



Hack it if you can

The EC's challenge to political parties to prove EVMs can be hacked is a welcome move

The electronic voting machine has been under strong scrutiny ever since it was deployed in the 1990s. The Indian EVM is a singular instrument with its dependence on standalone hardware-firmware-led machine components to register and tally votes – it is not reliant on computer software or networked components. Questions have been therefore raised about the possibility of EVM-tampering either by the introduction of malicious code (trojans) that could override the logic embedded in the chip, replacing its chip, or manipulating the communication between the ballot and the control units through remote signals or equipment. The Election Commission has evolved improvements over time to address these concerns, and has strengthened technical and administrative safeguards to prevent any manipulation. The steps include time-stamping of key presses, dynamic coding in second-generation machines besides tamper-proofing and self-diagnostics in the third-generation machines that are now being deployed. A strict administrative protocol involving first-level checks after manufacture, randomised deployment, sealed strong rooms for storage, and conduct of mock polls has been instituted. The EC has pledged the universal deployment of voter-verifiable paper audit trails beginning 2019. VVPATs will add another layer of accountability, allowing voters to verify the choice registered on the ballot unit in real time, and the machine-read vote tallies post-election.

These steps have obviously not satisfied some political parties which have used the logic of machine fallibility to claim that their recent electoral losses were a consequence of EVM tampering rather than actual voter choice. The Aam Aadmi Party recently demonstrated what it claimed to be a possible hack of the EVM by the introduction of a trojan on to an EVM prototype; it said that, therefore, it was possible to manipulate all EVMs by the replacement of its motherboard (to accommodate a chip that carried a built-in trojan). This critique does not stand scrutiny considering the EC's technical and administrative safeguards that prevent trojans or the mass manipulation of EVMs. The EC's challenge to political parties to participate in a hackathon on June 3, to test out manipulation of EVMs with the various safeguards in place, is welcome. The scepticism of some political parties apart, there is definitely a case for constantly improving EVM design and security features in order to completely rule out any sophisticated tampering attempt, howsoever difficult it is to carry it off considering the strict administrative safeguards in place. The more transparent the EC is about demonstrating the robustness of its safeguards and its determination to improve them further, the greater will be the public's trust in the electoral process.

Message from Riyadh

Trump adopts the Saudi line on West Asia, reversing the Obama outreach to Tehran

Donald Trump was particularly critical of Saudi Arabia. He attacked its treatment of gays and women and slammed the Washington establishment for taking "their money". He had also vowed to ban Muslims from entering the U.S. and, upon becoming President, actually issued an executive order banning people from seven Muslim-majority countries from coming to the country. (The order was later blocked by the courts.) But by choosing Saudi Arabia as his first overseas destination as President, Mr. Trump has signalled that his administration will retain the Washington establishment line towards West Asia. So while addressing leaders from over 50 Muslim countries in Riyadh on Sunday, he was extremely careful not to hurt the kingdom's sensibilities. He called for unity in fighting terrorism and said "Islam is peace". He noted Saudi Arabia's attempts at "empowering women", overlooked its disastrous military operation in Yemen and assailed Iran for fuelling "the fires of sectarian conflict and terror". He also signed a \$10 billion arms agreement with the Saudis. The message Mr. Trump is sending from his Saudi visit is clear: His administration will re-endorse Saudi Arabia, along with Israel, as a key pillar of America's West Asia policy and ignore criticism of Riyadh's human rights violations at home and interventions abroad. America will also supply its rich Arab allies advanced weapons: the defence industry at home will obviously benefit from such deals, creating more jobs.

Mr. Trump may be trying to kill too many birds with one stone. The Saudi-American partnership, that dates back to King Saud's visit to Washington in 1957, has only grown in strength over the years. Barring occasional criticism, U.S. Presidents have largely overlooked allegations of rights abuses in Saudi Arabia and deepened ties in the energy and defence areas. But President Barack Obama, while steadily expanding the defence partnership between Washington and Riyadh, had tried to balance America's interests between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Despite reservations from Saudi Arabia and Israel, his administration went ahead with the Iran nuclear deal. The logical next step of the nuclear deal should be bettering ties between Washington and Tehran. The major cause of instability in West Asia is not just Iran, as Mr. Trump mentioned in his speech, but the cold war between Iran and Saudi Arabia. If Mr. Trump wants to be peacemaker and make West Asia a more secure place, he has to reach out to both sides and appeal to them to dial down the tensions that have already spilled into Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and Iraq. Instead, he appears to have taken sides. The Saudi petrodollar muscle is hard to resist for an American President desperate to create more jobs at home. But merely supplying weapons to Riyadh and its allies will not bring peace to West Asia, or help defeat terrorism.

Iran votes for reform

But President Rouhani's challenges, domestically and with the U.S. and Arab neighbours, are just beginning



RAKESH SOOD

After a difficult campaign, President Hassan Rouhani won a crucial second term in Iran's presidential elections held on May 19. A high turnout of 73% helped him score a convincing victory over his principal challenger Ebrahim Raisi, a conservative cleric, in the first round itself, winning 57% of the votes compared to Mr. Raisi's 38.5%. More than two-thirds of Iran's voters are in urban areas and most of them are Rouhani supporters; therefore as voting hours got extended to midnight indicating a high turnout, the mood in the Rouhani camp turned jubilant.

A difficult campaign

In 2013, Mr. Rouhani had campaigned and won on a platform that focussed on bringing sanctions to an end, which he was able to achieve in July 2015 with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), a nuclear agreement concluded with the P-5 + 1. The sanctions relief has had a positive impact on the economy with oil exports up and GDP growth hitting 6% last year though expectations were higher. In a TV debate in the run-up to the election, Mr. Raisi described the JCPOA as 'a cheque that Rouhani had failed to cash'.

Opinion polls had favoured Mr. Rouhani, because Mr. Raisi, though close to the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, was considered a relative newcomer to politics. However, concern grew when Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, a former Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) pilot and the Mayor of Tehran since 2005, withdrew from the race in support of Mr. Raisi, who had spent most of his life in the judiciary before being appointed custodian of the shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad last year. He also controls Astan-e-Quds Razavi, one of the wealthiest



foundations, and is seen a possible successor to the present Supreme Leader who is 77 and in poor health.

Therefore Mr. Rouhani's decisive victory is a shot in the arm for the moderates coming after the elections in February last year for the Parliament and the Assembly of Experts where the moderates and the reformists had registered significant gains.

Rouhani's constraints

However, given Iran's complex governance structures, President Rouhani will have to tread carefully as his powers and those of the directly elected 290-member Parliament are constrained by the non-elected authorities. The key power centre is the Supreme Leader who is appointed by the Assembly of Experts and in turn appoints the heads of radio and TV, the armed forces and the IRGC, the Supreme National Security Council, the 51-member Expediency Council and the higher judiciary. He also chooses six members of the powerful Guardian Council, with the other six nominated by the judiciary. The Guardian Council in turn vets candidates for all elections, presidential, parliamentary and the 88-member Assembly of Experts. It cleared only six candidates out of the more than 1,600 who filed nominations for the presidential contest; rejections included former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's nomination. In addition, it approves all legislation passed by Parliament to ensure its consistency with Islamic jurisprudence. A dispute between Parliament and the Council is re-

solved by the Expediency Council. The Assembly of Experts is directly elected and its primary role is to appoint the Supreme Leader, critical during Mr. Rouhani's second term.

Mr. Rouhani's principal challenge will be to sustain economic growth and nudge the reform process forward in order to tackle unemployment, currently running at over 12%, and higher among the youth. He has promised to expand individual and political rights, enlarge women's role and ensure greater accountability. Some of these will be challenged. While his victory margin is a clear endorsement for reform, the Supreme Leader will play a critical balancing role. It is interesting that, in his immediate remarks, he praised the Iranian people for the impressive turnout, but did not congratulate the winner.

In foreign policy, Mr. Rouhani will present the image of a moderate and more outward-oriented Iran. He is no stranger to Iran's complex politics. From 1989 to 2005, he was Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, reporting to the Supreme Leader, and handled the nuclear negotiations during 2003-05. During this period, he also served a term each as Deputy Speaker of Parliament and as member of the Expediency Council. Following Mr. Ahmadinejad's election in 2005, he quit. After being elected in 2013, he persuaded the Supreme Leader to shift responsibility for the nuclear negotiations to the Foreign Ministry and let Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif take the lead.

In addition to managing his

home front, the other challenge for Mr. Rouhani will be keep the JCPOA going in the face of the U.S. Congress's and now President Donald Trump's declared hostility.

Dealing with Trump

During the election campaign, Mr. Trump had called it the 'worst deal ever' and threatened to tear it up as soon as he was elected! Subsequently, he seems to have modified his position, realising perhaps that it is not just a bilateral agreement with Iran but also includes Russia, China, the U.K., France, Germany and the European Union. In April, the Trump administration certified that Iran was abiding by its obligations but Secretary of State Rex Tillerson added that a 90-day policy review would be undertaken in view of 'Iran's alarming ongoing provocations'.

More recently, on May 17, the Trump administration continued the sanctions waiver (under Section 1245 of the National Defense Authorization Act 2012), needed every 120 days even while imposing sanctions on seven Iranian and Chinese individuals and entities on account of missile proliferation activities. In April, a slew of human rights related sanctions were imposed. In mid-June another waiver, this time under the Iran Freedom and Counter-Proliferation Act, will need to be renewed if the JCPOA is to be sustained. These are necessary because in 2015, the Republican-dominated Congress rejected the JCPOA and U.S. President Barack Obama used executive authority to waive U.S. sanctions but these waivers need to be renewed periodically.

The JCPOA was the outcome of protracted negotiations over more than a decade, during which Iran had steadily built up its nuclear capabilities, especially in the enrichment domain, and in 2015 was estimated to be only months away from acquiring enough Highly Enriched Uranium to produce one device (approximately 25 kg) though Iran consistently maintained that its programme was exclusively for peaceful purposes. Given deep suspicions however, the JCPOA with its extensive inspection and reporting obligations

was the best way to prevent Iran from developing a military nuclear capability for the next 10-15 years. Opponents say that while cheating is unlikely, they fear that Iran will retain its nuclear appetite after abstaining during the 10-15 year period and resume its activity once the inspection obligations expire.

The Saudi factor

Perhaps the most troubling problem is the new embrace of Saudi Arabia that was in evidence during Mr. Trump's visit. It raises the prospects of greater U.S. involvement in the war in Yemen and can push relations with Iran into a confrontation. In 2016, there were 19 'incidents at sea' between U.S. and Iranian vessels in the Persian Gulf. The most serious was in January 2016 when the IRGC held two U.S. vessels and 10 servicemen, accused of trespassing in Iranian waters. The crisis was resolved within hours, thanks to some quick phone conversations between U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Mr. Zarif. That link is missing today.

It is all the more ironic because Iran is the one country that is opposed to the Islamic State. Yet the U.S. is keener to bless the Saudi-created Islamic Military Alliance to Fight Terrorism, a grouping of 41 Sunni nations, under the command of former Pakistani Army Chief, General Raheel Sharif. It remains unclear what the role of this coalition is, to fight the IS or Iran or in Yemen, or to secure the Gulf monarchies!

For the last quarter century, the U.S. practised dual containment of Iran and Iraq, a policy that suited both Israel and Saudi Arabia. Mr. Obama's push for the JCPOA was driven by a desire to extricate U.S. policy from this stranglehold and expand options. If a return to the Saudi embrace creates additional tensions and a collapse of the JCPOA, it could push Iran to cross the nuclear threshold with much wider regional implications. Mr. Rouhani's challenges are just beginning.

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The united states of Myanmar?

Various models of federalism are on the table at the Panglong conference



NEHGINPAO KIPGEN

Myanmar is to hold the second round of the 21st Panglong Union Peace Conference in its administrative capital, Nay Pyi Taw, from May 24 to 28. A major issue at the meet will be the question of federalism.

During the government-led Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC) meeting in Nay Pyi Taw on May 12, the committee agreed in principle to grant the seven states and seven regions permission to draft their own constitution on the condition that they would not break away from the country.

The UPDJC, headed by State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, includes representatives from the ethnic armed groups, political parties and the government. The Panglong conference is likely to discuss the question of self-determination and the drafting of the Constitution by states and regions.

Rooted in history

The question of federalism or autonomy in Myanmar goes back

to the pre-Independence era. It is an important historical issue which unified and divided the country. The idea of forming a union government that would give equal status to all citizens brought together different ethnic groups at the Panglong conference of 1947. It has also divided the country psychologically and emotionally when the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League, the first elected government after Independence, failed to fulfil the political aspirations of the ethnic non-Burmans.

When the non-Burman ethnic groups pushed for autonomy or federalism, alongside having a weak civilian government at the centre, the military leadership staged a coup d'état in 1962. Though incorporated in the 1947 Constitution, successive military governments construed the use of the term 'federalism' as being anti-national, anti-unity and pro-disintegration.

Until as recently as 2011, when the State Peace and Development Council military government allowed the Union Solidarity and Development Party led by President Thein Sein – himself a former military general – to form a quasi-civilian government, one could land in jail for advocating federalism.

With gradual democratisation, the Thein Sein government accepted the concept of federalism, one

of the core principles of the ongoing peace process with the country's ethnic armed groups.

As a pro-democratic party, the National League for Democracy has been supportive of a federal government. But nobody really knows what type of federalism Myanmar will eventually have.

Opinions on different federal systems such as symmetric federalism, asymmetric federalism, dual federalism, cooperative federalism and creative federalism have been discussed by policy makers and scholars.

Symmetric federalism could be a major problem since the Bama or Burman majority dominates the seven regions plus the union territory of Nay Pyi Taw. Even if the majority Burmans propose such arrangement, the minorities may oppose it on the ground of being politically disadvantageous.

Asymmetric federalism may be opposed by some minorities who feel that they would be outnumbered. Many within the ethnic minorities feel that the majority Bama/Burman/Myanma group

should be given only one state in line with other ethnic groups to establish genuine federalism.

Dual federalism may be acceptable to the federal government, but the states may find it too invasive or intrusive.

Cooperative federalism, though an ideal solution for some, is an unlikely arrangement as it could lead to a power stalemate between the state and federal governments, making it difficult or even impossible to reach a compromise over important pieces of legislation.

Creative federalism could be a problem to implement if the two governments are unable to reach a consensus.

Due to the scattered population of several ethnic groups, the other concept widely discussed is a non-territorial federalism. In other words, self-determination should not be confined to a well-defined territory.

Possible solution

The non-territorial federal structure could be a possible solution, well suited to the demands of some ethnic groups. On the other hand, it could also be a source of conflict



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between different ethnic groups and even constrain relations between the state and regional governments which have a mixed population.

Given the hybrid nature of the political structure, there is also a danger that the government or the military leadership would push for a 'Myanmar Way to Federalism' similar to the idea of 'Burmese Way to Socialism' during the days of the Burma Socialist Programme Party government led by General Ne Win, or something along the lines of a "flourishing and disciplined democracy", as enshrined in the 2008 Constitution.

The ethnic minorities envision a federalism which is based on an equality of rights for all ethnic groups and a guarantee of a certain degree of autonomy over their people, territories and resources.

It is a positive development that the government has allowed not only the use and discussion of federalism but also the drafting of a Constitution by individual states and regions. Such a development may be construed as a case of Myanmar moving forward in its pursuit of a federal government.

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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.

A Kashmir 'solution'

Home Minister Rajnath Singh talking tough about ending Pakistan's relentless sponsorship of terrorism is welcome. However, his assertion that the government would not fail to find "a permanent solution" to the Kashmir issue is a bit of grandstanding. The rise in violence in the Kashmir Valley needs to be addressed carefully with patience and diligence. Sounding a battle cry will be of little use in a war of nerves. Provocations from the enemy should not decide the course of action for India ("Will find permanent solution to Kashmir issue", May 22).

DR. D.V.G. SANKARANARAO, Nellimarla, Andhra Pradesh

Sunshine in solar

It is incorrect to say that the tariff structure as far as solar power is concerned is not remunerative ("Green energy target tough, say officials", May 22). A standalone rooftop solar plant of 3kW installed even five years ago will fetch a decent return of 6-8%; this return is also tax free. The reasons that officials have cited for rooftop installations not getting traction such as a terrace "being used to dry clothes and host parties" are gross exaggerations. Elevated solar installations are possible without blocking terrace space. A major reason for the net metering scheme not taking off is the non-availability of two-way meters. Local electricity

departments lack knowledge and awareness of solar installations. The staff are also not enthusiastic or motivated enough to explore solar options. As far as subsidies are concerned, it is relatively easier to get them in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Gujarat when compared to Tamil Nadu. A 1 kW on grid costs about ₹65,000 to ₹70,000 in these States as against ₹80,000 to ₹90,000 in Tamil Nadu. A 30 kW rooftop unit installed recently in a residence in Hyderabad cost ₹16,00,000 under the net metering scheme. The first month's savings worked out to be ₹40,000; the payback period is about 3.5 years.

D. SURESH, Chennai

Down to the wire

Mumbai Indians (MI) may be the winners of the 10th edition of the Indian Premier League, but the true winner was Rising Pune Supergiant (RPS). It emerged from the bottom of the points table to work its way up to the finals even as fancied teams such as Sunrisers Hyderabad, Kolkata Knight Riders and Royal Challengers Bangalore bit the dust. If not for the absence of key players such as Ben Stokes and Imran Tahir – Lockie Ferguson and Adam Zampa were poor substitutes – RPS would have steamrolled MI. I also feel that all auctioned players must be made to complete their IPL formalities before moving to the national team so that the fabric of team

composition does not suffer.

R. SHANKARAN, Tiruchi

The way MI batted was disappointing and the match soon had signs of being one sided. But it was team effort that won MI the trophy. It was a perfect

finish to the IPL which even a neutral fan like me watched with bated breath. For a mediocre team, making it to the final was in itself a great achievement.

NAGARAJAMANI M.V., Hyderabad

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CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS

A sentence in the report headlined "Stalin questions Modi-OPS meeting" (some editions, May 22, 2017) read: "Everyone is aware of the problems of farmers; 200 of them had committed suicide. But the Chief Minister gave appointment to Mr. Panneerselvam, who today is just an MLA." It should have been Prime Minister.

An International page report headlined "Non-EU parents have residency rights: court" (May 14, 2017) erroneously referred to Kamal Rahman, head of the immigration group at law firm Mishcon de Reya in London, as Mr. Rahman in subsequent references. It should have been Ms. Rahman.

It is the policy of The Hindu to correct significant errors as soon as possible. Please specify the edition (place of publication), date and page. The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300 (11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday); Fax: +91-44-28552963; E-mail: readerseditor@thehindu.co.in; Mail: Readers' Editor, The Hindu, Kasturji Buildings, 859 & 860 Anna Salai, Chennai 600 002, India. All communication must carry the full postal address and telephone number. No personal visits. The Terms of Reference for the Readers' Editor are on www.thehindu.com