



## Preparedness pays off

India escaped the fury of the cyclone because of early warnings from the IMD

A potent cyclonic storm, Biparjoy, swept through Gujarat and parts of Rajasthan last week and while it did cause noticeable destruction to the infrastructure, scores of injuries and cattle deaths, there have been only two reported casualties. The India Meteorological Department began issuing its first reports on the cyclone's trajectory as early as June 8, and by June 11, the agency first indicated that the storm would not bypass India, as previously estimated, but would likely sharply swing towards coastal Saurashtra, Gujarat. The storm was also categorised as falling in the 'very severe' category – average wind speeds of over 115 kmph. The four days of lead time and an estimate of its strength gave enough time for district authorities in Gujarat to begin evacuating people – nearly 1,00,000 people in the coastal regions of the States were moved to shelters and close to 30 central and State disaster relief teams were kept ready. The railways cancelled several trains and fishermen too received advance warnings of the cyclone's impact, that kept them away from the sea.

There were power outages in 1,092 villages, about 5,120 electricity poles were knocked down and an estimated 186 transformers and 2,502 feeders were damaged in the Saurashtra-Kutch region. While shops and establishments have reportedly re-opened, a full return to normalcy is still awaited. Experience from recent years shows that cyclones, whether in the Bay of Bengal or the Arabian Sea, and their expected impact can be precisely gauged only 36-60 hours ahead. While a greater lead time should in theory mean more time for preparation, the nature of coastal infrastructure, inefficient communication networks and livelihood patterns, combined with the natural fury that cyclones bring about, mean that there are limits to precautionary measures. A cyclone in 1998, that struck Gujarat, reportedly killed nearly 3,000 people, and it can be safely said that India has moved beyond that era. However, there are newer threats on the horizon. Several studies warn that the Arabian Sea, thanks to the effects of global warming, is likely to be the fountainhead of many more severe cyclones. Frequent evacuation cannot be implemented as a permanent policy intervention and efforts must be made to ensure that coastal-regulation-zone norms that prescribe the kind of structures permissible at specific distances from the shoreline must be strictly implemented. The dwellings of rural, coastal inhabitants must be strengthened and natural bulwarks such as mangroves at wetlands must be buttressed for improved resilience.

## Massacre of innocents

Uganda and Congo must do more against Islamist militants

The killing of at least 41 people, including 38 students, in an attack on a school on the Uganda-Congo border by suspected Islamist militants is yet another cruel reminder of the worsening security situation in Africa. In recent years, Islamist and militant violence have picked up across the continent, from North Africa to Somalia, as governments look increasingly weaker. The border region between Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo is no stranger to militancy. Ugandan authorities have blamed the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), an Islamist militant group that largely operates from the Congo, for the attack. According to the police, a group attacked the Lhubiriha secondary school, located just two kilometres from the Congolese border, with machetes and grenades on Friday. Students were hacked, some kidnapped. The dormitory set on fire and the school looted. In 1998, the ADF had attacked another school on the Congolese border, where some 80 students were burnt to death. The outfit, which declared its allegiance to the Islamic State terrorist entity, in 2016, utilises such attacks for their shock value and to use kidnapped students as child soldiers.

The ADF was formed in the 1990s by a number of militant groups opposed to the rule of Ugandan leader Yoweri Museveni. Founded by a former catholic who had converted to Islam, the ADF's main recruiting plank was that Muslims, who make up some 14% of Uganda's population (official figures), are being discriminated against under Mr. Museveni's rule. After the 1998 school attack, the Ugandan and Congolese armies launched a joint operation, which forced the ADF to relocate to the jungles of eastern DR Congo. The group became active again in recent years as different al Qaeda and Islamic State-linked outfits emerged stronger in Africa, particularly after the North Atlantic Treaty Organization invasion of Libya that brought down the regime of Muammar Qadhafi, caused a civil war and triggered a proliferation of weapons in the hands of militant groups across the continent. The situation in Uganda is particularly grave. Under Mr. Museveni, who has been in power since 1986, the country has never been stable or peaceful. He has presented himself as an ally in the war against terror, while at the same time, turning his regime more repressive at home. In neighbouring Congo, another civil strife-hit country, the vast expanses of lawless eastern parts are a safe haven for militant extremists. Uganda and the Congo say they are committed to fighting militants including the ADF, but those words are written in sand unless the regimes take urgent measures to improve the quality of governance, implement law and order and launch joint operations, with help from international actors, against the growing networks of militants in the region.

# What Indians should be saying to the U.S. on June 21

When this April India surpassed China as the world's most populous nation, commentators were quick to declare this the "Indian Century", a plaudit primarily reflecting the so-called "demographic dividend". By 2030, the ratio of India's working-age population to its total population will reach 70%, the highest of any large economy in the world. This is a workforce of extraordinary magnitude – fully one quarter of the globe's – and a consumer class of equally extraordinary potential.

### A powerhouse of the world

There have been other Indian centuries, however – prior to the colonial depredations suffered before regaining independence in 1947. For a millennium before the arrival of the British, India, along with China, was a powerhouse; by the 1600s it is estimated to have possessed up to a quarter of the world's production capacity. The imperial capital in Delhi was the destination of ambassadors, from the court of King James I to that of the Ayutthaya emperor of today's Thailand; of poets and painters and musicians from across central and west Asia, and of craftsmen from as far afield as Italy, who brought with them the pietra dura artistry that adorns the Taj Mahal.

That century was only the last of many marked by breathtaking achievements. How even to begin an inventory? The invention of zero, making possible algebra and calculus and eventually the computer; the perfection of linguistics, matched by the West only in the 20th century; a language landscape vastly unlike Rome's or China's, which saw writers in dozens of languages producing works of transcendent beauty; weavers who clothed the world as far as Africa and beyond; metallurgists who made corrosion-resistant iron 2,000 years ago. And farmers who sent new cereals and cummin, cardamom, and other cultivars into the world – who also demonstrated how to live in harmony with animals hunted to extinction everywhere else.

Colonialism eroded most of the traditions that made India great, but after four decades of the most creative mobilisation for freedom in history, the country began in 1947 to reclaim its patrimony. Although the democratic constitution of independent India may have been written by an Indian who had studied at Columbia University, B.R. Ambedkar, the republican practices and federalism inherent in it have much deeper roots in the country; and while independent India's self-description, "unity in diversity," may have become a mere slogan today, it was exemplified throughout the long historical record of India's pluralism.

The remarkable achievements of India's distant and more recent past, above all, its singular achievement of learning to live with religious and cultural differences, are now at risk, under the government of Narendra Modi. From the moment he became Prime Minister in 2014 (after a youth spent in the ranks of a paramilitary organisation avowing Hindu nationalism, and then a long stint as Chief Minister of the State of Gujarat, where he was accused – and is still



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suspected by many despite his acquittal by courts – in the mass killing of Muslim citizens in 2002, Mr. Modi initiated a practice of intrusive state power and majoritarian nationalism that is unlike anything India has ever seen, while destroying much of what made India great.

### A systematic campaign

Last year, watchdog groups (including Genocide Watch, echoed by a Georgetown University study) issued warnings about the organised oppression of India's Muslims (14% of the population, nearly 200 million). It cited, in particular, the 2019 revocation of the special autonomous status of Kashmir, ending seven decades of protection; the Citizenship (Amendment) Act and the National Register of Citizens, together aimed at expelling Muslim refugees from Bangladesh but also reducing to second-class citizenship, millions of Indian Muslims, who lacked documents that many Indians lack; and anti-conversion laws, which the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom has found to be inconsistent with human rights.

And this is to say nothing of daily arrests and detention of Muslims on no lawful grounds, and repeated beatings and lynchings of Muslim shopkeepers and tradesmen. In a word, Mr. Modi's government persecutes Muslims both by the construction of laws and governmental practices that violate human rights, while maintaining silence over the atrocities committed against them by the lethal energies its own religious nationalism has unleashed.

Under Mr. Modi, the government has pursued a systematic campaign to destroy civil society, outlawing non-governmental organisations (NGOs), undermining universities, think tanks, and research centres, and harassing the independent press.

Last winter in its documentary, 'India: the Modi Question', the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) reviewed a British government document from 2002 that found Mr. Modi "directly responsible" for the slaughter of Muslims during the Gujarat riots, and that the violence had "all the hallmarks of genocide". Two months later, the Mumbai and New Delhi offices of the BBC were raided by the Central Board of Direct Taxes, citing "irregularities and discrepancies" in the broadcaster's taxes.

Comparable tactics have been used against environmental groups, including Oxfam India, Environics Trust, and the Legal Initiative for Forest and Environment (LIFE), whose director, the lawyer Ritwick Dutta, has been persecuted by the Central Bureau of Investigation, as well as against the Centre for Policy Research (CPR), India's leading public policy think tank. In each case, their foreign contribution licence was cancelled, effectively ending their capacity to function.

There has been a concentrated attack to undermine the intellectual and administrative autonomy of the Jawaharlal Nehru University, the most distinguished institution of higher education in the country, and research institutes such as the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in New Delhi and the Centre for Studies

Is this the Indian century?

# Responsibility and the complexities of climate leadership

Over the last few weeks, there has been an increasingly vocal campaign to unseat the President-Designate of COP28, Minister Sultan Al-Jaber of the host nation, the United Arab Emirates (UAE). This includes a recent letter from United States and European parliamentarians calling for his removal on the grounds that he is CEO of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company. As representatives of developing countries in the climate change front line, i.e., Bangladesh and the Maldives, and as leaders of the Climate Vulnerable Forum, a group of 58 of the world's most climate vulnerable countries hosting 1.5 billion of the world's poorest people, we know only too well the urgency of the climate challenge. We have endured climate-related economic losses of \$500 billion in the last two decades alone.

### This is a journey of unity

However, we also recognise that this journey, towards a clean energy future, is one we must embark on together. Fossil fuel-dependent economies are critical to these efforts, and they clearly have a more difficult task defining their energy transition strategy. It is important to avoid division and we must continue to engage our fellow parties at COP28 and elsewhere on the best way forward for their economies and for the planet.

Sultan Al-Jaber has led Masdar, the renewable energy company which has made huge investments in solar and wind projects. The UAE's Barakah nuclear power plant, which was recently opened, generates 6 gigawatts (5.6 or 5.8?) of clean power. Masdar and the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA)



**Sheikh Hasina**

is the Prime Minister of Bangladesh



**Mohamed Nasheed**

is Speaker of the Maldivian Parliament and a former President of the Maldives

The misplaced campaign to unseat the President-Designate of COP28 could result in setbacks to emissions cuts and climate action

recently signed an agreement aiming to triple global renewable energy capacity by 2030. This is leadership of our global clean energy future, in the most practical sense.

Finance will be crucial for COP28. Our programme of Climate Prosperity Plans, including the Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan adopted in Bangladesh, seeks to generate inward investment of tens of trillions of dollars in building clean energy infrastructure. This climate prosperity agenda recognises that economic growth for the poorest countries is non-negotiable, and that our prospects should not be curtailed so that the rich countries can keep on polluting.

Luckily we do not seek coal, oil and gas; we seek electricity, transport and industry, all of which can now be increasingly delivered with clean energy. We seek the UAE's leadership in helping secure investments supported by sovereign wealth funds and multilateral development banks which can deliver the huge boost in climate prosperity we need.

### Debt is a barrier

Many of our nations are also crippled by unsustainable debts, including debts which are becoming unpayable due to climate damages largely caused by emissions elsewhere. Rather than going one by one over the financial cliff, we urgently need a collective approach which recognises the debt problem and the barrier it now poses to clean energy investment and climate adaptation. Sovereign wealth funds and multilateral development banks (MDBs) could assist in de-risking restructured debts and insuring re-issued climate bonds, as Sultan

Al-Jaber has suggested. Sultan Al-Jaber can now demonstrate to Europe and North America what leadership really means by explicitly signalling to sovereign wealth funds and MDBs that he wants to see their full participation. We further call on the UAE leadership for a clean energy target starting in 2025, transforming the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company into the Abu Dhabi Clean Energy and Grid Company by 2030, and towards global financial reform including of the International Monetary Fund.

Thus, finance continues to be central to the COP outcome. The Loss and Damage fund that was secured last year in Sharm El-Sheikh must not be just be another empty bank account, and fossil fuels-dependent economies can demonstrate their commitment to a shared future by making subscriptions to support funding for climate damages in the most vulnerable countries, well in advance of the COP.

There are no winners and losers in a global climate breakdown, the oil industry included. As representatives of the most climate vulnerable developing nations, we call on American and European parliamentarians to reconsider their position. Instead of seeking to exclude relevant parties and stakeholders, we believe everyone should participate in decisions with such important ramifications.

Holding COP28 in the UAE, and with Sultan Al-Jaber as COP President-Designate, may well be an opportunity to engage the fossil fuels industry to make some significant and quantifiable commitments to emissions cuts and climate action in general. Time is running out, and we all need to work together to save the 1.5°C Paris target before it is too late.

Some of these abuses and assaults have targeted legitimate opposition to the activities of one company: Adani Enterprises, whose director is a Modi intimate. This global conglomerate, headquartered in India, has been much in the news. In November, *The New York Times* reported that the company's president, Gautam Adani, was named the richest man in Asia. Soon thereafter a New York financial research firm demonstrated that he had been running "the largest con in corporate history". What should also have been making news are Mr. Adani's coal mines, and his close ties to Mr. Modi. NGOs have been investigating Mr. Adani's staggering environmental destruction – including the devastation of some of the most biodiverse regions of the world, in eastern India and the wholesale elimination of villages and indigenous lifeways – in his pursuit of some of the world's dirtiest coal. Yet, it is Mr. Adani's critics whom the government has punished, as *The Washington Post* has reported, not the con that he perpetrated, nor the Prime Minister, who has strenuously helped him secure the lucrative coal deals.

The religious persecution, the attacks on NGOs, independent research centres, and the press are bad enough. The furthering of environmental chaos, of potentially global proportions but particularly catastrophic for India itself – Mr. Adani has been named by Oxfam as the third most culpable carbon billionaire in the world – shows the true scope of the problem.

As Chief Minister, Mr. Modi was denied a visa to the United States in 2005 because of his perceived involvement in the Gujarat pogrom. This week he arrives on a state visit to the United States, despite the fact that his human rights and civil liberties record since being elected Prime Minister in 2014 is in many ways worse. The plain fact is that this record has been totally ignored by Presidents Barack Obama, Donald Trump, and Joe Biden. If, as the White House has said, the Indian leader will be visiting in order to "strengthen our two countries' shared commitment to a free, open, prosperous, and secure Indo-Pacific", America's leaders must start talking seriously about what freedom and openness now mean in India. India will only inaugurate an 'Indian century' if its great traditions of pluralism and respect for diversity can be recovered.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Political battleground

It is unfortunate that textbooks have now become the new political battlegrounds, with political parties influencing what young minds should study ('South' page, "Karnataka govt. orders textbook revision with 18 changes", June 18). Today's student is tomorrow's leader. Our

political leaders must note that books and pens must be used to change the world for the better and not used to cross swords, with students as victims.

**T.S. Karthik,**  
Chennai

### Blocked routes

It is surprising that the official reaction to the issue

of elephants straying into human habitations in the Anaikatti area of the Tamil Nadu-Kerala border area is evasive ('South' page, June 18). During a recent visit to the place, I found almost the entire stretch of road leading to Kerala through Anaikatti to have barbed/electric wire fencing to ensure that elephants do

not cross from one side to the other, even though it is their normal path. This is forcing elephants to take other routes, thus leading to man-animal conflict.

**Soundarrajan,**  
Chennai

### Candid talk

Ravichandran Ashwin's candid interview ('Sport'

page, June 16) confirms his status not only as a top-ranked bowler in the world but also as a seasoned cricketer. But, not playing your best spinner was questionable. Such a risk need not have been taken in a final of a world championship. It has become clear that Ashwin's days are numbered. That he

is mature enough to accept it is heart-warming.

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Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address.