

CULTURAL IMPERIALISM

Local storytellers, global warmongers

We need to start talking about the issue of cultural sovereignty like the rest of our sovereignty depends on it too. We can't outsource stories of the self to interests that wish to exterminate that very self altogether.

OPINION

VAMSEE JULURI



Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent *Mann Ki Baat* addressed a pleasantly surprising topic: story-telling. With his elder-wisdom tone and usual attention to everyday heroes, Modi put storytellers into the heart of the pandemic story. We're all stuck at home with our families, so let's reconnect through stories, he said.

Krishna Deva Raya (non-fictional) and a brinjal. *Keep telling stories! And kids, listen to your grandparents' stories (excellent advice!)*

While I appreciated this endearing gesture, there is something I can't quite forget in the happy-go-lucky spirit of the moment either. There is an elephant in the room. Every parent knows it, and every child knows it perhaps even more. And that is the ominous reality that in India today neither parents nor elders are the dominant story-tellers to children anymore.

Media researchers as early as the 1970s were cautioning us about the phenomenon of cultural imperialism; of nominally free, in the 1970s, being reconquered by first-world corporate interests and imperial ideologies. In the 1970s, "foreign media" meant mainly movies or TV shows, easily regulated. Today, the "foreign media" is simply on all the time in every child's hand-held addition-device, even if sometimes the characters,



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stories and names seem cosmetically local. Worse, in the rush to embrace neo-liberal free-market rhetoric, media observers have abandoned the idea of cultural imperialism altogether, even observers with otherwise "nationalist" inclinations.

On that note, let us do a quick review of the stories that the Indian child today is probably actually growing up watching, hearing, and absorbing, besides the noble words of the Prime Minister and the story-tellers he wants us to rediscover.

On the global media giant Netflix's platform, there's a series for children and parents all to watch whenever they want, a much-touted movie called *Cuties*. It is about children who perform sexually explicit dances for fun. Some of the reviews around the time of the 2008 Hinduist attacks on Mumbai (26/11). Since then, the "evil Hindu" has become

the reigning trope in almost every major story about India or even from India on global media. Netflix's *Leila*, *Ghaoul*, and *Sacred Games* all normalised the story of India as some sort of a Hindu fascist state or one getting there soon.

The message that Hindus are evil is the most pervasive story perhaps that little children are being fed everyday now. That is the ominous cultural ground reality of the story-wars. Just look around for examples about how children who wish to celebrate Deepavali with fireworks or Holi with colours are agencies by their teachers, and even their classmates in their poosh schools. That stark ostracism too is the product of manufactured story-telling. Just recall how the MNCs and their ad agencies let loose a stream of Hindu-shaming ads (beautifully narrated no doubt, so that most people don't even realise that they are be-

ing deliberately persuaded about their very identity) with regular precision now. Global media giants, advertisers, and of course, "Bollywood" is not far behind. The stories that India's predominant film industry has been putting out for the last few decades are also deeply troubling and can no longer be seen as examples of a simple, popular heart-felt Indian syncretism and mutual respect (as I once did).

While media scholars mostly focus on what they believe is rising Islamophobia in Indian cinema, I think that the calculated erasure of Hinduism and Hindus from popular visibility in Bollywood (except for occasional and extreme targeted mockery like in *P.K.*) is something that needs to be studied more carefully too (and of course, the breaking-news sensationalism around the alleged substance-misdemeanours of a few movie stars hardly

affects the power that their products, their movies and stories, have on the people; TV witch-hunts are no solution to a civilisational catastrophe at all).

That Hindu gods can be mocked or denigrated is a story too that has been widely normalised in the minds of Indian children now; and academia and publishing too have advanced this story very effectively.

Indian parents, elders, and traditional story-tellers are no longer the main sources of stories and values in children's lives, nor can indigenous stories compete with the powerful meta-story of the mega-media discrediting them incessantly.

How is a grandparent, or a traditional story-teller like a Hari Katha or Yakshagana artist, who is pouring out the deepest aches, pains and longings for sacred cosmic reunions beyond the pale of modern monolithic

colonised minds, going to tell the children the difference between their version of a story, and that of a motivated mercenary masquerading as a story-teller to Hindus or Indians with equal (or more) authority? If a Carnatic singer who takes Rama's name only to persuade India's youth that somehow their elders, their *sampradayas*, their thousand years of hardships and resistance to genocidal hatred are all wrong, where will these youth find an alternative story?

I appreciate the Prime Minister's attention to story-telling. But as a student of media and the stories of our past, on it today, and the enormous power they have to discredit and silence local, indigenous, and resistive voices, we cannot fool ourselves into thinking that our children are growing up with the same wrong, where will these youth find an alternative story?

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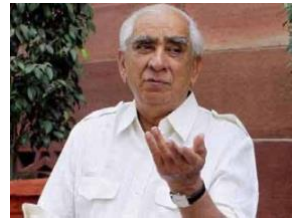
IN MEMORIAM

JASWANT SINGH WAS A GENTLEMAN POLITICIAN, ALWAYS POLITE & COURTEOUS



The ninth summit of the Group of 15 was held in Montego Bay, on the west coast of Jamaica, between 10th and 12th January 1999. The gathering had brought together leaders, representatives and policymakers from Non-Aligned nations which had joined together to create a forum to foster cooperation and develop information, which could collectively be presented to other international groups, as the World Trade Organization and the Group of Eight. The G-15, originally established at the ninth Non-Aligned Movement summit in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, in September 1989, had the common goal of enhanced growth and prosperity among developing countries in the areas of investment, trade and technology.

I recall being a part of the entourage of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who attended the G-15 Summit as a tall leader from India, along with Jaswant Singh as his Foreign Minister. For this G-15 meeting, Jamaica



had been the host. As part of the West Indies, the island country is known for its sugar plantations, its cricket ground, Sabina Park, in the capital city of Kingston, and for being the land of Bob Marley -- singer, composer and lyricist, known for his very popular number, 'No Woman No Cry'.

I remember Jaswant Singh, who died on 27 September 2020, as a highly cultured person, who was charismatic during the deliberations, as he was at other times too. He was positioned in a beautiful suite on the seafloor in a posh area in Montego Bay. The Indian media was stationed at the Holiday Inn, a beautiful resort overlooking the placid waters of the beach. Dozens of hotels are located on this northern side of the small city and, virtually, the entire island is dotted with excellent tourist facilities which meet the high Americans standards.

and honest remark left an indelible impression on my interaction can, at times, tell a long story. I wondered, are politicians truly like this? Although it is difficult to accept politicians at their face value, the courtesy shown to me by my cameraperson during the summit was something I cherished for a long time.

In Jamaica, Jaswant Singh was always polite and courteous and, just before the interview, told his staff to look after me and my cameraman, when he was informed of a sudden change in the time table. I had to wait for one unscheduled bilateral, which had suddenly cropped up at that time, and a foreign minister of a Latin American country was virtually at his doorstep. The time it took for this bilateral to be over gave me a good opportunity to savour the beautiful ambience of the surroundings. Each time we built on stills on the beach, facing the sea, which was safely at a little distance.

The brief interview with him also took place in a very cordial atmosphere. Now looking back, and keeping in mind the times at which he was in power, I wonder if during Singh's tenure as part of the Vajpayee government, he made for a better Foreign Minister or a better Finance Minister. Circumstances in the North and South Blocks would have brought in their own atmospheres.

INTERVIEW

THIS IS NO LONGER A MAN'S WORLD: JORIE HEALTHCARE CEO ANITA SINGH

ANINDYA TRIPATHI
NEW DELHI

In conversation with *The Daily Guardian*, Anita Sumra Singh, the Indian-origin CEO of Jorie Healthcare Partners and Jindal MMG, talks about her efforts and expansion in Chandigarh. With a dedicated team, she is bridging the best of Chicago and Chandigarh and in less than a year, her team grew from 11 employees in September 2019 to more than 250 employees today. The company's exponential growth has made quite a reputation for itself and is offering career opportunities even in these uncertain Covid-19 times. Excerpts:

Q. Please tell us about your journey in Jorie Healthcare.

A. Jorie Healthcare Partners is an 'outcome sourcing' company, providing practice and financial management services to the healthcare industry. Since its inception, Jorie has exponentially grown from 11 employees to more than 250 employees. By mid-October, the company plans to increase the total members over 300-400. With an average of 5% attrition rate per month, the company has successfully retained its entire workforce during the lockdown period. It has also created a proactive and systematic approach with employees working from home to effectively manage all client deliveries.

Q. The company completes one year in India. What are its future plans and strategies?

A. The plan is to keep growing and reaching out to the world -- we want to see over 2,000 people filling those top two floors in Quark City and more clients availing our RPA-powered services. We would like to help out the Indian segment of healthcare by exploring collaborations with hospitals



that would enable us to convert their patient files into a digital medical card for smoother service.

As part of our first anniversary, we have also tied up with the Panchkula-based arm of The Pink Foundation, an NGO that facilitates the development of marginalised women and children across India, besides other activities, to manufacture reusable cloth bags and three-tier face masks for our employees. Not only has this provided the NGO with some much needed employment, it also promoted our belief in eliminating single-use plastic and promoting our country's handiwork, rather than looking to export bulk, non-biodegradable plastic items from other countries.

Q. You have created a dedicated set-up in Panchkula. Have you any particular reason for choosing the city?

A. The company was looking to expand

and I decided to explore India for opportunities. We combed through other cities -- Delhi, Hyderabad, Chennai and Bengaluru (the hubs of outsourcing). But my gut told me to go with Chandigarh for two reasons: Having grown up in Chandigarh, I have always wanted to open up employment opportunities for people in the city. I strongly believe that the tri-city area (Chandigarh-Mohali-Panchkula) and its people are brimming with potential for this sector and development. So, in September 2019, I decided it was an apt time to merge the best of both my worlds -- my business family in Chicago with my origins in Punjab. So far, we have been proven right: People are clever and hardworking, and really deliver. We started out with just 11 employees last year, and despite Covid-19, we have expanded to over 250 employees, and are continuing to grow.

Q. What do you have to say about being a woman in this industry, along with being an outsider in the US?

A. I will say this: It is no longer a man's world, especially in the industry. Women are much stronger and much more capable of leading. I have never stopped being a mother (of two) or a wife, along with my overnight classes and a full-time high-pressure job in a different country. Women, I feel, are blessed with the power of giving and nurturing new life. Though everyone talks about equity, it is not always in that direction, the grim reality is that women have many glass ceilings that are left to be shattered, be it the wage gap or the lack of women in leadership roles. We have a long way to go, and some of us have even broken that ceiling. I have made it a constant in my work life and outside it to support and uplift other women.

Aamir bhar bhur A

PM Modi's game-changing labour reforms to boost growth

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's labour laws have been envisaged by recognising the changes in the global scenario in a post-Covid world. They seek to transform India and rid it of outdated technologies and methodologies.

opinion

SANJU VERMA



Parliament, in its just concluded monsoon session, passed three labour code bills: The Industrial Relations Code, Social Security Code and the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code. The Wage Code Bill, 2019 was passed by Parliament last year. Key provisions like making all categories of workers eligible for minimum wages, as against only 30% of the workforce being eligible at present, are indeed path-breaking. Minimum wages would be extended to the entire services sector, to domestic workers, unorganised workers and teachers, among others, to mainstream the informal sector. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has done what none before him could even dare to attempt. India's labour market reforms will herald the dawn of a new era in making businesses more efficient and competitive, cutting down extra flab and allowing flexibility in hiring and retrenchment, making industrial strikes difficult, removing multiple licensing and paperwork and, of course, getting rid of disguised unemployment. Disguised unemployment is a scenario

where employees are underutilised and therefore underpaid, as there is not enough work that can be allocated to them for various reasons.

India jumped 14 places to the 63rd position in the ease of doing business (EODB) rankings last year and by 79 positions in five years (2014-19). The Covid-19 situation has made the lives of both the employer and employee difficult. Under these circumstances, these new (labour) codes are bound to make new enterprises investor-friendly, increase ease of doing business and make it attractive to invite foreign entities which want to exit China. A key element of the proposed Social Security Code is to clearly define migrant workers and also enlarge the scope of the current scheme to cover the gig economy and those outside the organised sector, while recognising the emergence of online platforms and aggregators that provide access to workers.

was up to 100 workers. Companies with more than 300 workers need to apply for approval, but if authorities do not respond to their request, then it will be deemed approved. Besides, as per the IR Code, a notice period of 60 days will have to be given by trade unions or employees before going on a strike. Strike conditions have been applied to all industries. Currently, it is between two weeks and six weeks. This is a game-changing move that will discourage flash strikes and enhance productivity significantly.

As part of its Aatmanirbhar Bharat push, the government has decided to encourage medium enterprises to grow in size. The bill also reflects the changing nature of the economy; the growth of the gig sector and the vulnerability of sections of workers, from migrant labour to house helpers, who despite playing a crucial role, did not fit into the traditional definition of a "worker". The new bills will amalgamate 29 existing labour laws and pave the way for simplifying laws and take welfare measures to India's 50 crore workers, spanning the organised and unorganised sectors.

Some experts allege that the blanket exemptions to industries through various provisions will lead to social and economic unrest, promote contractualisation and take away job security and wage security. These allegations are baseless as in many areas, fixed-term workers and regular workers will be free to voluntarily join the employee state insurance (ESI) scheme for getting healthcare benefits. The code also talks about platform companies employing gig workers to make a provision of 1% to 2% of their profits for the social security needs of their workers.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

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the damage or forfeited.

All employees will now have an offer letter and both the Centre and the state will create a database on migrant workers and offer them several benefits including the portability of the public distribution system and construction cess benefits. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's groundbreaking labour laws have been envisaged by recognising the changes in the global scenario in a post-Covid world. The new labour code seeks to transform India and rid it of outdated technologies and methodologies. The reduction in compliance burden would also facilitate the expansion of establishments, helping to create jobs on a large-scale across sectors, giving PM Modi's transformation 'Make in India' a huge boost.

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PERSPECTIVE
75TH UNGA

to be in UnSC, India needs to lead

The stern message that the Prime Minister of India delivered at the UN General Assembly's 75th session on Saturday, that India could not be kept out of the United Nations Security Council, had a sub-text to it. Without mentioning China, it was, nonetheless, a severe indictment of China, because of whose stalling tactics India is finding it difficult to find a place on the high table of the UN. The Prime Minister was scathing in reminding the UN of its increasing irrelevance if it refuses to reflect the changed realities 75 years after the world body was formed. While India will be one of the ten non-permanent members of the UNSC from January 2021—its eighth time to be

so—in real terms the post is ornamental. The actual power vests with the veto wielding P5 members, four of whom are ready to back India. China is the only exception. In fact, one of the biggest failures of the UN has been its inability to curb the totalitarian tendencies of countries such as China. Take for instance the tribunal constituted under the United Nations Convention on Law of the Seas (UNCLOS), which, in 2016, ruled against China and in favour of Philippines in the matter of South China Sea. China just tossed that ruling into the waste paper basket. Perhaps that ruling was one of the strongest 'indictments' of Chinese policies by a UN tribunal, but to no

avail. For that matter, what action has the UN taken against China regarding its oppression of Uyghur minorities? What does the UN, whose primary job is to maintain peace and security globally, have to say about Chinese aggression against India? Worse, whatever be the UN's claims to being a humanitarian organisation, it has proved to be ineffective at a time when a virus originating from China is wreaking havoc across the world. And now China is taking increasing control of the UN itself. China heads four of the UN's 15 specialised agencies, including the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), which may help it tweak policies in favour of Chinese



telecom companies. Even the World Health Organisation, another specialised UN agency, is under Chinese control for all intents and purposes. The WHO's

inaction in first warning the world about the threat the virus posed and then its inability to get a proper investigation done into the origin of the virus raise se-

rious questions about its credibility. This being the situation, India becoming a veto-wielding member of the UNSC—there has been a suggestion about

India joining the UNSC but without veto, but it's hoped that New Delhi will not accept it—may seem like a miracle. All the more reason to ratchet up pressure on China not only through the G4 platform comprising India, Germany, Japan and Brazil, but also by tapping into the anger of countries around the world that have been left hobbled by the spread of the Wuhan virus. Nations are tiring of Chinese hegemony. This was proved from the way India was able to deliver China a drubbing in the election to the Commission for the Status of Women, which is apart of the UN Economic and Social Council. China could not even cross the halfway mark needed to be

elected, while India sailed through. India may have all the qualifications to become a UNSC member, but that is not good enough to corner China. India needs to channelise the world's anger towards China and hold it accountable for the spread of the Wuhan virus. India currently heads the WHO's Executive Board and should use this opportunity to stand up to China, instead of being browbeaten to white-washing China's misdeeds. It's India's responsibility to ensure that justice is done. This is the time for India to be the leader it is meant to be. If it wants to be in UNSC, it has to show the rest of the world that it means business. Joyeeta Basu

ANALYSIS

PM Modi, only you can root out drug menace

The youths will have to be saved from drug abuse, for the whole country will be ruined if the younger generation went astray.

OPINION

VIJAY DARDA



Dear Prime Minister Narendra Modi, You are the only person who can obliterate drug menace from India and save the younger generation from drug abuse. If the younger generation survives, the country will survive. If the younger generation is ruined, the country will be ruined too. I am directly addressing you because the agencies that act against the drug trade are under the control of the Central government. The second reason is that you are strongly opposed to the growing drug addiction among youths. You may not have had the time to pay attention to this issue due to your multiple commitments and work pressure, but this is the most pressing issue today. If you make up your

mind, you can eliminate the drug trade because you possess that determination. For once, we may ignore economic offences for some time. Smuggling of wood to medicine and gold and silver can be ignored for once but we cannot allow the spread of drugs into India. No Indian would want to, no parent would want their child to get addicted to drugs and be ruined. Everyone who got into the trap of drugs was ruined.

I would illustrate my point by giving an example of my own state Maharashtra. There are three important centres here - Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur. When I used to study in college in Mumbai, the picture of 'Bhole Baba' in any paan-cigarette shop was an indication for the people to understand that it sold drugs. I am talking about the 1960s era. Since then, I see that this illicit trade has continued to grow. Today, drugs are easily sold near schools and colleges. There are reports of drugs being sold even near the police station and the police headquarters. It is a matter of great sorrow and misfortune that the state government turns a blind eye to it. People feel that the police have full knowledge

about this illicit trade. So what prevents the police from stopping it only they can tell!

Today, Pune has become a hotspot of drugs business. Pune has the highest number of students and most of them are from outside. Drug addiction is spreading rapidly among them. Nagpur is also one of the secret bases where underground activities are carried out unhindered. It is said that Nagpur is the centre of distribution. This drug addiction is so bad that when young men and women get nothing, they consume balm or cough syrup. The Narcotics Control Bureau and the National Investigation Agency have also been monitoring Nagpur, but the kind of strict action that should be taken is nowhere to be seen.

Uddhav Thackeray ji, you are the chief minister of Maharashtra and I know that you have zero tolerance for drug abuse in Maharashtra but unfortunately people are falling prey to this menace on a large scale! Even foreigners operate drug trade in Mumbai. So the question is why was investigation not initiated or strict action taken when the videos of Karan Johar's party or other rave parties appeared on social media? Carrying or consuming drugs is a serious crime, so why were they not caught under the law? I would like to thank Kangana Ranaut for showing courage to raise this issue. She has adopted an aggressive stand on the issue of substance abuse.

This issue is not exclusive to Bollywood. Even Tolly-



I would like to thank Kangana Ranaut who has brought the issue of drug and substance abuse once again into the public domain through her aggressive campaign. It is indeed unfortunate that our younger generation is getting addicted to drugs. The country will be ruined if the younger generation is not saved from this peril. Now Modi ji is the only hope, for he has the grit to eliminate the drug mafia.

wood and the regional film industries are under its grip. Obviously, we use something when we have it in abundance. Drug menace in Punjab has reached its peak and attracted a lot of opprobrium. But even Bihar, UP or Rajasthan are not far behind Punjab! Delhi's schools and Delhi's rave parties have attained notoriety for drugs!

People say that many politicians have also participated in these parties. Who does not know the activities of Delhi's farm houses? There was a time when people used to ask questions to politicians and the latter were afraid. Now no one asks questions nor are anyone afraid.

It is our misfortune that India has become the hub of the

international trade of drugs. Drugs dispatched from Pakistan, Myanmar and Nepal borders, besides Mexico, reach India via Brazil, Africa, Dubai through the Arabian Sea route. Terrorist groups are involved in this drugs trade. They are destroying the lives of our youths and also making money for purchasing lethal weapons.

Drugs and arms dealers run parallel governments all over the world. The US has succeeded in putting an end to this menace to a great extent, but if we do not take effective steps to break this nexus in India, the time will write a painful story of destruction.

The Interpol, World Narcotics Association and anti-terrorist agencies meet every

year. They have also mapped out the drug hubs. Our officials also attend those meetings. If a concerted action is taken with international cooperation and the policy of 'zero tolerance' is adopted towards drug abuse, it will not be very difficult to wipe out this menace from India. After all, why are drugs not available in Singapore? This is because drug traffickers get the mandatory death sentence in Singapore as those found in possession of dangerous drugs are hanged irrespective of their wealth.

In India too, we have to adopt an effective approach because this country has to be saved. If the younger generation survives, the country will survive. Once a person gets addicted to drugs, no one can save him or her. A reflection of what this addiction could lead to was seen in Delhi when a drug addict indulged in an indiscriminate shootout. Against the backdrop of the growing menace of drug abuse among youths in the country, I feel horrified to think how I will be able to save my family members. Just a thought is enough to send a chill down the spine. The very thought that your near and dear one is addicted to drug or substance abuse is enough to trouble your soul. Every parent is afraid of the drug addiction and wants to keep the child away from it. And therefore, we all have great hopes from you, Modi ji!

The author is the chairman, Editorial Board of Lokmat Media and former member of Rajya Sabha.

ANALYSIS

Making things happen: Municipal corporation turns Indore into cleanest city

OPINION

ANIL SWARUP



Indore was known as an industrial town in the state of Madhya Pradesh but shot into prominence as it was declared as the cleanest city in the country in 2017. It continued to be awarded the cleanest city every year thereafter. What brought about a transformation that has been sustained now for so many years?

It wasn't very easy to begin with. A number of challenges were faced initially to set up

a system in the city:

- Insufficient knowledge and self-motivation of residents, community and operation staff
- Weak financial support and management
- Lack of involvement of stakeholders, including the private sector and non-governmental organizations.
- Lack of public participation
- Lack of strengthening of institutions for monitor and enforcement

To overcome these challenges, it was decided to transform the city through strategic planning and municipal waste management.

Indore Municipal Corporation (IMC) developed capacity to collect, transport and treat 1100 tonnes of waste generated every day. This was achieved through stakehold-

ers in the following manner:

- 100% source segregation of waste in dry and wet waste.
- 100% door-to-door collection
- 100% transportation of waste to processing facility
- 100% treatment of wet by composting
- 100% treatment of dry waste in two material recovery facility.

- 100% utilization of all rag pickers in the city in material recovery facility
- 100% recovery of land from old dump by bio-mining process
- 100% vehicles equipped with GPS with geo-tagging and real time monitoring through control room
- 100% workers registration with biometric system and wages directly to their accounts.

Extensive work to strengthen infrastructure and efficient operation and maintenance of solid waste management was carried out.

Information, Education and Communication (IEC) was the key to behaviour change. The first step therefore was to create awareness amongst the people and the community through pamphlets, loud speakers, rallies, meet-

ings and public participation. Made them aware to segregate wet and dry waste, its benefits and consequences on human health & environment.

Door to door collection and transportation services were designed in such a way that the citizens got the services on all 365 days in a year irrespective of any National Holidays, Festivals and Sundays. Accordingly, a ward wise deployment plan of sanitary workers, drivers and utilization of vehicles was prepared.

For better segregation 3bins are used in each house. Door to door collection of waste is being done in all 85 wards of the city using partitioned vehicles. There are three separate collection compartments for wet, dry and domestic hazardous waste in each tipper. The wet waste from semi bulk generators generating 25 to 100 kg of waste is collected through the dedicated Bulk Collection System.

The wet waste collected is transported by the tippers to one of the ten transfer stations. At the garbage transfer station (GTS), the tippers unload the wet waste into dedicated compactors which compress and load the wet waste on dedicated hook loaders.

The details of all the incoming waste collection vehicles are logged in the log books at the GTS. Aadhar based Biometric attendance of all the workers is taken every day. All vehicles are monitored by a GPS enabled tracking system. Any route deviation is penalized and multiple deviations are grounds for termination.

Sweeping of roads less than 18m wide is done manually by sanitary workers of IMC and wider roads are cleaned by 10 ultra-modern mechanized road sweeping machines. 400 km roads are mechanically swept between 10 pm and 6 am. Gangs of workers are deployed along with to wash the squares, footpath and monuments with pressure jet machines.

10 ultra-modern transfer stations have been developed at strategic locations to transfer the waste from small tippers to big hook loaders. From these transfer stations, wet waste is sent for processing. The segregated MSW is compressed into respective containers. They are then lifted by dedicated hook loader and sent to disposal site.

The bucket for the sanitary waste and domestic hazardous waste is off loaded into

dedicated drums and is transported to Common Biomedical Waste Facility (CBWTF) regularly.

The IMC took over an existing under-performing Centralized Organic Waste Processing Unit. After the takeover, complete overhauling of the plant, including repair of the machinery, was done. The compost plant is now working to its capacity of 600 MT of wet waste per day.

IMC established decentralized aerobic pit composting units in 414 gardens to treat lawn cuttings, leaves and tree branches. Depending upon the size of garden and quantity of garden waste generated the onsite composting facility for garden waste has been developed. Decentralized processing for wet waste has been developed at vegetable and fruit markets and at Khajrana Ganesh Mandir for converting flower waste into compost through Organic waste converter system.

Mobile Composting Vans for onsite treatment of Organic Waste generated from small food joints and restaurants has been deployed on contract basis.

The IMC took the initiative

to produce and utilize Bio CNG produced from processing of Municipal Solid Waste. The project with 20 TPD capacity is in one of the whole sale market of Fruits and Vegetables in Indore. This plant generates Bio CNG for public transport. It generates methane gas which is converted into CNG and utilized. 15 buses in Indore run on the Bio-CNG and consuming nearly 500 kg of gas per day & cover more than 2000 km per day.

On segregating dry and wet waste, around 500 TPD dry waste is generated. To handle and process such large quantity of dry waste, IMC has developed Material Recovery Facility. At this material recovery facility various fractions of dry waste like plastic, rubber, leather, glass, metal, cloth etc. are segregated by registered rag pickers. 1753 rag pickers were identified after extensive survey.

The non-biodegradable waste is segregated by category at the site. The recyclable low-density polyethylene (plastic bags) gets cleaned and sent for recycling at existing plastic briquetting unit, where the plastic briquettes are sold to

an irrigation pipe manufacturer. Other smaller-volume recyclables such as paper / carton, glass, metals, HDPE, PPP, and PET are cleaned, sorted, bunched and traded to wholesalers at a cost-plus margin.

A construction and demolition waste processing plants of 100 TPD capacity has been developed and 4 transfer points for C&D waste have been developed within the city.

The success of Indore shows that this is doable. It is a lighthouse project for MP and for other similar cities across the country. What is even more remarkable is that the wonderful and exemplary work initiated under the inspired leadership of the then Municipal Commissioner, Manish Singh was carried forward, consolidated and sustained by his extremely competent successor, Ashesh Singh. They have demonstrated that it can happen.

Anil Swarup has served as the head of the Project Monitoring Group, which is currently under the Prime Minister's Office. He has also served as Secretary, Ministry of Coal and Secretary, Ministry of School Education.

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THE EDITORIAL PAGE

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

END OF A PACT

SAD-BJP partnership wasn't driven by numbers alone. Both lose from their disagreement on a crucial farm reform

THE POLITICAL PARTING of ways wasn't foretold. The Shiromani Akali Dal (B) in Punjab has long prided itself on being a core member of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance at the Centre and the alliance itself seemed shored up by a meeting of political interests and reciprocity. During the Lok Sabha elections last year, at rally after rally, SAD patriarch and five-time Punjab chief minister Parkash Singh Badal sought votes for his party in the name of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who, in turn, had likened him to Nelson Mandela. On the three farm bills that have become the breaking point now, the murmurs of protest began in Punjab long before they were tabled in Parliament. But the groundswell of anger that became visible once it became certain that they would be passed without any amendments assuring the sale of produce at the minimum support price presented a challenge to the SAD-BJP. What the Modi government flouts as the biggest farm reform in agriculture is being seen by many farmers as an impending invasion by corporates in the agrarian state. Organisations of both traders and middlemen that the bills seek to free the peasantry from, and of farmers, have come together to oppose the legislation.

The walkout by the SAD from the NDA brings to an end an alliance that has won four elections in the state—the Akalis had joined hands with the Jan Sangh in the 1960s—but it wasn't a partnership driven by numbers alone. Though the BJP provided the Akalis a crucial opening in the urban areas dominated by traders, its vote share in the poll alliance averaged only around 7 per cent. More importantly, the partnership, in its best version, became a symbol of the syncretic culture of the state, an assertion of Punjabiyat, after a decade lost under the shadow of the guns. It helped the Akalis project themselves as more than a panthic party, and gave the BJP a foothold it couldn't have on its own in a key northern state. At the Centre, alliance with the Akalis helped the BJP to address itself more credibly to victims of the 1984 anti-Sikh violence. More generally, successful partnership with a 'Sikh' party was helpful for the BJP in responding to the charge that it was inhospitable to, or intolerant of, the minorities.

The agitation against the farm legislation comes at a time when the SAD is on a weak footing in the state, having logged its worst ever performance in the 2017 assembly polls. Now, as the party prepares for a return to the kind of pro-peasant and anti-Centre plank that held up its politics in an earlier time, however, it will confront a changed politics—and a changing agriculture. The agriculture sector in the state of the Green Revolution is ripe for another big push. For a party which claims to speak for the farmers, finding the way forward will also mean stepping up to the necessity of reform that the farm legislation promises to deliver.

ONLY LIP SERVICE

Sri Lanka's unresolved Tamil question continues to stand in the way of more meaningful Delhi-Colombo ties

THE FIRST MEETING between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Sri Lankan premier Mahinda Rajapaksa after the latter's landslide victory in last month's parliamentary election showed up starkly the differences between the two neighbours on a key issue that has dogged the bilateral relationship. It also showed how little India can do to change this. Since 1988, India has wanted Sri Lanka to implement the 13th Amendment of its Constitution to devolve political power to the Tamil dominated areas in the north and east. The amendment came out of the 1987 India-Sri Lanka Accord and remains the only constitutional measure that gives the Tamil minority a smidgen of autonomy within a unitary constitution. But the paradox is that while the second tier of devolved provincial councils came up as the island nation, the minorities—dominated north and east (earlier North-East), from where the demand for asymmetric devolution first arose, did not get these elected councils until some years ago, and then too, with curtailed powers. Now there is talk in Colombo of abolishing the amendment altogether.

The meeting of the premiers ended predictably. As noted in the joint statement, Prime Minister Modi called on the Sri Lankan government "to address the aspirations of the Tamil people for equality, justice, peace and respect within a united Sri Lanka", and urged it to take forward "the process of reconciliation with the implementation of the 13th Amendment". Rajapaksa noncommittally "expressed the confidence that Sri Lanka will work towards realising the aspirations of all ethnic groups, including Tamils, by achieving reconciliation nurtured as per the mandate of the people of Sri Lanka and implementation of the constitutional provisions". The Sri Lankan leader went on to issue a separate statement in Colombo that made no mention of the Tamil issue.

It is as if both sides now know they must pay lip service to Sri Lanka's yet unresolved Tamil question, while being aware that it is a charade that isn't going anywhere. Colombo knows its proximity to Beijing rattles Delhi. The Modi government has not been able to get any of the infrastructure projects agreed upon in July 2017 moving. Joint statement mentions offer no guarantee that the situation on the ground in Sri Lanka will change, either for Tamils or for the projects. The Rajapaksa, who speak the language of militaristic Sinhalese nationalism, are here to stay for the foreseeable future. Despite strong cultural links, the challenges in the relationship with Sri Lanka are a test case for Delhi's "Neighbourhood First" policy.

SINGER FOR THE AGES

SP Balasubrahmanyam represented the timeless spirit of music and art

HIS WAS THE voice that three generations of Tamils, Telugus, Malayalis and Kannadigas hummed their dreams, sorrows, romance, and devotion in. Sriparthi Panditadriyula Balasubrahmanyam, SPB to admirers and Balu to friends, who succumbed to post-COVID complications on Friday, was a singer for the ages. His career spread over five decades, males for staggering statistics—over 40,000 songs in 16 languages with six national awards. But no statistic can capture the impact SPB had on South Indian cinema—Bollywood was also fortunate to work with him.

SPB, born in Nellore in Andhra Pradesh in 1946, trained to be an engineer but music was in his genes, with his father being a Harikatha artist. Though without formal training in music, he had a sense of music and a voice that was the envy of singers. *Samkalanaharam*, a 1980 super-hit that celebrated and popularised Carnatic music, owed its success as much to the song with a classical base that SPB rendered. He was equally at ease crooning foot-tapping numbers, romantic hits and devotional. He sang for all the big heroes and music directors in South Indian cinema and with the finest among his peers. His stage shows were an act in improvisation, inspiring co-singers and the orchestra to keep pace with him. In the midst of his busy singing schedule, he also found time to act and dub. He lent his voice to Kamal Haasan in over 150 Telugu films and to Ben Kingsley in the Telugu version of *Gandhi*.

SPB's art exudes the joy of a person who was in love with life and his vocation. The opening lines of a Tamil hit, perhaps, sum up his music: *Ilavani pathiraiyehi idayam varai nannu*—the love of a person who was in love with life and his vocation.



SANJAYA BARU

MANY INDIANS TRAVELLING overseas would have had my experience of the 1980s with a taxi driver in Dakar, Senegal, who offered to drive me around for free if I would part with a music cassette of Anilabh Bachchan's latest movie. From Raj Kapoor in Moscow in the 1950s to Aamir Khan in Beijing more recently, Bollywood actors have been India's cultural ambassadors. In Tokyo's Diet Prime Minister Manmohan Singh received resounding applause when he informed his audience that he was aware of the popularity of "Odori Maharajah" (Dancing Maharajah), as Tamil actor Rajinikanth was popularly known in Japan.

Among the earliest strategic policy analysts to draw attention to the diplomatic benefits of Indian cinema's overseas popularity was none other than the guru of strategic affairs, K. Subrahmanyam. I had fascinating conversations with him a quarter century ago on the "foreign policy" of Hollywood. It was in 1990 that American political scientist Joseph Nye coined the phrase "soft power" exploring the US's global cultural influence that added to its economic, technological and military power. "When one country gets other countries to want what it wants," he said, "that would be its 'co-optive or soft power', as opposed to its 'hard or command power' of ordering others to do what it wants." If cinema or music can make a country popular in another that would be its soft power.

Subrahmanyam drew my attention to various examples of soft power. Worried about rising communist influence in Italy, and competing with the Soviet Union for the affection of Italians, agencies of the US government encouraged Hollywood to make films that reminded Italians of the 1960s about the sacrifice of US soldiers during World War II. Readers from my generation would be familiar with Gino Lollobrigida's *Bona Sera*, Mrs. Campbell and Stanley Kramer's film version of Robert Crichton's *The Secret of Santa Vittoria*, films that aimed to project American popularity in Italy.

While some in Washington DC understood the many external diplomatic uses of Hollywood's soft power, there have been others who have sought to malign the film industry in pursuit of their own domestic political

It is a national asset. Destroying its credibility for partisan-political purposes harms national interest

Attacking Bollywood as an institution in pursuit of a political party's partisan and ideological agenda, as is now happening, does not serve the national purpose. It is now becoming increasingly obvious that Hindu extremists within the so-called Sangh Parivar have targeted Bollywood for a variety of reasons. There is the view that Bollywood had come to be dominated by Muslims and Urdu. A campaign is afoot to 'Hinduise' and 'Hindi-ise' it. There is also the view that the lifestyle of cinema celebrities has encouraged young people to mimic an alien culture—from dress to drugs—forgetting that semi-nakedness and smoking weed are very desi attributes.

agenda. The most infamous of them all was Senator Joseph McCarthy who took it upon himself to purge Hollywood of alleged communist influence. A recent film, *Trumbo*, brings out poignantly the hounding of Hollywood script writer Dalton Trumbo by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) for being a member of the communist party. While both the Pentagon and CIA have had internal offices devoted to liaising with and funding Hollywood, the power elites of Washington DC and Hollywood have had a testy love-hate relationship that has endured over the years. Hollywood has had its favourite and detested politicians, while Washington DC's power elite have had their favourite and black-listed Hollywood producers, directors and actors. Few US Presidents have divided Hollywood more than Donald Trump. Oscar-winning stars like Meryl Streep and Robert De Niro criticised Trump for his politics and his crude rudeness and, in turn, Trump has attacked them.

Bollywood, too, has lived with its love-hate relationship with New Delhi. From India Gandhi's ban on the airing of Kishore Kumar songs during the Emergency to the politically motivated and orchestrated boycott of several actors and directors today, there have been many examples of political bossism stifling freedom of expression in cinema. On the other hand, many film actors from Sunil Dutt and Rajesh Khanna to Anupam Kher and Akshay Kumar have happily courted the Delhi Darbar.

Quite apart from such individual relationships, there has developed over time a certain institutional relationship between New Delhi and Bollywood, though it is not yet as well-oiled, subtle and effective as the relationship between Washington DC and Hollywood. If indeed power elites in both sides of a nation's soft power, then it is incumbent on the institutions of the state to deal with the former in a responsible and not overly partisan manner. If the state is an institution, not a person, the pursuit of a political party's partisan and ideological agenda, as is now happening, does not serve the national purpose. It is now becoming increasingly obvious that Hindu extremists within the so-called Sangh Parivar have

targeted Bollywood for a variety of reasons. There is the view that Bollywood had come to be dominated by Muslims and Urdu. A campaign is afoot to "Hinduise" and "Hindi-ise" it. There is also the view that the lifestyle of cinema celebrities has encouraged young people to mimic an alien culture—from dress to drugs—forgetting that semi-nakedness and smoking weed are very desi attributes.

On top of this middle-class communal and cultural critique some have begun to impose a caste perspective. Language, ethnicity, caste, class and even colour of skin are as inherent to cultural attitudes in India and Bollywood is no exception. To seek to purge Bollywood of one set of biases in favour of another is a political project but not one that would serve the larger cause of promoting diversity of talent and perspectives in Indian cinema.

While cleaning Bollywood of black money and bad influence is a worthy endeavour, the pursuit of political agendas that stifle free expression in the name of nationalism and puritanism, can rob popular culture of its soft power. Social media has been full of brazen campaigns against highly regarded Muslim actors like Shah Rukh Khan and Aamir Khan and writers like Javed Akhtar, as well as the icons of alternative cinema like Shyam Benegal. The media frenzy being whipped up about the personal life of actors harms not just the individuals involved but the institutions they function in. Cultural policing by the state and majoritarian politics can rob Indian cinema of its soft power with popular culture increasingly viewed as propaganda.

Indian cinema is a national institution and a national asset. It is an aspect of Indian soft power. In destroying its credibility by hurting the standing and credibility of the individuals who make these institutions tick, we harm the national interest. By muting the voice of Kishore Kumar on All India Radio, India Gandhi's government harmed the credibility of state broadcasting, not Kishore's popularity. Narendra Modi's government should not walk down that slippery slope.

Sanjaya Baru is a former Media Advisor to Prime Minister of India

SHE BROKE THROUGH

Isher Judge Ahluwalia was inspired by issues of urbanisation and governance



RAJAT KATHURIA

WHEN THE PHONE rang to inform me of the passing away of Isher Judge Ahluwalia, former chairperson of ICRIER and my former boss, the world stopped, if only for an instant, as if someone had pressed a pause button. The poignancy of the moment was accompanied by a flashback of memories of a smiling Isher with perfectly groomed salt and pepper hair, announcing with grace, dignity, poise, charm and brilliance, the start of another conference at ICRIER. Her public persona was larger than life. Behind the exterior, there was also an Isher who was compassionate, supportive, loyal and who possessed almost a childlike desire to learn about issues that drew her interest.

My close association with Isher began fittingly with a conference in April 2012. I was to take over as director and chief executive of ICRIER later that year. She decided to "induct" me at an ICRIER event in Vigyan Bhawan where the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was the chief guest. An updated edition of the festschrift, *India's Economic Reforms and Development: Essays for Manmohan Singh*, co-edited by me to be presented to him. She told me Dr Singh (she always called him that) had agreed to come to only listen but secretly hoped he would say a few words. She felt strongly that India's growth model needed new direction and that Singh could provide leadership as he had in 1991.

Over the years, I have shared platforms with stalwarts from government, academia and the private sector. When I questioned whether he belonged there, Isher insisted I did, and went on to supply the motivation and inspiration. What was abundantly clear to me was that ICRIER's

She once told me that allowing women to work flexibly from home (much before COVID struck) would double their productivity for they need to prove themselves through their work rather than visibility in the office. Often in public platforms Isher would proudly declare that ICRIER owes much of its success to its favourable gender balance. ICRIER has had around 70 per cent women for much of its recent history.

vast reputation and standing was inextricably linked with Isher. On occasions, ICRIER was (embarrassingly for her) referred to as her institute. Her name opened doors and funding opportunities, and after having worked closely with her, I can say with complete conviction that ICRIER was in her DNA. She was constantly thinking about ways to enhance the quality of research, attract new talent and raise more funds and was successful in all three.

For a scholar of her stature and with all the exceptional achievements to boot, she could well have rested on her laurels. There was nothing left to prove. But that was not Isher. Thank God for that. Not only did she inspire but was herself inspired by issues of urbanisation and governance. That, she often proudly declared, was her second calling as an economist. She made the area her own and would delight in speaking on urban issues, an area in which, in less than a decade, she acquired complete command. We often spoke about these issues in her office and home. In one such interaction she told me with almost childlike pleasure she had attended a talk by the visiting Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore, Tharman Shanmughanathan and asked him the definition of a smart city. His response was the use of technology to provide efficient and affordable smart services to citizens. Can Indian cities be smart without the basics of water, solid waste management, sanitation and public transport she asked rhetorically.

Her remarkable memoir, *Breaking Through*, was heroically completed during the time she was suffering from acute ill health and despite that she produced the most touching, readable

and stirring memoir of an extraordinary life. She dedicated the book to her two daughters-in-law, reinforcing what she had done through her professional life—support women and women economists. She once told me that allowing women to work flexibly from home (much before COVID struck) would double their productivity for they need to prove themselves through their work rather than visibility in the office. Often in public platforms Isher would proudly declare that ICRIER owes much of its success to its favourable gender balance. ICRIER has had around 70 per cent women for much of its recent history.

Her last public appearance at ICRIER platform was in February this year at the launch of Montek Singh Ahluwalia's memoir, *Backstage*. She worked tirelessly 'backstage' to help him complete it, proof read drafts, check data sources and at the launch she busied in the adulation that he received. She broke down several times that evening, knowing what was in store, but was happy at another result. Singh who was the chief guest, spoke expansively and spontaneously on what was wrong with India's growth model. Her secret wish had been granted. She remained loyal to him throughout. It was destined perhaps that she breathed her last on Singh's 88th birthday. Some things are best accepted as god's will. At ICRIER, we will continue to celebrate her life. Isher's couplet sums it up: *Khadi ki tar badal itna ki har taqdeer se pahle khuda bande se khud phir bhi taari razi kya hai*.

The writer is director of chief executive, ICRIER. Views are personal

SEPTEMBER 29, 1980, FORTY YEARS AGO

INDIAN EXPRESS

SEPTEMBER 29, 1980

CLAIMS ON OIL HUB

IRAQ SAID its forces punched 80 km inside Iran and were battling for control of three major cities in Iran's oil heartland. Iran denied these claims and said its forces were fighting back strongly. Iraq claimed the capture of Ahwaz, capital of Iran's oil province, and Iraqi forces were reported inside Kharramshahr and had besieged Abadan and Derful. Baghdad said its forces had crushed the Karheli herd defence line of Dezful, 110 km north of Ahwaz. Iran called claims that the announcement that Ahwaz had fallen a "great lie". Iraq accused Iran from broadcasting from another transmitter to "make the Iranian people believe that Ahwaz had fallen".

UP'S POLICE REVAMP

UP CHIEF MINISTER Vishwanath Prasad Singh has said that the provincial armed constabulary might be increased to weed out communal elements. He, however, ruled out the possibility of the PAC being disbanded as is being demanded by several leaders. Singh said that the force had been overworked during the Janata Party and Lok Dal governments because of several riots. PAC deployment was 80 per cent to 90 per cent, as a result of which the force did not have a single day of training, a necessary routine, he claimed.

OPPOSITION MEET

OPPOSITION LEADERS MET TO DISCUSS THE

parties—CPM, CPI, Lok Dal, Forward Block, RSP and Congress—in Delhi adopted a draft resolution on price rise, communalism and civil liberties. The draft was not read out at the session because members had not been given a copy. Among the few points which did not find a place was the demand to cancel the Asian Games in Delhi.

RAJIV GOES TRAINING

RAJIV GANDHI ARRIVED in Hyderabad for a course at the Central Training Institute of the Indian Airlines. He was asked when he saw a few Congress members at the airport.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2020

THE IDEAS PAGE

Tending to the neighbourhood

The anxiety that India is losing clout in the Subcontinent is not new. India's relations with its neighbours will always be about carefully managing the inevitable difficulties that arise



RAJA MANDALA
BY C RAJA MOHAN

THE IDEA THAT India is losing clout in the neighbourhood has recently become a special cause for anxiety among Delhi's commentators. Is this concern really new? A longer look at India's regional diplomacy suggests that Delhi has been losing some and winning some at any time in the region.

The current chatter on India's regional diplomatic failures takes me back to the early 1980s, when I began to track India's neighbourhood diplomacy at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses. I was drafted as a reporter for a major conference on "India and its neighbours", organised by India International Centre. The conference brought together the leading lights of India's foreign policy establishment—including current and former officials, newspaper editors and academics. The luminaries argued with each other on the sources of the problem and the remedies for it.

The divisions in the foreign policy elite only mirrored the fracture already evident in the political class. During the campaign for the 1977 general elections, the opposition Janata Party criticised Prime Minister Indira Gandhi for her costly pursuit of regional hegemony in South Asia and promised to build good neighbourly relations. Prime Minister Morarji Desai and his foreign minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee did bring about some important correctives. But it did not take long for them to face the same criticism as Indira Gandhi. No government since then has escaped the charge of mistaking the neighbourhood.

Was there a "golden age" in India's neighbourhood policy? Yes and no. If there ever was an extended period of India's regional primacy, it was before Independence. As the regional expression of the then sole superpower, Britain, the Raj exercised much sway not just over the neighbourhood but across the Indo-Pacific, if you will, during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

The Indian Ocean littoral was dominated by the Royal Navy and the Indian Army. Indian capital and labour moved across the Indo-Pacific. On the continental side, the Raj surrounded itself with a series of buffer states and protectorates and often projected military power beyond them. The Raj contributed to British efforts in developing new port cities (from Aden to Hong Kong), and constructing trans-regional connectivity through roads and railways. (You might call it the British Belt and Road Initiative!)

Even for the Raj, one of the mightiest powers in history, it was an unceasing struggle to sustain its primacy. It had to constantly fend off its European rivals from encroaching into the periphery of the Raj. The Great Game was about keeping the Dutch, French, Germans, Russians and Japanese at arm's length. There were the pesky local rulers who had to be continually disciplined, deposed or bought. Rebellions across the littoral—whether the Boers of Southern Africa or the Fajal of Tipu in Waziristan—had to be crushed. Keeping the Subcontinent safe resulted in frequent military and political disasters—in Afghanistan to Burma and



C R Sankaranar

Xinjiang to Singapore.

The notion of regional primacy certainly persisted in the Nehru era—recall the three security treaties that the first prime minister signed with Bhutan, Sikkim and Nepal during 1949-50. The newly-formed Ministry of External Affairs, the legatee of the Foreign and Political Department of the Raj, certainly retained some of the viceregal style of political agents in the neighbourhood. But beyond the region, Nehru had put India on a different diplomatic track that emphasised sovereign equality among nations.

Forget for a moment the schizophrenia this duality generated among the Indian diplomats: primacy was hard to sustain after Independence even within the immediate neighbourhood. Five reasons stand out.

One is the Partition of the Subcontinent. The problems generated by the great division of the Subcontinent on religious lines continue to animate the region. No amount of virtuesignalling in the name of good neighbourly policy can help fix the challenges of settling boundaries, sharing river-waters, protecting the rights of minorities, and easing the flow of goods and people. The burden of the Subcontinent's history is not easily discarded.

Second, the arrival of China at the Indo-Tibetan frontier during 1950-51. The unification of China amidst the Partition of India had profoundly transformed the geopolitical context of India. Beyond the bilateral territorial dispute in the Himalayas, the emergence of a large and purposeful state on India's frontiers was going to be a problem given the ease with which it could constrain Delhi within the Subcontinent. If it was the Raj that advanced northwards across the Himalayas before 1950, it would be China's turn now for a relentless southward ingress into the Subcontinent.

Third was independence India's conscious choice in favour of de-globalisation, which led to a steady dissipation of commercial connectivity with the neighbours. For Delhi's new project for autarky was not just from the global economy but also the regional one. India's economic reorientation since the 1990s and the rediscovery of regionalism had opened possibilities for reconnecting with its neighbours. Delhi today is acutely aware of the need to revive regional connectivity.

There is much progress in recent years—note, for example, the recent launch of a ferry service to the Maldives or the reopening of inland waterways with Bangladesh. But India has a long way to go.

Consider the recent fracas of union ex-

Here is an important question that Delhi's foreign policy debate avoids. Can India persistently champion the Tamil minority rights in Sri Lanka without incurring any costs with the Sinhala majority? But asking that question takes us to India's own domestic politics. Can Delhi ignore sentiments in India's Tamil Nadu in making its Sri Lanka policy? Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, for example, did not attend the Colombo Commonwealth Summit in 2013 because Congress leaders from Tamil Nadu opposed the visit by citing the impending elections.

see the neighbourhood as an integrated geopolitical space. But for the commerce ministry, there is no difference between Bangladesh, Bolivia, and Brunei. Integrating India's regional economic and foreign policy remains a major challenge.

Fourth is the persistent fallacy in Delhi that the neighbourhood is India's to will. It ignores the rise of political agency among neighbourhood elites and mass politics that they need to manage. Their imperatives don't always coincide with those of Delhi. On top of this, divisions within an elite easily intersect with their engagement with major powers, including India. China and the US, it is unlikely that Delhi can completely insulate itself against the intra-elite conflicts in the neighbourhood.

That insurance is tied to a fifth factor—the role of domestic politics in India's regional policy. Here is an important question that Delhi's foreign policy debate avoids. Can India persistently champion Tamil minority rights in Sri Lanka without incurring any costs with the Sinhala majority? But asking that question takes us to India's own domestic politics. Can Delhi ignore sentiments in India's Tamil Nadu in making its Sri Lanka policy? Manmohan Singh, for example, did not attend the Colombo Commonwealth Summit in 2013 because Congress leaders from Tamil Nadu opposed the visit by citing the impending elections. Manmohan Singh pulled the plug at the very last minute on the Tessa Waters agreement that PM Singh was to sign in Dhaka in 2011.

There are no easy answers to the regional difficulties that trouble all governments in Delhi. The source of the problem lies in the deeply interconnected nature of South Asian societies administered by multiple sovereigns. Contrary to the prevailing belief, India's domestic politics always had an impact on our regional policy. The same is true of our neighbours, whose domestic politics impact their engagement with India.

There is no happy end-state in India's relations with its neighbours. It will always be about carefully managing the inevitable difficulties that arise. Timely responses to emerging problems, preventing small issues from becoming big, and aligning Delhi's regional economic policy with India's natural geographic advantages are some important elements of any successful management of India's perennial neighbourhood challenges.

The writer is director, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore and contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Unanimity is a rare commodity in the tribal world of newspapers, but there has, rightly, been no dissent from the view that Evans was the most inspiring editor of his generation, and perhaps of any."

—THE OBSERVER

Our place at the global high table

Prime Minister underlined India's rightful claim to Security Council and by calling out the UN on Covid, emerged as the voice of many nations too



JAGAT PRAKASH NADDA

PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA Modi's historic address in the United Nations General Assembly, last week, was remarkable in many ways, particularly for the assertive manner in which he laid out India's claim to be a permanent member of the Security Council. PM Modi also did what no other head of state managed to—highlight the failure and incompetence of the UN in dealing with the pandemic. Thus, besides being the voice of 130 crore Indians, PM Modi emerged as the voice of many nations, particularly the smaller and weaker ones.

Without mincing words, the PM categorically questioned for how long will India—which has been contributing immensely towards the growth and strengthening of the UN—be kept out of the global body's decision-making process.

PM Modi highlighted how the situation has changed since the formation of the UN 75 years ago, when the world was trying to emerge out of the ravages of World War II. The entire world was badly shaken by the atom bomb explosions in Japan. India was waging a decisive battle for its Independence and colonialism was in its last throes. He highlighted how, in the last seven decades, the global scenario has completely changed. The world has seen far-reaching changes in this period—the Cold War, the disintegration of the USSR and the unification of Germany. We have also seen many countries attaining freedom, while many nations have been racked by civil wars. There were also many small and big wars, and many nations disintegrated to become smaller entities.

PM Modi said that the UN has kept itself aloof from reforms and restructuring—that he, emphasised, is the need of the hour. When the UN came into being in 1945, its charter was signed by 50 nations. Today, it has 193 member states. But the structure of such an important global organisation remains unchanged. We still have five permanent members in the Security Council. The PM said the UN's 75th anniversary should not just be a symbolic affair, it should go down in history as a landmark occasion by making the body more inclusive.

The PM made clear his disappointment at the UN's response to the COVID pandemic. He said that the global body had acted indifferently in these unprecedented times when lakhs of people have succumbed to the deadly virus. It has been pointed out how the WHO failed to rise to the occasion by not providing succour and hope to the poor and weaker nations.

The PM told the world how India has believed and practised universal brotherhood and cooperation. India has also been committed to global peace, prosperity and security. India has always stood by the UN in dealing with forces which are against humanity

and global peace. The PM reiterated that as a founding member of the UN, it is India's obligation and responsibility to fight and stand for its core values. A testimony to India's commitment is its unwavering contribution to peace missions and the supreme sacrifices made by the country's soldiers.

It is due to the PM's sustained efforts that, besides creating a unique space for itself in the world in the last six years, India has also managed to make the lives of its citizens better through various social and economic schemes. PM Modi gave a glimpse of this during his address. He told the world how the policy of "reform, perform and transform" has led to massive changes in the Indian society, which used to be perceived as impossible or unimaginable.

In the last five years, the Modi government has added 40 crore people to the banking system. It has also brought 60 crore people out of the curse of open defecation. PM Modi has now taken the pledge to provide safe drinking water to 15 crore households and connect 60 lakh villages with high-speed broadband. PM Modi has made a visible impact on the health infrastructure through his unique initiatives and made available to the masses affordable healthcare through the Ayushman Card scheme and Jan Aushadhi stores.

The PM has also turned the pandemic into an opportunity by giving the nation a golden chance to become "atmanirbhar" (self-reliant). PM Modi's philosophy is being widely appreciated in the world. It is also giving inspiration to other nations.

PM Modi's address to the UN has forced the world to take note of the fact that India is no longer a pushover. It has become a nation that dares to stand up for its rights. He also underlined India's rightful claim—permanent membership of the Security Council.

In 2021, India will become the non-permanent member of the Security Council, for the eighth time. India has made valuable contributions to the growth and success of the UN, and it is for this reason that India is more emphatically demanding its rightful position. The world is looking up to India. A glimpse of this was seen when 187 out of 190 nations voted overwhelmingly in favour of India to become a non-permanent member of the Security Council.

India, a nuclear superpower, has remained committed to global organisation remains unchanged. It is the world's largest democracy, inhabited by 18 per cent of the global population. India has been an important member of all major global economic forums and has been contributing to the world's economic progress.

PM Modi categorically stated how the representation of Africa and South America has been disproportionately low in the UN, which is dominated by five nations. The time has come to rectify this anomaly, a demand that has been repeatedly raised by various global bodies including the G-4. The PM's address has brought the attention of the nations to a common platform: these nations strongly feel that UN reform is the need of the hour and India deserves its rightful position at the global body.

The writer is national president, Bharatiya Janata Party



NALINI SINGH

THE BJP'S VETERAN leaders LK Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi, Kalyan Singh, Uma Bharati and 28 others, including Sangh Parishad worthies, have been asked to be present in Lucknow on Wednesday, as Special CBI Judge SK Vaidya delivers the judgment on the criminal conspiracies in the demolition of the "disputed structure" of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, on December 6, 1992. Will the verdict be guilty or innocent? It is difficult to fathom what some of these notable accused are thinking today about the destruction of the mosque, since few have spoken publicly. Uma Bharati is one of the few who has claimed that it was not matter to her what the judgment will be: "I am sent to the gallows, I will be blessed."

Some of the prominent accused have denied all charges of conspiracy. Yet today, 24 hours before the verdict, do some of the accused wish silently that the mosque had not been flattened, or are they steadfast in their belief that the bruised Hindu faith was avenged only when the domes of the 500-year-old Babri Masjid crumbled at their feet 28 years ago?

The Supreme Court has already recognised that the "polestar of faith and belief" among the Hindus is that the disputed mosque was built on the very temple which was made sacred by Lord Rama's birth. Of course, since Rama was yuvraj, son of King Dashrath, he was doubtless born in the king's palace, not in a temple (which would have

No victors, no survivors

A day before verdict in Babri Masjid demolition case, a message from the epics

Based on astronomical information on the constellation of stars and eclipses corresponding to events in the Ramayan, scholars have conjectured that the events described in the Ramayan took place 7000 years ago, and that this sweeping epic was first composed and then written in Sanskrit by sage Valmiki, and written manuscripts of his compositions have been traced to BCE 200—that is, to 2,200 years ago.

Tomorrow's judgment on the criminal conspiracy to demolish the 500-year-old masjid in Ayodhya, refers to a relatively recent event in the 7,000-year-old belief in Ram's birthplace being at the exact spot where the mosque was located. Thousands of years prior to this demolition, the chronicler of Ram's life, sage Valmiki had pointed to two astonishing and complex truths manifested by Ram and Sita after their return to Ayodhya.

After their victorious reception in Ayodhya, Sita, who was pregnant, was again faced with a clamour for proof of her marital fidelity and innocence. Rather than submit to this ominous demand, Sita took shelter in Valmiki's Ram when Ram's twin sons, Lava and Kush were born. Later, after Ram acknowledged the twins as his progeny, Sita asked the goddess Earth "to open wide for me" (Sarga 88, verse 11) when upon "from the surface of the earth there arose an unsurpassed heavenly throne" (verse 12) and Dharini, who was on the throne, took Maithili (Sita) in her

earth's surface as Sita re-entomb herself. Ram ruled Ayodhya benignly for 10,000 years (the cosmic equivalent of the blinking of an eye) during which Lava and Kush learnt statecraft. But the Valmiki Ramayan notes in the Uttar Kanda (Sarga 95-100) that one day Ram set forth from the palace on foot to the river Sarayu, with his brothers Bharat and Shatrughan (Lakshman had died), and when they reached the river, Ram "bodily entered the sacred water of the Sarayu" and immersed himself fully, as did his brothers, amid "a blazing energy proper to Vishnu". Victorious Ram immersed himself in the river.

Victory did not alter Ram and Sita to the indulgence of perpetual triumph, and in the disappearance from the apron of life, they affirmed, one, that there are no victors in life and two, that there are no survivors. And this is the sparkling truth with which the great Hindu faith is woven. But does the other Hindu epic, the Ramayan, affirm this interpretation of victory and extinction, or does it valorise eternal triumph? Gita Ved Vyasa's epic describes an 18-day war between two sets of cousins, the Pandavas (five in number) and the Kauravas (numbering 100). The Pandavas swept up a conclusive victory under the sharp guidance of Lord Krishna through his dialogue with Arjun, the third Pandava. This dialogue nestles as the invaluable Gita in the

Various narratives suggest that after vanquishing and killing the Kauravas, the Pandavas ruled for 36 years over Hastinapur and Indraprastha. But this land had been laid waste, with most young men killed in the war. The victorious Pandavas were exhausted, and despite winning all, they desired, they were unhappy with conflicts in the concept of life and living.

Eventually, bestowing the kingdom upon Parikshit (Arjun's grandson), the Pandava brothers and wife Draupadi walked away from the land they had conquered and set off for the Himalayas. But each of the Pandavas, and Draupadi, died on the way. Only Yudhishtira reached heaven's portal with Yama, the god of Death, in the form of a dog, and yet even he could not enter until he had performed a long penance for his sins. In essence, the Mahabharata confirms the boundless truths of the Valmiki Ramayan—about triumph and survival.

So, before the CBI court's verdict tomorrow, are the 32 accused of the conspiracy of the demolition of Babri Masjid asking themselves if they are victors because the domes were pulverised, or if the "Muslim side" asking itself if a guilty verdict will be their victory?

For survivors, look back in awe at the great Hindu epic—saints who held that in life there are no victors and no survivors.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

HONOUR PROCEDURE

THIS REFERS TO the article, "How Vajpayee took on Nehru govt over 1962 Chinese aggression" (IE, September 28). After reading the article, one thing jumps out at the reader and must be appreciated. Despite a majority in the House and a meagre Opposition, Jawaharlal Nehru as prime minister used to honour parliamentary procedure and principle. He would answer the questions raised by opposition leaders. Contrast this with the treatment meted out by the present government to the Opposition. It has not even held a discussion on major bills before passing them, ignoring a constitutional requirement.

R M Deshpande, Navi Mumbai

GO-TO MAN

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "The navigator" (IE, September 28). With his suave manner dignified demeanor, Joshi Jagan Singh proved to be the then prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's go-to man. He was a managing temperamental coalition partner Jayalalitha or dealing with the high jackers of ITC-184 or calming down the estranged international community after India became a nuclear power—he is the man the Prime Minister would depend on. This and his image as a liberal face of the RSS-congress party helped to keep the secular parties together with BJP.

Y G Choudhary, Pune

ROADMAP NEEDED

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Fooling all the people all the time" (IE, September 27). India's agricultural sector has been historically a prisoner of the APMCs. Essential Commodities Act and mid-1960s. The government has been trying to reform the sector on these aspects. But the moot point remains how it was planned to be done and when. No timelines were mentioned after India became a nuclear power—the Modi government should post-haste crystallise action plans, and give a push to private investments in farm infrastructure, as also grant MSP, a legal right of the farmers.

Ravi Bhoolchand Jain, Zirakpur

IDEAS ONLINE

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THE HINDU
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2020

OPED 7

UN and the retreat from multilateralism

The UN's capacity to face diverse challenges depends upon nations acting collectively



D.P. SRIVASTAVA

The United Nations commemorated its 75th anniversary on September 21, 2020 by adopting a Declaration. The anniversary comes at a time when the world is witnessing a retreat from multilateralism. It also faces an unprecedented pandemic. In his address to the UN on September 22, the UN Secretary-General called the pandemic "the fifth horseman". No one could have predicted it. It has also brought in its wake the deepest recession the world has seen since the 1930s. This has made it more difficult to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) the UN had adopted. The Secretary-General said the world is "careening off track" in achieving the SDGs.

Challenge to multilateralism

The challenge to multilateralism is coming not from the have-nots, but the main stakeholders of the system. The U.S. is not alone in withdrawing from multilateralism. Brexit has shown that nationalism remains strong in Europe. It has delivered a blow to the idea of Europe, united and whole. Nevertheless, the most important development is the position of the U.S. As French President Emmanuel Macron remarked in his speech at the UN General Assembly, the U.S., which created the international system as we know today, is no longer willing to be its "guarantor of last resort". U.S. President Donald Trump stressed "America First" in his speech, and suggested that others too should put their countries first.

China has stepped to take advantage of the West's retreat from multilateralism. But China's assertion of a role on the world stage is not an embrace of the idea of multilateralism. Its flagship Belt and Road Initiative consists of a series of bilateral credit agreements with recipient countries with no mechanism for multilateral consultation or oversight. Curiously, President Xi Jinping's speech at the UN General Assembly did not mention it. The



*Prime Minister Narendra Modi focused on UN reforms and India's contribution to UN Peacekeeping, at the 75th session of the UNGA on September 26, 2020, in New York. *— AFP*

European Union's and U.S.'s sanctions against Russia have driven it closer to China. The rift between the permanent members of the Security Council has already started affecting the work of the UN Security Council.

The speeches at the regular session of the UN General Assembly on September 22 brought out the clash of perspectives of the U.S. and China. President Trump highlighted China's culpability in the spread of the pandemic. He pointed out that China had banned internal flights but allowed international flights from Wuhan to continue. This set the stage for the spread of COVID-19. The World Health Organization also failed to provide early warnings. President Xi's speech sought to project the fight against COVID-19 as a matter of collective responsibility of the international community. He said China will "honour" its commitment to provide \$2 billion assistance to the developing countries over two years.

This was clearly a reference to existing pledges without bringing additional resources to tackle a crisis which has tipped the world economy into recession. This is not a large amount considering the scale. The actual assistance committed to the UN COVID-19 response fund was a

paltry \$50 million in addition to a similar amount pledged earlier.

President Macron pointed out that while the U.S. is withdrawing, the world faces China's projection beyond its frontiers. He also highlighted problems nearer home posed by Turkey's intervention in Syria, Libya, and the Eastern Mediterranean, which is a breach of international law. The last was a reference to Turkey sending a drilling ship in Greek and Cypriot exclusive economic zones. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan made a detailed reference to the Jamnu and Kashmir issue. Though otherwise Mr. Erdogan's statements may not matter, Turkey has assumed the position of UN General Assembly President.

Several hurdles

The UN Secretary-General's report on the work of the organisation highlights some of the achievements and challenges the world body faces. Over 40 UN political missions and peacekeeping operations engage 95,000 troops, police, and civil personnel. To be effective, they have to be put on a sound financial basis. The UN peacekeeping budget, a little over \$8 billion, is a small fraction of the \$1.9 trillion military expenditure govern-

ments made in 2019. Yet it suffers from a paucity of resources. There was an outstanding assessed contribution of \$1.7 billion for peacekeeping activities by the end of the financial year. Similarly, there was an outstanding \$711 million in the assessed contribution for the general budget. Most of the humanitarian assistance, developmental work, and budgets of the specialised agencies are based on voluntary contributions. There are calls for increasing public-private partnerships. This is not a satisfactory arrangement. The UN provides 'public goods' in terms of peace and development often in remote parts of the world. There may not be enough appetite on the part of corporations. The UN remains an inter-governmental body.

Most world leaders spoke of climate change. President Trump mentioned that China's emissions are nearly twice of those of the U.S., and despite its withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, the U.S. has reduced its carbon emissions by more than any country in the world. President Xi said that after peaking emissions by 2030, China will achieve carbon neutrality before 2060. President Macron said that he was determined to see the EU agree on a target of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050.

The Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan, in his speech made an extensive reference to Jamnu and Kashmir. Though this is customary for Pakistani leaders, he brought a particularly uncivil tone to the discourse. Meanwhile, his country has slid to the 134th rank in the UN SDG index, the lowest for any country in South Asia.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi focused on UN reforms and India's contribution to UN Peacekeeping for which we can be justly proud. What does the UN bring to the developing countries? It gives them greater political voice. We need to support reform not only to expand the permanent members' category of the Security Council but also to revitalise the role of the General Assembly. The retreat from multilateralism would undermine the UN's capacity to face diverse challenges.

D.P. Srivastava is former Ambassador to Iran. He dealt with United Nations issues for eight years in the Ministry of External Affairs.

Dalit politics at a crossroads

Mayawati's invocation of Lord Parshuram may blur Kanshi Ram's efforts of building a radical Dalit consciousness in U.P.



BADRI NARAYAN

In the 1990s, when Hindutva forces launched the Ram Jannabhoomi movement, Kanshi Ram, the founder of the Dalit-Bahujan movement and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), invoked subaltern myths and icons to counter it. Kanshi Ram gathered Dalit icons from oral and folk narratives and reinvented minor characters of the Ramayana and Mahabharata in the process of developing a counter-Hindutva narrative. The icons he invoked included Shambuka, Eklavya, Uda Devi, Jhalkaribai, and Rabidas. This helped mobilise the Bahujans in Uttar Pradesh and resulted in a BSP-led government in U.P. four times. The myths and icons of the Dalits questioned and ruptured the dominance of one narrative.

Invoking Lord Parshuram

Contrast this to what is happening now. In August, when the 'bhoomi puja' for the Ram temple took place in Ayodhya, attended by the Prime Minister, BSP leader Mayawati supported it. At the same time, Ms. Mayawati promised to pay respect to the memory of Lord Parshuram by building hospitals in his name and even a statue of him bigger than the 108-feet tall statue that the Samajwadi Party (SP) promised to erect. The two opposition parties in U.P. seem to be competing with each other to influence a section of the Brahmin community which is unhappy with the Yogi Adityanath-led Bharatiya Janata Party regime in U.P.

Lord Parshuram is worshipped by various Brahmin sub-castes as their *kulpurush* (protector of a clan). Parshuram is not a subversive icon; he is, like Lord Ram, an avatar of Lord Vishnu. He appears for a brief moment in the story of the Ramayana to strengthen the moral authority of Lord Ram. Though he is seen in some narratives as contesting the myth of Lord Ram, in the Tulsikriti Ramayana, he is seen in a supportive role.

Short while, in the 1990s Kanshi Ram successfully countered the Lord Ram-centred Hindutva narrative. Now Ms. Mayawati's effort to invoke Lord Parshuram may blur the effort of building a radical Dalit consciousness. One may justify her current symbolic act as a process of reinvention. Perhaps she is trying to subvert the myth of Lord Parshuram to sharpen contradictions within the Hindutva base. But this could be beneficial

only in the short term. In the long term, it may be counterproductive for the politics of the marginalised. It may diminish the assertion of their identity against dominant power and culture.

If we analyse the making of Dalit consciousness in north India, we see that it is mainly inspired by Bhakti saints such as Sant Kabir, Sant Ravidas and Swami Shirdhar. They were saints who emerged progenitors of reform movements within the structure of Sanatana Hindu religion, but they added many radical elements in the process. These saints did not inspire Dalits to aggressively depart from Sanatana Hinduism.

The Adi Hindu movement

In the 19th century, Dalits were deeply influenced by Swami Achhootanand, the founder of the Adi Hindu movement. Swami Achhootanand inspired Dalits to get educated and launched a movement for this around the 1920s, even before B.R. Ambedkar did. He established a Dalit printing press in U.P. He published a magazine in U.P. for Dalits which gave space to them to write and publish their articles. Ambedkar used to refer to Swami Achhootanand as 'Swamiji'. Swami Achhootanand is a popular icon for a section of the Dalit communities in U.P.; yet, no political party has projected him as a Dalit hero in their attempt at mainstreaming the icons of the marginalised.

But while on the one hand, Swami Achhootanand's efforts evolved a radical consciousness which responds to Brahminical dominance, on the other, it also led to the idea of a Hindu identity in another form. His Adi Hindu movement proposed that Dalits, Advaitis and the marginalised are 'Adi Hindu'. Ambedkar's inspirational campaign urging Dalits to turn to Buddhism has slowly faded. The movement urging Dalits to convert to Buddhism has not gained momentum in the community, especially in north India. The longing among Dalits for a Hindu identity is growing stronger.

This means that there is space both for improvisation of radical Dalit consciousness and to assert a sense of belonging to Hinduism. It is the leaders who decide the direction they want to take and the direction they want the community to take. Ms. Mayawati, who doesn't seem to see much potential for her electoral politics by asserting a radical Dalit consciousness, seems to want to play Hindutva's game on their own turf. How this game will play out will only be known in the long term.

Badri Narayan is Director of the G.B. Pant Social Science Institute, Allahabad

The missing postwomen

There are very few postwomen and no physically challenged women in post offices in India

BUNKER ROY

The Prime Minister has publicly stated that his government will give priority to women, especially physically challenged women, while providing government jobs in rural areas. But sadly, the Department of Post seems to still have a 19th century mindset.

A dismal track record

Village post offices all over the country are crying for want of attention. They are characterised by low morale, poor monetary incentives and a hierarchical management system that dates back to pre-independence times. In the age of computers, emails and the Internet, the village postman is still highly respected. Nothing can replace face-to-face contact. He writes letters for illiterate mothers to their sons



agent" can operate Aadhaar Enrolment Centres. It was forbidden by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) to outsource these jobs, he said, so he was helpless. When a Member of the Postal Board was approached to speak to the Secretary, he said there was no point.

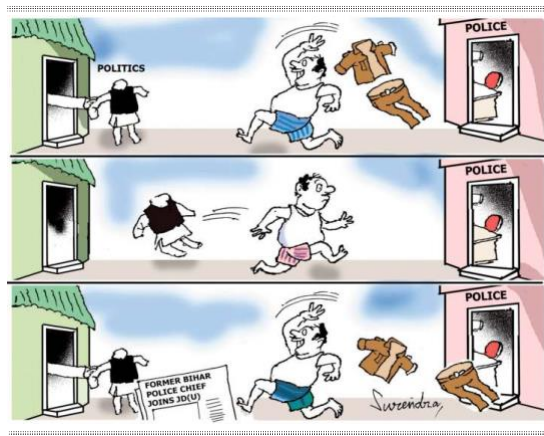
On May 21, 2020, UIDAI sent a notification to the Secretary of the Department of Post that read: "UIDAI do not have any objection if DoP either appoints Divyang on its roll or hire them from any manpower outsourcing agency for carrying Aadhaar enrolment/ update work in post offices subject to availability of DoP official as verifier at the centre."

Despite this notification, he remained unmoved. Further, the Director General of Post sent a circular asking other senior postal officers whether this would be a wise move. The Department of Post seems to really need a crash course on gender sensitivity.

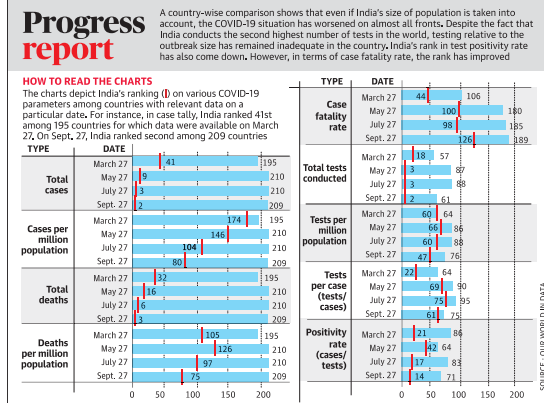
Unexplained resistance

It is the end of September, yet the Secretary of the Department of Post has not issued any orders for physically challenged rural women to operate the Aadhaar Enrolment Centres. The sub-post office in the village of Tilonia in Ajmer district of Rajasthan has an Aadhaar Centre. A qualified physically challenged woman is ready to operate the Aadhaar Centre. But it has been many months now and there seems to be great resistance from the Department of Post to break this glass ceiling. Can the Minister please personally intervene? When in doubt, set up a Committee. The mandate of this Committee should be to explore the practical possibilities of immediately hiring the daughters, some physically challenged, of village postmen who have retired or are about to retire looking for employment and security. That would indeed be a great achievement for the Department of Post.

Bunker Roy is the Founder Director of the Barefoot College in Tilonia, Ajmer District Rajasthan



DATA POINT



The Hindu

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 29, 1970

Nasser dead

President Nasser of the United Arab Republic died of heart attack here [Cairo] today [September 28] at 5:15 p.m. (20:45 I.S.T.). Cairo television and radio abruptly halted regular programmes at 8:30 p.m. (24 hours I.S.T.) and began broadcasting verses from the Koran for 30 minutes after which Vice-President Anwar Sadat announced the death of President Nasser. President Nasser, who was 52, had been treated in the Soviet Union for diabetes and a circulatory ailment. He was the most powerful and controversial Arab leader in modern history. It was under his influence that Jordan's King Hussein and Yasser Arafat, leader of the Palestinian commandos, met in Cairo this week-end to sign a peace treaty ending the Jordanian civil war. There had been no indication of any serious illness which Nasser might have suffered from. He went to Moscow in July this year for treatment of diabetes, but doctors there said he returned to Cairo in good health. Sadat said, in the death announcement, that he could not "find the right words to express the deep sorrow which befell the U.A.R. and the Arab nation."

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO SEPT. 29, 1920

The true issue

(From an editorial)

There seems to be still a considerable amount of misapprehension among the public as to the views which prevailed in the Special Congress session on political leaders in the country respecting the question of Non-Co-operation. The want of a full and accurate report of the proceedings of the Subjects Committee is one of the chief reasons for this misunderstanding. There was one section of leaders among whom were Sir Ashutosh Chandari, Mrs. Besant, Dewan Bahadur Govindraghavi and other men who were against the principle and programme of Non-Co-operation and urged the acceptance of the Reform Act as a partial statement of Swaraj. It is this view which has found expression in the manifesto issued by Sir A. Chandari and others, as will appear from our telegraph columns. The exponents of this view formed however a very small minority in the Congress. The great majority of the delegates were decidedly in favour of the principle of Non-Co-operation. They were agreed as to the basic grounds on which the Congress should proceed to shape its future policy and action. They were firmly of opinion that constitutional methods of agitation have entirely failed to achieve our object.

The
Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

[OUR TAKE]

Crop burning: No end in sight

In a year of farm protests, the issue becomes more complex. Innovate to tackle it effectively

The harvest season has begun in northwest India, and so has stubble burning and the unending search for a permanent solution to a problem that leads to severe air pollution in the region, especially in Delhi and the National Capital Region, every winter. According to a report in this paper on Monday, stubble burning may continue this year because central subsidies on straw management machinery are not attractive enough for small farmers to switch to them. Last week, Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal wrote to Union environment minister Prakash Javadekar, saying that the Centre must look into the Indian Agricultural Research Institute's (IARI) suggestion of converting stubble to manure using a chemical. Last year, an analysis of satellite data from the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center suggested no decline in the number of crop stubble fires in 2018 compared to 2017, despite the new policy for *in-situ* management of crop residue.

The challenge of disposing agricultural waste in India is significant. According to IARI, the net cropped area is 141.4 million hectares, and crop residues are estimated to be around 600 million tonnes every year, with generation being the highest in Uttar Pradesh, followed by Maharashtra, Punjab and Gujarat. Over the years, several policies have been proposed to address the issue, but they have been mainly *in-situ* technologies. The failure of these policies show that it is time to try out new multi-pronged approaches to tackle the problem: Incendivorous farmers to shift away from water-guzzling paddy and diversifying cropping patterns is one. Utilising crop residue in power plants, brick kilns and biomass gasifiers is another. A report by the Council on Energy, Environment and Trade suggests that increasing farmers' accessibility to stubble managing equipment by setting up more custom hiring centres and promoting rental models may work. Last year, Punjab and Haryana provided incentives to farmers, at ₹2,500 per acre, for managing the residue in alternative ways. But it was announced in the last week of November after much of the residue had already been cleared and was dropped this year after reports of the funds being misused at the panchayat level.

For any multi-pronged approach to work, there needs to be coordination between four groups: Farmers, states, Centre and scientists. At present, there seems to be a disconnect among all these groups and a lack of political will to find a solution. Mere lip-service from political leaders—the farm protests complicate the situation further this year; any policing move to control stubble burning will be seen as anti-farmer—is unlikely to take us forward.

Why herd immunity may not work

On Sunday, as India crossed six million Covid-19 cases, the Union health minister Harsh Vardhan said the country is far from achieving herd immunity. The minister cited the soon-to-be released findings of the second nationwide serological survey. The reality is that not enough Indians have built an immunological protection that could allow for going back to pre-pandemic behaviour.

What is also established is that India cannot pursue a herd immunity-focused strategy. Letting the virus run its course will overwhelm the health care system. Mumbai is believed to have faced this scenario. In Delhi, hospital beds dwindled rapidly before additional resources were mobilised. Additionally, some research suggests individual immunity may not last long enough to prevent future infections, making herd immunity an even riskier gamble. Many scientists have pointed out that herd immunity is a scientific tenet that cannot be used in the context of infection-acquired protection; it is possible only through an effective vaccine. And since vaccines are at least another year away, the minister's comments are a reminder that India must keep its focus on preventive measures as it heads into the festive season. Its citizens are battling behaviour fatigue and economic compulsion and may not adhere to social distancing and compulsory face-covering. It is important to address these while keeping distractions like herd immunity aside.

UN must go back to its original mandate

Its handling of the pandemic shows its diminished role in multilateral processes

The United Nations (UN) is observing the 75th anniversary of its founding amid the Covid-19 pandemic. Heads of States/governments marked the occasion with speeches delivered through the digital medium. They applauded the UN and the role it has played in the maintenance of international peace and security and in addressing major social and economic challenges. The reality is that the original and uplifting vision, which underlay the establishment of the UN, has lost its focus. The UN faces a crisis of credibility at the root of which is the enfeeblement of the spirit of internationalism and related to that, the diminishing role of multilateral processes in addressing cross-cutting and global challenges. This is evident in the marginal role that the UN is playing in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic and the doubts expressed over its credibility and effectiveness of the World Health Organization (WHO) in mobilising the international community in the fight against the virus. Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke of the concerns of countries like India and the need for reform in his address to the UN.

Despite the pandemic being a global crisis, it is being tackled as a public health emergency mostly at the national level. The results are suboptimal as is to be expected. The pandemic has spawned a major economic crisis, but countries are held in thrall by the growing confrontation between the largest and the second-largest economies of the world: The United States (US) and China. Without a minimal agreement between them on supporting the recovery of the global economy and trade, it is impossible to recreate the G-20 collaboration which dealt successfully with the global financial and economic crisis of 2007-08.

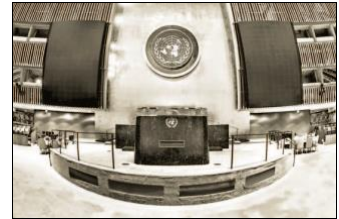
The World Trade Organization has been rendered irrelevant by the growing salience of large multi-national regional trade and investment arrangements such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the increasing recourse to bilateral deals. Both global economy and trade flows are becoming fragmented and the international economic environment is less conducive to the development of countries like India and Pakistan. Multilateralism is more important to emerging countries whose bargaining power is limited. But India, too, appears to have adopted the current preference among major countries to deal with issues through a stronger and more self-centred nationalism. The UN today is a depleted

version of its founding ideals and there are several reasons for this. Its original democratic impulse, limited though it was by the institution of the UN Security Council with five permanent members with veto power, is now weak. Resolutions of the UN General Assembly are rarely taken seriously. Its agenda is limited by the narrow sensibilities of its most powerful members.

A major problem relates to finance. The assessed contributions to the UN, based on the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of its members, is barely enough to support the UN establishment leaving virtually nothing for its wide range of activities, including peace-keeping. The UN and its specialised agencies are able to engage in their mandated activities only through project funding from major donor countries. They determine where and how these funds will be spent. It should

come as no surprise, therefore, that the activities of the UN are heavily oriented towards the preferences of the donors and not the priorities of its larger membership.

Developing countries who are in the category of middle powers, such as India, Indonesia, Brazil, South Africa and Mexico, for example, could prevent the capture of the UN by a small cluster of richer countries, China now among them, through larger contributions to the general budget. However, even among these



The major powers have no interest in leading the UN back to its original vision and mandate. They are comfortable with its current role as their handmaiden and its collaboration with big business

countries the tendency is to mimic the behaviour of the affluent countries. They, too, would rather seek to influence the activities of the UN to pursue their own foreign policy aims rather than serve the larger purpose of a relatively more autonomous UN.

It is now apparent that in key areas of technology and public health, large multinational corporations are playing an increasingly influential role. The turnover of five big tech companies, Amazon, Google, Apple, Microsoft and Facebook together exceeds the GDP of some of the largest economies of the world at over \$5 trillion. They run large philanthropic foundations and agencies but it would be naive to think that their activities are de-linked from their business interests. When the UN becomes a partner of these foundations and receives funds from them, then it is unlikely to encourage any questioning of their activities. The credibility of the UN is further undermined through these associations.

The major powers and more affluent nations have no interest in leading the UN back to its original vision and

mandate. They are comfortable with its current role as their handmaiden and its collaboration with big business. It is the large constituency of developing countries, including middle powers like India, whose interests would be served by a UN which in its role and activities, truly reflects the interests of its larger membership. I recall my experience as India's Alternate Representative to the Committee on Disarmament (CD) in the early 1980s. The Disarmament Secretariat led by Ambassador Rikhi Jaipal, played the role of adviser and counsellor to the Non-aligned and Neutral Countries in the CD, helping them set the agenda, marshal their arguments and acquaint them with procedural issues. If such secretarial positions are financed by project funds, independence of action by UN functionaries is impossible. It is these fundamental issues which need to be addressed by the UN if it is to regain its credibility and effectiveness.

Shyam Saran is a former foreign secretary and senior fellow, CFR. The views expressed are personal

Pakistan army's role in politics angers public

Former Pakistan prime minister (PM), Nawaz Sharif, defiant roar summarises both his biography and Pakistan's history over the past three decades. The occasion was an opposition conference on video on September 20. Quite apart from what the former PM said, the occasion was significant. The conference was hosted by the Pakistan People's Party (PPP). It brought together all the major opposition parties and leaders. The Pakistan Muslim League (N)—Nawaz Sharif's party—coordinating action with the PPP has not been seen some time. These two together make up a large chunk of the political spectrum and both are now increasingly led by charismatic next generation leaders—Nawaz Sharif's daughter Maryam Nawaz and Benazir Bhutto's son Bilawal Bhutto Zardari. What is common to both is that they attach to their names that of a parent who was the political face of Pakistan for long periods of its history—Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto. This is dynastic politics, of course, but it is also real politics.

What made the news most was Nawaz Sharif's broadside against Prime Minister Imran Khan and his government, of course, but more against those "who installed Imran Khan and who manipulated elections to bring an incapable man like him into power and thus, destroyed the country". Khan's failures of economic and foreign policy, on Kashmir, Pakistan's international isolation, alienation from Saudi Arabia and Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the stagnation of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), thus formed one aspect of the speech. The real firestorm was in the references to the erosion and throttling of democracy, that "every child knows that no prime minister has been allowed to complete five years in power", of a "state above the state".

All this refers to the role of the military—euphemistically called the establishment—in politics. What has been less reported than his references to the military and the generals were the comments about the judiciary and how it acts in concert with the military. Nawaz Sharif has been PM longer than

anyone else—in all over nine years but spread over three terms in which the first (November 1990-July 1993) and the third (June 2013-July 2017) are separated by a quarter of a century. While the military, or at least certain generals, had much to do with his meteoric rise through the 1980s to 2000s, Nawaz Sharif acted as if he was in charge. His first tenure ended, therefore, with a bitter feud with the president; the second with a coup after General Pervez Musharraf's Kargil misadventure; the third with what amounted to a judicial coup—or so at least many in Pakistan felt. In each of the three terms, his party had a majority but this was no defence against the forces arrayed against him.

The third term was marked by near-constant friction with the military on a whole range of issues. A close political associate and astute observer, former foreign minister Sartaj Aziz, has recently written:

"Nawaz Sharif's transition away from the military establishment to a new leadership was not only in his political interests or stakes were threatened by the absence of real democracy". Nawaz Sharif's interest and third terms stand out for his willingness to walk Pakistan's most dangerous minefield—relations with India. That story is well known.

The point, however, is that Nawaz Sharif understood intuitively that his authority as PM could be challenged only by the role of the military and for this to happen some improvement of relations, if not normalisation, was essential. Sartaj Aziz also notes, "Fundamentally, Nawaz Sharif did not fully comprehend the depth and strength of de facto forces and also ignored the importance of a broader coalition of political forces for establishing the supremacy of democratic institutions".

Whether this present front of opposition unity and better atmospherics between the leaders of the PML(N) and the PPP, therefore, heralds something new happening in Pakistan is too early to say. Nawaz Sharif stands discredited from politics for life and effectively in exile. Most Pakistani politicians in the opposition are fearful of the skeletons in their cupboards and the risk of jail or worse is real. Yet for all this the PML(N) and the PPP have remained largely intact with no major desertions or breakaways in the past two years. Khan's problems, on the other hand, are mounting—not the least of which is managing the growing clamour in public discourse that the military is too involved in national affairs. Nawaz Sharif's speech is designed clearly at advancing this discourse. Certainly he knows that what displeases the military more than anything else is an open discussion of its political role. Possibly he believes that agitation on this front will increase pressure—both on Khan and the military—and mistakes happen under pressure. The September speech may well mark Nawaz Sharif's fourth foray into Pakistan's murky terrain of curbing the military. If that is so, then describing Nawaz Sharif as epitomising a man with his future behind him may well sum up his biography as also Pakistan's political history.

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[AMARINDER SINGH] PUNJAB CHIEF MINISTER

Most of our farmers are small & marginal who will be severely impacted by these legislations. We ... will do everything to oppose it [farm bills]

To beat the pandemic, begin a mass campaign on safety protocols

As the Covid-19 cases keep increasing, people across the world are desperate for a solution. While many vaccine trials are ongoing, should we wait for a vaccine as a silver bullet, an exclusive solution to the pandemic? Perhaps not. Disease takes time. History tells us that in the seven countries surveyed were willing to take such a vaccine.

India's successful polio communication, exemplified by the vaccination efforts, like some lessons we can apply now. Considering that Covid-19 outbreaks take place at the community level, fighting the disease will also need concerted local action. According to Dr David Nabarro, World Health Organization Special Envoy for Covid-19, prioritising three universal essentials can help keep people safe: Wearing masks, hand hygiene and physical distancing. From rural hubs to urban wards, we require a mass campaign to communicate these fundamentals to every citizen through constant reiteration.

The prevention campaign needs to engage large audiences. Places of congregation, like markets, offices, public transport, slums, and residential areas, must be specially targeted. Just as non-compliance with road safety rules leads to traffic fines and more, there must also be strict emphasis on compliance for the Covid-19 safety protocols. The campaign against the virus must also fight misinformation, a major risk amid an infodemic of Covid-related content. As the economy reopens, it is imperative that there is sustained dissemination of Covid-19 prevention measures using every channel of mass communication, from posters, billboards and wall-writings to radio, TV, and social media. In addition to the three essentials, communication also needs to provide clarity on how the virus spreads. The vaccine will come in due course. Until then, stringent caution, robust communication of Covid-19 safety protocols, and compliance to trusted actions are the vaccine.

which covered 3,400 respondents from seven countries (India, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, South Korea, and Singapore), found that at 83%, India has the highest receptivity rate for a government-approved, no-cost vaccine among the countries surveyed. In comparison, only 65% of all respondents in the seven countries surveyed were willing to take such a vaccine.

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