

# EDITORIAL

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The subject who is truly loyal to the chief magistrate will neither advise nor submit to arbitrary measures - Junius

## The blockades, and the death of moderation

On Tuesday morning, a group of First Nations leaders, led by Perry Bellegarde, Grand Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, held a press conference in Ottawa. There were five men on stage, and depending on how the coming days and weeks play out, they will either be key players in resolving the current crisis, or they could find themselves shoved aside by a rising radicalism, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, that they were trying to tamp down.

Their message, which was at times more substantial and nuanced than that of the federal leaders who spoke later in the day in Parliament, urged calm, dialogue and a lowering of tensions. These men experienced the Oka Crisis firsthand, and what they were calling for was de-escalation. They know, in their bones, how the situation has the capacity to become radicalized, to be captured by extremists on both sides and to spin beyond the control of federal, provincial and First Nations governments.

Grand Chief Serge Otsi Simon of Kanesatake, the community where the tragic events of 30 years ago began, spoke of his fears of a backlash, and said he was “pleading with protesters” to remove the railway blockades, because they had “made their point.”

“Bringing down the blockades doesn’t mean that you surrender. It doesn’t mean we’re going to lay down and let them kick us around. No, it would show compassion,” he said.

Mr. Simon was being reasonable, practical and truthful – qualities that are always in short supply in politics, because they are so rarely rewarded. Within a few hours, a group of about half a dozen members of the elected chief’s community had barricaded his office in Kanesatake.

By Wednesday, Mr. Simon had come around to a different way of seeing things. “I wish to retract my comments yesterday about whether it is time for the blockades to come down,” he told reporters, reading from a prepared statement. He said he’d had concerns about the potential consequences of blockades, “but sometimes as a leader you have to know when to lead and when to follow. I am now deciding to follow the people. I will refrain from making any further remarks on this matter. I apologize for any harm or confusion arising from my remarks.”

At the same time as Mr. Simon was apologizing for moderation, new barricades were going up on Montreal’s South Shore. As of Wednesday afternoon, two Montreal-area commuter rail services were suspended due to blockades.

And in Edmonton, protesters blocked the CN tracks. A few hours later, a group of counter-protesters arrived and dismantled the blockade. An act outside the law was met with a response beyond the law.

That is not how things are supposed to go in Canada, but peace, order and good government are never givens. They risk evaporation if the people responsible for them do not act to preserve them.



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### NET OUT

Re Are Net-zero Emissions Pledges Greenwashing? (Report on Business, Feb. 19): I have a problem with accepting “net-zero by 2050.” I believe it is just kicking the can down the road without any measurable, yearly milestones. I can live with such a pledge from anyone who also has a net-zero goal for every year up to 2050. Otherwise, “net-zero by 2050” is meaningless in my view.

■ **Marc Forest** Winnipeg

Re No, Killing Frontier Won’t Devastate Alberta (Report on Business, Feb. 15): The Teck Frontier mine’s projected annual carbon emissions of four million tonnes would make it impossible for Canada to meet its Paris Agreement targets. However, columnist Eric Reguly also points out 20 other oil sands projects that can still go ahead, and collectively make up the equivalent in output to 10 Frontiers. If Frontier alone would make it impossible to meet the Paris targets, what effect would 20 other projects have on these targets and, indeed, on the world’s climate?

■ **Jeffrey Levitt** Toronto

### CRUISE CONTROL

Re How A Cruise Ship Became A 19-storey-high Incubator (Feb. 17): Columnist André Picard writes that “the passengers should also have been evacuated

new treatments?”

■ **Nicholas Lomonossoff**  
Nepean, Ont.

Re Legislators Must Stop Dithering On MAID (Feb. 18): I believe offering medical assistance in dying for mental illness tells patients that there is indeed no hope of recovery. Yet, loss of hope and desire to die are crucial components of mental illness that should address. That requires time and commitment by patients, health-care providers and our health-care system. Offering MAID would compromise that. Such policy would make Canada the only country where health-care providers could legally end the life of patients with an ambiguous desire to die, even when they refuse all treatments or interventions that could relieve suffering. Facilitating premature death, rather than promoting treatment seems the most ultimate form of discrimination.

■ **Trudo Lemmens** Toronto

### GUNS AND PUBLIC HEALTH

Re How Guns And Gangs Reveal Our Fault Lines (Editorial, Feb. 17): The Globe’s editorial screams social determinants of health. I believe guns and gangs are indeed a public-health crisis. We should address poverty, better housing and educational opportunities for our youths in the black and the Indigenous communities.

■ **Margaret McGovern** Toronto

be clear on how it can continue to be secure and to thrive in the mutating world system, and in particular to cope with the prospects for political instability in the United States, our existential partner on which so much of our national life depends.

■ **George Haynal** Ottawa

### INDIA AND THE WORLD

Re India’s New Citizenship Law Is Discriminatory And Should Be Repealed (Feb. 18): I believe India’s amended citizenship law is of humanitarian nature in helping persecuted minorities who fled there, before 2014, from predominantly Muslim countries such as Pakistan and Bangladesh (countries that were carved out of India in 1947). It is argued by contributors Ratna Omidvar and Deepa Mehta that the amended act is discriminatory, as it ignores Muslim minorities from these countries. However, if India were to grant citizenship to persecuted Muslim minorities, this would defy the painful religion-based partition of India in 1947. Indian law does permit discretionary grants of citizenship to foreigners on merit, regardless of religion. I believe most Indo-Canadians are fully supportive of the new citizenship law and find it consistent with the universal values that Canadians cherish.

■ **Azad Kaushik**  
President, National Alliance of Indo-Canadians; Morriston, Ont.

# India's new citizenship law is discriminatory and should be repealed

RATNA OMIIDVAR  
DEEPA MEHTA

OPINION

Ratna Omidvar is an independent senator from Ontario.

Deepa Mehta is an award-winning film director.

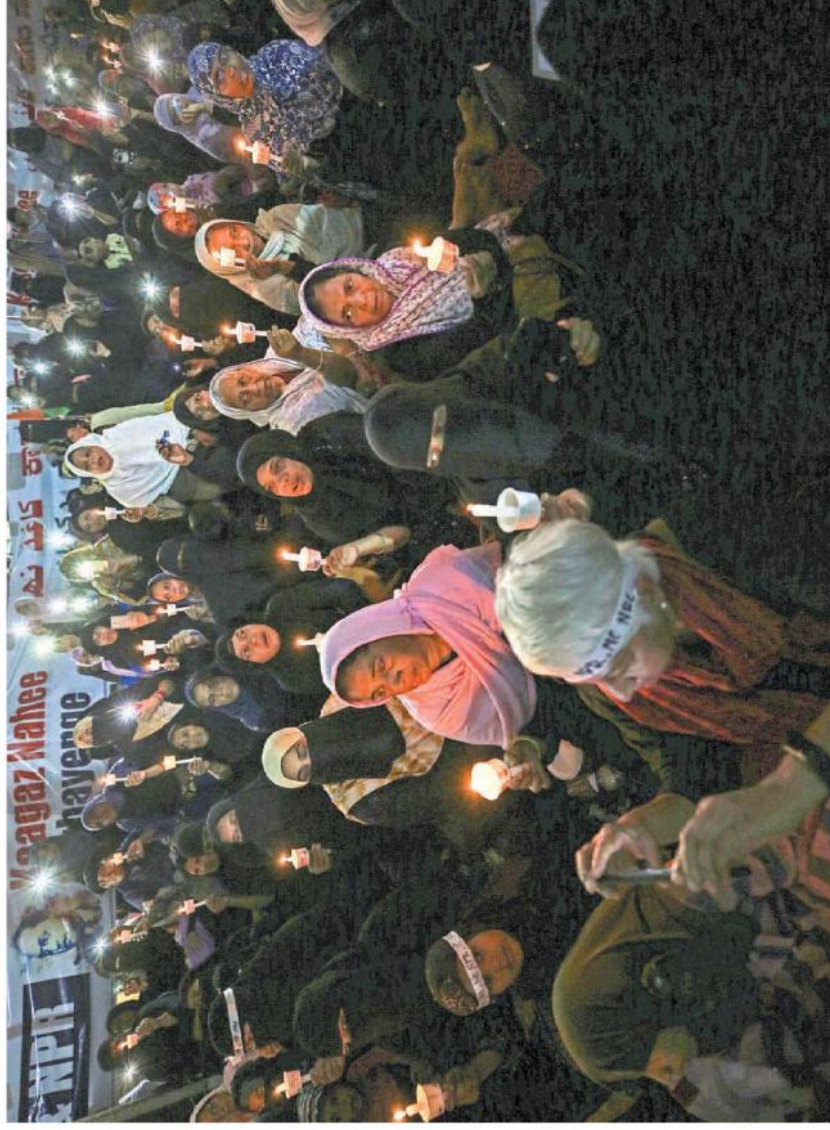
In recent months, a populist turn of events in India has tarnished Gandhi's vision and the country's future as the world's largest secular democracy.

We were born in the same provincial city in postcolonial India. We grew up on a steady diet of stories about the fight for independence. Our parents burned their Western-spun clothes as part of the national protest against England and donned home-spun khadi in support of Mahatma Gandhi's dream of a free, democratic and secular India, home to a new country for many cultures, languages and religions.

Through twists of fate, both of us find ourselves in Canada as grateful and engaged citizens of this country. But we continue to take an abiding interest in India, its people and its politics. We are both, therefore, saddened and dismayed by the developments in our country of birth.

In 2019, the Parliament of India amended the Citizenship Act to provide a path to citizenship for members of Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian religious minorities who fled persecution in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan before December, 2014. It's the first time religion has been overtly used as a criterion for citizenship under Indian nationality law.

The amendment has been



Indian women hold candles in Bangalore, India, on Friday during a protest against a new citizenship law that opponents say threatens India's secular identity. AJIAZ RAHI/ASSOCIATED PRESS

widely criticized as discriminatory on the basis of religion, in particular for excluding Muslims. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights called it "fundamentally discriminatory," adding that while India's "goal of protecting persecuted groups is welcome," this should be accomplished through a non-discriminatory, "robust national asylum system." The government has defended its position by pointing out that Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan are Islamic countries, where Muslims are unlikely to face persecution. This argument

fails to take into account that certain minority Muslim groups, such as the Hazaras and the Ahmadiyyas, have faced and continue to face persecution in these countries. In addition, there is widespread concern that the bill, coupled with the new National Register of Citizens, would render many Muslims stateless, as they may not be able to meet the stringent birth certificate requirements.

Indians have not stayed quiet in the face of this discriminatory law. Intellectuals, artists and particularly young students are speaking out with courage. Women are the leading voices in many cases. Sadly, the media and the courts appear to have largely succumbed to political and populist pressure and fallen silent.

Gandhi, "called to speak for the voiceless." She went on to say that the Citizenship Act "makes an enemy of India's own precious people, damaging the pluralistic democracy that has existed since 1947 and has been such an inspiration to the world."

What has inspired us the most is the involvement and initiative taken by young people. In Toronto, peaceful protests have been planned and led by university students. These students light the way forward for the rest of us. Their unwillingness to walk away from the reality of the situation and their passion to stand by what's right for humanity has been so moving.

Canadians and in particular Indo-Canadians need to add their voices to those demanding a repeal of the act. We need to remember that the persecution of one group or one religion or one culture opens the door to the persecution of others. As the world seems to increasingly fall prey to strong-man politics, we should do our best to ensure the health of the world's largest democracy.

We, proud Indo-Canadians, find ourselves labelled "anti-Indian" because we are against the bill and its nature. But the truth is that it is our very "Indianness" that makes us feel so fiercely indignant about what is happening. It is said that you can take an Indian out of India but not India out of an Indian. And this has never been as relevant as it is today. Although we are not in India dealing with the immediate ramifications of the situation, we can still stand by our fellow Indians in solidarity as they face it head on. Humanity is taking a hit, and we cannot stand idly by waiting for change. We do not become who we are in isolation.