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THE EDITORIAL PAGE

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FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

DIRTY PICTURE

Bollywood needs to show spine — but a cool head too. Calling for a gag on media, it plays into hands of who want to browbeat it

A NEW STORY is playing in the Hindi film industry. In many ways, and as it has often done, it mirrors themes of the larger social and political landscape. But this time, the drama is mostly off-screen. And the central tension that is driving the plot has a harder, more explicitly political edge. A government that has won a large mandate, not once but twice, has armed itself with a strategy of winner-should-take-all. Spaces political and non-political will be encroached, even if this means weaponising agencies and laws, and using prime-time megaphones to signal that there's only one game — and one new sheriff — in town. But Bollywood has always been a special place. It is not that the Hindi film industry has not played politics, or hasn't even been politically played. Yet, despite the Emergency, films with political themes and film stars who took the political plunge, in spite of the Censor Board and Income Tax department wielded as instruments of control, the intimacies between film and politics in Bollywood, unlike in the country's south, have been flickering — and much has been left to the imagination. Now, as the Sushant Singh Rajput case becomes a turning point, and the spectre of a purge takes shape, that precarious ambiguity stands imperilled.

While the government's aggressive bid to colonise the Hindi film industry is visible, and digital platforms may well be next, it is also clear that Bollywood needs a better-judged, more thoughtful script. In its push back, 38 leading cinema associations and production houses have sought a "perpetual and permanent" court injunction against two TV channels seen as proxies for the ruling establishment in making "irresponsible, derogatory and defamatory remarks". While the outrage against the media's "parallel and private investigations" is understandable, by seeking a gag order, Bollywood is standing up by seeking to intimidate. The attempt to control Bollywood by the political establishment requires a more creative response, one that does not speak the language of the aggressor, or ends up shrinking free speech. For all its warts and despite its timidities and nepotism, the Hindi film industry performs unique and important functions in India's democracy — it acts as a mirror, and as a sensor and warning system of new needs and aspirations; promotes a diversity of talents and perspectives; serves as a springboard for more famous parition refugees and successful women. Muslims and queer people than any other industry. In this moment of insecurity, therefore, it needs to find a response that preserves, not compromises, its essential values of openness and tolerance. In short, a strong spine — but also a cool head.

The BJP-led political establishment needs to recognise the dangers and costs of its will-to-control in a large and diverse country. It must know that any attempt to dissolve the lines between popular culture and propaganda, any imposition of the strait-jackets of nationalism and puritanism on the creative arts, will leave it with feeble pickings. It will emasculate that which it seeks to conquer.

100 PER CENT FAILURE

The marking system is dead, long live marks. Delhi University's cut-off crisis speaks of a broken education system

WHAT CAN BE said about an education system in which a prestigious Delhi University college sets 100 per cent marks as a cut-off for entry to undergraduate courses? That it is broken, perhaps irreparably. That it rewards a laughable idea of perfection, rather than intelligence and inquiry. That an outdated system of evaluating a student's "merit" and "ability" has, in a frenzied race to the bottom, lost all relevance and value. The Indian education system has long set itself up for such a fall.

It is an open secret that the majority of the country's schools fail in nudging children towards inquiry, curiosity or learning. The tyranny of marks has long crushed the spirit of many Indian students, but, at least, it had a limited use for higher education institutions in assessing their capacity for a degree. As school boards have out-competed each other in an insane "grade inflation" over the years, however, it has made those very grades increasingly meaningless. An analysis of CBSE Class XII results revealed, for example, that a 95 per cent aggregate in 2017 was 21 times as prevalent as it was in 2004. The marking system is dead, long live marks. But the cut-off crisis in DU spotlights more cracks in the edifice. The obsession with the elite college itself is a sign of a massive slow and steady gap in Indian education. Around 3.5 lakh students applied for 70,000 seats in DU colleges this year, setting thousands of students up for failure and anxiety. Beyond these shiny icons of "excellence" scattered in India and some state capitals, lies the vast, unlit wasteland of higher education, both private and government, which does out a half-baked learning experience to the majority of Indians. For those hobbled by inequalities of caste, gender and class, such bad colleges push them further into a cycle of deprivation. The National Education Policy has suggested a common entrance system for university admissions as a way out of this crisis. Such a system will also call upon colleges to have the freedom and resources to engage with applications on an individual level — and not just reduce a student to her market value.

The government must find ways to push school boards to inject a dose of sanity to its marking system. But, even so, only a reimagining of education and a greater inclusivity of opportunity can rescue it from the wreckage of this 100 per cent cutoff.

DECOLONISING THE MUSEUM

Dutch Council of Culture acknowledges the violent history of art acquisitions. It's a welcome forthrightness

IN THE 1830s, a group of Dutch naturalists went on an expedition to a river island on the south coast of Borneo. They were given a warm welcome by the island's Sultan, Panembahan Adam, who took his guests on a guided tour of the rainforests in his domain. But there was something else that dazzled the scientists — the Sultan's gemstones. How could a Dutch protectorate be so rich? The matter reached the Dutch government. In the 1850s, it abolished the Sultanate and confiscated Adam's property. In the booty was an uncut diamond, the Banjarmasin Diamond. The 70-carat gemstone was shipped to the Netherlands and went on to become a part of the collection at Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum. The museum has now supported a proposal by the Dutch Council of Culture to return "thousands of pieces of art looted by colonisers". Among them is the Banjarmasin Diamond. Collections in several Western museums have uncomfortable histories. Artefacts acquired through invasion, colonisation and unfair purchases were selected, organised and exhibited according to tags given by Europeans. Stripped of their cultural contexts, they challenge the capacity of the colonised to be authors of their own histories decades after decolonisation. The British Museum holds on to the Elgin Marbles by describing itself as the preserver of the sculptures, which, left to the 19th century Ottoman rulers, might have been crushed to make limestone. The museum describes the sculptures — and other artefacts in its possession, including the Koh-i-noor — as "unique resources for the world", which allow "visitors to explore the interconnected nature of human cultures".

It is such claims to cosmopolitanism that the Dutch Council of Culture challenges. "Justice was done to the local populations of former colonial territories when objects were taken against their will," says a report it issued last week. The question is: Can repatriation under the elision of colonial violence in Western museums?

A hollow credit architecture

Dilution of efficiency-based principles has implications for all borrowers, not just the chronically unhealthy



AMARTYA LAHIRI

FINANCIAL MARKETS ARE a key artery of modern economies. Banks along with bond and equity markets oversee the making of savers with borrowers. Without the matchmaking services of financial markets, businesses would be restricted to investing out of retained earnings alone. The tasks performed by these markets are non-trivial. They have to satisfy the return appetites of savers by looking for projects with the highest returns while simultaneously doing due diligence to minimise their risk exposure. As can be imagined, these two goals are often contradictory which makes the regulatory oversight of these markets a fundamental element of a country's financial infrastructure.

Two recently published books reveal the sustained hollowing out of the financial architecture in India over the past five decades, a process that continues unabated. In "Quest for Restoring Financial Stability in India", the former deputy governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), Viral Acharya, dwells at length on the fiscal dominance exercised by the central government over the central bank and its regulatory functions. In a very related vein, Ujjini Patel, former governor of the RBI, paints a sharp but dark picture of the fiscalisation of the entire banking infrastructure in his book "Overtake: Saving the Indian Saver".

A major theme of Acharya's book is the rampant subjugation of the financial and monetary infrastructure to the fiscal interests of the government. There are many examples of such fiscal dominance in India. The obvious one is the conduct of monetary policy. Since bank assets are marked to market, cuts in interest rates induce treasury gains for banks that effectively recapitalise them. Consequently, rate cuts are preferred by governments needing to inject capital into public sector banks (PSBs) with NPA overhangs. For similar reasons, liquidity injections, which raise bond prices, are preferred to liquidity absorptions. Indeed, fiscal compulsions can induce liquidity policy that undercut the rate setting by the MPC as the two arms often work towards opposing goals. This contradiction is further complicated by

the fact that the RBI is also the debt management agency for the government with one of its key tasks being to sell government bonds at the highest possible price.

Acharya refers to this fiscal dominance as a theory of everything in India, including the regulatory framework. Pressures for regulatory forbearance in recognising NPAs often arise from the government wanting to avoid having to recapitalise PSBs. The same incentive potentially also accounts for stock exchanges in India having a 30-day disclosure norm for registered borrowers who default on their bank loans. The standard in developed capital markets is immediate disclosure. But that would induce an overnight rating downgrade of the concerned borrower thereby triggering additional capital provisioning needs for the lending bank. He provides more such examples including the raiding of central bank capital.

Dealing with this will require, at a minimum, three reforms. First, there has to be a wholehearted attempt at privatisation of PSBs. Second, the RBI needs to be relieved of its public debt management role. Third, the RBI has to be empowered to act independently of the government. It is untenable for government-owned banks to be regulated by an agency that is itself reporting to the government. While legislating regulator independence would be the long run fix, a good start would be to stop the practice of appointing favoured bureaucrats as heads of regulatory institutions.

Patel's book expertly brings out the conflicts inherent in the state owning the banks that control about three-fourth of total banking assets in India. The primary problem with PSBs is that governments have used them as tools for macroeconomic management. PSBs are regularly used for resource mobilisation to finance fiscal deficits. We also have the fiscal situation wherein the government often announces credit policies rather than having the banks allocate credit based on risk-return management criteria. Indeed, PSBs are the favoured instrument for meeting employment targets, supporting farmers through loan write-offs, etc.

This kind of state interface with the business of financial intermediation naturally induces extreme levels of moral hazard in the behaviour of both debtors and creditors. PSBs are not incentivised to exercise due diligence since they expect regulatory forbearance and recapitalisation in the event of rising NPAs on their books. In contrast to the "constructive ambiguity" that sometimes surrounds prospective bailouts of banks in developed economies, Patel calls expected bailouts in India "destructive ambiguity". All sides of the market expect bailouts and are seldom unpleasantly surprised.

The dilution of efficiency-based principles

for banking has implications for all borrowers, not just the chronically unhealthy. Creditworthy borrowers pay a risk premium to cover the risksiness due to unhealthy borrowers. The worsening risk pool of borrowers is partly to blame for the fact that long term borrowing rates have remained stubbornly high despite repeated rate cuts by the MPC over the past 18 months.

There are three obvious problems with the existing architecture. The first is the state ownership of banks. The second is the chronically high fiscal deficit run by the consolidated public sector. The third is the widespread perception that market regulators work under close government direction. The interactions of these three factors have rendered hollow the existing financial infrastructure of the economy.

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While legislating regulator independence would be the long run fix, a good start would be to stop the practice of appointing favoured bureaucrats as heads of regulatory institutions. The career progress of these individuals is typically based on their ability to implement political instructions. Hence, their very appointment destroys perceptions of competence and independence of the regulator.

There is a complacency in policy circles surrounding the political and economic problems of India. Hence, one expects little action on financial sector reforms over the near term. It bears repeating, though, that the growth of firms, which is a key driver of productivity and growth, requires well-functioning financial markets. India has a lot of work to do.

The writer is Royal Bank Research Professor of Economics, University of British Columbia

AN AREA OF DARKNESS

Hathras highlights how Project Hindu Rashtra has intensified caste oppression



D RAJA

THE GRUESOME rape and murder of a young Dalit woman in Hathras has caused immense grief and rage. While dignity was denied to her by an oppressive social order when she was alive, the caste Hindu society denied her her rightful due after death. The UP Police, refusing to heed the pleas of her family, burnt the corpse at midnight.

The shock and grief caused by this macabre caste crime is beyond measure, yet it is by no means a surprise. It can be attributed to the sinister caste hierarchy based on graded social inequality and Brahminical patriarchy that viciously disciplines and punishes the Dalit body, especially that of the Dalit woman. Such caste and patriarchal dominance and the resultant exploitation when combined with Hindu supremacist ideas, subscribed to by both the Narendra Modi and Yogi Adityanath regimes, become more hideous and perverse. The insensitivity displayed by the police and UP's BJP regime towards the dead Dalit girl, even trampling upon the dignity due to a dead person, speaks of the appalling state of governance in our country. Therefore, this crime in Hathras must be seen from the perspectives of caste, patriarchy and Hindu supremacist ideology which are pushing our society and nation into multiple crises and denting India's image at the global level.

Yogi Adityanath continues to defend the violent idea of the Hindu Rashtra, which is deepening the existing caste stratification, fuelling atrocities and making Dalits, particularly Dalit women, vulnerable to lynching, abuse, sexual violence and murder. The

nexus between the casteist police machinery and the government of UP has been laid bare for all to see. The delayed medical care, destruction of evidence and the worst of all, disavowing the dying declaration of the victim — she named four upper caste men for having raped her — are indicative of the intentions of the state machinery.

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police and revenue services, the government was already, from the point of view of the untouchables, not a British but a Hinduo one."

That governance in several states is shaped by the Hindu and ideology several decades after Independence, does not augur well for our Republic. The Hindutva regime is constantly cooking up conspiracy theories to delegitimise dissent. All voices of protest and dissent and challenges to the authoritarian agenda of the current regime are being targeted with UAPA and sedition charges. The constitutional right to freedom of speech and expression is being denied to citizens.

When the anti-CAA agitation intensified in UP, Chief Minister Adityanath famously stated that he would take revenge against the protesters. Now he is using the same language against those who are agitating for justice to the Hathras victim. The government is threatening to invoke sedition laws against the people protesting against the ghastly tragedy through lawful methods. This mode of action recalls previous instances of abuse of law by the UP administration, which booked protesters, particularly Muslims, agitating against the CAA under the National Security Act.

The annihilation of caste has never been a more urgent cause.

The writer is General Secretary, CPI. He visited Hathras and met the victim's family as part of a joint delegation of CPI and CP(M) members on October 6.

OCTOBER 14, 1980, FORTY YEARS AGO

HOPE IN ASSAM TALKS

THE ASSAM ISSUE was discussed in various dimensions when the Union Home Minister Giani Zail Singh met a number of delegations from the state, and, later in the evening, had a one-on-one discussion with members of the All Assam Students Union and the Gana Sangram Parishad. The talks have resulted in a broad agreement on a policy framework to settle the foreign nationals' issue. While the Gana Sangram Parishad leader Nivaran Bora told newsmen, "we seem to have reached a take-off stage", Singh said there would be another meeting tomorrow, "and that itself is a hopeful sign". AASU leader Prashanta

Mahanta was guarded and said much would depend on tomorrow's meeting.

NUCLEAR POWER

UNIT 11 OF the Rajasthan Atomic Power Station (RAPS) at Kota will start producing about 200 MW power within four months. The project, set up at the cost of Rs 92.36 crore, was delayed by three years for want of heavy water supply which was to come from Canada, which went back on its commitment when India exploded her first nuclear device. I.P. Singh, who was in charge of the project, said RAPS had opened opportunities for many Indian players to enter the nuclear power field.

ARRESTS IN DELHI

DELHI POLICE COMMISSIONER P.S. Bhinder ordered the detention of 14 listed criminals — the first under the National Security Ordinance. He said that the detainees had been ordered to maintain law and order during the festival events of Dussehra and Id-ul-Zuha.

NOBEL FOR ARTIST

ADOLFO PEREZ ESQUIVEL of Argentina, a sculptor, architect and human rights activist was awarded the 1980 Nobel Peace Prize. The citation said the sculptor had been ordered to promote human rights through non-violent means.



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THE IDEAS PAGE

India's Inward (Re)Turn

Our growth model has been export-led and should not be abandoned. Export opportunities in general and in specific sectors could be significant even in a post-COVID world



SHOUMITRO CHATTERJEE, IAS

India has embraced an inward turn. This inward turn — actually return — amounts to abandoning two core principles of the post-1991 consensus: Export-orientation on the macro-economic side, and slow but steady liberalisation on the trade side. The inward turn strong? Is the underlying diagnosis-cum-prognosis correct? Will it work? Based on new research, our simple answers are, respectively: Yes; no; not really.

Let's start with some key facts. The inward turn is most evident in trade policies aimed at promoting domestic manufacturing. Leaving aside the spate of China-related restrictions, tariffs have been increased substantially, trade agreements have been put on hold, and a spate of production subsidies are being offered.

Between 1991 and 2014, average tariffs declined from 125 per cent to 13 per cent. However, since 2014, there have been tariff increases in 3,200 out of 5,300 product categories, affecting about \$300 billion or 70 per cent of total imports. The average tariff increased from 13 per cent in 2014 to nearly 18 per cent. The largest increases occurred in 2018 when tariffs for nearly 2,500 product categories were increased, amounting to nearly 4 percentage points. Tariff increases have been greatest in low-skill manufactured imports and cell-phone assembly, amounting to 10-15 percentage points.

The inward turn is based on three misconceptions of diagnosis and prognosis. First, the perception is that India's growth success since 1991 has not really been based on exports and certainly not on manufacturing exports. This is wrong. India has been a model of spectacular export success and an exemplar of export-led growth.

Between 1995 and 2018, India's overall export growth (in dollars) averaged 13.4 per cent annually, the third best performance in the world amongst the top 50 exporters. Most strikingly, India's manufacturing exports (in dollars) — for long considered India's Achilles Heel — grew on average by a whopping 12.1 per cent, the third-best performance in the world, and nearly twice the world average (Figure 2). Only China and Vietnam surpassed India.

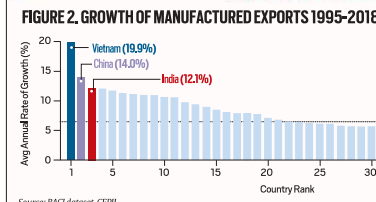
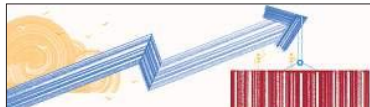
These exports made a substantial contribution to the overall GDP growth. In each of the three decades since the 1990s, exports contributed about one-third of overall growth. As a result, India's export-GDP ratio is currently 20 per cent, more than twice as high as in the early 1990s, despite the post-global financial crisis (GFC) slowdown. Thus, an export slowdown today is likely to have a more consequential impact on the overall economy. Every 5 per cent of the export growth foregone will shave off 1 per cent in overall GDP growth.



MADAN B LOKUR

A GRADUAL EROSION of one of our most precious fundamental rights — the right to freedom of speech and expression — is adversely impacting the liberty of all those who dare to speak up. Our freedom of speech is being mauled, through twisting and turning the law if not abusing it altogether. In my opinion, one of the worst forms of curtailment of the freedom of speech is charging a person with sedition. In 1962, a Constitution bench of the Supreme Court ... drew a correlation between sedition and violence, sedition and inciting violence, and sedition and tendency to incite violence — not just simple violence but violence of such a degree as to bring it within the purview of public disorder. So, when you have rival gangs confronting each other and one of them shouts "maro", a law-and-order situation of rioting and attempt to murder arises, not of sedition. However, depending on the occasion and context, when a speaker raises a slogan at a public gathering of supporters by shouting "goi maro", a charge could possibly be laid of tending to incite violence or incitement to violence and raising a public order issue rather than a law-and-order issue. The distinction is quite clear.

When there is a call to protest for a cause without any incitement to violence, it would not be sedition under any circumstances. For example, when a call was made for large numbers to assemble on the lawns of India Gate to protest against the



Source: BACI dataset, CEPII

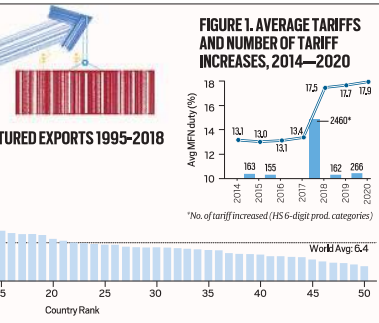
about India's future exports. This overlooks key facts. Export pessimism is based on expectations of deglobalisation abroad and weak performance at home. But India can gain market share even in a deglobalising world. Consider the numbers. India's manufacturing exports account for 17 per cent of the world's which is less than Vietnam's. Even if India's exports grow three-to-four times as fast as the world exports, it would gain only a few percentage points of the global market share after 10 years. China's secular ceding of low-skill export space provides further opportunity. This is one of the virtues of past under-performance: The future can be more accommodating to India and less intimidating for the world.

This possibility is not just hypothetical. It is exactly what India did after the global financial crisis. In the 2010s, world exports were stagnant and yet India's exports grew by about 3 per cent. This was true in both manufacturing and services.

The lamentation about deterioration in export performance in the 2010s (especially post-2014) is ironic given that it was partly self-inflicted. It was caused by a domestic anti-export policy, including a sharp exchange rate appreciation of 20 per cent, reputational damage that undermined pharmaceutical exports, and a social policy — on livestock — that affected agricultural exports. Not only did India's exports hold up as global trade collapsed, they could have held up even more had domestic policies not been so inimical.

The real prize that India should aim for is the large unexploited opportunity of unskilled labour exports — around \$140 billion which we discuss in our second column. The other under-recognised opportunity is in services. The post-global financial crisis era witnessed deglobalisation of world trade in goods but globalisation continued apace in services. World exports of goods peaked just prior to the GFC at about 25 per cent, declining to about 21 per cent in 2019. However, world exports of services which reached 6.5 per cent in 2019, took a hit, but have since steadily risen to about 7 per cent.

COVID could even create an upside po-



Source: BACI dataset, CEPII

production activities that require close physical contact will fare worse. The flip side is that activities that can be done at a distance — and tradable services are exactly that — could benefit enormously. If so, they could play to India's comparative advantage in service exports.

Atmanirbhar's third driver is the strong belief that India's market is big enough to sustain growth going forward and make up for the loss of opportunities overseas. Size seduces. At \$2.9 trillion, and as the fifth largest in the world, India's GDP seems alluringly big. But if the domestic market is to sustain growth, we need to look at the size of the market (say the "middle class") with some amount of purchasing power over manufacturing goods and services.

Based on some assumptions, our rough estimate is that this middle class market size is between 15 and 40 per cent of GDP. This is smaller than commonly believed and substantially smaller than any potential world market that Indian firms and producers can and should compete for. The reason is twofold. There are a lot of poor people with limited purchasing power and a few people with a lot of purchasing power who, however, save a lot. Both of these reduce the market for consumption. The delusion of size is making policymakers set their sights on the domestic market when it should be on the world market.

Normally, it is failure that is an intellectual orphan. In contrast, India's inward turn seems to be a case of making an orphan of spectacular success. India's growth model has been an export-led one and should not be abandoned. Moreover, India's export opportunities in general and in specific sectors could be significant even in a post-COVID world. The diagnosis and prognosis prompting the inward turn are flawed, while the policy prescriptions be effective? We respond in our next piece, highlighting the real prize that India should aim for.

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The Statesman

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TV in the dock

The fact that leading film producers of Mumbai have chosen to petition the Delhi High Court against the ugly characterisations of their industry by two television channels ought to serve as a wake-up call to the News Broadcasting Standards Authority, the self-regulatory mechanism created by television channels to curb offensive content. The Code of Ethics and Broadcasting Standards put together by NBSA enjoins channels to be impartial and objective, to avoid defamation and libel, to ensure neutrality, to strive to ensure allegations are not reported as facts or that charges are not conveyed as acts of guilt. While covering crime and violence, television channels are prohibited from reconstructions of crime scenes that are in poor taste and are specifically advised that "visuals or details of suicide or self-harm of any kind" should not cross boundaries of decency. Two facts are apparent. First, most viewers should immediately be able to assess how far and to what extent television news channels have adhered to their own Code, and whether they have in fact transgressed it insofar as adhering to neutrality, or reporting allegations as facts are concerned, or indeed whether they have crossed boundaries of good taste and decency. The second, and more worrying aspect from NBSA's perspective, is that the film producers have chosen not to place their faith in television's self-regulation mechanism but approached a court of law.

The NBSA is headed by a well-regarded former judge of the Supreme Court and has four eminent retired bureaucrats as members. It also has four representatives of television channels. NBSA, in terms of its powers of authority, may on its volition investigate violations of the Code, but seldom does so, preferring to wait for complaints to be made before taking them up for adjudication. Clearly, not too many complaints come up for NBSA's adjudication, for information available in the public domain would suggest that the body has not decided a single complaint since 24 January 2020, nearly nine months ago. On that day, the NBSA decided five matters, including four complaints preferred by the Government, and let off with a warning a channel that had shown a photograph of a rape victim on the ground that it only did so once, while dismissing the other four. While the decisions may be merited by the facts placed before the NBSA, the impression that the television industry indulging in a self-serving rather than a self-regulatory exercise is difficult to escape.

Whether words such as "filth", "scum" and "druggies" are apt characterisations of the film industry, or whether it is indeed "cocaine and LSD-drenched" is now for the court to decide. The burden of proof while seeking prior restraint on news dissemination is heavy, and the plaintiffs will have to contend with this in pressing their action. But, equally, to suggest that a defence of the right to express forms part of a battle for the truth may prove a stretch. If the NBSA chooses not to regulate, perhaps a court will.

Death for rape

It is not a coincidence that most nations in South East Asia are, amid the coronavirus-induced restrictions, seeing a sharp increase in incidents of rape. Nepal's government has been battling charges of letting rapists get away with impunity. Horrific instances of rape are being reported almost every day from India, and Pakistan was rocked by the rape of a woman near Lahore recently. But it is the Bangladesh government of Sheikh Hasina that has reacted substantively to outrage over a series of rape cases and the Supreme Court has ordered nearly 1,000 incidents of rape between January and September, a fifth of them gang rapes, the country's Cabinet this week approved the death penalty for rapists. But the extreme penalty may not prove a deterrent as a majority of those charged with rape manage to slip through the cracks of a lethargic judicial system which sees a very low rate of conviction. This problem is not peculiar to Bangladesh, for similar lacunae allow rapists to get away in both India and Nepal. Enhancing the punishment alone will not address the problem, as India has learnt. For even though laws were made far more stringent in the wake of the Nirbhaya rape case, and the rapists were hanged seven years after they had committed the crime, it did not prove a deterrent, with cases being reported almost daily from different parts of the country, including Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

The latest outrage in Bangladesh followed the circulation of a video from Naokhali, which showed a group of men stripping and repeatedly attacking a woman for almost a half hour. An investigation by the country's National Human Rights Commission revealed that the woman had been raped and terrorised with weapons for the past year by one of the men in the video. This case led to the outpouring of protests on the streets of Dhaka, forcing the government to issue an ordinance mandating the death penalty.

But as activists say, the culture of impunity is well engrained in society and they cite a United Nations report of 2013 which had found that 88 per cent of rural respondents and 95 per cent of urban respondents in Bangladesh said they faced no legal consequences after committing rape. The problem is compounded by victims who do not report the crime, fearing stigmatisation. Activists say rapists manage to obtain protection and even patronage from political figures who then use them to further their activities. While Sheikh Hasina's government may have managed the direction of the discourse for now with the announcement of the death penalty, it will, like governments in India, Pakistan and Nepal, have to radically transform the system of criminal justice if it truly wants to deter rapists.

The Harris Campaign

Babu Jagjivan Ram in his 34-year-long career (1946-1979) in the Indian Cabinet, never once talked about his caste, or that he was a Dalit. His reasoning was that to become Prime Minister, he would have to have the support of all castes. The Dalits across India would not exceed 15 per cent. How far would that carry me, he would ask in private



There is no doubt that Kamala Harris, the Democratic Vice-Presidential nominee and Joe Biden's mate, is campaigning with energy and extraordinary enthusiasm. Her emphasis on the USA being divided between blacks and whites, apart from causing a flutter in the roost, is not correct. The country can be more accurately described as multi-coloured, comprising yellows, Indian browns, Hispanics of bright brownish hue and what not. When Biden invited her to be his running mate, she insistently declared herself to be a black. Lately, Harris has been talking of dots and filter coffee, reflective of her association also with Chennai.

In Indian election campaigns, the contestants do not introduce themselves. The reasoning is that they are supposed to be leaders and therefore well known. They do not carry their visiting cards, as only unknown persons have to do that. Whether this practice applies to the USA or not I do not know, but it must be the same reasoning is likely to apply in that country. Ms. Harris' familiarity with American history is impressive, but it must have been better if she did not raise from the platform the issue of "one country 2 systems". That must be so, but for a candidate to raise such an issue is not desirable. Emphasizing the fact carries the peril of a likely polarisation of the electorate along the lines of black versus white.

For a white candidate, the remark could pass, but for a black lady to declare her deep sympathy for blacks would mark her as a clear proponent of identity. The opposition could retaliate by alleging that Kamala Harris has come out to represent the blacks of America. Biden could look after white interests. The others should fend for themselves. Carrying the logic further, a Republican Party vote or supporter could raise the question: what happens if Mr Biden happens to resign midway? Who would be President for 85 per cent of America? Mind you, these comments are based on Indian experience. To give an outstanding example, Babu Jagjivan Ram in his 34-year-

long career (1946-1979) in the Indian Cabinet, never once talked about his caste, or that he was a Dalit. His reasoning was that to become Prime Minister, he would have to have the support of all and various castes. The Dalits across India would not exceed 15 per cent. How far would that carry me, he would ask in private. Unfortunately, he did not become Prime Minister, but certainly retired from politics as Deputy Prime Minister of India in 1979.

Anybody who has a sensitive conscience would sympathise with the suffering the blacks have undergone for centuries. How they were captured from their homes and dragged out and sold to white traders who regularly visited West Africa. They were then packed into abnormally large numbers as if they were goods and not living beings. There were no toilets for thousands of people because they occupied the holds and not the cabins. The result usually was that the blacks were unhygienic. Before this, they were on the coasts of the New World, up to 30 per cent of the black passengers would have died; the dead bodies were flung into the ocean. There was no question of a coffin or any ceremony.

Fortunately, William Wilberforce, an active member of Britain's House of Commons, spent most of his political career trying to abolish this barbaric trade in slaves. More fortunately, William Pitt the Younger was his friend. Pitt remained Prime Minister for 22 years and supported Wilberforce in his fight for the abolition of the slave trade. Once England stopped trading in slaves, other countries too slowed down and stopped. Once the slaves were sold, the barbaric treatment suffered during the slave voyages no doubt stopped but the tale of long oppression began.

A glimpse of the oppression

of slavery, is in many ways, eloquently depicted in the famous novel Uncle Tom's Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe. However well some masters and their families treated their slaves, they could not appreciate how miserable human life is as a slave, which is devoid of aspiration. Another factor: the slaves came to the point of view of interesting. The Yankees or north Americans who ran industries came to the conclusion that the productivity of an average slave is less than that of a paid worker. In other words, it was better to employ and pay a wage than forcibly extract work out of a slave. This was one of the reasons why the Yankees supported abolition and even the Civil War. The Confederate southerners were obsessed with large labour forces to run their plantations, whether of cotton or other produce. No doubt, in the America of those early decades, so much manpower, other than the slaves, was not available.

For Ms Harris, it may be useful to praise President Barack Hussein Obama. To push the black point of view, of course, to talk about Floyd George and other murders would be music to the ears of black people. But such examples are likely to give offence to many white voters. He or she would feel that the candidate is trying to tease their conscience.

This is the same logic that influenced Babu Jagjivan Ram. In any case, it has been said by the wise that a victim is not his own best advocate. The other factor which Ms. Harris would be unaware of is that a brown person, whether Indian or any other, can be as prejudiced against blacks as some whites are. If she were to live in India for a little while, she would discover this herself.

An interesting question would be what might have been the calculation that motivated Joe Biden to select Kamala Harris

as his running mate. The women's vote is probably the largest segment in an American election. But then why has there been only one Presidential candidate so far? Hillary Clinton was expected to do well, but Donald Trump came from behind and overtook her at the last moment. Governor Sarah Palin of Alaska, although articulate and active and could not help Senator John McCain perform better. McCain eventually lost Obama. For the success of the Biden team, a disproportionate responsibility rests on Kamala Harris' shoulders. For one, he is old; for another, he has not shone with success in any presidential contest.

The fact that women have not been able to do better in American politics ought to be a subject of questioning and research by the Harris electoral team. The so-called South Asian subcontinent where India is, has done far better in this context. Indira Gandhi was Prime Minister; so was Benazir Bhutto Prime Minister of Pakistan. Bangladesh has produced two women prime ministers, Sheikh Hasina Wajid and Begum Khaleda Zia and Sri Lanka threw up Sirimavo Bandaranaike and later her daughter Chandrika Kumaratunga.

Could this be attributed to the fact that the Indian or Hindu tradition, to push the black point of view, of course, to talk about Floyd George and other murders would be music to the ears of black people. But such examples are likely to give offence to many white voters. He or she would feel that the candidate is trying to tease their conscience. This is the same logic that influenced Babu Jagjivan Ram. In any case, it has been said by the wise that a victim is not his own best advocate. The other factor which Ms. Harris would be unaware of is that a brown person, whether Indian or any other, can be as prejudiced against blacks as some whites are. If she were to live in India for a little while, she would discover this herself. An interesting question would be what might have been the calculation that motivated Joe Biden to select Kamala Harris



Covid-19 & environmental challenges - two sides of a coin

The number of Covid-19 cases continues to increase rapidly in Indonesia, while some Southeast Asian neighbors are beginning to live normally and moving closer to winning the battle against the pandemic. Almost every day, Indonesia continues to peak off the chart in the region, which comes as no surprise at all. Taking a step back, when the pandemic began to take the world by storm, some countries were adept at tackling the pandemic, while Indonesia responded slowly and even looked reluctant to announce the current state. As a consequence, Covid-19 transmission escalated, while lax health protocols saw many adopt a *tersehar* (whatever) attitude, as they felt frustrated by the government's inconsistent policies.

Looking at the prolonged health crisis, we cannot dismiss the striking similarity as to how the government responds to environmental problems. Indonesia's long-standing environmental problems, such as climate change, air and water pollution and deforestation, have been placed on the back burner, putting us in a state of *tersehar*. These environmental problems are no less important than Covid-19 and require an immediate response, as they may increase the risk of a future pandemic. With great aspiration, this pandemic has steered Indonesia into a green recovery, and that merits a discussion on how to address the existing environmental challenges after learning from our Covid-19 experiences. The agonising experience of dealing with Covid-19 thus far should be a call to be extra

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mindful that there are environmental concerns that are equally worth our attention. However, a major drawback is that the government seems confident that everything is under control. Indonesian Health Minister Torawan Agus Purwanto assured the public late in January that Indonesia was more than ready to handle the outbreak and he even repeatedly stated that there was no danger, as the coronavirus was just like a common cold. Southeast Asia's first wave of the coronavirus in 2020, Indonesia had recorded the highest case number and death toll in Southeast Asia. This exactly reflects the existing environmental challenges we face today.

Indonesia's neglect and its overconfidence and that environmental problems are under control are completely misplaced and should stop. Ironically, unlike Covid-19, Indonesia's environmental problems are not unprecedented. We have the annual Jakarta floods that no governor has ever coped with. Another interesting case that is similarly alarming is the smog that hazy haze. For more than two decades, the smog greys everyone every year on a not-so-happy morning, as many continue to set alight forests and farmlands because it is the cheapest way of clearing land for plantation. Each of these environmental problems records new worst cases almost every year. In the last few years, Indonesia has seen a similar pattern. Indonesians, again, with a *tersehar* mentality. Covid-19 has plunged the world into a recession. The Indonesian government must therefore prioritise the economic recovery over the pandemic.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

editor@thestatesman.com

Bose's idea of nationalism

SIR, I take strong exception to what Jaydev Jana said in his article 'Fact vs Falsehood' (10 October), to the effect that "Bose was not averse to the idea of violence for independence. He was deep believer in aggressive nationalism".

Netaji is what Swamiiji could have been had he actively engaged himself in India's freedom movement.

It's as if Vivekananda manifested himself politically in Subhas. Vivekananda's quintessence of teachings, *atmano mokshartham jagaddhitaya cha*, shaped Subhas's idea of nationalism which calls for boundless love for the suffering humanity and a reckless concern for the downtrodden, something that Bose's aggressive nationalism as opposed to Gandhi's theory of non-violence.

As desired by Swamiiji, Subhas's race and casteism is akin to Jingoism. Subhas, though invoking shakti (power) as desired by Swamiiji to win the independence of India, never took recourse to violence, impetuosity or volubility like Sandeep, the tankish in Tagore's *Home and World*.

On this point he differed with Gandhi's policy of compromise with the British on the question of India's freedom. Unfortunately, the Gandhians mistook Subhas's style of nationalism as opposed to Gandhi's theory of non-violence.

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the skewed concept of nationalism is sweeping the country.

Nationalism devoid of truth, love and compassion is akin to Jingoism. Subhas, though invoking shakti (power) as desired by Swamiiji to win the independence of India, never took recourse to violence, impetuosity or volubility like Sandeep, the tankish in Tagore's *Home and World*.

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power goes on building swaraj for itself..." (Towards Universal Man).

Mr Jana tried to play down the differences with Gandhi to obfuscate the truth, to elevate Gandhi to a

mythical personality. It's the mummifying manoeuvre of myth-prone minds precluding one reaching a proper perspective on persons like Gandhi.

How could swaraj, the end, be sacrificed for dogged adherence to the ideal of non-violence and satyagraha, as only a means to an end 'to be adjusted and altered, as exigency and expediency demand', unlike Gandhi who 'adhered to the highest standard of non-violence, even if the pursuit meant sacrificing and giving up the political goal of swaraj' (KF Nariman, Non-violent murder).

The political goal of swaraj should not have lost its direction in the means-ends conundrum. It was as if the top leader of the Congress was at war with Subhas, rather than with the British, simply because of Gandhi's non-violence. Gandhi with Subhas. Subhas was wounded till he resigned from the post of Congress presidentship, on the pretext of discipline.

Yours, etc, Sudipta Ghosh, Jangipuri, 11 October.

HALF-HEARTED

SIR, Jaydev Jana's observation (Facts and Falsehood, 10 October) on Gandhi's role in connection with execution of Bhagat Singh and his two comrades that "Gandhi tried his best to save their lives" needs to be commented upon. Gandhi did make some effort in this regard but that was half-hearted. A quote from Subhas Chandra Bose's *The Indian Struggle 1920-1942*, eleventh impression, page 126 would throw light. "I was reminded of a similar incident during the armistice between the Sinn Féin Party and the British government, when the strong attitude adopted by the former, had secured the release of an Irish political prisoner sentenced to the gallows. But the Mahatma who did not want to identify himself with the revolutionary prisoners, would not go so far as to naturally make a great difference when the Viceroy realised that the Mahatma would not break on that question."

Gandhi's 'Satyagraha' did not always mean adherence to truth. When Subhas Chandra became the Congress President for the second time, defying Gandhi's dicta, Gandhi did not mind diluting the meaning of Satyagraha. This election made it clear that Subhas's popularity in the country was more than that of Gandhi, a matter of worry for a leader who was till then the supreme commander of Congress. Gandhi wanted to teach a lesson to Subhas and succeeded in doing so, in a not so clean manner. The President could not function without the support of the Working Committee, majority of whom were Gandhi loyalists. The venerable Bapu instructed members of the committee not to cooperate with the President, a democratically elected one. The result was a resignation. Subhas could not function and resigned in disgust.

Yours, etc, Sanjit Ghatak, Narendrapur, 10 October.

Perspectives

Have academic journals crossed the line of bipartisanship?

ATANU BISWAS

Less than four weeks prior to the all-important US presidential election, an unprecedented and blistering editorial entitled "Dying in a Leadership Vacuum" in the 208-year-old *The New England Journal of Medicine*—one of the most prestigious peer-reviewed medical journals which is published by the Massachusetts Medical Society—is set to redefine the relationship between academics and politics. The editorial, signed by 34 editors including the editor-in-chief Eric J. Rubin, who are US citizens (one editor is not)—which itself is a rare phenomenon, pointed out that the response of American leaders who have undercut trust in science has been consistently inadequate in combating the pandemic. What's more, in addition to condemning the Trump administration's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic, the editorial called for voting them out of office.

The editors have commented: "although it is impossible to project the precise number of additional American lives lost because of weak and inappropriate government policies, it is at least in the tens of thousands in a pandemic that has already killed more Americans than any conflict since World War II." And add: "We should not abet them and enable the deaths of thousands more Americans by allowing them to keep their jobs."

The scientists, while pointing out that this pandemic and its severe economic and health crisis has produced a test of leadership, have complained that American leaders have failed that test, and they have taken the crisis and turned it into a tragedy. "But this election gives us the power to render judgment," the editorial says. And it asks for a better leadership. It is to be noted that Thomas H. Lee, a professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School and a member of the journal's editorial board, did not participate in writing or voting on the editorial.

The scathing editorial essentially calls on American voters to throw the president out of office. *The New England Journal of Medicine* is at least the third widely respected medical or science journal to call for a change in US leadership in the November election. Can or should they go this far? While *The New England Journal of Medicine* article did not explicitly

endorse anybody (i.e. Joe Biden), an editorial in a recent issue of the 175-year-old prestigious magazine *Scientific American* endorsed Democratic nominee Biden over President Trump. This marked the publication's first endorsement of a presidential candidate in its long history. The magazine's editors explained that they felt compelled to break with tradition because they believed Trump had badly damaged the US and its people by dismissing evidence and science and by mishandling the coronavirus pandemic. Projection from the University of Washington School of Medicine asserted that if almost everyone in the US wore masks in public, it could have saved about 66,000 lives by the beginning of December. But Trump and his vice president Mike Pence flouted local mask rules themselves.

All these were possibly started in May when an unsigned editorial in the British medical journal *The Lancet*, one of the world's leading medical periodicals since its founding in 1823, sharply criticised the Trump administration's "inconsistent and incoherent national response" to the Covid-19 crisis, and opined: "Americans must put a president in the White House come January 2021, who will understand that public health should not be guided by partisan politics." Subsequently other medical journals followed the same line.

These editorials, however, instigate us to rethink the scope of academic freedom. Academic freedom is widely defined as the right of the scholar to think, write, and speak whatever he or she wants to think, write, and speak. Of course, there are numerous instances of attempts to curb this freedom by the political entities of different countries. However, there are not many examples where academics directly stepped in to curb this freedom by the political entities within the academic setup as in this case. Will more and more scientific journals now be wading into politics? That might be a huge diversion from the academic tradition, in general, I'm afraid. Forget about a scientific journal, even an academic journal on politics or political science cannot do that, I suppose. In fact, personally I felt quite uncomfortable with such editorials in *The New England Journal*

of Medicine or *Scientific American* or *The Lancet*.

There may be arguments favouring and opposing such direct political views being expressed in academic journals. On the one hand, some may argue that it's the duty of a responsible medical or scientific journal to point out the underlying reasons for the severity and mishandling of a pandemic, which, they believe, have caused "tens of thousands" of additional lives. Then, wouldn't an academic journal and its editorial stop after pointing out the mistakes and mishandling of the Trump administration? Wasn't a call for change in regime (or directly endorsing the opposition candidate for a presidential election) much too political? Isn't that too much for a medical journal?

Are these scientists playing the role of self-appointed guardians of society which is beyond the scope of academia? Are they actually missing their scope to write an editorial in a reputed and widely-circulated academic journal? Certainly, these editorial members and scientists are also people of our society, they're responsible citizens, and they're full right to express their political views which may very well be blended with their scientific knowledge and expertise. Personally, I would have no problem if the editors wrote similar articles in *The New York Times* or in *The Washington Post*, for example. However, they chose to write these in editorials of respected medical journals instead.

Overall, I firmly believe that they have overstepped their limits. However, the broader issue is much beyond my personal discomfort. According to a recent article in Forbes, "many prominent scientists



Brock

have recently pointed out the upcoming election is no longer about 'partisanship.' Will academics be entangled with politics much more directly and more frequently from now on? That is certainly not the millennia-old style of functioning of academics. Socrates or Galileo, for example, had to fight relentlessly for establishing 'truth', but they never mixed their struggle with a fight against the political regime of the day. Academics usually thrive for knowledge, but seldom fight with the political power on this scale.

One must of course appreciate the democratic yardstick in the United States which allows a few scientists to pen down such impactful edi-

torials in leading scientific journals. But, are these just a few exceptional events, or is this a paradigm shift in the style of functioning of academics that might have emerged as a by-product in this era of post-truth?

The editors of *The New England Journal of Medicine* wrote: "truth is neither liberal nor conservative." I agree. In addition, I believe that a scientific journal's quest should be towards scientific truth only, advising citizens in casting ballots is nothing but officiousness on their behalf. Knowing the line of control is very important — for scientists and for society.

The writer is Professor of Statistics, Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata.

tion. But this possibility looks very distant in Nepal. To borrow the term from Karl Marx himself, the rise of the lumpen proletariat class in Nepal has only facilitated the extractive political class to dedicate themselves in fulfilling petty vested interests without interference and fear of retribution.

In his classic book, *Democracy in America* (1835), French political scientist Alexis de Tocqueville said, "In order that men remain civilised or become so, the art of associating must be developed and perfected among them in the same measure as equality of conditions increases." He also contended that for citizens without 'the taste to unite in political goals, their independence would run great risks.' The Nepali conscience yet seems to be acquainted with this particular 'taste', thus, exacerbating the inequality between the ruler and the ruled.

Nevertheless, it is beyond question that Nepal would be able to unshackle herself from the suffocating status quo without wading out the current set of self-indulgent and extractive political class without a bold and ethical democratic revolution. A contingent question, then, is: How proximate is yet another popular revolt in Nepal that can effectively reset the existing socio-political order? The Covid-19 pandemic can perhaps be the best eye-opener for the citizens-in-slumber.

The Kathmandu Post/ANN.

NO 28103

Does Nepal need a popular revolt?

ACHYUT WAGLE

The classical theory of change suggests that any desired transformation can only be achieved through three inevitable steps, namely unfreeze, change and refreeze. The task of unfreezing the adherence to the status quo in a few hundred ruling elites, across ideologies, is proving to be the most arduous task of all. Therefore, the chances of transforming Nepal's political system and public delivery mechanism through incremental reform appear increasingly slimmer. Lamentations don't help; what is needed is a structured call for quality in governance and change. While the delivery of good governance from the state has historically remained pathetic, the indifference among masses is as responsible in constraining the growth and prosperity of the country. This has never allowed the country's growth to hit an optimal level.

On Sunday, Dr Govinda KC ended his latest fast-unto-death protest, or satyagraha, after an agreement signed with the government to address his demands, mainly related to reform in the country's medical education system. But had Nepal been an accountable democracy, he need not have struggled for years for simple demands like making medical education more accessible geographically and accessible to the

people from the lower economic strata, and to stop corrupt practices surrounding the affiliation of medical colleges by the universities, among others. Unfortunately, not only has the Nepal state failed to do so on its own, but successive governments failed to even honour the agreements they had reached with Dr KC, accompanying each of his previous satyagrahas. The fate of the recent agreement also may not be any different.

The Covid-19 infection rate among the tested crossed the 25 per cent mark and the total number of proven infections broke the psychological ceiling of 100,000 last week. But the federal government, instead of assuaging and facilitating the people to overcome fear and contain the infection, is effectively indulging in fear-mongering on the one hand and terribly failing to implement containment and cure protocols on the other. "The government can do nothing to contain the virus," Prime Minister KP Oli reportedly told his ministers last Thursday. Initially, he had dismissed the impending scale of threats projected by the scientists and public health experts. Government officials are also terrorising the public with confusing information.

For example, the spokesperson in the Ministry of Health, while highlighting the achievements of the five-

month-long lockdown claimed that the country increased intensive care unit (ICU) beds from 900 in March to 2,600 by the end of September and provisioned ventilators from 80 to 900. But just after two days, when patients in the ICU reached 321 and the occupancy number of ventilators was 77, the same spokesperson declared that the ICU beds and ventilators were no longer available to patients in hospitals of 'conventional' locations, whereas, almost 70 per cent of ICU beds and 80 per cent of ventilators are within the Kathmandu Valley where about 60 per cent of the infected population is concentrated. The central government has miserably failed to enforce the social distancing and health safety rules, including in the public transports. It has also failed to take along the provincial and local governments so as to enable them to meaningfully contribute to the containment measures.

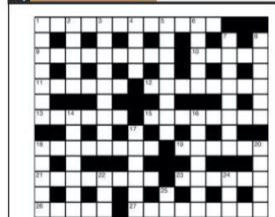
Every country in the world is now keenly committed to salvaging their respective economies affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. But Nepal for the past one and a half months is without a standalone finance minister, since Yubraj Khatiwada resigned. When he was immediately appointed as an advisor to the prime minister, general perception, despite his miserable performance while in

the post, was that he would function as the de facto finance minister. But now, amidst all this, Khatiwada has now been appointed as Nepal's ambassador to the United States. Such an ad-hoc approach of the government in managing the economy at the expense of the unprecedented national crisis only shows its lack of ability to identify and tackle important national priorities.

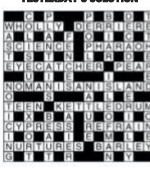
The media is inundated with barbaric stories of rape in every corner of the country. This has several socio-economic dimensions that need to be addressed to control this menace. But the government has completely turned a blind eye towards widespread political patronage of criminals and the ever-increasing sense of impunity perpetrators seem to feel. In the meantime, victims have very limited access to justice, cultivating Nepal's image as a 'horrible rape nation'. These issues have failed to be part of the pressing political agenda.

Despite all the problems the government has been unable to counter, the organised public anger that needs to be addressed to control the government is virtually non-existent. The course correction of non-performing or underperforming governments would be impossible without citizens' recourse to public pressure, protest, revolt and even revolution.

CROSSWORD



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION



ACROSS

- 7 This is in every way sacred for audience (6)
- 8 Cricketers cycling before and behind (8)
- 10 Maybe ecology sees Crocodile in landscape catching cold (7)
- 11 An ancient robus pub joins a row over here (6)
- 12 I heard a common pet's expensive in Paris anybody who's striking (10)
- 13 Fruit and veg recipe (4)
- 15 Mainland/North long steamships working and were all connected (2,2,2,2)
- 18 Adolescent initially needs support earlier on (4)
- 20 Instrument held in one area? (6)

Down

- 24 Tree in WWII battle swathed in gas (7)
- 25 Give up the burden (7)
- 26 Brings up return of routine work, ends in more stress (8)
- 27 A cereal crop, except on pastureland (6)
- 1 Stadium music featuring ELO post-break-up, making comeback (8)
- 2 A soldier in the pampas? That's bananas (9)
- 3 Folk hero regularly seen to split apple with head shot (6)
- 4 In our hearts we have this climbing wild rose (5)
- 5 Rat seen in a noor several years running (6)

- 6 Edward holds that place is linked with a painter (8)
- 7 Refuse to break sweat (5)
- 9 Crimes of these receivers? (6)
- 14 15A refused (4,2,3)
- 15 Regarding request for plain cake? (8)
- 16 Harrier's new, not initially fully developed (6)
- 17 A Fury flies up with consort high above the ground (8)
- 18 Formerly fortified wine and strong beer (6)
- 21 I'll stay in festival for short time - it's more relaxed (6)
- 22 Bred - a way to get Japanese sort to rise (5)
- 23 A film for everyone in the round is a wonderful thing (5)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)

100 YEARS AGO

OCCASIONAL NOTE

Sir Reginald Cridock's pointed inquiry addressed to the Khalifate agitators regarding the agency they propose to employ to undo the Turkish peace treaty is a pertinent one. Are British troops to be employed to attack the King of the Hedjaz and compel him to return the Holy Cities to Turkey, to re-impose on the Armenians and the liberated Greeks of the Smyrna area and on the Jews and Christians of Palestine the hated Turkish tyranny and, if necessary, to fight the French, Italians and other European nations which assisted from the settlement just reached? It is hardly possible that Mr. Gandhi and Mr. Shaukat Ali believe that such a programme is feasible. They can hardly suppose that India's exchequer will support the strain, to say nothing of the task such a programme would impose on her army. They must, however, have considered an alternative before they commenced their raging tearing propaganda. What is that alternative? While India waits to hear, it would be worth her while to consider the answer to Sir Reginald's other inquiry, namely, what have the Turks ever done for India's interest? The attitude assumed by the Ottoman Turk before the war towards the Indian Mussalman was unmistakable and the members of the Indian Red Crescent detachment who visited Constantinople in 1912 know what that attitude was. The more the Khalifate agitation is studied, the more possible it seems that it should lead to any practical result.

NEWS ITEMS

DAMAGES FOR NON-SUPPLY OF MEALS

An interesting suit for damages for the non-supply of meals was decided by the Fifth Judge of the Calcutta Small Cause Court yesterday, in which Mr. Dan Frizton, through his Mr. Chinnappa, sought to recover from Miss Thomas, Mr. L. MacGuire defended. The plaintiff's case was that Miss Thomas was supplying outdoor meals to him and his family, and that in consequence of which he was compelled to get his food elsewhere. Mr. MacGuire for the defendant said that the plaintiff had broken his contract by demanding meals out of hours, and that he refused to keep his own servant, which he originally agreed to do.

JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN

There was an interesting incident in the Commons on the occasion of the Prime Minister moving that His Majesty should be humbly asked to direct the erection at the House's expense of a monument within the precincts of the Palace at Westminster to the memory of Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, with an inscription expressing the House's high sense of his eminent services to the country and the Empire. Mr. Lloyd George, in the course of a long and glowing tribute, said there were few men in the history of Britain who had retained the passionate attachment of so many millions of their countrymen to the cause of a long period. Mr. Chamberlain's vision of the importance of strengthening the partnership of the Empire had already been justified by the most searching test applicable to any proposal.

SPORT IN RANGOON

What appears to have brought about a climax in public betting on football games occurred with the closing of a shop in 37th Street, near under the name of G. Ross, Turf Accountant. It appears that the accountant from time to time took money on B.A.A. Football games, besides money on races run at Rangoon and Kambe, when ten to one was laid against Friends Union Club winning the contest. They played with the Royal Scots. On that evening a good deal of money came on the Friends Union, and the accountant stood to lose about Rs 16,000. The game resulted in a win for the Friends Union by four goals to one. Successful bettors on turning up this morning were confronted with a notice purporting to have come from the police to the effect that all betting on football was to be stopped.

LADY DOCTOR AT AMRITSAR

The Bombay Municipal Corporation devoted part of the afternoon in discussing Mrs. Easdon's appointment as medical officer of a Municipal maternity home. Mr. Clayton, Commissioner, who spoke with warmth, made a lengthy statement explaining the circumstances under which Mrs. Easdon's appointment was made. He considered her to be the most suitable of the three candidates he had selected from among twelve applicants. Referring to allegations of callousness at Amritsar made against her the Commissioner was convinced that she had been maligned. In a letter she had written to him she most emphatically denied the accusations made against her before the Congress Committee, and it was only when she read the discussion in the newspapers that she first knew that such an accusation had appeared against her in the Congress Committee's report.

The new culture wars

Bollywood has emerged as the new site of political contestation

Thirty-four of Bollywood's top production companies, many helmed by the biggest stars, and four industry bodies, on Monday, filed a lawsuit in the Delhi High Court against "media trials". They have also sought directions against two news channels, seen as close to the ruling dispensation, for their "irresponsible, defamatory and derogatory" remarks against Bollywood and its personalities. Select media coverage, in the wake of actor Sushant Singh Rajput's suicide, portrayed the industry as a den of crime, drugs, and nepotism.

The case is significant for two distinct reasons. One, it will throw open the question of free speech and its limits. While it is tempting to frame the issue only in terms of free expression — and media platforms must be allowed to publish and broadcast all forms of investigative stories and diverse views — the fact is that this right to free speech comes with a degree of responsibility as constitutionally stipulated. To accuse people of murder, without any evidence, cannot be constructed as free speech. Some media outlets have also, often, provided a platform for hate speech. While the State cannot be trusted to regulate the media — for it will become a way to exercise control — self-regulation has failed too. The case must trigger a conversation on the need for a statutory-but-independent regulatory mechanism for television news.

India is also in the midst of a larger culture war. The political Right, which believes it is through culture that society and eventually politics is shaped, appears to view Bollywood as representative of the ancient regime, with its focus on pluralism and the presence of liberals as well as Muslim figures. The fact that the industry has a range of underlying issues — from a history of shady financing to nepotism — allows the Right to stake public distrust. The effort appears to be to delegitimise existing Bollywood power structures and create a parallel, more pliant, "nationalist" industry which will shape ideological and cultural consciousness as desired by dominant political actors. This newspaper does not endorse any illegal activity that may be taking place in the film industry. But the fact is that Bollywood has been an internal unifying thread for citizens, a secular space, an important economic hub generating employment and revenue, and a huge asset for India's soft power. It may need reform, but to paint the industry as evil is both wrong and dangerous. Bollywood unifying to defend itself is positive.

Why Farooq Abdullah is wrong

Former Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) chief minister and National Conference (NC) chief Farooq Abdullah, while reiterating his opposition to the constitutional changes in J&K, particularly the effective nullification of Article 370, spoke about how China has opposed the changes too. He, then, added that, "May Allah wish that our people get help from their might and our Articles 370 and 35-A get restored."

This is a deeply disturbing statement from a leader who has served as a Union minister, a three-time chief minister, and a long-standing parliamentarian in both the Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha. The change in Kashmir is purely an internal matter of India. This newspaper has been critical of the Centre's actions in Kashmir — particularly the detention of leaders and curtailment of liberty — and asked for a restoration of political normalcy. But this battle must be fought within the Indian constitutional and political scheme, through agitation, public opinion-building, political alliances and judicial recourse.

To turn to a foreign power — which is at the moment an aggressor and has undermined India's territorial integrity and sovereignty — is wrong and unwise. Mr Abdullah's statement will deepen the mistrust that exists about Kashmir's leaders among citizens elsewhere in the country. It will galvanise a nationalist backlash — and it is no surprise that the Bharatiya Janata Party has termed his remarks "seditious". And it will erode the moral standing and political authority of Kashmir's democratic parties. Mr Abdullah may be speaking out of pain and anger, but he would do well to revise his stand.

In Pakistan, a new battle takes shape

The Opposition has challenged Imran Khan and the army. Khan is weak; the army is not

The Pakistan army and the country's principal opposition parties are on a collision course. Despite the army's warning not to drag it into politics, these parties have publicly complained about its political role. The Pakistani political class has traditionally accepted the army's political role as a given and politicians have wanted to secure its support to promote their individual interests. Now, these Opposition parties are asking the generals not to interfere in the country's politics.

The real target of the People's Democratic Movement (PDM), which is scheduled to hold its first rally on October 16, is not Prime Minister (PM) Imran Khan, though his resignation and fresh elections have been sought, but the men in khaki. This also seems to borne out by former PM and the Pakistan Muslim League (N) (PML(N)) leader Nawaz Sharif's blistering attack on the army in his address to a multi-party meeting called by the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) on September 20.

Sharif said that Pakistan was controlled by a "state above the state" which did not let any elected Pakistani PM function properly or com-

plete his term. He criticised the manipulation of the 2018 national assembly election to foist a "selected" PM — Khan — on the country. The meeting, which decided to launch the PDM, also expressed great concern at the "establishment" (a euphemism for the army) increasing its "role" in the country's domestic affairs and, by doing so, threatening the country's stability and institutions. PPP chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari also called for a "non-political establishment".

The Pakistan army is a professional fighting force and, at the same time, despite its denials, a political institution. It is the final decision-maker of the country's security and foreign policies but has always, also, reserved the right to interfere in any other area of governance during civilian rule in the country.

Both the army and Khan are taking PDM seriously. This is borne out by Khan alleging that opposition leaders have joined hands to save themselves from corruption charges. He has quickened the pace of investigations against PML(N) and PPP leaders. Nawaz Sharif's brother, Shahbaz Sharif, the former chief minister of Punjab, has been jailed and former president Asif Ali Zardari has been charged for corruption.

More significantly, Khan, while mounting a stout defence of the army and maintaining that the Inter-Ser-

vice Intelligence is the finest service in the world, has fired the *brahmstra* against Nawaz Sharif, he has accused the former PM of playing India's game in maligning the army. There is no more potent charge that can be levelled in Pakistan than colluding with the permanent enemy, India. Nawaz Sharif is in London since last November. He was then in jail but was allowed to go abroad for his medical condition was said to be critical.

On its part, the army is letting Khan take the lead in battling PDM but is expectedly refuting charges of interference in governance. While addressing the cadets of the Pakistan Military Academy on October 10, army chief Qamar Javed Bajwa said: "I count it a great honour that we stand before the nation as a trusted and accountable institution". He also emphasised "Our actions are guided by constitution and the national interest of Pakistan".

This is not the first time in Pakistan's history that sections of its political class are seeking to take on the army. What is different now is that they are openly calling for it to be an apolitical force, as is traditional in true democracies. This goes against the grain of the army's entrenched belief that it is the only institution that can uphold the country's national interest, that all others are ineffective, and the political class is venal and corrupt. This thinking is reinforced by its view that India is a perpetual



The army will close ranks to protect its role in the polity. The India factor will be used to remind the people that it is needed to protect them, especially at this time

enemy. The army has ensured that this view of India becomes deeply entrenched among the Pakistani people. Now, even the new Pakistanis who stood for the normalisation of India-Pakistan ties have turned against India because they feel that this country has changed course after the 2019 elections.

Will the PDM succeed in consolidating the substantial disillusionment against the Khan government as well as creating a sentiment for the army to confine itself only to its professional duties?

The government has failed on different fronts since it assumed office. The economy continues to be in a mess and the macroeconomic targets set by IMF remain unmet. Consequently, the Fund is demanding an end to tax loopholes, increase in electricity rates and greater autonomy for provinces. These are politically almost impossible to accomplish. Pakistan's foreign policy is under

strain too. Its Kashmir policy has not yielded results and the strains with the Arab peninsula states, especially Saudi Arabia, are enormous. Turkey cannot replace the Saudi connection. There is thus material to fan discontent against the Khan government. The same will be difficult to do against the army, despite its support for Khan. Even if there is some discontent because of Bajwa's extension, the army will close ranks to protect its role in the polity.

The October 16 rally may, therefore, give an indication of both the capability of the opposition and the army's strategy.

Vivek Katju is a former diplomat
The views expressed are personal

The economy is looking up. Seize the moment

The festive season is upon us and finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman's measures to boost demand will come as a relief to consumers. Monday's announcement of the advance payment of a part of salaries to central government employees and spending tax-exempted travel allowance will be most welcome.

The announcement is a sign that the wheels of the economy are slowly moving again. Take specific examples. Exports touched \$27.5 billion in September, up by nearly \$1 billion in the same month last year. The Goods and Services Tax (GST) collection for September went up to ₹95,480 crore from a meagre ₹32,172 crore in April. Power demand accelerated to 113.5 billion units in September from 23.2 billion units in April. What is most welcome is the fact that there is a drop in unemployment. From a high of 23.8% in April, when the migrant labourers had returned home, the unemployment rate stood at 5.8% in September.

My optimism is not only based on the 8-11% growth forecast for the next financial year by all ratings agencies, but that it has taken on a V-shape recovery since the start of Q2. Passenger vehicles posted zero sales in April but, in September, it was up by 37%. Two-wheeler sales had plummeted to minus-100% but posted a 13.4% growth in September.

The most significant measure has been the Atmanirbhar package of ₹20 lakh crore announced by Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi on May 12. It was the biggest relief-cum-stimulus package among the G20 countries. And it ensured a sustained growth for India in the post-Covid-19 world.

Despite the crisis, India has seen its forex reserves grow to around \$550 billion as of September, enough to pay for 12-14 months of imports. The government should spend \$30 billion from the forex reserves on developing infrastructure, which will create jobs and entrepreneurship. The modalities and regulatory compliant structure could be

worked out in consultation with Reserve Bank of India (RBI). Normally, RBI buys government securities from the secondary market through the open market operation to create liquidity and manage interest rates movement. But the government and RBI can explore a legal framework to enable RBI to buy government securities worth \$30 billion in the primary market.

Another way the government can generate funds is by issuing perpetual bonds or "perps", as they are known in the corporate world. Governments resort to this method during extraordinary times but they are beneficial to all parties concerned. These will allow the government to spend on infrastructure development and build robust supply chains with a view to competing with China. RBI buying government securities will keep interest rates in check as opposed to, let's say, the government borrowing money from the market which might put pressure on the interest rates.

In the pandemic-hit global trade and economy, a new world order is emerging and it's a selfish one. The rule of the great powers in the global order it created in the aftermath of World War II, and most countries played along. In this new world order, India wants to be a regional economic powerhouse and deserving of a permanent seat in the Security Council.

The PM has made a strong pitch for a more meaningful role for India in the structures of the UN in his recent speech on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of its foundation. His argument was simple: "The world of 2020 is vastly different from the world of 1945".

Whether India will carve out a key role for itself in the new world order or not will depend a lot on how quickly it becomes a global economic powerhouse. We should seize the moment. I believe new trade deals and diplomacy will be at the heart of these opportunities. We need trilateral or multilateral trade deals with like-minded democracies. This should be done specifically to reduce dependency on China. For instance, the India-Japan-Australia joint initiatives of last month could be harnessed to reduce dependence on China and build supply chains.

On the domestic front, India needs to attract global brands which are keen to move out of China altogether. There are several such companies which have previously shown an interest in setting up shop in India. It is perhaps time to provide them with incentives in the areas of land, labour and legislation.

Another area of opportunity will emerge when we roll out the 5G technology. India has the potential to create hundreds of new businesses and generate new jobs.

There is no magic wand to control the pandemic, as it continues to destroy the economies across the world. We need patience and we need perseverance, both of which has been demonstrated by the PM in these trying times.

Syed Zafar is a Rajya Sabha MP, national spokesperson of the BJP and former managing director, Deutsche Bank, India
The views expressed are personal

{ MADAN B. LOKUR }
FORMER SUPREME COURT JUDGE

Almost every state seems to have weaponised sedition as a means of silencing critics and the numbers are increasing. Any statement is good enough for a sedition case.

The fragmentation of political power is key to institutional autonomy

Over the past few years, we have seen the erosion of institutional autonomy. Democracy requires institutions to enquire into and produce truth, mediate, uphold the rule of law, and protect other institutions from the whims of the executive. The diminishing of institutions must be resisted. Democracies are premised on the separation of powers and a system of checks and balances. However, this works only when political power is factionalised. In a democracy, political power is derived from organised public opinion. The State's executive power is acquired by winning elections. Institutions work when political power and executive power are distributed among competing factions. At some threshold of consolidation of political and executive power, institutions start to collapse. It would be wrong to see this as a result of individual failings, and examine systemic factors.

First, a large part of institutional power is essentially delegated power because the executive controls most institutional appointments such as the election commissioners and heads of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and Reserve Bank of India (RBI). Even in the selection of the Central Vigilance Commissioner (CVC), where the appointment committee includes the leader of the Opposition, the executive has a majority and appointments do not require a consensus. In such bodies or agencies, institutional capture is a real danger, especially if executive power is not transferred periodically between opposing factions. The executive can also make it difficult for independent-minded individuals to function to a point that they may wish to exit on their own.

Second, even where institutional design insulates the appointment process from the executive to a large degree, such as the judiciary, the executive has considerable official and unofficial coercive power. Dissent can be neutralised through inducement, marginalisation, intimidation, harassment, propaganda, transfers, even incarceration. A determined State only needs a pretext.

Third, institutions derive authority from normative legitimacy. Over the years, this normative legitimacy has been undermined due to various factors, including the percep-

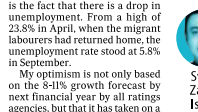
tion of fallibility and venality.

Moreover, most institutions are dependent on the coercive power of the executive for the implementation of their orders. This requires the executive to voluntarily accept the authority of other institutions and imposes an automatic horizon of acceptable opposition on institutions when facing down the executive. It is evident that while democracy needs institutions to function, this happens within a context. When the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) 2 government was thought to be on its last legs, institutions acquired a radical oppositional streak, driven not by any streak of independence but by political calculation. Similarly, executive overreach and countervailing institutional pusillanimity is greater in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s second term with consolidation of political power and its willingness to bypass normative thresholds to further consolidate power.

This moment is an inflection point. Institutions may always have been fallible but when political power is distributed, this fallibility is ad hoc to defuse specific issues or capricious in response to competing levers of power. Such institutional fallibility does not impede democratic contestation. The institutional capture of today is designed to consolidate political power and disempower constraints on State power which make it possible to contest it. Speaking up without organising is no longer enough because we are no longer working within the framework and the logic of liberal democracy where the State is responsive to principled criticism and institutions act as countervailing power to the State.

But India is still a democracy. Contrary to common rhetoric, democracy is not a binary construct but operates on a continuum. Important checks and balances have been lost but political and electoral contestation remains open. This underscores the importance and urgency of the political presence at this point in Indian democracy and the need to go beyond outrage in an echo chamber.

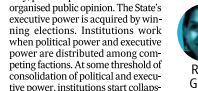
Ruchi Gupta is joint secretary with the All India Congress Committee
The views expressed are personal



Syed Zafar



Madan B. Lokur



Ruchi Gupta



A slim stimulus

The govt. cannot wait for the pandemic to ease to loosen the purse strings further

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's fresh set of measures, on Monday, to spur consumer demand and capital expenditure include an interestingly designed tweak to the LTC allowances of government employees. Her reckoning is that these would lend a ₹3,000 crore demand spurt to prop up the ailing economy in the second half of this year. This could rise beyond ₹1,000 crore if private sector employers offered similar LTC incentives. With industrial output slipping for the sixth month in a row in August, the clamour for new stimulus measures had been growing ahead of a particularly bleak festive season. But this package, which will cost the exchequer about 0.2% of GDP, taking overall fiscal support through the pandemic to 17% of GDP, may not be as persuasive as may have been envisaged. Enhancing the Centre's capital expenditure in specific sectors by ₹25,000 crore from the extant level of ₹4,12,000 crore is laudable. But pandemic restrictions have affected the ability to get new projects going. Till August, just about ₹1,34,400 crore of the budgeted capex had been spent. The same problem plagues the ₹2,000 crore offered as an interest-free 50-year loan to States for capital spending over the next six months.

While States have been allowed to use these loans to pay off existing contractors' dues, the amounts on offer are unlikely to have an impact; ₹2,000 crore has been set aside for States that manage to complete three of four reforms mandated in the earlier Atmanirbhar Bharat package, in order to get additional borrowing leeway. Only some States may qualify for this. Too many conditions also pervade the consumption push. Linking LTC perks of government staff who have not availed them yet due to restricted travel during the pandemic to spending on non-travel items is an innovative nudging. But requiring them to spend three times their return ticket fares under LTC on goods and services attracting at least 12% GST from GST-registered vendors, may be too prescriptive and overlooks the reluctance towards discretionary spending due to low visibility on the economy's prospects. Eligible employees may find the scheme complex and too expensive to avail. One hopes the government has more in its quiver to expedite recovery. Waiting too long for the pandemic to ease before loosening the purse strings further could extend the pain. The focus should not just be on conjuring a trickle-down stimulus from those with their jobs and savings intact but also on relief measures for those without. Even the IMF has been urging countries to spend now to diminish the damage. Avoiding spending now to maintain fiscal discipline and prevent a rating downgrade seems sensible, but if the underlying edifice of the country's growth story crumble in the process, a future downgrade will become inevitable.

Crisis in Caucasus

Azerbaijan, Armenia and the Karabakh rebels should go back to the ceasefire

The ongoing fighting between Armenian rebels and the Azerbaijan Army in Nagorno-Karabakh, a self-declared republic within Azerbaijan, risks becoming a wider regional conflict. Though Armenia and Azerbaijan agreed to a Russia-mediated ceasefire last week after days of fighting, the truce crumbled immediately amid a blame game. Whatever the truth is, an emboldened Azerbaijan, backed by Turkey, seems determined to press ahead with its offensive. The conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh is decades old. The region, largely populated by ethnic Armenians, is located within the international boundaries of Azerbaijan. Under the Soviet Union, it was an autonomous province that was part of the Azerbaijan republic. In 1988, when the Soviet power was waning, the regional assembly in Nagorno-Karabakh voted to join Armenia, triggering ethnic clashes. After the Soviet disintegration in 1991, Armenia and Azerbaijan went to war over this largely mountainous, forested enclave. By the time a ceasefire was reached in 1994, the rebels, with support from Armenia and Russia, had established their *de facto* rule and extended their influence to the Armenian border. Ever since, the border has remained tense.

What makes the clashes now far more dangerous is the external intervention. Turkey has called Armenia a threat to peace in the region; the Azeris and Turks share ethnic and linguistic bonds. Also, the pre-Soviet Azerbaijan was a local ally of the Ottomans when they invaded Transcaucasia in the last leg of World War I. For Turkey, which, under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, is trying to expand its geopolitical reach to the former Ottoman regions, the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh is an opportunity to enter the South Caucasus. Turkey also has a particularly bad relationship with Armenia. But its problem is that Armenia is a member of the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Russia enjoys good economic and defence ties with both Armenia and Azerbaijan. But Armenia, as a CSTO member and host to a Russian military base, has more weight. In a wider conflict, Armenia could trigger Article 4 of the CSTO treaty and ask for Russian help. And if Moscow responds to Azerbaijan, that would pit Russia against Turkey, a NATO member. Russia, already involved in military conflicts in Syria, Ukraine and Libya, may not like opening another front. That is why it has re-emphasised its neutrality and hosted talks in Moscow for a truce. But it will be forced to take sides if the conflict spills into Armenia. Both sides should understand the volatile situation and call off the hostilities. Nagorno-Karabakh has in the past witnessed large-scale ethnic violence. Instead of risking a regional war, Azerbaijan, Armenia and the Karabakh rebels should go back to the ceasefire and open up diplomatic channels.

The Arab World and the elusive two-state solution

The Arab World in a geopolitical sense no longer exists; the PLO leadership may have to think of a one-state solution



Hamid Ansari

Words have meanings that are used and misused. A few weeks ago, someone with evident limitations flung against a category of faiths depicted as 'Abrahamic'. Around the same time, the global media gleefully proclaimed the newly minted 'Abraham Accord' to describe a happening of political significance. Both expressions sought to trace it to the proper name, Abraham, a patriarchal entity who flourished in the Second Millennium BCE, is revered by three religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—and whose followers today account for a little over 55% of the world's population. Mention is also made alongside of a group of languages as Semitic—principally Arabic, Hebrew, Amharic and Aramaic.

Language as fulcrum

Till the end of World War I, most of the Arabic-speaking lands of West Asia and North Africa were ruled directly or indirectly by the Ottoman Empire. Today, thanks to geopolitical cartography, they constitute the 'Arab World' whose 22 members are members of the UN. The point of commonality is the language.

The seeds of Arab nationalism were sown in the 19th century. The classic work of George Antonius, published in 1938, records the ori-

gins: 'It was at a secret gathering of certain members of the Syrian Scientific Society that the Arab national movement may be said to have uttered its first cry.' A poem by one of its members gave it the battle cry: *Arise, ye Arabs, and awake!* The poem, viewed as seditious by the Ottoman rulers, did much to foster the national movement in its infancy.

A critique

In 1945 and reportedly on British prompting, the League of Arab States was formed to draw closer the relations between member states and co-ordinate their political activities with the aim of realising a close collaboration between them, to safeguard their independence and sovereignty, and to consider in a general way the affairs and interests of the Arab countries'. It has achieved none of its objectives and its hopes have been 'worn down to disillusion and cynicism' emanating from what Bassam Tibi has called 'the duality of words and deeds'.

The critique of mystifications of Arab nationalism was a promise; but the promise of getting light at the end of the tunnel did not bear the expected results. This was witnessed by a UNDP Human Development Report many years ago to deficits of knowledge, freedom and empowerment of women. Thus, absence of participatory governance and its institutions, disregard for individual freedoms, and the prevalence of one-person rule in what Abbas Ibrahim, a Cairo intellectual characterised as 'living in infra-historical rhythm'. Admittedly, sectional though uneven progress was made, but as the experience



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The Palestine issue

The one problem on which Arab states professed unity of opinion, but not necessarily of approach, related to Palestine and to the demand for a Palestinian state. After multiple resorts to war and popular uprisings, the tenacity of Israel and its American backers forced the Arab states and their international supporters to accept the Camp David and Oslo Accords and finally the Saudi-sponsored 2002 Arab Peace Initiative. It involved a *de facto* recognition of Israel and the latter accepted it with 4 reservations.

The truth behind this Saudi initiative has now been made public in a series of television interviews on Al-Arabiya channel on October 5 by the former Saudi Ambassador to the United States and later intelligence chief, Prince Bandar Bin Sultan. It is candid and revealing and sheds much light on the Saudi

suspicion of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) leadership, beginning but not ending with Yasser Arafat.

The ostensible reason for this, according to some Arab-American commentators, is 'perceived threat from Iran, the spread of regional terrorism and the rise of Islamism'. The take-off occasion, according to them, was the conference in Warsaw in February 2019 that was hailed by Israel Prime Minister Netanyahu as 'a breakthrough in Arab-Israeli relations'. This could be seen as stage in the success of Israel's grand strategy candidly spelt out in Yossi Alpher's 2015 book, *Parity*, aimed to outflank the hostile core that surrounds it and gain the major political-security goal of countering Arab hostility through relations with alternate regional powers and potential allies. It has been furthered by post-2011 developments in individual Arab countries and the aura bestowed on 'political Islam' or 'Islamism' prevalent in its protagonists such as Fahmy Howaidy who argued that Arab nationalism is a stage towards greater Islamic unity.

Public opinion vs. policy

Does this failure to jolt the system at the individual-country and regional levels have an impact on perceptions of the Palestinian problem? The Arab Center Washington DC and its *Arab Opinion Index* for 2019-2020 published last week concluded that 79% of the respondents felt 'the Palestinian cause concerns all Arabs and not the Palestinian people alone'. This figure in 2019-2020 was 84%. It is thus difficult not to conclude that opinion

at the public/respondent level is not in step with official policy orientation on this question. Does this in any manner further the Palestinian cause, more so because the direction of Israeli policy premised on incremental creation of facts on the ground together with furtherance of practical cooperation with individual Arab countries would inevitably result in *de facto* annexation of most parts of the West Bank even if a formal annexation is deferred?

A way out

The PLO leadership has been left high and dry even if not yet disowned by its own people. Would the new situation propel it to re-craft its policies? The promised Two-state solution is nowhere in sight except for some variants of Bantustans. Would it not be better to explore a One-state solution even if it involves a South Africa-like apartheid that would sooner or later prick the conscience of world opinion and their governments and allow a Palestinian Mandate to use Gandhian principles to seek justice?

So the Arab World in a geopolitical sense no longer exists. It will retain its focus on linguistic homogeneity and attendant cultural glory. As for the Palestinians and in the event of hard tactical options being forsaken, they might, even without the creation of a Palestinian point of lamentation, a 'walling wall', hoping that divine justice would eventually be forthcoming contrary to what their Abrahamic cousins

Hamid Ansari is former Vice President of India, 2007-2012

Outline of a pandemic fight, by and for citizens

With changed public behaviour, officials need to recognise the potential of a decentralised control approach



K.R. Antony

There needs to be a paradigm shift in the war against COVID-19, a war that has to be and can be fought with success mostly by citizens hereafter. If there is wider awakening, the novel coronavirus can be handled by citizens. But how is one to raise that level of civic sense is the moot question.

Initially, we never thought that a calamity in Wuhan, China would reach our doorstep. Though the bad news was confirmed as an international emergency since the middle of January, it was only on March 11 that the World Health Organization (WHO) declared it a pandemic. Initially, all nations looked to WHO to be the technical lead, but once there was a reluctance to admit the droplet and aerosol mode of transmission, WHO lost its credibility. Even as doctors and scientists were getting to know the enemy virus, it landed in their midst.

Gradual change

Using memories and experiences of conquering earlier viral outbreaks such as bird flu, Ebola, the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome and the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, technocrats were using a mix bag of approaches. Gene sequences were shared and testing methods and kits developed and shared. Epidemiology is

now better understood, with treatment modalities and experiences in reducing morbidity and mortality getting published. New approaches are being tried. No scientific tool has gone untried in the quest to understand the war is on to seal the infection.

Myths and misconceptions prevail despite WHO's campaign against 'infodemics'. But we do have a better understanding of the virus and how it spreads. Governments have been blamed for lapses such as having delayed stopping international flights, for curbing the lockdowns, for job losses and poor management of migrant workers returning home, for plummeting economy, for inadequate testing and contact tracing, and for lack of transparency in reporting of cases and deaths.

Helping governments

In all that the people have learned one big lesson — of the need to look after and take care of themselves. We cannot depend on the government to do everything. The state cannot rely on the predictions of technocrats. And, we should be able to interpret the assurances that politicians make. The novel coronavirus is still spreading in India and there is no evidence of the flattening of the epidemic curve in spite promised a few months ago. We need to be objective about the debate on testing strategy, the accuracy of reporting deaths, the case load and the recovery rate, and the claims of success in the race for vaccine development. We need to focus on what to do by ourselves.

What matters to all of us is to



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stay away from the virus as far as possible and prevent it from infecting us. This responsibility lies squarely on us; not on the government. Such a realisation will not only aid us but also the government in the overall fight against COVID-19. The government can then concentrate on strengthening the health system to test and diagnose the infection and the care of those who are infected. The government can concentrate on hospitals and the related infrastructure.

Our individual responsibility begins with self-protection. Mask wearing is the most important protection shield we have. In the fight against tuberculosis for example, doctors have been advocating its use for TB patients to minimise droplet spread of the TB bacteria. But very few have taken this advice seriously. In some states, the police check two-wheeler riders for helmet-wearing and also for face masks. Our newly acquired cough and sneezing etiquette is going to stay as a habit to stop aerosol transmission. We are not going to clear our throats and spit anywhere, including from the windows of a moving vehicle. We have also been educated on washing our face and exposed areas of the body once we reach home and

before we sit on furniture.

People are now observing hand-hygiene protocols. They even use sanitizers which are expensive. But in all this, not only can the spread of COVID-19 be stopped but also that of water-borne diseases such as diarrhoea, dysentery, jaundice, typhoid and even cholera. The novel coronavirus has taught us how to stand in a queue patiently. Physical distancing is now new social behaviour. We avoid crowding, festivals and processions, air-conditioned malls and shopping arcades, movie halls, displays and exhibitions. Even if all of these are allowed as an unlocking step, it is better we observe caution. We can go on a holiday or tour once it is safe to do so.

Community vigil

Though we were compelled to close places of worship, our attitude has changed to one of caring for the needs of others. But there is a need for changed behaviour by neighbourhood and social groups to prevent transmission. Virtual platforms must be used frequently to discuss the technical and administrative aspects of pandemic control by community groups. Volunteering for such community initiatives must be encouraged by elected representatives and members of local self government bodies. Self-administered and monitored epidemic prevention and community vigilance must be sustained. Monitoring of ground realities and learning from overseas experiences using smartphones, web connectivity and use of need-based new apps will all enhance the efficiency of this community empowerment.

Kerala had 45,000 registered community volunteers to run information desks and carry out screening at airports, railway stations and bus terminals and border check posts apart from carrying out contact tracing, and monitoring quarantine centres, running community kitchens and sanitation facilities. Odisha has Gana Unnayan Samitis and Andhra Pradesh its health link workers at the ward level. More States need to emulate such initiatives to rope in the community. Reverse quarantine and the protection of the elderly, cancer patients and people with co-morbidities need to be exercises with more community involvement than of enforcement by health, revenue and police authorities.

It is high time policymakers and officials realise the potential of such an approach of decentralised pandemic control. What we have now is patriarchal and protectionist, with unilateral information dissemination and enforcement of strategies either through health staff, the administration and the police. Now, the import of cases has been reduced and nearly 90% cases are through contacts. Finally, enable communities to take control of their own health and stop community transmission. Invest time and budget for this process. Let their civic sense be the biggest armamentarium to flatten the pandemic curve.

Dr. K.R. Antony is an independent Public Health Consultant from Kochi who has served UNICEF, the State Health Resource Centre, Changanassery and the National Health Mission. The views expressed are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

LTC scheme

The announcements regarding the LTC scheme must be examined with care. The government has stopped the DA of Union government employees up to July 2021. Further, the government employees are perhaps the only ones whose income has not been affected by the pandemic. It is clear that the pandemic-induced economic will not end this year and the government is unwilling to stretch its finances further. The government needs to think of transfers and enabling direct spending on goods and services.

S.K. Kishor, A. Chandrasekhar

Chennai

Congress spokesperson

Kushboo Sundar's move to quit the Congress and join the BJP as one more instance of the opportunism of an ambitious politician. Still, for the Congress as a political command, the development should be a wakeup call, indicating that all is not well within the Tamil Nadu unit of the party. The comment made by the TNCP president, K.S. Alagiri, immediately after her resignation was in very bad taste. Had the TNCP president thanked her for her services to the party until she left it, it would have been a graceful exit.

S.P. Asokan, Tirupur, Tamil Nadu

The news of Ms. Sundar

joining the BJP with Sundar joining the Congress and joining the BJP as one more instance of the opportunism of an ambitious politician. Still, for the Congress as a political command, the development should be a wakeup call, indicating that all is not well within the Tamil Nadu unit of the party. The comment made by the TNCP president, K.S. Alagiri, immediately after her resignation was in very bad taste. Had the TNCP president thanked her for her services to the party until she left it, it would have been a graceful exit.

T. Yoganandh, Salem, Tamil Nadu

opportunistic persons

their constant quest to seek greener pastures. Ms. Sundar, a high profile politician, a high profile profile post, which is normally assigned to senior party members, well versed in current affairs and with good command over the language. One cannot but remember that it was her duty to attack the policies of government as a person in the Opposition. It exposes her political dishonesty. Will the same argument apply if she quits the BJP?

V.N. Gopal, Chennai

wonder what was so

important for a prestigious newspaper to publish such news on the front page. I remember the legendary Y.B. Chavan's passing being reported on page 9. Have times changed?

C.K. Pr. em Kumar, Kolluvu, Palakkad, Kerala

of the chameleons in politics.

Let Sri Aurobindo say, Kumbakonam, Tamil Nadu

Tennis lessons

One should be very lucky to witness the three greats of tennis, Federer, Djokovic and Nadal, play in this golden era. They have entertained us and also showed us what it is to be humble, ethical and successful.

Hyderabad

corrections & clarifications

In the story titled 'Sri Lanka in talks to secure \$500 mn in Chinese loans' (Oct. 3, 2020) the sentence that read, 'If sanctioned, the new loan would take Sri Lanka's total debt borrowings from China over \$1 billion, after the \$500 million "urgent financial assistance" that Beijing extended to Colombo in March, to help Sri Lanka cope with the economic impact of the pandemic' should be recast to read: 'If sanctioned, the new loan would take Sri Lanka's total borrowings from China this year over \$1 billion, after the \$500 million... impact of the pandemic.'

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Ferment in the heartland

Caste rivalries are causing fissures in BJP's Hindu unity plank in U.P., opening an opportunity for Rahul Gandhi



Varghese K. Georje

In 2019, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won 62 of the 80 Lok Sabha seats in Uttar Pradesh, and in 2014, 71 U.P. elects 55% of the Lok Sabha members, but it contributed 20% of the BJP members in 2019 and 25% in 2014. The concentrated support in regions above the Vindhyas, the Hindu dharma heartland, enabled the BJP to win 56% of the Lok Sabha seats with 38% votes in 2019. In U.P., the Congress won two seats in 2014 and one in 2019. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi lost his own heartland seat of Amethi in 2019 to enter the Lok Sabha, he chose a seat in the geographical and social periphery of Hindu nationalism — the minority-majority Western Uttar Pradesh.

Mr. Gandhi has now sought to bring the battle back to the heartland, in Hathras in U.P., by rallying public opinion against caste violence, and in Punjab and Haryana, by spearheading farmer protests. He managed to put the spotlight on oppressive caste violence often invisibilised by slogans of Hindu unity as well as on the political self-quarantine of two champions of social justice, former Chief Ministers Akhilesh Yadav and Mayawati. Further thrusts in U.P. will depend on whether Mr. Gandhi remains consistent and whether the Rashtriya Swamivak Sangh (RSS) intervenes to enforce order in its tent. Threatening the BJP's pre-eminence in U.P. is not so much the upper caste violence against Dalits as the intensifying rivalry between two upper caste groups that define the social core of Hinduity in its geographical core — the Thakurs and the Brahmins.

The Yogi model
Affinity, privilege and dispossession linked to caste are not uncommon anywhere, but in U.P. politics, they are all uniquely intense. Caste has been a major obstacle to Hindu unity. Rejection, at least in theory, of untouchability, remained a common thread across all attempts of Hindu unification in history, but the question of inequality was rarely con-



fronted. In the 1980s, when the Sangh Parivar ramped up its efforts to reach out to the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and Dalits, it consciously chose the word *samrasta* (harmony) over the word *satmata* (equality). Harmony does not reject or preclude hierarchy.

Narendra Modi's rise marked Hindu 2.0 — political Hinduism confronted to demands of the market and material aspirations — which created a national Hindu majority, concentrated in the heartland. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad captured the ongoing process in a statement following the acquittal of Parivar leaders in the Babri Masjid demolition case thus: "We call upon the society to now look forward to the urgent tasks at hand, the completion of a Grand Temple at Shri Ramjanmabhoomi, the eradication of social inequalities and establishment of *samrasta*, to bring about social, educational and economic upliftment of the Scheduled Castes, Tribes and other economically backward sections of the society as also to build a strong and stable Bharat; capable of fighting the attacks and challenges from within and at the borders" (emphasis added).

The BJP has been far more open and successful in accommodating marginalised castes than the Congress in the heartland. The Parivar also overlooked, sidelined, or confronted autonomous intermediary and Dalit groups, as has been the case with the Marathas in Maharashtra, the Patels in Gujarat, the Yadavs in Bihar, and the Yadavs and Jatavs in U.P. It chose upper caste leaders only in non-threatening environs for the rest — a Thakur in Chhattisgarh or a Brahmin in Maharashtra. The appointment of Yogi Adityanath as Chief Minister of U.P. in 2017 marked a change in this pattern. It also coincided with an upper caste impa-

rity to reclaim their marginal losses during the Mandal surge. Mr. Adityanath's strident commitment to Hinduism was a factor that endeared him to the Parivar. If his Thakur background was deliberately overlooked, it may have been motivated by a belief — which now stands challenged — that being a priest in saffron, his identity was solely Hindu. The Parivar's preferred instrument for Hindu unity is hegemony as opposed to domination. Domination is used occasionally, for instance, against Ambedkarites. The disproportionate association of negative attributes such as inefficiency, corruption, nepotism and policy paralysis with OBCs, Dalit and minority leaders in public debates is not accidental but often an outcome of curated hegemonic discourses. The 2007 slogan that heralded the Jatav-Brahmin social coalition that catapulted Ms. Mayawati to power in U.P. creatively linked the emergence of a fresh political narrative to caste hierarchy — *Brahmin Shankh Bajayenge The Haathi Badta Jayenge* (If the Brahmin keeps blowing the conch, the elephant will keep moving forward). The Brahmins, estimated to be above 10% of the U.P. voters, are the most impactful swing voters anywhere in India at the moment. In 2007, their support brought Ms. Mayawati to power. In 2012, they moved en masse to Akhilesh Yadav who became the Chief Minister, and in 2017, they moved en masse to the BJP that won. Though Brahmins remain loyal to the BJP generally speaking, they feel sidelined and threatened in U.P. The social media chatter following the killing of gangster Vikas Dubey in July was instructive of how the community perceives its ties with the Yogi administration. If the Thakur-Brahmin

rivalry is settled amicably by the RSS leadership, the current turmoil in the State could recede and its memory will fade.

Rahul's second coming?

Mr. Gandhi is one leader who is beyond caste and even religion. While this could be his biggest advantage in a society reeling from sectarianisms of various types, this could be his biggest disadvantage too. He belongs to a cohort that is 'truly Indian', in the sense Ashis Nandy describes as one who "cannot be easily identified with any specific regional culture in India." You cannot fit them into anything local. They can only be called Indians. They are partly deracinated. These 'true Indians' are hence also disconnected from the rural, communitarian Hinduised political climate, being disconnected from particularities is a double-edged sword. Mr. Gandhi's grandmother and father had to assert their Hindu identity. He is evidently conflicted over the question — he is unsure of his *tilak* and *rudraksh*. The disconnect from the local and the sectarian is also the reason why the Congress remains at a loss in the aspirational of backward and Dalit politics. To be fair, it has been responsive in policy — the expansion of Mandal to higher education during the United Progressive Alliance regime is instructive. The challenge is in representation. The Congress has no Dalit or OBC leader in the heartland who is identified as such. Mr. Gandhi and his sister Priyanka Gandhi, forced a rethink among their critics through their taciturnous intervention in Hathras, but the exclusion of U.P. Congress chief Ajay Kumar Lal, himself an OBC, from the scene was inexplicable. What Mr. Gandhi lacks is not courage or conviction, but attention to detail and consistency, which are more important.

The caste rivalries in U.P. at the moment are a strictly regional house-keeping challenge for Hinduism, with no immediate implications for Mr. Modi's politics. However, their inherent contradictions have resurfaced more vividly than any time in the past. The BJP and this potentially open a fresh opportunity for Mr. Gandhi in the heartland.

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A concerted attack on RTI

The worst blow to the right to information regime has come in the form of a persistent attack on the transparency watchdogs



Anjali Bharadwaj & Amrita Jhri

This year marks 15 years of the enactment of the Right to Information (RTI) law, which has empowered millions to assert their citizenship and show truth to power. It was a vibrant grassroots movement, led not just by the educated elite but the working poor across the country, that eventually resulted in the passage of the historic law in 2005.

The right to information has been upheld by the Supreme Court as a fundamental right flowing from Article 19 of the Constitution, which guarantees every citizen the right to free speech and expression. Without access to relevant information, people's ability to formulate opinions and express themselves meaningfully is curtailed. Since its enactment, the RTI law has been used by people to seek information to actively participate in decision-making processes and hold governments accountable.

The potential of the law

Every year nearly six million applications are filed under the RTI Act, making it the most extensively used transparency legislation in the world. National assessments have shown that a large proportion of these are filed by the poorest and the most marginalised who have understood the tremendous potential of the law to empower them to access their basic rights and entitlements, especially in the absence of effective grievance redress mechanisms to address service delivery failures. During the COVID-19 crisis too, the law has been widely used to seek information about availability of medical facilities, like ventilators and ICU beds, and to hold government departments accountable for delivery of foodgrains and social security benefits meant for those in distress, including migrant workers.

The RTI Act has also been put to effective use by public-spirited citizens to shine the light on corruption and arbitrary abuse of power by the state. People have used it to question the highest offices. Information has been accessed about the anonymous electoral bonds though which thousands of crores have been channelled into political parties. The Prime Minister's Office has been queried about the expenditure of the PM CARES Fund set up to provide relief during disasters like the current pandemic.

By giving every citizen of India the right to access government files and records, the law

has potentially created 1.3 billion whistle-blowers and auditors. It has empowered citizens to question those who govern and hold them to account. Consistent attempts by governments to denigrate the law bear testimony to this tilting of the balance of power.

Attack on the transparency watchdogs
The worst blow to the RTI regime has come in the form of a persistent and concerted attack on the transparency watchdogs set up under the law. Information Commissions at the Centre and in the States are the final adjudicators empowered to act against violations of the legislation. In 2019, regressive amendments were made to the RTI Act which did away with statutory protection of fixed tenure and salaries of the commissioners. Despite stiff opposition within and outside Parliament, the government pushed the RTI (Amendment) Act which allows the Central government to determine the tenure and salaries of all Information Commissioners, signalling that directions to disclose inconvenient information could invite adverse consequences.

The functioning of commissions has been severely impacted by governments not appointing Information Commissioners in a timely manner. Vacancies in Information Commissions lead to large backlogs of appeals/complaints and long delays in the disposal of cases, effectively frustrating the people's right to know. The track record of the BJP-led government at the Centre has been particularly abysmal. Since May 2014, not a single commissioner of the Central Information Commission (CIC) has been appointed without citizens having to approach courts. Despite Supreme Court orders to fill all vacancies, six out of 11 posts of commissioners are currently vacant in the CIC, including that of the chief. The CIC is headless for the fifth time in the last six years. State governments appear to have adopted a similar strategy. Eight State Information Commissions are functioning without a chief. Two commissions — Tripura and Jharkhand — are totally defunct with no commissioners.

The right to question is the hallmark of a democracy. Any attack on the RTI law, which has empowered citizens to question those in power, is an attack on the foundation of our democratic republic. It is a clear reflection of the lack of political will of governments to be answerable to the people of the country.

As the RTI law completes 15 years, it is again time for those whom it empowers — the citizens — to demand that governments shed their fundamental right to information, which they attained after a long struggle.

Anjali Bharadwaj and Amrita Jhri are members of the National Campaign for Peoples Right to Information

Quadrilateral home truths

The Quad would do well to heed four lessons drawn from Asia's history and geopolitics

Sourabh Gupta

Regardless of how or when China's misbegotten military adventure is going to wind down in Ladakh, one thing is clear: it has breathed fresh life into the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue as a loose, consultative enterprise of like-minded democracies in the Indo-Pacific. On October 6, the foreign ministers of Australia, India, Japan and the U.S. held a standalone meeting in Tokyo. If the Quad is to prosper as a geopolitical construct, it would do well to heed four lessons drawn from the long arc of Asia's history and geopolitics.

No Indo-Pacific system

First, there is no such thing as an 'Indo-Pacific system'. There has never been one, as such, ever since the rise of the port-based kingdoms of India in the first half of the second millennium. Rather, there were two Asian systems — an Indian Ocean system and an East Asian system — with intricate sub-regional balances. The sprawling British empire never managed to combine the Indo and the Pacific into a unitary system and the effort by a U.S. in global retreat and relative decline to artificially manufacture one to enclose China will be no more successful.

Second, the Indo-Pacific region possesses no prior experience of enduring peace, prosperity and stability engineered from its maritime fringes. Rather, dynamic long cycles of Chinese influence radiating outwards have alternated with sharp periods of centripetal turmoil as China and the Asian system collapsed upon itself.

The emerging practice of ASEAN-centred multilateralism is more in tune with regional tradition and historical circumstance than the post-18th century European 'balance of power' system, where the 'flanking powers' (Britain and Russia) resisted revisionist challengers to periodically restore the tenuous equilibrium. For their part, the Indo-Pacific's 'flanking powers', India and Japan, have never balanced Chinese power throughout their illustrious histories.

Third, the sea lines of communication constitute the connective tissue

that links the Indian Ocean to the Western Pacific. It is also a valuable area of leverage vis-à-vis Chinese shipping and resource flows. This leverage must be wielded judiciously on India's terms, not on the Quad's terms. The latter, after all, has little to offer materially with regard to New Delhi's continental two-front dilemma but ceding this chokepoint leverage will invite overwhelming Chinese pressure against the full range of India's South Asian interests — to which the other Quad members possess neither will nor desire to answer. For the threat of interdiction to be credible furthermore, it must not be brandished off-handedly. Except during a general war, no sustained and significant campaign to interdict the maritime trade of a major power has ever been successfully mounted since the Napoleonic Wars of the 19th century.

A check on China's ambitions

Finally, the Quad has a valuable role to play as a check on China's Indian Ocean ambitions. India must develop ingrained habits of interoperable cooperation with its Quad partners and, thereby, pre-emptively dissuade China from mounting a naval challenge in its backyard. On the other hand, it will be more than a decade or two before the People's Liberation Army Navy will be credibly capable of projecting power in these waters. The shores of the Indo-Pacific littoral are strewn with the bones of Cold War winners, pan-regional architectures that were divorced from the underlying security dynamics. The Quad must resist this temptation for precipitate design over purpose.

In 2018, in his keynote address at the Shangri-La Dialogue, Prime Minister Narendra Modi noted that India would "work with [its friends] individually or in formats of three or more for a stable and peaceful region, but [that these] friendships are not alliances of containment". Reconciling this capacity to resist alliance formation while nudging the region's geopolitics towards cooperation as opposed to conflict should be India's, and the Quad's, priority.

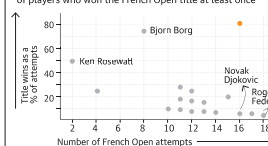
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DATA POINT

King of clay

STRIKE RATE | In 16 attempts at the French Open, Nadal won 13 titles at an unmatched strike rate of 81%, Bjorn Borg, with eight attempts, comes closest with a 75% strike rate. The graph depicts attempts and the title win % of players who won the French Open title at least once

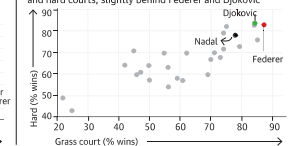


DOMINANT WINS

Dominance ratio (DR) is a metric which combines the performance of a player in both his wins and return games. DR is calculated as the % of return points won divided by the % of serve points lost by a player in a match. The graph depicts attempts and the title win % of players who won the French Open quarter-final, semi-final and final matches played by Roland Garros winners since 1991



ALL-ROUNDER | The graph plots the % of wins on grass against the % of wins on hard court in the careers of all French Open winners since 1968. For a dominant clay court player, Nadal has also won 78% of matches each on grass and hard courts, slightly behind Federer and Djokovic



Nadal's straight-set win against Andy Murray in the 2014 semi-final had a dominance ratio of 2.99, the highest in the considered period

At least four of Nadal's matches had a DR of >2. No other player in the period had more than one match with a DR of >2. Novak Djokovic's most dominant win (DR=2.3) was the 2013 quarter-final against Tommy Haas. In the latest French Open, Nadal's DR was 1.5, Novak's 0.6.

Roger Federer's most dominant win (DR=1.8) came in the 2009 final against Robin Soderling

SOURCE: TENNIS ABSTRACT

The Hindia

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO OCTOBER 14, 1970

Chances of accord on Cauvery remote

The chances of an accord on the Cauvery waters dispute, principally between Mysore and Tamil Nadu, at the next inter-State conference in Madras on October 27, are considered difficult in view of the basic differences in the approach of the two States. This was the assessment of knowledgeable people after yesterday's inter-State talks in New Delhi. Tamil Nadu swears by the 824 agreement on sharing the water of the Cauvery, without repudiating that agreement, has reservations on its application to Mysore following reorganisation of States in 1956. The Mysore Chief Minister, Mr. Veerendra Patil, who returned today (October 13), is understood to have done some 'plain-speaking' at the Delhi talks about the Centre's attitude all these years to the dispute. On a number of previous occasions, Mr. Patil has criticised the Centre for not adopting a helpful attitude towards Mysore's rights under the 824 agreement, even as the Government of India had been reportedly insisting on Mysore to keep to the 'limit flows' theory. This, it is pointed out here [Bangalore], took away Mysore's rights to utilise its share of 45.1 c.m. of the Cauvery waters.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO OCT. 14, 1920

Ireland (From an Editorial)

The problem of Ireland is intensifying to an acute, desperate stage. Sinn Féin is as busy as ever with its two-fold programme of organising republican institutions and of waging a guerrilla warfare on the agents of Government. Amazing success still attends its moves and the movement reveals no sign of breakdown, hesitation or perversion. On the side of Government, however, the trend of events seems to cause a self-battering panic. Chafing at the uncontrollable triumph of Sinn Féin, and lacking courage to take the only remedy suggested by the logic of the situation, the Government have decided on a policy of reprisals, tooth for tooth, nail for nail. Murders and loots from the Sinn Féin side are answered with loots and murders by the Government police; the insurgents reply with counter-reprisals and provoke Government afresh; and the chain of bloodshed and anarchy thus lengthens out to an unforeseeable end. The Government's drift into such a policy has already been the subject of severe comment, but Mr. Lloyd George appears to think it all perfectly right.