



## Imitation registry

Nagaland should take note of the minefield that is Assam's NRC process

Nagaland is following on the footsteps of its western neighbour, Assam, in the task of setting up a Register of Indigenous Inhabitants of Nagaland (RIIN). This is a variant of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) that Assam has adopted with decidedly mixed results so far. Nagaland claims to have watched the process unfold in Assam, followed it closely, and it will now complete the task of identifying and registering indigenous inhabitants in less than five months, by December 10, 2019. This is more or less the kind of time-line that was followed by Assam, which is yet to publish its final NRC a year after the process began. In two months from July 10, Nagaland hopes to have a list of indigenous inhabitants, after which it will be published and time given till October 10 to file claims and objections, before finalisation. It sounds simple, and Nagaland is considerably less populated than Assam. But the Assam experience shows that in the complex demographics of the Northeastern States, it may not turn out that way. As many as 40 lakh people were left out of the NRC listing in Assam, which seemed aimed to filter out 'illegal immigrants'. Indeed, in Nagaland, various local attempts have been made to determine non-locals, non-tribals and non-Nagas, and identify what some people refer to as the 'illegal Bangladeshi immigrant'. Two years ago, a town not farther than 15 km from Dimapur, the largest city and the commercial capital of the State, passed a resolution to place curbs on IBIs and devised ways to prevent them from integrating, living or trading in the town. When such is the situation on the ground, in an already volatile region where the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act is routinely extended, it is best that Nagaland proceeds with caution in this enterprise. The RIIN should not ultimately become a vehicle to make outsiders of insiders.

The Assam experiment has no clear end-point. Bangladesh has repeatedly suggested that the process going on in Assam is "an internal matter" of India, implying that there is no deportation possibility here. Other than deepening the existing fault-lines in its own State and rendering the situation even more volatile, it is unclear what the Nagaland government hopes to achieve through the exercise. What happens to the people who are in the end found to be on the wrong side of the Nagaland list? The right to appeal and a humane hearing should be in-built in this exercise. The NRC experiment in Assam witnessed extremely divisive political posturing. Other Northeastern states are sure to be watching with keen interest what is unfolding in Assam and Nagaland. Emotive political issues cannot be allowed to drive the compiling of a registry of citizens.

## Miles to go

India has some distance to cover before making self-care interventions freely available

Self-care, which mostly happens outside the formal health system, is nothing new. What has changed is the deluge of new diagnostics, devices and drugs that are transforming the way common people access care, when and where they need them. With the ability to prevent disease, maintain health and cope with illness and disability with or without reliance on health-care workers, self-care interventions are gaining more importance. Millions of people, including in India, face the twin problems of acute shortage of health-care workers and lack of access to essential health services. According to the World Health Organization, which has released self-help guidelines for sexual and reproductive health, over 400 million across the world already lack access to essential health services and there will be a shortage of about 13 million health-care workers by 2035. Self-help would mean different things for people living in very diverse conditions. While it would mean convenience, privacy and ease for people belonging to the upper strata who have easy access to healthcare facilities anytime, for those living in conditions of vulnerability and lack access to health care, self-help becomes the primary, timely and reliable form of care. Not surprisingly, the WHO recognises self-care interventions as a means to expand access to health services. Soon, the WHO would expand the guidelines to include other self-care interventions, including for prevention and treatment of non-communicable diseases.

India has some distance to go before making self-care interventions for sexual and reproductive health freely available to women. Home-based pregnancy testing is the most commonly used self-help diagnostics in this area in India. Interventions include self-managed abortions using approved drugs – morning-after pills taken soon after unprotected sex, and mifepristone and misoprostol taken a few weeks into pregnancy – that can be had without the supervision of a healthcare provider. While the morning-after pills are available over the counter, mifepristone and misoprostol are scheduled drugs and need a prescription from a medical practitioner, thus defeating the very purpose of the drugs. The next commonly consumed drug to prevent illness and disease is the pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) for HIV prevention. India is yet to come up with guidelines for PrEP use and include it in the national HIV prevention programme. Despite the WHO approving the HIV self-test to improve access to HIV diagnosis in 2016, the Pune-based National AIDS Research Institute is still in the process of validating it for HIV screening. One of the reasons why people shy away from getting tested for HIV is stigma and discrimination. The home-based testing provides privacy. India has in principle agreed that rapid HIV testing helps to get more people diagnosed and opt for treatment, reducing transmission rates.

# A blatant quest to consolidate power

'One Nation One Poll' limits to a single moment the opportunities to judge, evaluate and vote – the essence of freedom



DOLLY DAFTARY

Just over a month after the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won an absolute majority in the 17th Lok Sabha, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has now urged parties to fall behind his 'One Nation - One Election' (ONOE) proposition: that State and national elections be held at a single point.

The idea exposes the subversion of democracy. The ONOE puts the nationally incumbent party at an advantage in State elections, a position that the BJP now enjoys. The incumbent can deploy government machinery for State campaigns, a mega persona birthed for a national campaign can be fed into State ones, and a last-ditch sleight-of-hand that wins the Centre may land victories in the States. Perhaps the BJP sees the ONOE as the remedy to the spectre of its losses in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan in the 18 months before a national win. Perhaps the party would have won in those States in the currents of an exploitative military nationalism launched in February 2019.

### Roots in Gujarat

The ONOE catchphrase harks back to a moniker from Mr. Modi's rule in Gujarat, where he introduced the idea of samras village panchayats – sarpanches selected 'unanimously' or by 'consensus'. First floated in 2002, the idea was repeated in 2006. Sarpanches command significant resources, wield power, and deliver development

largely through clientelism, echoing the workings of elected leaders at the highest level. Elections give voters the same chance to oust a sarpanch who has skewed the distribution of development, as to expel a ruling party at the State or Centre. Samras gave incumbents an advantage in being reappointed as sarpanch (they were already panchayat leaders, had financial and tactical resources, and were networked with government officials and party actors).

In Dahod, a predominantly Adivasi district bordering Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan where I was doing fieldwork on how panchayats delivered rural development, bureaucrats confided that samras sprang partly from the Gujarat government's failure to respond to the floods in Surat in 2006. The government's incompetence was on display across national TV. Surat could have been the tipping point in a series of anti-people policies, including programmes of purported 'greening' and beautification that had displaced the urban poor, and rural schemes such as Vanbandhu Kalyan Yojana remaining largely unimplemented, with funds later found to be 'unavailable' and the scheme quietly withdrawn.

Panchayat elections were due in December 2006, and Assembly elections in 2007. Political parties mobilise votes for Assembly elections through sarpanches, and as the ruling party, the BJP had close ties with incumbents. Perhaps Mr. Modi feared that new sarpanches would be more equivocal about supporting the party in 2007. Perhaps the act of ousting a panchayat incumbent would make people feel more adventurous about ousting the State's incumbent. The germs of many of Mr. Modi's ideas lie in Gujarat, and their finessed



forms have been deployed on a national scale since he emerged as the BJP's prime ministerial candidate in 2014. The ONOE is the next point in the Prime Minister's attempt to quash the Opposition that a democratic exercise may throw up.

Why does Mr. Modi seek to reduce the electorate's verdict on his performance to a single point in time? Does another spectre, this time viewed from New Delhi, haunt the Prime Minister: that of multiple disenchanted constituencies (rural voters, the poor, Other Backward Classes, Adivasis, Dalits, religious minorities, and others) voicing their verdict in State election after another, and the domino effect this may have on the 2024 Lok Sabha poll? Assembly polls are due in Haryana, Jharkhand and Maharashtra in 2019, Bihar and Delhi in 2020, and West Bengal in 2021. Assembly elections are related to myriad pressing issues, the result of complex interactions of State and national government policies.

As the BJP enters a second term at the Centre, several crises loom larger than before such as a banking crisis, unemployment, an economic slowdown, agrarian distress, a water crisis, and privatised health care and education systems. Mr. Modi appears to count on the din of a national campaign that the ONOE would invariably

produce to carry both State and national elections for the incumbent at the Centre.

### Similar justifications

Mr. Modi justified samras by citing extreme spending by contestants and a drain on the exchequer, rationales now used to justify the ONOE. This, while proposals for State funding of elections languish, the Modi government introduced the electoral bond scheme in 2017 which renders donors to political parties opaque, and the BJP ran the most expensive campaign in India's history in the 2019 Lok Sabha poll. In Dahod, voters remarked that samras would simply shift contestants' spending from voters to other contestants to take them off the race. In the lead-up to Gujarat's panchayat elections in 2006, block development officers, revenue collectors and local BJP leaders pressured candidates to drop out of the race. Defiant candidates were verbally threatened with jail terms, and defiant villages were threatened with the withdrawal of development schemes.

Despite that, in Mahipura village where I did long-term fieldwork, and many others, contestants rejected samras, knowing that an election rather than 'unanimous selection', accorded legitimate power. A common comeback was 'Why doesn't Mr. Modi implement samras for his own seat?' At the end of the panchayat elections in December, Dahod had one of the lowest samras rates across Gujarat. Incidentally, the district is overwhelmingly rural, resource-poor, and inhabited largely by Other Backward Classes, Adivasis and Dalits. Political freedom must appear particularly hard-won to its denizens. One contestant returned to a block development officer, saying, "Consen-

sus pending consent, else not." Candidates knew that samras gave an edge to an incumbent sarpanch, just as the ONOE would tilt the scale in favour of the nationally incumbent party. Like samras seeks to dismantle the institution of panchayat raj, the ONOE seeks to undermine the institution of a federated government by giving a tailwind to the national incumbent. The question that voters in Dahod posed to Mr. Modi in 2006 inspires another question today: why propose the ONOE a month into an overwhelming national win? Why does the party that has equated punctuated electoral wins with the legitimacy of governance seek to discard punctuated elections?

### Thwarting possibilities

'One Nation One Poll' is a blatant quest to consolidate power by limiting, to a single moment, the opportunities for citizens to judge, evaluate and vote – the essence of freedom that an election promises. Mr. Modi announced a 'development fund' of ₹5 lakh to every panchayat in Gujarat that eschewed an election in 2006, roundly seen by the public as a bribe. Of 14,292 village panchayats in Gujarat, about 2,500 are currently samras. A fixture in BJP-ruled Gujarat, samras attempts to minimise the points, in space, of democratic choice. 'One Nation One Election' seeks to minimise these points, in time, to a single dot. The catchphrase is a giveaway, suggesting the goal of a single election for the country, and a single outcome from it.

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## Lessons from Bhutan

The incentive of an enviable income for teachers could mitigate many ills that affect India's education system



LOUIS JUDE SELVADOURAY

Bhutan's teachers, doctors and other medical staff will earn more than civil servants of corresponding grades, if a policy recently announced by the country's government is implemented. The new salary scales will benefit about 13,000 teachers and doctors. This is a novel move. No other country has accorded teachers and doctors such pride of place in its government service, both in terms of remuneration and symbolism. Remarkably, the proposal was announced by Bhutan's Prime Minister Lotay Tshering, himself a qualified doctor – which suggests that professional experience informs the policy.

### Inspired or fanciful?

Let us examine the policy's educational aspect. Is the proposal part of a coherent strategy, or an inspired announcement that is resolute in intent but likely effete in effect?

The policy's tonal reference is to be found in Bhutan's 12th Five Year Plan (2018-23), published by its Gross National Happiness Commission, the country's highest policy-making body. The commission's strategy to achieve desired national outcomes through educa-

tion opens with the notation, "making teaching a profession of choice". The proposal then is evidently at the core of a larger governmental strategy to achieve the country's human developmental objectives. The decision also comes in the wake of high levels of teacher attrition, especially the best. Clearly, the government has formulated the policy as a styptic to stop the serious haemorrhage.

Intuiting the correlation, as Bhutan has, between attracting the best talent to a profession and the remuneration it potentially offers is easy. But importantly, is it possible to demonstrate that improving the status of the teaching profession positively influences educational outcomes?

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a worldwide study that measures and compares student ability in reading, mathematics, science and global competence, with financial literacy an option. Accordingly, it ranks educational systems of countries. An independent study led by the economist, Peter Dolton, has demonstrated a distinct correlation between student outcomes in a country, as measured by PISA scores, and the status that its teachers enjoy. The initiative's latest report, Global Teacher Status Index 2018, based on its own surveys across 35 countries, goes on to make a strong case for high wages to improve teacher status.

Policies act as levers that go-



vernments use to achieve desired results in focus areas. The results of Bhutan's policy, if implemented, will take a few years to emerge for critical evaluation. It is, however, based on credible research.

### The fiscal implications

Bhutan already spends about 7.5% of its GDP on education. The fiscal implications of the new salary structure are unclear now. Generally, teachers constitute a considerable portion of government employees. Therefore, governments looking to emulate Bhutan's lead will inevitably be asked questions about the financial viability of such a momentous administrative decision. For instance, the Minister concerned in Tamil Nadu, one of India's better performing States on educational indices, turned down demands of striking teachers for better pension explaining that wages, pensions, administrative costs and interest repayments already amounted to 71% of the State's expenditure. He asserted it leaves little for other developmental programmes.

Can India afford a similar policy?

India currently spends about 3% of its GDP on education, accounting for about 10% of the Centre's and States' budgetary expenses. Salaries constitute a large portion of this expenditure. The NITI Aayog in its report last year recommended that India raise this to 6% of GDP by 2022. Paying teachers (and doctors) significantly higher salaries may seem like a tall order, but the Central and State governments could consider rationalising both teacher recruitment and allocation of funds to existing programmes. Some programmes may have outlived their purpose, while others could be pared down or better directed. In fact, improving accountability in the system could free up huge savings. A World Bank study found that teacher absenteeism in India was nearly 24%, which costs the country about \$1.5 billion annually. Absenteeism could be the result of many factors, including teachers taking up a second job or farming to boost incomes, providing parental or nursing care in the absence of support systems, or lacking motivation. The incentive of an enviable income which is girded with unsparing accountability could mitigate many ills that plague the system, free fiscal space and help meet important developmental objectives.

Piloting a policy of such consequence may also be easier in a smaller State, say Delhi. Education is a key focus area for the Delhi government; the State invests 26% of

its annual budget in the sector (much more than the national average). The administration has also worked on improving teacher motivation as a strategy for better educational outcomes. The base has been set. The political leadership in the State, which is unafraid of the bold and big in the social sector, could build on this. Moreover, since the State is highly urban and well-connected, it would be easier to enforce accountability measures, which must underpin so heavy an expenditure.

Ultimately, no investment that enables an educated, healthy, responsible and happy community can be deemed too high by any society. The short-term GDP-minded would do well to consider these words in OECD's 'Education at a Glance 2018' report: "The quality of education can be a strong predictor of a country's economic prosperity. Shortfalls in academic achievement are extremely costly, as governments must then find ways to compensate for them, and ensure the social and economic welfare of all." Governments intent on improving the quality of education they offer must step out of incrementalism in policy-making. Improving teacher status by offering top notch salaries to attract the best to the profession could be that revolutionary policy-step forward, which Bhutan has shown a willingness to take.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Handshake in Korea

U.S. President Donald Trump took everyone by surprise by announcing a sudden meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and then coming face to face with him in the Demilitarised Zone ("After surprise Trump-Kim meeting, n-talks to resume," July 1). The decision taken by the two countries to resume talks is a positive development, especially after the deadlock in the Hanoi summit earlier this year. Mr. Trump also created history by becoming the first sitting U.S. President to enter the isolated country. Both sides should take substantial steps to bring peace to the Korean peninsula.

TALA B. RAGUNATH, Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu

The one-to-one meeting augurs well for thawing of relations between the U.S. and North Korea. It is encouraging that both the tough-talking and strong-willed leaders realise that there is no option to the resumption of stalled talks to settle differences and disputes. That the meeting lasted for nearly an hour indicates that it was more than a handshake and a photo-op. The three things that Mr. Trump did – the announcement of creation of a team to resume denuclearisation talks; the downplaying of latest short-range missile tests by North Korea; and the extension of an invite to Mr. Kim to visit the White House – showed his keenness to find some common ground and arrive at an agreement. The Korean peninsula is one of the

potential flashpoints today and any diplomatic step that heralds peace in the region must get international support.

G. DAVID MILTON, Maruthanode, Tamil Nadu

### The G20 spectacle

The G20 deliberations did not result in any substantial outcomes ("Among members," editorial, July 1). Mostly, they have only made the participating nations reiterate their stated positions. It is distressing that the leaders couldn't reach a consensus on the important issues of trade protectionism and climate change funding. Even the "very big deal" between India and the U.S. promised by President Donald Trump did not materialise. It is important that preparatory discussions are held prior to

such events. Otherwise, they'll remain grand spectacles for a few leaders to show off.

KOSARAJU CHANDRAMOULI, Hyderabad

### Water and voter

Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted two important issues in his recent *Mann Ki Baat* programme – water conservation and the need to deepen democracy ("Democracy is our heritage," July 1). As regards the first point, there can be no disagreement – many parts of our country are facing water scarcity, requiring people's participation to overcome the crisis. However, it was amusing to hear someone whose party enjoys a brute majority talking about not taking

democracy for granted. The people are not and will not be capable of going against democracy. They cannot snatch away the rights ensured by the Constitution – the political class can. The dark phase of Emergency was possible as the then ruling dispensation, not the people, had taken democracy for granted. As long as the ruling party is mindful of democratic spirit, there won't be any risk to its glory. But as Mr. Modi has rightly said, everyone should be alert enough not to allow it to be dented.

D.V.G. SANKARARAO, Vizianagaram, Andhra Pradesh

### Taste of defeat

India's first loss in the Cricket World Cup to favourites England made the weakness of its middle order apparent ("India loses to England,

tastes first defeat of the tournament," July 1). The debate on the 'No. 4' position is yet to be settled, especially following the exit of Vijay Shankar due to injury. M.S. Dhoni's role in the team also needs to be discussed and a potential alternative like Dinesh Karthik can be considered. One's place in the team shall not be reserved just for the sake of advice during referrals to the third umpire. Both the present captain and vice-captain have enough experience to spearhead the team. The bowling side appears alright but inconsistency in the death overs has cost the team dear, including in the match they lost on Sunday.

SATEESH REDDY, K. Nalgonda, Telangana

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