

The National Register of Cruelty

It is horrific and undemocratic for a nation to be putting the onus on citizens to prove their Indianness



Fear writ large in his eyes, Shaukat Ali knelt suppliantly on the pavement, surrounded by a hostile crowd demanding, “Are you Bangladeshi? Is your name in the NRC [National Register of Citizens]?” Reports said that Ali was beaten up for allegedly selling beef and was forced to eat pork, an act of ultimate humiliation for a Muslim. Fortunately, Mr. Ali escaped relatively unharmed, but when the mob finally went home, he had lost his livelihood of three decades.

That image from the streets of Assam in April was disturbing in itself, but its import for the future of a secular India was even more chilling, as we witness a dangerous new intersection of beef, faith and citizenship on the ruling party’s electoral road map.

An unwise proposal

As if on cue, just one day later, the BJP vowed to implement the NRC all across India. The party has referred contemptuously to illegal immigrants as “termites... eating our grain... and taking our jobs”. Unmindful that such reckless rhetoric is an invitation to street violence, the BJP has added fuel to the fire by promising a path to citizenship to almost all but Muslim illegal immigrants. In short, the party is seeking to weaponise the NRC even before the project has fully played out in Assam – a proposition that has been quickly rebuffed by many in the Northeast.

The ground reality is that the NRC in Assam has only recently entered its most sensitive phase of adjudicating claims and objections, involving thousands of senior government officers and data experts, with numerous companies of Central police keeping peace. More than 90% of the 40 lakh people who were excluded from the final draft have filed ‘claims’ for reconsideration, and 2.65 lakh ‘challenges’ have also been filed, questioning the inclusion of others. The Supreme Court, which is supervising the entire process, has set a hard deadline of July 31 for the final



"It is premature to declare the NRC a success in Assam and push for its implementation in other States." Those whose names were left out of the draft NRC collect 'claim' forms in Morigaon district, Assam in 2018. •RITU RAJ KONWAR

NRC, an uphill task given the sheer scale and complexity of the exercise at hand. Under these circumstances, it is premature to think of the NRC as a success in Assam, and it is unwise to push for its implementation in other States before assessing the fallout in Assam.

What is the endgame?

No one can predict how many claimants will ultimately succeed in getting on to the final NRC, but what we do know for sure is that there is no clear plan for what happens to those who don’t make it. If one were to take the BJP’s manifesto seriously, non-Muslims would get a reprieve, while Muslims, possibly including many Indian citizens who are unable to produce the right documents, would be deemed stateless. Thereafter, they may get a hearing at one of the hundreds of Foreigners Tribunals yet to be constituted, and if they fail, they could be destined for the dozens of detention camps that are yet to be built. To quote Aman Wadud, a Guwahati lawyer: “A foreigner can be deported only when the country of origin accepts them... When Indian citizens are declared as foreigners for hyper-technical reasons (lack of documents), they can never be deported... The result is indefinite detention.”

As per the government’s own admission, the tribunal process has not gone well in the past, prompting the Supreme Court to call the whole process a “joke”. For example, of the 46,000 declared foreigners since 2015, only four were actually deported, and only 2,000 are currently in detention. As for where the other 44,000 went, even the government does not seem to know.

The court is very conscious of this reality and has been urging the government to explore more humane alternatives to prolonged detention. But unfortunately, every suggestion from the court as well as from retired bureaucrats and police officers has been summarily dismissed. That includes proposals to grant them ‘refugee status’, or give them work permits, or release them under sureties, or with ankle bracelets, and so on. All of this, unfortunately, lends a certain amount of credence to sceptics who claim that some of the intractable problems of our times remain unresolved only because of their potency as political wedge issues.

The court, however, seems underterred in seeking to end what it has called “external aggression”. It has been aggressively questioning the government about what comes next after the final NRC, but as of now, there is little clarity on what the endgame

is. So, here is problem one: Officials have been working hard for over three years to create a ‘fair and transparent’ process that is blind to an applicant’s faith, language and ethnicity. They have made lakhs of house-to-house calls and pored over 6.5 crore personal records dealing with birth and marriage, citizenship and refugee status, family trees, land and tenancy, banks and LIC, and so on, often going back to the original issuers to authenticate them. But now, even before their mammoth effort is complete, the BJP has thrown cold water on them by promoting the idea that some illegal immigrants are more welcome than others. That notion corrupts the very spirit of the NRC, and can hardly be deemed a success.

States will push back

Problem two is the assumption that the Assam experience can be readily replicated in other States. But in reality, the NRC in Assam is a direct response to its unique history as a bulwark against illegal migration, which resulted in the promises of the Assam Accord of 1985. Naturally, a majority of Assamese have been more than willing to submit themselves to the rigours of the NRC. But there is no such history nor affinity to the NRC in most other States, which are dealing with many more pressing problems than illegal immigration. In the end, notwithstanding the mandate of the Citizenship Rules of 2003, millions of poor and marginalised communities may simply be unable to comply with the onerous demands of the NRC, triggering a needless humanitarian crisis. As this reality sinks in, States will surely start to weigh the social costs of the NRC against its murky endgame, and they are bound to push back hard.

Setting aside all other considerations, the very idea that a nation should be putting the onus on every citizen to prove their Indianness 72 years after Independence is at once horrific and undemocratic. This is a proposition that must be vigorously scrutinised and debated before there is any attempt to implement the NRC beyond Assam.

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Surveillance wars in space

Mission Shakti is a giant leap for India, but only a small step in the world of counterspace



MADHUMATHI D.S.

The dust and furore kicked up by India’s Anti-Satellite Missile (ASAT) test on March 27 is yet to settle. Critics have not stopped worrying about the potential harm that floating debris may cause to other satellites around that band in the sky. Years after Russia, the U.S., and China (referred to here as the Big Three) made a mark in this area, India too has shown that it can hit back at enemies attacking from space.

Military experts say that possessing the highly difficult capability to conduct such a test is important and essential for ensuring national security in space. Mission Shakti, as it is called, has earned India a place in an exclusive club of ‘space defenders’. However, a peek into counterspace, the world where such dangerous space activities are practised covertly by the Big Three, shows that while Mission Shakti is a giant leap for India, it is only a small step in that world. The new measure of space supremacy lurks in counterspace now, and not so much in planetary excursions and astronauts’ outings. This is why the Big Three have been relentlessly pursuing for decades activities that enable them to rule space militarily, for offence or defence purposes.

Playground for confidential activities

According to academic reports, policymakers and those tracking the military space, for several years now, the space between 600 km and 36,000 km above the earth has been the playground for such secret activities. Most people have no idea about what is happening up there.

Around the time Mission Shakti took place, the Center for Strategic and International Studies based in Washington, D.C. and the Secure World Foundation came out with reports detailing counterspace capabilities that different countries have today and their sense of threat to space assets. The reports document that satellites have been launched to sidle up to other satellites in the same orbit. Satellites with robotic arms or handles have touched or nudged their siblings in orbit. Mother (or nesting) spacecraft have gone up to ‘deliver’ baby spy satellites in orbit. Satellites have sneaked up to high perches to see, overhear and sense all that happens in space and on the ground. The intent of being in counterspace is thus surveillance and es-

pionage. In times of war, the intent could even be to capture or disable a rival’s space assets in orbit.

Some say that the U.S. and Russia have always had some counterspace capabilities in their over 60-year-old space race. But this century, they have reportedly developed deadly armouries that can be either unleashed into or from space.

Loud concerns have been raised over rendezvous and proximity operations (RPO) in space. The actor countries neither acknowledge nor discuss such activities and give them other names. In an RPO event, one country sends a satellite that clandestinely sits next to one of its own (or another country’s) orbiting satellites. The motive could be to inspect and assess the target’s nature, eavesdrop on it, or even subvert its functions. The fear is that in extreme cases, the target may even be ‘abducted’ or taken control of. Fortunately India is not there – for now.

Loitering in orbit

Satellites of each of the Big Three has been caught loitering in orbit at different times, and the victims have cried foul. In September 2018, French Defence Minister Florence Parly was reported to have charged that Russian satellite Luch-Olymp was lurking too close to – and spying on – a Franco-Italian military communications satellite, Athena-Fidus, in 2017, that is, the previous year.

The U.S. has reportedly had its share of RPOs and other acts. In the foreword to the CSIS report, U.S. policymaker Jim Cooper says, “Every nation’s satellites face increasing threats... The risk of a space Pearl Harbor is growing every day.” He cautions that today countries depend so much on their satellites that “cripple our satellites and you cripple us”.

Countries are also honing non-kinetic, electronics and cyber-based methods to prevent satellites of other countries from spying on their regions. Cyber attacks can destroy, steal or distort other satellites or ground stations. The attacker gains control of the space asset.

“No one will declare that they are pursuing these kind of technologies but all are doing it, all have to do it, specially major players,” says Dinesh Kumar Yadavendra, distinguished fellow at the Centre for Joint Warfare Studies, a Delhi-based think tank of the Ministry of Defence. In times of war no one is spared, and a country must be ready with its counter-security tactics, he says.

What could India’s people in military space have up their sleeve? It is most unlikely that they will tell us.

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SINGLE FILE

Belt and Road 2.0

With the second Belt and Road Forum, a paradox is now apparent at the heart of the initiative

DHRUVA JAISHANKAR



Six years after it was unveiled, China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) assumes another avatar. In its initial form, it was all things to all people, a catch-all for China’s international engagement. But in fact it had multiple, layered objectives. The first concerned

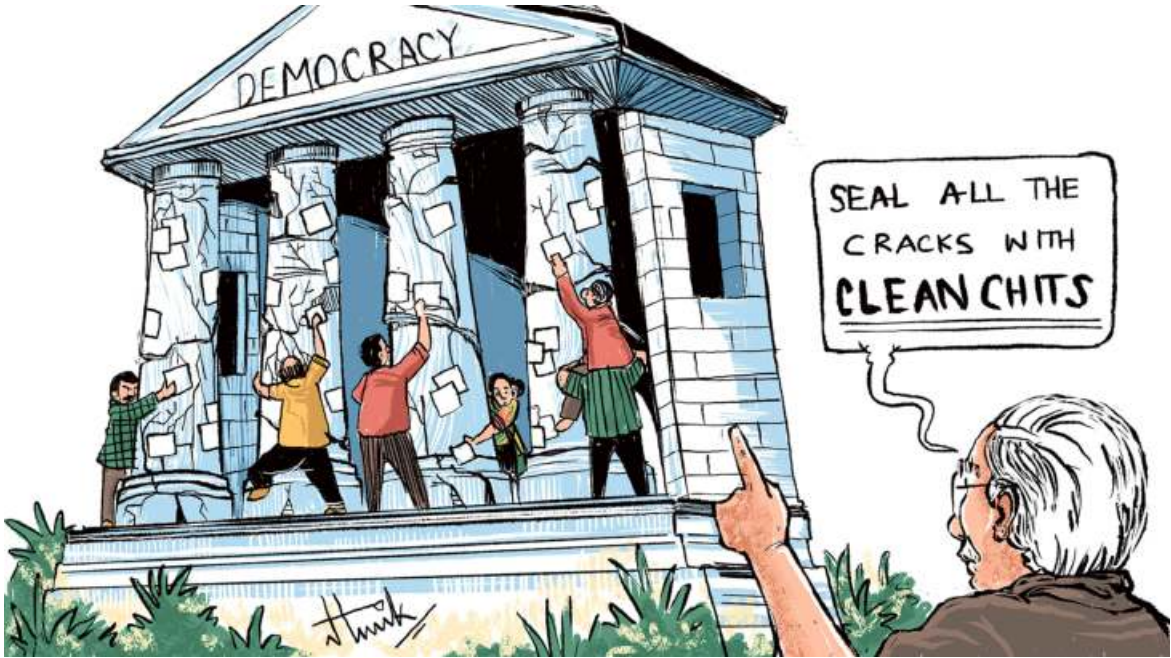
domestic economics: exporting surplus industrial capacity and cash reserves overseas to keep China’s economy humming, its industrial output flowing, and its employment levels high. The second concerned domestic politics: a signature foreign initiative to associate with Chinese President Xi Jinping. The third concerned security: stabilising Western provinces and the Eurasian hinterland. And the fourth concerned strategy: leveraging China’s new-found economic heft for political objectives in Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Indian and Pacific Oceans, and creating new standards and institutions in a bid to challenge U.S. leadership.

But Beijing may have moved too soon and too quickly. As the second Belt and Road Forum (BRF) concludes, a paradox has become apparent at the heart of its ambitious initiative. On the one hand, there has been a strong backlash. The economic viability of Chinese projects is now viewed with considerable scrutiny. In capitals around the world, the port of Hambantota in Sri Lanka is being described as a warning sign. The BRI’s sustainability is called further into question as Chinese debt, especially that held by state-owned enterprises, mounts. Additionally, security concerns have begun to predominate as far afield as in the European Union, the South Pacific and Canada. The role of China’s state in its business dealings is being deliberated openly. China’s military base at Djibouti has injected an overtly military element to its external engagement. And political pushback to Beijing is also discernible, whether in Zambia, the Maldives or Brazil.

Yet, despite these obvious deficiencies, the allure of the BRI remains strong. Many countries still see China as an attractive alternative to slow-moving democratic bureaucracies and tedious lending institutions. There are also political motivations at play: a minor agreement on the BRI is a useful tool for Italy’s Eurosceptic government to send a strong political message to the EU. Beijing has also become more flexible, the tone of this year’s BRF less triumphalist. Chinese overseas financial flows have slowed since 2017, and the focus has shifted away from massive infrastructure projects to realms such as digital technology.

Given these contrasting trends, the future of the BRI is more uncertain than ever. For India, which boycotted the BRF for the second time on grounds of both sovereignty (the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor traverses Pakistan-occupied Kashmir) and unsustainability (particularly in the Indian Ocean), it means continuing to monitor China’s international engagement closely.

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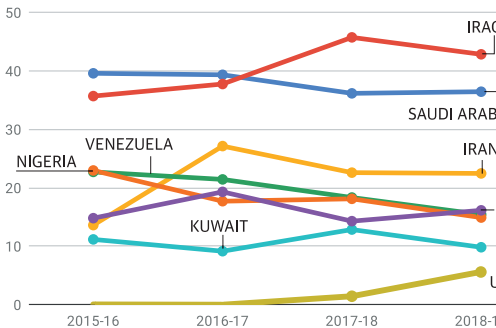
DATA POINT

Dearer on Indian pockets

India will be significantly hit by the Trump administration’s decision to end waivers that allowed the import of crude oil from Iran without facing U.S. sanctions. Iran has been among India’s top and most preferred sources of crude oil. Crude from the U.S., an alternative exporter, comes at a hefty price. By **Sumant Sen**

Crude sources from abroad

Iran has been one of India’s top suppliers of crude oil over the years. In 2018-19, 10.9% of India’s crude demands were met by imports from Iran. While Iraq is India’s top supplier of crude oil since 2017-18, there has been a sudden jump of 288% in imports from the U.S. since 2017-18. The chart shows India’s top suppliers of crude oil and their contribution over the years



Crude from the U.S.

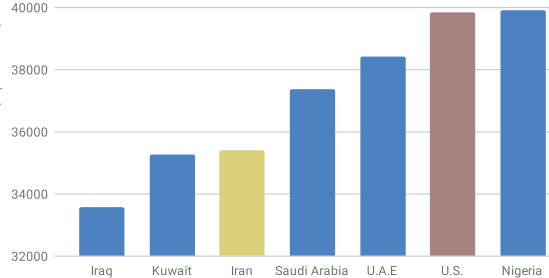
The U.S.’s exports to some of the world’s largest oil consumers, including India, Japan, S. Korea, and Italy, have increased significantly over time.

(Figures in 1000 barrels/day (b/d))

Country	2015	2016	2017
Argentina	465	591	1158
Canada	427	359	354
China	1	22	221
India	1	0	26
Italy	4	20	50

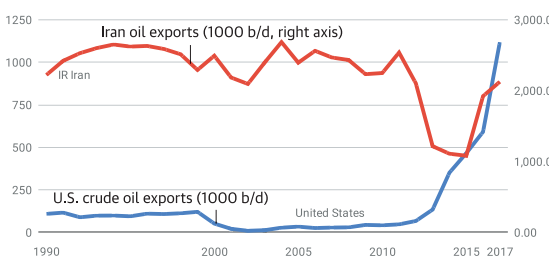
Coming at a greater cost

While Iran’s crude oil exports to India, at ₹35,395 per tonne, were relatively cheap in 2018-19, the U.S.’s crude exports, at ₹39,843, were among the most expensive. The graph shows the cost per tonne of crude oil imports from major countries



Contrasting fortunes

There has been a huge rise of 734% of global crude oil exports from the U.S. from 2013 to 2017. Iran’s crude oil exports dipped in 2013 following global sanctions, but recovered after they were lifted. The chart shows crude exports of U.S. and Iran



Country	2015	2016	2017
Japan	0	8	25
South Korea	3	11	56
The Netherlands	5	43	92
United Kingdom	0	15	97

Sources: Ministry of Commerce Got, OPEC, US Energy Information Administration

FROM The Hindu. ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO FROM THE ISSUE OF MAY 9 AS THERE WAS NO ISSUE ON MAY 8

Israel produces atom bombs

Israel has become the world’s sixth nuclear power and has built atomic bombs, with French help, at a secret plant deep in the Negev Desert, according to the West German News Magazine Der Spiegel. The magazine, in its latest issue, said at least five, and possibly six 20-kiloton bombs had been produced at the closely guarded plant, near Dimona. Security was so stringent that a damaged Israeli jet fighter which strayed into the Dimona area during the 1967 June war with Arabs was shot down by an Israeli Hawk missile and the pilot killed, it said. Israel was already capable of delivering its atomic bomb with its A-4 Skyhawk jets, it said, and added that Israel would receive the first of 50 American built F-4 Phantoms this autumn. In Cairo, the U.A.R. officials said that the U.A.R. would produce its own atomic bombs if Israel developed a nuclear weapons capability.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MAY 8, 1919.

Constable Shooting Case.

Mr. Swinhoe, Chief Presidency Magistrate [Calcutta], resumed enquiry to-day [May 7] into the circumstances connected with the alleged shooting of constable Seepujun Sing. An application was made on behalf of the constable for process against Sergeant White. The Magistrate referred it to the second Magistrate who fixed the 14th instant for hearing. Another application was made for an adjournment of enquiry which was refused at which counsel appearing for the constable retired. Mr. J. Cohen, Honorary Magistrate, who recorded the statement of the constable at hospital examined said that the constable had stated he was struck by a sergeant, but he could not say whether he was struck by a bullet or knife. Three doctors from hospital who attended the constable deposed that the wounds could not have been caused by a bullet from a revolver.

POLL CALL

Proxy

Service voters are members of the armed forces of the Union or States, or members of forces to which provisions of the Army Act are applicable, or those who are employed under the Government of India and are outside the country. Such voters are entitled to appoint any person as their proxy to cast a vote on their behalf and in their name at the polling station. The proxy must be an ordinary resident of that constituency. He or she need not be a registered voter but must not be disqualified to be registered as a voter. The provision for voting through proxy is valid till the person making the appointment is a service voter. Once appointed, the proxy will continue until his or her appointment is revoked by the service voter.

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