



## Mixed messaging

The Centre seems unclear about the political process needed for normalcy in J&K

Union Home Minister Amit Shah's first visit to Jammu & Kashmir after August 5, 2019 when Parliament diluted Article 370 of the Constitution that granted it a "special status" and downgraded and bifurcated the State into two Union Territories, took place against the grim background of the killings of 11 civilians by terrorists in one month. J&K has been under central rule since June 2018 and the political and parliamentary subterfuge in reorganising the erstwhile State still rankles as a discordant chapter of India's experiments in federalism. Mr. Shah used the three-day visit to underscore the progress J&K has made since its reorganisation – the uptick in tourist inflow and the string of development and welfare projects. As for the stringent curbs that the people have had to endure meanwhile, Mr. Shah said those were bitter pills that helped save lives. Through a series of public engagements and official functions in Jammu and the Valley, the Home Minister's single-minded focus was on reiterating the Bharatiya Janata Party's political narrative on Kashmir. He said "three families" had held J&K to ransom until the party came to its rescue. Whether or not politics in J&K has been any more or less corrupt than other parts of the country is anyone's guess, but it is a matter of fact that the former State had a poverty rate of 10.35% against the national average of 21.92%.

The Centre has been successful in removing the question of independence or even autonomy from the conversation on Kashmir. But to pretend that there is no political question in Kashmir to be discussed or resolved is reckless. Besides trying to systematically delegitimise the mainstream parties, the BJP policy also sought to build an entirely new political apparatus in the Union Territory. Mr. Shah ruled out any talks with Pakistan, but said he was willing to talk to the youth of Kashmir. That promise can be meaningful only with immediate action. Now that the Centre has made the restoration of statehood as the endgame of an unclear political process, it must establish a mechanism for dialogue with the people. In June, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had met political leaders from J&K in Delhi but there has been no follow up to that since then. On the contrary, Mr. Shah's messaging over three days emphasised the divisions between the people of the Valley and Jammu, and berated political leaders. True, he made the right gestures in terms of visiting victims of recent violence and interactions with locals but that is far from enough. More than 700 people had to be detained ahead of his visit, which is instructive of the continuing volatility in the Valley. Mr. Shah's trip is the latest in a series of visits by Union Ministers in recent weeks. While the Centre's outreach is indeed a welcome step, it needs to be more honest and open to be effective.

## End the impasse

A solution is needed for core issues concerning farmers, and not merely for road blocks

The time may have come for a more concerted effort by the Government and the protesting farmers to find a solution to the prolonged impasse over the three agriculture-related laws enacted last year. The Supreme Court has emphasised that public roads cannot be blocked indefinitely by protesters. In an observation in the context of more petitions from members of the public, complaining that their right of free movement has been curtailed by the ongoing protests by farmers, the Court has said a solution has to be found, that roads cannot be blocked for long and there is no reason for it to lay down the law again and again. The reference was to last year's judgment on the Shaheen Bagh protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, wherein it was held that public ways and public spaces cannot be blocked indefinitely even during a peaceful protest. The observation can be seen either as a disapproval of the tactic of holding interminable protests or as an implicit criticism of the Government for being unable to find a solution to the farmers' grievances. Even while denying that they are responsible for the hardship faced by the public, and blaming the police for the blockade, the farmers say they should be allowed to continue their agitation at the Ramlila Maidan. However, the Government will have none of it, recalling the unsavoury incidents that took place on Republic Day when the protest rolled into the Capital.

The conflict between the two competing rights – freedom to protest and the right to free movement of the public – is not the only aspect that requires immediate attention. There seems to be no attempt to break the deadlock on the core issue, with the farmers demanding an outright repeal of the laws and statutory validation for the claim that the MSP regime will not come to an end. Late last year, the protesting farmers and Union Ministers did come to a partial agreement on decriminalising stubble-burning and safeguarding power subsidies, but the two core demands have not seen any breakthrough. It is not out of place to recall that an expert committee constituted by the Court has submitted its report, but nothing has been heard about it after that. To an extent, the fact that the Court has not taken it up again or made the report public may be a factor in the continuing impasse. An expedited hearing that involves further review of the panel's recommendations, or any such similar initiative from the Government, is needed to arrive at a solution. The objective must not be merely to resolve the incidental issue of blocked roads, but to reconcile or eliminate the deep differences over what the Government sees as necessary reforms in the farm sector. Any reform that seeks to eliminate distortions in the sector must also win the confidence of farmers, the principal stakeholders.

# The Perils of an Unresolved Boundary

Nirupama Rao looks at the India-China relationship of the 1950s-60s, the border issue, and negotiations on Tibet



NIRUPAMA RAO

*The India-China relationship is in a difficult place, with the past shadowing the present. The period from 1949 to 1962 is crucial as Jawaharlal Nehru sought, albeit unsuccessfully, to establish a workable relationship with the Chinese. Nirupama Rao, former Foreign Secretary and Ambassador to China, traces the history of Tibet, the genesis of the McMahon Line, Communist China's military takeover and domination of Tibet, and the border row between India and China in her new book, The Fractured Himalaya. An excerpt from the book:*

It was to be over a year before negotiations between India and China on relations between India and Tibet opened in Beijing. These commenced on December 31, 1953. Jawaharlal Nehru's approach to frontier questions between India and China was already well-entrenched by then. Tibet had become more a 'psychological' buffer from a political one during British rule – psychological because Nehru was convinced that any military attack on India from Tibet was not feasible. For him, while the status of Tibet and Tibetan autonomy, as also Indian interests in Tibet inherited from the British were issues for discussion with China, the frontier, as his biographer S. Gopal noted, 'was firm, well-known and beyond dispute'.

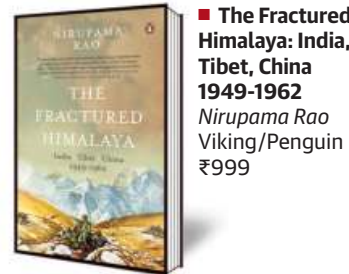
Loosely put, Nehru's attitude was that there was no room for controversy over the McMahon Line: 'Our maps show that the McMahon Line is our boundary and that is our boundary – map or no map. That fact remains and we stand by that boundary, and we will not allow anybody to come across that boundary.' Gopal notes

that this assertion of rights was more definite regarding the eastern sector of the boundary.

### Flawed advice

The problem lay in the fact that, except for Sikkim, the border had not been demarcated – jointly with China – on the ground; the boundary in the western and middle sectors had not been defined in detail by treaty and only, as Nehru stated, by custom, usage and tradition. The McMahon Line was shown only on a map that the Chinese government had initialled in 1914 but not subsequently accepted. The Chinese would set their strategy in such a way subsequently, when the officials of the two sides met in 1960, to seek 'fresh acceptance of every stretch' of the boundary. K.M. Panikkar, without the benefit of hindsight, only had this advice to give Nehru: the issue would pose no difficulty. Could Panikkar [the first Indian Ambassador to China] have sensed the actual Chinese attitude? In retrospect, his advice to Nehru would have serious repercussions for India. As advice, it was fatally flawed.

Throughout his stay in China, Panikkar took the stand that the Tibetan issue was a simple one. Leaders like Zhou Enlai, in his view, recognised the 'legitimacy' of India's trade and cultural interests in Tibet and only suggested that the political office in Lhasa, 'an office of dubious legality' in Panikkar's words, should be regularised by its transformation into an Indian Consulate-General. Other posts and institutions like the telegraph lines set up in the British era, the military escort at Yadong in the Chumbi Valley, 'were to be abolished quietly in time', and the trade agents in Tibet and their subordinate agencies brought 'within the framework of normal consular relations'. In his seeming obsession with the big picture of two big Asian nations forging deeper understanding and cooperation, Panikkar was content to say that he left 'no outstanding issue' pending at the time of his depart-



■ **The Fractured Himalaya: Tibet, China 1949-1962**  
Nirupama Rao  
Viking/Penguin  
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### EXTRACT

ture. It was a strategic miscalculation which would have serious consequences.

When Zhou Enlai told Panikkar in September 1951 in a 'shrouded sentence' that the question of the stabilisation of the Tibetan frontier – a matter of common interest to India, Nepal and China – could be settled by discussion between the three countries, it was assumed, in diplomatic guesswork, that stabilisation meant that there was no territorial dispute between India and China.

### 'Cunning' move

Many records indicate that the view of the officials in the Ministry of External Affairs was that while negotiations for an agreement between India and China on Tibet were necessary, they should also include a border settlement. There should be a *quid pro quo* for India's recognition of Chinese sovereignty over Tibet. A note by the Foreign Secretary, K.P.S. Menon on April 11, 1952 observed that the

Chinese government's attitude was far from straightforward, and could, in fact, be termed 'cunning'. A child could see through the game, said Menon. Zhou Enlai had suggested in September 1951 that India's position in Tibet should be regularised and the 'boundary with Tibet stabilised'. India had said immediately that 'we were ready for discussions' but there had been no response from the Chinese. The latter were saying that 'they [the Chinese] have been in Tibet only for a short while and want more time to study the problem.' Menon was suspicious of Chinese irredentism, and a whispering campaign was already doing the rounds in Lhasa that not only Tibet, but Sikkim and Bhutan, and even the Darjeeling-Kalimpong area 'would soon be liberated.' This would encourage the Tibetans to lay their hands on Tawang and other disputed areas to the south of the McMahon Line. 'The Chinese have long memories; irredentism has always played a part in the policy of the Chinese government whether imperial, Guomindang or Communist.' India was clearly inviting trouble when it was decided that the border issue would not figure in the negotiations on Tibet. Responding positively to the Chinese move for an agreement on Tibet was seen essentially as a means of reducing Chinese pressure on the border, and as 'helping' the Tibetans within a larger policy framework of coaxing the Chinese out of their isolation.

### Piecemeal solution

The 'knight-administrator' (called thus because of his British knight-hood and being a member of the Indian Civil Service) Sir Girija Shankar Bajpai was by now the Governor of Bombay. He continued to be in the picture regarding Tibet. He had noticed that the list of pending issues proposed for discussion with the Chinese did not include the question of the frontier with Tibet. His view, as expressed to the Foreign Secretary, was that 'This business of Sino-Indian relations over Tibet, would, in my judgement, be best handled comprehensively and not piecemeal', implying that the question of the border should not be left aside. Perhaps, as a result of Bajpai's letter, the Prime Minister in a note to the Foreign Secretary on 23 July, expressed his inclination that the frontier should be mentioned in the talks with the Chinese. Panikkar's reasons for not advancing this subject, be what they may, were appreciated but Nehru felt 'that our attempt at being clever might overreach itself' and that it was better to be absolutely straight and frank about the issue with the Chinese.

### Nehru's misgivings

This was not the first time that Nehru had expressed some misgivings on the issue. In June of the same year, he had in a message to Panikkar said it 'was odd' that Zhou Enlai had made no reference to the frontier in his discussions with the Ambassador. He did not like Zhou's silence in the matter, he added, since the Indian government had made it clear in Parliament that not only the direct frontier with Tibet, but also the frontiers of Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim, should remain unchanged. Panikkar's response was to state that the Chinese were aware of India's interest in the integrity of Nepal and had not raised any question about it. Neither had they objected to the PM's public statements on the issue. Panikkar said he did not want to make this a subject for further discussion. India should stick to the position that the frontier had been defined 'and there is nothing for us to discuss'. It would be legitimate 'to presume that Chou En Lai's silence on this point and his NOT having even once alluded to Sikkim or Bhutan at any time even indirectly during our conversation would mean acquiescence in, if NOT acceptance of our position.' The Prime Minister did not demur further.

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# A reminder that India still trails in the hunger fight

The Government's objection to the methodology of the Global Hunger Index is not based on facts



DIPA SINHA

The Global Hunger Report (GHR) has once again made headlines in India for the country's poor ranking in terms of the Global Hunger Index (GHI). The report ranks India at 101 out of 116 countries, with the country falling in the category of having a 'serious' hunger situation. The ranks are not comparable across years because of various methodological issues and so it is wrong to say that India's standing has fallen from 94 (out of 107) in 2020. However, it is true that year after year, India ranks at the lower end – below a number of other countries that are poorer in terms of per capita incomes. This in itself is cause for concern.

### The indicators

The Government of India, through a press release, refuted the GHI, claiming that it is 'devoid of ground reality' and based on 'unscientific' methodology. The GHI is 'based on four indicators – percentage of undernourished in the population (PoU); percentage of children under five years who suffer from wasting (low weight-for-height); percentage of children under five years who suffer from stunting (low height-for-age), and percentage of children who die before the age of five (child mortality)'. The first and the last indica-

tors have a weight of one-third each and the two child malnutrition indicators account for one-sixth weightage each in the final GHI, where each indicator is standardised based on thresholds set slightly above the highest country-level values. Looking at each of these indicators separately, India shows a worsening in PoU and childhood wasting in comparison with 2012. It is the PoU figure of 15.3% for 2018-20 that the Government is contesting.

### From official data sources

The Government's objection to the methodology, that "They have based their assessment on the results of a 'four question' opinion poll, which was conducted telephonically by Gallup", is not based on facts. The report is not based on the Gallup poll; rather, it is on the PoU data that the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) puts out regularly (as has also been clarified by the publishing agencies). PoU, according to the FAO, 'is an estimate of the proportion of the population whose habitual food consumption is insufficient to provide the dietary energy levels that are required to maintain a normal active and healthy life'. PoU is estimated taking into account a number of factors such as food availability, food consumption patterns, income levels and distribution, population structure, etc. All the data used are from official data sources of respective national governments. In the absence of food consumption data in most countries, this indicator is an estimate based on a modelling exercise us-



ing available data; therefore, there is some margin of error. Most of the criticism of the FAO's PoU data has been about how it underestimates hunger rather than over. Therefore, while there is scope for a valid discussion on the GHI methodology and its limitations, this objection by the Government is not warranted.

### Slow rate of progress

The main message that the GHR gives is to once again remind us that India has not been very successful in tackling the issue of hunger and that the rate of progress is very slow. Comparable values of the index have been given in the report for four years, i.e., 2000, 2006, 2012 and 2021. While the GHI improved from 37.4 to 28.8 during 2006-12, the improvement is only from 28.8 to 27.5 between 2012-21. The PoU data show that the proportion of undernourished population showed a declining trend up to 2016-18 when it reached the lowest level of 13.8%, after which there is an increase to 14% for 2017-19 and 15.3% for 2018-20. Other data also broadly validate these findings. The partial results of the National Family Health

Survey-5 (2019-20) also show that stunting and wasting indicators have stagnated or declined for most States for which data is available. The leaked report of the consumption expenditure survey (2017-18) also showed that rural consumption had fallen between 2012-18 and urban consumption showed a very slight increase.

### A period before the pandemic

It must also be remembered that all the data are for the period before the COVID-19 pandemic. There were many indications based on nationally representative data – such as from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy and various field surveys conducted by research organisations, academics and civil society groups – that the situation of food insecurity at the end of the year 2020 was concerning, and things are most likely to have become worse after the second wave. Many of these surveys find that over 60% of the respondents say that they are eating less than before the national lockdown in 2020. Services such as the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) and school mid-day meals continue to be disrupted in most areas, denying crores of children the one nutritious meal a day they earlier had access to. It would, therefore, not be surprising if national surveys (hopefully conducted soon) show a further slowdown in improvement in malnutrition.

The novel coronavirus pandemic has affected food security and nutrition across the world. In countries such as India – where the situation was also already poor to begin with – the impact is prob-

ably worse. The response cannot be one of denial; rather, what is needed are measures to ensure rapid recovery. It has been pointed out by many that the relief measures of the Government, so far, have been inadequate in comparison to the scale of the problem.

### Cuts for schemes

The only substantial measure has been the provision of additional free foodgrains through the Public Distribution System (PDS), and even this has been lacking. It leaves out about 40% of the population, many of whom are in need and includes only cereals. Also, as of now, it ends in November 2021. At the same time, inflation in other foods, especially edible oils, has also been very high affecting people's ability to afford healthy diets. On the one hand, while we need additional investments and greater priority for food, nutrition and social protection schemes, Budget 2021 saw cuts in real terms for schemes such as the ICDS and the mid-day meal.

The argument that the GHI is an indicator of undernutrition and not hunger, is only diverting attention away from more substantial issues. Of course, malnutrition is affected by a number of factors (such as health, sanitation, etc.) other than food consumption alone, but that in no way means that healthy diets are not central. There is no denying that diverse nutritious diets for all Indians still remain a distant dream.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### State of the Congress

A number of articles and letters have been published on the subject of the Indian National Congress in this daily. It goes without saying that ever since Indira Gandhi established her supremacy in the Congress, it ceased to be a democratic outfit and virtually became her family's fiefdom except for the brief interregnum during the prime ministership of P.V. Narasimha Rao whom the party had virtually

'disowned and discarded'. It has become virtually impossible to bring out the party from such a predicament as Congresspersons are mentally incapable of accepting any leader other than anyone from the Nehru-Gandhi family. If the Congress led by great men like Mahatma Gandhi won freedom for the country, the same party cannot even dare to think of securing independence from the dynasty. The Congress is

unlikely to have a renaissance as long as the Gandhis consider that they are the party and the party is theirs.

C.G. KURIAKOSE,  
Malippara, Kothamangalam, Kerala

### On Sunday, at Dubai

There is not too much to debate on India's big loss to Pakistan in the ICC T20 World Cup opener. The match was a classic example of an overdue application of the law of averages. It was by all

means Pakistan's day and it is meaningless to erase the glitter of its victory by pointing one's finger to any inadequacy in India's bowling or batting departments. Virat Kohli did not move a wrong foot as captain either. The toss cannot be talked about as vital as Pakistan was ruthless in its goal to vanquish India. India lost just another match and it is as simple as that.

SANATH KUMAR T.S.,  
Thrissur, Kerala

The result is a great disappointment for fans in India but it is an undeniable fact that Babar Azam and team exhibited unparalleled professionalism in their approach to traumatise Virat Kohli and his men. It was a game of complete mastery on Sunday night.

S. SESHADRI,  
Chennai

Indian cricket fans would definitely like to forget the match but the fact is that the team that played better won.

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It is unfortunate that instead of considering the game as just a match there has been much hype created around it. Added to this have been debates and data calculations of past matches as if Sunday was the last and final match ever to be played between the two teams. Miscalculations led India to lose. But there is always another chance!

M. PRAADYU,  
Thalikkavu, Kannur, Kerala