in this summit?

### Visible signs and science

The summit occurs amid a steady drumroll of scientific alarm. The scientific advisory group to the summit (of which I am a member), reports that the five years since 2015 is set to be the warmest of any equivalent recorded period, sea level rise is accelerating, and oceans have become 26% more acidic since the dawn of the Industrial era. Recent weather events bring into focus the likely implications of a warming world. This summer saw Delhi-like temperatures across southern Europe; Hurricane Dorian rendered large parts of the Bahamas unliveable; and witnessed simultaneous raging fires in the Amazon, central Africa and even Siberia.

Scientists are increasingly able to link these individual events with climate change – the heat wave in France and Germany was made eight to 10 times more likely by cli-

mate change. Yet, concentrations of carbon dioxide continue to rise, and current country pledges would not stem this increase even by 2030.

The growing evidence of climate change – scientific and experiential – has spurred an upwelling of social action, notably among the youth. While more noticeable in the global North, young people are also mobilising in India and other countries in the global South, with *The New York Times* reporting that organisers estimate four million youth turned out in protest (on Friday) against inaction on climate change around the world.

### A political disconnect

If science, experience and public alarm are increasingly on the side of action, unfortunately, national politics in country after country is trending in the wrong direction. A turn toward nationalism in multiple countries has created a short-term, look-out-for-our-own mentality that is inimical to the global collective action needed to address climate change. Thus, in the United States, President Donald Trump not only refuses to enhance actions, he has actively rolled back measures in the electricity sector and actions to limit methane emissions in the name of competitiveness. In Brazil, President Jair Bolsonaro has made it clear he sees environmental protections as limiting Brazilian business. And nationalism in some countries makes it much harder to pursue aggressive action even in countries where the politics is more conducive.

Backed by popular mobilisation and scientific evidence, can the UN Summit swing the tide toward enhanced action? The Secretary-General is pinning hopes on a two-track approach.

First, in an exercise of diplomat-



ic pressure, countries have been urged to enhance their pledges for action made as part of the Paris Agreement, committing to lower future emissions. The intention is to provide a platform for climate champions to step up and claim leadership of an important global agenda.

So far, the response is underwhelming. A number of small and mid-sized countries, including the United Kingdom, have already committed to achieving the objective of making their economies net carbon neutral by 2050 (that is, the sum of emissions and uptake of carbon through 'sinks' such as forests is zero). By contrast, several large countries, notably the United States, Brazil, Australia, Canada, Japan and Mexico are reportedly not even going to participate in the event at a high level. China and India have issued statements hinting that they are doing quite enough, and India has highlighted the need for enhanced finance if it is to do more. While there may be last minute surprises, the UN Summit does not look like shifting any entrenched positions – those willing to act are known, and those unwilling are unmoved. International suasion, even backed by science and popular mobilisation, seems unlikely to shift entrenched national politics.

The second track operates less in the realm of diplomacy and seeks instead to induce changes in real economies around a set of 'ac-

tion portfolios'. These include, for example, furthering and accelerating an energy transition toward low-carbon energy, making cities more climate friendly and more resilient to climate disruption, and starting the process of turning energy intensive sectors such as steel and cement more carbon friendly. Notably, domestic objectives are central to these conversations: promoting solar energy for energy security reasons; making cities more liveable; and making industries more efficient and therefore competitive. These initiatives serve as a focal point for broader conversations including coalitions of business and researchers. If the UN Summit is to result in enhanced action, this may well be the more fruitful track.

### A path for India

What does this canvas of global climate politics mean for India? First, that the prospects of effective global action required to address climate change are so weak is extremely bad news for India. We are a deeply vulnerable country to climate impacts. It would behoove India not to be a status quo player in this context, but to argue for enhanced global collective action.

Second, India has the potential to show the pathway to accelerating action on climate change even while pursuing its development interests. A notable example is its energy efficiency track record, which helps limit greenhouse gases even while saving the nation energy. However, there are inconsistencies in India's story as a climate champion. India is justifiably recognised for promoting renewable energy, yet also muddies the waters by sending mixed signals on future coal use. The choice of Houston – the U.S. oil capital – for the Indian Prime Minister's recent public event, risks signalling that

India sees its energy independence as tied to enhanced fossil fuel use. While some increase in fossil fuel is inevitable for India, the messaging is incoherent at best. India needs domestic energy policies that are more clearly and coherently tuned to a future low carbon world.

Third, such a domestic message would position India to be a true global climate leader, rather than a leader only among climate laggards. Could an India, firmly committed to a low-carbon future that brings development benefits, strike common cause with other powers? Could, for example, India and China, both jostling for influence in African nations but also both losers from climate impacts, jointly help ensure that Africa's development is powered by renewable energy rather than fossil fuels and based on an energy efficient future? Such an agenda could bring together economic, environmental and political gains.

The UN Summit is likely to teach us hard lessons about climate politics in an era of nationalism. The pathway to enhanced action is unlikely to override entrenched national politics, powered by international suasion. Instead, the aim should be to make accelerated climate action congruent with an enlightened notion of national interest by focusing on key actions in rapidly changing areas such as energy and urbanisation. Such a pathway holds enticing prospects for India. But it requires that India can build a diplomatic approach on a firm domestic foundation that takes seriously climate change as a factor in its future development pathway.

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# Punjab's pain, India's agony, Britain's unrepentance

The U.K. needs to build on the Archbishop of Canterbury's repentant gesture at Jallianwala Bagh



NONICA DATTA

It happened to be in Amritsar for some research work on the day of the Archbishop of Canterbury's visit to Jallianwala Bagh in early September. I actually bumped into him and spoke to him briefly in the hotel lobby. He came across as affable, kind and humble. He was ready to talk to a stranger like me.

### Gesture of atonement

His presence in Jallianwala Bagh, on September 10, as we remember the 100 years of the massacre this year, is momentous. What he did inside the premises of the Bagh was even more dramatic. He lay down flat to pray in front of the memorial and said he was "personally very sorry". This was no publicity stunt. It requires courage to do that.

The Archbishop further added, "I have no status to apologise on behalf of the UK, its government or its history. But I am personally very sorry for this terrible atrocity." He said, "Coming here arouses a sense of profound shame at what happened in this place. It is one of

a number of deep stains on British history. The pain and grief that has transcended the generations since must never be dismissed or denied." No words could be more appropriate, well-timed and consoling.

As head of the Anglican Church of the world, the Archbishop, Justin Welby, commands a worldwide status. But he also has a special place in Britain. A post granted by the Queen, he crowns the British monarch and holds a significant position in the hierarchy of the British state. In his statement on the Amritsar massacre, he said he was not speaking for his country, but the Anglican Church. As the senior most churchman in a Christian country, his words do matter.

In the light of the descendants of the victims appealing for an apology from the Archbishop to assuage their "hurt feelings against the British atrocities", the Archbishop's repentant gesture seeks to lend a healing touch to the echoes of the dead. The Jallianwala Bagh massacre is one of the most horrific acts of violence in modern history. The impact of General Dyer's cold-blooded, rational shooting of hundreds of innocent lives, on April 13, 1919, with 1,650 gunshots continues to torment. We still have not got over it. Many may never. Not just confined to Punjab, the pain of the carnage forms the collective agony of en-



tire India. The Archbishop did more than what anybody in his position could possibly do. Predictably, his visit brings to the fore once again the age-old hyper-sensitive question of the U.K. taking responsibility for its own imperial past and violence. This is the unresolved and controversial historical issue of colonial injustice and apology. The Queen did not apologise. Prince Philip did not. Former British Prime Minister David Cameron on a visit to India in 2013 did not. The current British High Commissioner in 2019 did not. The list goes on and each time a British dignitary comes to Amritsar, it feels like scratching a scab on the wound. A perpetual wound. The city of Amritsar continues to grapple with the legacy of Dyer's savagery. The ensuing military violence echoed across the Punjab.

### Contours of imperial violence

Dyer's monstrous act was principally a racially motivated onslaught, which formed the core of imperial violence. He ordered the

troops to fire without warning and continued even when he could see that people were running for their lives. In his evidence to the Hunter Committee, he persisted, "... I had committed a just and merciful act." Dyer regretted nothing, and made no attempt to conceal anything. After the firing, there was no provision for the relief of the wounded. When questioned, the unrepentant Dyer said, "It was not my job."

Dyer's brutality was justified in the racial climate of those times. He was celebrated as a hero in certain British circles. The Dyer Fund was set up for his survival back in England. What is appalling is that the colonial monstrosity continued even after April 13, 1919 in Punjab. Martial law was imposed from April 15. The British held summary trials, tortured prisoners and executed Indians. Punjab, which provided the largest number of recruits during World War I, was rewarded with such type of terrible punishment and brought under a rule of terror. Punjab could never be the same again.

On April 19, Dyer promulgated the "crawling order" on a street in Amritsar where a lady missionary, Miss Sherwood, had been attacked. The order instructed people to crawl on all fours through the lane. They were tied to flogging posts and flogged with several stripes. Dyer's excessive use of ra-

cial force was designed to, in his own words, create a "wide impression" and "moral effect". He had the backing of Michael O'Dwyer, the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab and Lord Chelmsford, the Vice-roy of India.

The shrieks of the victims of the massacre continue to hound the legacy of the British empire. They echo as haunting cries of a victimised generation of a community whose trauma has not been fully addressed. The shrieks have now turned into a seething rage. This is not just a matter of apportioning blame and instilling guilt on the British Empire and its after-effects and holding it culpable for its unwarranted monopoly on violence against the colonised. It is also about introspection, acknowledgment and responsibility that would facilitate healing and restitution. The Archbishop of Canterbury's compassionate gesture is certainly a symbolic sign of reconciliation and empathy. The people of India demand that the British government takes the "historic step" towards tendering an apology. Is it not time for Britain to acknowledge the inconvenient truth and trauma of colonial and racial violence? Perhaps, the Archbishop's initiative marks a new beginning.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

### Children for change

It has been heartening to read about and see visuals of the protests staged by millions of school students across the world last Friday over inaction on climate change. These protests and strikes offer many valuable lessons. The first is that students' lives are not confined to the four walls of the classroom but transcend beyond that. Since they are also social beings, they too must have deep awareness of burning social issues. What is the logic of filling their minds with information about global warming and climate change if they have no role in bringing about changes in the world? The student community across the world must take a leaf out of the youth climate movement's book and learn to protest over substantive issues rather than trivial

ones. It is delightful that the youth climate movement launched by the young Swede, Greta Thunberg, has been able to invigorate and mobilise youth across the world against environmental degradation.

VENU G.S.,  
Kalluvathukkal, Kollam, Kerala

### Houston and after

It is strange that the sponsors of the mega event in Houston, U.S., "Howdy Modi", do not even appear to realise that ultra-nationalism, which grips some in the curiously ambivalent Indian-American community, is a double-edged sword (Editorial page, "One people, many countries", September 21). One day they could end up facing a backlash from those of their ilk on foreign soil. It appears that the upsurge of populist nationalism in

both the U.S. and India in recent times has something to do with this. There is a trend in both countries to push forward narrow and exclusivist definitions of national identity. Beyond all this, the Indian-American community may also have been looking for some kind of parity – or an illusion of parity – between the U.S. and India in getting the two leaders on a common platform even as the world waits with bated breath for the likely bi-national ramifications of the meet.

M. JAMEEL AHMED,  
Mysuru

I fail to understand what the multiple identities and split loyalties are which the writer is arguing about and how such identities, if at all they exist, are being trampled on in India under 'Hindutva rule'. Individual

identity, regional identity, language and religious identities have been flourishing from time immemorial and will continue to irrespective of the ideology of whichever party rules. In a democracy, the ruling party does not drop from the sky but is chosen by the majority. Indian voters are more mature and intelligent; the national identity is supreme.

DUGGARAJU SRINIVASA RAO,  
Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh

### Oscar entry

Once again a Hindi film has been nominated for the Oscars (Page 1, "Gully Boy is the official entry for Oscars", September 22). And this film too has its gaze on the slums of India. The point is that the jury needs to understand that there are films in India in other languages too – especially from south India – which may not have the

"slum touch" but have nevertheless won audiences over with their focus on critical issues such as caste, education, religion, women's rights and even music.

G. PADMANABHAN,  
Bengaluru

### Hardly united

The column, 'Letter from a Concerned Reader' (Magazine, "Tea and Parle-G", September 22, sums up in its own humorous way how a single man's "wave" is unwittingly having a huge impact on relations among family and friends. Three years ago, after shifting to Chennai from Mumbai, I created a WhatsApp Group of school friends, now scattered across. It was a major online reunion after nearly 30 years. It led to even invitations being extended to each other to visit home and attend family functions.

Everything went on smoothly as long as there was only an exchange of nostalgic moments. Enter politics, the villain of the piece. Soon posts grew with a counter-wave of replies. Fake versions of politics had a free run. As a group administrator, my requests to stop posting political content went unheeded. The innocence of schooldays had vanished. After a while, some friends left the group in a huff while relations with others soured. It was ironic that while we were united on a social platform, we suddenly found ourselves divided. It is disturbing that when it comes to making a choice between political affiliation and personal relationships, there are many who prefer the first.

V. SUBRAMANIAN,  
Chennai

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