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# Index

|   |    |
|---|----|
| India's move on Article 370 is 'illegal and invalid', says China .....            | 2  |
| New equality, enduring changes .....  | 4  |
| The urban migrant and the 'ritual' tug of home .....                              | 6  |
| India cancels Chinese smart meters contract, snap bids to be called shortly ..... | 10 |
| A 'generational catastrophe' .....  | 12 |
| Pakistan's cartographic absurdity .....   | 14 |

## INDIA'S MOVE ON ARTICLE 370 IS 'ILLEGAL AND INVALID', SAYS CHINA

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - China

India on Wednesday told China “not to comment on the internal affairs” of other countries, in response to Beijing describing the dilution of Article 370, on the one-year anniversary of the move, as being “illegal and invalid”.

China had “no *locus standi*” on the matter, the Ministry of External Affairs said.

In a statement in Beijing, in response to a question from the Pakistani media, the Chinese Foreign Ministry repeated its opposition to “any unilateral change to the status quo” in Jammu and Kashmir, echoing its statements on the issue last year.

“China follows closely the situation in the Kashmir region,” Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said on Wednesday. “Our position is consistent and clear. This issue is a dispute left over from history between Pakistan and India. That is an objective fact established by the UN Charter, UN Security Council resolutions and bilateral agreements between Pakistan and India. Any unilateral change to the *status quo* is illegal and invalid.”

MEA spokesperson Anurag Srivastava said India had “noted the comments of the Chinese MFA spokesperson on the Indian Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir”.

“The Chinese side has no *locus standi* whatsoever on this matter and is advised not to comment on the internal affairs of other nations,” he said.

Last year, Beijing had particularly voiced its opposition to the creation of a Union Territory in Ladakh, which included within its boundaries the Aksai Chin region, now occupied by China, although India had pointed out to China that the change had not altered India’s external boundaries or its territorial claims in any way. Wednesday’s statement from Beijing did not mention Ladakh.

Mr. Wang said the Kashmir issue “should be properly resolved peacefully through dialogue and consultation between the parties concerned”.

“Pakistan and India are neighbours that cannot be moved away,” he said. “Peaceful coexistence serves the fundamental interests of both and the common aspiration of the international community. China hopes that they can properly handle the differences through dialogue, improve relations, and jointly safeguard peace, stability and development of both countries and the wider region.”

The Foreign Ministry did not, however, respond to a question on a new map issued by Pakistan on Tuesday and refrained from criticising the move. “I have already stated China’s position on the Kashmir issue,” Mr. Wang said, adding he would not repeat the statement.

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## NEW EQUALITY, ENDURING CHANGES

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Indian Constitution - Features & Significant Provisions related to The Preamble, Union & its Territories and The Citizenship

August 5 marked the first anniversary of the abrogation of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir and conversion of the erstwhile state into two Union Territories — Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. But more than all this, it has meant the constitutional mainstreaming of this erstwhile state and an end to the shameful, discriminatory and undemocratic policies pursued by an entrenched elite for seven decades.

In one sudden political strike, executed with surgical precision a year ago, Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) and Home Minister Amit Shah abrogated the provisions — [Article 370](#) and [Article 35A](#) — that went against the core values of our Constitution and ensured that finally everyone in Jammu and Kashmir secured the rights and privileges available to citizens all over the country.

Looking at the changes brought about in the past 12 months, it is obvious that the Union government has pulled out all the stops to ensure that everyone living in the two Union Territories would get a sense of the egalitarian principles that are firmly embedded in India's Constitution. These developments extend to a wide range of issues like social and political equality, education, jobs, reservations and other rights enjoyed by the underprivileged in the rest of the country.

It is indeed creditable that the government has ensured that all this has been achieved within a span of 12 months. For the first time after seven decades, the Indian Constitution and all the 890 Central laws are fully applicable to J&K. This has meant the application of 170 more Central laws to J&K, including progressive laws such as the Scheduled Caste and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1954, the Whistle Blowers Protection Act, 2014, the National Commission for Safai Karamcharis Act, 1993, the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forests Rights) Act, 2007, the National Commission for Minorities Act, and the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009.

The question we need to ask is why the leadership of the Congress, Left parties and the state parties did not allow such crucial laws which protect the Dalits and other disadvantaged groups to be implemented in the erstwhile state for all these years. Another discriminatory legal provision, which prevented women in J&K from retaining their rights if they married outside the state, has been put to an end.

The treatment meted out to around 10,000 municipal workers (safai karamcharis) in the erstwhile state was equally shameful. They were denied citizenship, access to education and jobs. Now, the municipal workers have become legitimate domiciles in the Union Territory with access to all rights and privileges and the Dalits and the tribal communities have got their due, as in other states. How could such discrimination happen within the geography of independent, democratic India all these years? What explanation do the Nehru-Gandhis, the Abdullahs, the Muftis, the Congress Party, the communists and their fellow travellers have for this? Why did the communists, the so-called standard-bearers of the working class, not take up the cause of the Dalits and safai karamcharis in J&K?

Apart from these initiatives, the last 12 months have seen several other momentous developments. The first of these is the rehabilitation of the Kashmiri Pandits, who were hounded out of the Valley 30 years ago by militants. The ethnic cleansing of nearly four lakh Kashmiris belonging to the Hindu minority remained a blot on India's secular credentials. In the year gone

by, 4,000 of them have got jobs in the UT and many others are listed for employment. Also, over 20,000 refugees from West Pakistan, who were treated as aliens in their own country and denied all rights, have been given domicile rights and financial assistance of Rs 5.50 lakh per family.

The follow-up after the constitution of the two Union Territories has been swift. Simple rules have been formulated for issuing domicile certificates — this will create a much-needed level-playing field for all residents. The J&K government has also initiated a massive recruitment drive to fill up 10,000 vacancies in the local government; another drive to fill up 25,000 posts is in the pipeline. Also on the anvil are revised rules to enable the hitherto disadvantaged groups like Scheduled Tribes, OBCs and economically weaker sections to get employment.

Other measures which have ensured mainstreaming of the region are the enforcement of the Right to Information Act, 2005, direct supervision of the Central Vigilance Commission with regard to anti-corruption cases and the setting up of the 18th Bench of the Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) for the UTs of J&K and Ladakh.

The decision to make Ladakh a separate Union Territory has been hailed by the people of the region. It seemed inevitable because of the discrimination suffered by the region at the hands of the political leadership of the erstwhile state. The Union government has initiated innumerable measures to put Ladakh on the road to development. This includes work on massive infrastructure projects in both the UTs.

One year ago, the CPM described the abrogation as “an attack on democracy, secularism and the Constitution”. Equally amusing was the statement of the Congress leader, Rahul Gandhi that “the nation is made by its people, not plots of land”. Really? If so, are not the Kashmiri Pandits, Dalits, tribal folk, municipal workers, people?

As one sees the fundamental changes brought about in the two UTs, they remind us of the monstrous failure of the Congress leadership which lacked the courage and confidence to correct these wrongs and hence chose to tout pusillanimity as an act of great statesmanship. As a result, J&K slipped away from the liberal, secular and democratic traditions that India stood for. But that is now a thing of the past. It is now time to celebrate the new beginning.

***The writer is former chairman, Prasar Bharati***

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# THE URBAN MIGRANT AND THE 'RITUAL' TUG OF HOME

Relevant for: null | Topic: Urbanization, their problems and their remedies incl. Migration & Smart Cities

Did our urban, means-ends rationality get it wrong again? Was it lockdown-related job loss that poisoned the well and led migrant workers, mostly single men, to head for their villages? Or, was there something non-economic, not quite this-worldly either, that turned their stomachs?

The migrant worker, when in crisis, is not seeking material help from his family in the village; they are, anyway, much poorer than he is. What disturbs him profoundly at such times is the fear of dying alone with nobody to perform the rites for him.

Also read | [Cabinet clears affordable rental housing for urban migrants](#)

In nearly every religion, the family plays a central role in the observance of mortuary rituals. Not just that, these have to be performed correctly so that the departed soul can easily negotiate the afterlife.

It is considerations of this kind, more than financial hardship, that prompt single migrant workers to leave for their rural homes. The Indian labouring classes are much less rattled by joblessness as unemployment is a frequent, if unwelcome, visitor at their door.

This is clearly an outcome of the fact that 93% of our economy is informal. Ironically, the Industrial Disputes Act encourages this trend. It mandates employers to pay severance wages, and other benefits, only if workers are hired, and on the rolls, continuously for over 248 days.

This law has had the unintended consequence of making it attractive for management to periodically flip labour around. As a result, only a minuscule minority stays employed for long.

Also read | [After turning their backs during lockdown, cities now want migrant workers back](#)

Most other workers suffer joblessness for long periods in the bear pit called the city. Yet, it took just two days of the lockdown for a large number of male workers to start the trudge to their respective villages.

When faced with an imminent threat to life, the tug of home and family is much stronger for the migrant worker than the industrial glue that comes with an urban occupation. This job could be well paid and the worker may have even held it for some time.

There are no laboratory conditions to settle this issue, but a comparative approach might help. In Surat in 1979, when there was a widespread fear that a satellite was going to fall smack in the city centre, causing untold deaths, a large number of migrants there left for their villages.

Again, in Surat, in 1994, the plague scare prompted over 6,00,000 to leave their work stations for the railway station. In both these instances, jobs were not threatened, but there was this perceived fear of death.

On the other hand, when demonetisation happened in 2016, only a few migrant workers left because this distress was primarily economic, without a threat to life. Later, in 2020, when COVID-19 started killing wantonly, there was a radical shift; now, men without families went

home because they did not want to die alone.

### Lockdown displaces lakhs of migrants

We missed paying attention to this fact in the latest pandemic exodus because it was accompanied by an economic downturn. It also satisfied our middle-class mentality because, from our angle of vision, economic lenses provide the right focal point.

For the better off, even a temporary job loss can be traumatic. Besides a bruised self-esteem, there are also equated monthly instalments, or EMIs and mortgages to be paid. It is not uncommon, under these conditions, for a middle class person to turn to the family, as the first port of call.

A 2018 CBRE survey shows that 80% of young Indian millennials live with their parents. Further, a YouGov-Mint-CPR Millennial Survey conducted in 2020 tells us that they depend on their parents' real estate property and savings to give them a start.

No wonder, Census figures show that joint families are growing, albeit slowly, in urban India, but declining in the villages. But the short, bullet point is that unemployment does not send migrant workers to their villages because their families there are in no position to help them financially.

What brings them home is the dread of dying on alien soil without the necessary prayers.

Also read | [Two-thirds of migrants have returned to cities or wish to do so: survey](#)

Among Muslims, washing of the body as well as the lowering of the shrouded corpse are important aspects of death rituals and ought to be performed by the immediate family. Despite regional variations, certain aspects of Islamic mortuary customs are constant.

Death rituals vary among Hindus too. There is no consensus, for instance, on how many days must elapse before major mourning rituals such as *chautha* and *shraddha* can commence. Also, most Hindus are cremated, but some are buried too.

Only the family would know the minutiae of these details. Further, among Hindus, male blood kin alone can perform the *pind daan* and the ritual erasure of debts, or (*rin*), of the dead relative.

If these, and other rules, are not followed correctly, the soul of the dead person could suffer perpetual torment in the other world. It will take more than a job somewhere to overcome the fear of dying anonymously, without proper ceremonies being performed.

Forced by poverty, workers can take economic hardship on their chin and stomach at the same time. They may have a face for radio and a voice for silent films, but in the theatre of survival, they move adeptly, playing their part.

Also read | [Migrant workers returning to cities to reclaim jobs, Solicitor General tells Supreme Court](#)

It is in the theatre of death that they need their families to provide the props. If about 90% of slum dwellers in Dharavi stayed put, post lockdown, it was because most of them lived with their wives and children and did not fear a death without rituals.

Newspapers were quick to notice that it was mostly men walking on highways, or leaving from train stations and bus stands. Though the image of vulnerable women and children in the midst



of all this is much more wrenching, their numbers were not that many.

This is not a trivial observation because women actually form 55% (or, the majority) of rural migrants to urban India. If there were fewer of them on highways it was because arranged marriages have brought most of them to the city, not a flimsy job prospect.

This makes their transition more permanent because they now generally have properly anchored urban husbands. These women, in the fullness of time, make a home, birth a family and nobody in that unit need any longer fear dying alone and un-prayed.

On the other hand, rural men migrate with tentative employment prospects and it will be a long time before they can, if at all, imagine getting their families over. Of course, a stable job, with entitlements, would let them live that dream. Till then, the thought of death and a frantic bus ticket home will always be paired.

Even so, despite economic uncertainties, and underemployment, about 72% of slum dwellings are owned, not rented. This shows the overwhelming preference the poor have for family life, only if they could afford one.

When urban workers rush to their rural homes, it is because they fear a death where nobody prays for them more than a life where nobody pays them.

*Dipankar Gupta is Retired Professor of Sociology, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi*

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## INDIA CANCELS CHINESE SMART METERS CONTRACT, SNAP BIDS TO BE CALLED SHORTLY

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - China

NEW DELHI: The Centre has cancelled the 2-million smart meter tender awarded to Indonesia-based PT Hexing, over concerns about its Chinese ownership and manufacturing plans in India, according to a top executive at state-run Energy Efficiency Services Ltd (EESL), which has been designated to implement the country's smart metering programme - the world's largest.

PT Hexing is said to be owned by Hexing Electrical Co, with headquarters in Hangzhou, China.

EESL which had put the order on hold, plans to call snap bids shortly for awarding the cancelled contract for around 3 million smart meters now.

The National Democratic Alliance government plans to convert all electricity meters into smart prepaid meters by 2022.

"We have cancelled the bid because they did not meet tender conditions of manufacturing the meters in India, which is part for the bid conditions. Therefore EESL has cancelled the contract. We are shortly coming up with a snap bid for 3 million meters," said Saurabh Kumar, managing director of EESL, a joint venture set up by NTPC Ltd, Rural Electrification Corp. Ltd, Power Finance Corp. Ltd (PFC) and Power Grid Corp. of India Ltd.

PT Hexing couldn't be contacted.

The move comes in the backdrop of India restricting companies from countries with which it shares a land border from participating in bids for government procurement without approval from competent authorities.

Earlier, Uttar Pradesh Power Corporation Limited had also scrapped a consignment of Chinese smart meters being procured by EESL.

A smart meter architecture requires a two-way communication network, control centre equipment and software applications that enable near real-time gathering and transfer of energy usage information. The Union government is cautious about such imported equipment running the risk of being infected by a malware.

As part of its economic squeeze on China, India last week imposed restrictions on import of colour television sets after barring Chinese apps and cancelling railway and road tenders secured by Chinese firms.

Chinese smartphone handset maker Vivo has reportedly pulled out as the title sponsor for this year's Indian Premier League. Chinese language has also been removed from the curriculum of Indian schools and the government is set to review the status of Confucius Institutes aimed at popularising Chinese in India.

The letter of award (LoA) for smart meter contract was given to PT Hexing, before the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) came up with order, restricting companies from countries with a shared land border with India from participating.

Of the total order for which PT Hexing was the lowest bidder, around 10,000 meters have been supplied from its Indonesia facility. Of around 1.6 million smart meters supplied by EESL to Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Delhi, 1.4 million have been supplied by Genus Power Infrastructures Ltd's Rajasthan facility. The remaining meters have been supplied by ITI and Larsen & Toubro.

EESL's smart meter programme plans to replace 250 million conventional meters that will help increase the debt laden discoms' annual revenues to Rs1.38 trillion. Also, India's proposed 3.5 trillion distribution reform scheme to arrest electricity losses at below 12% starts with smart meters.

In a related development, as part of its strategy of compulsory purchase preference to local suppliers, India has also set up a standing committee headed by the secretary, DPIIT, to ensure enforcement of the strategy.

In a wider decoupling exercise, firms defined as Class-I local suppliers, having local content of 'equal to or more than 50%', will be the only ones eligible to bid for contracts that have a sufficient domestic capacity. For international tenders, if the lowest bidder (L1) is a Class-I local supplier, the full contract quantity will be awarded to it. In case the L1 bid is not a Class-I local supplier, only half of the order quantity shall be placed with the bidder. Then, if the lowest bidder among the Class-I local supplier matches the L1 price or falls within its range, the remaining 50% of the contract will be awarded to the domestic firm.

This public procurement order is intended to give preference to local suppliers and promoting manufacturing and production of goods and services in India with a view to enhancing income and employment.

India wants to become an integral part of global supply chains as firms look to move production lines out of China following the coronavirus pandemic that originated in Wuhan. Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced his vision for a self reliant India on 12 May with finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman outlining a number of steps to help domestic industry recover from the lockdown as well as attract foreign investors.

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# A 'GENERATIONAL CATASTROPHE'

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Education and related issues

Aug 06, 2020-Thursday

-°C

Humidity

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Wind

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On August 4, the United Nations (UN) released the secretary-general's policy brief on the impact of Covid-19 on the world's education system. The policy brief points to the fact that the closure of schools and other learning spaces have impacted 94% of the world's student population (up to 99% in low and lower-middle income countries). It suggests that despite the delivery of lessons by radio, TV and online, and efforts of teachers and parents, many students still do not have access to education. It highlights how learners with disabilities, those from marginalised communities, displaced and refugee students, and those in remote areas are at highest risk of being left behind. And it warns that the knock-on effects on child nutrition, child marriage and gender equality could be enormous. The cumulative impact of all these on children may lead to a "generational catastrophe" that could waste human potential, undermine decades of progress, and exacerbate entrenched inequalities. This is not good news for any nation, more so for those in the low and lower-middle income segments such as India. According to Unesco, nearly 321 million Indian children have been at home since March-end. There is no clarity on when schools will reopen.

In the last few decades, especially since the enactment of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, India has seen a surge in school enrolments and infrastructure development in the primary and secondary segments. But the learning outcomes have not kept pace. The pandemic has now exacerbated this existing challenge. In addition, the extended period of closure means students don't have access to midday meals; and with parental incomes under strain, there could be a spike in drop-out rates, especially among girls.

While the focus must be now be ensuring the safety of students, teachers and staff, and putting in place protocols for school reopening, there has to be an extensive assessment of the learning loss and well-thought-out plans to bridge the learning gap, and schemes to retain students. This entails tweaking the syllabus and changing pedagogy. This forced break must also be used to align the sector to the National Education Policy (NEP), which was released last week, especially to its foundational learning goals. Last but not least, governments will have to arrange for funds required for the sector. This will be a challenge post-Covid-19, but starving the education sector of finances will be irresponsible, for it is crucial to meeting India's development goals and creating an inclusive society.

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# PAKISTAN'S CARTOGRAPHIC ABSURDITY

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - Pakistan

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[Lucknow](#), [Patna](#), [Ranchi](#)

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The Imran Khan government has issued a map that shows the entirety of Jammu and Kashmir and the former Gujarati princely state of Junagadh as Pakistani territory. Such maps were common in the 1950s. Over time, Junagadh was largely dropped, but Survey of Pakistan maps have shown the border running south of Jammu.

The map has kept the self-determination flag flying by printing across Kashmir that its future will be “decided” under the relevant United Nations resolutions. Curiously, the border between this fictional Greater Pakistan and China is a “frontier undefined” — something not reflected in Beijing’s maps.

Ancient maps have some use in territorial disputes, overnight ones produced by a weak government have none. Mr Khan issued the map one year after the amendment of Article 370. One of the policy shifts explicit in India’s decision was that the future of this part of Kashmir would no longer be negotiated with Islamabad. Pakistan has spent the past year trying to argue it is essential to the issue. Initially, it turned to the international community to get some support. When that failed, it resumed shelling across the Line of Control and supporting terrorism. That Mr Khan’s government has now been reduced to printing pieces of coloured paper should be seen as further evidence that Pakistan has been reduced to a cipher as far as Kashmir is concerned. Nepal, Pakistan and others have recently turned to cartography to provoke the Indian government. But drawn ink lines are not even credible statements. They show shallowness of thought and, most crucially, weakness at home.

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