

The
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{ OUR TAKE }

On China, an opening

The Moscow talks can yield positive results, if China translates words into action

Once again, India and China have agreed to disengage and de-escalate. In previous rounds of negotiations and statements, China failed to translate this commitment into action on the ground. But, perhaps, this round may be different for a set of reasons. The first is simply the high-level, face-to-face nature of the negotiations. The military-to-military meetings ran aground, with local commanders lacking the authority to make decisions that require political sanction. The meeting between defence minister Rajnath Singh and his Chinese counterpart, Wei Fenghe last week, and between external affairs minister S Jaishankar and his counterpart, Wang Yi, on Thursday (both in Moscow) were, thus, the first genuinely high-level—and physical—interactions between the leadership of the two countries since the border crisis began.

A second reason is the instability inherent in the massive military mobilisation all along the Himalayas. The surprise Indian military deployment along the heights near Spangur Tso and Finger 4 has reminded China that even for the two largest armies in the world, this particular border is impossible to defend and hold in its entirety, all year round. China made some initial territorial gains, but it is not difficult for India to make similar incursions. With both armies having lost lives, moved within firing range of each other, and with shots being fired at LAC for the first time in 45 years, the confrontation has become much more dangerous than similar incidents in the recent past. A third reason is that India's economic sanctions, against both digital and physical products, and its technology alignments with the United States, will translate into an enormous lost opportunity for China. The issue was never money; it was about blowing a hole in more ambitious plans to establish a Sino-centric global standards regime. Ultimately, when the foreign ministers met, the message sent out was that the cost for eight kilometres of lakeshore was high and going to become higher. The entire bilateral relationship was at risk.

All of this gives hope that Beijing will understand that the terms "disengagement" and "de-escalation" mean only one thing for New Delhi: A return to *status quo ante*. India has provided an opportunity for a genuine settlement. Though not evident in China's recent actions, it is hoped its fabled statecraft and pragmatism reasserts itself.

{ FAULT-LINE }



The ordinance raj of the Bharatiya Janata Party

By increasingly resorting to ordinances, the Centre has flouted democratic norms and undermined the spirit of parliamentary democracy

An ordinance is a temporary law made by the President of India (on the advice of the central government) when Parliament is not in session. An ordinance becomes a permanent Act (the law of the land) on being approved by Parliament within six weeks of reassembly.

As Parliament convenes amid the Covid-19 pandemic from Monday, it will need to consider and approve ordinances promulgated over the past six months. Since March 24, when the lockdown was imposed, 11 ordinances have been signed by the President.

With every session, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is brazenly rewriting the rules of Parliament. Cancel Question Hour, so the Opposition isn't given a chance to hold the government accountable. Slash Zero Hour time by half, from 60 minutes to 30 minutes, to deprive the Opposition of raising issues of importance. Misuse a constitutional tool such as an ordinance to mock Parliament, in a way it hasn't been done in 70 years.

Five of the 11 ordinances are broadly related to the outcome of Covid-19, coupled with two in the health sector. All the other ordinances are unrelated to the pandemic, including the Banking Regulation (Amendment) Ordinance, and the three ordinances related to agriculture. These are the 11 ordinances that Parliament will be required to approve in the coming fortnight.

Many previous Presidents have raised questions about individual ordinances. The current President, in his wisdom, prefers to go ahead without asking questions. Unchecked, the BJP government has embraced an unfortunate cult.

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For a start, West Asian producers will have to do away with discriminatory pricing regimes that adversely affect major global consuming centres in Asia. Although Saudi Aramco, one of the biggest players in the market, has slashed its official selling price (OSP) for its October-bound crude exports to Asia, this has to become an institutionalised practice given tightened refinery margins in recent times. This has led to refiners scrambling to replace some barrels with cheaper oil from the West, and also procure from the heavily-discounted spot market.

Historically, major West Asian producers, such as Saudi Aramco and the Iraqi State Organisation for Marketing of Oil (SOMO), have been providing hefty discounts to the United States (US) and Europe to gain market share with a differential pricing system by pricing the same grade of crude oil higher for Asian markets.

74% of Indians approved of Obama and had confidence he would do the right thing in world affairs. Obama's India visit in January may have played a role but, not entirely. President George W Bush found his mark with Indians before his own India visit. A 1995 global poll by Pew, such as the one cited above, found 54% Indians approved of Bush and had confidence he would do the right thing in international affairs. By the time he left office in 2008, he had improved his India ratings to 55%, with an India visit in 2009 and the path-breaking India-US nuclear deal in 2008 in between. At home, only 33% Americans said they had confidence in his conduct of foreign relations in the same Pew poll, and checked up about the same in domestic ratings at 34% in the Gallup tracker.

President Trump had an indifferent start with Indians. He barely scraped by with the confidence of 44% of Indians as a candidate in 2016, and in a Pew poll, by 2018, 40% of Indians had grown to have faith in his ability to do the right thing on the global stage.

ture of ordinances. Some statistics are revealing. In the first 30 years of our parliamentary democracy, there was one ordinance promulgated for every 10 Bills introduced in Parliament. In the following 40 years, the rate was two ordinances for every 10 Bills. In the 16th Lok Sabha (2014-19), the number jumped to 3.5 ordinances for every 10 Bills. In the current Lok Sabha it is, so far, 3.3 ordinances to every 10 Bills.

Look at it another way. Between 1988 and 2004, when the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance was in office, the government promulgated 9.6 ordinances a year. Between 2004-09 (United Progressive Alliance), 7.2 ordinances were issued a year and for UPA-II, it was down to five a year. Between 2014 and 2019, in the first term of the Narendra Modi government, the number shot up to 10 ordinances a year. About 10 ordinances were issued on the eve of the 2019 general election. Clearly, the BJP has a preference for short-circuiting democracy.

Ordinances have to be approved by Parliament within six weeks of reassembly. So, is there really a problem, or are we in the Opposition only being sticklers? No, there is a problem. In fact, two problems. One, the BJP government thinks nothing of re-promulgating ordinances that have lapsed.

Is the BJP government guilty of pushing laws that it wants in place without adequate parliamentary discussion or scrutiny by Parliament committees? Or while the country is distracted by a pandemic? Consider a few of the recent ordinances.

The Banking Regulation (Amendment) Ordinance is a response to the Punjab and Maha-

ra Cooperative Bank scandal. There have been two parliamentary sessions since the scandal became public knowledge, and no draft bill was introduced.

Similarly, permitting corporate farming, and liberalising agricultural trade regimes as well as produce movement to benefit big retailers, should have been preceded by adequate parliamentary debate.

These are significant and controversial decisions. Has care been taken to address the information asymmetry between farmers who sell and big traders and corporations that buy? This could have been scrutinised by a parliamentary committee. The ordinance glosses over it—passing itself off as either pandemic relief for farmers or an economic reform. It is neither.

The timing of such ordinances is very odd and no coronavirus-related gap is being filled.

This problematic ordinance culture has extended to BJP-run states as well. During the lockdown, BJP governments in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat issued ordinances diluting labour laws, without consulting worker unions and civil rights groups.

Even the International Labour Organisation advised caution. On March 15, just before the lockdown, the Uttar Pradesh Recovery of Damages to Public and Private Property Ordinance

was promulgated. It sought to impose punitive fines on those who damaged public and private properties during protests. This is a law reminiscent of the colonial era.

To support and enable the implementation of the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance, the central government is pushing states to amend their Agriculture Produce Marketing Committee Acts. This will minimise the role of state market committees and risk creating agricultural cartels of big food businesses and retailers. Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, and Karnataka have acted as per command and promptly promulgated ordinances.

Where will this stop?

Post Script: There are only three parliamentary democracies in the world that permit the ordinance route—India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The practice in India was adopted from the Government of India Act, 1935, where the viceroy could do as he pleased. In every other country, Parliament has to be convened in order to get a law passed.

Derek O'Brien is the parliamentary leader of the Trinamool Congress in the Rajya Sabha

The views expressed are personal

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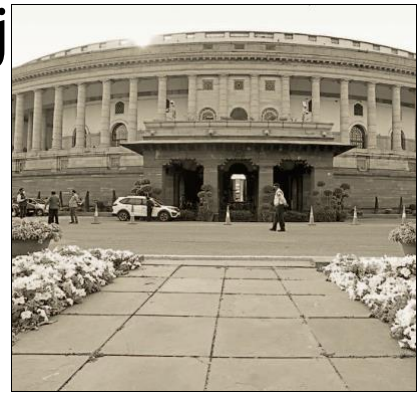
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The deliberation and fine-tuning, the pre-legislative stakeholder consultations and the committee scrutiny are important stages in the passage of a law. Ordinances that hurriedly become Bills and then Acts bypass this process

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Oil: The interplay of pricing, supply, demand

The technical committee of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) carried out last month to reaffirm the whipping crude oil supply cuts in the global pipelines to rebalance oil markets in view of the huge demand destruction unleashed by Covid-19. However, it is not enough to just "manipulate" supply. Global oil demand has to be nudged up if oil producers are to retain their respective market share in the face of altered realities.

For a start, West Asian producers will have to do away with discriminatory pricing regimes that adversely affect major global consuming centres in Asia. Although Saudi Aramco, one of the biggest players in the market, has slashed its official selling price (OSP) for its October-bound crude exports to Asia, this has to become an institutionalised practice given tightened refinery margins in recent times. This has led to refiners scrambling to replace some barrels with cheaper oil from the West, and also procure from the heavily-discounted spot market.

Historically, major West Asian producers, such as Saudi Aramco and the Iraqi State Organisation for Marketing of Oil (SOMO), have been providing hefty discounts to the United States (US) and Europe to gain market share with a differential pricing system by pricing the same grade of crude oil higher for Asian markets.

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President Trump had an indifferent start with Indians. He barely scraped by with the confidence of 44% of Indians as a candidate in 2016, and in a Pew poll, by 2018, 40% of Indians had grown to have faith in his ability to do the right thing on the global stage.

As the number of those sceptical of him remained stable in the poll, he appeared to have made inroads into 67% of respondents who had either refused to answer or had said they did not know him enough in 2016. His Gallup ratings at home, by contrast, have languished in the 40s.

There are very good individually unique reasons of policies, politics and personality behind the popularity of incumbents with Indians. But collectively, they appear to represent a pattern: you don't have to try very hard to get the Indians on your side.

But Indians in the US, an estimated 1.8 million Indian-Americans who are eligible to vote, are a completely different story. Many of them, who do not share the enthusiasm of their Indian relatives and friends for the US president, often find themselves yelling at their WhatsApp groups on their smart phones, and tapping out angry rejoinders in all-caps, much like the US president, Covfefe and all.

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calling it the "Asian premium". Kuwait, Iraq and the United Arab Emirates typically follow Riyadh's monthly pricing. This is declared around the fifth of every month, affecting about 12 million barrels per day (mb/d) of crude bound for Asian markets.

According to Indian oil records, the Asian premium against the prices for US ports, for instance, in December 2018 and January, February and March 2020 was \$51, \$6.29, \$3.71 and \$7.3 respectively per barrel. The Asian premium for Arab medium crude in September is \$0.19 for the US and \$2.79 per barrel for Europe. This eats into the gross refinery margins of Asian oil companies and makes them scout for cheaper alternatives. The premiums fell sharply during April to July this year when global demand for oil had sunk by about 14 mb/d and Russia and Saudi Arabia had unleashed a price war.

Meanwhile, even with producing cheaper crude, companies such as Saudi Aramco are losing their market share to unlikely competitors, for instance, Russia. Ironically, US shipments from Saudi Arabia to American ports slumped from 371,000 barrels a day (b/d) in June to 271,000 b/d in July—their lowest since 1986. August was even lower at 102,000 b/d.

With the shale boom, the US has become the

largest crude oil producer, overtaking Saudi Arabia and Russia. Crude from the US region has started flooding the Asian markets. For instance, the bilateral hydrocarbon trade between India and the US has touched \$9.2 billion during 2019-20, marking a 95% increase compared to 2017-18 figures. India is now the fourth-largest export destination for US crude. China's crude import from the US surged 492.25% between June and July while it slumped a record 27.9% in July from Saudi Arabia—pushing Riyadh behind Russia and Iraq as

China's third-largest crude supplier. August saw about 21 million barrels of crude coming into China from US oil fields—the largest volume for a month—and, reportedly, a total of 80 million barrels over July through December to comply with the Phase-I Beijing-Washington trade deal signed in January.

Although, shale production in the US that reached a high of 12 mb/d in February, this year may have left its best production days behind, \$35 per barrel is enough for many of the drilled-but-uncompleted wells, or DUs, to kickstart into action. Another price rally facilitated by Opec+ will fortify competitors in the American Gulf coast region as well as Canada, Argentina and China which are expanding their own shale gambit. This does not sit well for the petro-states, many of whose budgets are solely dependent on oil exports. Last month, Aramco said that its second-quarter profits plunged a massive 73% due to "strong headwinds from reduced demand and lower oil prices".

Opec, in its latest monthly report, states that world oil demand will fall by 9.06 mb/d this year instead of an 8.95 mb/d decline predicted a month ago. While peak demand is a highly-contested subject, the emergent story is that renewables are lifting capital much easier than fossil fuels, making them increasingly competitive.

With the near-saturation of demand in the US and Europe, West Asian producers should focus on natural markets in Asia.

Though the West Asian region may remain the central bank regulating crude currency, simply providing a floor to crude prices may turn out to be a short-sighted move to retain its grip on the oil geographies.

Shreerupa Mitra is the executive director of The Energy Forum

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{ PIT STOP }

Yashwant Raj

Where Indians and Indians in US diverge

If Indians could vote in the United States (US) presidential elections, they will probably go with the incumbent, if he (or she and they, someday) was on the ballot for a second term, no matter how poorly the candidate was polling at home.

Indians—not to be confused with Indian-Americans—appear to like American presidents once they get to know them, which can be after a visit or an agreement or just personal charm. That should explain, to an extent, President Donald Trump's loud and

insistent Indian supporters. I have got to know some of them from their angry mails or messages in response to something disagreeable I wrote about the US president.

President Barack Obama finished his sixth year in office in January 2015 with an average approval rating of 42.6%, according to Gallup, which has tracked US presidents for decades. This was the lowest of the yearly averages of his eight years in office. Six months later in June, as his domestic ratings hovered around 45%, a Pew global poll found

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{ EDITOR'S PICK }

HT's editors offer a book recommendation every Saturday, which provides history, context, and helps understand recent news events

SEXUAL RIGHTS AND THE SUPREME COURT

Saurabh Kirpal—a lawyer in the Supreme Court for two decades, a counsel for the petitioners in the case that led to the reading down of Section 377, and someone who identifies as gay—recently alleged that he had not been made a judge by the court because of his sexual orientation.

This week, we recommend Kirpal's just-released edited volume—*Sex and the Supreme Court: How the Law is Upholding the Dignity of the Indian Citizen*. It deals with the Navtej Johar case that decriminalised same sex relationships, and examines the court's approach to transgender rights, sexual harassment, interfaith marriages, adultery, and entry into the Sabarimala temple. With writings from advocates, judges and petitioners, journalists and writers, it deals with sexual rights and its intersection with the individual, community, religion, and the workplace. The book suggests that the SC has placed the individual at the centre of recent jurisprudence.

Book Name: Saurabh Kirpal: Sex and the Supreme Court: How the Law is Upholding the Dignity of the Indian Citizen

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BOOKS



INTERVIEW | SHOKOFEEN AZAR

Magic that serves realism

The Australian-Iranian author talks about Iran, the Islamic revolution, and her new novel

Nawaid Anjum
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1 Your novel, *The Enlightenment of the Greengrass Tree*, which was shortlisted for the Booker International Prize, is the story of an intellectual family of five that is compelled to flee Tehran for a remote village following the 1979 Islamic Revolution. What prompted you to tell this story?

A month after the end of the eight-year Iran-Iraq war, in the summer of 1988, more than 5,000 opponents of the Islamic regime were executed in prisons without trial or by speedy and unfair trials. From that date until today, the regime has never acknowledged the massacre. It has never been a part of Iranian literature. The subject of my writing is the fate of humans in the captivity of dictatorial regimes like Iran because wrong political systems, like the Islamic Republic, take more lives than the coronavirus.

2 The novel — peopled by the living and the dead, demons and jinn — is narrated by the ghost of a 13-year-old girl, Bahar, and presents the narrative of a family that opposed the Islamic regime.

A small minority, like my family, believed that the Shah's (Pahlavi) regime was much more reformable, modern, and patriotic than the Islamic regime. History has practically proved the same to the Iranian people. I intended to be a narrator of a tiny percentage of Iranian dissidents in the 1979 revolution who voted "No" to the Islamic Republic in the 1980 referendum; the families very similar to my own. These families opposed Islam, Khomeini, and the Revolution, and considered the Islamic Revolution as an irreparable deviation in the development of modern Iran. Forty years after the regime formation, nearly 90 percent of Iranians have understood that the Islamic Revolution was an irreparable mistake in the process of development and democracy of Iran.

3 Do you think magical realism lends the story a certain power that would have been difficult to achieve otherwise?

Magical realism gives me possibilities that realism does not. In my opinion, the best style to show the height and depth of real human feelings and emotions is magical realism. In this novel, I have tried to present that fantasy and magic in magic realism can be used in the service of factual events. Therefore, the magic realism in this novel has been used to document the real political, social and religious issues in Iran. That is, magic serves realism in this novel.

4 What kind of literature has shaped you as a writer?

The literature that came from reckless, critical minds. The literature that has always influenced me is the kind that has the pulse of its time in its hand; the literature that reminds us of human conscience and morality in the context of the collapse of social morality. The literature that believes it has a great mission for humans, society and humanity.

Nawaid Anjum
is an independent
journalist, trans-
lator and poet.

On the roof of the world



The road to Ganden monastery in Lhasa, Tibet.

YANG SHAOHUAN/VEG VIA GETTY IMAGES

Calling India's prime ministers to account

Rajiv Dogra's new book is a critique of the foreign policies of eight prime ministers

Maharajakrishna Rasgotra

Two recent books by retired IFS officers have started a new trend in writing the history of independent India by critically examining the policies of the country's prime ministers. Jaimini Bhagwat in *The Promise of India*, published last year, after assessing the entire range of the policies of each of India's 14 PMs proceeds to pronounce a judgment on the impact of the Character, Competence and Charisma of each on the nation's overall growth. For example, an exhaustive chapter on Nehru's policies ends with the judgment that the great leader had Character and Charisma in abundance but in Competence "he may be faulted in some measure on foreign policy and national security matters".

Former ambassador Rajiv Dogra's *India's World: How Prime Ministers Shaped Foreign Policy* is a sharply-focused critique in 200 pages of the foreign policies of the seven prime ministers who completed a full term of five years, plus Shastri, the hero of 1965. The author measures the performance of each leader on three counts: whether it ensured the country's security, strengthened its unity and democracy, and gave India a major role in the world. In this broad framework he relates "without bitterness or partiality" a few important facts from the leader's policy and actions and reflects, with passion combined with aloofness, on their impact on the country. Dogra considers the role of advisors indispensable to a leader's success. The leader must listen, and follow good advice. Nehru's disregard of the sage counsels of experienced MEA officials and even a senior cabinet colleague, V. K. Rajwade, resulted in the tragic

failure of his China policy. In contrast, Indira Gandhi's due regard for the advice of a 'dream team' of cabinet colleagues and mandarins like PM Haksar and RN Kao and a battle-hardened army chief, General Manekshaw, resulted in a stunning victory in the war of 1971. At the same time, the author is justifiably critical of the ineptitude of Indira Gandhi and Lal Bahadur Shastri in losing the gains of war at the negotiations for peace.

Failure to learn from the experience of predecessors in dealing with India's fractious neighbours is a flaw shared by all PMs, except Indira Gandhi. In the absence of a "well drafted long-term approach" each succeeding PM is seen as striving to outdo his predecessor to "improve relations with neighbours". Failure and disillusionment are the bitter result of such endeavours. Dogra advises against investing hopes and resources in SAARC, for "as transformational regional arrangement it is a pipe dream". Similarly, while the divided world of the Cold War dictated the choice of the Middle Path, non-alignment lost relevance with the end of the Cold War. Ever since, by fits and starts, India has been trying different alternatives — Engagement with All, Strategic Partnerships with 30 odd countries, the inchoate QUAD — but even faced with the long-term option of a functioning alliance with the USA. To those who worry over the loss of India's strategic autonomy in an alliance the author asks: What is the meaning of strategic autonomy for a country without an indigenous defence industry?

Each of the eight PMs has succeeded to his credit, as well as failures to blench his story. For example, Manmohan Singh's Friendly Labours lost in Islamabad are more than balanced by his brilliant nuclear deal with Washington. And for all Modi's travails in Kathmandu, Lahore and Wuhan there is soothing comfort of warm hugs in Washington.

India's World: How Prime Ministers Shaped Foreign Policy
Rajiv Dogra; 248pp, ₹595
Rupa

Riyadh and Abu Dhabi. But we should return to Nehru as Dogra has a lot more to say about his "misadventures" in the foreign policy domain.

While acknowledging that India's democracy and technology are its most cherished legacies with lasting impact, Dogra censures him for taking the Kashmir issue to the UN. He compounded the mistake by adding to it the domestic complications of Articles 370 & 35A of the Constitution against Dr. Ambedkar's sage advice to the contrary. He chides Nehru for repeatedly rejecting the "offers" of a permanent seat in the UN Security Council, especially the "unexpected bonanza" offered by Bulganin and Khrushchev during their Indian visit in 1955. Perhaps Nehru was apprehensive that the issue would, once again, be lost in the inevitable complexities of the UN Charter's revision. In his third "misadventure" Nehru is said to have given away 80 percent of Punjab's waters to Pakistan. While there are arguments both for and against the 1960 treaty, there is simply no room in Ladakh and Kashmir to store the waters of the Indus and Jhelum or to cut new courses for them. Nevertheless, I agree with Dogra: Why give anything at all to a cantankerous, partitionist neighbour for nothing in return?

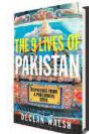
Note of this diminishes the grandeur of Nehru's renaissance man. As Dogra says, "Right or Wrong, Nehru was a thinker distinguished by absolute personal honesty and a lofty vision of India." And he was a man who grew in storm and stress to become the representative figure of much that was noble in his time". Dogra's book, with its honesty and candour of content and his pleasing writing style, is a pleasure to read. There is also wit and humour in it in gems like the following scattered across the narrative: "If Nehru had a temper, Narasimha Rao had a temperament"; "When impulse overtakes prudence upsets are inevitable"; "Democracy, like happiness, is one of those elusive things whose promise is almost as important as its performance".

Maharajakrishna Rasgotra is a former foreign secretary of India

NEW READS

A COMPELLING PORTRAIT OF A LAND OF CONTRADICTIONS

The demise of Pakistan — a country with a reputation for volatility, brutality and radical Islam — is regularly predicted. But things rarely turn out as expected, as journalist Declan Walsh knows well. Over a decade covering the country, he encountered Pakistanis whose lives offer a compelling portrait of this land of contradictions. He meets a crusading lawyer who risks her life to fight for society's marginalised, taking on everyone including the powerful military establishment; a chieftain spouting poetry at his desert fort; and a politician waging a mini-war against the Taliban. Lastly, Walsh meets a spy whose orders once involved following him, and who might be able to answer the question that haunts him: why the Pakistanis expelled him from their country. Intimate and complex, unravelling the mysteries of state and religion, this book offers an account of life in a country that, often as not, seems to be at war with itself.



The Nine Lives of Pakistan
Declan Walsh
388pp, ₹799
Bloomsbury

AN AMERICAN ON HOW THE WORLD IS SHAPED BY CASTE

The hierarchy of caste is not about feelings or morality. It is about power. Beyond race or class, our lives are defined by a powerful, unspoken system of divisions. In *Caste*, Pulitzer Prize-winning author Isabel Wilkerson gives a portrait of this hidden phenomenon. Linking America, India and Nazi Germany, she reveals how our world has been shaped by caste — and how its hierarchies still divide us today. With rigour, she demonstrates how our own era of intensifying conflict has arisen as a consequence. Weaving in stories of real people, she documents health costs and explores its effects on culture and politics. Finally, she points to the ways we can — and must — move towards our common humanity.



Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents
Isabel Wilkerson
456pp, ₹999
Penguin Randomhouse

A FRAGILE HOUSEHOLD COMES APART

This English translation of a Bangladeshi novel, *Roubo*, written by UK-based playwright and filmmaker Lesa Gazi features the sisters Lovely and Beauty whose home is a cage. Their mother Farida Khanam never lets them out of her hawk-eyed gaze. Lesa Gazi's *Heffire* opens with Lovely's first ever solo expedition to Gausia Market on her fourteenth birthday. There will be many firsts for her today, but she mustn't forget the curfew Farida Khanam has ordained. As Lovely roams the streets of Dhaka, her mother's carefully constructed world begins to unravel. The twisted but working arrangements of a fragile household begin to assume a macabre quality as the day progresses. Told in stark, taut prose, this tale of a family born of a dark secret is a scintillating debut.



Heffire
Lesla Gazi; Translated from Bengali by Shabnam Nadiya; 199pp, ₹359, Westland

onweb

Fresh take on an old classic

Though Vikram Seth's novel and Mira Nair's series based on it is structured around matchmaking for Lata Mehta, the tender love story in the background between Mann and Firoz exists alongside their love for women.



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THE TIBET PLAYBOOK | LESSONS FROM HISTORY

A look at India's last years in Tibet

Thubten Samphel
letters@htnews.com

What's happening with China these days? It is picking fights simultaneously with most of its neighbours. The only time communist China opened two fronts was in 1950 when it invaded and occupied Tibet and fought the US-led UN forces to a standstill at the present demilitarized zone between South and North Korea. Now, China is harassing Japan in the East China Sea, restricting the freedoms of the people of Hong Kong, and firing missiles across the Taiwan Strait and training most of the South China Sea disputed by many countries in South East Asia. The latest is China's encroachment on Indian territory. China is doing everything according to its Tibet playbook: in the early

1950s, it occupied the Indian territory of Aksai Chin. Both in Ladakh and in the South China Sea, Beijing hopes to apply its Tibet playbook to establish facts on the ground and on water and later argue that possession is nine-tenths of the law. How China developed its Tibet playbook that includes encroachment, occupation, and the spinning of a narrative of false claims is examined in detail by Claude Arpi in his four volumes on Tibet's relations with India. Digging into the material at the National Archives and the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, his latest offering focuses on his findings on the last five years of India's diplomatic presence in Tibet.

In Tibet from November 1956 to February 1957 and met with the Dalai and Panchen Lamas,

a friend or foe? The China-as-a-friend camp carried the day. India handed all its extraterritorial rights including trade agencies in Gyantse, Dromo (Yatung) and Gartok in Tibet to its new rulers. In 1954, on its signed the Panchen Lama agreement with China that formally recognized Tibet as a part of the People's Republic. One of the important documents Arpi has dug out is a report filed by Apa Pant to the Indian foreign ministry of his observations in Tibet. Pant was the Political Officer based in Gangtok. Apa Pant travelled to Tibet from November 1956 to February 1957 and met with the Dalai and Panchen Lamas,

members of the Tibetan ruling elite and leaders of the Tibetan resistance. His observations about the sentiments of the Tibetan people under their new rulers and his predictions about China's plans for Tibet are prophetic: "Only when roads, aerodromes and perhaps a railway line are completed millions of Chinese will start flooding into Tibet and settling there permanently." Claude Arpi adds that this has come true 60 years later.

Arpi's final volume in his examination of Tibet's

The End of an Era: The Last Years of Tibet
Claude Arpi
599pp, ₹1,950
Vij Books India

relations with India from 1947 to 1962 ends with the closure of the Indian Consular General in Lhasa. New Delhi cited restrictions imposed on the consulate for its closure. One wonders whether the closure was wise. If it had remained open, New Delhi would have had a keener sense of what was happening behind the Himalayas.

For scholars and researchers interested in this phase of Tibet's relations with India, Claude Arpi's books will remain essential reading. These four volumes are a seminal contribution to our understanding of Tibet's interaction with both India and China and India's interaction with China on Tibet at a critical period in history.



Jawaharlal Nehru with China's Premier Mao Tse-tung in a picture clicked on 27 October 1954 during the Indian Prime Minister's visit to China. The Panchsheel Agreement had been signed a few months earlier on April 29. BETTMANN ARCHIVE/GETTY

It's 2020 but Indians still hate live-in girlfriends

Rhea Chakraborty's role in Sushant Singh Rajput's death is for the law to decide but the custodians of public morality have already deemed her guilty



CULT FRICTION
SANDIP ROY

Even though news channels have appointed themselves judge, jury and public executioner, there is much we do not know about the Sushant Singh Rajput and Rhea Chakraborty case. Although she has been arrested under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, we do not even know what role drugs actually had in his death. We do not know the true extent of his alleged mental health problems. We do not know the role Chakraborty played or did not play in the final unraveling of his life. And we certainly do not know what went through his mind that fateful day when he died.

But there is one thing we know for sure. Rhea Chakraborty was his live-in girlfriend. And it's hard to think that has not coloured our perception of the entire story, a saga that now has all the elements that make for a perfect storm of moral outrage—drugs, sex, money and Bollywood.

Long before the media started talking about drugs and money-laundering, the live-in girlfriend was already an object of suspicion in a way a wife would never have been. She became the Bengali girlfriend who knew black magic. A cartoon on a Facebook group called Justice for Sushant Singh Rajput put up a picture of Chakraborty next to the coronavirus and asked, "Which virus is more dangerous?" One of the young men administering the partner, a final-year engineering student in Faridabad, Haryana,

tells Newsland: "How can they suddenly call him crazy now? It must have something to do with the fact that Rhea was living with him right?" Another administrator of that group says he too has a girlfriend but "woh Rhea jaisi nahin hai (she is not like Rhea)". Now with the suspicion that she somehow aided and abetted his alleged drug use, Chakraborty has become a veritable *vishkanya*, as some have already dubbed her. As photographer and film-maker Ronny Sen writes in *Kaadam Mag*, "The high-profile drug scandal reflects how Indian society sees drug use and addiction as a moral crisis, not as the public health issue that it really is." Add a live-in partner to the mix and the morality play reaches maximum outrage decibels.

When Chakraborty tried to defend herself against a media trial and made a comment about the Bihar chief minister's statements, a director general of police questioned her "aakal" (stupid). Rajput's family lawyer dismissed a video Chakraborty made saying she was just trying to play the part of a "simple woman" because the real Rhea would not have ever worn that kind of *saree* suit. While the media has treated Rajput's ex, Anika Lokhande, more sympathetically, it's also worth remembering that when they broke up, press reports had blamed her alleged insecurity about Rajput's rising stardom. In our heart of hearts, we still think that it's for six months or six years, whether it's for six months or six years, somehow lacks something in commitment anyway.

As the legal website SCC Online has documented, the courts have gingerly waded into this loaded territory of the human heart. In 2010, the Delhi High Court had to hear a case involving a petitioner whose partner had a live-in relationship with her and had fathered a child even though he was not divorced



A case like Rhea Chakraborty's gives us the perfect cover to give vent to all our prejudices against live-in relationships.

from his wife and had a child by her as well. The court had called such a relationship "walk-in-walk-out", with no legal safeguards, something that was "renewed every day" and could be terminated any day with or without the consent of both partners. But in another case in 2010, the Supreme Court had ruled that a live-in relationship, if it continued for an extended period, could not be called "walk-in-walk-out". It has also ruled that women in a live-in relationship are entitled to the same rights and claims as a legally wedded wife. In 2013, it even tried to define what constituted a live-in relationship, from partners socializing with friends in public to women doing household activities like

cooking and cleaning just as a wife would! In 2018, the Supreme Court ruled that an adult couple has the right to live together without marriage. Live-in relationships are also recognized by the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, which talks about couples related by "marriage or through a relationship in the nature of marriage". But the court understood that it needed to mind the gap between public opinion and the law. The Allahabad high court once observed that if a man and woman live together without getting married, "this may be regarded as immoral by society but it is not illegal. There is a difference between law and morality."

Except, as the media has discovered, morality (or rather immorality) is much better for TRPs than the law with its spoilsport presumption of innocence.

With time, the law and the custodians of public morality have had to make peace, sometimes grudgingly, with many changing social mores. In the wake of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which criminalized gay sex, being read down, it's certainly not cool, especially in Anglophone circles, to display homophobia or even homo-discomfort. Yet we still hear too many stories of young men and women forced to marry despite families knowing they are gay/lesbian. Gay rights might be okay in a hypothetical sense, a gay child in one's own backyard is a different matter. Few want to admit to championing caste discrimination but balk at their daughter falling in love with a lower-caste man, stories that too often still have terrible, tragic bloody endings. We may have to keep our discomfort with a "live-in" relationship in check publicly but a case like Rhea Chakraborty gives us the perfect cover to give vent to all our prejudices without being accused of being old-fashioned pruders.

That's partly because we often treat modernity as a fashion accoutrement, something we want to flaunt as a marker of cool like a Gucci bag rather than a system that aspires to fairness, equality and individual choice, one whose values we want to internalize. We want the symbols and perks of a liberated lifestyle without the hard work of living up to those values. A snazzy rainbow meme is always easier and more fun than actually cultivating and mentoring true diversity in the workplace. There is an innate distrust of cosmopolitanism as being a sort of cultural globalization that threatens age-old social values, tantamount to what the writer Mark Gevisser dubs the "globalisation of perversion". The story of

Rajput's rise and fall fits perfectly into this story of decadence and its come-uppance, with Chakraborty as the femme fatale.

In *Sreemoyee*, a popular soap opera on Bengali TV that preaches women's empowerment, a meek housewife learns to stand on her own feet after her husband leaves her for his "modern" office colleague—think chic hair cuts, sleeveless blouses and a smattering of English. But in the serial it is that other woman who quickly becomes the scheming, shrieking villain of the piece rather than the married man who willingly chose to have an affair with her. He quickly becomes more sinned against than sinning.

In real life too, the late Bengali superstar Uttam Kumar remained the untainted heartthrob of the masses while Supriya Devi, the actress he chose to have a long live-in relationship with while never divorcing his wife, was the epitome of the scheming home-wrecker. Every time she would appear on television ads to sell some mislami with a photograph of Uttam Kumar placed prominently behind her, thousands of middle-class Bengalis would wrinkle their noses in collective disdain at her wanton "shamelessness".

This is not to let Rhea Chakraborty or her family off the hook. That's for the law and police to determine. But the rush to tar and feather her, to pronounce her guilty even before she was arrested, to find sinister meanings in fairly innocuous WhatsApp chats, reveals how ready we are to question the *aakal* of a live-in partner to demand society's respect.

Cult Friction is a fortnightly column on issues we keep rubbing up against. Sandip Roy is a writer, journalist and radio host.

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LOW SPORT MAKES US MORE HUMAN

The covid-19 pandemic may have changed the rules of playing sport but it hasn't dented the enthusiasm of fans

Archi Pari

With the football and Formula One (F1) seasons winding up, and the Indian Premier League, India's largest sports tournament, scheduled to begin its 2020 season later this month, sport is limping back to action after the hiatus due to the covid-19 pandemic. Fans are excited—but what is it that makes us long to see fellow humans play in the first place? This is a question worth pondering, for we truly understand desire when we are separated from the very object of it.

Imagine you are the Elon Musk of Jupiter and have just discovered life on Earth. Amongst all the absurd sights you would witness would be one of 22 men chasing a spherical rubber object hit it into a net, with thousands watching them. Sport is a part of human evidence that seems almost embarrassingly banal when we look at it for what it really is (or how an alien would view it), yet we are obsessed with every aspect of it.

Our affinity for sport is often attributed to the idea that it is, as George Orwell said, "War minus the shooting." Sport allows people to display heroic qualities, such as discipline, camaraderie, skills the importance of winning, honour and fair play in the modern world, without the devastation and destruction caused by war. But there are deeper reasons too.

SPORT FOR COMMUNITY

There are very few phenomena in this world that bring people together as much as sport. We wear the same colours, yell together, experience tension, elation and grief, all at the same time. Partisanship in sport is rewarded with unquestioned loyalty, as it is in politics and religion (not the only commonality between the three), irrespective of any objective assessment about which team is the best. This blind fealty gives a signal to your tribe of fans that despite the better statistics or superiority of the opposition team, you are siding with your own.

Imagine if the Croatian president had backed France in the 2018 Football World Cup final, citing the superiority of its and expert predictions in favour of the ven-



Marshalls can be seen in the stands with cardboard cutouts of fans prior to the F1 Grand Prix on 6 September in Monza, Italy.

tual champions. Would you expect the president to ever win an election again at home?

So why do sports fans think in herds? Is their lack of objectivity a bug or a feature? It is a favourite pastime of management bookies to label "herd-mentality", a primal feature in human decision making, as irrational. Advertising guru Rory Sutherland contradicts this with an elegant example in his book, *Alchemy*: "We are a herd species in many ways: we feel comfortable in company and like to buy things in packs. This is not irrational—it is a useful heuristic that helps avoid catastrophe. Antelope might be able to find slightly better grass by escaping their herd and wandering off on their own, but a lone one would need to spend a large proportion of its time looking out for predators rather than grazing; even if the grass is slightly worse with the herd, they are able to safely spend most of their time grazing, because the burden of watching for threats is shared by many pairs of eyes rather than one."

The lack of objectivity even makes sense through an evolutionary lens. As I wrote in an essay (*'Is Objective Consump-*

tion Of News Overrated?, 13 June) on the lack of objectivity in news, "We would like to hold the beliefs that bring us the maximum number of allies, protectors or disciples, rather than beliefs that are likely to be objectively true. For millions of centuries, our minds have been shaped to grow this way and that hasn't changed in the last couple of hundred years."

Sport allows individuals to bond. While these bonds could have multiple foundations, the most common one we know is geography. We back people from our regions since they speak like us, look like us and have grown up in similar environments. But bonding over sport also transcends geographical similarities. Sports teams have an ecosystem of fans from all parts of the world. If an FC Barcelona fan from Delhi meets one from Dallas, both would have a common language of jokes, player quirks, rivalries and stories of glory to bond over. They can instantly start feeling a certain sense of sameness by discussing a stunning Lionel Messi lob or how Sergio Ramos of arch-rivals Real Madrid is always a pain in the backside of their team—regardless of the economic,

social or geographical status of the two individuals.

What French sociologist Émile Durkheim once remarked about religious groups holds true for groups of sports fans too. "Members of each clan try to give themselves the external appearance of their totem." For religious, such a totem may be small figures of gods, a book or a building. Sports fans wear the team colours, bear its flags, icons and mascots, whilst literally singing its praises. A devotion to these totems allows clan members to feel like they are part of something

that's greater than them.

Following a team, watching its games and talking about it with fellow fans from across the world on social media also gives fans a common identity. This is evident if you notice how fans identify with their teams. They can be heard saying "We won the match" or "We could have played better." How? By shouting louder at your television? By buying team merchandise? Sports fans don't have much direct agency in the results of sporting events but it might not always feel like that's the case.

HEALTHY ESCAPISM

Sport allows us to transcend the monotony and anxieties of everyday life. When your favourite team wins, you feel it is a proxy win for yourself. At a seminar at the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, once, a sport marketing executive rather cynically remarked that Indians are obsessed with the game of cricket since a significant chunk of the population, which suffers every day financially, is unlikely to achieve something special in their lives so they fill this void by believing that their team's win is their own. It's

almost a cliché to say that when India won the 2011 cricket World Cup, it wasn't just a win for 11 players on the field, but for the billion-strong viewers glued to their televisions. Many of us, including my teenage self, couldn't hold back a couple of tears trickling down our cheeks. It was the greatest moment of unexceptional lives.

With a slouched back on a couch and diabetes-inducing food in hand, we can witness a human being displaying the absolute zenith of coordination and control, whether it is "the runner at the starting blocks, the swimmer in mid-stroke or the golfer at the end of a swing", elegantly captured in an essay in *The School Of Life*, an encyclopaedia for practical philosophy. "It's a strange and poignant moment to experience ourselves in this masterful way. In an act of scarcely believable precision, on a golf course, a tiny white ball that might have gone pretty much anywhere—into the pond, on to the trees, into the head of a salesman in the clubhouse—can be made to resist all temptations to focus on the task of flying four hundred yards through the air to come cleanly to rest inside a small, barely visible hole on a highly manicured lawn on the opposite side of a hill."

On the flip side, it also gives us an outlet to release our frustration. You might not be able to scream at your boss when you don't get that salary raise but you can come back home and generously cuss at former Liverpool Football Club captain Steven Gerrard on social media after seeing him famously slip in a football match, an error that allegedly denied his team the English Premier League title in 2014.

The feeling of camaraderie and collective effervescence while watching a game with friends and family in the same room as well as virtually, through WhatsApp, can do wonders for your mental health. In fact, evolutionary psychologists have found that the effects of winning and losing have also been proven to positively affect the testosterone level of male sports fans, a hormone that is crucial to male mental health.

Life is messy, with a high degree of uncertainty and without exact rules—particularly so during this pandemic. Sport gives us a way to witness contest that balances skill with some chaos, all within the guard rails of fixed rules. Breaking such rules to win is a team win, but it is a proxy win for yourself. At a seminar at the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, once, a sport marketing executive rather cynically remarked that Indians are obsessed with the game of cricket since a significant chunk of the population, which suffers every day financially, is unlikely to achieve something special in their lives so they fill this void by believing that their team's win is their own. It's

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THE INDIAN EXPRESS, SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2020



THE EDITORIAL PAGE

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

FIVE POINT REPRIEVE

While Delhi must negotiate with China in good faith, it cannot again mistake Beijing's diplomatic words for PLA's deeds

THE FIVE-POINT FRAMEWORK that emerged out of a "frank and constructive" conversation between External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyan Jaishankar and his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi, on the margins of an international conference in Moscow has certainly raised hopes, if tentative, for defusing the extended military crisis on the Ladakh frontier. But Delhi must keep its fingers crossed amidst the badly shaken trust in Beijing since the People's Liberation Army's surprise aggression during April-May. Jaishankar and Wang agreed that the two armies, now staring at each other at many points in Ladakh, must "quickly disengage" and "ease tensions". Scopes in South Block will note that this is not the first time in the last few months that Beijing has promised to stand down. In various telephonic conversations between the foreign ministers, Special Representatives on border negotiations, senior diplomats as well as in direct and continuous dialogue between military commanders on the ground, China raised expectations only to dash them quickly.

The context for the talks between Jaishankar and Wang, however, has been somewhat different. In the first few months of the crisis, China appeared to have convinced itself that India had no option but to accept the new facts on the ground. This confidence was reflected in Beijing's refusal to pull back its forces to peaceful locations, its dismissive diplomatic tone and the aggressive military actions to consolidate its territorial gains from the aggression. India's repeated demand for restoration of the status quo ante on the frontier seemed empty rhetoric, until the Indian army ramped up its mobilisation and boldly seized some high ground to challenge Chinese military positions. These moves on the frontier were matched by a series of economic measures against China unveiled by Delhi. India's demonstration of the political resolve to escalate the conflict and the military capability to back it may have probably convinced Beijing that it needs to rethink its approach to the current crisis.

Although the change in China's political tone is welcome, there is no missing the deep differences that continue to complicate the path towards comprehensive military disengagement and de-escalation. If the joint statement issued after the Jaishankar-Wang talks is a bar-bones agreement, the separate explanatory comments from Delhi and Beijing reveal the challenges ahead. While India insists that the objective of the exercise is to "restore" the status quo ante, there is no explicit Chinese commitment to that goal. While Beijing wants to separate the border conflict from the rest of the relationship, Delhi says the two are inextricably interlinked. As the military disengagement and return to the five-point consensus on principles into tangible outcomes on the ground, there will be problems—including over the nature of the steps and their sequencing. While Delhi must negotiate in good faith, it cannot again mistake Beijing's diplomatic words for the PLA's deeds.

BETTER LATE

Suspension of Oxford trials is a sobering reminder: There are no shortcuts to vaccine development

ON TUESDAY, the global pharma major AstraZeneca announced that it is putting a halt to the ongoing clinical trials for the COVID-19 vaccine, after a volunteer developed inflammation in her spinal cord. The Swedish-British company, which is developing the vaccine in collaboration with Oxford University, has confirmed that the volunteer from the UK, who developed the adverse reaction, was administered the vaccine, not the placebo. It has said that an independent panel will investigate what went wrong. The pharma company's Indian collaborator, the Pune-based Serum Institute of India, has also put the vaccine's trials on hold. It is too early to say if these suspensions amount to a setback in the global efforts to develop a preventive against the novel coronavirus. But there are enough reasons to suggest that there is no need to jump to pessimistic conclusions. The review should, instead, be seen as a part of the rigorous scrutiny that vaccine candidates must go through.

Adverse events during vaccine tests are not rare—in 2014, work on the Ebola vaccine was temporarily stopped because some volunteers suffered arthritis. Unlike the first two phases of the trials, in which healthy adults are administered the vaccine, phase 3 trials involve a large number of participants some of whom could have an underlying medical condition—Oxford AstraZeneca's UK trials reportedly include volunteers over 70 years of age, which increases the risk of adverse events. The volunteer who fell ill after being administered the vaccine candidate developed symptoms of transverse myelitis—a rare neurological disorder that is treated with steroids, though serious cases are known to leave lasting disabilities. There is also the possibility that the volunteer's illness has no direct connection with the vaccine—in fact, in July, preliminary trials of the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine were temporarily stopped because a volunteer developed neurological symptoms, later found unrelated to the jab. The review process will test out whether the latest adverse reaction was coincident with the trial or caused by it.

The pause in the Oxford-AstraZeneca trials comes at a time when there is a virtual scramble to develop a vaccine against the novel coronavirus. There are concerns in the US that the country's regulatory agencies could be pressured to approve a vaccine before the presidential elections in November. US President Donald Trump has repeatedly suggested that the country's vaccination drive could begin in late October. The adverse event at the Oxford-AstraZeneca trials—and the vaccine developers' response—is a sobering reminder that vaccine development is not about winning a race. Science must be followed and due process.

LONELY IN THE CROWD

India is reopening after half a year in confinement, but social distancing is taking half the joy out of it

JUST AS WE were all about to go stir crazy, Unlock 4.0 brings relief. But with it comes the responsibility of keeping distance from other humans. Can a social animal maintain social distancing for too long without getting somewhat warped? The reopening of Metro services, which have become the lifeline of cities, was eagerly awaited as a sign that the nation was committed to living with the virus. But the sight of half-empty carriages, with people sitting so far apart that they could not possibly speak to each other, has been quite sobering. Imagine a half-empty Mumbai local. Part of the experience consisted of genial support—you were pressed so close by neighbours on all sides that you could not possibly fall down.

New rules and suggestions for social conduct appeared in the midst of the unlocking. Some were reiterations of common-sense injunctions which had circulated at the beginning of the lockdown, while others were imported from nations as far away as Japan. Speaking loudly on public transport is now proscribed, which means that you can't yell at the conductor if the bus misses your stop. You should not speak directly to fellow travellers, but turn away and make an aside. Even if it exposes you to the moral hazard of infecting the stranger beside you, rather than the person you addressed.

Under social distancing norms, life in public looks like one long solitary. Watching movies in a hall in which every other seat is verboten must send serotonin plummeting. Even the socially distanced protests which have been seen in countries like Spain look depressingly impersonal. But at least the world's most gregarious animal has been uncaged.



PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

INDIA AND CHINA continue to be locked in a tense stand-off, despite the meeting between Minister S Jaishankar, and Minister Wang Yi. India is right to stand its ground that the Chinese have violated existing protocols on the border. It is right to send a signal that it will not embolden China by ceding territory. But it is worth looking beyond the morality of the claim and counter claim, at the structural logic of the situation to see why India and China are now locked in this precarious embrace, where they might not want war, but will not be able to will peace either.

The first is an issue of trust. Clearly, the Chinese actions have set back trust between the two countries by decades. But rather than think of trust as an attribute of character, think of the tactical logic of trust. Was the "trust" that kept tranquillity at the border largely a product of a perceived asymmetric relationship? Keeping a measured distance and disengagement made sense when both sides could assume that the other side either did not have the capacity or would not rapidly deploy troops in strategic positions at the border. With the building of infrastructure on both sides, this trust was bound to break. The ground realities were shifting. So even if there is some temporary disengagement, both sides will now assume that the slightest diminution in military deployments could give the other side an opportunity to advance in a matter of hours. An infrastructure-thick environment will require permanent presence and closer deployments.

Chinese capabilities are probably greater than India's in this respect. But with India ramping up infrastructure and capabilities, this fear will be tangible on both sides. The fact that at the level of the army, we seem to have consistently misread the PLA's intentions, both in April and May when the first deployments happened, but also in June and July when disengagement was supposed to have taken place, will make trust nearly impossible. So, heavier deployment of assets is now a fait accompli. The closer the armies get, the greater the risks.

Beyond the tactical logic, there is a political logic that does not bode well. Let us, for a moment, put aside the moral claims and

Chinese aggression is a problem for the world. India has announced it intends to break the shackles of the past

Chinese actions have set back trust between the two countries by decades. But rather than think of trust as an attribute of character, think of the tactical logic of trust. Was the "trust" that kept tranquillity at the border largely a product of a perceived asymmetric relationship? Keeping a measured distance and disengagement made sense when both sides could assume that the other side either did not have the capacity or would not rapidly deploy troops in strategic positions at the border. With the building of infrastructure on both sides, this trust was bound to break. The ground realities were shifting. So even if there is some temporary disengagement, both sides will now assume that the slightest diminution in military deployments could give the other side an opportunity to advance.

look at the self-reinforcing logic of perception. There is still speculation on why the Chinese are taking an aggressive posture. A distracted US gives an opportunity for Chinese assertion. But the very fact that we are not sure of Chinese motives means it is hard to know their endgame.

We may not know their motives, but we can think about their fears. These fears make the situation precarious. At a basic level, they will want to secure their interests in CPEC. But on the most important matter, Tibet, the situation may be as bad as the 1950s. China has always wanted an aggressive territorial and cultural consolidation on Tibet. In the Fifties, it felt vulnerable on account of fears that India and Nepal could be a staging ground of resistance in Tibet, aided by the Americans. The importance of this structural issue has not diminished. Chinese interest in Nepal is less to encircle India. It is to ensure Nepal is not used in any way. With China intensifying its cultural consolidation in Tibet, Sino-US tensions rising, the fear of India being a ground zero for any resistance is high.

On Tibet, India is in an awkward situation. At one level, India does not have to do anything and China will still see it as a potential threat to its cultural hegemony in Tibet, because of the presence of the Dalai Lama. Ladakh and Tawang are also important pieces in that cultural consolidation. The Sino-India modus vivendi was premised on keeping the Tibet issue in check, and India, in recent years, often against its own democratic instinct, clamped down on Tibet. But as we are not sure of Chinese motives, they may not be sure of our motives either. There is an ideological shift to a deeper authoritarianism in China; and authoritarianism by its very nature will require an aggressive nationalism to shore up its power.

Chinese aggression is a problem for the world. But India has also announced that it intends to break the shackles of the past; its growing power means it needs a new paradigm of foreign policy. This policy will supposedly safeguard India's interests more assertively. It wants to exchange the allegedly placid submission of the past with a more

sophisticated policy, where all options can be exercised. India may be right about its claims. But it does not take a genius to figure out that, if diplomatically not well managed, this posture also causes great uncertainty in the international system and makes it harder to assess motives.

Our Pakistan policy is premised entirely on keeping them guessing on what we might do, including possible military options and altering the territorial status quo. We may think we were within our formal international rights to alter administrative status quo in Kashmir. But like China we are also signalling that we are not content with the status quo and would like infrastructural, territorial and cultural consolidation on our periphery. The government of India may paint a picture of diplomatic maturity. But the domestic ideological articulation of India's position ranges from reclaiming PoK to Aasai Chin. We never weigh our own words carefully. We cannot abandon Tibetans. But it is not difficult to see that Ram Madhav attending a Tibetan commander's funeral fits into a narrative of uncertainty over our intentions.

The point is not to impugn India's claims. Between India and China there is no comparison on who is the more responsible power. The point is a simple analytical one that our own trumpeted departure from the past, without either the diplomatic preparation, domestic political discipline, and full anticipation of military eventualities, does not make it easy for others to understand our endgame. So there is a mutually reinforcing cycle of mutual antagonism. More than a tactical deadlock, there is now also a deeper psychological and political deadlock. Faced with a palpable threat, India cannot back down. But we are in uncertain territory in terms of the logic of escalation. Resolving this conundrum will require not routine political guidance but great statesmanship on both sides. Otherwise we are in a state of nature, where neither side can anticipate the other's intent and will take pre-emptive measures, heightening the risk of conflict.

The writer is contributing editor.
The Indian Express

A NEW EQUILIBRIUM

India is spelling out its red lines, politically and diplomatically



ARUN SAHNI

THE EVENTS ON the night of August 29-30 once again highlighted the gravity of the situation in the ongoing standoff between the Indian Army and Chinese PLA in Ladakh. It is to the credit of the Indian Army that the troops were alert and displayed resilience in pre-empting the designs of the PLA on the critical southern bank of Pangong Tso.

There is growing frustration at China's intransigence vis-à-vis the confrontation that started in April. There has been no positive outcome on ground, despite diplomatic overtures, innumerable military interactions and three apex-level marathon discussions between the corps commanders. Talks between the highest diplomatic levels have not given tangible results. Instead of withdrawing, there is a massive build-up of Chinese forces in the areas of intrusion.

India must not fall into complacency and take measures for not only forestalling Chinese belligerence but be poised for gaining the upper hand in case of the extreme eventuality of an armed confrontation. The armed forces need to ensure a high state of "operational readiness" until the onset of the severe winter. Operational logistics need to be pragmatic. The administrative challenge of maintaining troop accretions at this altitude, during the winter season, will be of serious concern. The political-diplomatic initiative will need to be on an offensive to ensure that the current standoff is resolved without conflict. But in case of conflict, it

must be localised to the Ladakh region. Lastly, it is important to ensure that the country is not faced with a "two-front conflict".

There should be no doubt that any military confrontation we are on our own and have to be prepared accordingly. Also, irrespective of all the hype of "new-age warfare" and "maritime power", limited conventional conflict is still the reality for India due to the expanse of its disputed borders. Therefore, there is a need for clarity at the apex level that expenses incurred for sharpening the arsenal of the armed forces is money well spent. Till Make in India-Defence matures, there is a need for India-bound provisioning of essential war-wagging wherever it is.

The prime minister's resolute leadership has resulted in a meaningful disapproval of Chinese high handedness. It has also led to the banning of nearly 200 Chinese applications. These applications were being exploited by Chinese companies, for illegal data mining. These technologically advanced companies are intricately linked to the PLA and Communist Party of China.

Politically and diplomatically, we must ensure continued US and international pressure at China's other pain points—the South China Sea, Taiwan, Hong Kong. We need to continue to isolate China on its insidious role in starting the current pandemic. We need to strengthen the Quad and other multilateral regional groupings of like-minded countries. There is also a need to create a US-led

international consensus that deters Pakistan from any aggressive plans while we are addressing the northern neighbour. We need to seriously consider signing with our "strategic assets" that China limit the use of missiles in any conflict, as it is difficult to distinguish between nuclear and conventional missiles in a hot war situation. To enhance deterrence, India must spell out its red lines, especially when it comes to territorial intrusions. We need to insist on the reworking of current bilateral agreements with an unequivocal "no war pact" with China and a categorical, time-bound resolution of all border issues.

It is my firm understanding that the India-China relationship has been irreversibly altered. The recent posturing in the Chushul sector is indicative of India's resoluteness to tackle border issues. It has for the first time taken the initiative to change the narrative. This will presumably lead to breaking the deadlock. However, the loss of trust and China's insidious statecraft will also weigh heavily on future engagements. In the words of the NSA and foreign minister, India has realised that it needs to create a new equilibrium in its future relations with its neighbours, including China.

The writer is a former army commander and served as general officer commanding of the 3 Corps, which was stationed at the China border in Arunachal Pradesh

SEPTEMBER 12, 1980, FORTY YEARS AGO

INDO-IRANIAN AMITY IRAN HAS AGREED to sponsor India's case for supplying crude oil at concessional prices at next week's meeting of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), according to Union Finance Minister R Venkataraman. India had demanded that the criteria for concessional rate for crude should be per capita consumption and not the total quantity of crude imported. Venkataraman who is in Tehran as Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's special emissary said Iran appreciated India's stand. He also said that Iran will supply crude to India on a deferred payment basis, and at a low interest rate.

PACT WITH KUWAIT INDIA AND KUWAIT HAVE agreed to cooperate in the field of oil exploration. This is evident from the joint statement of the two countries issued at the end of the visit of Amir of Kuwait Shaikh Jabbar Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

US SUPPORT DOUBTFUL INDIA HOPED that the US will honour its commitment to supply enriched uranium for the Tarapur Atomic Power Plant. "We are, however, prepared to deal with any eventuality," a spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs said. India has always fulfilled all its obligations under its

agreements with the US and we hope that the US will do likewise, the spokesperson said. US law seeks to ban supply of fuel to any country that does not sign the NPT, though the country's President Jimmy Carter favours honouring his country's 1963 agreement with India on nuclear fuel supply.

MEETING-LESS DAY ALL MINISTRIES AND departments of the government will have no "meeting-less day" every week to enable officers to concentrate on work. The decision has been taken to speed up disposal of cases in the Central Secretariat.



New Delhi



THE INDIAN EXPRESS, SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2020

THE IDEAS PAGE

The tough get going

From countering Beijing to proactive diplomacy in the Arab world, India is playing its geo-strategic cards effectively. More challenges lie ahead



RAM MADHAV

THE DILIGENCE, DEXTERITY and determination that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has displayed in diplomacy in the last six years and the immense geo-strategic costs that he has inflicted on India's traditional rivals, is an important chapter. India's handling of the stand-off with China in the last few months along the LAC is one such example, widely talked about in the diplomatic circles today with awe and admiration.

China has been a difficult neighbour. It has quietly reframed its neighbourhood policy in the last few years. In 2003, Premier Wen Jiabao articulated "Good Neighbourhood, Secure Neighbourhood, and Wealthy Neighbourhood" as China's neighbourhood vision. In 2009, President Hu Jintao talked about his vision of "periphery diplomacy" for a "harmonious world". But President Xi Jinping has introduced an aggressive policy with China's neighbours since 2013 that involved expanding cultural influence, improving regional security cooperation and socialising in the region to make countries accept China's view of its core interests, and enforcing the PRC's sovereignty and territorial claims.

Not many could stand up to this aggression. In the South and East China Sea areas, China unilaterally enforced the Nine-Dash Line maritime boundary, while neighbours like Japan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia watched helplessly. In a landmark verdict, the UNCLOS on July 12, 2016, decided China's historical claims based on the Nine-Dash Line. But China simply rejected the verdict. The petitioner, the Philippines, couldn't do much. It couldn't do much either when its ships were harassed by the Chinese Coast Guard in the same area later. Vietnam had to be content with international condemnation when their fishing vessel was forcefully sunk by the Chinese Coast Guard. Recently, a Chinese survey ship, Haiyang Dizi, encroached deep inside the Malaysian Exclusive Economic Zone in search of oil reserves, while the Malaysians were forced to look the other way. Even the Americans and the Japanese find it difficult to countenance the aggression of the PLA navy in the South and East China Sea. Their ships are regularly harassed, many times by moving dangerously close, by PLA naval warships. The aircraft carriers of the PLA navy, like the Liaoning, undertake exercises in close vicinity of the American carriers provocatively.

But one place where China finds the going tough nowadays is on the Indo-Tibetan border along the LAC. Its aggressive manoeuvres are met with stiff resistance from the Indian side. The first taste of India's proportional response to the aggression came at the Doklam tri-junction in North Sikkim in 2017. Indian resistance forced the Chinese to back-track. A similar proportional response is being offered by the Indian forces along the LAC in Ladakh in the last couple of months. The Indian response in the form of "proactive diplomacy and strong ground posturing" has forced China to alter its approach. India is continuing its efforts to restore peace in the region.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Modi's proactive diplomacy with the countries in the Arab world has led to the 57-nation Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) shedding its anti-India rhetoric. A virtual split seems imminent

in the OIC between the Arab and non-Arab countries. The Arab world is led by Saudi Arabia, while Turkey and Pakistan are playing an active role in mobilising non-Arab Muslim states. Sensing the potential geo-strategic damage from the impending split in the OIC, China stepped in extending tacit support to the emerging new Islamic alliance. Prime Minister Mahatir Mohamad of Malaysia hosted a conference of the non-Arab Muslim countries in Kuala Lumpur. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan played an important role in this conference. With a view to sabotage the conference, the Saudis used their financial clout with Pakistan to force Prime Minister Imran Khan to abstain. Khan had to succumb to Saudi pressure. China stepped in to rescue Pakistan from the crisis, thus paving the way for a non-Saudi led alliance of the Islamic states.

India has played its geo-strategic cards very effectively through this entire process. It has even isolated China at the UN Security Council on two occasions in the last one year when it tried to push through a discussion over Kashmir at the behest of Pakistan. A delicate handling of the situation by India's Permanent Representative helped in thwarting these moves, leaving China red-faced. In the latest instance, in August this year, China couldn't secure support from any country except Niger, when it tried to initiate a discussion on Kashmir. Pakistan's efforts to get some innocent Indians sanctioned by the UNSC as international terrorists too came a cropper due to India's proactive diplomacy. Besides the US, several European nations like the UK and

So far, it has been a successful run for India. The delicate, yet effective strategic moves Prime Minister Modi made have given rich dividends. But India should be prepared for certain new challenges ahead. Turkey is taking over as the Chair of the United Nations this month. The ECOSOC, an important UN body on social and economic affairs, has Pakistan as the elected president. While India cherished its historical relations with Turkey, tensions between the countries remained a feature of the relationship primarily due to Turkey's intimate bond with Pakistan. On Kashmir, Turkey has largely sided with Pakistan in the past, although Erdogan has tried to slightly moderate the position. However, with China raring to get back at India at all international forums and its not-so-tactful efforts at propping up the Turkey-Pakistan-Australia leadership to counter the Saudi-led OIC, issues such as Islamophobia and Kashmir may return to dominate the international discourse. The new OIC led by the troika will be headquartered at New York. India should be prepared for this new face-off at the UN. The US, with elections around the corner, will be less interested in these affairs for some time. India's traditional allies in Europe will help, but it needs to cultivate countries like Australia, Vietnam and Japan in the Indo-Pacific neighbourhood to tackle this new challenge.

The writer is national general secretary, Biff and director, India Foundation

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"To maintain territorial integrity and long-term tranquility of our southwest border, no price is too high. This is not a slogan, but should be our true will. Chinese people love peace, but we will also fight when we have to. This is not just a facade to the outside world, but who we are."

—GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA

Divided by ideology

Pakistan sees its face in the mirror and doesn't like what it sees



KHALED AHMED

PRATAP BHANU MEHTA recently ("Simply Vishwas", IE, August 26) wrote: "Politics of belief (vishwas) is different from one based on fact and interest. It has an underlying cultural nihilism." In Pakistan, it has an association with "ideology" serving as the foundation of the Islamic State. The word "ideology" came into use during the French Revolution and postulated a sure and encyclopaedic form of knowledge upon which social engineering could be based. Ideology came on the scene as a champion of Enlightenment and rival of religion, but it soon acquired the status of a dogma. The principal voice of the ideologues and author of *Elements d'ideologie*, Antoine Destutt de Tracy (1754-1836), spoke frankly of "regulating society".

Most ideologues possess a kind of certitude, not just that utopia can be built but that it is destined to be built. Nothing promotes aggression more than certitude. Yet, a fatalistic trust in the tide of history and the ideological frame of mind go together. However, history cannot be left alone to unfold — the "passionate insensibility" (W B Yeats) of ideology craves it, you go in for rigorous imprisonment. This is a special shibboleth. An American can say America should join China and still be free. But in Pakistan, you can be hauled up for implying Pakistan's "unseparateness".

Ideology interfaces with nationalism. Ideology remains Islam, but don't ask it, you go in for rigorous imprisonment. This is a special shibboleth. An American can say America should join China and still be free. But in Pakistan, you can be hauled up for implying Pakistan's "unseparateness".

The founder of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, did use the word ideology once or twice during the Pakistan Movement, but it was in the Western liberal sense. The USSR had an ideology which was fixed. If you opposed Soviet ideology you could go to jail. In Iran, there is an ideology which no one can oppose. The only difference is that in Iran it can be done in the detail but not in principle.

In the USSR, the Communist Party looked after ideology. In Iran, the clergy appointed by the constitution does the same job. In Pakistan, ideology gained respect after 1947 and some of it, it must be confessed, came from the USSR and its great economic achievement. India was democratic. Pakistan was ideological. India was an ordinary concept as a state. Pakistan was something special. The Left thought ideological meant socialism. The Right thought it meant Islam. The utopia of the Right was "falsh" (welfare) state, somewhat akin to the communist utopia. Today, Imran Khan calls it the State of

Madia.

All politicians in Pakistan proudly claim to be "nazriati" (ideological). It can mean "principled", but it also points to an Islamic utopia. Pakistan has tried to define this utopia. But under General Ziaul Haq, a committee called Ansari Commission said Islam "did not allow opposition". So, the general had a non-party election and there was no opposition in parliament. It was clear that Pakistan did not equate ideology with democracy. There is a Federal Shariat Court in Islamabad to make sure everything happens in Pakistan according to Islam. That is very much like ideology.

The clerical view is that the Pakistani utopia should be recreated in the light of the "sharia", which also includes the "fiqh" (case law) of the medieval jurists of Islam. AIs, in the eyes of the clergy, the state remains "incompletely ideological" and, therefore, an unhappy state. It is a small island on which the non-clerical Right and a minuscule Left are surviving in Pakistan. Needless to say, the clerics are unhappy and denounce the state.

Muslims who want to be "modern-Islamic" are unhappy because the state can't move quickly enough to assimilate the new universalism. Muslims who want the state to be perfectly Islamic are unhappy with it for being tardy in rejecting modernity. You have to be a good Pakistani. That means you have to love the idea of Pakistan as a state that lives separated from India.

If you imply that Pakistan is not separate from India or that it should re-spin it, you go in for rigorous imprisonment. This is a special shibboleth. An American can say America should join China and still be free. But in Pakistan, you can be hauled up for implying Pakistan's "unseparateness".

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The acme of nationalism is fascism, which then becomes ideology. Ideology, because of its "utopian" control, also aspires to fascism. Stalin fought against fascism but then created an ideological state, which was not much different from Hitler's Germany. Pakistan is like Caliban. It sees its face in the mirror and doesn't like what it sees.

The writer is consulting editor, Newsweek Pakistan

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

PUBLIC INJUSTICE

THIS REFERS TO the article, "Don't look back in anger" (IE, September 11). Instead of acting like the judiciary is there to handle justice, people and the ravenous media seem to have caught up with the idea that they are the ones who need to pass justice statement, which is evident from the belligerent heckling of Rhea Chakraborty. The author is right — this society is living in denial. Rather than fixing the issues at the root — patriarchy in nuclear families, vulnerability — entertainment is being sought at the cost of others' lives. If Rhea is declared "not guilty", who'll be responsible for the atrocities on her?

Prateek Mitra, Noida

BURDENING STATES

THIS REFERS TO the article, "Not Centre vs States" (IE, September 11). The options put forth by the Union finance ministry to compensate states at war, State-level politicians have been justified because the unprecedented pandemic situation has wreaked havoc on the Centre's finances and the borrowing by states to meet the shortfalls wouldn't be compromising on fiscal discipline. But exhausting the borrowing limit could impact the states' ability to raise money in the future, as serving this debt through compensation cess (Democracy, IE, September 11). This government began by taking the ordinance route for laws it felt would be difficult to pass in Parliament. Now, it is doing away with debate. If it is not thoroughly questioning the policies and laws proposed by the executive, Parliament stands in danger of becoming a rubber stamp.

Supad Kumar Dey, Kolkata

PARLIAMENT ERODED

THIS REFERS TO the article, "Democracy in question" (IE,

September 11). The government's decision to abandon Question Hour is clearly a bid to avoid a volley of questions at this critical juncture. As the article states, Question Hour was not suspended even when India was at war. State-level politicians like Jawaharlal Nehru and Atal Bihari Vajpayee never avoided facing Question Hour. Often, they answered boldly, keeping the Opposition at bay. It is clear that when a government refuses to be questioned or challenged, Parliament ceases to matter.

R M Deshpande, New Mumbai

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Biswadeep Chatterjee, Delhi

Changing the rules mid-game

With new exam, National Law School of India University does students a disservice

KHUSHBU SINGH

CAN YOU IMAGINE what would happen if half-way into a Test match, the teams were told that it was now going to be converted into a T20 game? Even a Virat Kohli would struggle to score in the face of such an abrupt change. This would familiar to the 2020 law school aspirants awaiting entrance examinations. The National Law School of India University (NLSU), Bengaluru, has suddenly decided to part ways with the Consortium of National Law Universities' annual Common Law Admission Test (CLAT) and conduct its own entrance examination. And it thought it alright to announce this new exam giving the students little more than a week to prepare. The apparent reason for introducing a new entrance examination is that they want to avoid a Zero Year in the event that CLAT 2020 gets indefinitely postponed due to COVID.

There was a time when CLAT was introduced in 2008 when every college and university conducted separate entrance examinations, causing students much mental and physical stress — not to mention economic hardship. Directed by the Supreme Court in *Venugopal v. Union of India*, CLAT was lauded as a step in the right direction.

In what has been a major reform, a move

towards common entrance examinations in a variety of fields has been the norm over the last couple of decades. NEET (National Eligibility cum Entrance Test), JEE (Joint Entrance Examination), and UPSC (Union Public Service Commission) are some examples. NLSU's decision to introduce the break-away NLSU in a new, truncated format — 40 questions in 45 minutes — is not only regressive but also insensitive to the plight of the students. It is possibly also violative of certain provisions of the Constitution.

Courts across India have held that a contract, tender or a binding MoU cannot be changed in the middle of the game or after it is over, especially when it affects the outcomes. NLSU has done precisely that.

Law aspirants prepare for years for the entrance examinations to the coveted NLSU. Annus horribilis, 2020, just got worse. AILET and CLAT were two different examinations with similar patterns and a common syllabus till recently. Earlier this year, CLAT decided to

change its pattern and now NLSU has been introduced. So, we now have three different examinations in three different formats — one being instituted at a week's notice in the backdrop of a rapidly deteriorating pandemic. Coronavirus might be an "Act of God", but this disaster is certainly an "act of man".

Even after five years, the online-centre CLAT continues to be marred by controversies, hence the consortium decided to conduct CLAT 2020 in the manual mode. NLSU's decision to jump from a manual to online-at-home exam may at best be termed as a leap of faith as an online-at-home exam while good in theory, is still a work in progress. Moreover, NLSU seems oblivious to their online-at-home entrance examination being discriminatory and favouring the privileged. It completely discounts students with limited access to a laptop, uninterrupted internet, reliable power supply and the other specifications laid down in the exam guidelines. NLSU is gambling by changing the format as well as the mode of examination. Eventually, NLSU may save a year but will be a net loser if it does not get the best students. The only party benefitting from this arbitrary, unilateral decision are the coaching centres who

are already exploiting the stressed, overburdened and overwhelmed students by introducing new coaching material and test series tailored for NLSU.

NLSU might have had genuine grievances and concerns but this is a case of throwing out the baby with the bathwater. A spirit of accommodation is the basis on which any consortium exists. NLSU and the rest of the consortium should have worked harder to resolve the issues keeping the best interests of the students in mind rather than setting a bad precedent for the other NLSUs to emulate. The Keryan aphorism "When elephants fight, it's the grass that suffers" applies aptly to the current situation with students becoming collateral damage.

NLSU has acted in contravention of the memorandum of understanding, ex-facie violated the by-laws of the Consortium, prima facie violated Article 14 and Article 21 of the Indian Constitution and has exhibited a shocking level of indifference to the plight of students. With the Supreme Court seized of the matter, the fate of NLSU still hangs in balance.

The writer recently graduated from Jindal Global Law School

New Delhi

Opinion

Hearts don't beat faster for 'the rules-based international order'

Timothy Garton Ash

As you read this, speechwriters around the world will be sitting down to write the words "rules-based international order" into their ministerial speeches to the UN general assembly, which opens on Tuesday. I have a message for them: please don't. Think again and find a better phrase.

This commonplace of international discourse was trotted out by no less than 55 speakers in the first 20 plenary meetings of last year's general assembly, with slight variations, but always using the "rules-based" formula. The UK foreign secretary, Dominic Raab, has described the country as "a doughty defender of the rules-based international system". The moniker is so commonly used in internal British government documents

that it has its own acronym: "the RBIS". The case against the phrase is twofold: substantive and rhetorical. Substantively, the problem is that it captures only a part of what we should be defending — and perhaps not even the most important part.

As governments and central banks try to steer the world economy away from the quagmire of a post-Covid-19 global depression, they are frequently observed to be "tearing up the rule book". This is generally meant as praise.

A new book by the political scientist Vivien Schmidt persuasively argues that the first phase of the eurozone crisis was greatly exacerbated by doubling down on rigid, one-size-fits-all rules — what she calls "governing by rules and ruling by numbers". It was only when policymakers started reinterpreting the rules by stealth that a more sustainable recovery followed.

A monetary union of democracies should not allow any of its members to sink into extreme economic misery, even if avoiding that outcome involves

reinterpreting a rule or two. An underlying value or principle takes precedence over arbitrary rules, which are often the product of messy bureaucratic, diplomatic and political compromise.

Such rules should not be confused with international law, which a UK minister this week outrageously, foolishly and unacceptably said his government will "break in a specific and limited way". International law has a very high value and must be upheld. But if what we mean by "rules" is actually law, then we should say law — a stronger, simpler and more precise word.

If we need a single overarching term, then the broader concept of "liberal international order" is more persuasive than RBIS, embracing as it does both international law and all the institutions and practices of international co-operation built up over many decades. Yet even that abstract phrase hardly speaks to the heart.

Here is the second, and most important point. We who wish to defend liberal democracy and multilateral co-op-

eration are up against nationalist populists. Their highly coloured rhetoric, simplistic and mendacious though it is, appeals strongly to the emotions. Consider US president Donald Trump's slogan, "make America great again", the Brexiters' "take back control", or French politician Marine Le Pen's "in est chez nous" (we are at home). In the ter-

The phrase captures only a part of what we should be defending — and not even the most important part

minology of classical rhetoric, they may be short on *logos* but they are long on *pathos*.

Even if you think rules-based international order perfectly captures the essence of what we are trying to defend, you must acknowledge that the phrase has very limited emotional appeal — except perhaps to some elderly school-

masters. The brave people protesting in Belarus, Lebanon or Venezuela would never think to put such words on their home-made banners. They write "freedom". Or "justice". Or "truth".

No one's heart ever beat faster at the sound of the rules-based international order. It is one of those wooden prefabricated phrases that George Orwell denounced in his essay "Politics and the English Language".

Once upon a time, western leaders used to be good at this. I have before me a copy of Winston Churchill's handwritten corrections to the Atlantic Charter that the British prime minister and the American president Franklin Roosevelt put forth in 1941. Thus improved, the charter proclaims the stirring goal "that all the men in all the lands may live out their lives in freedom from fear and want".

"Dare more democracy!" cried West German chancellor Willy Brandt in 1969. Twenty years later, US president George H W Bush, though he deplored "the vision thing", gave us the single best

description of what to aim for in a long-divided continent: Europe whole and free.

Today, in the age of Twitter, the language probably needs to be less grandiloquent (and more gender inclusive) than that of Churchill and Roosevelt. Yet it is always good to go back to primary values: freedom, justice, peace. Better still to include a strong transitive verb: defend freedom, make peace, stop murder. (Russia's Vladimir Putin take note. #Navalny.) The rhetorical repetition of a simple phrase such as "work together" can also be effective.

To counter the deceptive brilliance of slogans such as "take back control", we need something muscular, original and simple, appealing as much to the heart as to the head. A prize to the speech writer who comes up with it! History will remember you — or at least, your boss and your phrase.

The writer is a professor of European Studies at Oxford university and a Hoover Institution senior fellow

Belarusian musician was jailed after tearing up her passport and refusing to leave the country, writes James Shutter

When Belarusian authorities tried to force opposition leader Maria Kolesnikova out of the country in the early hours of Tuesday morning, they were following a well-worn playbook.

Since the nation erupted in protests in August after its autocratic leader, Alexander Lukashenko, claimed victory in a deeply flawed election, his main opponents have been coerced into leaving, one by one. But the attempt to expel his Kolesnikova went awry. Grabbed off the street by masked men and bundled into a van in central Minsk, she was taken to the border with Ukraine and put into a car with two other activists. She had been told she would have to leave Belarus "alive or in pieces".

Ms Kolesnikova refused. Instead, according to the two activists, she tore up her passport so she could not enter Ukraine. Her defiance has left her facing a prolonged period in prison, but it has also cemented her position at the forefront of a protest movement that has brought hundreds of thousands of people on to the streets in the most serious challenge the authoritarian Mr Lukashenko has faced during his 26-year rule.

The 38-year-old, whose cropped bleached-blond hair and bright-red lipstick make her instantly recognisable, is in some ways an unlikely figurehead for the movement. Born to two engineers in 1982 as the Soviet Union limped towards dissolution, she grew up with her sister in Minsk. While she was briefly involved in the opposition Youth Front, it was music that became her main focus.

She started playing the flute aged nine and was teaching it in a local school by the time she was 17. After graduating from the State Academy of Music, she left for further studies in Germany, and immersed herself in avant-garde music, as a performer and a manager.

"A while ago I couldn't have imagined that she would get involved in Belarusian politics in this way," says Martin Schüttler, a composer and music professor who got to know Ms Kolesnikova after her studies in Stuttgart. "But in retrospect, it doesn't surprise me at all. She is above all focused on people, and interested in exchange, understanding, community development and solidarity — and she takes responsibility."

To others the transition was obvious. "When you try to change something fundamental in culture in an authoritarian country, then sooner or later you go into politics," says Sergei Newski, a Russian composer who has worked with Ms Kolesnikova. "What we see is a completely normal evolution. Maria went from musician to manager and from manager to politician."

The catalyst was Viktor Babariko. In 2017, Ms Kolesnikova contacted the then head of Belgasbank, a Belarusian bank controlled by Russia's Gazprom, to ask for support for a music event. They co-operated on various projects and when Mr Babariko decided to run for president, he asked Ms Kolesnikova to manage his 2020 campaign. "She totally shared his values, so I



Person in the News | Maria Kolesnikova

The opposition leader who would not budge

understand why she did it," says Tatsiana Khomich, Ms Kolesnikova's sister. "Of course I felt a bit nervous, but our family supported her."

Mr Babariko's campaign was short lived. Having gathered more than 400,000 signatures to support his candidacy and established himself as Mr Lukashenko's main rival, he was promptly jailed in June.

In his absence, Ms Kolesnikova threw her weight behind the candidacy of Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, a political novice who ran in place of her husband, a popular YouTube star also jailed by the regime. They were joined by Veronika Tsepkalo, the wife of another banned candidate. The three women formed an alliance that mushroomed into a serious threat to the regime amid frustration over the economy and Mr Lukashenko's erratic response to Covid-19.

When Mr Lukashenko launched his savage post-election crackdown, the trio found themselves squarely in his sights. Ms Tsepkalo fled to Moscow. Ms

Tikhanovskaya, who had already evacuated her children, was forced to leave for Lithuania. But Ms Kolesnikova stayed. "Maria always said that she would never leave Belarus because she has friends detained here," says Ms Khomich. "About 20 or 30 of her friends are in prison now."

'She always said that she would never leave Belarus because... 20 or 30 of her friends are in prison now'

"She's a tough lady, she's not an easy nut to crack," adds a diplomat who deals with Belarus. "She has no kids, so she cannot be intimidated via them as has happened to others."

As the opposition leadership has scattered, there have been the first signs of disagreement. Last week, Ms Kolesnikova said she was launching a political

party. Together, which would push for constitutional change. That drew a rebuke from Ms Tikhanovskaya, who warned it would distract from ousting Mr Lukashenko. In an earlier interview with Haaretz, Ms Kolesnikova conceded that she and Ms Tikhanovskaya were not in direct contact any more but communicate via their teams.

Other opposition leaders reject suggestions of fragmentation. "We have a common position. We are united, we are still active and we will be more active," says politician Pavel Latushko.

Ms Kolesnikova's detention means that all the opposition leaders have now all been either jailed or expelled. Yet given the grassroots nature of the protests, that may not spell the end of the resistance. Allies say she remains unbowed. "As far as I know from her lawyer, Maria is OK, she is well," says Ms Khomich. "And she doesn't give up. Even now, she doesn't give up."

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Quick, dirty Covid tests can help end the weariness

Tim Harford
The undercover economist

Screw tape, CS Lewis's unforgettable devil, has this advice for crushing people who are facing a test of endurance. "Feed him with false hopes... Exaggerate the weariness by making him think it will soon be over."

Thanks to the coronavirus pandemic, we are starting to learn all about weariness and false hopes. It seems endless. And since a highly effective vaccine remains an uncertain prospect, is there any way we might get back to normality without?

I think there is. The image I can't shake off is that of the Ready Brek advertisements that have run since I was a child in the 1970s. They show children walking to school in wet and gloomy British winters shielded by a warm orange glow because they ate their porridge-adjacent breakfast.

So indulge me for a moment of science fiction. What if everyone who was infectious glowed bright orange? The virus would be extinct in humans within a month.

Coronavirus is an information problem. A few people are infected, but we don't know who. We are forced to assume that anybody might be — and, as the economist Joshua Gans observes in his forthcoming book *The Pandemic Information Gap*, this is extraordinarily costly.

It would be worth a lot to know who is and who is not infectious, and the obvious way to approach the orange glow scenario is to produce tests so cheap, so plentiful and so easy to administer that everyone could test themselves frequently, by spitting on to a strip of special paper.

Such an idea has been discussed for months in certain circles, including in a campaign by Paul Romer, a Nobel laureate economist. But it came to the foreground in the UK this week when — against the backdrop of a faltering testing system — Prime Minister Boris Johnson promised millions of tests a day.

A promise from Mr Johnson might well have negative value. He and his ministers have repeatedly set and missed targets for the scale of testing and the speed at which tests are processed. And while industry press releases have suggested that cheap, accurate tests are just around the corner, independent experts such as Jon Deeks, a professor at Birmingham university, point to a history of over-promising and to a lack of trustworthy evidence that new tests are effective.

Even if a cheap-as-a-cup-of-coffee test could be produced and distributed in sufficient quantities, problems remain. The most obvious is the issue of false positives. The Office for National Statistics estimated that one in 2,000

people were infected with coronavirus in England and Wales in late August. With a test that has a false-positive rate of just 1 per cent, you would wrongly flag up 20 uninfected people for every genuine case. The rarer the virus, the worse this problem becomes.

No wonder the experts are sceptical — not just that a cheap test will be produced, but that it could be useful for mass screening if it were. Yet while false positives are a disaster if we react to them in the wrong way, even a shoddy test used well can nudge the odds in our favour.

Imagine a quick-and-dirty test which takes five minutes to conduct, but produces a false positive rate of 10 per cent. Two hundred false positives might be flagged for every genuine case. That is disastrously high if we apply the current UK rules, in which the tested person and everyone in their household has to self-isolate for more than a week.

But even the bad test produces some information: the person with a positive test is 10 times more likely to be infected than a randomly selected person. So what about the following rule? If you take the test at the school gate and test positive, you must go home and try again tomorrow. If you take a positive test at the theatre entrance, you will need to leave and your ticket will be refunded. If you take it on arrival at Heathrow airport, you'll have to do a more accurate swab test and isolate until results arrive.

These are all irritating scenarios for

Since a vaccine remains an uncertain prospect, is there a way to get back to normality without one?

the 200 out of 201 who do not actually have the virus. But they are not nearly as irritating as no school, no theatre, no flights and everyone back in lockdown by Christmas.

Fast, cheap tests don't need to be perfect to help contain the virus. They don't even need to be nearly perfect. Cheap and quick is enough — provided we use the information wisely. We can't shut down a school or an office block because one person tests positive on a ropey test: the risk of false positives is too great. But we can ask them to stay at home instead and book a more accurate test.

I have long believed that we undervalue two things. First, when it comes to technology, we undervalue quick-and-dirty relative to expensive-and-perfect. Vaccines get vastly more attention than the prospect of spitting on to a paper strip to produce a result that is probably wrong.

Second, we undervalue data. We spin it, make language habits, turn it into targets, lie about it and disbelieve it. But data, even noisy data, about who is infectious is information that could save both livelihoods, and lives.

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COMPANIES & MARKETS

Good times for big US banks cannot last under Biden

Robert Armstrong
On Wall Street



The prospect of a Joe Biden presidency — or, more to the point, a Democratic sweep of the presidency, the House and the Senate — should worry executives who run banks and anyone who invests in them. If Joe and the Dems get their way, banks will be taxed more heavily and regulated more strictly than they are now.

The question is how hard that political squeeze will be and how it will compare with the pressures the banking industry is already facing.

Start with taxes. The Trump administration's biggest boost to the sector was the cut in the federal corporate tax rate. This is because banks are among a handful of US industries that actually pay the full rate. As Ed Mills of Raymond James' policy research team points out, the standard tax offsets are for capital expenditures and research and development, where banks are relatively inactive. Most banks' businesses are heavily domestic, too.

In 2017, for example, JPMorgan Chase's reported tax rate (including state and foreign taxes, and assorted deferrals and offsets) was 32 per cent. In 2019, it was 18 per cent. The biggest contributor to the fall was the cut in the statutory federal rate from 35 to 21 per cent. Mr Biden has proposed moving the rate back up to 28 per cent. A seven percentage point hike would have cost JPMorgan investors \$3.1bn in earnings last year or, at the bank's current earnings multiple, some \$30bn in market value.

That will not be the only tax change on the table. Both Mr Biden and running mate Kamala Harris have expressed support for a financial transaction tax, which would shave a fraction of a penny

from each stock, bond or derivative trade. There will be a fight about this ("It's a tax on pensioners!" and so on) but it may happen. It could raise a lot of money — \$777bn over a decade, according to the Congressional Budget Office — and the amount taken from each trade "seems so small," as Mr Mills says.

Turning to regulation, bear in mind that personnel is policy or, to put it slightly differently, that Elizabeth Warren did not disappear when she lost the Democratic nomination to Mr Biden. The senior Senator from Massachusetts — and banking's *bête noire* — will, at the very least, have a strong say in key regulatory appointments, she could also serve as Treasury Secretary, which would give her a big platform to repeat her calls for the separation of investment banking and deposit-taking.

The question is how hard the political squeeze will be and how it will compare with existing pressures

latory appointments, she could also serve as Treasury Secretary, which would give her a big platform to repeat her calls for the separation of investment banking and deposit-taking. If that prospect is not enough to spook bank executives, imagine the following regulatory trifecta: Ms Warren at Treasury, Lael Brainard as chair of the Federal Reserve and California representative Katie Porter at the helm of a reanimated Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

Ms Brainard, a current Fed governor and chair of the central bank's financial stability committee, was the dissenting voice as Trump appointees filed the sharp edges of the Dodd-Frank rules and the Community Reinvestment Act. As for Ms Porter, anyone who missed

her performances when bank executives were dragged before the House Financial Services Committee should find them on YouTube. The former law professor has written textbooks about consumer protection law. She worked for Ms Harris in bank supervision when the latter was California's attorney-general. At the CFPB, she (or another Democrat) could make life very difficult for segments such as payday lending, while making it easier for start-ups to compete with incumbents in basic services.

A Biden administration would provide some offsetting benefits to the big banks. If he strengthens the social safety net, that could help subprime card and auto lenders. Mr Biden also halts from Delaware, which has become the credit card capital of America because of its lender-friendly laws. That makes it unlikely that he would support moves such as a cap on interest rates, which has been floated by Democrats to his left.

Remember, too, that the industry has more to worry about than rules and their enforcement. For all the warmth of the Trump administration, bank stocks are down about 17 per cent since he was inaugurated. Policy matters — but the path of economic growth and interest rates matter more.

Mr Trump's critics will argue that Mr Biden represents a return to sane governance. Business in general, and banking in particular, rely on predictable policies that breed stability. To his supporters, Mr Biden represents a step in that direction. Investing, however, requires a degree of myopia. In the shorter term at least, a Democratic sweep would bring pain for bank investors.

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Don't be a hero, preserve your cash when everyone wakes up and blinks



Ben Smith, the legendary short-seller, said on a brokerage house floor in October 1929: "sell 'em all, they're not worth anything!"

Well, President Donald Trump's reported opinions of heroes are spot on and I endorse them. Heroes, he supposedly said, were "suckers" and "losers". The so-called leadership were a bunch of "babies and dopes".

I am not thinking here about Trump's alleged opinions of the uniformed military of course.

His remarks apply to the investment professionals who are still long equities or at least at the long end of their allowed portfolio mix.

This rally, by the way, is pretty close to the recovery in US shares between November 1929 and May 1930.

Those investment people are heroes, of a sort, who are willing to hold their positions without regard for danger. The rest of us will divide up their belongings before attempting to conduct an orderly retreat out of risk markets.

Consider the obvious signals. The US Federal Reserve just concluded the least significant policy review in memory. Yet, after the biggest monetary action in history, we still have a Eurodollar futures curve that is inverted well into next year.

What about further fiscal stimulus? The US Senate just published a "re-stimulus" bill, which cuts off all "unallocated" Fed lending authority created by the Cares bill on January 21

2020 — apparently so any president, but perhaps particularly a Democratic one, will not have anything to throw immediately at a new economic contraction.

Did I say new contraction? According to the oil market we never got out of over appropriation on a peak of 9m barrels a day in production cuts, the oil curve is in contango, meaning that even after production declines, there is not enough demand.

Good for our long-term carbon path but not for any near-term economic recovery.

Actually used for transactions inside Japan among Japanese, the yen-dollar market is an important waypoint for

The only things that work are, basically, insane, such as paying five times more for Tesla than in March

dollars being borrowed in China. FX yen-dollar swaps have been a "risk-free" way for Japanese banks to make a couple of basis points.

Now, either the west is unwilling to lend, or China is unwilling to borrow, and Japanese yen are moving back home.

The consequent yen strength is very much not in the country's interest. It also suggests that yen assets, a better haven than the Trump dollar, are more in demand. After all, they have already done their 20 years of stagnation and ex-bubble penance.

America has not, so the senior lending officers at its banks have been raising credit standards at the fastest rate since 2008.

Consumers are paying down

revolving credit lines. Even the US government is hanging on to cash — there is more than \$1.6tn in the US Treasury's General Account, which means even an election year administration is holding on to cash, as the bureaucrats worry about their next appropriation.

Where would an industrial recovery in the US come from? In the past couple of decades, the country has been an outstanding builder of aircraft and assembler of oil and gas production equipment.

But the buyers for those products, which are not already bankrupt, are surviving because they cut their capital spending. There is no recovery in the aircraft market. And there is all the oil and gas we need.

There is a lot of Hamlet-like indecision in the investment world.

The only things that work are, basically, insane, such as paying five times more for Tesla now than in March when at least it could buy enough nickel for its batteries.

September and early October have been a time of cash shortness since farmers brought their crops to market in agrarian economies.

September is when Long Term Capital Management ran out of cash to cover its short-Bunds position.

September is when Lehman failed. September is when the repo market ran out of liquidity last year.

Commercial property lenders have not figured out how to turn nothing (rent from retail) into something (debt service).

State and local governments think the Democrats in Congress will bail them out. They will not.

Why not be the one who wakes when everyone else wakes up with blinks? Sometimes, the Ben Smiths are right.

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The day in the markets

What you need to know

- Tech-heavy Nasdaq heading for steepest weekly fall since March
- Sterling tumbles further against the dollar after Brexit tension mounts
- Best weekly performance for London's blue-chip stocks in four months

Stocks on Wall Street were on track to record a second week of losses after a sharp sell-off for large tech companies.

The Nasdaq Composite index shed about 10 per cent over the past week, deflating a rally that had propelled the tech-heavy benchmark up more than 70 per cent from March lows.

Analysts at Danske Bank said investors were looking ahead to a US Federal Reserve monetary policy meeting next week, which should help to lift sentiment.

"The events of recent weeks show latent risks remain high," they said. "This will likely force the hands of various central banks who are likely to reiterate continued economic support on the back of this."

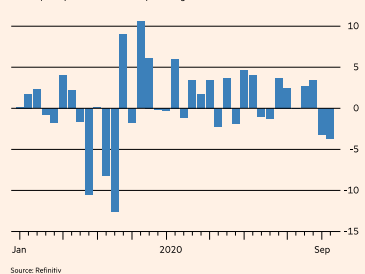
Alongside a weekly fall of around 3.5 per cent for the Nasdaq, the large-cap S&P 500 index was heading for a 2.5 per cent dip over the past five days after edging up 0.1 per cent at lunchtime in New York.

In Europe, equities were almost flat with the region-wide Stoxx Europe 600 index closing up 0.1 per cent. In the Asia-Pacific region, China's CSI 300 index of Shanghai- and Shenzhen-listed stocks rose 1 per cent while Hong Kong's Hang Seng and Tokyo's Nikkei gained 0.8 per cent and 0.7 per cent, respectively.

In currencies, sterling fell more than 3

Worst week for US tech stocks since coronavirus sell-off

Nasdaq Composite index (weekly % change)



per cent against the dollar this week after the UK unveiled plans for legislation that would override key parts of its EU exit agreement, risking the collapse of trade negotiations with Brussels.

Analysts at ING added that the chances of a UK-EU trade deal being struck were now "50:50 at best, given the events of the past few days". The pound sell-off was, however, a boon for global-facing companies of the

FTSE 100, whose exports benefit from a weaker currency. London's blue-chip index rose 0.5 per cent yesterday, taking its increase for the week to 4 per cent, its best weekly performance since June.

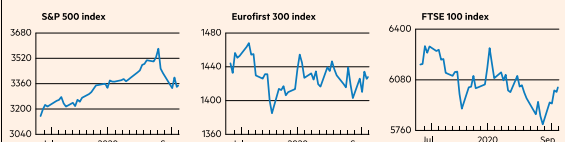
Oil prices, which fell sharply on Tuesday on concerns about waning global demand for crude, recouped some gains yesterday afternoon. Brent crude, the international benchmark, rose 0.2 per cent to \$40.14 a barrel, although that was \$2 less per barrel than at the start of the week. Harry Dempsey, Hudson Lockett and Ray Douglas

Markets update

	US	Eurozone	Japan	UK	China	Brazil
Stocks	S&P 500	Eurofirst 300	Nikkei 225	FTSE100	Shanghai Comp	Bovespa
Level	3348.02	1427.95	23406.49	6032.09	3260.35	98826.85
% change on day	0.26	0.16	0.74	0.48	0.29	-0.01
Currency	\$ index (DXY)	\$ per €	Yen per \$	\$ per £	Rmb per \$	Real per \$
Level	93.191	1.183	106.200	1.278	6.837	5.292
% change on day	-0.155	-0.337	0.019	-0.699	-0.047	-0.114
Govt. bonds	10-year Treasury	10-year Bund	10-year JGB	10-year gilt	10-year bond	10-year bond
Yield	0.672	-0.483	0.019	0.182	3.125	6.881
Commodity	Oil - WTI	Oil - Brent	Gold	Silver	Metals (LME)	
Level	44.170	48.801	1930.00	23.32	5.200	
% change on day	0.31	1.01	1.59	0.98	2.15	-0.42

Yields and % change are based on 16:00 GMT. S&P, Dow Jones, Nikkei, FTSE, Shanghai, Bovespa, and Real are based on 17:00 GMT. Gold, Silver, and Metals are based on 16:00 GMT. Bond data supplied by TD Bank Group.

Main equity markets



Biggest movers

	US	Eurozone	UK
Up	Huntington Ingalls Industries 4.56	Lvmh 3.03	Aviva 5.02
	Under Armour 4.47	Novozymes 2.59	Anglo American 4.46
	LyondellBasell Industries NV 4.27	Swatch 2.58	Rio Tinto 4.35
	Cognac Technology Solutions 4.18	Hugo Boss 2.32	Glencore 4.15
	PerkinElmer 4.05	Kering 2.00	Burberry 3.71
Down	Nortonlifelock -5.87	A.P. Møller - Maersk B -5.73	Ad Sports Fashion -3.81
	Darden Restaurants -3.70	Accor -4.27	Int Consolidated Airlines S.A. -3.09
	Host Hotels & Resorts -3.64	ThyssenKrupp -4.16	Morrison (wm) Supermarkets -3.08
	SI Crocs Realty -3.05	Casino Guichard -3.16	Taylor Wimpey -2.59
	Nordstrom -2.98	B. Sabadell -3.28	Misg -2.52

Prices listed at 17:00 GMT

All data provided by Morningstar unless otherwise noted

Wall Street

Peloton surged to a record high after the exercise bike maker delivered forecast-beating earnings and guidance.

It posted its first ever quarterly profit after Covid-19 demand boosted revenue by 172 per cent, in spite of sharply lower marketing spend, which helped improve margins.

Goldman Sachs repeated "buy" advice on Peloton, saying product waiting lists made management's raised guidance look overly conservative.

Peloton is "in the earliest stages of creating new and expanding existing categories connected fitness products" and "the window of opportunity for any meaningful competitor is rapidly closing", the broker said.

Oracle gained on the back of fiscal first-quarter results showing stronger than expected software licence revenues, which rose 8 per cent year on year.

Dominos Pizza rose after Cowen & Co turned positive. Opportunities to cut costs and expand its market share in the US pizza category, which stands at just over 50 per cent, suggested upside to consensus forecasts, the broker said.

Craft retail website Etsy gained on the back of "buy" advice from Jefferies, which told clients that third-quarter numbers were set to exceed forecasts. Bryce Elder

Eurozone

Arysta, owner of bakery brands including Delice de France and Otis Spunkmeyer, jumped to a six-month high on news that US hedge fund Elliott was in advanced talks to buy the company.

The Swiss-Irish group had said over the summer that several parties had expressed interest in bidding after it had earlier hired Rothschild this year to conduct a strategic review.

Knorr-Bremse of Germany dropped after majority shareholder Heinz Hermann Thiele cut his stake in the brake maker to raise around \$12bn.

Shipping company Maersk retreated by the most in three months on a report that China's transport ministry had called a meeting with container line operators.

Fuchs Petrolub rose on the back of an update to from Commerzbank, which said the German lubricants distributor was a likely beneficiary of growing demand for electric vehicles.

LVHM and Kering, the Gucci owner, Casino Guichard said that luxury goods spending appeared to have rebounded through the summer on improved US demand. Bryce Elder

London

Royal Mail hit its highest level since December after a trading update earlier this week showed stronger than expected parcel volumes, which helped bolster hopes of a turnaround and an eventual break-up of the business.

JPMorgan Cazenove upgraded Royal Mail from "underweight" to "neutral".

"While the UK turnaround is far from certain, stronger short-run trading has at least bought some time, and should prevent a build-up of net debt," JPMorgan Cazenove said.

The immediate risk for investors was that a pay deal with unions could be backdated to April 2020, which would eat into planned cost savings, said the broker.

Travis Perkins, the builders' merchant, rose after Jefferies analysts turned positive. The stock had lagged behind peers in spite of being best placed to capitalise on a recovery in UK property repair and maintenance spending, it said.

Fund manager Ashmore retreated on disappointing full-year results, which showed cost savings compensating for weak investor flows. The poor out-turn suggested a "recovery in flows would be delayed and flow mix will result in pressure in fee margins", Citigroup said.

Aviva led the FTSE 100 gainers after announcing the sale of its Singapore arm for £1.6bn to Singlife. Bryce Elder

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