



## Poll position

Citing the Karnataka poll to delay the Cauvery scheme is a poor excuse

The Centre's excuse for being unable to submit a draft scheme on the Cauvery issue is so poor that it will convince nobody. That it was extremely reluctant to take a decision which could have electoral repercussions in Karnataka, which goes to the polls on May 12, is well known. But the Attorney General's explanation that the draft scheme could not be readied because the Prime Minister and other ministers were busy "travelling" in Karnataka is laughable. While the world of politics is sometimes ruled more by expediency than law, the Centre has cut a sorry figure by admitting in court that its leaders are too preoccupied with an election campaign to fulfil a court directive – one over which it could be punished for contempt. That the Attorney General asked for the contempt petition to be taken up a day after the Karnataka election gives the game away. There are several reasons why the Centre's stand is legally untenable and morally wrong. First and foremost, the framing of a scheme to implement a river water tribunal's award is the Centre's statutory obligation, and it is not open to the government to weigh its political or electoral implications in the face of such a deadline. Besides, the plea that the Prime Minister and the Union Minister concerned were unavailable is questionable – a day before the submission was made, the Cabinet had met and announced important decisions.

In its verdict on February 16, 2018, the apex court granted six weeks' time to the Centre for framing the scheme. It added for good measure that no extension of time would be granted on any ground. Yet, on the eve of the expiry of the deadline, the Union government chose to file an application seeking three more months. Tamil Nadu filed a contempt petition. In its application for more time, the Centre had mentioned that it had convened a meeting of representatives of the four States and had also cited the differences of opinion among the States over the composition of the proposed mechanism. There was at least a ring of truth to this, given that consulting the parties over the composition of the scheme was necessary to frame it. Even then, the Supreme Court was unimpressed; it had asked the Centre to prove its *bona fides* by submitting a draft scheme on May 3. That it not only failed to do so, but also chose to cite the Prime Minister's preoccupation with the campaign is bound to raise questions about its commitment to impartial governance and its disdain for judicial orders. The Centre's attitude suggests that it hopes to persuade the court that a degree of political expediency in the light of the election is normal and acceptable. Clearly, it is not as keen on proving its own *bona fides* as it is on improving its prospects in Karnataka.

## Raising fences

The Windrush scandal marks another episode in Europe's hardening politics on immigration

The scandal over the targeting of Britons of Caribbean origin is the latest twist in Europe's recent politics over immigration, denting the continent's image as being open, liberal and tolerant. The development comes at an awkward moment for London, which hopes to negotiate trade agreements with the countries of the British Commonwealth as it withdraws from the European Union. The Windrush generation, named after one of the many vessels that ferried some half a million people from the Caribbean islands to the U.K. in the late 1940s, has fallen victim to a ruthless policy that stipulates annual net immigration objectives. In its wake, people with cultural links to the region but who have lived all their lives in the U.K. are having to provide proof of residence for every year of their stay of up to 60-70 years. Inability to furnish such evidence has been met with job losses, threat of deportation, withdrawal of welfare benefits and even denial of critical medical care. For Britons of West Indies origin, the enormous emotional trauma of being regarded as aliens in a country that had invited their families to rebuild its economy must be hard enough to endure. Knowledge that they are at the receiving end of a policy devised by Prime Minister Theresa May when she was in charge of the Home Office only adds to their anxiety. In the event, Ms. May's apology to the heads of Commonwealth governments over the mistreatment of people from Britain's former colonies, and the resignation of Amber Rudd as Home Secretary, brought too little comfort and too late. The Windrush saga is a reminder of the grotesque response from some central European governments in 2015 to prevent desperate Syrian migrants from entering their territory.

It is arguable whether the debate over the so-called illegal immigration across the industrialised world has focussed attention on systemic shortcomings and genuine violations. But surely, the controversy has typified the inability of governments to manage the political fallout from the current phase of globalisation and trade liberalisation. This is especially true of the EU, which has enshrined the free movement of people as a fundamental principle. Consequently, the 2004 expansion of the bloc into the countries of the erstwhile Soviet Union afforded nations in Western Europe cheap immigrant labour and compliance with better standards. But the process also gave a fillip to xenophobic parties of the extreme right across the region, threatening to halt immigration. Similarly, populist parties in Britain fuelled public anger over the dynamics of closer integration to target EU migrants during the 2016 referendum. The country's two mainstream parties, although committed to remaining in the bloc, could hardly counter the trend. The lessons from the Windrush scandal are too fundamental to miss.

# A post-colonial reckoning

Britain's approach to immigration from the Caribbean and South Asia is in the political spotlight



VIDYA RAM

On Wednesday, the anger and emotion felt by some MPs during an intense debate in the House of Commons on the Windrush scandal enveloping the British government was palpable. "What we are not talking about so much is race," said Shabana Mahmood, an opposition Labour MP for Birmingham, who sought to drive home the impact Britain's tough immigration regime had on its diverse population. "Try making an application, as a British national, to the Home Office with a name that is demonstrably South Asian in origin. I promise that the protection of a British passport will not help one little bit. People will have visited upon them casual humiliation upon humiliation. The system will treat them as if they were dirt on the bottom of its shoe, and that is not good enough."

David Lammy, a black Labour MP pointed to the painful legacy of empire and slavery: "I remind the House that I am here because you were there. I say 'you' metaphorically. The Windrush generation are here because of slavery. The Windrush story is the story of British empire."

### Since the 1970s

The British government's hopes of containing the scandal over the treatment of Caribbean and other Commonwealth nationals has failed miserably. To recap: the Windrush generation were mi-

grants from the Commonwealth Caribbean who came to Britain before 1973 (1971 legislation no longer gave them automatic settlement after that date). Along with others from the Commonwealth, they and their families were encouraged to Britain to help meet acute labour shortages, whether in the National Health Service (NHS) or beyond. During Wednesday's debate, one of the MPs reminded his colleagues why Brixton, a trendy part of south London, had become a hub for Caribbean migrants: "They settled in Brixton to be near the job centre because they wanted to work." Toughening of immigration rules has led to them being penalised and wrongly treated as undocumented illegal immigrants. Shocking stories of families being separated, unable to return to Britain from holidays abroad, denials of life-saving treatment have abounded in recent weeks. While the stories have mostly centred on those from the Caribbean, there are fears that migrants from across the Commonwealth will inevitably have been impacted. "The scandal also includes those who came from many other Commonwealth countries, including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and countries in West Africa," said Diane Abbott, Labour's spokesperson on home affairs.

The government – while apologising for the treatment of the Windrush generation and promising acting including compensation – has attempted to treat it as an aberration that had no link with its wider immigration policies. It has tried to make the case that its obsession with cutting migration targets and dealing with illegal migration had nothing whatsoever to do with what had happened. "Mea-



sures over many years to tackle illegal immigration are of course a good thing, and we stand by those measures," insisted Britain's new (and first ever ethnic minority) Home Secretary, Sajid Javid, who took over earlier this week, as the government sought to contain the crisis. While pointing out that it could easily have been one of his family members who had come from Pakistan to have been impacted, Mr. Javid said it had nothing to do with the pursuit of a "compliant environment" to tackle illegal immigration.

Yet these efforts to separate have proved fruitless amid further revelations around the treatment of people legally in Britain or attempting to get to its shores. Last week it emerged that at least a hundred, and potentially more, Indian doctors who had been recruited by NHS trusts up and down the country to fill sorely needed positions, mostly in emergency medicine, had been unable to take up their positions because of visa issues. *The Evening Standard*, edited by former Treasury head George Osborne, revealed that Prime Minister Theresa May herself had rejected calls for an easing of the visa rules for non-EU doctors.

# Karl Marx, 200 years later

To ignore Marx the philosopher is to remain impoverished in a market-driven world



RAMIN JAHANBEGLOO

Today is the 200th anniversary of the birth of Karl Marx, the author of *Das Kapital* and the leading spirit of the International Workingmen's Association (known as the First International). In the words of Oscar Wilde, the Irish playwright and writer, "An idea that is not dangerous is unworthy of being called an idea at all." If this statement is true in the case of only one thinker in the history of ideas, that person would certainly be Marx.

If Marx had not decided to change the world, he would have been remembered today only as a name on a gravestone in Highgate cemetery in London. Thus, there is no question why a thinker like Marx was at the same time a great influence on the most important thinkers of the twentieth century and a victim of a terrible misunderstanding for all those who made a revolutionary prophet out of him.

### Not of gulags, killing fields

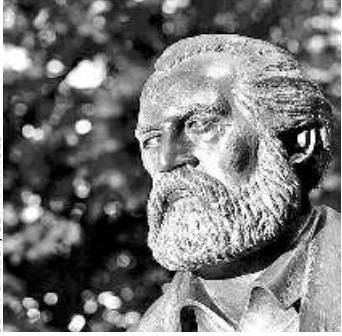
For over a century the fate of Marx's thought was tied to that of Marxism. Even today, three decades after the fall of the Soviet empire, many still blame Marx for the cruel atrocities that happened

around the world in the name of Marxism.

However, to think and to repeat that Marx is responsible for the Stalinist gulags or the killing fields of Pol Pot in Cambodia would be nothing but pure nonsense. No doubt, he would have been one of the first victims of Stalin, Pol Pot or any communist dictator. As such, the responsibility for the horrors of communist totalitarianism would be on the shoulders of no other ideology than Marxism-Leninism, which turned the materialist and historicist philosophy of Marx into a revolutionary eschatology and in many cases into a thermodynamics of terror. As Voltaire says majestically, "Those who can make you believe absurdities, can make you commit atrocities."

Despite what happened in the past hundred years in the communist countries, Marx remains an important thinker and a central figure of the modern canon around the world. In other words, he should be read closely, with precision and patience. As such, any loosely philosophical approach or iconic view of Marx would turn the critical edge of his analysis of modernity and capitalism into wrong principles of a wrong struggle.

This is not to say that Marx provides us with all the answers to all our problems. Marx knew it himself and that is, most probably, one of the reasons why his writings were so complex and so antithetical. On the one hand, Marx is a philosopher who believes in the



autonomy of human beings, since he affirms that human beings make their own history, that the emancipation of the workers will be the work of the workers themselves. On the other hand, he is obsessed by the Hegelian idea of making a total system, dominated by the universal law of social transformations in history. It was precisely this second Marx, the theorist of historical materialism, who was elevated by Engels, Lenin, Stalin and many others as a prophet of a secular religion called socialism. But, the great mistake of several generations of Marxists was to consider Marx's philosophy of history as a readymade revolutionary recipe for action.

Raymond Aron, the French sociologist of the 20th century, once said: "It is really no more difficult to present Marx's leading ideas than those of Montesquieu or Comte; if only there were not so many millions of Marxists, there would be no question at all about what Marx's leading ideas are or what is central to his thought."

As a matter of fact, Marx's criti-

A separate row is brewing over the treatment of foreign students.

### Foreign students

For many years now the British government has been attempting to deport foreign students (and others) based on allegations that they had committed fraud to obtain the English-language qualifications to stay in the U.K. After a 2014 BBC investigation found evidence of fraud at one testing centre, thousands who had gained their qualification via that route at different test centres were accused of fraud, despite what one judge described as "multiple shortcomings and frailties" of the state's evidence and the "plausible and truthful" statements of students.

Sanam Arora, the chair of the National Indian Students and Alumni Union U.K., which has been campaigning on behalf of students who have faced accusations of fraud believes a "significant population" from India has been impacted. "Our strong suspicion is that thousands could have been wrongly deported or facing difficulties," She notes that the government's "deport first, appeal later" strategy, which came into effect around the time students began to face these difficulties, meant there was little recourse open to the students. While she recognises the ambitions of Britain to curb illegal migration, she notes that that the burden of proof – and blame – was swiftly placed on the shoulders of the students rather than the Home Office-approved system that had allowed the fraud to happen. The same applied to past attempts to cull "bogus colleges", she notes, where rather than treating students as the victims, they were treated by the government and British media as "bogus stu-

dents". "The policies of this government are lacking in empathy and concern for the welfare of students," she says.

Separately, a burgeoning group of South Asians are campaigning against what they believe is a misuse of a clause in legislation to prevent the settlement of criminals. The clause is being used to deny IT professionals, doctors and others long resident in the U.K. the indefinite leave to remain because of minor errors in their tax returns. Hundreds are believed to be impacted.

"I feel vindicated in many ways," says Lord Karan Bilimoria, a crossbench peer who has been campaigning against the toughening immigration regime, particularly as it pertains to students, for many years now. "I certainly believe that since 2010 the government's immigration policy has got it very wrong. The word hostile is being used and the atmosphere is blatantly hostile. You just have to look at the catalogue of their policies and the impact it has had."

### Change afoot?

"I do not believe that the term 'hostile environment' is in tune with our values as a country," insisted Mr. Javid in Parliament, referring to the now notorious phase once used by Ms. May. His mollifying words have done little to convince campaigners, however, that fundamental change is on its way. For the first time perhaps, the sturdy thread connecting Britain's colonial past and legacy, its approach to immigration and its profound human impact, that for decades had been deemed invisible by mainstream politics, has caught the sunlight.

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Union and its satellite countries, any allusion to Marx the philosopher and the author of the *Manuscripts of 1844* would have provoked indifference or for the most only a bitter laughter.

When Soviet communism fell apart towards the end of the 20th century, nobody could say what would be the destiny of Marx beyond the demise of Marxist regimes. For a long period of time Marx was read and practised as the founder of a new faith. For some his church continues living on the ruins of the political and economic system he inspired. For others who suffered the communist regimes or simply believed in an anti-communist crusade, Marx continues to be a dangerous mind who should be banned from our schools and universities.

But now that the statues of Marx were torn down bitterly and indistinctively as those of Lenin and Stalin, what really remains of him for future generations of readers? The answer could be: a critical mind with the great intellectual courage of a Socratic gadfly who continues to defy our way of thinking and living in a market-driven world. If that is the case, then we should celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth of a major thinker of human history who has found his place in the pantheon of great philosophers next to Kant, Schelling, Fichte and Hegel.

Ramin Jahanbegloo is Director, Mahatma Gandhi Centre for Peace, Jindal Global University, Sonapat

## 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.

### Change in protocol

The presentation ceremony of the National Film Awards also appears to be an occasion for controversy ("Film-makers skip award function", May 4). If on previous occasions, there has been much heartburn over the conspicuous omissions of leading artistes, especially from the south, the protests now, at the 65th NFA function over "selective treatment" show that the situation was imminently avoidable. Much of honour associated with a national award lies in the fact that it is given by the first citizen and the President of India. If the President found it inconvenient to give away all the 137 awards in a single stretch, it could have been arranged as a staggered function. The solemnity of the function is preserved

when tradition is observed.

A. JAINULABDEEN,  
Chennai

■ One is unable to understand why, out of the blue, it has been decided that the President of India "can spare only an hour for convocations and award ceremonies". Will the same yardstick be applied now for the Republic Day Parade and other grand functions, where after exactly 60 minutes, the President decides that he has to drop everything and depart? For awardees, receiving a national award is a great moment and they expect the President to have the time to honour them. The new condition only diminishes the stature of national award winners and amounts to shutting the door on them.  
BIDYUT KUMAR CHATTERJEE,  
Faridabad

■ It is inappropriate and unfair to practise a kind of apartheid in classifying artists based on perceived notions of their importance and status. It sends out a wrong message that some artists are more important than others to deserve an audience with the President. It is baffling why the President should restrict his public appearances to a stipulated time. In a democracy, leaders are not expected to consider their public interactions as a burden. It is better to take the people into confidence if the President's health does not permit his participation in extended and physically tiring ceremonies.  
V.N. MUKUNDARAJAN,  
Thiruvananthapuram

■ An avoidable controversy has been generated by the last-minute change in

protocol. How much more graceful and thoughtful it would it have been had the 11 awards (if indeed that was a restriction) were given away by the President to newcomers and/or first-time winners (selected by lots if you like). For a little known or first-time winner of a National Award, it is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to receive the award from the first citizen of the country, a moment to be cherished for ever. The whole issue seems to have been handled with a total lack of sensitivity, imagination and grace.  
K. BALAAKESARI,  
Chennai

### Election 'excuse'

As expected, the Bharatiya Janata Party has decided not to rock its electoral prospects in Karnataka and has sought more time to prepare the Cauvery draft water-sharing

scheme. However the "excuse" of political pre-occupation with electioneering in Karnataka will find no takers ("PM busy in Karnataka, need time for Cauvery plan: Centre", May 4). In this era of information technology, distances can be covered and solutions found if there exists a will to do so. At the same time, whipping up passions to settle political scores would do more harm than ensure positive results. Since an out-of-court settlement is not feasible where all the contesting States would only be eager to appease their local constituencies, it is wise to let law take its own course.  
V. SUBRAMANIAN,  
Chennai

### Politics and rationality

One can pacify oneself by saying that not every politician is a scholar and

that it is better not to expect accurate facts and data even from popular leaders. The problem arises when a former civil servant also starts making absurd statements. Bureaucrats were till now expected to be more rational and logical than politicians given their qualifications, having cleared a tough and competitive examination and also having valuable experience from administrating the country. But even this appears to be changing. Either we can drop such expectations now or choose to believe that such statements are a deliberate attempt to divert people's attention from the real issues (Editorial page - "Into the brave new age of irrationality", May 4).  
SUMIT BHARDWAJ,  
Mohali, Punjab

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