

VIRUS FALLOUT | TECHNOLOGY



Storage tanks behind the oil refinery in Omsk, Russia. In April, Russia, Saudi Arabia and other producers agreed to record production cuts.

Oil Producers May Ease Record Production Cuts

By STANLEY REED

Saudi Arabia, the world's largest oil exporter, and other major oil-producing countries are likely to increase their output in August, as coronavirus lockdowns ease and demand begins to rise again.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, Russia and other producers are expected to modestly ease the record production cuts that they agreed to in April and later extended through July. A committee of key officials from OPEC and Russia will meet on Wednesday by video conference to discuss their approach to the market.

The oil-producing countries want to make sure that they maintain or increase their share of the recovering market.

But analysts say that the actions by OPEC and its allies could

Despite optimism, continuing virus spread is said to be 'casting a shadow.'

be outweighed by the impact of the pandemic on demand. The International Energy Agency said oil demand fell by more than 16 million barrels a day in the second quarter compared with the same period in 2019. The Paris-based group is forecasting a strong recovery but said the spread of the virus in countries like the United States and Brazil and elsewhere "is casting a shadow" over the outlook by raising the prospect of further lockdowns that could discourage driving and other activity.

Total demand for gasoline in the United States rose in early July, a big month for driving, the agency said, citing data from the research firm Kayrros, but it fell in Texas, Arizona and Florida, which have seen recent surges in reported cases of infection.

"We could be in for a second dose of falling demand," said Bill Farren-Price, a director at RS Energy Group, a market research firm.

Oil prices have been on a wild

ride in the last few months. They plummeted in April into negative territory, despite a deal days earlier by OPEC and the other oil-producing nations for deep cuts in their May and June production, as demand collapsed and the world ran out of places to put all the oil the industry was pumping. But a month later, as the global economy started to show signs of life and the production cuts by OPEC and producers in the United States began to take effect, oil prices climbed back above \$30 a barrel.

In early June, with road traffic, air travel and other activity still depressed, the group, known as OPEC Plus, decided to extend the 9.7 million barrel-a-day cuts through July. The Saudis also reduced production "voluntarily" by another one million barrels a day in June to the lowest levels in three decades.

Unless there is a change in thinking, the production cuts will ease to 7.7 million barrels a day — still a large amount — in August, as agreed in April.

On Friday, Brent crude traded at \$43.24 a barrel, still about 35 percent below the level at the beginning of year, and West Texas Intermediate, the American benchmark, was trading at \$40.55 a barrel.

The International Energy Agency said it did see some encouraging signs for the oil market. For instance, it said, the amount of oil stored on ships fell in June by about 35 million barrels from record levels of over 200 million barrels in May — a sign that increasing consumption may be beginning to work off the glut that has built up.

An OPEC delegate said that demand was improving globally, especially in China and India, which are major importers and customers for the OPEC countries.

In an interview in April, Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman, the Saudi oil minister, said that Saudi Arabia would go to great lengths to protect the Asian market, the destination of around 50 percent of Saudi oil.

"Nobody is going to fiddle with our backyard," he said.

By NOAM SCHEIBER

The most contested question in the gig economy may be how much workers earn, since their hourly wages can be widely uneven. Concerns about pay have helped fuel moves in California and New York City to regulate gig-economy companies as if they were conventional employers.

Last week brought evidence that drivers for Uber and Lyft may be much better compensated than previously understood. But it hardly settled the debate.

A study by researchers at Cornell University found that the typical driver in Seattle made over \$23 per hour after expenses during one week last fall. Previous studies for other areas had put net earnings well below \$20 per hour. Another new study put the figure at less than half that.

"Given what we had read about the ride-sharing economy, we were extremely surprised by our result," said Louis Hyman, an economic historian who was the Cornell study's lead author.

The finding comes at an important moment for Uber and Lyft, which are facing a California lawsuit over misclassification of workers that could cost them hundreds of millions of dollars and a Seattle effort to impose a minimum wage for drivers.

But it has also raised questions from critics who have seized on the fact that Uber and Lyft sought out Mr. Hyman and provided his team with data.

Two prominent economists unaffiliated with the research team said the study had been rigorously executed, but second-guessed some of the researchers' decisions. They also said the study reflected the limitations of research that seeks to assess the costs and benefits of prominent digital platforms — not just Uber and Lyft, but also giants like Amazon and Facebook.

In interviews, the two economists — Luigi Zingales of the University of Chicago business school and Lawrence Katz, a labor economist at Harvard — argued that because such studies were difficult to conduct without data provided by the companies, the body of research might be subtly skewed.

"We all make assumptions," Mr. Zingales said. "If at the end of the day you want to please who gave you the data, you might choose a certain set of assumptions."

The Cornell study is valuable in part because it drew on data from both Uber and Lyft, which allowed the researchers to avoid some potential pitfalls. For example, other studies may double-count a certain amount of work time because a driver who spends an hour with the Uber and Lyft apps simultaneously activated may seem to have worked for two hours.

Still, much of the result appears to have been influenced by two decisions. The first involved whether time spent waiting for a fare is work.

While other researchers have assumed that drivers are working any time their app is turned on, even if they're not on their way to pick up a customer or don't have a passenger in the car, the Cornell study counts such time as work



A study done by researchers at Cornell University found that a typical driver in Seattle made over \$23 an hour.

only if it directly precedes a ride. If a driver turns on the ride-share app but is not dispatched on a ride before shutting it off, the authors do not count the time as work.

According to the Cornell authors, this assumption adds about \$2.50 per hour to the typical driver's earnings.

Mr. Katz, the Harvard economist, said the assumption appeared at odds with a conventional understanding of work. He cited the example of a receptionist, who is typically considered to be at work even during down time.

The Cornell authors also assume that many of the costs of owning a vehicle, such as the value a car loses as it ages or financing costs, should not be considered work expenses because car owners would typically pay these

A collaborative process that may lead to skewed results.

costs even if they didn't drive for Uber or Lyft.

The only costs the authors factor into their preferred calculation are so-called marginal costs — like gas and maintenance costs

that accrue because of the extra miles a worker drives while on the job. This assumption results in costs that are up to about \$5.50 an hour lower for full-time drivers, and a net wage that is several dollars per hour higher, than under a more conventional calculation.

But many Uber and Lyft drivers may buy a more expensive car in order to drive on these platforms. If that's the case, the vehicle's additional cost should be considered part of the driver's expenses as well, according to Mr. Katz.

"I think the expense number is just way too low," he said. He worried that focusing on a single week might have created an unrepresentative portrait of earnings.

Mr. Hyman of Cornell acknowledged that the assumptions on

wait time and expenses might have overstated the results somewhat and noted that his team had provided analysis using alternative assumptions. He said that the study had found a wide variation in earnings among drivers, and that driving might be a worse deal for full-timers than those who drive casually or part time.

Some critics on social media noted that the companies had paid Cornell \$120,000 to support costs like research assistance, not an unheard-of arrangement for such work. (Mr. Hyman and his fellow professors received no money.)

Both Mr. Katz, who called the group "totally honest," and Mr. Zingales suggested that the paper highlighted a more subtle problem: Academic work that relies on data controlled by companies tends to avoid negative findings.

Scholars typically obtain such data in two ways: They approach the company with a research question they would like to answer; one recent paper in this vein examined the wage gap between male and female Uber drivers, and another sought to put a value on the flexibility of workers for Uber. Or the companies can approach scholars with a question they want answered, as with the Cornell study.

When the scholars are faculty members at an academic institution, the companies typically cede editorial control to them.

But the process still tends to skew what we know about the companies, Mr. Zingales said, because companies are unlikely to approve the release of data for a study, or approach a scholar with data, if they believe the conclusion is likely to reflect poorly on them. One such study, he has noted, recently asked whether traffic fatalities increase after Uber and Lyft start operating in a city, for which the companies did not provide detailed data.

Many scholars have an interest in maintaining a relationship with companies because it is difficult to answer key policy questions without access to their data. This can

lead researchers to adopt more favorable assumptions when there is legitimate debate about how to handle a methodological question.

Mr. Katz said the problem arose with many companies, but was a growing concern with digital platforms in light of their size and relevance to the economy.

Mr. Hyman said Uber and Lyft had not influenced his results in any way. He said they had approached him after people at Uber read his 2018 book, "Temp," a well-rehearsed history of the rise of alternative work arrangements that was relatively positive about the online gig economy.

The companies appeared to be pleased with the findings, and were quick to point out flaws in a study for the City of Seattle that put the typical driver's wage at \$9.73. That study calculated earnings from cruder data the city had obtained from Uber, supplemented by a survey of thousands of drivers.

Cornell's study is the first to provide an independent, data-driven picture of the full earnings experience of ride-share drivers," Matt Wing, an Uber spokesman, said in a statement. He said the other study "is based on limited data and flawed assumptions."

Mr. Wing said that Uber was willing to share more detailed data but the city couldn't commit to protecting its confidentiality.

Julie Wood, a spokeswoman for Lyft, which declined to share information with Seattle, also pointed to the merits of data used by the Cornell researchers and cited the other study's limitations.

Mr. Hyman seemed exasperated by the experience, particularly his dealings with what he called "the Twitter mob."

"I would love to have dragged Uber's name through the mud, trust me, but it's not what the data showed," he said. "I thought it was important for public debate and drivers most importantly to have access to the data nobody knew."

"For me, this is not going to get me anything," he added. "I'm tenured."

TRIPPED UP

Help! I'm Owed a Refund, But the Hotel Won't Budge

Dear Tripped Up,

My wife and I were supposed to attend a wedding in Sonoma this spring, but the affair was obviously canceled. I canceled our Best Western reservation well before the 24 hours required by the company's new coronavirus cancellation policy; but was told that the only option is to postpone our stay for a year — as if I jet-set out to wine country every year for a wedding (and besides, I'm more of a beer guy). I've been messaging back and forth with Best Western on Facebook; the customer-service people said the hitch lies with the hotel owner, who is refusing to issue the refund. What's the point of flexible corporate cancellation policies if individual hotels aren't required to adhere to them? **GEORGE**

Hi George,

The pandemic has brought to light some nerdy issues about the travel industry — ones that most of us never needed to think about before. But here we are, wondering aloud about the oversight capabilities of hotel franchises, and what powers they can exert over their thousands of individual owners.

I got several emails about this topic. Nick, another reader, faced a nearly identical uphill battle while trying to cancel a June reservation at the Hilton Rome Airport. Hilton's stated policies for refunds are flexible, yet the individual hotel owner refuses to budge.

For starters, the answer is yes: Whenever a company like Best Western or Hilton announces a flexible corporate cancellation policy, it's meant to apply to all branded hotels. But Best Western also states outright that a small percentage of individual owners

may be eligible to deny refunds on a small percentage of bookings. And that's what happened here.

A spokeswoman for Best Western said in a statement that "During the Covid-19 pandemic, Best Western Hotels & Resorts has offered a flexible cancellation policy to its valued guests. This policy includes that 'a more restrictive cancellation policy may apply to a limited number of high-demand dates at individual hotels,' which was applicable to this guest's reservation."

After reaching out to Hilton, I learned that Nick got tripped by an even more peculiar loophole — a bizarre wrench in the pandemic's ever-expanding toolbox of bizarre wrenches. On March 17, Italy passed the "Cura Italia" decree, a relief measure meant to offset the economic toll of the pandemic in one of the hardest-hit countries. The new law gave hotel owners in Italy the option to make the call on



RETNA NORDELA

whether to issue refunds or vouchers.

As I've reported before, struggling travel companies have numerous reasons for retaining nonrefundable payments in the age of the coronavirus, and it's also not hard to understand why the owner of hotel in Italy — at an airport, no less — would choose that option, especially when expressly given the green light by the Italian government. Another reader bemoaned a similar issue, also with an Italian hotel. "Why is an American who never set foot on Italian soil subject to a new Italian decree?" she wondered.

In general, though, hotels have generally been better about Covid-related cash refunds than airlines, tour operators and cruise lines. In mid-March, as the world started shutting down, every major hotel company announced newly flexible cancellation terms, even for "nonrefundable" or "advance purchase" reservations. And even now, as we move into summer, hotel policies remain pretty flexible. Hilton, for example, allows guests to cancel any reservation booked through August without penalty, as long as it's at least 24 hours before the arrival date. It's a strategic move meant to get people to take a leap, plan travel, book trips.

Hilton's communications department has worked its magic — a spokeswoman for the brand has confirmed that Nick's refund is in process. And George, in a follow-up email, you told me that Best Western's Facebook customer-service team has offered you a gift card, which, unlike a reboked stay, can be used at any of the company's hotels.

I realize it's not quite the same as a cash refund, but amid an era when planning (and canceling) travel feels especially difficult and impersonal, measures like these can feel like a welcome human touch. Whatever you're drinking — be it beer or wine — I'll say cheers to that. **SARAH FIRSHINE**

JENNIFER SENIOR

Dear Students, You Haven't Been Robbed

OVER THE LAST FEW WEEKS, America's elite colleges and universities have been announcing their reopening strategies one by one, weighing explicit health imperatives against implicit economic ones. Most have landed on a disappointing-but-realistic conclusion: The fall semester of 2020 will have to involve an alloy of in-person and remote learning. Many college students will experience only an attenuated version of campus life—if they get to experience it at all.

It's easy to see what they will lose in this situation. The intoxicating pleasures of independence. The stimulation of late-night conversation about life, meaning, and the universe. The pure exhilaration (and relief) of finding your own kind.

But let's face it: It's pretty luxurious to have these experiences in the first place. Perhaps it's worth discussing what these lackluster of students might also gain at this moment. Because they do stand to gain. It just requires that they reimagine what late adolescence is for, and what it should be about.

The fact is, many colleges—especially private liberal arts schools, the ones that have driven much of the discussion in recent weeks—are clustered, passive settings. Students are fed and housed, just as they were at home; their time and activities are structured, just as it was when they were still in high school. Colleges may give them wonderful opportunities to think, form relationships, and self-define. But it seldom gives them the chance to productively engage with the world.

Yet they are more than capable of doing so. In "Huck's Ruff," his highly readable history of American childhood, Stefan Mintz points out that Herman Melville worked as a clerk, a teacher, a farmer laborer and a cabin boy on a whaling ship, all by age 20. ("A whale-ship was my Yale College and my Harvard," says Ishmael.) George Washington became an official surveyor for Culpeper County at 17 and a commissioned major in the Continental Army at 22. "Behavior that we would consider precocious," Mintz writes, "was commonplace." It wasn't until the end of World War II that children emerged as a truly protected class in this country. That was when they finally became, in the words of the sociolo-

The world needs you, liberal arts majors. Here's your chance.

gist Viviana Zelizer, "economically worthless but emotionally priceless."

But only the most privileged kids got to be useless right through college. If you think about it, that's a pretty awkward time to be useless—as is adolescence more generally. We may regard teenagers as unruly and rebellious. But what they may really be is restless, pining for greater agency and productivity, ability.

Well, now they have their chance. I called Nancy Darling, a psychology professor at Oberlin College, to discuss this. She's one of the smartest people I've ever read on the subject of adolescence and emerging adulthood. Her response was swift and enthusiastic: "I keep telling my students: 'This is the defining event of your cohort. It's going to be hard, but it offers unique opportunities. Rather than doing a crummy internship while you're learning from home, go do something exciting! What do you want to build?'"

Students of means can distribute food from food banks. They can mobilize voters. They can organize social media campaigns for advocacy groups, child care for essential workers and reading lists for libraries. "If you're a volunteer for six months," she points out, "in many places you can just take over the damn organization."

They can help remove Donald J. Trump from office. There's an idea.

Darling notes that finding a way to be useful will be especially valuable (if challenging) to this generation, who have had much experience in structuring its own time—many of her students have been overscheduled since birth—and often conceive of identity-building as a process of self-examination, rather than simple doing. They'll also have a chance to discover the importance of civic engagement at a time when it's in severe decline.

The irony is lovely: While social distancing, they can develop habits that will ensure they won't spend their adulthood bowling alone, to borrow the political scientist Robert Putnam's shorthand for our disengaged lives.

Of course, most students already know what it means to be useful. A 2018 report from Georgetown University found that 70 percent of full-time college students work. Those in community college, for instance, are generally older and come from low-income homes. Many take for granted that they'll be organizing their educations around work and parenting schedules. One can only hope that asynchronous learning will to them be a boon. It's much easier to care for your kids and hold down a day job if you're liberated from the tyranny of a fixed lecture schedule.

But that assumes they can afford the technology and have internet access. Many students, at community colleges and elsewhere, now do not. Others find themselves in households with one or two unemployed family members, and it's suddenly on them to make ends meet—which may or may not mean dropping out. It's a burden that, like so many others right now, is disproportionately afflicting African Americans and Latinos.

Having the chance to be useful—not to their families, but to the world—is a luxury at this moment. Students ought to embrace it. They may be astonished by what they find. □



JOHN NICHOLSON/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Trump Knew, and Did Nothing

Douglas London

DID President Trump know about the intelligence community assessments that the Russians had offered bounties to the Taliban for attacks against U.S. and coalition forces in Afghanistan? He hasn't so far offered a direct answer but instead shifting, manipulative responses.

That is itself troubling. It is also troubling that he has not condemned even the possibility of such Russian aggression.

But let's step back and set aside the question of Russian bounties for a moment. For years, Russia has provided material and financial assistance to the Taliban, with what was surely the intent of supporting attacks against troops from the United States and coalition forces. Was the president aware of that?

From 2016 to 2018, I was the C.I.A.'s chief for counterterrorism in South and Southeast Asia, overseeing operations and intelligence concerning Afghanistan and including related activities of regional actors, like Russia. And I can answer the question: Yes, he was most certainly aware of Russian assistance to the Taliban. Despite that knowledge, he chose to do nothing.

"Bounty" is not a term intelligence professionals would likely use. Intelligence reporting requires precision in language to guard against the risk of misunderstanding or misinterpretation, and "bounty" lacks specificity in meaning, purpose and consequence. Intelligence professionals speak with dry, clinical facts and offer assessments that are not "confirmed" or "verified," but rather corroborated to various degrees of confidence.

The goal is to provide the president with information on developments that may significantly affect U.S. interests. With this information, the president and his team can take any necessary action against potential threats. We can't wait for complete certainty; by then it would be too late to do anything about it.

It can therefore be semantically true that the president never received a briefing on Russian "bounties"—that specific word may not have been uttered. But the White House does not deny that the Feb. 27 President's Daily Brief discussed in public reporting included information from our intelligence agencies in clinical terms that Russians were offering financial incentives to encourage Taliban attacks against U.S. and coalition troops.

Now, the Russians would not provide the Taliban blank checks. The continuation and expansion of their assistance would have required the Taliban to provide video evidence of how they used Russian arms and financing to attack U.S. and coalition targets.

Intelligence services use this common practice to verify the investments in proxy groups, as well as to make sure they are productive and aligned with their goals. Even the Russian military intelligence agency, widely known as the G.R.U., has auditors who make to ensure that funds expended are used as intended.

But in short, American intelligence agencies reported that the Russians were offering bounties—even if they were called "payments" in the intelligence community.

The Russian bounties look like an escalation of that earlier Russian support for the Taliban—support that was publicly commented on by Defense Secretary Jim Mattis in 2017 and by the commander of U.S. and coalition forces in Af-

ghanistan, Gen. John Nicholson, in 2018.

At a 2017 news conference, when asked whether he was refusing that Russia was sending weapons to the Taliban, General Nicholson responded, "No, I'm not refusing that."

Secretary Mattis received the President's Daily Briefs that Mr. Trump did. General Nicholson read both strategic and tactical-level reporting about Afghanistan, including the actions of Russian, China, Iran, Pakistan and India that might affect military and political circumstances on the ground. There is

Ignoring aggression by Russia just invites more of it.

nothing inaccurate in the observations from Generals Mattis and Nicholson. The president must have known all this, too.

There is also substantial evidence concerning Pakistan's and Iran's support for Taliban efforts to target U.S. troops. In a recent report, the State Department intelligence agency, widely known as the G.R.U., has auditors who make to ensure that funds expended are used as intended.

Iranian support to the Taliban reportedly included lethal aid and training under the direction of Esmail Ghaani, the Iranian general who later took over command of the Quds Force, the foreign expeditionary arm of the Revolutionary Guards, after America's targeted killing of Gen. Qasim Soleimani.

Iran's Shiite leadership is not an ideological ally of the Sunni Taliban, but as Russia does, it looks for opportunities to

Why Conservatives Shouldn't Give Up on Originalism

William Baude

FOR decades, originalists, many of them conservatives, have argued that courts should interpret the Constitution and other laws in keeping with their original meaning.

And their views have gained power. Both of President Trump's appointees to the Supreme Court, Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh, have described themselves as originalists, leading many to hope or fear that they would form a conservative majority with Chief Justice John Roberts and Justices Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito.

But that same court has just issued a mixed buffet of decisions—with conservatives splitting on cases concerning gay rights, immigration, executive power, Native American tribes—leading many to accuse the justices of political maneuvering or faulty reasoning. Some have also questioned whether originalism, or a related theory called textualism, is outdated.

After the Bostock v. Clayton County decision, which held that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is forbidden by the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Senator Josh Hawley, Republican of Missouri, said, "If you can invoke textualism and originalism in order to reach such a decision—an outcome that fundamentally changes the scope and meaning and application of statutory law—then textualism and originalism and all of those phrases don't mean much at all."

And some conservatives have turned against originalism altogether. Adrian Vermeule of Harvard Law School, to take one especially notable example, has called for conservatives to abandon originalism in favor of a "common good constitutionalism," where judges and other officials would forthrightly import moral principles into the Constitution.

But today, originalism is the closest thing we have to a publicly shared set of legal principles. And it is not time to abandon it.

When the court looks to fundamental principles, it looks to the text and history of the Constitution. For instance, in an important immigration case, *Thurgood v. Barr*, the court upheld Congress's power to cut off habeas review for attempted entrants to the United States. In doing so, the court relied extensively on

the original meaning of the Constitution's guarantee of habeas corpus, pointing to English precedents and writings by the founding-era authority William Blackstone, among others, to argue that the writ of habeas corpus was never meant to guarantee an immigrant's entry.

Originalism also drove an even more important case about the scope of executive power, *Seila Law v. Consumer Financial Protection Bureau*, a 5-to-4 decision written by Chief Justice Roberts. The court held that the head of the consumer bureau, a federal agency, must be removable at will by the president, who is vested with the country's "executive power." Text and history were woven throughout the decision.

To be sure, these readings of the Constitution's text and history are sometimes contested. There were dissents in

Some on the right wonder if a pillar of their legal thinking is outdated.

both of these cases, and Justice Elena Kagan's dissent in *Seila Law* was especially thorough in trying to marshal its own reading of the Constitution's original meaning.

Justice Kagan's dissent is notable because it shows how historical arguments are not used exclusively by conservatives. Justice Kagan pointed to debates at the founding about the scope of executive power and subsequent practices during the 19th century to argue that the Constitution had let Congress decide how to structure such agencies.

She was quite right that this is a very close question, even if other scholars (including me) think that the majority was more likely correct. Justice Kagan relied on similar history in *Chifalo v. Washington*, holding that states have the power to control presidential elections.

Moreover, these disputes sometimes split the court's conservatives. In *Bostock*, Justice Gorsuch held that sexual orientation discrimination is covered by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. He claimed to be interpreting the original meaning of the statute enacted in 1964, on the basis of sex, even though most people would not have anticipated the re-

sult. But the dissenters—Justices Alito, Kavanaugh and Thomas—countered with their own originalist arguments, and many other originalists have found Justice Gorsuch's arguments to be a stretch.

Bostock revealed debates among the originalists—for instance, how to balance a conflict between the apparently plain meaning of the text and the expectations of the people who wrote it. Justice Gorsuch stressed that because "ours is a society of written laws," the court must faithfully bound by the text. Justice Alito's dissent, by contrast, called the majority opinion "a pirate ship," sailing under the false flag of textualism but actually replacing the text with modern values.

In fact, neither account was quite right. What made Justice Gorsuch's opinion most persuasive was not its textualist analysis but its use of precedents interpreting the Civil Rights Act, which the dissent's logic would have had to repudiate.

A similar debate emerged from another important Gorsuch opinion, *McGirt v. Oklahoma*. In *McGirt*, Justice Gorsuch held that 19th-century treaties with the Creek Nation remained enforceable today, thus divesting the state of jurisdiction over Native Americans in substantial parts of Oklahoma, despite many decades of federal state hostility to the tribe and disregard of its rights.

Justice Kagan's dissent argued that the federal government may have wished the tribe's reservation to disappear, but held that "wishes don't make for laws," and so again the court was bound to enforce the 19th-century promises until Congress acted more formally. By contrast, Chief Justice Roberts's dissent regarded this account as "fantasy," arguing that Congress had acted even if it had failed to use magic wands.

All of these features were present in the court's decisions in *Trump v. Vance* and *Trump v. Mazars*, regulating subpoenas for the president's financial records. In both cases, the court did advert to founding-era history for the broad outlines of the separation of powers. But it then went on to color in this history with more recent practice and its own balancing of separation-of-powers concerns. In doing so, it again split some of the conservative justices among themselves.

Finally, the court's especially important to social conservatives, the court's deci-

hasten America's withdrawal from Afghanistan, increase influence with the Taliban and make the United States pay a price for a military presence so near its borders.

The Iranian and Pakistani support probably did more to endanger Americans and Afghans than Russian aid did. So the president was right to support efforts to address, within practical limits, evidence of Pakistani and Iranian behavior affecting the security of Americans.

Yet Mr. Trump took no action to flag a red line for Moscow's support to the Taliban. He could have signaled discontent with Russia diplomatically, economically or through back-channel intelligence conduits. Instead, to make matters worse, he pressured the U.S. intelligence community to invest time and resources in potential counterterrorist cooperation.

It backfired: Russia was not forthcoming and sought to manipulate the engagement to influence policymakers and target Russian dissidents.

As any observer of Russia knows, neglecting Russian aggression inevitably invites more of it—more efforts to expand Russian influence and power at American expense. For examples, look at Ukraine, Syria and increasingly Libya, Africa and even Europe.

In Afghanistan, the aggression apparently took the form of more audacious Russian behavior like bounties.

We cannot ignore the bigger picture of America's Afghanistan policy. Within days of receiving the Feb. 27 President's Daily Brief addressing Russian bounties, Mr. Trump directed Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to oversee an agreement with the Taliban for the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan.

This also came despite, just weeks earlier, a kidnapping by the Taliban of an American civil engineer and government contractor, Mark Frerichs. In May, the United Nations Security Council shared information—reaffirmed by our own intelligence in a Pentagon report dated July 1—concerning close and continuing cooperation between the Taliban and Al Qaeda.

Even the leader of the U.S. Central Command, Gen. Kenneth McKenzie, told the Middle East Institute on June 11 that the Taliban had yet to meet conditions concerning its cooperation and relationship with Al Qaeda to merit the U.S. withdrawal.

Clearly, regardless of the facts on the ground or the intelligence about Russia and Al Qaeda, Mr. Trump and Mr. Pompeo remain determined to see through their agreement with the Taliban and likewise make it appear a success.

It is easy to get lost in the fog of Mr. Trump's continuing and calculated war of denial and deception. But this much is plain: He has still, despite weeks of public debate over Russian bounties, not offered a clear and unambiguous condemnation of such Russian aggression.

It's imperative that he be held accountable. The president must explain to the American people, and especially to those who risk their lives for their country and our families, why he continues to abide Russian threats to our troops, our security and our democracy. □

DOUGLAS LONDON was a senior operations officer in the C.I.A.'s clandestine service for over 34 years.

sions showed that the importance of precedent may sometimes rival that of originalism. Two of the court's rulings in favor of religious liberty, *Espinosa v. Montana Department of Revenue* and *Our Lady of Guadalupe School v. Morrissey-Berru*, relied on founding-era principles, but filtered those principles through the court's own precedents.

And precedent played a decisive role in *June Medical Services v. Gee*, an abortion case in which Chief Justice Roberts surprised many by invalidating an abortion regulation. The chief justice explained that his vote was driven by precedent, because the court (over his dissent) had recently invalidated an identical law.

These decisions show that while originalism has had great force at the court, it is not a juggernaut. The justices disagree about how to interpret ambiguous provisions and about the role of precedent; originalists disagree among themselves about how to balance text and other context.

These disputes are healthy. Even if the court does not get every decision right, it demonstrates a widespread commitment to the method of originalism, in which the meaning of the Constitution as enacted by the people is paramount and judges can interpret it but cannot alter it. Originalism is foundational to our law, even though the justices sometimes disagree in applying it and even though the role of precedent remains fraught.

Still, as originalism becomes more popular and sometimes delivers liberal outcomes, some conservatives may turn against it altogether, following the lead of Professor Vermeule. If what matters most to you are the results in specific cases, you may want non-originalist justices.

But one danger of results-oriented judging is that other people, including future conservative judges, may not share your moral convictions. Even politicizing the courts may not produce moral consensus. Originalism is a method of evaluation, not a party platform.

Originalism has had widespread support for a reason. It has the potential to transcend our moral disagreement. And that may be what we need most in the long run. □

WILLIAM BAUDE is a professor at the University of Chicago Law School.

OUR VIEW



We need policy clarity on import substitution

Any plan to nurture a domestic industry that makes lithium batteries behind tariff barriers mustn't end up fostering inefficiency in India. A well designed policy could help prevent this

India is reported to be considering a new tariff regime for the import of lithium-ion cells, together with a raft of local incentives, to boost domestic production. Since China is a major supplier of these, the broad objective is self-evident: to curtail and then eliminate dependence on a country that has shown itself hostile to India. Lithium cells are the basic building units of rechargeable batteries that power everything from portable devices such as laptops and smartphones to larger energy hogs, such as electric vehicles. These cells have military and aerospace applications as well. The government is said to be mulling a 10-year import duty plan that will let local manufacturers find customers even if they make these products at higher cost. To encourage an industry at home, the Centre may also offer companies tax-offs and concessional finance. This would be a policy of import substitution, nearly three decades after the country began to rid itself of such schemes. While a revival of the concept goes with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call for a self-reliant India, and we should not let China corner local markets, we should still exercise caution before embarking on an experiment that has had a poor record of success in the pre-liberalization era. The overall experience so far has been that industries shielded from global competition by high tariff walls—or even non-tariff barriers—have little incentive to keep costs down and quality high, as companies based in India have a large captive market within the country. Over time, even if there exists domestic rivalry, this arrangement tends to spell inefficiency that pushes up costs for all users of the protected product. Lithium batteries are so important to digital and internet enablement

today, that a rise in their cost will have an instant impact on sunrise sectors of our economy. It could also delay India's bid to switch to electric mobility, since the battery costs of e-vehicles must fall sharply for them to match the price-value deal of petrol and diesel options. Of course, the government would expect Indian battery makers to crush costs as they go along. In the business of stored-power units, though, China is seen to have a natural advantage as well, thanks to its abundance of input minerals—including rare earths—for their production. To keep India well supplied with raw materials, three state-run metals companies formed a joint venture last year called Khanij Bidesh India Ltd, which aims to acquire reserves of strategic minerals such as cobalt and lithium in countries such as Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, South Africa and Australia. How quickly these efforts begin to bear results could determine the pace at which our local players can replace Chinese imports without hurting consumers.

How our plan to edge out imported lithium cells ultimately works out, however, might depend on the details of our substitution scheme. To prevent domestic cost-bloat, it would make sense to build a gradual reduction of duties into the decade-long programme. That would give domestic players enough time to get their act together while raising their exposure to import competition. In addition, export targets could be set as a test of how globally competitive their products are. If they fail to sell their products in world markets in about three or four years, the entire plan should be scrapped. The push for self-reliance must not turn India into a high-cost market, least of all in areas vital to the future of value creation.

India's economy needs a way out of short boom-and-bust cycles

Corrective action begins with the question of why Indian expansions turn into crises so soon



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In the context of the recent tensions that erupted between India and China at their border high up in the Himalayas in June, a column that I had written ('Towards 'Bridgeline', 19 March 2020) assumes relevance. Despite being the epicentre of the global financial crisis, US stock markets were doing better than emerging stock markets in 2012. Further, its policies had generated adverse spillover effects in different ways on Brazil and India. The column made an argument that by publicly demanding China to revalue its currency, the US had pushed China to drive to keep its currency perpetually undervalued, resulting in debt accumulation and asset price bubbles for the latter. It concluded with the plea for emerging economies to chart their own paths to economic prosperity by collaborating with one another, rather than emulate the failed policies of the West. That plea has been buried, perhaps forever, in the debris that dotted the Galwan Valley in June 2020.

As I write this in mid-2020, the world economy faces deep uncertainties and question marks over its future path. A global pandemic has struck. History reminds us that pandemics bring the curtains down on an open and integrated era, and herald the beginning of a less open and more fragmented era. If the pandemic is controlled, then there is climate change to reckon with. Some

jobs are permanently lost even as other jobs open up. The net effect of these changes on the labour class and its prosperity is unclear. There is also the onward march of artificial intelligence to contend with.

Be it an economic or health crisis, policy responses have featured ever-falling interest rates and ever-rising mountains of liquidity. They do far more to boost asset prices than the fortunes of the median household. The divergence between stock market valuations on one hand and prospects of real economic growth and corporate earnings on the other has never been greater. The biggest risk to the world economy in the coming months and years is not so much from the pandemic, but the policy response to it and the bizarre effects such a response has had on asset prices and investor psychology. The global economy needs a reset, and it will most likely get one, perhaps, after the American presidential elections in November. But, the path from here to there won't be smooth, nor will it be pleasant. In many respects, the "new normal" in America will be anything but normal. The America of the 2020s will be wholly unpredictable and India will do well to assume that it is on its own.

On the economic front, India cannot reduce its dependence on China overnight, nor can it attract global value chains leaving China immediately. It is a process. To expect immediate results is likely to be both futile and frustrating, and sap morale that needs to be sustained because both are multi-year, if not multi-decadal, processes. A beginning has to be made somewhere and the skirmishes in the Galwan Valley are as good a starting point as any.

India has had a somewhat disappointing decade between 2010 and 2019, relative to expectations generated by the first decade of the millennium. This is because the first decade began with promise after the turbulent events of the end of the first millennium that spilled over into 2001. India, in particu-

lar, faced droughts and financial system strains, and had to endure appropriation and sanctions for going nuclear, apart from the fallout of the terror attacks on America in September 2001. India endured them all, undertook some reforms, built infrastructure and enjoyed the fruits of growth for a few years. But the cycle set in too quickly.

In recent times, my interest in such historical cyclical episodes has been piqued by the works of Neil Howe and William Strauss (*The Fourth Turning*), George Friedman (*The Storm Before the Calm*) and Peter Turchin (*Secular Cycles*). Leaving out Sir John Glubb's classic paper, *The Fate of Empires*, would be a folly. In my view, it is both natural and reasonable that most social and economic phenomena are better understood through deductive approaches. Of course, by their nature, predictions based on deductive logic are risky endeavours because they mix up deductive analysis with inductive theorizing.

That said, most of us are familiar with the cycle of crises, from anger to anger to acceptance, action, recovery, expansion, complacency, excess and another crisis. While this framework applies to economic organisms, it can be observed in human behaviour too. In short, cycles are a reality. The problem with India is that it had its excess and crisis too soon after merely five years of expansion in the early years of the noughties. India's crisis started with an exaggerated response to the global crisis of 2008, presumably because that was the "in-thing" to do. But that has spawned many other crises in its wake that continue to hold India back.

Openness to evidence and criticism and honest stock-taking are needed for India's economy to emerge stronger from this crisis. Both need trust. Who will set the ball rolling? If not now, when? Corrective action begins with the question of why India's expansions turn into crises so soon.

These are the author's personal views.

10 YEARS AGO



JUST A THOUGHT

It is definitely true that the fundamental enabling technology for electric cars is lithium-ion as a cell chemistry technology. In the absence of that, I don't think it's possible to make an electric car that is competitive with a gasoline car.

ELON MUSK

MY VIEW | MUSING MACRO

Asia's two big economies will both lose as they decouple

AJIT RANADE



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For two years in a row, India's biggest trading partner has been the US and not China, and this is based on merchandise trade only, i.e. without including India's impressive export of software services. More encouragingly, India's trade surplus with the US has been rising and its trade deficit with China, in all likelihood, this trend would have continued were it not for the disruption of covid-19 and the fatal military clash in Galwan Valley. Despite thorny border issues spanning decades, several tense standoffs, including most recently for 72 days at Doklam, there hadn't been fatalities for nearly 50 years. An eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation at the border has always been defused before it could get nasty. But after the incident of 15 June, in which 20 Indian as well as an unspecified number of Chinese soldiers were killed in eastern Ladakh, the

mood on bilateral trade has soured. Chinese imported cargo is languishing at ports, as clearance is either denied or delayed. This is hurting Indian importers that have already paid for the cargo. India's export consignments face similar hurdles in China. Various confirmed orders to Chinese companies for road construction or for supplies to the Indian railways stand cancelled. India has also banned 59 Chinese apps, despite their user base in India of over 200 million.

Even before Galwan, India changed its policy on select foreign investment, aimed primarily to curtail equity money flowing in from China. This adversely affected at least a dozen startups, which crucially depend on venture capital funding from China. Due to the changed law, Chinese investors have to now apply through our consulate, and at the time of writing this, there is word that almost 100 applications await approval.

How did we get here? Such a rapid deterioration in commercial relations was not anticipated even six months ago. For nearly two decades, trade growth has been vigorous, although skewed in China's favour. In 2001, India was ranked 19 as an export destination for China. This rank rose to 6 in 15 years, clearly showing the growing importance of the Indian consumer to Chinese producers.

Bilateral trade was within the target of \$100 billion. Indian entrepreneurs began sourcing more and more from China, mainly for the huge cost advantage as compared to Europe or America. In 1999, only 5.8% of India's imports came from China, but that climbed to 41% by 2015. Much of the capital expenditure for India's fast-growing telecom and power sectors, including solar power, was sourced from China, and in some cases funded by loans from Chinese banks. Imports of intermediate goods included chemicals, electronics, and textile fibre and fabrics, while those of consumer products spanned a wide variety, from gadgets to Ganesha idols.

Most tellingly, India's dependence on sourcing active pharmaceutical ingredient (API) from China also increased dramatically. APIs are crucial ingredients required for India's pharmaceutical industry, which exports generic drugs. These low-cost generics help keep healthcare costs low for India as well as its trade partners. Today, more than 68% of

APIs are imported from China. The import dependence in other sectors is as follows: In electronics 45%, in capital goods including machinery 32%, in organic chemicals 38%, in furniture 57%, in fertilizers 28%, and in automotive parts 25%. Nearly 80% of compressors used in products like air conditioners are imported from China, as are 95% of motors used in washing machines.

It would be unwise to see the trade relationship only through the lens of import dependence. In certain categories like specialty chemicals, pharmaceuticals and auto ancillaries, India's exports were improving. There was also ongoing bilateral dialogue to bridge the deficit. The trade deficit was partly set by rising capital inflows.

The present value of Chinese investment in India is about \$8 billion, but there is scope for much more. Even 1% of Chinese foreign exchange reserves invested annually in Indian infrastructure projects can practically wipe out India's trade deficit. This would be investment in a variety of non-sen-

sitive sectors, with no threat to national security.

Alas, all these bright prospects have evaporated after Galwan. When President Xi Jinping took office eight years ago, he had outlined five proposals to improve Indo-China relations. These included maintaining strategic communication, harnessing each other's comparative advantage in trade, strengthening cultural ties, expanding coordination in multilateral fora, and accommodating each other's core concerns. Dialogue and engagement were supposed to be the cornerstone of the relationship.

But in the past two years, China's increased aggression, not just in Ladakh and Doklam, but elsewhere in the South China Sea, Hong Kong and the Indo-Pacific, has diminished the prospects for healthy growth of trade between the two Asian neighbours. With high tension, it is becoming untenable to keep geopolitical issues apart from economic and trade relations, no matter how mutually advantageous the latter may be. The decoupling may be gradual and not total. But the mutual enthusiasm for free trade, economic, strategic and cultural ties has cooled off, at least for the foreseeable future. Unless cooler and wiser heads prevail, that promise will remain unfulfilled—may, be betrayed.

12



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THE EDITORIAL PAGE

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

SACHIN AUTOPILOT

If Ashok Gehlot and his deputy are to blame for the current mess, Sonia and Rahul are the co-accused — all four need to reset

IN 2018, AFTER the Congress won underwhelmingly in Rajasthan, scraping past the halfway mark in a state where anti-incumbency sentiment was strong against the BJP's Vasundhara Raje government, Ashok Gehlot was made chief minister and Sachin Pilot his deputy. That was clearly not the end of the leadership tussle in the Congress. It was, in fact, only the beginning of a new phase of the attrition within. For that persistent unease in one of the few states where the Congress still has a government, both Gehlot and Pilot are to blame — Gehlot more, given that as the head of government, the buck stops with him. But Pilot isn't the innocent victim done in by a wily superior. If the No. 2 job, as it was defined, was too small for him, he should not have taken it. Sinking about the CM when you are his deputy in the government is neither good politics nor smart governance. But this time, Gehlot must take responsibility for the extraordinary sequence of events — a bizarre notice issued to Pilot, among others, by the Rajasthan Police's Special Operation Group, to record their statements in connection with the arrest of two BJP leaders allegedly conspiring to topple the Congress government. After that, an all-too-familiar political brinkmanship has played out in a Congress government still to turn two years old — MLAs openly divided into camps, being ferried in buses with tinted windows into fortress-like resorts. All this, even as the other staple of an Opposition government in crisis in recent times — income tax raids — takes place, apparently coincidentally.

But if Gehlot must own the larger share of the blame for the Congress unravelling in Jaipur, it is the party high command that is most answerable. If it knew of the patchy peace between the warring CM and his deputy — and how could it not — the question is: What did it do to resolve the resentments? What mechanisms did it put in place to prevent a breakdown like this one? There is no evidence that either Sonia Gandhi or Rahul Gandhi addressed themselves to the task in Rajasthan with any urgency. Like much else in the Congress, the CM vs Deputy CM conflict in Jaipur was left unattended, and allowed to fester and grow. The organisational ill-discipline that has marked the Congress ever since the Modi BJP laid it low has contributed to the implosion in Rajasthan — just as it led to the collapse, earlier, of the Kamal Nath government in Madhya Pradesh after the exit of Jayprakash Narayan and subsequent cross-over to the BJP. The irresoluteness at the centre of the party, if it continues, could well stoke other simmering factional resentments in other state units, jeopardising more Congress governments.

Whichever way the Gehlot vs Pilot face-off goes, this much is clear: The Congress needs to get a grip on itself and that process must start with filling the apparent leadership vacuum at its centre. It cannot keep deferring important decisions indefinitely. This is a vital necessity for the Congress, if it wishes to survive. It is also necessary for the polity to have a coherent and healthy national party of the Opposition.

A CASE FOR BAIL

First, Varavara Rao must get the urgent medical care he needs — that is his right, and the humane state response

THE GOVERNMENT MUST urgently heed the plea of the family of jailed Telugu poet and civil rights activist, Varavara Rao, to shift him to a hospital in view of his medical condition amid the pandemic. Rao, 81, is currently in Talaja jail, New Mumbai, detained under the Elgar Parishad case with 10 others. Maharashtra minister Jitendra Awhad, on Sunday, confirmed the family's worries about Rao's deteriorating health and appealed to the Centre to "urgently shift him to a hospital".

Courts have repeatedly held that bail is the rule and jail is the exception. However, they have been conspicuously reluctant to apply this principle in Rao's case — his bail pleas have been rejected several times. The accused in the Elgar Parishad case — public intellectuals with distinguished records as human rights activists — have been booked under the provisions of the draconian Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, which allows extended detention without trial and bail. The chargesheet filed by the NIA holds that Rao, who has been awaiting trial since August 2018, is a senior member of the banned CPI (Maoist) and that he conspired to organise the Elgar Parishad, but his advanced age and precarious health clearly indicate that he is in no condition to derail the investigation or tamper with evidence. The Supreme Court has ruled in the past that membership of a proscribed organisation is not sufficient reason to deem a person a criminal. Rao — and his co-accused — should be given bail, especially considering the questions that continue to surround their incarceration in the first place.

The Maharashtra police had claimed nearly two years ago that the Elgar Parishad, a public gathering of Dalit and Left-leaning groups in Pune on December 31, 2017, was organised to destabilise the government. The Parishad was also blamed for inciting the violence that rocked a commemoration event by Dalit groups at Bhima Koregaon the next day. Investigators claim to have unearthed a conspiracy and arrested political activists from across the country — most of them had not attended the Parishad. With several questions hanging over the veracity of the police claims, it is necessary to have a speedy trial and closure in the case. Keeping widely respected writers and academicians under a prolonged cloud of suspicion in prison does not behave a liberal democracy that respects free speech and the right to a fair trial.

THE MASKED ONE

America's coffer-in-chief has appeared in a mask for the first time. This deep into the pandemic, it's just a black joke

THE EPIPHONY of "masked man" usually signals that the Phantom, Batman or Zorro is present and will start pounding the ugliness immediately. But Donald Trump, admiring himself in a mask, has invoked the West and discovered a striking resemblance with the vintage Lone Ranger. Trump did his self-admiration in the strictest privacy, being a resolute foe of masks. He had said that he did not see himself greeting "presidents, prime ministers, dictators, kings, queens" in a mask. He seems to be ignorant of the moral code of the Lone Ranger, which includes the directive: "That a man should make the most of what equipment he has."

Trump has not been known to his people, who are bearing the brunt of the pandemic. The mask is about all the equipment that the citizen has against spreading the disease. Trump's rejection of this common-sense protection has served as an example to his flock, who abhor masks for interfering with "God's wonderful beauty system". He has scoffed at a political foe Joe Biden for being responsible and wearing a mask. His recent show at Mount Rushmore had people packed like sardines, and very few wore masks. The results are awaited.

But Trump's mask policies may be making the sensible Republican voter uncomfortable, and a change of tack is visible. Trump wore a mask to visit veterans at the Walter Reed military hospital. He thought it would be irresponsible to do otherwise when encountering the vulnerable. The English would have said that it's like closing the stable door after the horse had bolted. The Americans, who are more visceral, think it's like using a prophylactic after the act. And while meeting kings, queens and tinpot dictators, Trump will remain persistently, gloriously unmasked. God help him in the tribulations to follow.



PRAKASH SINGH

POLICE WAS IN the news for the right reasons till yesterday — for its humanitarian role during the pandemic. It was lauded as "the frontline of the frontline" and even the prime minister said that "the human and sensitive side of policing has touched our hearts". Unfortunately, the pendulum has very soon swung to the other extreme.

The brutal treatment of a father and son in Sathankulam police station of Thoothukudi district in Tamil Nadu, resulting in their death, exposed the ugly face of the police. It showed that the police are still relying on medieval methods in their day to day working and that custodial torture continues to be an area of serious concern. What was worse, the supervisory officers abdicated their responsibility and failed in their primary duty of registering a case against the delinquent police personnel and getting them arrested. It is a great pity that the high court had to step in and the case had to be handed over to the CBI. The situation could have been easily defused if the officers had risen to the occasion and ensured action under the law. We are now faced with the embarrassment of the UN Secretary General wanting the incident to be investigated.

On top of that, we have an encounter in Kanpur where a criminal wanted for the murder of eight policemen was killed by UP Police in circumstances which have raised uncomfortable questions. They would hopefully be answered by a proper inquiry into the matter in due course. However, we need to go to the root of the problem.

As far back as 1993, the Vohra Committee had submitted a report on the nexus between the criminals, politicians and government functionaries. The DIB, in its report to the Committee, clearly stated that "the network of the mafia is virtually running a parallel government, pushing the state apparatus to irrelevance", and suggested that an institution be set up to effectively deal with the menace. There were heated discussions in Parliament, but the matter ended there.

The police are in the dock. Reforms must start with the political system

We must have a law which debars persons with serious criminal cases from entering the assemblies and Parliament. Secondly, the criminal justice system must be revamped as recommended by the Malimath Committee. Thirdly, the Supreme Court's directions on police reforms must be implemented. Fourthly, an institution comprising representatives of the police/CBI/NIA, Intelligence Bureau, Income Tax department, Revenue, Intelligence and Enforcement Directorate should be set up to monitor the activities of the mafia and criminal syndicates in the country and ensure stringent action against them.

There was hardly any follow-up action.

And it was futile to expect any decisive action. Politics in the country was gradually entering a murky phase. The mafiosi, who were hitherto supporting the politicians from outside, had decided to enter the fray. They started contesting elections on party tickets. It is a sad reflection on our democracy that the number of members of parliament with criminal background has been going up with every successive election. It was, according to the Association of Democratic Reforms, 30 per cent in 2009, 34 per cent in 2014 and 43 per cent in 2019. The present UP Assembly has 36 per cent or 143 MLAs with criminal cases against them. What do we expect from them in their constituencies except that the number of members of parliament with criminal background has been going up with every successive election. It was, according to the Association of Democratic Reforms, 30 per cent in 2009, 34 per cent in 2014 and 43 per cent in 2019. 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13 THE IDEAS PAGE

Amid crisis, lessons in statecraft

As Britain recognises that China can't be the anchor of its post-Brexit foreign economic and strategic policies, Delhi has a huge opening to restructure its relationship with London



RAJA MANDALA
BY C. RAJA MOHAN

WHILE SHASHI THAROR and William Dalrymple were writing best-sellers trashing British colonialism in India, the Chinese, it turns out, were buying up the current British establishment. Recent reports from London indicate how expansive the Chinese infiltration of the British ruling caste has been.

But first to the anti-imperialist tradition of Delhi and Beijing. The Communist Party of China (CPC) is no less anti-imperialist than the Indian nationalists. The "century of humiliation" at the hands of Britain and other European powers is central to the CPC's narrative. Beijing never lets Britain forget the Opium Wars of the mid-19th century and the unequal treaties it imposed on China.

There is one big difference, though, between Indian and Chinese anti-imperialism. The Indian elite is utterly comfortable, at a personal level, with its British peers. Britain is one place where the Indian diaspora has thrived and is now enmeshed in the upper reaches of the British political class. Yet Delhi has struggled to shed its compulsive public posturing against Britain.

Communist China, on the other hand, began with multiple handicaps in engaging with Britain. But over the last two decades, the CPC has systematically advanced its strategic influence in Britain. While the CPC has successfully transformed British hostility of the mid-20th century into near acquiescence in the early 21st century, Delhi finds it hard to separate the inherited grievances from its current strategic imperatives.

A recent British report leaked to the press in London is said to reveal the extent to which China and its global companies like Huawei have penetrated Britain's elite night institutions. Titled "Elite Capture", the report outlines how Beijing is converting the British ruling class — from the Lords to senior bureaucrats, ministers to sports persons and business dynasties to university dons — into "useful idiots" in promoting Chinese interests.

The report dates elite capture to the David Cameron years when London and Beijing announced a "golden era" in bilateral relations. A just-released book, *Hidden Hand* by Clive Hamilton, a British author, and Marielle Heiberg, a German think-tanker, gives details of Chinese influence operations across many geographies — including Britain — and international institutions.

Influencing foreign elites has always been part of statecraft. But the Chinese may have crossed the line between a legitimate effort at winning support in other countries and the unacceptable use of corruption and coercion to shape decision-making in target nations.

To be sure, the CPC is also building on the Leninist tradition that underlined the importance of using the capitalist contradictions to advance socialism. Vladimir Lenin, who led the Russian Revolution and founded the Soviet Union, had famously declared that greedy capitalists will be happy to let the rope that communists intend to hang them with. While communists everywhere have used these tactics over the last century, the CPC's emphasis on influence operations has acquired unprecedented salience under President Xi Jinping.

In India, though, it seems the CPC did not have to try at all. Delhi was more than eager to pre-emptively defer to Beijing's sensitivities, despite the many challenges that China poses to its economy and security.

Discussing the ideological sources of that policy will be a fascinating digression. Let us turn, instead, to what India can learn from China's successful influence operations in Britain.

First, the Chinese emphasis on separating anti-imperialist ideology and the pursuit of national interest. The CPC has never disowned its founding ideology nor has it forgotten China's past conflicts with imperialist powers. But Beijing had no problem in effortlessly moving from an alliance with the Soviet Union and a confrontation with the US in the 1950s to embracing imperialist America in the 1970s. It leveraged the partnership with the US in the 1980s to elevate its position in the global system and now challenges American primacy.

Second, instead of treating the West as a collective, China continually probes the "imperialist contradictions". The report on elite capture says that separating Britain from the US and weakening the Five Eyes alliance of the Anglophone (the US, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) were among the major objectives of China's influence operations in the UK. Earlier this year, the UK had decided to break from the US and turn to Huawei for its 5G future.

It seemed to confirm the assessment of Hamilton and Heiberg, cited by the British media. "So entrenched are the CPC's influence networks among British elites that Britain has passed the point of no return, and any attempt to extricate itself from Beijing's orbit would probably fail." That brings us to the third lesson.

While influence operations can shape policy evolution in targeted nations, they certainly can't eliminate politics. It is rather hard, in the end, to turn a nation against itself for a prolonged period of time. While China was close to winning over a critical section of the British elite, there was a major revolt in the Conservative Party against the Huawei decision. Coupled with pressure from the US, Prime Minister Boris Johnson has begun to review the relationship with China. He is expected to announce at least a partial British dissociation from Huawei this week.

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But the biggest lesson, however, is that Delhi should not write off Britain as a strategic priority in its foreign policy calculus. In his first term, Prime Minister Narendra Modi made an effort to reach out to Britain but that seemed to have petered out. Britain's incorrigible balancing act between India and Pakistan and London's continuing reluctance to think of Delhi in strategic terms tends to put off Delhi. Rather than turn its back on Britain, Delhi should set itself a political challenge — to decisively turn Britain in favour of India. If Beijing could nearly subvert London, Delhi has enough equities to promote a change in the British establishment's attitude towards India.

As the external affairs minister Subrahmanya Jaishankar told a business summit in London last week, Britain remains a top-tier economy, has much international influence, enjoys special relations with the US and Europe, and is an important global hub of research and innovation. In other words, Britain is an important middle power that can help expand India's strategic options.

In the last two decades, Delhi has managed to change the dynamics of its ties with Washington through sustained diplomatic effort. Delhi has given a boost to its engagement with Paris in the last two years. It needs to launch a similar effort with London that is coming out of a prolonged strategic inattention with Beijing.

As Britain recognises that China can't be the anchor of its post-Brexit foreign economic and strategic policies, Delhi has a huge opening to restructure its relationship with London. Tharor and Dalrymple are right to engage with our tragic past with Britain, but South Block must necessarily focus on the present and future possibilities with Whitehall.

The writer is director of Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore and a contributing editor at International Affairs for The Indian Express

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Decoupling from China goes completely against Europe's interests. Despite competition between the two sides, China provides irreplaceable market resources for Europe to keep being powerful." —GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA

India, like the US

Both must recognise: Pledges of liberty, equality, fraternity and dignity possess much broader pull than hardening notions of nationalism



RAJMOHAN GANDHI

THIS ARTICLE HOPES to add to Ashutosh Varshney's convincing comparison ("The same shoring up, IE, July 6) of the current Indian and American scenes and in particular, of African-Americans and India's Muslims. After pointing out that though unlike Blackism relation to the US, Muslims sit on Indian thrones in a distant past, today, like America's Blacks, they constitute a poor minority. Varshney offers this conclusion: "A democracy is not a proper democracy unless it safeguards minorities. And if the minorities are also poor, the protection becomes the world's number one power. As to what fuels that push, I would let experts in the politics, history and psychology of China decide. But one expertise is needed to recognise the limitations of 'White nationalism' and 'Hindu nationalism' in any confrontation with China's drive."

My first additional point, a pretty obvious one, is that another large country, China, looms over both the Indian and American scenes, and that for both nations their relationship with China is critical. My second point, also hardly original, is that while the democracies of India and the US may both be deficient in serious ways, they being democratic differentiates them from China in a fundamental way.

Of the three countries, only China styles itself as "the People's Republic". However, a short phrase with which both the American and Indian constitutions begin — "We the People" — contains an unmistakable declaration, not available in today's China, of the mastery of a nation's people over their rulers. My third point will be, for some, less palatable. Democracies in both India and the US face a similar internal challenge. If an ideology of White supremacy threatens American democracy, India's democracy is intimidated by Hindu nationalism.

India and the US face a similar external challenge too. China's apparent push to become the world's number one power, as to what fuels that push, I would let experts in the politics, history and psychology of China decide. But one expertise is needed to recognise the limitations of "White nationalism" and "Hindu nationalism" in any confrontation with China's drive.

In his frantic bid to retain the White House, President Donald Trump repeatedly reminds Americans of COVID-19's origin in China. His fans yell with delight when, a malicious grin widening on his face, Trump calls the disease "Kung Flu", not caring that the racist slur would offend the large number of Chinese Americans as also millions of Chinese around the world, including in China.

Unfortunately for Trump, a great many in the US and the rest of the world are aware that his racist taunts often extend either plainly or merely with a wink to African Americans and other Americans with origins in Latin America and Asia. A more far-reaching reality, noticed by the whole world, is the recent decline of American smugness. Recognising the depth of their country's racial injustices, protesters have continued, day after day, to fill America's streets.

As Varshney observes, these demonstrations are similar to the anti-CAA protests that crowded chowks and baghs across India in the final months of 2019 and in January 2020, as India's Muslims opposed being legally shoved into second-class status, and many of India's non-Muslims also refused to tolerate that discrimination. Then COVID-19 imposed its restraints.

A US where Blacks are routinely denied respect from the police cannot suddenly come from China in an ideological battle. The same is true for an India where persons from religious minorities cannot be confident that the police would protect them.

On the other hand, if collective exertions can bring it about, an India working sincerely for justice, liberty, equality and fraternity for all its citizens would intrigue the people of China, who like me must be troubled by (among other things) the condition of their supposed counterparts in Hong Kong, Xinjiang and Tibet.

Fortunately, Prime Minister Narendra Modi did not seek to denigrate the Chinese people when he flew to meet our soldiers in Ladakh and from that altitude conveyed India's resolve to meet any challenge. He could have used the occasion also to say that India stood for the liberty, equality and fraternity of all its people, irrespective of their religion or caste, but he didn't.

A declaration from the Himalayan heights that India would protect everyone's democratic rights would have offered cheer to people within and beyond India, but that was never on the cards. Instead, Modi seems to have used the Ladakh visit to underline his, and by implication his government's, "Hinduness".

All know "Muslimness" has not so far united any Muslim-majority country — not Iran, nor Afghanistan, nor Pakistan, nor any other. It has not united even the Muslims of any country. Christian Americans form a majority in the US, but their "Christianism" has not turned Americans into a single people. "Hinduness" has not sufficed to keep Nepal as India's partner, and it will not draw India's Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and Buddhists from its own struggle against a major adversary.

Pledges and reminders of liberty, equality, fraternity and dignity possess a much broader pull, and those who have marched under such banners in the US, India or elsewhere, seem to inspire millions of others. Occasionally, they also invite questions.

In the US, the questions seem to be about a sense of proportion and limits. This is targeting, fortunately rare, of persons like George Washington and Abraham Lincoln betrays an irrational demand for perfection from figures of history. The demand may also be unwise, for it could put off allies crucial to a Trump defeat. Should a defence of humiliation of minorities extend to offending others? But the keenest question induced in an Indian like me, who has been watching for weeks America's remarkable re-examination of its culture, is this: When next will Indians of diverse backgrounds march for the equality and liberty of their Muslim, Dalit and Adivasi brothers and sisters? And while marching, honour the ones brutally killed by proclaiming their names?

The writer teaches at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Seva in a pandemic



ALMOST every corner of the world. The depredations of the virus have led to the loss of millions of jobs, and unleashed a humanitarian crisis that is exacerbated by hunger and starvation. To mitigate the crisis, governments all over the world have come out with economic packages to provide interim relief to their citizens. Remedying the economy by state intervention has been widely discussed but there are many instances of non-market interventions through which individuals and communities have extended a helping hand, based solely on the principles of compassion. The exceptional role of civil society, NGOs and religious organisations during these challenging times has become a fine example of what we can call a moral economy — efforts that are sustained over time following a moral principle. One such institution is the practice of Gauri Nankani in gurdwaras all over the globe.

In the Sikh religion, the notion of "sewa" (service) is particularly manifest in Gauri Nankani. This is perhaps best described in terms of a gift economy, following the sociologist David Cheal, who sees gift-giving as "institutionalisation of social ties within a moral economy". The langar is a key institution that puts into operation the act of seva — with the gurdwara forming the backbone on which such

was founded by Guru Nanak in the 15th century, the principles of this relatively new religion have emphasised selfless service to God as well as humanity. The practice of a free community kitchen serving food to everyone without any discrimination was established by Guru Nanak and since then, the tradition has been well-known all over the globe. This practice derives its meaning from the touchstone of Nanak's three pillars of philosophy — "kirat karo" (earn with labour), "naam japo" (contemplate the various names of God), and "vand chakro" (share with others). As is well known, caste and religious divides are well entrenched in Indian society and often characterise it. The sharing of meals by people sitting together on the floor irrespective of their social background was a one-of-a-kind taboo-breaking practice. Selfless service is seen as a ladder to get closer to God. The gifts to others, whether they be in the form of bodily, mental, and material gestures, require a platform to become operational. This has generated institutions such as the round-the-clock langar, which in turn, can be sustained only with a material base. Such a material base is provided by a large number of daily offerings in the form of money and other goods. The offering in cash and kind can be thought

equitable. It is perhaps akin to a progressive tax in spirit, only that it is a transfer by voluntary action based on faith and compassion and made in a setting which is outside the exchange economy.

The challenges posed by the pandemic have exposed many fault lines in our society. The negligence of healthcare and lack of adequate social safety nets have made millions of people vulnerable. In such times, the institution of restructure its relationship with London, Tharor and Dalrymple are right to engage with our tragic past with Britain, but South Block must necessarily focus on the present and future possibilities with Whitehall.

Singh is professor and Wamshik is doctoral student, Centre for the Study of Global Governance, JNU

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

APPEAL FOR RAO

ACCORDING TO PRESS reports and the statement of his family, the renowned Telugu poet and writer, P Varavara Rao is extremely ill in Taloja jail. He is suffering from low levels of sodium and potassium as diagnosed by the J J Hospital, Mumbai, where his treatment was abruptly terminated and he was taken back to Taloja jail in Navi Mumbai. This is a life-threatening situation for someone who is 81 years of age, and suffers from high blood pressure and heart conditions. We appeal to the Government of Maharashtra and the National Investigation Agency to facilitate the immediate transfer of Rao to JJ Hospital. Rao poses no flight risk and has voluntarily submitted to all investigations for the past 22 months. There is no reason in law or conscience to hold him in circumstances that increase the risk to his fragile health. To knowingly risk the life of a person in state custody by refusing proper medical treatment would amount to a form of the "en-counter", an extra-legal punishment which the State institutions are duty-bound to forego.

Romila Thapar, Prabhat Patnaki, Devaki Jain, Maja Darwalla, Satish Deshpande

HAKIM'S CONFLICT

THIS REFERS TO the report, "Office of profit cloud over Firdah Hakim, EC seeks clarification from Chief Secy" (IE,

IDEAS ONLINE

LET THE LIT LIVE: BINOY VISWAM

● MAKING ISLAMABAD COMPLY: JAY MANOJ SANKLECHA

www.indianexpress.com

July 12), Firdah Hakim should show a commitment to moral values by resigning. Incidentally, Sonia Gandhi set an example by resigning as the Chairperson of the NAC in 2006 even before EC's petition against her. S S Paul, Nadia

SINKING SHIP

THIS REFERS TO the report, "Crisis in Rajasthan, Cong says party intact" (IE, July 13). Defections have been a part of politics in India since long, but what is happening with the Congress in Gujarat, MP and other states is indeed bizarre. It may stop only after "interim" president Sonia Gandhi, like the captain of a sinking ship, jumps last. Varin Dhilr, Ahmedabad

6 EDITORIAL



A crisis in pause

Pilot overplayed his hand, but the Congress leadership should have stepped in early

The brewing rebellion in the Rajasthan Congress lost its fizz midway but the rivalry between Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot and his deputy Sachin Pilot will continue to haunt the party's government in the State. Mr. Pilot appears to have overplayed his hand, in the process exposing himself to potential retribution by the veteran who is known to be as ruthless to adversaries as he is loyal to followers. The Deputy Chief Minister had claimed the support of 30 of the 107 Congress MLAs in the State, but the show of strength on Monday turned in a different picture. More than 100 MLAs appear to have attended a meeting of the Congress Legislature Party, which is above the halfway mark in the 200-strong Assembly. As the head of the Congress State unit, Mr. Pilot played a crucial role in the victory of the party in 2018 and his disappointment at losing the top post to Mr. Gehlot soon became a festering wound into which the latter only rubbed salt. The Gehlot camp has accused Mr. Pilot of hobnobbing with the BJP to topple the government. By going public with his resentment and marshalling legislators in his camp to BJP-ruled Haryana, Mr. Pilot gave a fillip to speculation that the BJP was involved as it was in toppling the Congress government in Madhya Pradesh in March. Any such moves would have been a disavowal of the mandate that Mr. Pilot himself laboured for in Rajasthan in 2018.

Uninterested or incapable, the Congress central leadership was asleep as storm clouds were gathering over its government in Rajasthan. Factional fights have been endemic in the Congress, but ambitious and impatient leaders are usually kept in check by the alertness of the central leadership. Rahul Gandhi often takes the plea that he is not the party president and Sonia Gandhi, who is the president, desires for her son, creating a loop of power vacuum and lack of accountability in the party. There is despondency at all levels in the Congress, still reeling from two consecutive Lok Sabha election routs. Many leaders have left the party for greener pastures. The friction between Mr. Pilot and Mr. Gehlot is also emblematic of a larger issue of a halting generational transition in the Congress. To say that Mr. Pilot, who became a Member of Parliament at the age of 26, Union Minister in his mid-thirties and Deputy Chief Minister at 41, is not recognised in the Congress is laughable. At the same time, there is a strong case for infusion of younger blood on a massive scale in the party. Far from being less than searching for new ideas and people, the Congress leadership is throwing away the limited assets it has by sheer callousness. The averted disaster in Rajasthan will return in a new avatar if nothing is done. It will take a lot of blood and toil for the Congress to take the battle to the BJP's camp; but before anything, the party must put its house in order.

Gains from rains

A steady, well-spread monsoon spells good news for farmers and the economy

So far, India appears to be having a good run with the monsoon. As of the most recent data available from the India Meteorological Department (IMD), rainfall during the season has been 14% more than what is usual for this period. The month of June only accounts for about 17% of the monsoon rainfall spanning June-September. It is the month during which the monsoon sets in and that process can sometimes be delayed for as much as a week. June is also when the monsoon begins its journey from two extremities of the country. One branch starts its journey northwards from Kerala and the other wing – called the Bay of Bengal branch – enters India from the southeast. Both branches eventually converge in the north and usually, this merging and strengthening of the monsoon currents over the mainland takes at least until July 15. The IMD never forecasts the possible rainfall likely during June because of the vagaries involved in onset and the pace of the journey. This year, two significant things happened. The monsoon set in at a textbook date of June 1. This was even after concerns that Cyclone Amphan that had ravaged West Bengal would delay the monsoon's entry into India from the Andaman Sea. The second factor was the record pace at which the monsoon covered the country. Along with the monsoon onset this year, the IMD announced a revision to the onset and withdrawal dates across several cities. According to this, the monsoon covered India's northern and western borders no later than July 8 as opposed to the previous historical date of July 15. This year, however, the monsoon broke even this speed limit and covered the country by June 25 – at a pace that was unprecedented since 2013.

The net result of all this: more rainy days in June and a fairly even distribution across the country. The IMD's records show that only on four days in that month did daily rainfall drop below its historical normal. Except for northwest India, which is starting at a 2% deficit, the rainfall in east, south and central India has posted surpluses of 13%-20%. While good rains in June signal farmers to prepare the soil and sow *kharif* crop, the most important months are July and August. These two months account for two-thirds of the monsoon rain. This is also the time the monsoon goes into so-called 'break' conditions. Prolonged breaks, or an absence of rainfall, can even lead to droughts. In spite of significant improvements in data gathering and technological advancement, meteorological agencies cannot yet reliably forecast the advent of a break or how long it can last. What is critical is that 'normal rains' also obscure the possibility of heavy rains or severe droughts in districts or over larger areas. Therefore, short and medium range forecasts need to be strengthened and effectively communicated to the people.

Enabling people to govern themselves

With the pandemic showing up flaws in governance institutions, this is a better way for humanity to face new challenges



ARUN MAITHRA

Governance systems at all levels, i.e. global, national, and local, have experienced stress as a fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic. Architectural flaws have been revealed in their design. Breakdowns in many subsystems had to be managed at the same time – in health care, logistics, business, finance, and administration. The complexity of handling so many subsystems at the same time have overwhelmed governance. Solutions for one subsystem backed off on other subsystems. For example, lockdowns to make it easier to manage the health crisis have made it harder to manage economic distress simultaneously. In fact, the diversion of resources to focus on the threat to life posed by COVID-19 has increased vulnerabilities to death from other diseases, and even from malnutrition in many parts of India.

A mismatch is evident Human civilisation advances with the evolution of better institutions to manage public affairs. Institutions of parliamentary democracy, for example, and the limited liability business corporation, did not exist 400 years ago. Institutions of global governance, such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organization, did not exist even 100 years ago. These institutions were invented to enable human societies to produce better outcomes for their citizens. They have been put through a severe stress test now by the global health and economic crises. The test has revealed a fundamental flaw in their design. There is a mismatch in the design of governance institutions at the global level (and also in India) with the challenges they are required to manage. Designed like machines for efficiency, they are trying to fit themselves into an organic system of the natural environment coupled with human society. It seems that governance institutions are square pegs forcing themselves into round holes.

design. There is a mismatch in the design of governance institutions at the global level (and also in India) with the challenges they are required to manage. Designed like machines for efficiency, they are trying to fit themselves into an organic system of the natural environment coupled with human society. It seems that governance institutions are square pegs forcing themselves into round holes.

Interconnected issues The global challenges listed in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations, which humanity must urgently address now, are systemic challenges. All these systemic problems are interconnected with each other. Environmental, economic, and social issues cannot be separated from each other and solved by the government responses to a credit crisis in India or by agencies focused only on their own problems. A good solution to one can create more problems for others, as governments have seen with the coronavirus pandemic have revealed.

Even if experts in different disciplines could combine their perspectives and their siloed solutions at the global level, they will not be able to solve the systemic problems of the SDGs. Because, their solutions must fit the specific conditions of each country, and of each locality within countries too, to fit the shape of the environment and the condition of society there. Solutions for environmental sustainability along with sustainable livelihoods cannot be the same in Kerala and Ladakh, or in Wisconsin and Tokyo. Solutions must be local. Moreover, for the local people to support the implementation of solutions, they must believe the solution is the right one for them, and not a solution thrust upon them by outside experts. Therefore, they must be active contributors of knowledge for, and active



participants in, the creation of the solutions. Moreover, the knowledge of different experts – about the environment, the society, and the economy – must come together to fit realities on the ground.

A case for local systems

Governance of the people must be not only for the people. It must be by the people too. Gandhiji and the first woman to win the Nobel Prize in Economics, J.C. Kumarappa and others, developed their solutions of local enterprises through observations and experiments on the ground (and not in theoretical seminars in capital cities). E.F. Schumacher, founding editor of the journal, *Resurgence*, and author of *Small is Beautiful*, had pointed out by the 1970s, the flaws in the economics theories that were driving public policy in capitalist as well as communist countries. He had proposed a new economics, founded on local enterprise, very consistent with Gandhiji's ideas. Elinor Ostrom, the first woman to win the Nobel Prize in Economics, in 2009, had developed the principles for self-governing communities from research on the ground in many countries, including India.

When there are scientific explanations for why local systems solutions are the best, if not the only way to solve complex systemic problems, and when the Indian Constitution requires this too, then why does not the government devolve power to citizens in

villages and towns in India for their own affairs?

An Indian anthropologist gave me an insight. She said she had observed that several Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers she knew, who seemed to have more compassion for communities than their colleagues had, were involved at some time in their careers with the evolution of community-based public health and the self-help group movements in Andhra Pradesh. She contrasted their views about how change is brought about with the views of IAS officers who have implemented the Swachh Bharat programme recently. The latter, also very fine officers, saw their role as 'deliverers of good government'. Whereas the former, through their experience, had begun to see the role of government is perhaps to 'enable governance'.

The District Collector

The key IAS functionary in India's governance is the District Collector – the role his forebears in the Indian Civil Services set up by the British, were expected to perform. Which was to collect revenues and to maintain law and order. When, after Independence, the Indian state took up a large welfare role, he also became the District 'Deliverer' of government largesse. It strengthened the image of a paternalist government taking care of its wards. The District Deliverer's task became complicated when the numbers of government schemes multiplied – some designed by the central government, and others by state government. The schemes were managed by their own ministries and departments in the capitals, with local functionaries of those departments as the points of contact with citizens. At a meeting of IAS officers in Shimla with the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG), sometime in 2013, to un-

derstand why government schemes were not producing enough benefits for people on the ground, an officer presented a list of over 300 schemes that were operational in her district. The citizens did not know how many schemes there were and what they were entitled to. And even she found it hard to disentangle the schemes.

The pandemic has not passed yet, but evidence is emerging that some States in India, such as Kerala, have weathered the storm better than others. And some countries, such as Vietnam and Taiwan, better than others too. A hypothesis is that those States and countries in which local governance was stronger have done much better than others. This is worthy of research by social and political scientists looking for insights now into design principles for good governance systems that can solve problems that the dominant theory of government is not able to solve.

The dominant theory in practice of good government is 'government of the people, by the government, for the people'. Which slips easily into 'government of the people, by the government, for the political party in power'. This has been the prevalent theory in most States of India for too long. Even when government is for the people, as a deliverer of services, money into their bank accounts, (and money for building toilets), it is not good enough. The government has to support and enable people to govern themselves, to realise the vision of 'government of the people, for the people, by the people'. Which is also the only way humanity will be able to meet the ecological and humanitarian challenges looming over it in the 21st century.

Arun Maithra was a member of the Planning Commission

To whomsoever it may concern in the INC

The Congress Party needs to reinvent itself and work in a sustained manner if it is to stay politically relevant



P.S. JAYARAMU

India is facing turbulent times calling for statesman-like leadership to handle the complex task of rebuilding the nation affected by the twin challenges of economic troubles and the health pandemic. The premise here is that the Indian National Congress (INC) has a golden opportunity to reinvent itself as the Bharatiya Janata Party-led coalition government seems clueless about how to revive the economy as well as gain the trust of the poor and the working class after the handling of the lockdown in an inhumane way. The INC should use the time between now and the next Lok Sabha elections, in 2024, to be in the reckoning.

The interim President of the INC, Sonia Gandhi, its past president, Rahul Gandhi, and leaders such as P. Chidambaram, to name only a few, have no doubt, raised the right questions and tried to cause embarrassment to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. But sadly that by itself is not enough. The party should come up with alternative policy perspectives to deal with the complex challenges facing the country.

It is appropriate to recall that a few thinking members of the party, such as Shashi Tharoor, Jairam Ramesh and Sanjay Jha, have expressed opinion on the need for not only serious introspection at the top level but also institutional reforms within the party. The following are some of the suggestions if the project of a revival of the Congress Party is to bear fruit.

Tap talent

The party should constitute a Committee comprising talented party members and outsiders drawn from public life who carry credibility and entrust them with the task of holding organisational elections at the national and State levels in an impartial and transparent manner in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. There must be an emphasis on bringing in young blood to man party positions and keep the party future ready. Let it not be forgotten that Mrs. Indira Gandhi had Young Turks to usher in her socialist programme in 1969; Rajiv Gandhi too had his own young team to work towards his vision of a technology-driven India. The United Progressive Alliance regimes too brought in some young people but failed to exploit their potential to the full as Sonia Gandhi who virtually held the reins of power was reluctant to give a free hand to the younger elements in the government.

It is also necessary to de-emphasise the role of the high com-



mand, which is antithetical to a vibrant democratic functioning of the party. While there seems to be a strong case for the Gandhi family to be kept out, it may not happen, sadly, because of the sycophancy of the old guard with whom Sonia Gandhi is comfortable, and who plead for her continuance as the party chief. The bane of the Congress leadership has been its reluctance to develop a second line of leadership that is independent of the Gandhi dynasty.

Reign in the social base

The party needs to reinvent itself ideologically and while doing so, the narrative should be built around a broad left-of-centre position, in support of the poor and socially economically oppressed sections while also taking into account the aspirations of educated urban voters for whom ideology does not really matter. The party should address itself to the needs of farmers, small and medium-sized industrialists, rather

than siding with big business.

It needs to make serious efforts to regain its social base among Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes, which has eroded in recent times as borne out by the outcome of the 2019 Lok Sabha and subsequent Assembly elections. Minority appeasement also will not work the way it is used to in the past.

Crucially, the Congress has to rebuild the morale of its party workers, which stands eroded after successive defeats either electorally or losing power after being in government for rather quick succession in States.

The leadership at the central and State levels will also have to accord priority to enrol new members to the party to make it cadre-based. Figures are not available about recruitment of new members to the party-fold in recent years.

Side by side, serious efforts ought to be made to root out the bane of factionalism in the party. And that can happen if the leadership is persuasive and inclusive in its intent. The high command which has concentrated decision-making powers should make way for decentralised functioning of the party.

At the State level, it has to align itself with regional parties if it has to successfully capture power. More pertinently, the party-State level leadership needs to be nurtured and allowed to function in

dependently keeping in mind the ground realities.

Project voters It is high time the party set up a shadow cabinet at the central level, drew up and publicised its alternative policy prescriptions, and presented them in Parliament rather than getting fixated in obstructing official business. Unparliamentary behaviour by members of the Opposition and ruling party members is detested by the public.

Additionally, the party leadership would do well to involve experts in drawing up medium- and long-term solutions to problems which are increasingly becoming complex in the interdependent and technology-driven ecosystem.

In these days of the powerful role played by the media, especially by the electronic media which is owned by business houses, the party may have to take the help of some such group to project its image and point of view.

The conclusion is inescapable: The Indian National Congress needs to work tirelessly and strain itself in a sustained manner on all fronts if it has to play an effective role in our democratic polity and to stake its claim for power in future.

P.S. Jayaramu is a former professor of political science, Bangalore University and a former Senior Fellow, Indian Council of Social Science Research

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.

Beijing's border moves

It is evident that the absence of a clearly demarcated Line of Actual Control came in handy for the Chinese PLA to make gradual incursions into territories to which India also lays claim ('Exclusive', Page 1, 'Xi's mobilisation order, months of planning preceded border moves', July 13). The stamp of approval for the mobilisation order by none other than the Chinese President himself only emboldened the PLA to adopt aggressive, and subsequently violent moves. Considering the nature of terrain in the Ladakh region, it will be a humongous task to undertake the process of delineation. However, nothing is impossible and

both countries need to set aside their mutual rancour, adopt a strategic stance, hold detailed negotiations and evolve a robust mechanism for implementation. **V.N. JHANSANAR, Chennai**

■ The Chinese leadership seems to treat border incursions as war games to test its own military preparedness and the LAC as a laboratory to experiment with geopolitical posturing. India needs to re-examine its policy of tactical equivocation in the Chinese's occupation of Indian territory. While calculated restraint may allow China to pull back without loss of face, India may create a moral case of incentivising Chinese border violations as cost-free

adventurism. Compelled to prioritise verification over trust in its dealings with China, it makes sense for India to depend on its own satellites in the sky to keep a hawk-eye on China's border manoeuvres. **V.N. RAJESWARAN, Thiruvananthapuram**

■ Rajasthan tussle It is puzzling how and why the Indian National Congress's radar misses inner-party squabbles over and over again (Page 1, 'Pilot's rebellion with 30 MLAs puts Gehlot govt. on the edge', July 13). Unless the BJP restores itself in a fundamental way, it is not going to offer any challenge to the Bharatiya Janata Party government in the Centre or in States across India. While it is not shocking to find

parties using a generous cocktail of money, muscle power and deflections to gain and retain power, the BJP appears to have mastered the art and science of defection engineering and technology to perfection. It is unclear why the same BJP is not showing the same deftness in handling the economy, the border crisis with China, and, of course, the pandemic. **A. VENKATASUBRAMANIAN, Thrissur, Tamil Nadu**

■ At a time when the country is battling COVID-19 and has locked horns with a belligerent neighbour, the timing of politicians to rock the boat exposes their indifference to solving the burning issues on hand. It is time for liberals to protect the lawless to read about and see lawmakers being bundled in

buses and transported to resorts when they are supposed to be nursing their consciences. The gliblib electorate is being taken for a ride. **V. SUBRAMANIAN, Chennai**

■ What is happening? The Congress used to be a pan-India party, representing all sections of society, be it peasants or landlords, workers or capitalists, radicals, socialists or moderates; a party of Gandhiji, Patel, Nehru, Bose, Tilak, Kripalani, Rajaji. The party needs to be ruthless about getting rid of corruption, defectors and rufous on appealing to the minorities, the marginalised, and the liberals to protect the soul of the Indian Constitution, which

cherishes plurality, unity, and the rule of law. The only way forward if the Congress must breathe is this: the dynasty must go. **SHARADHO, SINGAR, Shrirang, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh**

■ Trump wears a mask It is heartening that U.S. President Donald Trump has at last seen reason ('World page', 'Trump dons a mask in public, finally', July 13). Any leader should know that he or she should be exemplary in his or her life. With the change of attitude in Mr. Trump, India will be budding faith in preventive measures, one hopes that the U.S. will soon be able to overcome the disease. **J. EOWS ALEXANDAR, Thuvuvur, Tamil Nadu**

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OPED 7

The politics of nepotism

The discourse is a salvo in a battle between two elites: the Nehruvian 'ancien regime' and the new faction



In recent weeks, nepotism has become centre stage in mainstream public discourse. Triggered by speculations over the death of actor Sushant Singh Rajput, the debate was initially confined to the film industry. But it has since spread to other domains. What began as a hashtag about a tragic death has acquired a life of its own. How do we understand this sudden upsurge, given that nepotism is not a new phenomenon?

In India, whichever field one may consider, there is no denying the prevalence of influential families that wield nepotistic influence. But does this mean we make peace with nepotism? Certainly not. But a lot depends on how the debate is framed, and the nature of the contingent politics around the nepotism discourse.

The current debate

What is now derisively described as 'nepotism' is how things were traditionally done. In pre-modern societies, the realms of domesticity and work were merged, with the family playing a central role in determining an individual's entry not only into an occupation, but also the public sphere. In insufficiently modernised societies such as India, this tendency remains strong. Second, traditional social norms still dictate that family comes first, caste/clan second, and everything else, including merit, last.

In India, where upper caste dominance across domains is well documented, nepotism extends beyond the family and operates along the axis of caste as well. Deep historical inequalities and a dwindling welfare state have made India one of the most unequal societies in the world, with the richest 1% holding more than four times the wealth of the bottom 70%. It stands to reason, therefore, that anyone concerned about nepotism would want to attack the cause of which nepotism is the symptom: the reproduction of inequality. After all, the more unequal a society, the greater the scope and incentive for nepotism. In a hypothetical society of perfect socio-economic equality,



each individual's nepotistic reserves would cancel out that of everyone else's. So, tackling nepotism calls for political mobilisation against socio-economic inequality. The most effective means of reducing such inequality are social justice measures such as affirmative action, universal access to public health and education, and redistributive policies such as an inheritance tax.

But the theme of inequality is conspicuously absent in the nepotism discourse. Its preferred binary is not 'privileged' versus 'non-privileged' but 'outsider' versus 'insider', with all the outrage reserved for the insiders. The idea is not to call for a level playing field but to stoke the socialised outsider's desire to displace the 'insider' as the new 'insider', without dismantling the insider-outsider structure as such.

The key to understanding the nepotism discourse lies in the parallels it shares with the Anna Hazare-led anti-corruption movement. First, beneath the hold of moral righteousness, the nepotism discourse is also powered by right-wing majoritarian elements. As was the case with the anti-corruption movement, this aspect remains understated, if not hidden, thereby enabling the discourse to get traction across the political spectrum, including from liberals.

Second, the nepotism discourse is right-wing populist in precisely the same way that the anti-corruption movement was, with both having the same objective: to consolidate the base of Hinduist politics by channeling public resentment against traditional elites. In politics, where the old elite, symbolically and literally, is the Nehru-Gandhi family and its allies, the strategy worked brilliantly — giving the illusion of authentic change while one faction of upper caste elites displaced another to be-

come the ruling elite.

The contours of this factional war are clear in the Bollywood context. Since 2013, several notables at the periphery of the Bollywood power structure have chosen to ally with majoritarian politics. But six years down the line, their strategic alliance with the new power elite in Delhi has yet to yield a meaningful change in their status vis-à-vis their own industry's power centres, which continue to be the same old families. As these families continue to monopolise lucrative opportunities for those disinclined to challenge their supremacy, life could get tough for anyone who has fallen out of favour.

Understandably, there is genuine cause for resentment here. Also, since many of these ambitious 'outsiders' to Bollywood themselves come from bubbles of privilege in terms of their class and caste origins, they are not easily silenced, unlike, say, an Advait or Dalit summarily displaced from her home in the rural hinterland. In a society where a feudal sense of entitlement simmers beneath a veneer of economic modernity, aspirational upper castes with bottled up resentments are legion in every domain. They represent a political resource waiting to be mobilised. The 2011 Anna Hazare movement showed how it's done.

From the same old toolkit

Corruption did not peak in 2011, when the movement began. But a media-supported public campaign made it seem like it had, helping to fuel resentment against the UPA regime, which became synonymous with a valiant elite that owed everything to the nepotistic influence of the Nehru-Gandhi. Corruption did not disappear after 2014. But the anti-corruption mobilisation had done its job — as a Trojan horse that enabled

the forces of Hindu majoritarianism to capture power at the Centre.

The increasing sophistication of right-wing propaganda and its layered execution through social media campaigns has meant that it rarely registers early enough on liberal radars. Nepotism is the latest instrument from the right-wing populist toolkit. As an ideological weapon, it is a missile with multiple warheads. At one level, it does what populism always does: fuel rage against an elite in the name of 'the people'. At another level, Hinduist forces are using it to achieve three objectives: consolidate their upper caste base by appearing to empathise with their frustrations; translate status anxieties into resentments against sections of the elite that are yet to make a break with the Nehruvian consensus and embrace Hinduist; and, finally, communicate to recalcitrant sections of the liberal-Nehruvian elite the same message that goes out to some MLAs whenever a non-BJP government meets toppling: switch sides or face the consequences.

Fomenting new social antagonisms along the axis of 'the people' versus 'the elite/insider' is a proven political strategy of right-wing authoritarian populists. The nepotism rhetoric is a similar operation where the resentments and frustrations of the less privileged, aspirational, upper and middle castes are sought to be weaponised against older, relatively more privileged upper caste factions, now 'othered' as the Nehruvian elite.

The nepotism discourse, then, is another salvo in a battle between two elites: the Nehruvian 'ancien regime' with its pluralistic instincts, and the brahmin aspirational faction that wants its share of the spoils of power. This is a shift it feels entitled to, the basis of its political commitment to Hinduism. But given the heavy competition and the small size of the party, a great many feel deprived and resentful as they see the old liberal elites continuing in their privileged perches, as they always have. It remains to be seen whether deepening this social antagonism through polarising rhetoric offers enough fuel for a propaganda campaign capable of insulating the ruling party from the political costs of governance failures and economic headwinds.

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Yet another challenge to the Dalit movement

The language of mobilisation needs to change



BADRI NARAYAN

The pandemic is forcing us to understand the changing nature of society. In north India, specifically, it has also reshaped the discourse on marginalisation. Dalit issues are part of this discourse but are submerged in the broader discussions on economic vulnerabilities highlighted by COVID-19.

This pandemic has brought about two important shifts in the political discourse on the marginalised. As the lockdown caused untold suffering to poor, migrant labourers, it brought them from the margins to the centre of deliberations. Second, discussions on the space for the marginalised in the public health system and their safety are in focus. However, the concerns of Dalits remain hidden under the broader categories of poor, vulnerable, marginal, etc.

Changing vocabulary

In contemporary debates, there is a reappearance of caste-based vocabulary. Caste-based issues have either become invisible or are only visible as part of the wider discourse. Leaders such as Bahujan Samaj Party supremo Mayawati and Bhim Army chief Chandrashekar Azad have not been able to engage effectively with these new shifts. They have not been able to carve out a location in these new debates for their own politics.

They have to reorient their exclusively caste-based language and reshape their political discourse to be in tune with the times. There are a large number of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes among the migrant labourers. But Dalit leaders in north India have not been able to represent their concerns. This dilemma has made Dalit leaders non-assertive. It is possible that these shifts in political debates may continue in the post-pandemic phase at least for a few years as vulnerability of the marginalised will increase.

The Dalit movement in north India is habituated in using caste-based binaries in its mobilisation language but has failed to respond to the changing political dictation. In fact, leaders have not changed their political dictation for 30 years, since the time of the Kanshi Ram-led Bahujan movement. The movement is facing a crisis of agendas and

social programmes. The constant repetition of unfulfilled claims and commitments and slogans and promises create disillusionment among a section of their support base.

Another issue is that the Dalit movement in north India is grappling with a leadership crisis. This crisis has appeared due to a break in the umbilical cord tying the movement with the party. In States such as U.P., Bihar, Punjab and Rajasthan, Dalit assertions are mostly centred around the electoral politics of Dalit-Bahujan political groups and parties. Even alternative social movements led by Jignesh Mevani and Mr. Azad seem to be caught in the logic of electoral politics.

Leadership crisis

During the Bahujan movement in the 1990s, the idea was that the movement and the party could facilitate each other. But the BSP, which emerged from the Bahujan social movement, developed gradually as a party structured like a pyramid. Under Ms. Mayawati, it has stopped its reciprocal relationship with the Dalit movement. In the BSP, the emergence of political leaders of various Dalit-Bahujan castes at different levels became frozen. This caused erosion in the broader social base and ultimately weakened the Dalit movement. So, while on the one hand, the Bahujan movement allowed numerically important Dalit-Bahujan communities to have political aspirations, on the other, the freeze on the emergence of leaders at various levels smashed political ambitions, destroyed the initiatives of the cadre and hampered the natural growth of the party and movement. The Dalit movement is constantly facing new challenges but its leaders are not able to change their strategies and grammar of politics to respond to them.

Under the influences of the Ambedkarite ideology and the Dalit-Bahujan movements, an assertive and politically aware Dalit consciousness was being formed among a section of Dalit groups. In the meantime, inter-castes using caste terminology such as 'labourer' and 'poor' even as a majority of the migrant poor are Dalits and OBCs. This dilemma has made Dalit leaders non-assertive. It is possible that these shifts in political debates may continue in the post-pandemic phase at least for a few years as vulnerability of the marginalised will increase.

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The club of virus deniers

Leaders who kept the economy open are having to tackle both a severe health and an economic crisis

SREERAM CHAUDHA

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, who has managed the pandemic in the most disastrous manner, has tested positive for COVID-19. In Brazil, COVID-19 has affected more than 18,50,000 people and claimed more than 72,000 lives.

Mr. Bolsonaro's ostrich-like behaviour towards the unprecedented public health crisis has deepened his dismissal of the virus as "a little flu", bragging that people like him who have had an athletic past "have nothing to worry about", refusal to wear a mask in public until ordered by the judiciary, promotion of unproven medicinal cures for the virus, unwillingness to impose lockdown restrictions, active encouragement of mass rallies, and firing of the Health Minister (whose replacement resigned a month into the job) are all astonishingly cavalier actions. They show that the Brazilian President inhabits a parallel world.

A hall of infamy

However, he is not alone. There is a hall of infamy of like-minded world leaders who have deliberately denied or downplayed the dangers posed by the virus. Their callousness is leading to a large number of cases and deaths in their respective countries. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson wasted valuable months when the virus was spreading like wildfire and shied away from preventive social distancing measures. He cheerfully insisted on shaking hands in public, then got infected himself, and oversaw a health disaster that the U.K. has not suffered for generations. U.S. President Donald Trump repeatedly said the virus will just disappear; his country has the highest number of cases and deaths in the world. Vice President Rosario Marillo invited Nicaraguans to participate in a 'love in times of COVID-19' walk. Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko said that drinking vodka and working in fields with a tractor will 'heal everyone'. Tanzanian President John Magufuli argued for people to flock to churches as "COVID-19 cannot survive in the body of Jesus". Turkmenistan's Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov urged that the use of the word 'coronavirus' be censured. These are all heads of government who have more or less replicated the Bolsonaro and Johnson models and plunged their societies into deep tragedy.

Although the above listing of leaders has a mix of far-right and far-left populists, their common threat is the politics of extremism. They share comparable traits of mistrusting expert knowledge, stoking suspicion about formal institutions, stirring up their social base of hardcore, die-hard loyalists, cultivating a cult of personality around themselves, and maintaining a self-image as the sole guardians of the interests of the ordinary masses.

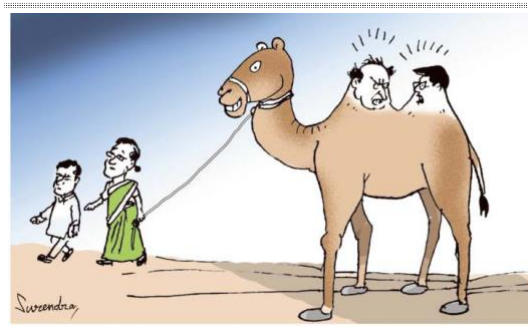
Primacy of the economy
An oft-observed tendency among the virus-denying leaders is the belief in the primacy of the economy as the be-all and end-all of life which should never get disrupted by "psychosis" about human health or environmental protection. These politicians are short-sighted enough to buy into the false dichotomy between livelihoods and lives, and prioritise the right of the working classes and businesses to work over the right of every citizen to receive healthcare and survive.

In an abstract sense, the economy or markets shape society and politics, according to these leaders. But as the virus tears into their countries, it is painfully proving the fallacy of their overly materialistic and inhuman world view.

The U.S., Brazil and the U.K., to name a few, have been saddled with the proverbial worst of both worlds — mass casualties from the virus and economic depressions not seen in a century. The club of deniers chafes narrow, short-term goals of keeping the economy open and ended up with the double whammy of high cases and deaths and no GDP growth to flaunt.

Given how obstinate politicians like Mr. Bolsonaro are, they may never learn from their critical mistakes until booted out of power. History will judge them harshly.

Sreeram Chaudhary is Director of the Jindal School of International Affairs



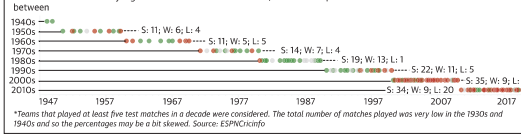
DATA POINT

Calypso back in rhythm?

TEST RECORDS The first part of the table lists the win/loss% in Tests for West Indies across decades in home and away conditions. Windies dominated the 80s, with the best home and away Test win % among all nations. The second part of the table lists the best and worst teams' according to Test win % in each decade. Since 2000, the Windies had the worst win % in away tests among all nations. The third part lists the ten West Indian captains who led the team in the most matches. The most impactful among the lot are Clive Lloyd and Viv Richards, who spearheaded the team's dominance in the 1980s

Decade	Home		Away		Home % win		Away % win		Captain	Span	Win %	Loss %
1930s	38	25	Aus, 65	NZ, 0	Aus, 47	NZ, 0	G. Sobers	1965-72	36	32		
1940s	50	20	Aus, 70	SA, 0	Aus, 88	SA, 0	C. Lloyd	1974-85	49	16		
1950s	30	30	Aus, 60	NZ, 7	Aus, 44	Ind, 0	V. Richards	1980-91	54	16		
1960s	35	15	Eng, 43	NZ, 10	WI, 38	NZ, 0	R. Richardson	1992-95	46	25		
1970s	24	21	Aus, 50	NZ, 14	WI, 34	Pak, 0	C. Walsh	1994-97	27	32		
1980s	60	3	WI, 60	SL, 0	WI, 48	SL, 0	B. Lara	1997-06	21	55		
1990s	46	20	Aus, 61	SA, 0	Pak, 43	Ind, 3	C. Hooper	2000-02	18	50		
2000s	24	32	WI, 24	Aus, 61	WI, 11	D. Sammy	2010-13	27	40			
2010s	36	45	Ind, 74	SL, 30	Pak, 40	WI, 17	J. Holder	2015-20	33	52		

SERIES HISTORY The chart depicts every Test series played by the West Indies (S) across decades. Each circle depicts either a West Indies win (W, ●), or the opposition's win (L, ○) or a draw (D, ⊖). While the share of series wins recorded by the Windies was relatively high between the 1960s and 1980s, in the subsequent decades the victories were few and far between



*Teams that played at least five Test matches in a decade were considered. The total number of matches played was very low in the 1930s and 1940s and so the percentages may be a bit skewed. Source: ESPNcricinfo

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JULY 14, 2020

Control of Royal Institute

(From an editorial)

The control of the Royal Institute of Science, Bombay, was the subject of an interesting correspondence between the Syndicate of the Bombay University on the one hand and the Government on the other. In presenting the case for the transfer of the control and management of the Institute to the hands of the University, the Syndicate went into the history of the origin of the institute and referred to the expectation reasonably entertained by the University from the very beginning that, in accordance with the new policy of enabling to University to undertake instruction, and specially post-graduate instruction, the working of the institute, would be entrusted to the University. Such expectations were also, as the Syndicate pointed out, strengthened from time to time by the remarks of responsible heads, like those of Lord Sydenham in his Convocation Address of 1913. Further, the very objects of the institute, provision of instruction for the B. Sc. and M. Sc. courses, of facilities for research work in science, both pure and applied, as well as the creation of an atmosphere that will be conducive to the development of the research spirit in Western India — these were more likely to be secured, according to the Syndicate, if the institute was under University control than under the ordinary service conditions in a Government department.

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COMMENT & ANALYSIS 3

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REFORMS

Babudom needs an overhaul if self-reliance is to succeed

The British built a system to 'administer' and 'regulate' a colony, and we are continuing that. We must change. Now is the time to instead reorient our bureaucracy towards 'facilitation'.

OPINION

DARSHAN SINGH



Since 1947, the key objective of self-reliance (*aatmanirbhar*) has remained a mirage just beyond the elusive horizon. Everyone claims to know what needs to be done, but to make it happen, we as a nation have to first get past the syndrome of 'The Emperor's New Clothes'. Nobody seems to want to accept and state the obvious, some out of fear or retribution, while others prefer to just drift along with the current.

In 1990 the then Finance Minister assisted by his Secretary carried out the instructions of the then Prime Minister. Much has been said and written about the wonderful changes that they had affected. The truth is that there was no complicated economic magic to it. The most important thing they did was to 'open up' the economy. They removed needless licensing, reduced controls and generally enabled Indian entrepreneurial talent to blossom. Even though these were done in a limited way, it was still a great deviation from the

past, and the results were immediately there for everyone to see. Literally industrial and commercial activity moved forward enabling the financial sector and the country's money reserves to grow. In a win-win situation, the tax revenues also grew alongside from the resulting larger industrial base.

Since then many genuine attempts have been made by well-intentioned people across the board including politicians. Even now our present leadership is making sincere attempts towards achieving self-reliance. This time the clarion call by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has come when our backs are to the wall and there is the hard realization that the supply chain from China can be used to twist our arms, thanks to the never-ending Chinese habit of saying something and doing something else.

This time if we can even partially attain a state of *aatmanirbhar*, it could truly lead to the development of our nation. We have to resist the inevitable forthcoming Chinese promises to befriend us, for this campaign for self-reliance is mainly to their detriment. This time we must let the much overdue call for *aatmanirbhar* go on to ensure a surplus economy that gets us to the crucial stage of a net exporter. It is export income that gives us the cash to lower inflation and decrease the need to print more currency.

There is no doubt that the current intentions of the government at the political level are genuine. However, the endemic problem remains for any businessman in India, who does not have special patronage, is that he must survive 'in spite' of the government. In all other successful countries

the entire officialdom (not only limited to the bureaucracy) is a part of the national effort to build and nurture industry. Successful European countries, or even China, Japan, etc, have their officials visiting industries to find out what more can be done to enable them to succeed. They have a national recognition that they are partners with their own industry. This is where lies the rub.

Since 1947 this is the most important missing aspect in how our officialdom behaves with industry. If the greatest enemy of an Indian entrepreneur is his own country's officialdom, then it explains why so many Indians left to start ventures outside India. The performance of our bureaucrats and officials who are in positions of power are never evaluated on how many industries they were able to nurture, or more importantly how many jobs were created under their administrative control. Politicians genuinely try for development as they have to go through the process of winning more votes. However, Indian officialdom still remains a hangover of the British colonial system which incidentally the British never applied in their own country. Our bureaucrats, once installed, continue to administer the population as 'subjects'. There is no responsibility on officials, who are never evaluated on the nation's success. Those countries that export to us are de-

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lighted by our failures, such as having the crucial post of a Joint Secretary (at whose level all national activities are controlled); maybe a person who may have been JS (Textiles) for two years will then serve in an unrelated activity as JS (Steel) for the next couple of years and so on. There is no continuity of acquired knowledge. This is what also makes India lag behind, especially in the field of research and development — a key element in becoming *aatmanirbhar*. The British built a system to 'administer' and 'regulate' a colony, and we are continuing that. We must change. Now is the time to instead reorient our bureaucracy towards 'facilitation', for otherwise we will stay where we were regardless of all the recent noble intentions of our highest politicians.

In the more successful nations, the aspect of 'facilitation' is the key. Politicians try to see that our best young people leave our own shores to find better opportunities elsewhere. Why have the majority of the children of our own senior bureaucrats left this country regularly for the Western world? So if they had to leave, then there can be no better proof of the pudding

— the basic recipe — itself being defective. If for the children of our bureaucrats the working environment is not good enough, then why do the very same people need to remain a part of the system? The Indian system knows how to put blame on entrepreneurs and businessmen, but regularly turns a blind eye when it comes to the shortcomings of our officialdom.

We need a revolution in our system of governance. To start with, the IAS must have a specialised cadre who are exclusively made responsible for 'facilitation' and ensuring the success of all the new initiatives announced under *aatmanirbhar*. This should be the case not only for our products but also for Indian investments flowing into other countries. Instead, currently, we are at the stage where we cannot even manage our own economy without foreign investment, per se, is the biggest mess. All the new rules and regulations that have been announced are welcome and they do help. But this is no final solution as all that it does is mainly smoothen the surface and round off the edges.

The specialised cadre will need to start from district level (working on Industries), going into higher levels including becoming commercial counsellors (not from IFS) in our embassies abroad, and WTO and the like. European businessmen visiting India

always meet their respective embassies in Delhi for assistance in lobbying the Indian government. But when an Indian businessman goes abroad, he hardly ever gets any support from Indian missions abroad.

We need a massive change in our administration. Many people can tell what our problems are, but nobody has gone to the roots to suggest a long-term solution. Without a solution, as can be seen even if some companies leave China, they still prefer Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. India, which should have been the obvious choice with its diverse strengths, still gets bypassed. Why?

The solution suggested must ensure the importance of the new specialised cadre and it can at best be chosen from the same IAS stock (taking care that they would be selected from among those who know how to 'apply' their acquired knowledge, and not just those who got in based merely on acquired knowledge. Finally, those who make up this new grouping should never be subordinate to the IAS. This would amount to a complete radical overhaul of our administrative services and it is but natural bureaucrats will oppose the creation of what they will consider to be a watchdog body that overrides them. If his clarion call for *aatmanirbhar* has to succeed, the creation of the new cadre is a prerequisite that needs to be implemented at an all-India level.

Darshan Singh is an entrepreneur who has worked in quite a few key areas that have been critical to the process of nation-building, including the railways and oil and natural gas exploration. He is also an educationist, currently the chairperson of the William Boys' School in Dehradun.

PERSPECTIVE
ANATOMY OF VIOLENCE

MEANWHILE IN BENGAL, THE WILD EAST

Bengal is back in the news and once again for all the wrong reasons. The death of a Bharatiya Janata Party MLA, Debendra Nath Roy—found hanging in an alleged case of murder—should serve as a reminder to the fact that the state is headed for elections in less than a year. In March-April 2021 to be precise. This incident is likely to be the 'curtain raiser' to the violence that is bound to sweep through Bengal's landscape in the run-up to the elections. A quick look at events in the last couple of years gives enough indications of the way things are headed. After all, this is a state where in the panchayat elections in 2018, violence was the weapon that was used to ensure that Opposition candidates could not file even their nominations in a large number of seats. This is a state where the run-up to the Lok Sabha elections was bloody, and the actual process of voting was marred by major violence, even though voting was spread over several phases. The results came as a rude shock to the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) as it barely managed to win half of the state's Lok Sabha seats. The aftermath of the results was pockmarked with gruesome incidents of murder and mayhem. Political violence is in the DNA of Bengal, and also of Kerala, perhaps because of the strong hold communism has had in these two states. And there is no denying that communism's history is blood-soaked—it killed at least 100 million people in 100 years of its existence. Let us forget, it was Bengal that birthed the ultra left and violent Naxal (Maoist) movement in the late 1960s, early 1970s. 35 years of Left rule in the state exacerbated the situation, with the comrades becoming synonymous with the Sainbari killings and the Marichjhapi massacre, to name just two, and finally the Nandigram deaths that tipped the balance against them, leading to their downfall. Once Mamata Banerjee came to power, riding the winds of poribartan (change), it was expected that violence would be exorcised from the state's veins. It didn't happen. It couldn't happen, considering most of the thugs who had become the face of the Left on the ground migrated to the dispensation that replaced the communists. Violence had lost its ideological moorings during the Left rule itself and had morphed into sheer criminality. Also, it was not possible for the new dispensation to uproot the Left without a bloody turf war and that took its toll on Bengal's politics. Over the years, a bad situation has become worse, with corruption, criminality and communal violence keeping the pot boiling. It's Bengal that is suffering in the process, with all round degeneration setting in. At present, there is immense anti-incumbency against Mamata Banerjee's government. Add to this the immense resentment over the way she is handling the coronavirus crisis and the BJP believes that it is within striking distance of power next year—notwithstanding its ramshackle state apparatus and a lack of a Chief Ministerial face to counter the feisty street fighter that Mamata Banerjee is. The TMC knows that it's a do or die battle ahead. If it loses, it loses it. The BJP too is learning that the path to power in this state is paved with blood. A 'new' turf war has started. So corona pandemic or no pandemic, lockdown or no lockdown, in the next few months in Bengal, there will be blood. It's the Wild East after all.

JOYEETA BASU

NEW WORLD ORDER

Time to give expanded Quad Plus a chance

RAJESH MEHTA, SOMYA MATHUR & RAJESH KATKAR



In the backdrop of its trade wars against the US, an increasingly aggressive China starts land reclamation and territorial expansion which results in geopolitical shifts in the Asia-Pacific region. Controversies surrounding information security acted as a catalyst and Quad was revitalised after an eight-year-long hiatus, by meeting on the margins of the Manila ASEAN Summit in 2017. The US, India, Australia and Japan came together in 2004 as a 'core group' to provide humanitarian assistance. They formed the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) in 2007, but it was withdrawn in its nascent stage in 2008. But now, the Quad nations have been convening regularly, reaffirming their shared objectives of regional security and non-proliferation, up-

holding of international law, enhancing connectivity and economic development and freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific.

The current coronavirus pandemic calls for humanitarian aid and equipment, and cooperative vaccine development. But the recent India-China standoff in eastern Ladakh and the imposition of the national security law on Hong Kong drew the Quad nations to a conjunctural alliance. In the meeting held in March 2020, three more countries — New Zealand, Vietnam and South Korea — exchanged notes to tackle the Covid-19 crisis and economic recovery post-pandemic, making the alliance 'Quad Plus'. The growing aggression of China in the Indo-Pacific region and its initial cover up on the coronavirus outbreak, has led Quad+ to gain momentum and has subsequently increased the participation in Quad meetings by new players like India, Brazil and South Korea. We have also taken into account the prospective UK's member-

ship in Quad, given the tensions in Hong Kong and the UK's citizenship plans, and its good ties with India, and hence have considered the expanded Quad Plus group with Brazil, Israel and UK along with the other seven countries discussed above; so we consider our group of 10 countries as Quad+.

The expansion of the Quad in the economic downturn conditions caused by the recession, trade wars and the pandemic, is vital for economic cooperation between the Quad nations to pull them to a path of economic recovery. On one hand, it will help in cornering China and on the other it would also kick-start trade and investment negotiations between the Quad nations. It's already a matrix of strategic and economic, trilateral and bilateral agreements. The US, Australia and Japan have come into an infrastructure agreement to counter the BRI of China. India, US and Japan have entered into a trilateral agreement to hold joint naval exercises. New Delhi avoided participating

in the BRI of China and has also tactfully withdrawn from RCEP, much to the ire of Beijing, which is bringing into its clutches many debt-ridden nations by its predatory economic policies.

The recent India-China standoff has paved a way for India to come to the forefront in the Quad dialogue. The changes in the world order are throwing opportunities for India to emerge and establish itself as a regional power, which it can do by fostering ties with the Quad member nations in economic cooperation. The US is the largest importer of Indian products, manufactured goods (\$12.154 billion), service goods (\$10.136 billion), pharmaceuticals (\$6.247 billion), textiles (\$4.957 billion) and wearing apparel (\$4.369 billion). US President Donald Trump has terminated the 'Generalized System of Preferences for India' on June 2019, and has re-instated US tariffs. India and the US are exploring areas of economic partnership. As per Mukesh Agni, president and CEO, US India Strategic

Partnership Forum, 'The rule of international law is important for nations to collaborate, compete and understand limitations. The Quad is focused on ensuring that the rule of law is accepted, deliberated and changed in an acceptable norm. Quad has the potential of becoming an economic bloc where an FTA (Free trade agreement) would facilitate investment, innovation, infrastructure development and mobility of professionals.'

The UK imports \$5.611 billion of business services, \$1.644 billion of wearing apparel, \$1.051 billion of petroleum and coal products, \$781 million of manufactured goods and \$729 million of transport equipment. There are talks going on of an FTA between the UK and India. Similarly, between India and Australia negotiations are on for an FTA. Japan and India have had an FTA enforced since 2011. India exports petroleum and coal products (\$2.241 billion), business services (\$671 million) and manufactured products (\$831 million) to it.

According to Keiichi Onozawa, South Asia Regional Representative of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, Japanese Government for South Asia, 'Japanese manufacturers see India as an export hub, taking advantage of scale economies. To improve competitiveness, strengthening value chain and interdependence among like-minded countries including Quad is a natural solution.'

Japan's largest imports from China are in computer, electronic and optical products (\$40.092 million), wearing apparel (\$20.598 million), electrical equipment (\$17.642 million) and machinery and equipment (\$14.272 million). India has potential to develop in these sectors with adequate foreign investments and high technological transfers. India is prepping up to be the manufacturing hub of the world, taking advantage of the disruptions created by the pandemic and shifting of base by many foreign companies. The cyber security concerns and the consequent banning of Chinese apps have given a

huge opportunity for startup entrepreneurs and companies to create robust alternatives that are 'Made in India' for the world. Also, half of the Indian unicorn startups have Chinese investors which may be impacted and may have to look for alternative foreign investment. Amidst the pandemic, to create a favourable climate for foreign investments and paving a road for economic recovery and self-reliance, the Indian government has also announced a number of reform measures under the 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan' for the improvement of ease of doing business in India. This will act as a game-changer.

Sanjeev Josphipura, executive director of Indiaspora, says, 'Although the border tensions between India and China might be gradually easing, China's actions seem to have caused a lasting shift in mindset among global political, business and academic leaders. People have begun talking about not just the Quad grouping of nations, but an expanded Quad Plus,

as a loose but formidable alliance of countries that serve as a counterweight to increasing Chinese might and power. After China, India is the largest economy with the fastest future growth prospects, and multinational companies will consider India as an alternative base for operations and supply chains.'

PM Modi laid down the red carpet for foreign companies at the India Global Week 2020. He urged them to tap the favourable ecosystems created by the recent reforms, which have provided attractive investment opportunities in various sectors including agriculture and defence. The close cooperation on Quad+ countries would not only counter China but also help in fulfilling PM Modi's dream of 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat'.

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Important Editorials from Newspapers by Read To Succeed 14th July